Good practice

Preventing abandoned picnics

This project piloted a new behavioural intervention to address litter arising from picnicking in parks, or 'abandoned picnics' litter. The intervention aimed to illustrate the cost of cleaning up litter in parks to those using them. It communicated to park-users how much had been spent to date in each park and what could otherwise have been purchased for the park if this resource had not been spent on cleaning up litter (new trees, a hedgehog habitat, a public barbeque, etc.). This was communicated to park-users through the design and installation of a thermometer style litter gauge and supporting posters.

Keep Britain Tidy partnered with Parks for London to trial this intervention in four London parks:

- Oak Hill Park, Barnet
- Hampstead Heath, City of London
- Northala Fields, Ealing
- Finsbury Park, Haringey

The litter gauge intervention reduced litter across four London parks by an average of 18%. Northala Fields had a 48% reduction, Finsbury Park had a 32% reduction Oak Hill Park had a 16% reduction; however, Hampstead Heath saw an increase in litter of 24%. Clearly, there is a need to further investigate the results from Hampstead Heath to better understand why the intervention appears not to have been affective despite good results across the other three sites.

Of those observed littering during the baseline phase of the intervention, the most prevalent litterers across the four sites were those aged between 16 and 24; male park-users; groups consisting of three to four people, followed by groups of five to ten; friend groups and; adults who were picnicking, socialising or partying, followed by families picnicking.

During the intervention phase, the observed littering of food related packaging reduced by 61% and there were several observed engagements which suggest the intervention was successful in attracting attention and sparking debate about the cost of removing litter.

The intervention received positive engagement from park-users of all age groups across all the pilot sites. Looking specifically at picnic related litter, the observations research found that the intervention was successful in reducing observed instances of food related litter, as well as paper litter, cigarette related litter, plastic bag litter and drinks packaging.

Overall the responses to the gauge were positive, with more than half of the sample agreeing that the intervention has made them more aware that money spent clearing litter could be spent on other items for the park and over half of the sample agreeing that the intervention should be used in other parks to discourage littering.

