

PARISH LITTER-PICKING

Many years ago I helped my son do an 'A' Level Geography project which tried to find out, via a questionnaire, the different views about their locality in a number of contrasting areas of Felixstowe. A uniform complaint from the residents in all areas was 'dog fouling and litter'. It is everywhere – both the litter and the dislike of it.

Some years ago, as part of an overall evaluation of our Parish of Levington, the Parish Council conducted a similar questionnaire. The irritation caused by a few anti-social inhabitants and visitors, who were happy to enjoy our spectacular environment and yet were quite prepared to spoil it for others, came high on the list of grievances. It was clear that the District Council could not afford to pick up litter on every road and path in every parish and so as a Council we decided to tackle the problem head-on for ourselves.

We have over 20 adopted footpaths, 3.5km of foreshore on the North bank of the River Orwell and of course a number of roads, 8.5km of them. We made sure that dog bins and poo-bag dispensing bins were placed at the start or end of all our major walking routes: paid for by some of the businesses in the village. The local District Council kindly collect the rubbish on a regular basis from the bins and the Parish Council have arranged for three public-spirited dog-walkers to keep the bag-dispensers topped up on a permanent basis. (We spend £75 per year on bags.) Also at suitable places we displayed notices saying it was an offence to drop litter and/or fail to clean up after their dogs. Some of the notices were permanent, others were changed regularly to keep people alert to the problem.

Please report anyone who fails to clear up after your dog!
Dogs are lovely – their messes are not!
Litter is horrid, Dog mess is worse – both are unnecessary!

More controversially

Are you a retriever or a poo-dle?

and the one that caused the most comment – most of it unfavourable -
Four legs are welcome – so long as they are accompanied by an old bag

Well it got people focusing on their environment and a Council problem!

Levington foreshore is a spectacular place to walk and we were determined that it should be as natural and unspoilt as possible. In the early days we needed working parties to clean up the shore – on one occasion we had a barbecue using the wood reclaimed from a former cruiser that had been an unsightly wreck for many years. All the flotsam and jetsam was wheelbarrowed to the Creek Car Park where the District Council collected it. There is no doubt that litter be-gets litter: now, ten years on, we are picking up far less, because people can see that the foreshore is well-kept: so they take their rubbish home or use the bins that we have provided. We have Spring and Autumn Saturday morning clean-ups, which are co-ordinated with Beachwatch now called the Great British Beach Clean organised with the Marine Conservation Society. We remove anything that is not entirely natural, especially on the high-tide line. We might get 10 helpers, often less, sometimes we are offered assistance from businesses which will sponsor their employees by giving them paid time-out or they will organise the whole office staff to come on a Saturday morning and clear-up a section of the foreshore. Yes we had to do the dreaded Risk Assessment, but once done it can be trotted out on each occasion.

However most important of all is the dog-walker patrol. On a daily basis there are parishioners who

will collect whatever small pieces of litter they find and so the volume never builds up.

The road clearance is given the same treatment. A big clear-up in the Spring, before the undergrowth has time to build up, when we collect the rubbish that has been thrown from cars or deliberately fly-tipped. Every road in our parish, other than the A14, is covered by collectors working in pairs. Fridges, tyres, pieces of broken cars and loads of detritus are bagged and put by the side of the road, from where they are transported to an agreed collection area, in a tractor belonging to a local farmer. Once again the District Council will collect on the Monday or Tuesday following the Saturday collection. The secret is continually keeping on top of the bad manners of the passing motorists. Most infuriating are the long-distance lorry drivers who will leave their Kentucky fried baggage, urin-filled pop bottles and worse in the lay-bys despite there being a bin a few yards away. However by having community-minded walkers we keep on top of the worst of the rubbish and 90% of the village is litter free 90% of the time.

What do you need?

1: You need one individual who will organise the teams, the equipment and the collections. I am the Village Idiot for Levington.

2: You need the rings, grabbers, rubber gloves and high-vis vests. If you want to make a start you can borrow equipment from the District Council, who also provide all the rubber gloves & black bin-bags all year round. Indeed, if you ask nicely, they may even deliver them to the organiser's home.

We persuaded businesses from within the parish to purchase bag-dispensing bins, the rings, grabbers and high-vis vests for the Parish Council. One business was so impressed with the result, they sent a £100 donation to be spent on whatever we thought appropriate.

3: Finally you need to find a way to motivate enough people in the Parish:

- I. Either to be responsible for a bag dispensing bin,
2. or to do a regular weekly clear-up on one particular path or to join one of the periodic 'clear-ups'. We used "Clean for the Queen" as a particular motivator this year.
3. Initial enthusiasm may dwindle to a few dedicated helpers, but once you have set a high standard of 'NO LITTER', it is much easier to keep it under control.

In 2008 we entered the Village of the Year competition and we made a particular effort to ensure that there was NO LITTER anywhere in the parish: this impressed the judges and we think it was one of the reasons why we were the National winner.

It can be dispiriting to see how quickly litter will build up: in our parish, often deposited by complete strangers, but a small team of dedicated helpers can make such a difference and with the help of the District Council and local businesses it need not be an expensive enterprise. So much of our countryside is spoilt by unnecessary litter: the effort to clear it is really worthwhile and definitely raises the feeling of civic-pride within the community.

A minority of humans spend too much time diminishing our environment: perhaps we can help give back to the majority the unadulterated beauty of God's creation. I am very willing to answer any questions that you may have.

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