

Strong message to those who toss litter in Guildford

Despite polite requests and many reminders littering in Guildford remains a growing problem. Today the Council launches a blunt anti-littering campaign with a strong message appealing for people to 'take litter home'.

Keep Britain Tidy, City of York Council and Bath & North East Somerset Council have all recently adopted a similar approach to discourage the tossing of rubbish. National press coverage indicates the initiative seems to have originated in New Zealand.

Our campaign starts today and is endorsed by Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey Hills AONB with both organisations adding their logos to our posters as a mark of support.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Caroline Reeves explained why she felt the bold move was the only option. She said: 'Since restrictions began lifting we have seen an astronomical rise in the amount of litter being thrown in our parks, countryside and streets. Littering is illegal, anti-social, has a negative effect on our environment and costs thousands of pounds to clear up. You can receive up to £150 fine for dropping litter or up to £2,500 if it goes to court. We completely understand how difficult the last few months have been for our residents losing their freedoms and for many very sadly their loved ones. Our vulnerable communities in particular have suffered immeasurably and continue to need our support.'

She added: 'However when lockdown began easing and we could all go outdoors for as long as we wanted to, suddenly we found we had twice as much litter as an average week in the school holidays. It's as if everyone has forgotten how to behave. We've asked politely so many times and put out so many statements and messages asking, 'please just take your litter home' but nothing has worked.'

The impact on our environment is damaging. Research published recently in Keep Britain Tidy's Journal of Local Environmental Quality showed that millions of small mammals – voles and shrews - were dying after being enticed into bottles and cans.

Sarah Jane Chimbwandira, Chief Executive of the Surrey Wildlife Trust, fully supports this campaign. She said: 'We have real concerns about the exponential increase in ASB, littering and disregard for the countryside. In some places, it is the worst we have ever seen. It is particularly concerning when we are recognising the benefits of nature to our wellbeing, which is not possible when sites are full of litter.'

Rob Fairbanks, Director of Surrey Hills AONB agreed and said: 'We have seen unprecedented numbers of visitors to the Surrey Hills area and there have been major problems dealing with litter, congestion, gates left open and BBQs. We ask all our visitors to please respect our countryside, its farmers and our local communities.'

In addition to allocated government funding the Council agreed an emergency £15 million budget in May to ensure it can continue to serve and meet the needs of the borough. During the Coronavirus (Covid 19) outbreak all essential services have been maintained and frontline staff have been overwhelmed with the wonderful support and gratitude shown to them by residents such as notes left for the waste collectors or kind words and thanks on social media.

Cllr Reeves continued: 'We have been so proud of how most of our residents have played their part in Guildford's response to the outbreak, staying at home to save lives and protect our NHS and now as we start to emerge, they are dutifully following the guidance and being sensible. Their community spirit and those who have volunteered to help others have been an inspiration. But there are those that aren't and we need to shock them into seeing sense and simply get them to stop littering – we cannot spend more on clearing up after them. This weekend sees further relaxing of the guidance with our pubs and restaurants opening and we are very concerned the litter problem will escalate even further.'

The posters which will go up around the borough in parks, green spaces and countryside sites today, invite the reader to reflect on why they are throwing the rubbish and give three suggested reasons:

- I'm lazy
- I don't care about this community
- I think other people should pay to clean up after me

Cllr Reeves said: 'We will not put any of these posters near to playgrounds of course and we apologise in advance for any offence caused by this strong message but we want to make an impact and get residents to take their litter home with them and put it in the bin'.

She added: 'Please don't throw or toss litter, take it home. Help us to keep Guildford beautiful: love where you live'.