



Pride in Place: Tackling Incivilities

Case Study: Tipton Litter Watch

Tipton, West Midlands





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written by Ekosgen Consultants

Photographs courtesy of Tipton Litter Watch

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The Challenge

Tipton in the West Midlands was badly affected by litter and fly-tipping. Local people consistently highlighted the environment as the main thing they disliked about the town. The poor local environment was having a negative impact on people's well-being and meant they had no pride in their local area.



The Response

In 1997, a group of residents got together to form Tipton Litter Watch, with a view to campaign against litter and put pressure on the local authority to take action to tackle it. The group has evolved over time, moving from a campaigning organisation to one which takes direct action to reduce litter. It has developed its own educational programme, Think Before You Throw, which is delivered in every school in Sandwell. Its volunteers have collected 118 tonnes of rubbish and helped to change residents' perceptions of young people.

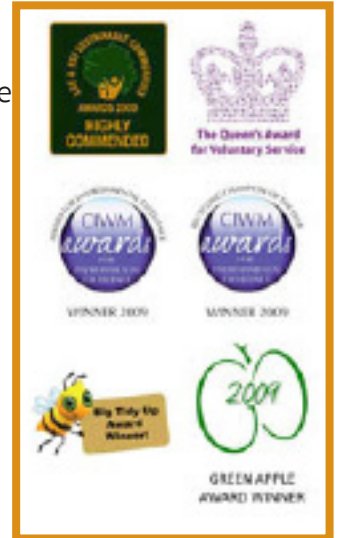
How it worked

- Tipton Litter Watch was established in 1997. Over time, the group has developed from a campaigning organisation to one which takes direct action to tackle environmental problems, educating local children about their role in environmental issues ranging from litter to renewable energy to Fair Trade. Its area of interest has moved beyond Tipton to cover the whole of Sandwell borough.
- Originally a membership organisation made up of local community activists, Tipton Litter Watch became incorporated as a charity in 2005 and has a board of trustees who continue to provide a link to the local community. With two paid staff, the charity draws on many volunteers to deliver its community activities and has plans to increase the role of volunteers in delivering the educational part of its work.



- In its 15 years of operation, Tipton Litter Watch has developed an environmental education programme which is delivered in every school in Sandwell. This is based on a belief that educating young people about environmental responsibility at school leads to action at home, increased household recycling and reduced litter on the streets, so creating a more sustainable borough.
- Working with Sandwell MBC and Serco, the local environmental services provider, Tipton

Litter Watch helps to deliver Sandwell's annual Big Spring Clean. It has supported litter-picking events involving more than 28,000 young people, and worked in the local community to educate and raise awareness about recycling and litter reduction across the borough.



- The hard work, commitment and passion of those involved in Tipton Litter Watch - both volunteers and paid employees - has been the basis of the project's success. The project has evolved considerably since it first started, adapting itself to changing national and local policies and funding regimes, whilst maintaining its core message and values.
- Tipton Litter Watch's plans for the future include diversifying its funding base and using its educational programme to generate an income stream, supporting other areas to develop similar projects and recruiting volunteers to lead activity in each of Sandwell's six towns.

Background to the project

An industrial town in the Black Country, Tipton is one of the six towns that make up the borough of Sandwell, one of the most deprived local authority areas in England. It was here, in 1997, that a group of residents got together to form Tipton Litter Watch.

Consultations undertaken with local residents as part of the Tipton City Challenge programme consistently found that litter and the environment were high on the list of things they didn't like about the area, which they described as 'dirty' and 'untidy'. The sites of demolished former factories were used for fly-tipping and parts of the area were badly littered.

The poor-quality environment damaged the image of the town and became 'a self-fulfilling prophecy'.

' – People thought “we live in a dump, we're not worth anything”.'

Project Manager

Tipton Litter Watch began as a fight back against this image:

'It was about trying to instil pride and encouraging people to take more care of their area.'

Chair of Trustees

The project began as a campaigning organisation, raising awareness of the right of citizens under the

1990 Environmental Protection Act to insist that the local authority and others removed litter – and taking action against them if they didn't. Volunteer 'Litter Wardens' from the project were given responsibility for overseeing the cleanliness of local streets and lobbying Sandwell MBC to clean up when needed.

Over time, the group's activities and area of operation have changed considerably:

'We moved on from the complaining stage and started to look for solutions.'

Chair of Trustees

They noticed that particular problem areas were often around schools, so developed a programme to educate young people about litter, recycling and waste management.

Today, Tipton Litter Watch works across the borough of Sandwell and has expanded its operations beyond litter to cover a range of environmental sustainability issues, from renewable energy to Fair Trade.



What the project does

From its initial campaigning focus, Tipton Litter Watch has been through a number of stages of development and now focuses mainly on delivering its educational programme and working with volunteers and partners in the Council and Serco. In 2000, funding was secured from the National Lottery Community Fund, and a co-ordinator was appointed and the project began working with local schools. To begin with, this involved taking theatre productions on litter and recycling into schools, but in 2005/06, having secured funding from Sandwell MBC, the newly-appointed project co-ordinator (who had previously been involved as a volunteer) developed Tipton Litter Watch's own educational programme, Think Before You Throw (TBYT).

TBYT is a 'ready-made programme of environmental study' for teachers and pupils, designed to make it as easy as possible for schools to participate by providing lesson plans, pupil worksheets, environmental competitions and an online learning website. Now part of the curriculum in every Sandwell school, the award-winning programme begins with Tipton Litter Watch training school staff, who then become TBYT co-ordinators for their school.

Schools are supported to establish eco-committees, undertake litter audits and integrate green thinking into mainstream school activity. The project covers a range of issues which can be covered as part of general topic work or in stand-alone lessons.

The two Tipton Litter Watch staff also deliver a range of environmental activities in schools across the borough, including interactive assemblies covering a range of environmental themes,, tailored to the age and understanding of pupils. The project workers also organise and participate in school litter picks, and help teachers and pupils

deliver environmental action plans for their school, including commitments on recycling, minimising energy use and waste reduction. To date, 32 primary and secondary schools in Sandwell have gained the Think Before You Throw status award.

Since October 2011, this activity has been enhanced by the addition of Tipton Litter Watch's Eco Bus, a refurbished double decker bus which acts as a mobile environmental classroom. It will visit every school in Sandwell this academic year. The bus is used to deliver a series of activities, workshops and games for young people and more than 2,500 local school children entered the competition to design the interior of the bus, using recycled materials.

Tipton Litter Watch makes a major contribution to Sandwell Council's annual Big Spring Clean campaign, which developed from a pilot project originally run by Tipton Litter Watch. The charity recruits schools from across the borough to take part in litter picking and clean-up activities. Over the past five years, the charity has 'litter picked' with over 28,000 young people in Sandwell and in 2010 alone, the Council estimated that 68 tonnes of litter were cleared from Sandwell's streets.

Tipton Litter Watch first secured funding from the National Lottery in 2000 and was funded by Sandwell Council from 2004/05. In 2010, Serco was awarded the environmental services contract for the borough, as part of which the company is committed to part-funding Tipton Litter Watch for the next three years. Some sponsorship is also secured from local and national businesses to support the annual schools competitions and litter picks. Total annual funding in 2011/12 amounts to around £65,000 and the group has had an income of c.£50-£60,000 each year since 2005.

Plans for the future

Whilst the current focus is on getting the Eco Bus project up and running and embedding it in the TBYT programme, the Board and Manager of Tipton Litter Watch have a number of priorities for the future:

1. Diversifying funding sources and reducing reliance on Sandwell Council and Serco. As well as securing additional funding from the private sector, this includes investigating the possibility of generating an income from the TBYT programme, by selling it or licensing it to schools outside Sandwell;
2. Considering routes to expansion via a franchise-type model - supporting other areas to develop similar projects which would then become autonomous;
3. A renewed focus on working with the wider community, recruiting volunteers to take forward the project in each of Sandwell's six towns.

Community involvement and leadership

From the start, Tipton Litter Watch has been driven by a group of community activists - local people who wanted to improve the place where they lived. Over time, the organisation has become more formal, becoming incorporated as a charity in 2005. Although 'keeping people involved over time is a challenge', the Chairman notes that 'as people have dropped out, others have dropped in.'

Tipton Litter Watch has been through several periods of transition - from a campaigning organisation to one involved in direct action, from mainly working with adults to having a focus on work with young people and, from a loose organisation to a formal charity - and this has presented challenges to those most closely involved who have been on a steep learning curve:

'It's been a real journey.'
Chairman

However, the constant change and development has made it an exciting project to be involved in and the feeling of empowerment it has given volunteers has been an important motivator.

As well as community representation on the Board of Trustees, Tipton Litter Watch has constantly worked with and within the Sandwell community to raise awareness of litter problems and encourage recycling. The project co-ordinator attends community events, road shows and weekend litter picks to promote the work of the charity, and has used the local press to engage local people.

The charity works extensively with local community and faith groups to recruit volunteers for its litter picks and clean-ups and the former project co-ordinator noted that recruiting volunteers 'hasn't been that hard really - once you get your name out there and people know about you.'

Project achievements and impact

In 15 years of activity, Tipton Litter Watch has:

- Worked with local communities across Sandwell to educate and inform them of their rights and responsibilities in relation to litter and waste;
- Delivered its educational programme in every primary and secondary school in Sandwell;
- Litter-picked with over 28,000 young people, collecting 118 tonnes of rubbish;
- Persuaded Sandwell Council that all hot food premises should have a litter abatement notice as part of their planning permission;
- Been recognised nationally, winning awards ranging from the Chartered Institute of Waste Management's Environmental Excellence Award, to Keep Britain Tidy's Cleaner Safer Greener Network Awards, to the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

The impact on local schools has been significant, with every one of the borough's schools participating in the programme and 32 now holding the TBYT status award. Those employed directly by the project, staff in partner organisations and community members all agree that working with young people has been a particular success of the Tipton Litter Watch approach:

'Children are the adults of tomorrow - if you get the message across to them, you're halfway sorted.'

Community Activist.

'If you can educate the children, they will then educate their parents.'

Local authority officer

'Listening to what children say after they've taken part in the events - that's when you know your message is getting through.'

Project Manager

The charity's work with schools has also helped to change the perceptions of young people held by some adults in Sandwell. Analysis of the litter collected during litter picks has shown that a large proportion of it is adult-related litter (beer cans, cigarette packets etc), challenging the assumption that it is children and young people who are responsible for most litter. There has been a good response from elderly residents when they see schoolchildren helping to tidy up the local area, and some older children have undertaken gardening work for residents living near to schools as part of the litter-picking days.

There is some evidence of behaviour change within the borough. The council reports that although the number of volunteers involved in the Big Spring Clean is increasing each year, the volume of litter collected is falling, suggesting that Sandwell as a whole is less heavily littered than in the past.

The project has also built capacity in the local community, particularly amongst those most closely involved in project delivery. For example, the previous project co-ordinator (who has recently moved onto a new job, but remains involved through membership of the Board of Trustees) began as a volunteer and was recruited to the co-ordinator post at a relatively young age. During her time with the charity, she learned many new skills, such as bid writing, applying for awards, cultivating the local media and building relationships, which contributed to the success of the group. The Trustees themselves have also learned new skills as their role has developed over time.

Reasons for project successes and lessons learnt

The underlying reason for the success of the project is the hard work, passion and sheer belief of all those involved that what they were doing could make a difference. This drove the community activists who originally founded Tipton Litter Watch and has been reflected in the paid staff they have recruited to deliver the project.

Being a hands-on organisation which is very active and visible in the local community and local media has also contributed to Tipton Litter Watch's achievements.

' – They have become a household name.'

Council Officer

Being accepted in the borough's schools has played an important part in this visibility – lots of local people first hear of Tipton Litter Watch through their children or grandchildren. The arrival of the Eco Bus has further increased this visibility, as it is very prominent when travelling through the borough or parked outside local schools.

The quality of Tipton Litter Watch's key product – the Think Before You Throw educational programme – and the value of the on-going support which the charity provides to schools and communities have helped to maintain its

success. Once the decision had been made to focus on education and work with young people, the charity deliberately recruited a co-ordinator with knowledge of the education system, a background in recycling and community action and a youthful outlook (she was just 23 when appointed) to design and develop what became Think Before You Throw.

She then worked extensively with local schools to get the programme accepted, making it as easy as possible for teachers to use the resources in their lessons.

The project has demonstrated that it can adapt to rapid and frequent changes in national and local government policies, initiatives and funding regimes, whilst continuing to provide what is a unique service within the local area.

The charity uses a fun and lively approach to communicate very simple messages which will 'help improve people's lives for the future.'

Local Community Activist

The charity's Chairman and previous project co-ordinator highlighted a number of lessons learned from the earlier stages of the project:

1. Being careful not to take on too much, especially when resources to do the work are limited – keeping the scope of the work manageable: *'We have learned that we would rather deliver smaller things of higher quality than big things that aren't as good.'*
2. Involving a broader range of Trustees from an earlier stage: *'people from different backgrounds can provide a wider variety of support.'*



Advice to other communities

Although one of the priorities for the future is to support other areas which wish to develop similar projects, the chair of the charity warns that other communities should not think they can simply replicate what has been done in Sandwell:

*‘You need circumstances to come together to create the spark.’
Chair of Trustees*

Despite this, those involved in the project had a number of pieces of advice for others:

1. Believe in what you are doing, you must be enthusiastic and you need to maintain your enthusiasm. ‘Don’t go into anything half-heartedly - you have to be committed and take others along with you.’
2. Be clear about what you are trying to achieve, understand that it will take time to get there and do your research - prepare a plan, but be flexible and responsive to new opportunities.
3. You can’t do it on your own - put together a good committee, involve people from different backgrounds who bring different skills, and find a local champion who can act as a critical friend.

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