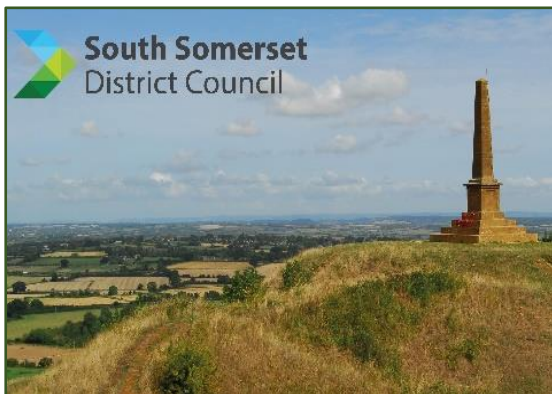




Why Litter Bins are not always the Answer

Case Study: Ham Hill Country Park, South Somerset District Council (SSDC)

The removal of litter bins at Ham Hill Country Park has been hailed a success after the amount of litter at the site fell by approximately 85% annually.



Ham Hill Country Park

[Ham Hill Country Park](#) is a much-loved beauty spot in South Somerset, owned and managed by SSDC. The site is 173 Ha and welcomes over 300,000 visitors a year. As a District Council, we wanted to continue to preserve and keep the site safe and clean for everyone to enjoy.

Why did we consider removing the litter bins?

After a spate of anti-social littering at the site in 2017 and 2018, we were forced to rethink how to address an ever-increasing litter problem at the site. Ham Hill is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (Geological SSSI), Scheduled Ancient Monument (due to the Iron Age hill fort) and Country Park.

SSDC's Countryside Rangers were spending a large amount of time managing litter, leaving less time to use their wide range of skills and knowledge to maintain the ecological environment and preserve the heritage of the country park. In June 2019, we made the decision to remove all 14 litter bins from the site, encouraging visitors to take responsibility for their own waste and asking them to take their rubbish home with them and recycle what they could.

We were finding that the litter bins on site were always full around key areas, and if the bins were full, rubbish was then placed on the floor next to them (essentially, litter attracting more litter). If this happened out of hours (the country park is open 24 hours a day) it led to wildlife distributing it overnight, which looked awful and posed a risk to both visitors and wildlife.

Initially, our Rangers tried to put notices on the bins asking people to take their litter home if the bins were full. We also tried installing recycling bins in well-used areas, but these were just used as litter bins too.



Overflowing bins at Ham Hill Country Park, 2018



In 2018, we undertook a survey to weigh our rubbish collections from both general and dog waste bins; we collected over 8 tonnes and 16 tonnes a year respectively. All this waste was being sent to landfill, un-separated - a huge environmental problem!



We therefore did some research and consulted other parks that we knew had removed their bins.

How did we do it?

In June 2019, a decision was made by our Countryside Ranger team to remove all 14 general waste bins, leaving only the dog waste bins. The team decided not to announce this in advance; instead, Senior Officers and Members at the District Council were briefed around the potential for public

push back. On the day the bins were removed, we shared a Social Media campaign and video (alongside posters around the site) asking people to take their litter home and dispose of it responsibly, explaining that “we could not recycle it, but they could”. The campaign explained how much litter was generated at the park annually, how we wanted to reduce it and send less to landfill, and that we needed our visitors help to achieve this vision.

Alongside the Social Media campaign, we also installed a new litter-pick station at the entrance to the site, equipped with litter-pickers and reusable bags for anyone to borrow and do their own #2minute clean up. The aim of this was to give visitors a chance to help keep the site tidy!

Was removing all the litter bins the right decision?

In 2021, we collected around 1.5 tonnes of litter; this represents a reduction of c.85% compared to 2018.

Paul McNeill, Ham Hill Countryside Ranger said, “Yes, it’s been a really good move. We have reduced the amount of litter left at the site and given people the opportunity to contribute to the wellbeing of this much-loved site and its wildlife. We have reduced staff-time handling waste and saved around 6-hours a week not clearing out litter bins; this is nearly six weeks of someone’s time annually, valuable time which can be put back into managing the site for our visitors and wildlife.

The site has been the recipient of the Green Flag Award for the past 17 years, which looks at how well maintained and clean a site is. The removal of the litter bins and our new litter pick station has helped to maintain the high standard at the site”.



Litter Pick Stations for visitors



Initially the decision was met with some apprehension by visitors, who had concerns that the Country Park might become even more overwhelmed with litter. To allay fears, we communicated that we were not altering our staffing levels and both rangers and volunteers would still litter pick and inspect the site as often as they used to (*it's just much quicker now*). Since visitors have become used to the idea, we've received lots of positive feedback!



Volunteers litter picking at Ham Hill

SSDC's Portfolio Holder for Environment Councillor Sarah Dyke added, "The removal of bins at Ham Hill has proved the right decision. Visitors take items that generate waste there, so there is no excuse not to take the waste away and recycle what they can at home. The vast majority of visitors respect our no bins policy and help to preserve this wonderful environment, by leaving no trace and respecting the wonderful visitor destination that Ham Hill is."

Is it right for all sites?

Every site is different, and the removal of bins should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The decision taken for Ham Hill was based around the type, size and location of the site and its demographic of users. It is a rural site with 90% of visitors arriving by car, therefore we felt that taking rubbish home with them (mostly from consumables) would be easier than if they'd walked somewhere for a picnic. We also did not have the ability to sort, separate and recycle waste from site and that played a large part in our decision making.

At our Chard Reservoir site, we only provide litter bins at the car park for overnight anglers to dispose of their waste.

However, at Yeovil Country Park we have not removed the litter bins as the site is linear in nature, with visitors crossing from residential area to residential area, as well as being too close to the town centre for bin removal to be considered effective. We are continuing to monitor this however and have been looking at other ways to reduce litter at this site, for example through providing visitors access to our #2minute litter-pick stations.

SSDC's Environment Strategy

The removal of litter bins at Ham Hill is one of a number of initiatives being implemented as part of SSDC's overarching Environment Strategy, which was formally adopted and approved by Councillors in October 2019.

To find out more, and to get in touch with our environment team, visit our website at: www.southsomersetenvironment.co.uk.

Details of our Country Parks can be found on our Visit South Somerset website at: www.visitsouthsomerset.com/explore.