

Title of the project: Tackling ASB at Harry Road Park

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Summary:

Scanning:

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) in Harry Road Park was having a significant effect on the residents surrounding the Park. Issues were raised at a public meeting attended by the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT). Members of the public were clearly dissatisfied and disillusioned by the response from Police and Partners in tackling the problems. An environmental scan of the Park showed high levels of blight (graffiti and litter), the whole area was unkempt with overgrown trees and shrubbery, and play equipment was not fit for purpose due to damage.

Analysis:

Difficulties were encountered in analysing ASB data due to inadequate recording systems. Information was sought from partners indicating numerous repeat visits to the Park to remove graffiti and litter. Residents had formed a residents group and all reported high levels of ASB involving youths aged 11-17 years particularly on weekend evenings. Council officers confirmed a lack of resources in Youth Services and inadequate youth facilities in the Gawber area. The play equipment was minimal and inadequate yet no funds had been allocated to rectify this problem.

The Darton West Ward, covering Harry Road Park, did not have a formal structure in place to identify local priorities to be dealt with by service providers, as in other areas of Barnsley. The response to ASB from the Police was flawed in that District policing priorities took precedence over local priorities.

Response:

Several objectives to resolve the issues were identified. The short term issues involved reduction of ASB, improving the perception of crime and ASB, and improving confidence in service providers. The long term goals were to improve the Park facilities and engender ownership of the area in the local Community.

ASB was tackled by the SNT using enforcement tactics. Council officers worked on making immediate improvements in cleaning up the Park. Residents meetings were attended by all agencies to report back to the community on what actions were being taken. Residents were supported to form a 'Friends of' group to progress re-development.

Assessment:

ASB has reduced significantly due to an effective multi agency and community approach. Only 2 incidents of ASB in Harry Road Park were logged in 2008. All stakeholders have reported a reduction in demand for service and residents have reported their satisfaction that issues have been addressed.

Words: 377

Description of project

SCANNING:

Introduction

Harry Road Park lies within the Darton West Ward of the Local Authority of Barnsley and has an area of over 32,000 sq metres. The park lies on the outskirts of the town centre in a residential area surrounded by 70 houses. The Park has a car park, a large playing field capable of accommodating two football pitches, and a small children's play area consisting of equipment that does not conform to British Standards. There is no lighting on the playing fields or on the public footpath. There are no litter bins, seats or signage within the Park. Due to the lack of adequate play equipment and features, very few children or adults use the Park for recreation.

How did the issues come to light?

Complaints from local residents to the Council resulted in a Community Meeting being held with council officers, elected members and residents in April 2007. One of the main issues raised at this meeting was anti-social behaviour (ASB) with residents reporting nuisance motorbikes, underage drinking and stone throwing. Residents felt that there was a lack of youth provision in the area and that this was the main cause of youth disorder in the area.

Stakeholders involved:

Residents
Barnsley Council
Police
Elected members

A Community Conference was organised to take place by the Darton West elected members in September 2007. All stakeholders were invited to attend. The main issue raised at this conference was ASB in Harry Road Park.

Impact on residents:

Residents reported that youths were running amok, drinking alcohol, causing damage to play equipment, graffiti, littering and using drugs. When residents had tried to challenge this anti-social behaviour, they were met with a barrage of abuse.

Incidents were frequently reported to the police, however Response officers were often engaged in dealing with higher priority incidents and unavailable to attend in the first instance. Unsurprisingly, residents were dissatisfied with this. They perceived a lack of support from the police, were frustrated that anti-social behaviour had been allowed to continue, and had lost confidence and trust in the police service.

Impact on Barnsley Council:

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Repeat demands were made for service in terms of graffiti and litter removal. Council Impact Wardens confirmed that they had visited the Park on numerous occasions to remove blight (most instances involved offensive words and images) following calls from the public. 1763 square metres had been removed in the local area from July to September 2007.

Numerous calls had also been received by the Environmental Regulatory Unit regarding the amount of litter deposited in the park, however due to limited resources, the service they could provide was insufficient. In addition, there was a lack of service provision from Youth Services in the area, and a lack of funding to improve Park facilities.

Impact on Police:

Numerous incidents were reported however, due to competing demands, many incidents were not attended until several hours too late. SNT officers followed up incidents of anti-social behaviour but often were unable to appease disappointed residents regarding lack of attendance whilst incidents were on-going.

Following the Conference, officers from the SNT visited Harry Road Park and found that there was a high level of graffiti on the boundary fences surrounding the Park. The green spaces and shrubbery areas were covered in litter and drug paraphernalia, bushes were overgrown and existing play equipment was damaged and covered in graffiti.

Impact on elected members:

Elected members received high numbers of complaints from local residents about perceived lack of action from the police and council services, and were put under pressure to voice the residents concerns. Elected members outlined that they had spent months trying to resolve issues on behalf of their residents, however the response from all service providers, particularly the Police, had clearly been inadequate.

ANALYSIS:

The environmental scan of the area and contacts made with all relevant parties confirmed that anti-social behaviour was taking place, and was clearly having a negative impact on local residents.

Anti-Social Behaviour was classified under the following headings:

- Abandoned Vehicles
- Vehicle Obstruction
- Animal Problems
- Begging / Vagrancy
- Hate Incident
- Hoax Calls To Emergency Services

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- Inappropriate Use / Sale / Possession Of Fireworks
- Malicious Communications
- Noise
- Prostitution Related Activity
- Rowdy / Nuisance Behaviour
- Environmental Damage / Littering
- Rowdy / Nuisance - Neighbours
- Rowdy / Nuisance - Rowdy or Inconsiderate Behaviour
- Street Drinking
- Substance Misuse
- Trespass
- Vehicle Nuisance / Inappropriate Vehicle Use

As the Park area and adjacent car park is overlooked by 70 houses, residents were often directly affected when disturbances in the Park took place.

Why was ASB prevalent in Harry Road Park?

A similar Park in nearby Mapplewell provided a useful comparison. The Park area in Mapplewell was of a similar size, also in a residential area, however levels of ASB reported was relatively low (in terms of both police incidents and through local community meetings).

The key differences appeared to be:

- A well-attended new Multi-Use Games Area and children's play area
- Regular Youth provision in the form of outreach workers
- A motivated and active 'Friends of Mapplewell Park' Group
- A robust Pub Watch Scheme, reducing the availability of alcohol to young people
- Adequate lighting, provision of litter bins

These elements were not present in Harry Road Park, therefore this analysis suggested that the following factors were likely contributors to creating ASB: environmental decline, lack of youth provision, access to alcohol, and lack of 'ownership' in the local community.

Key Objectives

It was crucial that all stakeholders in Harry Road Park work together to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) Significantly reduce ASB in Harry Road Park
- 2) Improve public confidence in the service providers

3) Improve the Park facilities

Success in achieving the objectives outlined could be measured by a reduction in demand on service providers and from positive feedback from the public at Community meetings.

Problem Analysis of Harry Road Park

Police IT systems do not adequately capture ASB data down to street level, therefore information noted by SNT staff attending residents meetings was used to define the problem.

Offenders:

Residents reported that offenders were predominately male youths, aged 11-17 years. They were frequently in drink and in possession of alcohol, and tended to congregate in the Park between 7pm until 11pm. The 'hot' days were weekend evenings. Residents reported that the youths were not from the surrounding streets, but had come from further afield.

Location:

The Park had no lighting or bins, bushes and shrubbery were overgrown, boundary fences were frequently blighted with graffiti, and the existing play equipment was old, damaged and not fit for purpose. There was no youth service provision in the local area in terms of outreach workers, or local youth clubs.

Victims:

Many residents reported unacceptable levels of noise, foul language and aggressive behaviour from youths in the Park. Residents had often gone into the Park to speak with the youths however had been met with verbal abuse. They had therefore resorted to calling the Police on every occasion, however, when the Police did eventually attend it was some time later after the youths had dissipated. Residents did not use the Park themselves as the litter problem was so severe and the play equipment was unsuitable for young children to use.

Service providers received a high level of demand from this location, and resources were used ineffectively by carrying out repeat visits to remove graffiti and litter, and deal with unruly youths.

It was established that a Crime and Safety Group (CSG) had not been set up in the Darton West area, although there were several Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) set up. CSGs operated effectively in other ward areas, and were attended by all relevant service providers and residents to address issues collectively. These meetings provided an integrated 'one-stop shop' to effectively tackle issues with a multi-agency approach. As this structure did not exist in the Darton West area, residents were unable to effectively report and deal with ASB. Elected members reported that residents were frustrated that their TARA meetings were not attended or supported by key agencies.

RESPONSE:

Objective 1 - Reduce ASB in Harry Road Park

In December 2007, a letter (see below) was devised by the SNT Inspector and sent out to over 200 addresses in the local area. This included letters sent to parents of youths who had frequented the Park recently (whether involved in ASB or not) in order to inform them of the issues and also to reassure the local residents that the matter was being addressed. The aim was to inform parents of the situation to encourage them to provide tighter supervision of their children. It was believed that most parents were unaware of the problems in the Park. The letters were hand-delivered by members of the SNT to enable dialogue between parents and the Police.

To the parent / guardian of:
Childs name
Childs address
Childs address
Postcode

Date:14/12/07

Reference: Anti Social Behaviour – Harry Road Recreation Ground



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Dear Parent / Guardian,

I would like to inform you of police activity taking place in the Recreation Ground which is accessed via Harry Road and Innovation Way, Wilthorpe, Barnsley.

High visibility patrols by the Darton / Dodworth Safer Neighbourhood Team are now taking place in order to combat the high volume of incidents involving anti-social behaviour. The following incidents give an overview of the types of behaviour and offences that have been experienced by the residents bordering this recreation ground:

- **Youths shouting and swearing.** The volume of noise generated by some groups have left children in nearby houses in tears and parents understandably annoyed and frustrated. When some residents have gone out to challenge offensive language and behaviour, they have been subjected to further abuse.
- **Littering.** The amount of rubbish left by youths, during the evenings in particular, is simply disgraceful. Barnsley taxpayers are regularly footing the bill to clear the large amount of cans/bottles, crisp packets, used condoms, drugs paraphernalia and other discarded articles left by youths frequenting this area.
- **Arson offences.** Residents have reported fires being set in the bushes behind Innovation Way. Not only does this pose a risk to the fences and houses on this road, but it has a detrimental effect on the wildlife that live in this area.

I have instructed my team to adopt a 'Zero Tolerance' approach to all reports of disorder in this area. If offences are taking place, positive action WILL be taken. This letter has been issued to you in order to inform you of our activity and for you to take the opportunity to advise your child accordingly.

This letter has been distributed to parents/guardians of children who have used the recreation ground recently.

If you would like to discuss this matter further please contact the Darton / Dodworth SNT Golden Line on T/N 01226 736395.

Yours Sincerely,

INSPECTOR JULIE MITCHELL

Beat Sweeps

The SNT adopted a programme of Beat Sweeps. This involved the full team (One Sergeant, 3 Constables, and 4 Police Community Support Officers) focussing their attention during every afternoon shift on patrolling the Harry Road Park. Response Teams were informed of the issues and requested to pay attention whenever possible. Youths frequenting the Park were spoken to and advised of the impact of ASB on local residents. When ASB was witnessed, a letter was written to the youth's parents. These letters were hand-delivered by SNT staff to the parents, to enable a discussion to take place regarding the impact of their child's behaviour. If more than two instances of ASB were witnessed, SNT staff negotiated an Acceptable Behaviour Contract tailored to each child and parent.

Please see example of an ABC used below:



ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR CONTRACT

THIS CONTRACT is made on 13 June 2008

BETWEEN South Yorkshire Police & Berneslai Homes

AND (Subject Name)

Of (Subject Address)

AND AGREES the following in respect of future conduct -

I agree not to throw missiles, cause damage to, or graffiti any property that does not belong to me.

I agree not to act in a way that encourages others to commit any form of anti-social behaviour.

I agree not to use any foul, abusive or threatening language in any public place.

I agree not to engage in conduct, which is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person and

not to encourage others to do so.

I agree not to commit any criminal offences

I agree not to drive any vehicle in a manner likely to cause annoyance to others.

FURTHER, if **(Subject name)** does anything which he has agreed not to do under this contract which **South Yorkshire Police & Berneslai Homes** considers to amount to anti-social behaviour, this may result in an application to the Magistrates' Court for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order to prohibit **(subject name)** from acting in a manner likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household.

FURTHER, **(Subject name)** acknowledges that where an Anti-Social Behaviour Order is made by the Court and breached he will be liable on conviction to terms of imprisonment not exceeding five years or to a fine or both.

DECLARATION

I confirm that I understand the meaning of this contract and that the consequences of breach of the contract have been explained to me.

Signed () **(Subject name)** Date:

Signed () Parent Date:

WITNESSED

Signed () Police Inspector Date:

Signed () Police Officer Date:

Signed () Berneslai Homes Date:

Underage Drinking

The issue of underage drinking was addressed by using police powers to seize alcohol from underage drinkers, and several test purchasing operations were carried out on local off-licence premises. Information was passed via the local radio (Dearne FM) that the SNT were clamping down on underage drinking by carrying out test purchases in local outlets.

Car Park Misuse

Residents were requested to use the SNT Contact Line (answer machine service) to leave details of vehicles misusing the car park on an evening (wheel spinning, playing loud music). All vehicles that were reported received a visit from the SNT, and one regular culprit signed up to an Acceptable Behaviour Contract. These activities were widely publicised in the local media (Dearne FM), via local letter drops, and at all existing public meetings.

Objective 2 – Improve Public Confidence in Service Providers

A meeting was held in January 2008 with key service providers to progress physical improvements to the Park. We wanted the residents to actually see that improvements were being made swiftly, and to reduce further incidents in line with the 'broken window' theory.

- The Council Impact Wardens cleaned all graffiti from the boundary walls and play equipment.
- The Neighbourhood Pride Dept cut back the trees and shrubbery adjoining the residents properties that had been used by youths to make dens, and cleared away the high volume of litter.

All reports of crime and ASB were followed up by a personal visit from the SNT and an action plan to resolve the issues was agreed with the complainant. Regular updates were given on crime investigations and actions taken by agencies involved to tackle the problems. Every opportunity was taken to publicise the efforts of service providers to keep the public informed.

A new Crime and Safety Group

To address residents concerns, and following consultation with partner agencies, the SNT decided to set up one Crime and Safety Group (CSG) covering Darton West to address the issues across the Ward area (including Harry Road Park). This was to streamline the number of meetings attended by SNT staff and to keep the focus of discussion on Crime and Safety issues. The first meeting was held on 11th October 2007 at Kexborough Community Centre. All partner agencies were represented, that is SNT, Barnsley Council, NHW members and elected members, and the meeting was attended by several residents. Unfortunately, residents surrounding Harry Road Park did not attend, despite wide local publicity.

What went wrong?

In order to establish the reasons why people were not attending the new Crime and Safety Group meetings, follow up calls were made to several residents surrounding Harry Road Park. Most residents responded that they did not want to attend a community meeting outside the immediate vicinity of the Park area, and that Kexborough was too far away. The SNT responded to this feedback and decided in the short-term to continue engagement with residents by attending their residents group meetings in order to discuss crime and safety issues.

Responding to feedback

In June 2008, a second Darton West Crime and Safety Group was established. Taking into account the feedback from the first attempt to establish a Crime and Safety Group, the SNT located the new meetings in the Gawber area, some 200 metres from Harry Road Park. Meetings were publicised locally, and attendance has included residents from the Park area.

Objective 3 - Improving the Park facilities

This objective fell into the longer term category which to some extent relied on the acquisition of funding. It was necessary to involve the Community in work to re-design the Park, to enable them to take responsibility and ownership of the area.

In April 2008, Youth Services deployed the mobile Youth Advice bus in the Park. This was used as a base for consultation with young people regarding what play equipment they would like to see in the Park. This was followed up in the 2008 Summer holidays where the results of the consultation were presented to young people at a Youth Meeting. The result of this meeting was the formation of the 'Harry Road Crew'. The Harry Road Crew is made up entirely of young people and was formed with the intention to represent the voice and opinions of the younger members of the community.

In May 2008, a 'Friends of Harry Road Park' group was set up. The aim of this group was to progress the development of the recreational area. Supported by the Council's Area Forum Officer and elected members, the group have conducted surveys in the locality to establish the views of residents on various designs and siting of play equipment. The SNT showed support to this group by attending meetings to discuss issues raised. Representatives from Harry Road Crew also attend the 'Friends of Harry Road Park' meetings.

- The 'Friends of Harry Road Park' group is now well established. Membership is open to all members of the public who support the aims of the group. Members are encouraged to be active participants in the management of the playing field.

Their meetings have been supported by elected members, Council Officers and the SNT.

This group set themselves several objectives, including the '**Harry Road Park Project**':

- To upgrade, replace and add new recreation facilities and physical infrastructure
- To improve the presentation, cleanliness and overall quality of existing recreation facilities
- To create a safe environment that can be enjoyed by all sections of the community

The Way Forward

An agreement was drawn up by the Friends of Harry Road Park with the Council Parks Services, committing to an ongoing schedule for grounds and equipment maintenance.

Funding to the cost of £143,000 has been submitted by the group to several funding streams (BIG Lottery Fund, WREN, Youth Opportunities Fund, Community Support Fund, and Section 106 Monies). The group is awaiting news as to the success of these funding bids.

The Friends of Harry Road Park have put together a business plan which includes plans to publicise the Park after the Project has concluded, starting with a formal opening ceremony and production and distribution of leaflets and posters. The aim of this publicity is to encourage all members of the community to enjoy the new facilities provided.

ASSESSMENT:

Reduction of Crime

In terms of crimes committed in Harry Road Park (assault, arson, damage, drugs, theft) only 2 crimes were recorded in 2008. This compares to 10 crimes in 2007 and 8 crimes in 2006.

Reduction in demand for Council Service

The Council Impact Officers responsible for graffiti removal have provided the following data. This shows the amount of graffiti removal in square metres in the area encompassing Harry Road Park:

April – June 2007	1327 sq m
July – Sept 2007	1763 sq m
Oct – Dec 2007	256 sq m
Jan – March 2008	301 sq m

No graffiti removal has been required since.

Reduction in demand for Police

Harry Road Park continues to receive attention from the SNT, however the focus is to engage with the local youths using the Park, rather than taking enforcement action. This also provides reassurance to local residents that we will continue to monitor the area. All youths that previously caused nuisance behaviour have engaged with agencies, following the Youth Bus engagement work, and are constructive in their ideas towards improving the Park.

The success of the initial Darton West CSG was limited, in that it did not cater for the needs of the Harry Road Park residents (although it was very successful in meeting the needs of Kexborough residents!) More consultation between the SNT, elected members and residents could have led to the establishment of this group in the Gawber area. This issue was addressed some months later by setting up a second group closer to the Harry Road Park.

Reduction of ASB

Reduction of ASB in Harry Road Park has been remarkable. It is difficult to quantify as ASB data was only held for 13

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months, however in 2008, only 2 calls relating to ASB in this location were logged. Feedback received from residents and elected members at all public meetings have been very positive, and appreciative of the efforts of all agencies concerned. A particular difference was noted by residents and the SNT following distribution of the letter in December 2007. It was felt that perhaps some parents had been previously unaware of the issues and were supervising their children more closely.

Residents whose property overlooks the Harry Road Park made the following comments on 18th April 2009:

“Before the Police and Council got together the problems in the Park were horrendous. We were sick and tired of hearing the foul language and clearing up the rubbish. We haven’t had any problems for months now, it’s been really peaceful. We’ve had no more graffiti, and the group of youths that used to get drunk and abusive have gone now.”

“We’re really grateful for all the work that’s been done. The police and CSOs have been brilliant”.

“Occasionally, there a bit of litter dropped, but no more that anywhere else. When it’s reported to the council, it’s cleared away pretty quickly. The kids causing the problems have gone....it’s been great”.

Sergeant Simon Grayson said “18 months ago, every Friday and Saturday afternoon shift was spent dealing with youths at Harry Road Park. We put the long term measures in place that resolved the ASB issues, and now pay the area passing attention. That’s all that is required to give reassurance to the local community, enforcement is no longer required”.

Elected Members have commented that they have not received complaints about the Park for some time, in contrast to 2 years ago, when all their councillor surgery time was taken up by this issue.

More detailed consultation with all stakeholders in the area has been carried out in relation to the new play equipment proposal. This included questionnaires being sent out to the 70 houses bordering the Park and the Harry Road Crew. The young people in particular highlighted the benefits of the planned re-development as they felt it would give them somewhere to meet and socialise with friends, keep them off the streets and therefore being viewed as a nuisance to other members of the community. The ‘Harry Road Crew’ included children that were previously responsible for ASB in the Park, however by including them in the re-design process, they were enabled to take responsibility for their actions in the community.

Words: 3,997

Authorisation

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