

Athlone Town Council

Litter Management Plan

2010 to 2012



December 2009

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1. Introduction

(i) Background

Under Section 10 of the Litter Pollution Act 1997 each Local Authority is obliged to prepare a Litter Management Plan for its own area. This plan must set out the Local Authority's own objectives to prevent and control litter as well as measures to encourage public awareness. The plan must set out the measures and arrangements by which these objectives are to be achieved.

Litter is a visible and objectionable kind of environmental degradation that scars our towns and countryside. The blight of litter countrywide detracts from our national image of a clean and natural environment and is often the lasting impression for those who visit our town and country.

Its presence devalues our living environment, makes it less attractive for leisure, tourism and investment, generates a negative impression of our town and places a significant financial burden on Local Authority finances.

It is important to state at the outset that litter remains a national problem that requires a consistent, concentrated approach to address effectively. The co-operation of all community sectors is required here - Athlone Town Council alone cannot eradicate the problem. Therefore education and enforcement are important. Achievements have taken place, and through implementing the measures outlined in this plan, and with full co-operation from every sector, further progress can be made to improve the overall situation.

(ii) Scope of the plan

This plan sets out Athlone Town Council's objectives to prevent and control litter as well as measures to encourage public awareness of the litter problem, with particular emphasis on educational and information strategies aimed at young people.

The plan includes information on, and was prepared having regard to-

- existing litter prevention and control measures being carried out by the Council
- the policies and objectives of the Council in relation to the prevention and control of litter

- litter prevention and control activities being carried out by agencies other than the Council
- recycling and recovery facilities provided for public use
- the Council's enforcement of the Litter Pollution Act 1997.

(iii) Format of the Plan

Athlone Town Council believes that the litter problem in the town can be tackled through comprehensive action in five key areas, and this plan is set out accordingly. These areas are-

1. Education and information
2. Litter prevention and control
3. Enforcement
4. Community involvement
5. Recycling and recovery

Each of the five sections commences with a brief overview of the relevant area. The activities and strategies being undertaken by the Town Council are then set out in some detail. The plan concludes with a list of contact information for relevant Council staff members.

(iv) Definition of litter

Section 2 of the Litter Pollution Act 1997 defines litter as "a substance or object, whether or not intended as waste (other than waste within the meaning of the Waste Management Act 1996, which is properly consigned for disposal) that, when deposited in a place other than a litter receptacle or other place lawfully designated for the deposit, is or is likely to become unsightly, deleterious, nauseous or unsanitary, whether by itself or with any such substance or object, and regardless of its size or volume or the extent of the deposit".

The definition of litter is quite wide and extends beyond casual pieces of paper or cigarette ends to anything large or small that is, or is likely to become, unsightly.

(v) Fines

Local Authorities are responsible for implementing the litter laws in their own functional areas. They have the power to take enforcement action against individuals who break or ignore these laws.

Leaving or throwing litter in a public place is an offence which can be subject to an on-the-spot fine of €150 or a maximum fine of €3,000 in court. A person convicted of a litter offence may also be required to pay the Local Authority's costs and expenses in investigating the offence and bringing the prosecution. Athlone Town Council has also adopted the 'Name and Shame' policy of publicly naming persons convicted of litter offences in the local press.

2. Education and information

Overview

The Council recognises that some people who litter are not aware of the fact that they are committing an offence. They may not realise the extent to which litter damages the environment and detracts from the image of Ireland as a clean and green land. The Town Council is committed to using a combination of measures to ensure that the anti-litter message is reinforced at every opportunity.

Furthermore, the Litter Pollution Act requires the Town Council, in this plan, to include details of its educational and information measures aimed specifically at young persons. Athlone Town Council has in place a schools environmental education programme which combines a friendly and informative approach with practical supports designed to ensure that an anti-litter ethos is fostered at all times. This is available to any school that requests it. The National Green Schools Programme also targets litter and is a valuable addition to making the school-going population more litter-aware.

The Council considers that education does not solely rest with the school population. There is also a need to encourage and educate the general public and the commercial sector to reuse and recycle where possible, thus minimising indiscriminate dumping in the countryside and reducing levels of waste entering landfill sites.

Strategies

(i) Awareness

Advertising: The Town Council makes use of the local media to publicise events such as National Spring Clean and the Town Council's Clean-up weeks throughout the year which are carried out with Athlone Tidy Town's Committee.

Website: The Environment Section has published information on the Town Council's website and Athlone.ie is also used to promote the activities of Environment Section in relation to the Environment.

(ii) Personnel

Community Wardens: Athlone Town Council employs a Community Warden who is the visible face of the Council's various litter prevention strategies and represents a considerable opportunity to increase public awareness of the litter problem and the Council's response to it. Her duties include the issuing of litter fines and also liaising with and assisting Residents' Associations with anti litter initiatives and estate clean ups. She also advises shop owners as to the best practice in the avoidance of litter.

The Wardens' information activities include-

- Attendance at meetings of Community Groups, Residents Associations and Tidy Towns Committees to advise on their activities and discuss any litter-related problems.
- Ongoing informal contact with involved parties, which enables the Wardens to take immediate action in relation to new litter blackspots, fresh incidents of illegal dumping, abandoned cars etc.
- Visits to retail, industrial and commercial premises in the town to advise owners, occupiers and staff members of their responsibilities under the Litter Pollution Act.
- Meeting members of the public in private to discuss litter matters directly affecting them.
- Visits to schools to publicise their presence and to discuss the contents of this Plan and the Litter Pollution Act with students.

Environmental Awareness Officer: Westmeath County Council has assigned a member of the Environment Staff with responsibility for raising public awareness of all aspects of the environment. An integral part of the officer's duties is to ensure effective publicity for, and development of maximum public participation in, the Council's activities regarding litter pollution. These duties include-

- Development and implementation of the schools education programme

- Administration of Grants for Anti Litter and Anti Graffiti Awareness Initiatives
- Liaison with Community Groups
- Assisting with the implementation of this Plan and the Waste Management Plan
- Responding to general environmental queries

Administrative Support: The Housing/Environment Section administration staff members are trained to deal with general litter-related queries. There is a specific member of staff dedicated to supporting the Community Warden services and to issue and deal with litter fines.

Housing Liaison Officer: The role of the Housing Liaison Officer employed by Athlone Town Council has advanced the function of Community and Estate Management in Council estates through advising and informing tenants of their responsibilities in the area of litter control and estate enhancement. Levels of dumping and littering have reduced in areas where these roles have been fostered and developed.

Outdoor Staff: The Council operates a Johnston suction sweeper, which sweeps the roads throughout the Town. This machine sweeps through the Town between 7.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. each morning including Saturday's and Sunday's.

The remainder of the Town is swept on a rota basis, which has been devised to ensure that each housing estate is swept on a monthly basis.

As this machine cannot access many of the narrower streets or awkward corners in the Town it is supplemented by a mini-sweeper, which sweeps the narrower streets and footpaths. The sweeping is augmented by the use of a 2 no. handcarts, which allows for better coverage of the town centre. Improvements of the street cleansing operations will help to control the litter problem throughout the town but in itself street cleansing will only serve to reduce the visual impact of the underlying litter problem until further litter is scattered.

In addition, Athlone Town Council have a responsibility for the management and maintenance of Parks and Open Spaces which is carried out diligently by our outdoor staff crew.

(iii) Schools Education Programme

The Town Council believes that by bringing the anti-litter message to students through the measures indicated below, substantial progress can be made in ensuring that the next generation will consider a litter-free environment to be a basic entitlement.

The Green Schools Programme

This national programme, which is co-ordinated by An Taisce, aims to promote whole school activity to develop environmental awareness in both the school itself and the wider community. There is particular emphasis on litter in the early stages of the five-module programme. 2 schools in Athlone have registered for the programme, and 3 schools have received the prestigious Green Flag. Westmeath County Council acts as a facilitator for schools that wish to become involved in this programme and actively encourages all schools to join this project.

The Green-Schools programme is funded by Westmeath County Council, through an annual payment directly to An Taisce. In addition, Athlone Town Council provides materials and advise through the Community Warden for appropriate projects for participating Green-Schools.

School Visits

The Community Wardens visit the primary schools in Athlone to talk to students on a wide range of environmental issues. Discussions on litter-related matters are especially popular.

Support materials

In order to assist schools with litter clean-up campaigns, items such as litter pickers, bags and gloves are provided free of charge. In addition, educational material from ENFO and several other sources is readily available. Westmeath County Council also provide compost bins for biodegradable matter to all schools.

3. Litter Prevention and Control

Overview

The Council recognises that regardless of the efforts of all concerned in raising public awareness of the litter problem, there will always be a requirement to undertake litter prevention and control measures to a greater or lesser extent. The Council will continue to provide these services as resources allow in order to ensure Athlone is as free of litter as possible.

Strategies

(i) 2009 Budget

The Council's commitment to providing a litter-free environment can be seen by the 2009 annual financial provision as the 2009 allocation under Street Cleaning has increased by €46,930 from 2007 to €424,000. The table below demonstrates the considerable increases in expenditure in environmental protection areas from 2006 to 2008.

Description	2006	2007	2008	Increase % from 2006 to 2008
Street Litter Disposal	55,000	75,000	80,000	45.5%
Provision of Litter Bins	8,500	16,000	20,000	135%
Anti-Litter Initiatives	10,500	20,000	25,000	138%
Grant to Tidy Towns	5,000	€17,000	€20,000	400%

(ii) Street Cleaning

As mentioned previously the Council has been undertaking the sweeping of the streets. The street cleaning service is a combination of mechanised cleaning with manual sweeping as necessary. The street sweeper undertakes the cleaning of the main streets very early

in the mornings and then proceeds to the other streets throughout the town. The remainder of the town is swept on a rota basis which has been devised to ensure that each Housing Estate is swept on a monthly basis.

(iii) Litter bins

The Council has installed and services approximately 115 litterbins throughout the town including the side streets, the parks, walkways and along the canal with particular attention being paid to potential litter blackspots, e.g. schools, bus-stops, etc. In 2007, the Council spent €25,000 on bin replacement. In 2008, a further €15,000 has been spent under this heading.

4. Future Plans

Athlone Town Council proposes to make special Bye-Laws to prevent and control litter in respect of the following:

- distribution of advertising material which contravenes the Litter Pollution Act.
- premises (including mobile units) selling food and drinks for consumption off the premises.
- Storage and presentation for collection of household and commercial waste.

4. Enforcement

Overview

Athlone Town Council has been committed to enforcing all aspects of the Litter Pollution Act since its introduction. The Council will continue to exercise these powers in a firm and fair manner at all times.

Strategies

(i) Community Warden Service

In 2001 the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government initiated a pilot scheme for Community Wardens in six local authorities. The Community Warden Scheme received permanent status in 2006 after the initial success of the pilot project. Athlone currently has one full-time Community Wardens. The

Community Warden carries out a range of enforcement duties under the Litter Pollution Act as well as under Parking Byelaws and Road Traffic Legislation. The Wardens provide an essential link between the administration staff of the Council and the Community. She is the Council's eyes and ears on the ground and is actively involved in Anti-Litter Awareness campaigns in the local national schools as well as liaising with Residents' Associations and An Garda Siochana.

(ii) On the spot fines

The on the spot fine for litter offences increased from €125 to €150 on 30th September 2007. The administrative staff issue these fines for offences under the Litter Pollution Act. A total of 43 litter fines were issued in 2008. 25 fines have been issued from January to the end of June 2009. It is Council policy that unpaid fines are pursued through the Courts.

(iii) Advertising Flyers/ Signage

The law forbids the putting up of posters & signs on poles or other structures in public places unless permission is granted in advance. The placing of advertising leaflets on vehicle windscreens is also prohibited. Auctioneers / Estate agents who fail to comply are subject to a litter fine and /or prosecution under the Litter Pollution Act.

Unauthorised signage will continue to be targeted by the Wardens. Any signage found to be illegally erected along the public by-way, will be removed immediately by the Wardens and a fine will be issued under the Litter Pollution Act. Signs will only be returned to the owners following the payment of a fee proportionate to the cost of removing and storing of the unauthorised sign.

(iv) Retail Outlets

The owner or person responsible for a place to which the public has access is obliged to keep the place litter-free, regardless of how the litter got there. The Council will continue to encourage retail outlets to maintain the public area in the immediate vicinity of their premises, particularly in relation to shopping centres, licensed premises, and transport hubs.

(v) Major Events

The Council monitors major events and pro-actively works with promoters, sporting groups and the community to ensure litter

control measures are in place at the venue and surrounding areas before, during, and after the event. Licensing of major events such as music concerts includes provisions for dealing with litter on and off-site.

5. Community Involvement

Overview

The support of the wider community is vital if the litter problem is to be dealt with successfully, and the Council gratefully acknowledges the ongoing dedicated efforts of the very many concerned individuals and groups working to tackle litter at a local level. To this end, the Council operates a number of schemes designed to assist local communities with financial aid, materials and equipment or any other support possible. The Council will continue to encourage all community-based initiatives and welcomes suggestions from all persons active in this area.

Strategies

(i) National Spring Clean

This national initiative takes place for the month of April each year in conjunction with An Taisce. Its aim is to encourage individuals and groups to take practical steps to remove litter from their local areas. Athlone Town Council actively supports the campaign through the provision of bags, gloves, litter pickers and skips for organised clean up events. Athlone Town Council in collaboration with Athlone Tidy Towns Committee holds its 'Spring Clean-Up Week' in April each year giving the town a 'face-lift'. These clean-ups are always a great success with a turnout of several hundred volunteers throughout the town.

(ii) Clean-up Operations

The Council will provide bags, gloves and litter-pickers for approved projects. The environmental crew will collect and safely dispose of all materials collected. The scheme is not intended for cleaning out houses, garages etc., and a detailed schedule of the proposed works must be provided. It is important to note that only clean-ups of public places, such as walks, road margins, streets etc. will be supported.

(iii) Anti-litter Awareness Grants

In conjunction with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Westmeath County Council operates this scheme on an annual basis. The scheme provides funding for projects that promote greater public awareness and education in relation to litter pollution. Particular emphasis is placed on projects that involve schools and/or young people in general. The scheme is advertised in the local press. All Schools and Tidy Towns groups are notified and invited to apply for funding under the scheme.

(iv) Athlone Tidy Towns Committee

Athlone Town Council is committed to the support of Athlone Tidy Town Group. Athlone Tidy Towns Committee was regenerated in 2007 with greater links with the elected member of Athlone Town Council. In conjunction with other local support groups and Athlone Town Council, a hard working tidy towns group keep up the effort in presenting the town in its best appearance. Hanging baskets and flower tubs are prepared, set out and maintained by the members during the summer season and at least one new project is undertaken every year. A general pride in the profile of the town exists across all sectors of the Community. The committees hard work and determination is paying off at each Tidy town result since the committees regeneration. In 2009 it's mark increased by 9 points. Athlone Town Council is committed to the partnership approach with the Tidy Town committee and in 2009 a grant of €35,000 was allocated from it's annual budget. In addition a contribution of €55,000 was made to the Tidy Towns Committee towards the cost of the employment of seasonal workers employed in the area of litter control and environmental works.

(v) Residents' Associations

Residents' Associations are an integral constituent of community life in Athlone. Visitors to the town invariably comment on the high standard to which estates are maintained. Athlone Town Council offers financial assistance to the Residents' Associations to assist their work by way of an annual maintenance grant.

(vi) Irish Business against Litter

Irish Business against Litter, which was set up in 1996, is an alliance of companies sharing a belief that continued economic prosperity is contingent on a clean, litter-free environment. As part of the IBAL Anti-Litter League, An Taisce monitors all towns of populations of 6,000 and over independently in accordance with international grading standards.

6. Recycling and Recovery

(i) Bring Bank Sites

Rehab have installed recycling banks in Athlone at the Fair Green, Dunnes Stores, Montree, College Park and at the Strand. These facilities allow for the recycling of cans, glass and clothes. In addition the Civic Amenity Centre located at Golden Island operated by Westmeath County Council opened in 2004 and is a welcome asset.

Westmeath County Council also provides a Christmas Tree recycling service in January at a number of locations in the town, where members of the Public can dispose of their Christmas trees free of charge.

The Council will continue to look at how it can further assist in relation to the promotion of recycling.

7. Contact Information

Environment Section

Address: Athlone Town Council, Civic Centre, Church Street,
Athlone, Co. Westmeath

Telephone: (090) 6442100 e-mail: tclerk@athlonetc.ie

Fax: (090) 6479020 web: www.athlone.ie/UDC/

An after hours phone service has been set for environmental complaints and the number is [1890 320 005](tel:1890320005)