



'NO IFS. NO BUTTS.'
Designing out cigarette litter.

Case Study

Winner: EPSA Certificate of Best Practice

Winner: Keep Britain Tidy Innovation Award



Cigarette litter collected from 20 City of London Smartbins over a two week period (4 inches deep)

A new approach to a familiar problem.

Busy streets need more than repeated cleaning. They need a practical way to prevent small litter from becoming a large, recurring task.

Why the City acted

Cigarette ends and chewing gum are difficult to recover once they reach the ground. They accumulate around entrances, beneath street furniture and in pavement cracks. In a high-footfall environment such as the Square Mile, repeated cleansing places demands on time and resources while the next wave of litter can quickly undo the work.

Start with people

The City's "No ifs. No butts." programme began with a practical question: how could the public be helped to dispose more considerately? The approach addressed the barriers between good intentions and action by providing recognisable facilities where people needed them, supported by communication and participation.

Use the street that already exists

Working with Smartstreets, the City developed a network of disposal points fitted to existing lamp posts, signposts, walls and railings. Tailored fitting options allowed facilities to respond to different locations. The aim was to make disposal convenient while respecting the street scene.

Prevention and cleansing work together

The programme did not remove the need to clean. It sought to collect more litter before it became dispersed, leaving cleansing teams with less avoidable picking and sweeping and giving the public a visible role in caring for shared spaces.

Small litter. A measurable difference.

The City of London tackled cigarette litter before it became a cleansing task: provide convenient disposal, engage the public and coordinate action across the Square Mile.

64%

Reported reduction in cigarette litter

27.48m

Estimated cigarette ends collected annually

633

Smartbins in the historical network

A programme built around participation

Launched in October 2009, “No ifs. No butts.” combined disposal facilities, public engagement, education, enforcement and business partnerships. Smartstreets worked with the City to develop and supply the Smartbin network that supported the programme.

An established network, now around 1,000 bins

The City of London network has grown to around 1,000 bins, according to Smartstreets’ October 2026 update. The historical results below relate to the earlier 633-bin network.

What the historical evidence shows

The original report records 633 Smartbins at 361 locations and 40,000 Minibin pocket ashtrays distributed. Its 64% reduction is attributed to a City before-and-after local environment quality survey. The annual collection estimate was extrapolated from monitoring between September and December 2012.

Source: original City of London case study. Annual collection estimates reflect September-December 2012 monitoring; seasonal variation, fill levels and compaction affect totals.

Five parts. One shared purpose.

Make considerate disposal easy, encourage participation and reinforce expectations through a coordinated programme.

01 Provision

Create a visible network of suitable bins on existing lamp posts, signposts, walls and railings. Provide pocket ashtrays for use when a fixed bin is not nearby.

02 Engagement

Use visible campaigns and branded materials to invite workers, residents, visitors and businesses to take part.

03 Education

Work with businesses and facilities managers to explain the programme and communicate consistent disposal messages to staff and visitors.

04 Enforcement

Support the programme with enforcement against littering, alongside targeted educational interventions. These are components described in the historical report.

05 Partnership and recognition

Encourage shared responsibility through business participation, the Clean City Awards and recognition of responsible waste management.

The Smartstreets contribution

Purpose-designed products and tailored fitting options helped make disposal convenient within the existing street scene. The lesson is a practical one: facilities and public participation work together.

Facilities people could find and use.

The network was the starting point. Engagement, education and business participation helped turn available facilities into everyday action.

A visible invitation to participate

City-branded Smartbins and campaign messages made the initiative recognisable. The original report also records distribution of 40,000 Minibin pocket ashtrays: a personal option for people who could not reach a fixed bin immediately. Together, these tools offered practical alternatives to dropping cigarette ends.

Businesses as partners

City teams visited businesses and facilities managers to explain the programme and encourage support. Literature and information packs helped messages reach staff and visitors. Environmental best-practice meetings provided opportunities to exchange ideas about responsible waste management.

Encouragement, with clear expectations

Targeted engagement included “Red Card” interventions that explained littering consequences and encouraged people to change their behaviour. Enforcement supported the wider programme. These activities are described as historical programme components, rather than current enforcement guidance.

Recognition that sustained participation

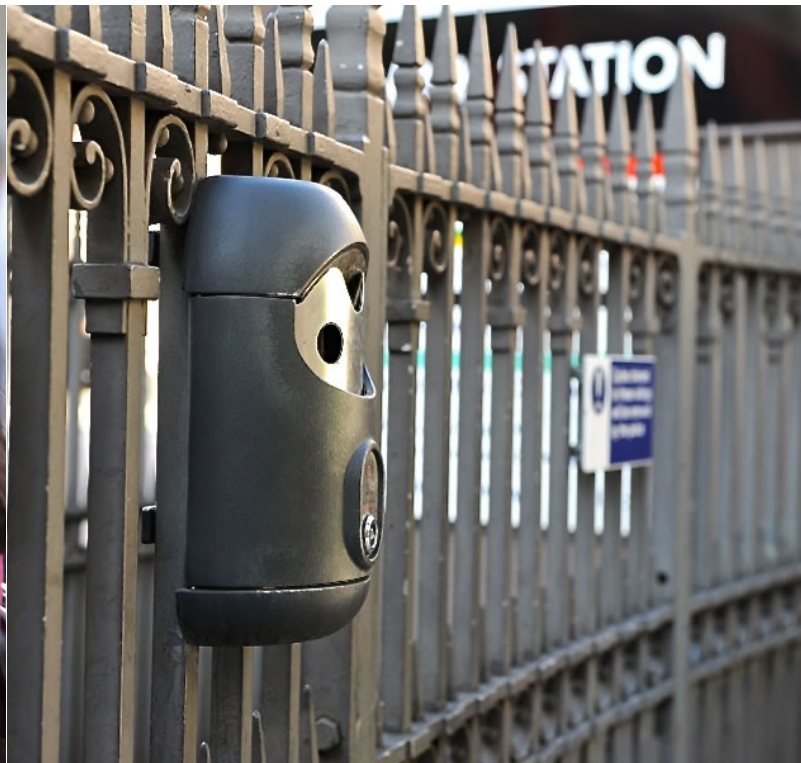
The Clean City Awards helped recognise responsible waste management and share good practice. The programme connected the City’s effort with the contribution of local businesses and the public, making cleaner streets a shared responsibility rather than solely a cleansing service task.

Convenient disposal. Visible design.



City of London: Smartbins alongside St Paul's Cathedral and within the Square Mile's streets. Existing infrastructure provided recognisable collection points in the places people used.

Designed for real streets.



City of London installations, public use and portable Minibin disposal.

Keep the solution close at hand.



40,000 City of London Minibin pocket ashtrays distributed, as recorded in the supplied print edition of the case study.

A portable option supported considerate disposal when a fixed bin was not nearby. City branding connected the individual action with a wider public campaign.

Collect it before it spreads.

Every cigarette end deposited in a bin is one that does not need to be retrieved from the pavement. The original report modelled three ways to collect 27 million cigarette ends.

Historical collection scenario	Labour hours	Labour cost
Manual litter picking	45,000	£427,500
Mechanically assisted collection	18,000	£225,000
Smartbin collections	2,250	£21,375

A model of collection efficiency

The scenarios assumed 10 minutes per 100 ends for manual picking at £9.50/hour; four minutes for assisted collection at £12.50/hour; and 30 seconds for Smartbin collection at £9.50/hour. Under these assumptions, the Smartbin scenario used 95% fewer labour hours than manual collection.

What the figures do - and do not - establish

These are historical labour-cost scenarios, not audited net savings or current prices. They exclude purchase, installation and wider operating costs. A current business case should account for servicing routes, maintenance, equipment, overheads and actual local conditions.

The opportunity for your streets

Start with your locations and litter hotspots. Plan facilities around public use, choose suitable fixings, support the scheme with clear communication and measure the change. The aim: cleaner streets, more effective cleansing and a visible improvement people can use.

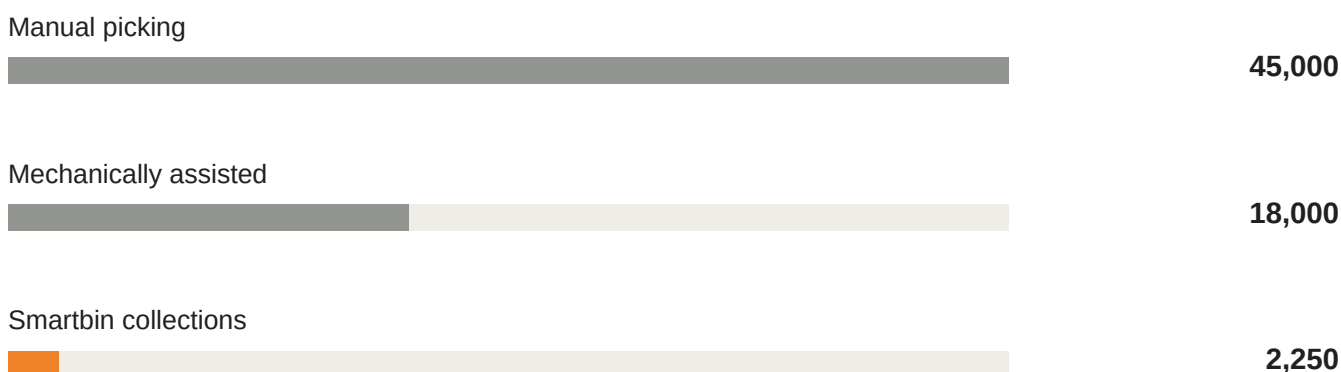
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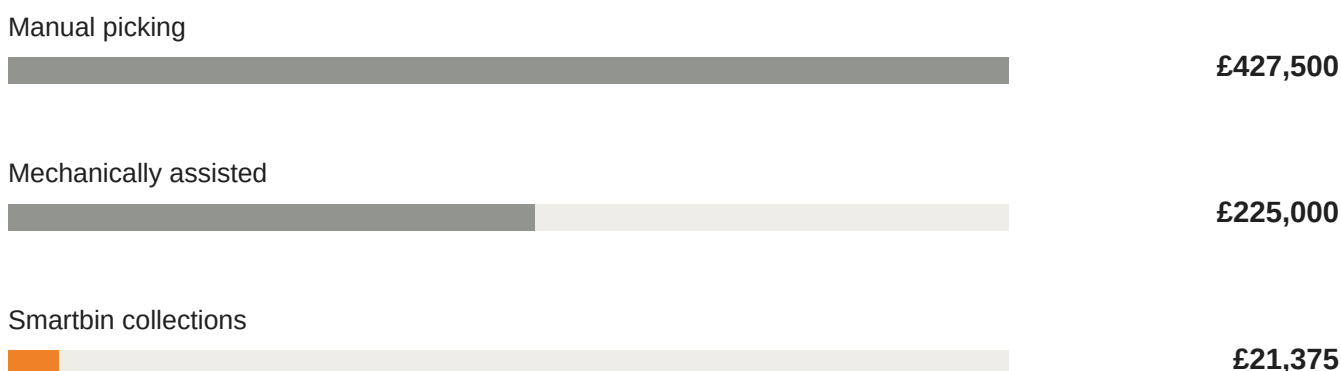
Time and cost, side by side.

Comparable historical scenarios for collecting 27 million cigarette ends. Bar lengths share a zero baseline within each chart.

Labour hours



Modelled labour cost

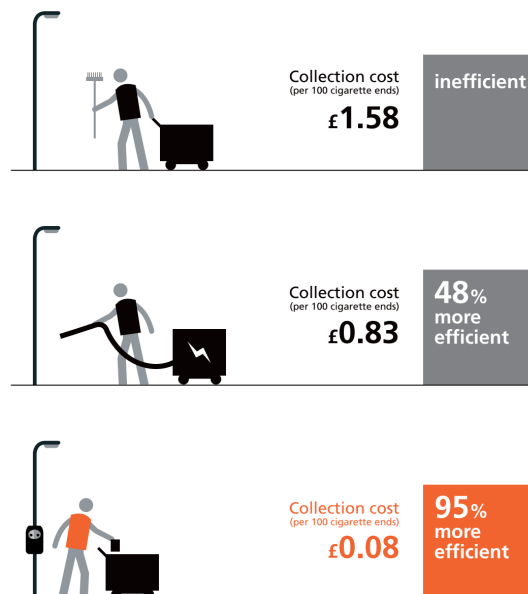


These charts show assumptions-based labour comparisons, not audited savings. The model uses historical wage rates and collection speeds for 27 million cigarette ends.

Less picking. More prevention.

Historical model: the same 27 million cigarette ends, collected in three different ways.

Economic Benefit



The “95% more efficient” caption refers to the historical model comparing Smartbin collection with manual collection.

The practical principle

Concentrating litter in predictable collection points changes the task from searching and picking to planned servicing.

Model assumptions and exclusions are given on page 10.

Public-service innovation, recognised.

The programme received recognition for combining original thinking with practical improvements to the local environment.

Keep Britain Tidy Innovation Award

The programme was recognised for new approaches to cigarette litter and improvements in local environment quality. The award recognised initiatives able to demonstrate positive outcomes and increased efficiency.

EPSA Certificate of Best Practice

The European Public Sector Award programme recognised the initiative among submissions from 26 European countries and EU institutions. There were 230 projects submitted under the theme “Weathering the Storm: Creative Solutions in a Time of Crisis”.

These honours recognise the City’s wider initiative: the disposal network, public participation and coordinated street management working together.

A strategy beyond the product.

The City of London case is a story about facilities, people and operations working together. Smartbin was part of that wider approach.

Design that supports a purpose

Well-placed facilities can make considerate disposal an easier choice. Recognisable products and appropriate fixings help create a coherent network within an existing street environment. The practical benefit is a predictable place to dispose of small litter when it is needed.

A different collection task

Recovering scattered cigarette ends and emptying a collection point are different operations. The historical model illustrates why prevention can improve collection efficiency. Actual benefits depend on local use, bin coverage, servicing routes and costs; the model provides a starting point for a local business case.

Adapt the principles to your place

A council, campus or business can start by identifying hotspots, understanding public movement and reviewing existing infrastructure. Choose suitable facilities and locations, involve the people who use the space, plan servicing and measure what changes. The City's results are evidence from its programme, not a guarantee for every new scheme.

A visible commitment to better streets

The ambition is a cleaner, more welcoming place with facilities people appreciate and use. The network now numbers around 1,000 bins, according to Smartstreets' October 2026 update. That growth sits alongside the historical evidence and shows the continuing scale of the installation.

Cleaner streets. Shared responsibility. Visible results.

Original design. A practical street strategy.



Let's get started.

Call or message us today.

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