

Making Woking's open spaces better places to visit

During lockdown and social distancing, many people have appreciated the open spaces and parks in Woking, whether walking the dog or simply getting exercise.

However, a small number of Woking's residents are spoiling it for the majority of the law-abiding citizens, and even endangering them. The problem is litter. This is not just some inconsiderate people leaving a few bottles and cans or food waste lying about, but is on a large scale and caused by friends gathering into large groups. These people are congregating, often at dusk, and leaving a considerable amount of rubbish behind, including glass bottles and plastic waste, which can be a danger to the public and pets.

The problem is not restricted to just one open space, but is occurring across the borough. The amount of litter being left behind constitutes anti-social behaviour, which is a crime.

Adding a few waste bins won't solve the problem as these people are unlikely to use them anyway, and emptying them would be difficult as Serco, the council's contractor, is not allowed to drive across the playing fields to get to faraway bins. The solution is therefore not easy and requires action by Woking BC, the police, and us, the residents.

Woking BC and the neighbourhood policing team work closely together and can usually address a problem quickly if it is reported to them in a timely manner. But the police and council can only act when someone reports something to them. So please call the police on 101 if you see people congregating illegally where litter is a known problem. The police may not rush round at every occasion, but if the same group is reported regularly, something will get done about it.

If you come across large amounts of litter left from the night before, please take a photo of it and report it to Woking BC (you can do so here: https://my.woking.gov.uk/service/street_cleaning_and_litter).

As members of the public, please continue to collect the litter yourself, after taking a photograph and reporting it. The rubbish can be left in or by a public bin so Serco can dispose of it, along with legitimate rubbish left in the bins around public spaces.

Sadly, the problem Woking is experiencing is a seasonal one, made worse by lockdown and the boredom that brings – particularly for young people who are not at school or college.

The problems are the same across the country. On a cycle ride early on a Saturday down the Wandle Valley from Wandsworth to Carshalton, the amount of litter overflowing the bins and on the cycle path was quite a shock to me. But it had all gone by the time I cycled back up the river at 11am. Some open public spaces were notably clear of litter, even at 8am, due to dog walkers having cleared the route already by that time. In this case the public, London boroughs – and in one instance, the National Trust – were clearly working together to make the area a better place.

But it would all be so much better if everyone disposed of litter in the bins provided, or took it home!

