

Reducing Litter Drop in Abergavenny

Park Ward Hotspots Interventions 2022

1 What this report is about

This is a KAT (Keep Abergavenny Tidy) volunteer report on the roll-out and learning to date (June 2022 to November 2022) from two hotspot interventions to test out ways of reducing litter drop sustainably in Park Ward Abergavenny.

It's written by the KAT volunteer primarily involved for KAT and its partners in order to inform learning from work on these two hotspot interventions between July and November 2022.

Why Hotspots Interventions?

KAT volunteers, like other Tidy groups in Monmouthshire, are stated pillars of the county council's litter strategy. The delivery of this strategy relies on volunteers to clear litter across the county, alongside funded services such as the Abergavenny Town Team.

Between 2019 and 2022, KAT volunteers cleared 2000 bags of litter from Abergavenny and its environs. Litter volumes are not reducing.

Dirty and littered public spaces negatively impact on, variously: community and individual wellbeing and pride in place; biodiversity [eg nesting birds feed their chicks bits of plastic]; and the physical and built environment [eg drains blocked with litter; street flooding].

There is a huge cost to the public purse of Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) in having to clear roadsides and public places that Tidy volunteers cannot manage.

In 2022, KAT decided to:

- find out what works to reduce litter drop sustainably, i.e., the reduction is maintained over time;
- do this in partnership with Abergavenny Town Council (ATC), MCC, Keep Wales Tidy (KWT), Gwent Police and with local people.

Between January-June 2022, four KAT volunteers collectively spent in excess of 30 days:

- researching ideas and strategies to reduce litter drop;
- identifying litter hotspots [KAT routinely collects data of amounts and locations of litter dropped] where interventions could be trialled in Abergavenny; and

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- planning a focused, structured and facilitated session with partners (officers and members as appropriate of the town and county councils, Gwent Police and Keep Wales Tidy) to gauge their commitment to working in partnership to trial hotspot interventions in Abergavenny.

KAT's aims in initiating this were to:

- work together with partners to trial [i.e., test out] interventions to find out what, if anything, works to reduce litter drop in known hotspots; and
- use best research evidence and learning from elsewhere to find out what might work to reduce litter drop in Abergavenny.

Hence this was a KAT-initiated exercise using citizen science to tackle a social problem with partners.

What is citizen science?

Here, citizen science was intended to:

- use systematic, planned and measured interventions; that are
- agreed and carried out by partners [Tidy groups, councils, local people]; and
- designed to tackle a social problem like litter drop; in order to
- to learn what interventions are most effective, where and why.

Knowing more about what works matters to local residents and volunteers who clear rubbish off the streets. It should be important to public services like councils and the police because:

- other anti-social behaviours are associated with highly littered communities and public spaces; and
- knowing what works to keep litter drop down sustainably means shrinking public sector budgets can be targeted to interventions that have been found to be effective in reducing litter drop.

The elements of a systematic and planned intervention – the citizen science – include:

- *Deciding the intervention target area* on the basis of data and the lived experiences of people affected by the problem;
- *Assessing the target area*, for example, is the littered area 'hidden' from public scrutiny [so the litter-dropper is less likely to be seen by others]? Where are the litter bins? Are they visible? In the right places?
- Looking at the *evidence and results from elsewhere* about what works to tackle similar problems;
- *Partners designing and agreeing an intervention plan* which is systematic and identifies:
 - *what* intervention[s] are to be done;
 - *when* [in what order]; and
 - *how* the intervention will be measured and evaluated.

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- *Implementing* the plan.
- *Analysing* results.
- *Drawing interim conclusions* and lessons learned.
- *Evaluation*: repeating the survey of litter drop, say 6 or 12 months later. Be able to answer the question – has the litter drop reduced over time? Did the interventions work?

Partners' launch meeting, 22 June 2022

Sixteen people (from ATC; MCC; Gwent Police; KWT; KAT) came to this structured and KAT-facilitated meeting held in Abergavenny Town Hall on 22 June. A record of this event is available from the KAT coordinator.

All agencies said they'd work with KAT to trial interventions in:

- The businesses at the end of Lower Cross St;
- The Alleyway running between Park Crescent and Ysguborwen in Park ward; and
- The Shop at the junction of Park Crescent and Hereford Road, also in Park ward.

This report discusses results after five months of the two interventions in Park ward [the Alleyway and the Shop].

MCC, ATC and KWT committed to work together on these interventions with KAT.

2 Results: Alleyway Intervention, July – November 2022

On 11 July, a site meeting took place in the Alleyway and at the Shop in Park ward involving KAT, Keep Wales Tidy and ATC [local ward councillor, Town Clerk]. MCC wasn't present [illness]. A report of this site meeting is at Appendix 1.

Issues identified in the Alleyway were:

- Persistent and often heavy littering;
- Litter on the ground and trapped in the hedge and behind a broken barbed wire fence;
- The alleyway is out of sight in comparison with the roads at either end;
- The outgrowing and overhanging hedges block streetlight and reduce visibility;
- There's no litter bin within a radius of several hundred metres of the alleyway;
- Graffiti on junction box and a short section of corrugated tin fence in the alleyway.

Local people using the Alleyway complain of:

- the heavy litter drop;
- fear of using alleyway in restricted light;
- the smell of urine in the Alleyway.

Provisional interventions identified at this 11 July site meeting were:

- Establish ownership of overgrown hedges and get them cut back;
- Establish ownership of broken barbed wire fencing on either side of the alleyway, and get it removed;
- Install a litter bin;
- Measure litter drop before *each* intervention [i.e., cutting back hedges; installing litter bin and signage to it; removing barbed wire fence; cleansing of the alleyway]; and
- Measure litter drop after each intervention to see what worked [if anything] to reduce litter drop.

Alleyway actions, July-November 2022

Overgrown hedges

To date, ownership of the hedges has not been established¹.

Consequently, there is no annual plan yet in place for ongoing maintenance of a clear line of sight throughout the Alleyway.

Sometime between 11 and 15 July, the lower [SW] part of the hedge was cut back at the sides [not the height]. ATC and MCC said they did not do this work.

¹ After this report had been completed, MCC wrote to ATC, KWT and KAT about responsibility for the hedges. See Appendix 2.

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On 15 August, the upper [north] part of hedge was cut back by ATC [without reference to the planned Alleyway interventions].

The hedges cutback in advance of establishing responsibility for their ownership and maintenance may have affected survey results reported below, as clearer pathways and better sight lines expose litter-droppers to greater scrutiny by others and thus may modify litter-dropping behaviour. So, for example, the hedges cutback in July and August *may* have led to reduced litter drop in the Alleyway, but this cannot be known for certain as no data were collected before hedges were cut.

Measurements of litter drop done in the Alleyway in late August and early September were timetabled to precede one of the installation of a litter bin [discussed below].

Broken barbed wire fence

On 20 September and as described below, KAT and KWT cleared 15 bags of litter trapped behind the upper (west side) section of this broken barbed wire fence.

In October 2022, and in response to KAT and KWT, MCC said it was responsible for the barbed wire fence.

This fence was removed on 16 November.

Litter bin installation

MCC said they would install a litter bin in the Alleyway [or nearby] in early-mid September.

Therefore, baseline pre-litter bin installation surveys had to be done before then.

Between 26 August and 9 September, KAT and KWT undertook two baseline surveys of litter drop [type and volume] in the Alleyway.

On 13 September, MCC supplied and installed a litter bin in the middle of the alleyway by a metal chicane.

On 20 September, a KAT volunteer and KWT:

- climbed over the broken barbed wire fence running along the Alleyway and removed 15 bags of litter from behind the fence;
- stencilled temporary [chalk] signage to highlight the presence of the new bin at either end of the alleyway ('bin this way', footprints, arrow).

Between 27 September and 18 October, KAT and KWT undertook four post-litter bin installation surveys.

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These surveys counted less rubbish dropped in the Alleyway after the litter bin was installed [Data will be reported by Caru Cymru, as below].

Visual inspections by a KAT volunteer found the bin to be used.

Caru Cymru resourced these pre- and post-litter bin installation surveys, providing signage for stencils and staff time. Caru Cymru is reporting separately on this six-week litter bin intervention.

Reliability of litter bin installation intervention data

There are caveats to the reliability of these pre- and post-litter bin installation data.

It became clear during the pre-litter-bin intervention surveys that several local people collected litter in the Alleyway.

KWT and KAT asked the pickers we knew of to record data on categories and volumes of litter picked. We can't be sure that these data reports were complete or that we knew every local picker.

As the date of MCC's scheduled works to install the litter bin was early-mid September, baseline surveys before installation had to be done in August and early September.

Anecdotally, litter pickers report a lower litter drop in holiday periods. Hence the pre-litter bin installation survey data may not reflect the litter drop in this Alleyway outside this holiday period.

Community engagement

Local people readily engage with litter pickers. As noted earlier, people who pick this Alleyway are another flank of the reserve army of litter-pickers. They're critical to ongoing work to keep this Alleyway litter-free, and they also have good local intelligence about other anti-social behaviour.

The partnership

Partners to this trial [town and county councils, KAT and KWT] did not meet as a partnership in this five month period, July-November 2022.

Thus there was no systematic intervention plan [i.e., agreed actions and agreed sequencing; measuring, monitoring and evaluating] agreed between the partners [i.e., talked through, agreed, written down and actioned].

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No discussion about mutual roles, responsibilities, expectations of respective partners took place.

No set-up meeting involving all partners prior to interventions being actioned took place.

The only time all partners to the Park ward interventions had been in the same room was at the 22 June launch of the hotspots project.

During July and August, KAT was asking partners for a meeting to agree a plan. The need for this meeting was pressing as uncoordinated actions like the cut-back of hedges were happening, and the date for a litter bin installation was fixed. Hence, the window for agreeing a systematic plan of intervention *before interventions started*, was closing.

In early September, KAT asked KWT to take over trying to get a date with the two councils for a partners' meeting as KAT had not heard anything.

KWT asked partners for dates for a partners' meeting. After 21 days, with several email reminders, the KWT doodle poll was completed by both councils, and a date fixed for a partners' meeting on 10 October.

During July and August, KAT was asking ATC for one of its Lansdown councillors to engage with the Alleyway intervention, as the upper end of the Alleyway was thought to be in Lansdown ward. No response was received. In the event, a Lansdown councillor contacted ATC in September about the litter in the Alleyway. KAT initiated contact with this councillor, who attended what turned out to be an aborted partners' meeting on 10 October [neither MCC nor a Park ward councillor were in attendance].

3 Results: Shop intervention

No partners' plan was agreed, nor any meeting held, after the site meeting on 11 July (reported in Appendix 1).

At KWT's request, MCC re-sited the litter bin on the north side of Park Crescent at the junction of the Crescent and Hereford Road.

On a visual scan by a KAT volunteer, more litter was put in this bin after it was re-sited to a more prominent position than before its move.

There are no results to report as there has been no planned Shop intervention to date.

4 Discussion

Partners engagement

While both the town and county councils were responsive to KAT's invitation at its 22 June meeting, the engagement in the Alleyway interventions that occurred was largely driven by KAT, with essential and important input from KWT and local people.

It was significantly challenging and unreasonably time-wasting for KAT throughout this trial to repeatedly try, and fail, to get councils' partners together in a partners' meeting to agree a trial intervention plan.

Intervention plan

To date, there is no partners' intervention plan for future actions in the Alleyway, and no intervention plan for the Shop.

What works?

On the basis of the evidence of this work between July-November, it is not possible to say what works to reduce litter drop sustainably in this Alleyway.

As no partners' meeting took place, no partners' intervention plan was agreed to systematically measure the impact of *this* intervention compared to *that* one.

A longer term follow-up is needed to measure volumes of litter dropped in the Alleyway and an agreed survey point, compared to those surveys done by KAT and KWT in September-October.

Even if this follow-up is done, it cannot reach conclusions [as there was no agreed intervention plan] about which of the interventions (litter bin installation; hedge cutting; removal of broken barbed fence] had what result in any changes recorded in litter drop in the Alleyway in a longer time frame.

That said, we have data [caveated, as reported above] that indicate lower litter drop in the measurements taken in the four weeks after the litter bin installation.

Litter bin installation

Less litter was counted at the four survey points following the installation of the bin compared to two weeks before its installation. Caru Cymru's separate report on the 6 week

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litter bin intervention survey will be a useful snapshot, although the 6-week survey of itself is not designed to identify what works *over time* to sustainably reduce litter drop.

Hedge cutting and removal of broken barbed wire fence

The Alleyway intervention to date has not been able to establish if and how removal of the broken barbed wire fence [on 16 November], and the further cleansing of the exposed and previously littered area behind it, will impact on litter drop in this location *over time*.

Pre-action surveys weren't done, as no notice was given about the hedge cutbacks², one of which Abergavenny Town Team completed.

So, we cannot be sure to date *which* component of this intervention – cut hedges back, get rid of litter traps like broken barbed wire fences, install a litter bin – had *what* impact on the volume of litter drop.

Communication

Between partners [Tidy groups, town council, county council].

As it was, and by default in the absence of an all-partners meeting to agree roles as well as the intervention plan, driving this work fell disproportionately to KAT with support from KWT. KAT's communications with an elected ward rep were not responded to. MCC and ATC both 'forgot' meetings KAT and KWT had called.

With local people and other KAT volunteers

More people than KAT was aware of litter pick this Alleyway. Had there been a partners' intervention plan with an agreed communications strategy, planned engagement with local people [eg door knocking; leafletting] and known KAT pickers could have taken place.

5 Conclusions

KAT receives endless accolades from councils for its litter-clearing. The interventions described in this report presented grand opportunities for the councils to step up with KAT and local people to take litter-clearing to the next level – by learning what can reduce litter drop, over time.

In the event, what was learned in these five months? The Alleyway now has a bin, and a broken fence was removed. Hedges were cut back at different times; responsibility for their

² Responsibility for Alleyway hedges maintenance had not then been established. See Appendix 2.

ongoing maintenance and management was not established by partners beforehand³. No systematic intervention plan was agreed between partners, who never met together. Litter drop in the Alleyway was reduced in the four weeks after the bin went in. However, it's not possible from the work done in this Alleyway between July-November 2022 to say how citizen science can inform interventions to reduce litter drop over time, as the key elements of the concept weren't operationalised.

Should KAT and potential partners contemplate further work to find out what works to reduce litter drop sustainably, recommendations from this five month experiment follow.

³ See Appendix 2

6 Recommendations

If another systematic intervention to sustainably reduce litter drop is considered, recommendations, addressed to all partners, from this five-month trial include:

a. Hold a partners' set-up meeting

A facilitated, structured set-up meeting should be held before any interventions start.

This set-up meeting must involve all partners.

Before any interventions kick off, all partners should:

- Understand what citizen science is and isn't, so all are clear about what it is they will be doing, how and why;
- Agree mutual commitments, responsibilities and expectations of each other;
- Agree an intervention plan of *what* will be done *when*, by *whom*, *how* it will be measured and evaluated over time, and how it will be communicated to the public.

b. Community engagement

Before any planned interventions start, partners should:

- identify local people who pick litter so that they're brought into the intervention communications [particularly about surveying and counting litter drop];
- talk with local people about the planned interventions;
- involve local people in initiatives to keep their area free of litter longer term. If this work is to be sustainable, it's local people who will drive that.

c. Communications

Comms with local people. Any planned, systematic interventions need to engage local people, eg, by leafletting; door-knocking. This role might fall to any local councillor who works in this way.

Agree media and comms for regular dissemination of trial activities to the public, press and social media.

d. Communications within KAT

When interventions have been agreed with partners but before they start, communicate (using a variety of methods) with KAT litter-pickers [and MCC pickers] who routinely clear the hot spot area. Explain surveying, counting and measuring. Explain their vital role as 'citizen scientists' [noticing, counting, surveying, reporting back] in the intervention.

Repeat the above over the duration of the intervention. Use different methods and different media to repeat same key messages.

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e. Six month evaluation

So that findings of this five-month piece of work aren't wasted, KAT recommends KWT initiates a six month evaluation of volume and type of litter drop in the Alleyway in April 2023. Such a follow-up will be compromised if the councils are not engaged as partners in it.

Appendix 1

Abergavenny litter partnership site visits to Park and Lansdown ward hotspots. 11th July 2022

Map Showing locations and key features including nearest bins.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1jV3JNFHDvwm9phQJlqxGW32hRZ5yNwI&usp=sharing>

Link to photos. <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjzXJhy>

Alleyway Park Cres to Ysguborwen

Comments/ Description

- Through route between town and North Abergavenny
- **Overgrowth of hedges** both sides.
- West side of hedge - 3-4 metres high?
- Overgrowth blocks sight lines up and down.
- Where does the boundary lie between private and public property?
 - Householders on both sides of the alleyway [three properties to east; one to west] have fences that appear be theirs and what they regard as the boundary?
 - The hedges [both sides] are planted outside these fences.
 - Both sides of the alleyway halfway up are fences with wooden post and rail and chain link wire fence.
- Significant build of **litter** lodged inside this fence so is not accessible for picking. Visual impact.
- Significant **litter** on the ground in the alleyway compared to nearby pavement.
- **Graffiti** on telecom box
- Bottom [Park Cres end] of alleyway - **dog bin** on corner with Park Cres
- Local people say there was **formerly a litter bin** the alleyway in the past but it was vandalised. MCC should have a record of this bin.
- **Far from nearest bin.** No litter bins from the north side of Bailey Park until the Dobbins shop at the top of Hillcrest Road, half a mile away? The other nearest bins to this site is on Hereford Road - 600m away?
- The ward boundary between Park and Lansdown wards intersects the east side of this alleyway.
- The two garages at the top of the alleyway are surrounded by concrete and isn't visible from the path. Mon HA own these. Asbestos [?] bits are on the ground around the garages, along with broken glass. Previously pickers have found discarded band cards, as well as drink tins, bottles, vape and smoking detritus.
- Anti-social behaviour reported here by local residents.

Possible actions to consider

- Litter retrieved from behind fencing. (Involving removal of near fence?)
- Fence removed permanently. Replaced by post and rail but not chain link.
- Reduction of hedge in height and width.
- Anti-litter signage.
- Garage end mural.
- Litter bin(s) serving the alleyway.
- CCTV
- interventions book ended with surveys of litter dropped. Surveys to include perception survey of passers-by.

Shop on Hereford Rd/ Park Crescent

Comments/ Description

- Seems to be an oil container outside the shop that **seeping oil** onto pavement?
- Bin outside shop. **Litter** around it.
- **Littered items around the shop**- cigarette butts, some wrappings also dog fouling.
- Bin on opposite side of the road in Park Cres where cars are parked. Somewhat off the line people walk and often obscured by parked vehicles. Underused? (monitor to compare with other nearby bin)
- A lot of **littered cardboard vape packets** around the shop end of the Crescent. (Plot distribution?)
- Opposite the shop inside the boundary of a derelict bungalow - a lot of **vape detritus**. Possible site of underage vaping of product bought at the shop. - Licensing issue?
- Drink cans and crisp packets and other plastic food waste dropped along Park Cres.
- **Items of waste around the shop**- old cabinet, cardboard for collection.

Possible actions to consider

- Engagement with shop owner about waste disposal and cleansing.
- Longer term solutions on storage of waste.
- Engagement with the shop owner using 'Litter Free Zone' template
- Plot the drop of vape detritus to see if vapes bought at the shop may be dropped along the pavement.
- Issue of selling age-restricted products to underage people - matter for council/police?
- interventions book ended with surveys of litter dropped. Surveys to include perception survey of passers-by.
- Anti-litter signage.

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Appendix 2 Responsibility for Alleyway Hedges

Email from MCC to ATC, KAT, KWT sent after this report was completed.

On 28 Nov 2022, at 14:14, Leaworthy, Nigel <NigelLeaworthy@monmouthshire.gov.uk> wrote:

Hello

Below is the response from our solicitors:

It appears that we are only responsible for the footway itself and not the adjoining hedges.

Residents would be responsible for the hedges.

MCC would not and have not undertaken any scheduled maintenance to the hedges.

We will not be replacing the fence.

Regarding the litter picking, in essence and with regard to the reply from our solicitors, this would be private ground that belongs to the residents.

Nigel

“The Council has registered title to the pathway itself under two separate registered titles CYM572046 and CYM572050. One side of the footpath has a boundary with 63 Park Crescent. On the other side two properties have boundaries with the footpath, 1 and 2 Nursery Crescent. I have attached 5 map searches showing the land contained in each of the registered titles coloured green. I have also attached Official copies of each of the five registered titles giving details of the registered proprietors. There is an application pending at the Land Registry relating to 63 Park Crescent – I have attached details of that which shows the solicitors dealing with it. The house may have been sold or it may possibly be a re-mortgage.

I hope this helps but let me know if you have any queries. Where a hedge is obstructing the passage of pedestrian notice can be served on the owner of the hedge to cut it back – Section 154 of the Highways Act 1980.”