



# Oxclean litter campaign - Oxford

Members of Oxford Civic Society, surveyed in 2006, were expressing increasing dissatisfaction with the state of the city - Oxford has about 160,000 residents but about 7 million visitors a year. Good perhaps for the local economy but generating a lot of litter, and the city council were struggling to keep up.

A small group who quickly called themselves OxClean ([www.oxclean.org.uk](http://www.oxclean.org.uk)) was set up to look at the problem. At a meeting with the city council, we mentioned our idea of replicating 'Clean Up Australia' ([www.cleanup.org.au](http://www.cleanup.org.au)) on a smaller scale by organising a community litter pick. The city immediately offered support if we went ahead - and we couldn't have done it without them. We built up a database of local organisations - residents groups, community associations, allotment societies, schools, churches and so on - and mailed them, inviting them to register to carry out a two hour litter pick at a place and time of their own choice during our chosen weekend in early March. Our role was as liaison between these groups and the council, sorting out equipment needs and site for collection of rubbish at the end of the event, getting feedback and using our website to enable access to health and safety advice (by a link to [thebigtidyup.org](http://thebigtidyup.org)) and other instructions, including forms, posters and so on.

We have just finished our fourth Spring Clean (March 2011). About 120 groups take part (not always the same groups each year), involving about 2000 volunteers. Almost all the schools take part, a few businesses and the rest are community groups of varying sizes from one person acting alone to larger residents associations of 20 or more volunteers. Feedback this year suggests the city is cleaner - people felt there was less to pick up, or they had to cover a wider area. The city are delighted as this exercise means places that are low in city priorities get tackled sooner, as well as contributing to their statistics - we collect recyclables in a separate bag, and clear quite a bit of small scale fly tipping. And the volunteers unanimously report that it was fun, they feel good, now they know some neighbours, they will do it again, nice to see the place a bit cleaner.

As soon as Spring Clean is past, planning the next must start - we send out a 'Save the Date' message in June or July as some have an annual programme into which they slot Spring Clean. Serious recruitment starts in November; equipment requests are solicited in January-February.

Alongside Spring Clean we run a schools antilitter campaign. Volunteers visit all state primary and secondary schools during the year to see how tidy they keep their own sites, and a shield is awarded to the best secondary in the city, certificates to each primary. We are also developing a scheme with a local professional group, Creation Theatre, to run antilitter workshops in the secondaries - this needs more funding, which is not easy at present, but the school that has taken part so far reports a significant improvement.

Over the four years, we have:

- ☛ worked hard on keeping good relations with council staff and trying to reduce their burden if we could;
- ☛ kept closely in touch with local media: in particular The Oxford Times which runs frequent articles in the run-up to Spring Clean.
- ☛ tried to do as much as possible by email and via our website - in the first year we spent a lot on postage and printing;
- ☛ applied for grants wherever possible (from the city, county, Co-op and charitable trusts) but had support from Oxford Civic Society if we failed to raise enough;
- ☛ limited Spring Clean to Friday and Saturday - in year one only a few groups chose Sunday and council staff costs were also much higher;
- ☛ used grants to buy equipment. Some is donated to groups to keep, to encourage them to hold interim litter picks; the rest kept by us as loan stock (we have found it difficult to rely on council equipment: also most councils won't hold enough for so many groups working at the same time);
- ☛ provided laminated "Just Cleaned by..." signs for display after each litter pick - with reminders to display only for a fortnight as we don't want to be in trouble for fly posting!

After our initial success with Spring Clean, we widened the message to Don't Drop It, to tackle the source of the littering. We have had posters displayed on buses of the two major companies in Oxford and on some bus stops and notice boards. We have not got far with involvement of businesses yet. We designed a window roundel which the taxis have agreed to display. And we do quite a bit of lobbying relevant council officers - the enforcement team, the housing department, the councillor with responsibility for environment and others.

Since we began, the council have launched and run their own Cleaner Greener Oxford campaign, focussing on enforcement and fines, and many more litterbins have appeared, but litter continues to be a problem in some places - for example the city centre gets a lot of attention but elsewhere there is less change. And the city's Ring Road and the main roads approaching Oxford are still problematic - running through different districts means the scope for buck passing is always there.

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