

**Tackling Anti-social behaviour and drug taking along  
the Grand Union Canal Cycle way**

Presented by

Hillingdon Safer Transport Team  
Metropolitan Police

Summary

The towpath alongside the Grand Union canal is designated as a Cycle Quietway by Hillingdon Council, in order to provide a safe environment for cyclists in Hillingdon Borough. Incidents of ASB have been identified along the towpath particularly drug use. Beneath a road bridge at a location called North Hyde Gardens (See Appendix FIG10 red boxed area) there is a large concrete void which can be accessed through a metal door from the canal towpath. The poor environmental design of the area i.e. overgrown vegetation, poor lighting, high instance of graffiti and low foot traffic contributed to the problem. Rough Sleepers, drug users and dealers were utilising this space to conceal their activities leaving behind needles and extensive

paraphernalia. Police also found improvised offensive weapons (see appendix FIG3). From a different perspective this void could be accessed by members of the public i.e. children exploring/playing. After research Police have ascertained that drug supply/use and related ASB is occurring at the location as offenders easily go undetected behind the natural vegetation and within the insecure void in the bridge. There is no CCTV at the location. The environment also leads to convenient escape routes for offenders. Several positive drug searches resulted in arrests. Essentially, this location had been a target by criminals who were supplying drugs to users by taking advantage of the insecure premises and the environmental layout. Offenders who were arrested and charged returned to the location to feed their drug habits.

This problem needed to be dealt with due to two important reasons. Firstly, in order to preserve and promote the confidence of those who use the canal towpath and

secondly, to ensure an effective police response to the problems highlighted which may have deterred or achieved a constant reduction or eliminate such incidents in the future. Therefore, it was important to act upon this issue as it had an adverse effect on the employees of local business such as British Airways, Abellio Bus Company, Volvo, Vodafone as well as ramblers and cyclists who used this route as part of their journeys to and from work. This would have had an impact on their perception of crime and the Metropolitan Police Service. What were we trying to achieve? - in essence to eradicate ASB, rough sleeping, graffiti, improve cycle confidence, improve canal users experience and increase the general foot traffic along the tow path. The longer term project was to put the void under the bridge to practical use.

### **Scanning (SARA)**

There was ongoing ASB, Drug use, Criminal damage (graffiti) (See Appendix FIG 1) and Littering, causing members of the public and employees within the immediate vicinity to fear for their safety. The local authority was aware of the issue as were police and other agencies. There was however no coordinated agency approach to dealing with the matter. Research showed that the victims of crime were: Employees that were based at North Hyde Gardens industrial estate who used the footpath to commute to and from work on foot and cycle. This is a well used cycle path which connects to Ealing and Hounslow Boroughs and considered for the "Quietways" cycle project. A snapshot survey of towpath users concerns was taken which raised issues around drug use, graffiti and general untidiness of the towpath. Research showed the age demographic of offenders was within the age ranges of 18-45 and predominantly male. The offences were drug related (using

and taking class A). The location had been identified as the area on the towpath under the road bridge at North Hyde Gardens. There was a large concrete void under the bridge that had an access point via a door that was unlocked ( see appendix FIG 2) The area in this void was the focus for the drug dealing, taking and rough sleeping, the main reason being that these activities were out of sight. Extensive graffiti around the bridge had added to the general poor and run down appearance of the location. Research showed the majority of the offences highlighted took place either in the afternoon or late evening. Criminal intelligence reporting indicated that this location was being used on a daily basis by drug users. We conducted a user survey at the location which showed 100% of pedestrians and cyclists were unhappy with the perceived levels of criminality and ASB. Surveys were also conducted with Abellio, British Airways, Volvo and Vodafone staff who corroborated the the general feelings of dissatisfaction towards the canal tow path. After

extensive research we ascertained that drug supply/use and related anti-social behaviour was occurring at the location as offenders easily went undetected behind the natural vegetation and within the insecure space under the bridge. There was very poor lighting, no CCTV and no crime deterrent signs. The location also provided a convenient escape route for all offenders. Essentially, this seemed to show that this location had been targeted by criminals who were supplying drugs, taking complete advantage of the insecure premises and the environment. Offenders that had been arrested had shown total disregard as they swiftly re-offended therefore indicating that the suppliers are also showing no regard for the law. Other indirect consequences of the crime at the location impacted the Abellio Bus company with drivers struggling to negotiate the parked cars at the location. The bus garage operates 24/7. This inevitably impacted on bus journeys. This project was singled out from others as important as it was increasingly

taking up valuable police and agency resources in dealing with the crime and associated clean ups of dangerous paraphanelia.

### **Analysis**

Several confidence meetings were held with all parties involved, Police, Hillingdon Council, Canal River Trust, Abellio, Volvo, Vodafone, Ramblers Association, Thamesreach homeless charity, British Airways to identify the problem and trends. Once established, an action plan was put into place whereby all parties had input to ensure that maximum results were achieved. Several surveys (See appendix FIG11 and FIG13) were conducted before any action was taken, which showed low confidence amongst canal users as well as the local community who were scared to venture down to the canal. Police monitored any incidents that took place at the location via intel systems, crime reporting systems and any arrests made. Research showed

that the usual victims of crime ranged from the ages of 18-45. The vast majority were employees from the business park however, the local community has also suffered with thefts from motor vehicles (fuelled by drug use). There were also complaints from dog walkers that animals were getting broken glass stuck in their paws along the tow path which was due to the drinking/ASB issues around the bridge. The type of crime included robbery, theft of pedal cycle, PWITS, possession of drugs, offensive weapons, theft from motor vehicle and criminal damage. Research shows the offenders for this are predominantly unemployed, homeless males with an offending history who were illegal immigrants. Please note that the above refers to only a snap shot of the problems that were occurring at this location. The crime was varied and affects of all members of the local community as well as local business. Due to the location being a permanent structure the likelihood of the problem being displaced was very likely, which was taken into consideration. Cross

border boroughs (Ealing and Hounslow) were made aware that there may be increase in drug crime etc in their respective areas . Therefore, it was deemed sensible to look at patterns of offending away from this locality in the immediate vicinity if necessary to establish and identify suspects that may have been committing like crimes. Although the incidents that happened had been at sporadic times the majority of offences highlighted took place either in the afternoon or late evening, to which police were flexible in their working hours and targeted patrols to suit the need of these crime trends. Public surveys were very fruitful. A lot of intelignce was gained about the main offenders which ensured that police targeted the correct people. It narrowed down times and places. The night time economy proved to be a focal point especially as the majority of the businesses closed for the night therefore there were less eyes on the area. Only two businesses were 24/7 operations, however, only a skeleton staff operated and were often too busy to

pay attention to the area. Other tactics which were employed consisted of calling victims of crime who were in the area at the time and gaining a greater understanding of why they were there and the profile of the suspect. This tactic also proved fruitful, as in some cases there were named suspects on crime reports, which again assisted us in compiling an offender profile and trying to understand the motivations for committing crime in this area. An environmental analysis was carried out of the tow path and bridge. There was a large amount of graffiti, litter (cans/beer bottles) needles, tin foil, blankets, clothing and cigarette butts. This all suggested large groups of people were congregating in the area, drinking and smoking. During police visits, a number of males were sleeping in the void under the bridge and consequently arrested for immigration offences. This assisted with profiling offenders and providing assistance with outside agencies. Feedback from officers who conducted site checks suggested that offenders often

saw/heard police coming therefore giving time to run away from the location. Covert methods of policing were deployed to tackle this issue and officers were tasked to walk along the tow path from the other end of the canal, therefore heading the offenders off. Prior to undertaking this project, there was little long term police involvement. The graffiti tags on the walls which were dated suggested the area had remained untouched for about 3 years. This too was backed up by the amount of litter and general debris which was not cleaned up by the land owner.

### **Response**

Hillingdon Safer Transport teams' response to this was as follows:

1: identify and set up a meeting with partner agencies i.e. Hillingdon Council, Canal River Trust, Thames Reach homeless Charity, Drug rehab centre in Uxbridge and the owner of the structure, JLL Estates. The purpose of this meeting was to establish the problems at this location and

what could be done about it. A priority was to seal the void under the bridge and paint over the graffiti - this would have an immediate impact on the issue. Hillingdon Council had powers and the finances to contribute to this part of the project. It was agreed that a day of action by all partner agencies would be a logical way forward. Each partner had their own area of responsibility as is outlined below. As part of this strategy, it was agreed by all partner agencies that the tow path between Station Road Hayes and North Hyde Gardens be targeted as it would have a high visual impact on the community.

2: Wednesday 9th April 2014 - day of action- Hillingdon Council Contractor arrived at North Hyde Gardens with police. The void under the bridge was searched and sealed using industrial metal sheeting (Appendix FIG5) Hillingdon Council's graffiti contractor also arrived on scene and begun painting over the graffiti on the North Hyde Gardens bridge (See Appendix FIG4) The Hillingdon Safer Transport team,

litter picked the tow path between Station Road and North Hyde Gardens, the litter pickers and bags were provided by Hillingdon Council. In all, 60 bags of waste were collected from the tow path. Hillingdon Council provided a van and crew to dispose of this waste. Additionally, thick vegetation was cut away from the area around the bridge, opening up the area, therefore providing less cover to offenders. Canal River Trust provided the day of action with a barge which assisted on two fronts. Firstly, the barge collected all the waste bags from the tow path and transported them to a single point. Secondly, the barge provided a safety platform for the graffiti contractor to paint over graffiti on the opposing side of the waterway which is difficult/dangerous to reach. The homeless charity, engaged with rough sleepers along the tow path who had set up camp in heavily wooded areas. Advice was offered as well as temporary placements in sheltered accommodation. The press attended this day of action and the efforts of all partner agencies were reported in

the local gazette as well on internet forums. (See Appendix FIG 6/FIG7)

3: Hillingdon Safer Transport team continued their efforts in the days and weeks following the day of action by showing a high visibility presence in uniform along the tow path and dealing with ASB. Any new instances of graffiti were immediately reported to Hillingdon Council and cleared within 24 Hours (see Appendix FIG 9) Reacting quickly to this type of criminal damage has two benefits a) it will show that someone cares about the area, therefore increasing confidence of canal users b) will deter graffiti vandals from spraying the bridge as they know it will be painted over within 24hours. If the vandal returns there could be a good chance they would be arrested by police. By the void being sealed, the effect was immediate. There was no longer any place to hide from the eyes of the community. The day of action was also publicised to the other stakeholders - the employees of British Airways, Abellio, Volvo and Vodafone.

They were encouraged to call police and report any unusual behavior on the tow path. This would provide police accurate data on further offending. One month after the day of action, PCSO's conducted a survey of tow path users. The feedback showed that users (cyclists, walkers, residents, employees and barge owners) felt more confident to use the tow path than before. Comments were noted that none of the usual dealers/users had been seen around North Hyde Gardens since the clean up. Crime data from the area also saw a huge drop in recordable crime, some 90%. The amount of criminal intelligence also dropped significantly, suggesting the day of action was a success. In order to improve and monitor our success, PCSO's were tasked to conduct a monthly confidence survey amongst canal users. This project was not seen as a quick fix. It was identified that a longer term solution would have to be established in order the area "policed itself" which would allow police resources to be used elsewhere. Through continued meetings with the

partner agencies and constant communication, Hillingdon Council applied for the Incubator Fund which is granted by Transport for London. The incubator fund aims to use derelict spaces in London for a practical use. The Sharks Canoe club have been looking for a permanent home for some time along the Grand Union canal. The Void under North Hyde Gardens bridge would provide the perfect home. An Application for funding was submitted and £40k was awarded to the scheme. A further £20k was promised by the land owner JLL. This funding will make the void under the bridge safe and secure. The area around the bridge will be landscaped, the plan is to open the tow path and surrounding environment making it more appealing to users. By basing the canoe club at this location, it is envisaged a sense of ownership will grow therefore police would be able to disengage resources over a longer period of time and the concept of civilian policing will be established. Foot traffic will increase and it is hoped that in the future more support

businesses ie cafes will establish along the tow path. In the medium term, as part of the patrol strategy, PCSO's have been tasked to patrol the area on a weekly basis so that we are not reliant on the community to know exactly what is going on in this area. It is recognised that by overlooking this area and by not patrolling ASB can return and confidence amongst users can drop dramatically.

### **Assessment**

At the outset, success in this project probably looked a little different from what success was to look like prior to starting it. Initially, we were certainly looking for a significant reduction in the number of reported criminal acts relating to ASB, criminal damage, drug use, graffiti, littering and causing members of the public and employees within the immediate vicinity to fear for their safety. As officers started to patrol the area on a regular basis the number of arrests, Intel reports and reported crimes increased initially therefore giving a clear message to the drug users/sellers that police

were tackling this problem. This would lead to an increase in public confidence in police action due frequent high visibility patrols. The increase and then steady output of crime prevention i.e. arrests confirmed the growing belief that the behavior of the criminals was at this point only being reacted to and the underlying reasons were not being tackled effectively. There was a realisation that possible drug rehabilitation was needed and to make secure the insecure void under the bridge. This was done with immediate affect due to the health and safety implications. Following the premises being secured there was an immediate noticeable fall in reported crime. From April 2014 until September 2014 there have been no reports of ASB, crime, drug use in that area due to the initial police response and ongoing response.

Feedback was also sought from (See Appendix FIG 12) drivers, cyclists, pedestrians and business users during busy periods to which has all been of a positive nature with a

particular emphasis on how satisfied they are with police response and the impact that the positive action has had on the community.

A further community impact survey (See Appendix FIG 12 &13) has been completed which showed a 65% increase in satisfaction with the "How safe do you feel?" at the location and a 70% satisfaction rate of people that had confidence in the actions the police and partners had taken. These surveys will continue to be done on a regular basis and at different times to as to capture as many different users as possible which will give a better measure of our success.

The successful bid of the incubator fund for the Canoe club will further enhance the area and make it environmentally pleasant for users. There is a continuing issue with graffiti at the location, however, it is reported as soon as it is seen and is cleared within 24 hours. This is an agreed timescale between the council contractor and police. It is envisaged that when the canoe club move into their new home,

ownership of the area will be taken and area will be looked after by the canoe club. Another off shoot project as a result of Police involvement on the canal network is the commission of a floating police office which will benefit the canal network throughout London. Through partnership working, the Canal River Trust has provided a narrow boat for police use (see Appendix FIG14). The narrow boat has been branded with Police Insignia and will further enforce the work being done on the canal network. This is a unique and innovative solution which could only have been achieved through partnership working for the benefit of local communities.

Further positive action as a consequence of this project for the wider benefit of the community was in the form of community resolution. Street drinkers were specifically targeted over a 4 week period around the canal area. The individuals were given a choice of receiving a penalty notice for disorder for littering or drinking in the street (£50)

or as an alternative to this, under police supervision litter pick, specifically beer cans, from the canal tow path. The message got through to regular street drinkers that littering was not acceptable. This approach drastically reduced the amount of litter along the tow path, especially beer cans.

### **Our Key Partners:**

The Community, made up of local residents, narrow boat residents, ramblers, dog walkers, fishermen

The Canal River Trust - Administrators and trustees of the UK Canal network

Hillingdon Council - Local Authority/jurisdiction

Thames Reach - Homeless Charity

Hayes Town Partnership - body charged with developing the neighbourhood

Local business - British Airways, Vodaphone, Volvo, Abellio Buses

### **Project Contacts:**

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## Appendices



**Fig1**



**Fig 2**



**Fig 3**



**Fig 4**



**Fig 5**

## Police clean up canal bridge blighted by dealers

- Apr 10, 2014 16:18
- By Jack Griffith

Officers collect 50 bags of rubbish as part of operation to rid secluded Grand Union Canal towpath stretch of "undesirables", and make it safer for cyclists and walkers



PCSO Charlotte Yates of Hillingdon Safer Transport Team holding an hypodermic needle found under the North Hyde Gardens bridge over the Grand Union Canal

**Fig 6**

# Grand clearing up session in trouble spot

By Jack Griffith  
jack.griffith@hillingdon.com

**POLICE are reclaiming a canal towpath that had become a no-go area, frequented by rough sleepers and drug dealers.** Hillingdon's Safer Transport Team (STT) says it is driving out 'undesirables', reducing anti-social behaviour and making the area safe once again. Two people have been arrested in connection with drugs offences.

The Grand Union Canal towpath close to North Hyde Gardens, in Hayes, has been a well-known trouble spot for some time.

Officers have been patrolling in recent weeks and said they discovered a stash of weapons hidden in

the undergrowth – a kitchen knife and a makeshift spiked truncheon made from a roll of clingfilm with screws sticking out of it.

Officers also filled about 50 rubbish bags on Wednesday morning last week.

PC Kris Scigalski, of the STT, co-ordinated the operation.

"The problems here were brought to our attention by local businesses and residents who walk there," he said.

"Officers have been on proactive patrols and dispersed groups, and our presence acts as a deterrent."

"There is a gate to the canal that normally remains open, but we have spoken to the landowners, who agree it is a problem and they will be keeping this gate locked at night."

"This will be an ongoing

**■ EYESORE:** (Top) A former storage area had become a general dumping ground, (right) PCSOs Charlotte Yates and Gurpreet Saran and colleagues filled 50 bags with rubbish



**■ BAGGING UP:** PC Kris Scigalski and PCSO Anthony Cox clear rubbish from a pathway

Photos by Lucy Ven 04 Vesel 04/2014/09/04

No in:

POLICE town t amid j trouble Since comm have j groups informk Street, surrou Hill anti-sic becom in the partici gather verbal shopp Offi respon shops, these custom Mar Joolz store, the p bands "Th and st there things outsid "I h doing The green of th

**Fig 7**

# Canal clean-up a safety boost

## People praised for Grand Union efforts

by **Alan Hayes**  
alan.hayes@trinitymirror.com

**EVERYONE** involved in a scheme to make a corner of Hayes safer, tidier and more accessible has been praised and thanked.

For years, the stretch of the Grand Union Canal close to Station Road, through North Hyde Gardens, was a hang out for drug users and street drinkers, and became filthy and litter-strewn with hypodermic needles scattered around.

Graffiti also covered many structures in the area. Community organisations, the police and local people pitched in.

Now the area is cleaned up, a majority of local people polled say they feel safer there, according to recent opinion surveys.



■ **HANDS-ON:** PC Kris Scigalski and PCSO Antony Cox clear a path

Photo by Toby Vandavelde  
www.buyaphototms.co.uk  
NL20149184

The body that runs the nation's waterways, the Canal and River Trust, has praised all involved

and the scheme won a silver award for the Hillingdon Safer Transport Team at the annual Problem Oriented Partnership Awards, handed out by the Met Police in November.

Dick Vincent, a Canal and River Trust towpath ranger, said: "We're delighted the work to improve North Hyde Gardens has been so successful. I'd like to thank the police and all those who have worked so hard to improve it.

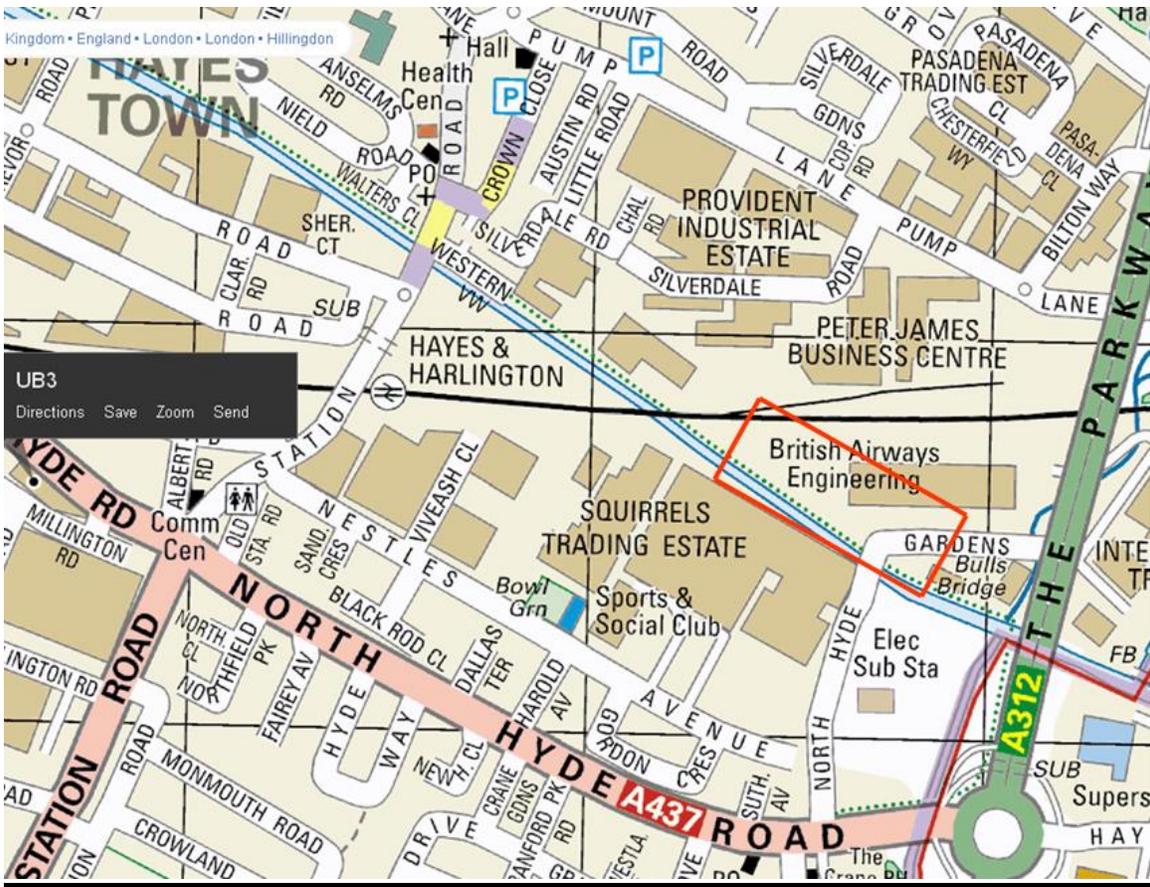
"Local people using the area have noted that the work done there has had a real impact. It's a great example of what can happen when organisations work together to problem solve.

"The towpath is now clean, safe and well looked after."

**Fig 8**



**FIG 9**



**FIG10**



**FIG14**

## Survey of 100 Canal Users (February 2014-April 2014)

Pre Intervention	Yes		NO
Do you feel confident/safe about using the canal tow path?	10		90
	AM		PM
What times do you feel unsafe?	10		90
Are you worried about graffiti?	85		15
Are you worried about drug taking?	73		27
Are you worried about being robbed?	93		7
Are worried about street drinkers?	70		30
Are you worried about litter	75		25
Do you regularly see police on the towpath?	10		90
Are you confident about police actions on the tow path?	15		85

**FIG 11**

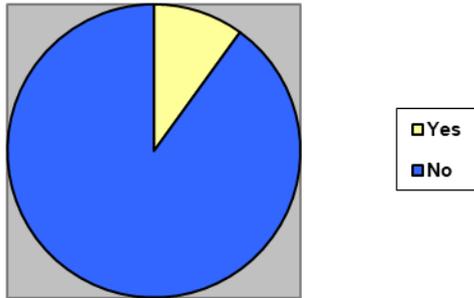
## Survey results (June 2014-September 2014)

Post Intervention	Yes	NO
Do you confident/ safe do you feel about using the canal tow path?	75	25
	AM	PM
What times do you feel unsafe?	10	90
Are you worried about graffiti?	15	85
Are you worried about drug taking?	40	60
Are you worried about being robbed?	55	45
Are worried about street drinkers?	20	80
Are you worried about litter	10	90
Do you regularly see police on the towpath?	35	65
Are you confident about police actions on the tow path?	70	30

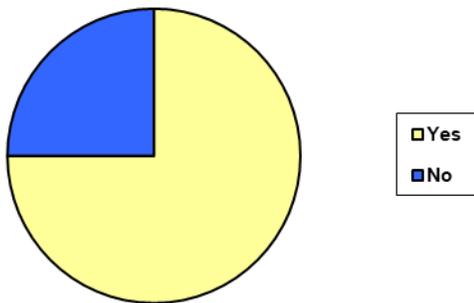
**FIG12**

**FIG 13**

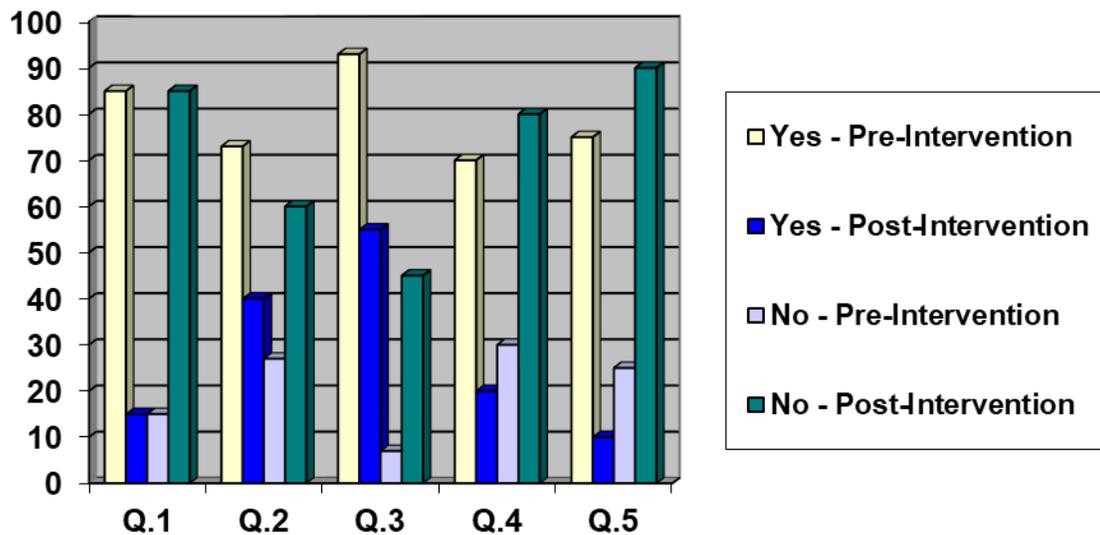
Do you feel confident/safe when using the canal tow path?  
Pre-Intervention



Do you feel confident/safe when using the canal tow path?  
Post-Intervention



	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you feel confident/safe when using the canal tow path?	10	90	75	25

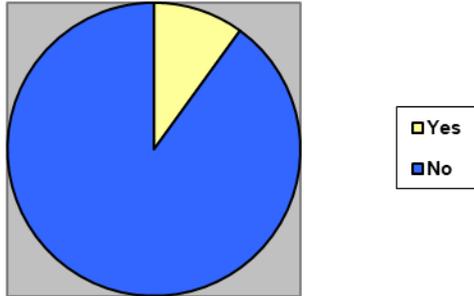


**KEY**

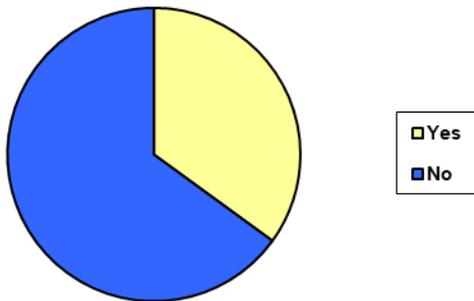
- Q.1 Are you worried about graffiti?
- Q.2 Are you worried about drug taking?
- Q.3 Are you worried about being robbed?
- Q.4 Are you worried about street drinkers?
- Q.5 Are you worried about litter?

		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Q.1	Are you worried about graffiti?	85	15	15	85
Q.2	Are you worried about drug taking?	73	27	40	60
Q.3	Are you worried about being robbed?	93	7	55	45
Q.4	Are worried about street drinkers?	70	30	20	80
Q.5	Are you worried about litter	75	25	10	90

Do you regularly see police on the towpath?  
Pre-Intervention

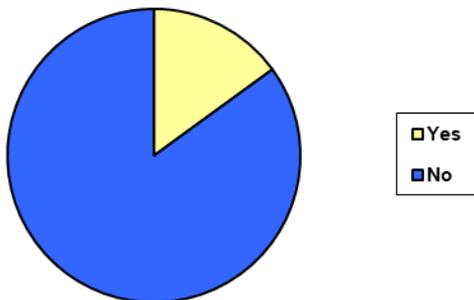


Do you regularly see police on the towpath?  
Pre-Intervention

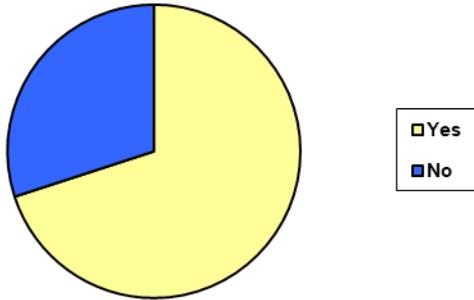


	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you regularly see police on the towpath?	10	90	35	65

Are you confident about police actions on the tow path?  
Pre-Intervention



# Are you confident about police actions on the tow path? Post-Intervention



	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Are you confident about police actions on the tow path?	15	85	70	30