

Greenprint Forum Beachwatch report 2023

Part of our campaign [Plastic Action](#) towards our goal of a Pollution Free Environment

Beachwatch, or “Great British Beach Clean”, is the annual survey of marine litter affecting the coastline of Britain conducted by teams of volunteers who survey and categorise the marine litter they find on their adopted 100 metres of beach, with all of the data being collated by the [Marine Conservation Society](#) to help them understand the current situation with marine litter and apply pressure in an informed way where it is needed to influence positive change.

For example, the 2020 ban on the supply of single use plastic cotton buds, stirrers, and straws was secured thanks to evidence like this, whilst since the 5p charge on single use plastic carrier bags was introduced, the MCS report a 55% decrease in the numbers of these being found on the UK’s beaches.

The current government of the UK has also promised to ban other single use plastic and polystyrene items, including cups, plates, and cutlery, which is set to become law on 1 October 2023.

The shoreline is a zone of flux, onto which litter may be both washed up from the sea (potentially having entered the sea from anywhere), and washed onto from inland – but it all entered the marine environment due to human activity in the first place. By removing litter from our beaches, we are preventing it from entering (or returning to) the sea. [Eunomia](#)’s report *Plastics in the Marine Environment* indicates that the coast is the marine environment with the highest concentration of plastic pollution worldwide, with a global average concentration of plastic litter on the world’s beaches of 2,000 kg/km².



Back here in the UK, the MCS surveys have been finding less litter overall on our beaches recently. In 2022, an average of 369 items were found on each 100 m transect, compared to 385 in 2021, 425 in 2020, and 585 in 2019. We typically find much less than that on the beaches that we have surveyed in Suffolk, and our findings this year again reflected that.

What did we do?

To support Beachwatch in 2023 the Greenprint Forum organised two local marine litter surveys combined with beach cleans across one weekend in September.

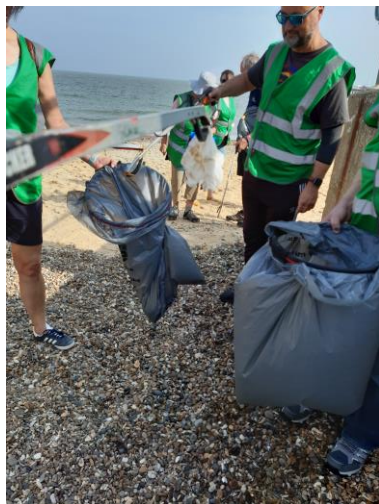
All who attended helped make it fun and rewarding, we had some good engagement with passersby and it is always encouraging to see that there are those in our communities who understand the issues and are prepared to give up their time to support this form of action.

Saturday 16 September – Southwold North of the Pier



This was the second time we surveyed this particular beach, the previous occasion having been back in 2019.

We had a team of 10 for our activity this year, and we converged on Southwold on a lovely sunny day thronging with beachgoers and holiday makers enjoying the late summer season meaning we were seen in action by lots of members of the public.



We fortunately only found one wetwipe in this survey transect, but we'd rather find none at all – these things can clog up drains, as well as being disgusting if they escape into the environment, so should never be flushed – these always belong in the bin.

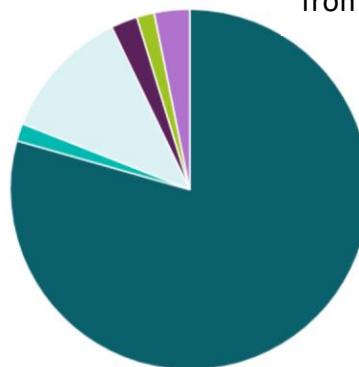


We were joined by local volunteer group Blyth Litter Angels, whose additional local knowledge led us to head for the skatepark to give that a bit of clean up once we had completed the survey on the beach; we gathered 0.92 kg of litter from the skatepark.

Materials collected



- Plastic/Polystyrene
- Rubber
- Paper/Cardboard
- Wood (machined)
- Metal
- Sanitary



Numerically, fragments of plastic up to 50 cm in size (x 34) were the commonest items we found during the survey of our transect, followed by cigarette stubs (x 26), out of the total of 126 items found, totalling 0.22 kg. Plastic or polystyrene comprised 79.37% of all the litter we found in our transect.

Sunday 17 September – Felixstowe beach Manor Terrace to Orford Road

For this activity, we teamed up with [Litter-free Felixstowe](#) as per the year previous, and also a wonderful team of 5 lads from DHL, and more from the Greenprint Forum and the local community totalling a team of 18 for our survey of this bit of beach.

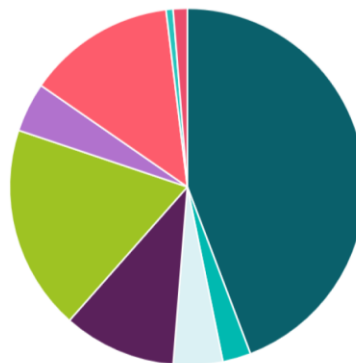


It was very disappointing to find not only one helium balloon in the survey transect, but also another one in the nature reserve – in addition to the one found during the risk assessment a few days before our activity. We are grateful to East Suffolk Council who, thanks to encouragement from the Greenprint Forum some years ago, have a [ban in effect prohibiting the release of balloons \(and sky lanterns\)](#) from land owned by the council. If you know of anyone planning a release, please gently nudge them to [safer alternatives](#), if you feel comfortable doing so.



Materials collected

- Plastic/Polystyrene
- Rubber
- Cloth
- Paper/Cardboard
- Wood (machined)
- Metal
- Glass
- Sanitary
- Pottery/Ceramics



We found much more litter this year than in years previous at this particular beach, with a total of 156 items recorded totalling 1.42 kg, though this is still well below the national average. The most common items of litter we found here were fragments of plastic, bits of wood, and bits of glass.

After the survey, we were joined by more volunteers from Litter Free Felixstowe to make best use of this opportunity to gather more litter, from the car park at the end of Manor Terrace, and from part of Landguard Nature Reserve.

[Landguard Nature Reserve](#) is well worth a visit, with its internationally rare habitat of vegetated shingle as well as lowland acid grassland. Given its geographical location it is a migration hotspot for birds travelling to and from the near continent, and [Landguard Bird Observatory](#) is well situated to monitor these migrations.

Find out more and get involved:

The Marine Conservation Society is an important national data recording, reporting and campaign organisation incorporating citizen science. If you're organising a beach clean, why not incorporate a Beachwatch survey as part of your activity to help the MCS with their data-driven work, and maybe even consider adopting your stretch of beach to survey annually. (And please remember to also inform Neil Lister at the [AONB team](mailto:neil.lister@suffolk.gov.uk) so that they can include your results in their local report for Suffolk neil.lister@suffolk.gov.uk.)

Even if you're not near the coast, you can still survey the litter you find in your town, park or other inland environment and submit data to the MCS through their [Source to Sea Litter Quest](#) – this is an important source of survey data too, given that litter escaping from our inland areas to the oceans, for example via natural watercourses and surface water drains, is a considerable contributor to marine pollution.

You can find out how to get involved in Beachwatch surveying and the Source to Sea Litter Quest survey, here: [Marine Conservation Society | Home \(mcsuk.org\)](https://www.mcsuk.org/)



Thanks to our local event supporters:

- Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB team — who collate and share local results (reports from 2017-2022 available here [Beachwatch – Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB](#)), encouraged participation, coordinated local Beachwatch activities, and provided us with sharps boxes. Last year the team supported 362 Beachwatch volunteers across Suffolk who collectively removed 7034 items of litter from our county's coastline!
- East Suffolk Services Limited — who provided us with hi-vis coats, litter pick sticks and bags and ensured the responsible removal and disposal of the litter we'd gathered.
- And of course all those who took part in our activities this autumn.

