

# Street Cleanliness in Bloomsbury

Advice for its Improvement

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ST. ORMOND STREET

Camden  
Working for a cleaner environment



# Foreword

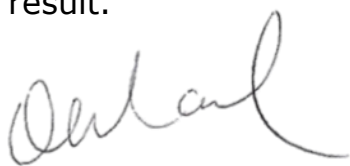
For the past half a year I have been an outspoken critic of the levels of cleanliness in the area of Bloomsbury, and particularly in my locality of King's Cross. Cleanliness issues have been an historical problem in these areas, but I am of the view that there are no significant (and certainly few financial) obstacles to having a district as clean as many other European cities.

Almost everyone in this area feels that Camden could do better to keep this place clean. Indeed, I have spoken to close to two hundred people throughout Bloomsbury personally asking what they think about the levels of cleanliness and Veolia's performance, and only one person stated anything positive whatsoever. Public opinion is overwhelmingly negative.

The problem is that the inefficiencies in the current system of street cleansing are plain to see even for the public, and many arbitrary bureaucratic reasons which the Environment Services use to justify these inefficiencies simply aren't known, and are even less accepted by the public. When poor performance is observed, it is largely impossible for the public to properly report this and reach a resolution, as the border between Camden and Veolia acts as a wall of unaccountability. It cannot be overstated how much the daily observance of Veolia's poor performance undermines public confidence in Camden as a local authority.

I have decided to write this report in the hope that Camden Council can properly heed my advice and consider effecting some if not all of my proposed solutions. I have found myself in a unique position, being a resident but also having worked with Camden to see things from their perspective. I doubt that any person will find themselves in a similar position, and I hope you can thus afford the weight to this report that it deserves.

Finally, it may seem strange for a resident to go to the effort of writing up a report as detailed as this, even being a member of local committees. I am personally highly motivated to do all I can to bring a proper level of cleanliness to my neighbourhood and Bloomsbury as a whole, but I have realised that the only way that lasting change will be effected is if Camden Council can understand the problems currently faced by the Environment Services and act to resolve them from above. Rather than spend endless amounts of time agitating for arbitrary 'change', I have decided instead to sit down and write up all that I have learnt over the past six months, along with my preferred solutions, in the hope that we can all work together to bring real, visible change to Bloomsbury, or even all of Camden, and benefit the lives of thousands as a result.



Owen Ward – 11<sup>th</sup> January 2020

# Contents

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary             | 5  |
| 1. Fly-Tipping                | 8  |
| The Current Problem           | 8  |
| On-Street Collection Points   | 11 |
| Deciding Collection Points    | 12 |
| The Waste Disposal Culture    | 13 |
| Sustainability Considerations | 13 |
| True Fly-Tipping              | 13 |
| The Current Situation         | 14 |
| Free Bulky Waste Collections  | 14 |
| 2. Litter Bins                | 16 |
| The Current Problem           | 16 |
| Mathematical Considerations   | 16 |
| Volume                        | 17 |
| Number                        | 18 |
| Rate of Emptying              | 20 |
| Recycling Bins                | 20 |
| Conclusion                    | 23 |
| 3. Fly-Posting                | 23 |
| The Current Problem           | 23 |
| Community Painting            | 25 |
| Advertisement Columns         | 26 |
| 4. Sweeping                   | 28 |
| The Current Problem           | 28 |
| The Sweeping System           | 29 |
| 5. Clean Camden               | 32 |
| The Current Problem           | 32 |
| Greater Functionality         | 33 |
| Conclusion                    | 35 |

# Executive Summary

The state of Bloomsbury's streets are widely considered by the public to be unacceptable. The report examines contributors to this lack of cleanliness, and sets out ways to address them.

1. **Fly-tipping** reports have skyrocketed in recent years. It is explained that this is due to insufficient provision for the disposal of household waste, coupled with the requirement for officers and the public to report '*inappropriately presented household waste*' as fly-tipping. The time at which waste should be presented on the street is 'invisible' to the large transient population in Bloomsbury leading them to mistakenly commit acts of 'fly-tipping'. It is suggested that timed collection points should be introduced in areas of high population density, advertised clearly by means of signs attached to posts on the street. This is a method already employed in Westminster. Ways to impose the timed collections in a sustainable fashion are explored. It is suggested that provision is made for the free collection of bulky waste to prevent 'true' fly-tipping.
2. One of the main contributors to littered streets is the inadequate provision of **litter bins**, and the fact that they are often left to overflow. In windy weather this can severely affect an area's cleanliness. Mathematical considerations lead to the suggestion that a much greater number of litter bins should be introduced, along with the bins themselves having greater volume. It is pointed out that Veolia use a standardised bin-bag which is far too small for many litter bins causing them to overflow within hours, and that simply using a larger bin - bag is an obvious way to increase litter bin capacity, and therefore cleanliness, at no cost. It is suggested that a reversion to heritage-grade cast iron bins are effected, with larger volume, to enhance the special historic character of the area.
3. The problem of **fly-posting** is examined. It is suggested that local communities should be engaged to care for their area by removing stickers themselves and repainting street furniture as part of a 'community project', in areas of low fly-posting incidence. To aid with this, though, it is suggested that heritage-grade furniture is installed to replace old and poor quality street furniture that does not contribute to a sense of place. It is pointed out that Veolia's current methods of fly-post removal are absurd and actually cause more harm than good, and a sensible alternative is offered. For areas of high incidence, such as around UCL and on Euston Road, it is suggested that 'advertisement columns' are installed, and any superfluous street furniture is removed to deter potential offenders. It is pointed out that fly-posting is simply a form of advertisement, and so providing adequate space for advertisement should do much to reduce this offence. It is also pointed out that fly-posting is an invaluable source of social history in the area and that some way to conserve this history is preferable to erasing it.
4. The problems with **sweeping** are examined. It is pointed out that the disconnect between Camden's own monitoring team and the street sweepers creates a wall of unaccountability, which absurdly allows sweepers to

underperform in sight of monitors, without monitors being able to take any direct action. This allows sweepers to skip streets and omit to do contracted work without any consequence, which is particularly irritating for members of the public who observe poor performance but have no avenue for complaint. It is suggested that monitors are given the ability to directly manage street sweepers. It is also pointed out that failures in Veolia's management can lead to individual roads being left out of schedules so that they become significantly more unclean than their immediate neighbours. It is suggested that sweeping schedules are made public.

5. The issues with the **Clean Camden** application are explored. It is highlighted that evidence points to reports having been falsely marked as completed all over the borough, also backed up by individual residents' experience of the application 'not working'. It is pointed out that this significantly undermines confidence in Camden, and that Veolia have effectively 'dodged' fines of tens of thousands over two years. It is suggested that various updates are made to the application to ensure that this can no longer happen, and then to advertise the application to the community to encourage community-based monitoring.

The report has been circulated to various community groups in Bloomsbury, whilst also being shared and discussed with the two monitoring officers covering Bloomsbury, and their Head of Service.

The report has received surprisingly widespread interest and support from the community in its draft stages, and also from the Environment Services. In a meeting with the Head of Environment Services many points were discussed and it was resolved to investigate how many of the changes could be effected. In particular:

- Timed collections may be trialled on Judd Street, installing signs, although it was agreed that collection 'points' will cause more harm than good, and waste will continue to be presented outside individual properties.
- We will be liaising with the monitoring officers to discuss where new bins should be installed, and to explore alternative options in areas of frequent overflow. The use of small binbags will be abolished.
- The viability of installation of one or more advertisement columns will be explored in the UCL area. It is also planned that low profile stippling will be introduced in areas of high incidence, although we do not support this option as detracting from the visual quality of the area.
- Plans have been made to repaint street furniture as a community project, involving Bloomsbury Residents' Action Group.
- Ways to improve sweeper performance were discussed, including the possibility of introducing a 'points' system for sweepers to encourage attention to detail and take pride in their work.
- The possibility of introducing community noticeboards explaining waste disposal, along with more information for locals and visitors, including the history of the area, was discussed.

- Updates to the Clean Camden application are in the pipeline, with hopefully the requirement for Veolia operatives to upload a photo of the completed work, along with a section for explanation if work could not be completed, along with making it easier for users to complain of poor performance.
- The possibility of applying to the Heritage Fund, and similar funds, was explored to reinstate heritage street surfacing and street furniture, along with community noticeboards. This would help to increase pride in an area and therefore hopefully decrease littering, whilst also circumventing reliance on the local authority's budget.

The report begins below.

# 1. Fly-Tipping

## The Current Problem

Camden has recently been receiving poor press coverage for the extraordinarily high number of reports of fly-tips over the past year, 2018-2019. The exact figure of 25,765 defies belief. The fact that this number is so large does indicate a real problem, but it is paradoxically not one particularly concerned with fly-tipping.

The vast majority of reported fly-tips in Bloomsbury are not true environmental crimes. The fact of the matter is that most 'fly-tips' are actually what the Environment Services would call '*inappropriately presented household waste*'. In plain English, this is when a black binbag is put out onto the street by a household, but not as part of an organised collection. This has to be reported as fly-tipping for it to be removed.

In Bloomsbury, perhaps only one in one hundred reported fly-tips are true environmental crimes, in the sense of them not just being a household's black binbag. Extending this to all of Camden, the reported number of true fly-tips would reduce to about 250, which is a far more reasonable figure.

The true fly-tips comprise mainly mattresses and sometimes piles of building waste.

The core problem causing the figure of 25,765 is that some residents are placing their waste out onto the street for it to be collected but not during a collection. Many residents are placing their waste in the wrong place at the wrong time, and so Veolia do not collect it as part of a household collection. It is necessary for these incidents to be

reported as a fly-tip for removal. This is how the level of reported fly-tipping can easily skyrocket.

For a binbag to be collected as part of a household collection, it has to be placed in a certain place at a certain time. For houses, it is acceptable for the waste to be presented on the doorstep on collection days. However for housing blocks, of which there are many in Bloomsbury, there is a designated place and time where all residents of the block must place their waste. It is not always the case that residents are aware of this time and place, especially new residents of which there are many each year, and some falsely assume that it is acceptable to place their waste anywhere at any time. Seeing that their waste is indeed collected in this manner, it is not an unreasonable belief to hold.

To understand why residents behave in this manner, it is enlightening to consider how, in general, residents of any place learn how to dispose of their waste.



'Fly-tipping' on Tonbridge Street

Most residential areas in the country are simply rows of houses on a road. Each house has a wheelie bin, which is used to dispose of waste. It is thus part of English 'culture' to have a wheelie bin, and to fill it with household waste



when necessary, and then to wheel it out onto the road on the collection day. It is not known to a new family which the collection day is, but within the first week of living in a new home, a line of wheelie bins will appear on the kerbside. This indicates to the new resident which day 'collection day' is, and thus they automatically learn how to dispose of waste properly.

Thus we see that for most of the country, there is no ambiguity over how to dispose of household waste. This is because it is simple to learn the proper process of waste disposal, and it is largely the same throughout the country, save for variations in the collection day.

It is important to note that this learning process does not require any intervention from the local authority – simply by existing in an area, one can learn how to dispose of household waste.

If we turn our attention now to the situation in Bloomsbury, there are a number of fundamental differences which frustrate this learning process. These differences arise from the high population density of Central London, coupled with its high turnover of residents.

When a person moves into Bloomsbury, which usually means moving into a housing block, the first thing to notice is that there are no wheelie bins. Thus there is already confusion over how to dispose of waste.

There are no noticeboards in the area describing the waste disposal process, and rarely any sort of 'welcome pack' explaining to new residents how to dispose of waste.

What does occur however is that simply from being in Bloomsbury, a new

resident will notice that every day there are piles of binbags on the streets.



*'Fly-tipping' on Argyle Street*

These piles vary greatly in size and seem to appear in random locations, and are then collected by Veolia.

Akin to the moment of realisation in most parts of the country when a line of wheelie bins appears, new residents realise that to dispose of waste, all one has to do is place their waste out onto the street.

This realisation is a *true* one, but what a minority of residents then fail to realise is that the time and place of the placement of household waste is of paramount importance.

This is essentially due to the fact that there simply is no information advertising where and when waste should be presented, so to new residents the placement and timing seems essentially random.

In most cases, a resident would find how to dispose of waste from a

neighbour, or sometimes housing blocks have their own collection service whose job it is to place waste in the correct place at the correct time. However, in both situations, the knowledge of the correct time and place is only passed on by word of mouth.

There is a part of Camden's website which purports to distribute this information but it doesn't work properly, claiming for most residents that there are no waste collection services at all.

A minority of new residents will then tentatively place their waste out onto the street for collection.

These residents notice also that waste is often accumulated around litter bins and tree pits. These two places are sensible places to place household waste. A litter bin is a symbol of waste and so signifies that the bin bag is waste ready for collection, and a tree pit is a place neither pavement nor road, and so it is a useful place to put waste out of the way of vehicles and pedestrians.

When a new resident for the first time places their waste out onto the street, then wherever they put it (collection point or not) it is collected within a day. The new resident then learns that indeed it is acceptable to place waste onto the street at any time and in any place, and it will be collected.

New residents are not generally interested in discovering whether what they are doing is correct or not. From a resident's point of view, they pay their taxes to have their waste removed, and if they can put it out at any convenient place and it is removed, then that is enough to know, and they will continue to do it without intervention.

It should also be said that the opinion of the public is often that if the local authority is not going to make the waste disposal procedure obvious, it is not the duty of the public to research what it is.

Making reference to the national 'culture' of having a wheelie bin and using it on the correct day, the equivalent 'culture' in Bloomsbury is one of dumping waste out onto the road at whatever time and in whatever place, and it will eventually disappear.

The real problem is that the distinction between an offence of fly-tipping and simple presentation of household waste for collection is invisible and arbitrary.

*Whether or not a binbag on the street is 'out for collection' or a 'fly-tip' essentially boils down to whether the binbag has been placed in the correct place at the correct time.*

However there are no proper means to discover where the correct places and times are.

This is further frustrated by the fact that there are no official time slots for collection even in proper collection places. Waste can officially be presented all throughout the day but in practice, Veolia turn up at specific times as part of a routine and if residents don't know this piece of local knowledge, even presenting waste correctly can lead to a reported offence of 'fly-tipping'.

It should be noted that in a place of stable resident population, eventually everyone would learn how to properly dispose of waste. This problem is peculiar to the residential parts of Central London as there are continually new people moving in and out each year. This means that it is impossible to 'catch' every offender before they

simply move out and thousands more move in, who then are likely to start to commit the same offences.

## On Street Collection Points

The way to solve this problem is to ensure that residents are properly educated about how to dispose of waste. That much is obvious.

A simple and sustainable solution is to create on-street collection points by means of signage indicating the times at which waste can be properly presented.

This is a solution already employed in Westminster.

This will then give an obvious identity to timed collection points which already exist all throughout Bloomsbury but which are largely invisible to new residents.



Collection Point, Westminster

The on-street collection points would apply universally to residents and businesses, meaning that waste could

only be presented at the collection points in a time slot, say of two hours, on particular days.

This would have the effect of erasing the seemingly arbitrary distinction between 'fly-tipping' and 'on-street collections' by making it obvious exactly *where* and *when* waste of all types is collected.

The currently arbitrary and invisible border would become a very definite one, marked on the streets by means of signs which detail the exact time slots at which waste can be presented there.

This is a sustainable solution in the sense that any new resident will see these signs upon moving into the area, and thus learn the way to dispose of waste properly. These signs will also be seen by any tourists who may be staying in the area for a short while, and so even tourists will know how to dispose of waste.

If we then examine what happens when a new resident moves into Bloomsbury, they will see, as before, piles of binbags accumulating on the street. But rather than these being seemingly random, instead they will be accumulated around posts, and the post will have a sign on it obviously marking that point as a 'collection point' and detailing the time slot and day(s) that waste should be presented there. This way, the resident should immediately learn, with no intervention from Camden, how to dispose of waste properly.

In the majority of cases, housing blocks will have their own waste collection system so that residents won't need to use this information. But the point is that it will act as a safety net to catch those residents who either don't have a collection service or don't use their collection service. Currently there are no options open to that minority.

## Deciding Collection Points

Veolia currently, as part of an informal routine, make on-street collections at relatively predictable times. This is part of a routine which has just 'happened' over time, and so locals and caretakers are aware of when they should place their waste out onto the street.

As the routine is informal, Veolia can arrive much earlier or much later than is usual.

If they arrive much earlier, what happens is that waste is presented out onto the street shortly before the usual time of collection, but it is not collected until the next day. This means that for a great deal of time, a large amount of waste is left clogging the streets of Bloomsbury. Veolia are not penalised as there is no requirement to arrive at the 'usual' time.

If Veolia arrive later, then again a large amount of waste is left clogging the streets.

Most locals and caretakers want to have the waste out on the street for as short a time as possible. This is because it looks unsightly, it gets in the way, and it also attracts litter and fly-tipping. If left overnight it can attract rats and foxes, and in strong winds the binbags are blown into the road and destroyed by vehicles, causing a huge amount of mess and disruption.

Thus it is important for locals and caretakers to place the waste out only shortly before the usual collection time.

The point of this observation is twofold.

Firstly, the very existence of the informal routine that Veolia employ suggests a grassroots way to impose timed collections over the whole of Bloomsbury, simply by adopting a time

slot in an area which is Veolia's usual time slot, and to which everyone *already adheres*. The creation of timed collection points would simply formalise a routine which is currently informal.

Secondly, if Veolia are required to adhere to the time slots which they usually choose anyway, then there will be no problems whereby large amounts of waste are left on the street. It will make it easier to ascertain what exactly is a missed collection rather than just a 'later than usual collection', and so easier to enforce deductions to Veolia's payment wherever necessary for poor performance.



*Business waste left overnight, Tottenham Court Road*

The presence of these signs would also stop businesses from placing their waste out at inappropriate times. The usual offence in Bloomsbury is that businesses place their waste out onto the public highway at the end of operating hours (usually around 18:00) which is after collection time. Thus almost every night the streets of



Bloomsbury are clogged with businesses waste until it is collected, usually the next morning. This practice encourages littering and vermin, and also disrupts pedestrian flow and is generally an inappropriate and inconsiderate use of the public highway of which the public disapproves.

### **The Waste Disposal Culture**

The advantage of this approach is also that it becomes obvious even to residents what is appropriate presentation of waste and what isn't. Currently it is certainly unknown. If a binbag appears in any other place than a collection point, for example by a litter bin, it will be easy enough to discover whether it is a designated collection point or not. If there is no collection point sign, then it is not a collection point. Thus the common observation of binbags by a litter bin transforms from one of *'this must be the usual thing to do'* to *'this is evidently an unreasonable and uncommon thing to do'*. It would therefore be advantageous to have on every collection point sign a part clearly stating that presenting waste anywhere other than a collection point is an offence.

This is useful in the sense that it will allow new residents to both identify what is allowed and what isn't. This is a natural process of learning and will help to make inappropriate presentation of waste a socially unacceptable thing to do.

### **Sustainability Considerations**

It has already been stated that this is a sustainable solution in the sense of it being independent of Bloomsbury's transient population.

It is also a sustainable solution in the sense that it doesn't particularly depend

upon the current contract with Veolia. If Veolia have chosen a particular route to use to collect waste, then it is most likely the easiest route to use. Thus any future contractor can use the current route.

It is also unlikely that the route is going to become 'slower' in the future as traffic levels in Central London are only decreasing with cycling and pedestrianisation initiatives. Thus it is hard to see how imposing the current informal routine as permanent will cause any future problems.

One might however wish to cater for a faster collection service in the future, or indeed a less frequent collection service, if Bloomsbury ever comes close to being a zero-waste neighbourhood.

It therefore may be better to innovate on Westminster's design to have a sign whose day and time slots can be adjusted, similar to a 'flip clock'. Alternatively it could simply have a piece of paper, but this is admittedly a less professional way to do things.

This would also allow for wholesale adjustments in the collection routine if a future contractor finds a better routine for waste collection.

Having an adjustable collection point such as this could be a way to add interest to Bloomsbury's street environment, and if done properly could do much to enhance the conservation area's special character. Adjustable collection points of this type could be a real addition to London's historically quirky items of street furniture.

### **True Fly-Tipping**

The level of true environmental crime in Bloomsbury is relatively low and does not require any sort of significant intervention.

The nature of true fly-tipping in Bloomsbury is again related to its peculiar identity as a residential district of Central London. True fly-tipping incidents mostly arise from residential redevelopment, and from contractors purposely disposing of waste on Bloomsbury's streets to save on fees.

Having worked in the building trade myself I can understand the predicament that tradesmen find themselves in in Central London. The conventional thing to do is to leave waste at the property for the owner to dispose of. This way the owner can dispose of the waste for free at a local tip, or by hiring a skip.

However property owners in Central London do not generally own cars, and there are no nearby tips. Hiring a skip is all but impossible. If residents need to get rid of bulky waste, from the trade or not, they are faced with a paywall. It is impossible to transport bulky waste on public transport, and far too expensive to hire a taxi. Most of the public do not know of the bulky waste collection service, even less that some residents are entitled to a number of free collections. It is simply an easy and low risk option to dump waste onto the street.

The point is that the public of the United Kingdom feel as though they are entitled to the free removal of any kind of waste, via collections or via the tip. The public do not feel any sense of criminality in fly-tipping items such as mattresses or piles of bricks, as they often see it as 'revenge' against a local authority unreasonably forcing them to pay to have the bulky waste removed.

### **The Current Situation**

The current situation is that fly-tips appear at random throughout the area, although usually in 'hotspots' which are

particularly secluded and known to Environment Services, such as Argyle Walk in King's Cross.

There is then a time period whereby the public or Environment Services has to find the fly-tip and then report it. Veolia are then given 24 hours to remove the fly-tip.

During all this time the cleanliness of the area is negatively affected.

### **Free Bulky Waste Collections**

The only sustainable solution to this problem is to offer free bulky waste collections.

The number of fly-tips which lead to a prosecution and a fine is low and the level of the fine is barely enough to pay for the administration involved. So the fly-tip collection service is a constant drain on public money.

If Camden offered a free bulky-waste collection service, fly-tipping offences should be all but eliminated.

All that would change is that individuals who would usually fly-tip would call up to have their waste collected. This would eliminate the administrative cost of first having to find a fly-tip, then having to report the fly-tip, and then having to hire Veolia to find the reported fly-tip and have it removed.

The real difficulty will be in weighing up whether the money *lost* to all those routinely paying for bulky waste collections is going to be less or more than the money *saved* by not having to collect fly-tips, coupled with the public benefit of a reduced level of fly-tipping.

It may be best to introduce an annual allowance for residents of free bulky waste collections, of say three a year, so that those who currently pay for

regular collections (such as housing blocks) still pay for regular collections.

It will have to be properly advertised that bulky waste collections are available for free as the public currently are not generally aware of a bulky waste collection service.

Despite its drawbacks of possible increased spending for Camden, offering such a service is perhaps the only sustainable solution to the fly-tipping problem. Fly-tipping is such an anonymous and random crime that it would be impossible, even with unlimited funds, to prevent every fly-tipping offence. If Camden can offer a free route to dispose of waste which would usually be fly-tipped, then this is a sure way to all but eliminate fly-tipping offences in Bloomsbury, or even all of Camden.

It should be remembered however that the current level of true fly-tipping is not particularly high so that the public benefit of eliminating these rare incidents is relatively small.

## 2. Litter Bins

### The Current Problem

Litter bins provide a way for pedestrians to properly dispose of litter. A proper availability of litter bins is essential to maintaining proper street cleanliness. The public generally will use a litter bin where one is available, but a significant problem in Bloomsbury is that there are often too few bins available, and often those that are available are left to overflow.

The vast majority of litter on the streets of Bloomsbury arises as a result of overflowing litter bins. The public will always try to use a litter bin, even when it is full. This leads to an overspill which on windy days can be blown throughout the locality. This increases the amount of work for street cleaners and significantly negatively affects street cleanliness. The frequent sight of an overflowing litter bin and the subsequent inability to properly dispose of waste significantly undermines public confidence in the local authority.

The secondary cause of litter on streets occurs as a result of a shortage of litter bins. This is especially true in areas where there are none in sight. The public then often choose to dispose of their waste by placing it in hidden places (behind electrical boxes or inside telephone boxes for example) or by even burying it in tree pits.

A particularly absurd phenomenon is that when litter bins overflow and litter is blown onto grassy verges or private property, Veolia will then refuse to clear that area as it not being part of their contractual obligation to do so. This leads to a substantial accumulation of litter which Veolia do not clear up, but which has been caused directly by their poor performance.

It is part of Veolia's contract to ensure that no litter bin is more than 85% full or overflowing, and Veolia are required to empty a litter bin more than 85% full within 2 hours of a report, or face a deduction of £34.18 from their contract (true of 2019 but subject to annual variation).



*Overflow in Gordon Square*

### Mathematical Considerations

Litter bins provide the only way for pedestrians to properly dispose of waste.

The capacity of bins, along with their spatial density, and how often they are emptied, combine to create a number which is the maximum volume of litter removed from an area per day, or what might be called the *litter removal rate*.

For example, if a square has 5 litter bins, each of a volume of 100 litres, and they are emptied 2 times daily, then the litter removal rate for that square is  $100 \times 5 \times 2 = 1000$  litres per day.



The public dispose of a certain amount of litter per day, which might be called the *litter disposal rate*. The litter disposal rate depends on various things, such as weather, and can be difficult to predict. For example in a square on Christmas Day, the litter disposal rate might be 0 litres per day, because perhaps nobody chooses to visit the square on Christmas Day. However on the hottest day of the year, a large number of people will visit the square and eat lunch there, and the litter disposal rate will be extremely high.

The only way that cleanliness can be maintained is if the litter removal rate far *exceeds* the litter disposal rate. This would ensure that every bin is emptied before it becomes full.

The clause in the contract stating that bins should be emptied before they become 85% full essentially implies that the litter removal rate must far exceed the litter disposal rate. However litter bins are always overflowing in Bloomsbury and this directly implies that the litter disposal rate actually exceeds the litter removal rate, which means that it is a mathematical certainty that Bloomsbury's streets and squares become littered on a regular basis, which is indeed what happens.

Thus the litter removal rate must be increased to cater for the natural demand. There are three ways that this can be achieved.

1. *Increase* the **volume** of bins.
2. *Increase* the **number** of bins.
3. *Increase* the **rate** at which bins are emptied.

Currently the third option, being the most flexible option, is the one that is left to the street sweepers to regulate. Rather than having a fixed schedule of bin emptying, sweepers are simply told

to empty a bin when it becomes more than 85% full. In this manner the litter removal rate should always exceed the litter disposal rate, but it is unfortunately the case that sweepers often opt to let bins overflow.

Sweepers are also not warned in advance of situations such as heatwaves which cause a spike in the litter disposal rate and which cause a drastic plummet in cleanliness when bins overflow.

## Volume

The volume of the current standard litter bin is small which directly causes the bins to fill up more quickly and overflow more frequently. This places greater demand on street cleaners to empty bins more frequently than would be the case if the bins were larger.

The type of cast iron litter bins used in historic squares would be an ideal replacement as being of a much larger volume and would therefore increase the litter removal rate.

The use of traditional cast iron bins would also be an excellent way to enhance the special character of the Bloomsbury conservation areas. The current plastic litter bin detracts from the character of the street environment, also becoming easily damaged and difficult to repair.

The use of cast iron is also far more sustainable than plastic, the painted cast iron being easily repaired and the iron having intrinsic value.

The most absurdly unnecessary contributor to poor levels of cleanliness in Bloomsbury is Veolia's insistence on the use of a specified green plastic bin bag which is incredibly small and actually does not utilise the full volume of any of the standard litter bins.

The way that these bin bags are used in cast iron bins also means that even the small volume of this green bag is not fully utilised, as about half of the plastic is used in tying the bag to the exterior of the bin.



*An Example, Bramber Green.*

Only about half of the available volume of the standard litter bin is utilised in this manner and only about a third of the cast iron bins are utilised, dropping even to about a quarter when it is tied around the exterior.

This means that litter bins in Bloomsbury fill up 2-4 times as quickly as the current infrastructure allows, directly as a result of Veolia's use of the green bin bags.

This means that street cleaners are required to empty bins 2-4 times as often as usual, which might mean in squares that a instead of a daily routine a sweeper has to visit the square 4 times in a day.

This is evidently an absurd approach and should immediately come to an end. The Environment Services have been pushing Veolia to end this approach in squares but it is still being used, and it should also be stopped in all further areas.

## Number

Around the time of the London terror bombings a large number of litter bins were removed and have only begun to be replaced as public confidence in safety has increased. The number of bins before the bombings probably indicated the number that was necessary to cater for the litter disposal rate ten years ago, and the litter disposal rate has certainly increased since that time, with the strange prevalence of overpackaging in the fast food industry, and the increased numbers of tourists on Bloomsbury's streets. Thus to properly cater for the natural demand for litter removal, there should be more bins than there were, but there are less.

There should realistically be a bin on every corner, so that there is always one within view, along with bins at places of public congregation, such as at bus stops and benches. This way the placement of litter bins will be predictable so that the public can be certain that a bin will be present simply at the next junction. Currently one can walk for a long period of time without coming across a bin, particularly along the backroads of Bloomsbury. This is where the 'stuffing' of litter occurs the most often, behind electrical boxes and the like.

An abundance of bins such as this will also encourage smokers to dispose of their cigarette butts properly, as it is unreasonable to expect that a smoker will hold onto an old cigarette butt for a

long period of time whilst searching for a bin.

One of the main reasons why there is not such an abundance of litter bins, and why litter bins are not situated on back roads is the general belief amongst Environmental Services, which is often stated as '*litter bins attract fly tipping*'. This has already been touched upon in the fly-tipping section of this report.

The cause for this belief is that it is commonly seen that household rubbish bags appear around litter bins. These rubbish bags, being '*inappropriately presented household waste*' must be reported as 'fly-tipping' incidents, so that it is true in a sense that litter bins do indeed attract 'fly-tips'.



A litter bin 'attracting' a 'fly-tip'

However as explained, these incidents are not really incidents of fly-tipping, and nor do those individuals who place

their household waste by a litter bin believe so. The reality of the situation is that a litter bin simply acts as a *de facto* collection point. Thus the earlier suggestion of providing real collection points should go some way to eliminating this phenomenon.

It seems that the observation that '*litter bins attract fly-tipping*' then leads Environment Services to believe that increasing the provision of litter bins will increase the levels of fly-tipping. Thus the provision of litter bins, especially on backroads, is severely restricted.

Although it is indeed the case that currently litter bins provide a place for some confused households to put their waste out for collection, this is not to say that litter bins *encourage* fly-tipping, and the distinction between this statement and the previous one is not well acknowledged.

There is therefore no real reason why the provision of litter bins should not be dramatically increased throughout Bloomsbury, so long as proper collection points are also provided throughout the area.

The fear that this might bring on an epidemic of household 'fly-tipping' should be reduced with a simple observation.

Along with litter bins attracting fly-tipping, it is also the case that '*tree pits attract fly-tipping*'. Just as litter bins provide a 'symbol' of waste disposal thereby letting households indicate they want their waste collected, tree pits provide a convenient place for waste presentation as being off the footpath and off the roads. Thus we find that household binbags often accumulate around tree pits, especially in areas where the waste collection is ambiguous.



Camden has enthusiastically planted plenty of trees in Bloomsbury thereby dramatically increasing the number of tree pits in the area, so that now there are usually several to a road. It is certainly not the case that every tree pit brings with it an accumulation of binbags – it is a relatively rare occurrence that household binbags appear in tree pits. In other words, the increase in the number of tree pits has not somehow encouraged household fly-tipping, and therefore nor should an increase in litter bins do so.

### **Rate of Emptying**

Street cleaners are simply required to empty a bin when it becomes more than 85% full. Thus the rate of emptying naturally varies to cater for the litter disposal rate in any area.

The advantage of increasing both the volume and number of litter bins is that the required frequency of emptying should drop in line with the level of increase in volume and number. What this means in practice is that each bin should fill much more slowly than bins currently do, reducing the workload on street cleaners.

For example, if a bin is currently emptied daily, and its volume is doubled, it should only need to be emptied once every two days.

This is obviously an advantage because a reduced demand on sweepers should increase the quality of their work.

The less obvious reason why a slower rate of filling is advantageous is that it affords a greater tolerance to street cleaners in times of unpredictable demand such as during heatwaves.

Litter bins in Bloomsbury usually require daily emptying. What this means is that if a sweeper arrives too

late in the day, especially if there is an unforeseen spike in demand, the bin could be overflowing. This could not easily have been avoided because it may be the first time that a sweeper visits the bin during that day.

If the number and volume of litter bins were to increase to such an extent that litter bins only required emptying once every three days for example, what that would mean is that the sweeper as part of their daily routine would be able to visit the bin and assess its fullness two or three times before it started to overflow. This therefore reduces the probability that the litter bin overflows at all, even in times of great demand such as during a heatwave.

### **Recycling Bins**

On street recycling bins were originally provided for the residents of Camden's estates, but have evolved to become used by all members of the public.

Unfortunately these recycling bins are often contaminated with black binbags meaning that the contents of the bin can't be recycled.

Many of these bins have been removed in an effort to combat the 'attraction of fly-tipping' around these bins.

It was indeed unfortunately the case that residents often disposed of inappropriate waste around these bins.

However the vast majority of 'fly-tipping' incidents arose when the bins became full and residents were forced to leave their recycling waste on the ground in bags.

Veolia then would class this as 'fly-tipping' and refuse to remove it as part of the recycling collection.



Residents would often force open the lid to be able to fit their recycling waste in when the bins became overfull, which was almost a daily occurrence.

Veolia would often refuse to empty the recycling bins when they were contaminated with black binbags. However up until the new housings, there were actually no signs indicating that black binbags couldn't be used.

It is still often the case that the recycling bins overflow leading to large amounts of spillage which blows throughout the area.

It is simply the case that the demand for recycling removal far exceeds the supply offered by Camden. This often comes down to Veolia not emptying bins often enough, deeming it acceptable to allow the bins to overflow even if it causes decreased cleanliness.

The current provision of on-street recycling bins is not a sustainable way to offer recycling services in such a densely populated area. Camden is looking for ways to increase recycling but simultaneously removing recycling facilities, meaning that Veolia are forced to empty recycling bins more and more regularly, something which it seems they are not happy to do.



The current recycling bins also take up a huge volume on the streets and are unsightly, being an epicentre of

cleanliness issues when the bins continually overflow.

The system of offering household recycling collections is far more efficient for an area which is as densely populated as Bloomsbury.

The problem with on-street recycling services is that even if a single resident decides to contaminate the bin, then the recycling efforts of the whole neighbourhood are squandered. Some residents simply do not make the effort to consider whether their waste is recyclable or not, and those residents 'ruin it' for the vast majority of conscientious residents.

The obvious disrespect with which these recycling points are treated - with the previously damaged and dirty bins, the continual overflowing, the lack of proper emptying and cleansing from Veolia, and the occasional contamination or fly-tip from residents - does nothing to encourage a proper consideration and consciousness of recycling.

Camden can thus either try to erase and rewrite the failed history of these bins, or simply remove them and encourage households to use the recycling collection service as an alternative.

Taking control of one's own recycling in this way is beneficial as it encourages residents to adopt their own standards, needing to research themselves what can and can't be recycled. The on-street recycling points are not a place for recycling but simply a place for mess, and that encourages a minority to inappropriately dispose of non-recyclable waste in these areas.

It does however remain to Camden to properly advertise and provide the household recycling collection service.

It is currently the case that new residents have nowhere to learn of this service but only see the on-street bins. It might be prudent , if on-street collection points are provided, to properly advertise at those points how to get the clear recyclable waste bags.

There is a section of Camden's website which purports to do this but it doesn't work.

## **Conclusion**

A widespread introduction of the cast iron litter bins throughout Bloomsbury, coupled with the proper use of adequately sized binbags, would be hugely beneficial for cleanliness in the area. The use of cast iron instead of plastic would also increase sustainability, and the 'heritage' design would bring greater pride to neighbourhoods and enhance the special character of the conservation areas. Such a large provision of litter bins will also increase public confidence in Camden as being an approach which is the 'obvious' thing to do to increase cleanliness.

The on-street recycling services do not work particularly well. They are a blot on the landscape and both Veolia and the public are disinclined to treat them with proper respect. This means that Veolia do not ever clear up the mess that comes with overspill, and the public are not conscientious enough to pay close attention to what can and can't be recycled, when they can see how self-evidently the recycling services are disrespected. It may be sensible to simply remove these on-street recycling bins and simply provide household collections for all recyclable waste.

# 3. Fly-Posting

## The Current Problem

Camden's areas of Central London are a hotspot for fly-posting. There are two problem areas in Bloomsbury – its northern border Euston Road, and UCL. These areas seem to attract dozens of fly-posts daily. The majority of Bloomsbury's roads and squares however aren't fly-posted as frequently, but the rate of removal of fly-posts is so low that some areas seem to be badly affected, when in fact the fly-posts have built up over several years.

Much of the strange dynamics of fly-posting can be understood by viewing all types of fly-posts as a form of advertisement.

Some types of fly-posts are self-evidently forms of advertisement. For example advertisement of services, such as proofreading services around UCL. Some types are less obvious. Football fans often fly-post areas with their football team's stickers. This is not so much an advertisement of a service as an advertisement of an *identity*. This second type of 'identity advertisement' is fairly common. One often finds individuals who fly-post as part of a hobby, who actually create and order batches of 'their' stickers, which they then go on to distribute throughout the area. The identity is deliberately opaque, but it is an identity all the same. For example, 'Notes to Strangers' used to be fairly common.

The very point of fly-posting something is so that the public can see it. In that sense, anything which is fly-posted is an advertisement.

The advertisement can be a blanket advertisement – such as advertisement of a clothing website. Or the

advertisement can be targeted, such as essay-writing services around UCL, or prostitution adverts in telephone boxes.



Targeted Advertisement, UCL, Byng Place

An interesting phenomenon to observe is that when a new piece of street furniture is installed, it goes without being fly-posted for a remarkably long period of time. What then happens is that a single person decides to break the trend and attach a sticker to the new post, sometimes after as long as half a year going without it being fly-posted. Thereafter the number of stickers on the post explodes in a short space of time. However if one immediately removes the initial sticker, then the subsequent explosion does not occur.

What this indicates is that the vast majority of fly-posters choose only to fly-post areas *which are already fly-posted*. Fly-posters are unwilling to be the first to deface a new piece of street furniture. It seems that fly-posters only believe they are truly vandalising if the street furniture is not already vandalised.

This is reasonable. The difference between one sticker and two on a post is slight, but the difference between one and *zero* makes the difference between respectability and vandalism.

This is important, because it suggests that a natural way to deter fly-posting is simply to keep street furniture continually in a respectable state, by quickly and efficiently removing any new stickers that appear by 'real' vandals.

What currently occurs is that Veolia are not required to remove stickers as part of a routine.

Environment Services or a member of the public can report fly-posting incidents. Veolia are then tasked with removing the fly-post within a week. If Veolia fail to respond within that time and default on the report, a deduction of £34.18 applies to their payment.

Fly-posting incidents are mostly stickers. Some incidents are paper stuck with glue, and a minority are paper attached with tape.

Veolia remove all types of fly-posts with a combination of pressure-washing and scraping with a metal scraper.

Both methods are extremely damaging to street furniture and frequently remove large amounts of paint. Veolia do not then repair this damage, as they claim that they are not contracted to do so.

High-visibility street signs often have their high-visibility layer damaged beyond repair, and left hanging from the sign. Veolia often choose to simply not fully remove stickers from street signs as they are aware that their methods will damage the sign. Thus they default on the report but instead

mark the report as completed to avoid a deduction.

The pressure-washing method frequently removes all the paint from street furniture so that indeed the sticker is properly removed. Alternatively the scraping method is used, which either removes the sticker and scratches the surface, or only removes the top layer of the sticker, leaving all the adhesive behind.



Tavistock Place. Partially removed sticker with damage from metal scraping.

Both these methods are ridiculously crude especially when considering the fact that sticker removal liquids are readily available on the market which dissolve the adhesive allowing the sticker to be easily removed without damage. This method would presumably also be less costly than using a pressure-washer, and would be less costly in the sense that public money would not need to be spent on repairing every piece of street furniture in Bloomsbury that Veolia put their hands to.



The fundamental problem with Veolia's methods is that they do not ever restore street furniture to its initial state. This means that vandals can hardly feel bad about adding a sticker to a post which has had half of its paint stripped away and its reflective coating peeled off.

Alternatively, if a square of adhesive is left on a piece of street furniture which then goes on to accumulate dirt and grime from London's air, it is hardly an improvement upon a sticker, which at least served a purpose for somebody.

The only state in which a piece of street furniture is respectable is when it is brand new. When it is stickered for the first time, unless a resident goes to the effort of properly removing the sticker themselves, the piece of street furniture is thereby doomed to be further damaged by Veolia and left in an endless cycle of vandalism and damage, until it is either wholesale repainted or as the case may be, replaced.

The only state in which street furniture is respected is when it is well-kept.

The only other option which Camden offers is the use of 'stippled' paint which creates a surface which is textured and cannot be stickered. But this surface is not particularly aesthetically pleasing and defeats the object of trying to keep street furniture unstickered and respectable in the first place.

## **Community Painting**

It is beneficial if the community can be encouraged to repair street furniture themselves by repainting. Community painting is already widespread and is a popular way to encourage community ownership of an area. Camden could set up a system whereby the paint is

funded for residents to then repaint street furniture to a high standard themselves. Significant interest has been shown by members of the community already in such a project even without funding from Camden.

This would be a way to change the failures of the past into a success of community spirit, which is much needed in modern Bloomsbury.

The local community, taking ownership of an area in this way, would then keep an eye out for flyposting incidents and either report them on Clean Camden or remove fly-posts themselves

Not all street furniture can be repainted however. Damaged street signs will simply need to be replaced. The plastic bins which are easily damaged and often stickered cannot be repainted. This is another reason to have them replaced with cast iron heritage bins, as it is easier for members of the community to take ownership of bins with such character, and they can also be painted.

It would be preferable for this reason if the common large lampposts could be replaced with older heritage versions. This would firstly reduce the total area available to stickering, and would encourage the community to take ownership of them. The introduction of heritage lampposts would also be an excellent way to enhance the special character of Bloomsbury's conservation areas.

The shorter heritage lampposts are also preferable as the taller lampposts are often shrouded by the trees that Camden has planted over the past decade or so.

Making reference to respectable street furniture being more respected even by fly-posters, having heritage lampposts

should also act as a further deterrent to would-be vandals. The aesthetic qualities of a heritage lamppost over the common lamppost (which at street level is just a wide post) are evident to even the most insensitive of people.

## Advertisement Columns

Encouraging community ownership can only be successful in areas where there are communities.

The hotspot areas of Euston Road and around UCL, along with further hotspot areas, cannot be expected to benefit from 'community ownership' methods. There are no, or very few, residential units on Euston Road, and UCL is academic, with plenty of students who are unlikely to take an interest in community ownership.

In hotspot areas, the task of keeping on top of flyposting is also likely to be too much even for the most motivated of community members.

**The only sustainable solution to the fly-posting solution in these areas is to cater for the natural demand for advertisement space by providing proper areas for fly-posting.**

Any attempt to try and suppress fly-posting on Euston Road or around UCL is likely to have only short-lived success.

Furthermore, there is a legitimate motivation for people to fly-post – advertisement – so the proper provision of advertisement space should do much to deter people from using second-rate spaces such as lampposts.

This will allow people genuinely wishing to advertise a service a proper place to do so. It will be more effective as an advertisement space, as being

centralised, more people are likely to go there to look for services, rather than search for services on lampposts. Thus it should deter service advertisers from using street furniture.

It should also attract more conventional fly-posters and therefore decrease the levels of fly-posting on street furniture.

In this way, it would be useful to have on these columns a statement to the effect that stickering street furniture is illegal. It is doubtful whether most individuals recognise that stickering street furniture is illegal and carries fines, and there are no notices up to that effect currently.



Advertisement Column, Paris 1910

Advertisement columns have already been used throughout European cities, introduced to Berlin in 1855. They were often used to advertise theatre productions and the like, being open to anyone to post on them, although sometimes a license was required. Currently, these columns are often covered in a glass screen exactly so that people can't attach their own

stickers. What is recommended is an introduction of advertisement columns that *do* allow people to attach stickers freely, so that it can concentrate all the flyposting in an area to a single column.

These columns could be experimentally introduced to UCL and Euston Road, and then extended to other areas if they are successful.

This would be an excellent chance to add real interest to Bloomsbury's street environment, and if the design were done to heritage standards then it would certainly enhance Bloomsbury's special character.

Such an innovation has the potential to become a landmark as famous as the telephone box.

It would also be an excellent chance to create a 'living archive' of social history in Bloomsbury, as layer upon layer of advertisements and posters are stuck upon each other. Currently social history is continually being erased by the continual removal of stickers.

It is hoped that by providing such a large amount of advertisement space in such a central manner, the street furniture in Bloomsbury will be under far less pressure of stickering. The quality and size of the advertisement space should 'flood the market' for flyposting space and make it far easier to maintain other items of street furniture.

The introduction of these columns could be coupled with the total removal of all stickers in an area along with repainting, just to ensure that the public are aware that stickering on street furniture is no longer 'accepted'. The introduction of such columns could also be coupled with the removal of any street furniture which isn't absolutely necessary. There are plenty of items of street furniture which are superfluous

and which could be removed, especially with the decreased road traffic in recent times.

It would also be beneficial to entirely remove street lamps, which provide the primary source of sticker space, and replace them with wall mounted street lamps, wherever appropriate. The street lamps on Euston Road are some of the worst affected by flyposting, and it is all but impossible to keep them in a respectable state. Wall lamps would be far out of the reach of pedestrians and so would not encourage stickering.



Wall Mounted Lamp, Westminster

There is an opportunity to effect this currently with the Town Hall redevelopment.

The use of advertisement columns and the replacement of streetlamps with wall mounted lamps in the problem areas offers a sustainable solution to the current fly-posting problem which currently is simply a drain on public money.



# 4. Sweeping

## The Current Problem

Veolia are contracted to perform Camden's environmental obligations, along with further services. This means that Veolia do work such as sweep the streets of litter and leaves, but also are contracted to remove fly-posts when asked to do so.

The fundamental problem is that Veolia do not consistently perform the tasks to the required standard. Most roads are kept at the required standard consistently, but some roads become 'forgotten roads' where both litter and leaves build up in large amounts, along with bins regularly overflowing.

Furthermore, as previously explored, Veolia's fly-posting removal team do not use appropriate methods to remove stickers, meaning either the stickers aren't properly removed, or stickers are removed along with plenty of paintwork.

*When Veolia operatives perform poorly, there are no direct ways to improve their performance.*

Members of the public can observe poor work, but it is impossible to then identify the individual responsible to Camden and then reach a resolution. Environment Services also do not monitor individual operatives, but the state of the streets instead. Thus, despite all the work being done by ground level operatives employed by Veolia, nobody is actually monitoring these employees from Camden. This is a serious issue. The very requirement of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 'to ensure that the streets are kept clear of litter and refuse' could be interpreted as ensuring that the

sweeping operatives are performing properly.

At a fundamental level, the cleanliness of the streets comes down to how well the street level operatives are performing. To ensure that Bloomsbury's streets are kept clean, it is necessary to ensure that the street level operatives are performing properly. But this responsibility is given to Veolia, and this subsequent gap in accountability makes it impossible for Environment Services to properly monitor the performance of operatives. Operatives can then perform poorly, and even when this is directly observed by the public and Environment Services, there is no mechanism to hold these operatives to account and ensure better work in the future. This is extremely concerning, as it means that in effect *Environment Services has no control over the individuals actually carrying out Camden's environmental obligations.*



Street below grade, Judd Street



The inability of Environment Services to 'people manage' at the most granular level is a significant cause of cleanliness issues in Bloomsbury. When an operative is directly observed doing poor work or actually skipping work allocated to them, the only way to raise this concern is indirectly by reporting the road as being below standard. When the issue of operative performance is raised with Veolia, Veolia are reported to instead choose to unreasonably protect their employees by coming up with excuses, fostering a culture of overt laziness amongst the street level operatives.

It is worth stating that not all operatives choose to perform poorly. But when an individual decides to start cutting corners, there are absolutely no consequences, allowing the standard of work to continually drop until quite often, the operatives stop doing their required work almost completely.

## **The Sweeping System**

Each road in Bloomsbury is swept as part of a routine, the frequency of sweeping dependent upon the road's 'intensity of use'. All roads are scheduled to be swept at least three times a week.

Main roads are cleaned by means of vehicles, whilst backroads are often allocated to sweepers. Each team is given a list of roads to clean.

These operatives are required to remove all litter from a road when they visit there, along with all leaves and detritus. They must also empty bins if they are more than 85% full.

Environment Services and members of the public can then report cleanliness issues with Clean Camden or Echo. These reports in theory should only be made relatively rarely, as it indicates

that an operative hasn't performed properly, or that an administrative error means that a road has been missed off a schedule.

The vehicular team do an excellent job of removing most of the litter and leaves on a road. This means that most main roads are kept at a good standard.

However individual sweepers, left to work alone, often do not perform properly and even skip out roads entirely. This means that it is a constant battle to keep backroads clean, despite these roads theoretically being the easiest to keep clean, as being littered at the lowest rate.

It is often the case that a backroad drops below an acceptable standard simply because it has not been swept properly for weeks, despite it being scheduled for sweeping multiple times in a week.

Sweepers are allocated a list of roads in a particular area. However what often happens is that, as it is impossible to visit every road without visiting some roads twice, sweepers will choose a route through an area which they take every day, routinely missing out whole roads.

What then happens is that the public and Environment Services are forced to continually make reports on Echo and Clean Camden on Bloomsbury's backroads to divert resources from elsewhere to clean the missed roads.

The fact that Environment Services cannot manage individual operatives means that it is impossible to resolve these issues efficiently and permanently.

When reports of cleanliness issues are made, these are passed on to the

sweepers to complete. The sweepers are then free to mark jobs as complete even if they haven't completed the job. Even when multiple reports are made of the same issue, a sweeper can simply mark the job as complete without completing it.

It is then impossible to properly report these issues, again because Environment Services do not manage these individuals directly.

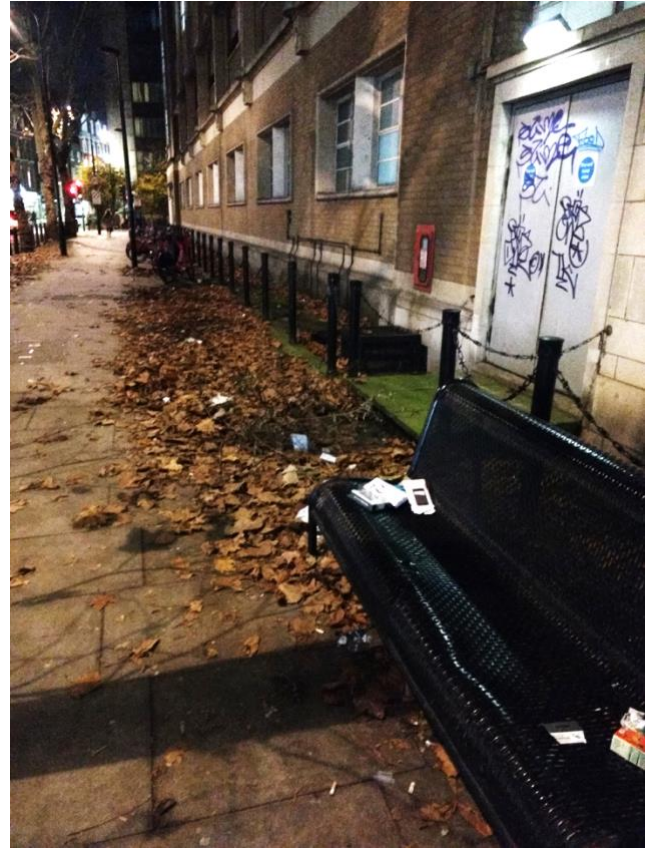
It also sometimes happens that parts of roads or entire roads are accidentally left off schedules, so that nobody is scheduled to sweep a road. This often occurs when a road is on the boundary between two teams, or if a road crosses a junction.

This happens on main roads as well as backroads, leading to a particular road consistently having a lower level of cleanliness than its immediate neighbours.

Neither Environment Services nor the public have direct access to the sweeping schedules so that they can only incidentally discover when this has happened, often when a Veolia operative flags the issue up. All this conspires to create 'forgotten roads' throughout Bloomsbury which simply *are not swept as part of a routine*. These roads consume a large amount of administrative labour as to have them maintained at a proper standard, it is necessary for the public and for the local SAMO to continually report the road as requiring a sweep.

These forgotten roads become especially obvious during the leaf-fall. As leaves cannot be reported by the public, they are only removed by scheduled sweeps, or by a report from a SAMO. Forgotten roads then face an immense build-up of leaves until they are cleared. Reports are passed on to

the local sweeper but they often choose to mark the report as complete after sweeping only a handful of leaves or only removing any litter present, before moving on.



A forgotten road, Howland Street

The reason for this is that the sweepers know that if a sufficient amount of leaves build up then a machine will instead be sent to remove the leaves. This is much more of a time-efficient method. A sweeper can choose to either spend hours over weeks continually removing leaves from a road, or allow a fortnight's worth to build-up and have a machine remove the leaves in a matter of minutes. The choice is rather obvious, even if it means dishonest practice.

The sweepers again can get away with this because they can hide behind a wall of unaccountability, not being monitored by Environment Services.

Although it makes sense, it leads to an excessive amount of leaves which are unsightly and potentially hazardous.



A dangerous level of leaves in a cycle lane. Note how the adjacent road is perfectly clean.

performing sweeper should be taken seriously and resolved quickly, as it means that a whole neighbourhood can be affected by unpleasant levels of littering and dirtiness. It especially undermines confidence in Camden when it is observed that not only does a sweeper perform poorly, but reports of this are not investigated.

Essentially all of the common problems with sweeping come down to the poor performance of Veolia's operatives and the inability to improve their performance directly. The cleansing system would work far more efficiently if Environment Services had more control over street level operatives, removing the current wall of unaccountability.

It should be the case that Environment Services directly manage the Veolia ground level operatives. The amount of time that is wasted in simply making reports of cleanliness issues caused by poor performance of sweepers is immense. It would be far more efficient if Environment Services could directly hold poorly performing sweepers to account. Stated differently, the single problem of a poorly performing individual causes a multitude of cleanliness issues daily which all require individual reporting. Resolving the individual cleanliness issues does nothing to actually address the *cause* of the issues, which is poor sweeper performance.

It also seriously undermines public confidence in Camden when poor sweeper performance is observed. It is quite obvious even to the public that plenty of sweepers are performing extremely poorly, and even when they make complaints about this they come to nothing. A complaint of a poorly



# 5. Clean Camden

## The Current Problem

The Clean Camden application provides a way for the public to report cleanliness issues. These reports are given to Veolia, and if Veolia default on them by not resolving the issue in set timescales, then Veolia receive an automatic deduction from their payment. Clean Camden offers a real way to empower the public to take ownership of their area and direct the street cleansing operation at a grassroots level.

The problem is that Veolia do not always properly respond to reports.

A report on Clean Camden is first 'Open' and then marked as 'In Progress' when the issue is in the process of being resolved.

It is then 'Closed'. It is closed as 'Complete' if it has been completed. If it is not completed, it is marked as 'Incomplete'.

Veolia do not always complete reports for various reasons, but will almost always mark reports as 'Complete'. In this way Veolia will avoid deductions from their payment.

This is not serious if the report was invalid. Sometimes a report can be invalid if it relates to an issue on private property for example, which Veolia do not have to resolve.

It is a serious issue if the report was valid. It has been observed and proven that valid reports have been closed as complete without any action from Veolia. This means that Veolia neither do the work, nor receive a deduction. The deduction is meant as an incentive for Veolia to do the work *within*

*timescales*, not simply for them to do the work at all. The practice of closing reports as complete without completing the work is a serious issue and appears to be widespread.

It also seriously undermines public confidence in Camden when this is observed. Indeed, the reason why the public do not use the application *en masse* is exactly because everyone has encountered an issue which is marked as completed without action.

These issues mainly pertain to the sticker removal team, which already have been noted for their poor work even when they do decide to respond to reports.

| 2019  |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| No. of defaults reported via Clean Camden App | Financial deduction |
| 2   | £66.03              |
| 4   | £132.06             |
| 5   | £165.08             |
| 1   | £34.19              |
| 1   | £34.19              |
| 4   | £136.74             |
| 1   | £34.19              |
| 6   | £205.11             |
| 1   | £34.19              |
| 0   | £ -                 |
| 0   | £ -                 |
| 0   | £ -                 |
| 25  | £841.76             |

Clean Camden defaults in 2019

It has been noticed that the sticker removal team falsely close down reports from Environment Services as well as the public.



The response to reports is particularly important for the sticker removal team because the sticker removal team do not remove stickers as part of a routine but *only* respond to reports. The evidence showing that the sticker removal team are falsely marking reports as complete is serious. It means they are being paid to do nothing, and avoiding deductions for doing nothing.

The levels of deductions that have been made over the past two years from defaulted Clean Camden reports are also unreasonably small and unequivocally point to reports being falsely marked as completed on a large scale throughout all of Camden. I know that throughout the month of September at least a handful of my reports exceeded the timescales, and yet only one report was apparently defaulted throughout the whole of Camden, relating to a single bin not being emptied within 2 hours of a report.

### Greater Functionality

The application is currently outdated and clunky and is in need of an update. It would be made substantially more difficult for reports to be falsely completed if it were made mandatory for those completing the reports to upload a photo of the completed work. There should also be an option for operatives to type a message. This would then mean that the case of an invalid report could be explained to the user.

The requirement to include a photo of the completed work should all but stop individuals from skipping jobs and encourage at a grassroots level better attention to detail.

It would also be an improvement if it were made easy to flag up issues with reports not being properly completed.

Currently there is no real way to do this, except to manually take screenshots and show them to Environment Services along with a separate photo proving that the work wasn't done.

It would also be advantageous if further functionality could be added to the application.

It would be advantageous if the ability to report a missed collection could be added to the application. Currently this can only be done via Camden's website.

It would be advantageous if the ability to report an excess of leaves could be added to the application. This would not require a resolution within set timescales but would allow the public to help monitor leaf fall. Currently there is no way to report an excess of leaves.



A planning application from 2016, Store Street.

It would also be advantageous if the ability to report abandoned bicycles could be added to the application. Locating and removing bicycles is

currently purely the responsibility of the local SAMO and so allowing the public to help would reduce workload.

It would also be advantageous if expired planning documents could be reported on the application. Currently there are plenty of planning application documents attached to posts throughout Bloomsbury which have been there for years along with cable ties. The only way to get these removed is to simply do it oneself.

It would also be advantageous if unwanted hire cycles could be reported on the application. Residents currently have to manually move these bicycles themselves to remove them from inconvenient places.

# Conclusion

I hope that the value of this report is self-evident and that the solutions proposed speak their own worth, and that you can consider effecting these solutions.

Observing the street cleansing operation in Bloomsbury, what I primarily see is a lack of any individual stepping back and attempting to address the issues actually *causing* the problems, rather than simply trying to resolve individual issues as they arise. This works in the short term, but in the long term much money and time is wasted, and the waste of human resource is not something that should be taken lightly in a time of cuts, or indeed at any time.

What I also see is the lack of any one individual attempting to grasp the 'bigger picture' of the state of the streets in Bloomsbury. Each individual problem has a way to be resolved, and Environment Services tend to concentrate on those. Thus, when I initially raised concerns of widespread cleanliness issues in Bloomsbury, I was simply told to report each individual one on Clean Camden. Of course that is a way to resolve my concerns *now*, but it does nothing to stop the same problems arising in the future, or in another place, and it is *unsustainable* to report every observed issue on Clean Camden. Indeed, a friend of mine experimented in doing this and reported that a five minute walk would often take at least half an hour.

All that I have done is attempted to address the issues actually causing cleanliness issues through this report, in the hope that widespread problems can be properly resolved at the source. This report by no means touches even on all of the issues that I am personally aware of, but I hope that it addresses all of the main issues. I certainly believe that if all of the solutions proposed were effected, the increase in cleanliness would be dramatic and sustained.

Underpinning all this is a belief that if Camden can show pride in its streets and squares, then the public will also follow suit. There are plenty of residents in Bloomsbury who only wish that they could take ownership of their streets, but are discouraged by observing poor sweeper performance and receiving unhelpful responses from Camden. Communities do not really feel as though they are even *allowed* to take ownership of their streets. In a time of cuts, Camden should be actively looking for ways to involve the community in the running of their local area, especially given the fact that residents already *want* to do so. Encouraging this spirit through community painting, installing high quality heritage street furniture, increasing confidence in Clean Camden, and any other way can only be a good thing, and even regardless of cuts, is the right way to do things. But for the community to take ownership of an area, they first have to be confident that Veolia are going to empty bins on time and take rubbish away when scheduled. Otherwise all bets are off.

I sincerely hope that in the future we can *all* work together to bring unequivocally positive change to the area, and that this report is just the first of many steps in the right direction.

**Owen Ward**







# Street Cleanliness in Bloomsbury

## Advice for its Improvement

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2020

Improving Street Cleanliness



**BLOOMSBURY**  
**CONSERVATION AREAS**  
Advisory Committee

