

Greenprint Forum Beachwatch report 2024

Part of our campaign Plastic Action towards our goal of a Pollution Free Environment, combining direct action with citizen science

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.

Beachwatch, or “Great British Beach Clean”, is the annual survey of marine litter around 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, which was extended recently to encompass polystyrene cups, plates and cutlery, was secured thanks to evidence like this. Although still in the top 10 litter items nationally as of 2023, plastic cutlery, trays, and straws were recorded on 5% fewer beaches nationwide than in 2022, and a 14% decrease year-on-year in the presence of cotton bud sticks, which could reflect an early impact of those bans. [MCS 2023 Beachwatch Report.pdf](#)

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. By removing rubbish from beaches, we can help to prevent it from adding, or returning, to the estimated average of 70 kg of plastic litter per square kilometre of the floor of the ocean globally.



What did we do?

To support Beachwatch in 2024 the Greenprint Forum organised three local marine litter surveys combined with beach cleans during 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.



20 September – Bawdsey upriver of the Quay

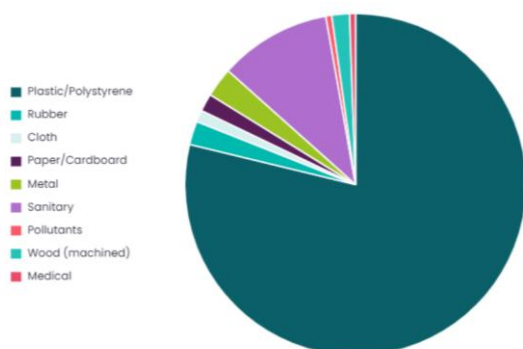
This Beachwatch activity was arranged as a team-building activity for the new cohort of Graduates who started with councils and other public sector employers across Suffolk this September as part of the Suffolk Graduate Programme, providing the graduates with an opportunity to combine direct environmental action with citizen science as part of their induction. [Graduate scheme - Careers \(suffolk.gov.uk\)](https://suffolk.gov.uk/graduate-scheme-careers)

It was also a great chance for the seven Graduates, who are each on a placement with a different employer, to spend a bit of time getting to know one another, whilst learning about the issues and impacts of marine pollution.

This was the second time that the Greenprint Forum organised a survey of this particular beach for the Suffolk Graduate Programme, the last time being in 2019.



Materials collected



Of the three beaches we surveyed this year, this one yielded the most litter numerically, with a total of 179 items recorded, though this is still well below the national average. The most common items of litter that comprised the 880 g recovered from our transect, were fragments of plastic, bits of polystyrene, cotton bud sticks, caps and lids, and cigarette ends. Plastic or polystyrene of some form comprised 79% of the total in numerical terms. We also found a pair of old pants and a pair of swimming shorts!

Along with our post-survey pick of more of the beach and the verge of the road, we ended up removing a total of 1.62 kg of litter from the environment here.

We also found a freshly deceased grass snake during our activity, and reported the finding to the [Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service \(suffolkbis.org.uk\)](https://suffolkbis.org.uk).



Saturday 28 September – Pakefield below the Jolly Sailors

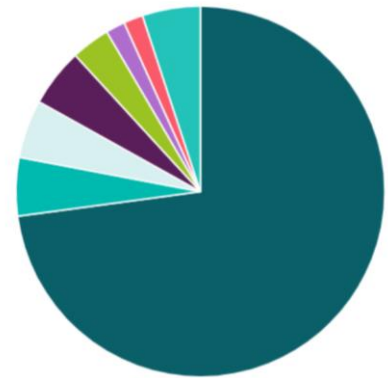
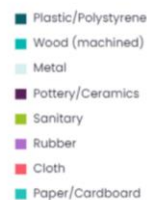
This Beachwatch activity was led by Jamie Bretton, who is currently serving an Apprenticeship with the Climate & Sustainability team at East Suffolk Council. Jamie had this to tell us afterwards:

“For this activity we enjoyed perfect weather—sunny with little wind. Six of us participated in the survey, including the MP for the constituency of Lowestoft Jess Asato, and together we collected just 200 g of litter over our transect of 100 metres. With only 1 wet wipe being found and a couple of cable ties being the most noticeable items the team found, the team collected just 59 separate pieces of litter.

“After the survey, with the addition of another dedicated volunteer, we continued our efforts with a litter pick as we walked northwards towards Lowestoft, feeling that we had all made a meaningful contribution to actively caring for our coastline having removed from the environment two full bags of litter by the end of the session.”

Materials collected

The last time we carried out this activity here was in 2022, when we found 176 items on our transect.



Sunday 29 September – Felixstowe beach Manor Terrace to Orford Road

Our final Beachwatch activity for 2024 took us back to this stretch of beach in Felixstowe. With a team of seven in total, we found just 40 items of litter along our survey transect, compared to 156 in 2023, just 9 in 2022, and 55 in 2021, which shows the degree of variation we can see in these zones of flux where litter both enters the marine environment and can return, potentially to return back again to the sea, with the movement back and forth of the tides.

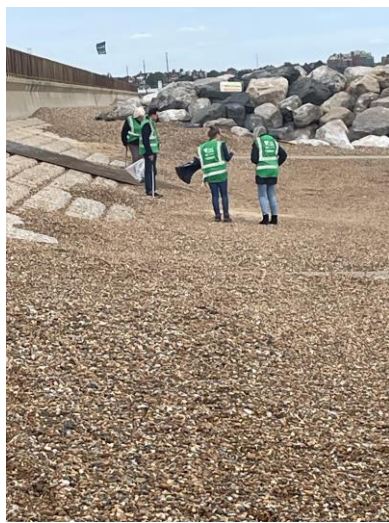
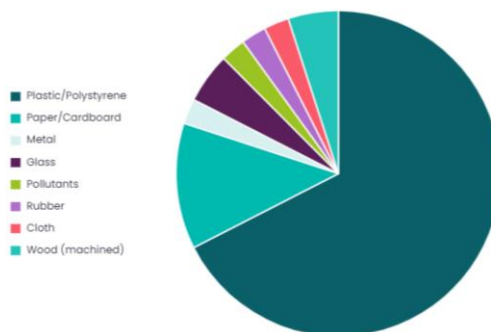
The weight of the litter from our 100 m totalled 620 g, with some form of plastics or polystyrene comprising 27 of the 40 items found, and the commonest items found being fragments of plastic, cigarette butts, and plastic packets.

After we completed the survey we continued northwards along the beach to Martello Park, before making our way back along Manor Terrace to our start point, collecting rubbish as we went.

Among our finds after the survey, we found a large yellow wooden object identified by one of the volunteers as a rat guard from a ship, a device attached to the moorings of a ship at dock to prevent boarding by rats.



Materials collected



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.)

We usually organise at least two Beachwatch activities under the banner of the Greenprint Forum each September, one in Felixstowe, and one further north along the coast. If you are part of a local litter picking group, or a business looking for a team-building opportunity for your colleagues, and would like to team up with us on one of our future activities and make it a joint event, please let us know.

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 an 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 all our supporters:

- The team at the Suffolk & Essex Coast and Heaths National Landscape — who collate and share local results (reports from 2017-2023 available here [Coast & Heaths NL - Beachwatch](#)), encouraged participation, coordinated local Beachwatch activities, and provided us with sharps boxes. Last year the team supported 627 Beachwatch volunteers across Suffolk who collectively removed 180 kg of litter from the coastline of our county!
- 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.