

Appendix 8: Focus Group Summary

October 2009

The General Impression of Cleanliness

Overall there was a positive impression of the cleanliness of the town centre. The rural areas were considered to be generally less clean than the town centre and that the parishes were considered to be given less attention. Some of these differences were accepted as being related to population densities. Some problems with littering on the interlink roads between villages were highlighted.

Good Points:

- Anti-litter signs and banners on main routes into Maidstone were generally considered to convey positive messages and help with the perception that Maidstone is a clean place
- Fly tips are picked up very quickly
- Dog fouling is much less of a problem than it used to be although it has by no means been eliminated
- The 'cleaning here today' signs and bright orange staff uniforms and vehicle liveries were mentioned as helping with the visibility of the service
- Graffiti is not a big problem within the borough except for a few isolated locations

Bad Points

- Areas close to secondary schools were identified as high in litter
- Overgrown weeds are a problem and impact on perception of cleanliness
- Items thrown from cars (e.g. fast food packaging) are a problem in rural areas
- Chewing gum cigarette ends are real problems
- Mote Park was considered as having a litter problem, particularly after weekends and near the café.
- The fabric of the street (e.g. quality of the surface, making good the surface after maintenance work, street furniture, curbs, etc) is poor in a lot of areas and has a negative impact on perception

Cleaning Frequencies and Extent of Cleaning

Responses on cleaning frequencies varied although there was broad understanding and acceptance that cleaning frequencies in the town centre were far higher than in the outlying areas.

Increasing cleaning frequency during the autumn to both to collect leaves and to pick litter which is exposed by leaf fall was suggested as being necessary.

It was accepted that the council does not clean private land but the exact boundaries on verges and ditches were discussed. Residents do not differentiate between who owns what and this can impact on perception of cleanliness and whether the council is doing a good job

Views on Campaigns

Recent campaigns which highlighted the responsibilities of individuals were considered to be effective campaigns. The chewing gum boards were considered to be an innovative way to engage with teenagers who were discussed as being a particularly difficult group to engage in anti-littering campaigns. Signs often referred to enforcement but people did not know exactly how much enforcement actually takes place or whether the perceived risk of being caught was high enough. The role of enforcement was considered to be an essential component of maintaining street cleanliness.

Clean Sweep campaigns were thought to be positive in promoting a sense of community but may also promote the idea that litter will always be cleaned up by somebody else.

Further campaigns on chewing gum, cigarette ends, engaging with teenagers and changing the culture of littering habits were considered as good areas to develop further.

What Would You Do to Improve Cleanliness?

Ideas included:

- Increase enforcement
- Use CCTV footage or images in campaigns to highlight littering habits
- Publicise the amount of litter collected in an area and break the results down in to different types of litter
- Develop funding partnerships for different schemes with private firms (e.g. fast food outlets)
- Work more with secondary schools on awareness and education initiatives
- Devolve budgets to parish councils to carry out local cleaning campaigns

What Would You Do To Improve Perception of Cleanliness within Maidstone

Ideas included:

- Have a blitz on chewing gum
- Use a van in the high street to demonstrate how much rubbish gets collected during the course of a day
- Improve the painting and maintenance of street furniture (e.g. benches, bins, bollards, etc)
- Improve the thoroughness of cleaning
- Establish parish caretakers to help improve ownership
- Borough council could co-ordinate clean-ups. Involve local youth groups (scout, guides, etc)

What Can You Do to Help?

- Develop good communication between partners. Agree action plans for problem areas and areas which are not on cleaning schedules
- People do not appreciate (or care) about land ownership issues or responsibilities. This requires good co-operation between partners.
- There is a need for people to take personal responsibility for litter. Work on initiatives to help change people's behaviour

- Change the focus of Green Week next year from recycling to a general litter focus (cigarette ends, fly tipping, litter, etc.)
- Work more with retailers – marketing meetings are already organised for town centre retailers and could be used as a forum for MBC to raise the profile of anti-litter campaigns.
- Use security guards employed by retailers to assist, e.g. enforcement
- Develop parish partnerships