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# **THE HESSLE EXPERIENCE**

## **BREAKING THE CHAIN**

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## APPENDICES

1. Map showing King George Playing Fields and Park Avenue
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## THE HESSLE EXPERIENCE

Hessle is a small town located to the west of the City of Kingston upon Hull.

Historically there has always been a nucleus of local teenagers, together with several smaller groups, actively engaged in house and shop burglaries together with the theft of motor vehicles. Many of these young people were also drug abusers moving from amphetamine to heroin.

This was tackled by officers targeting those responsible and putting them before the Criminal Justice system.

The problem was how to stop the cycle of other young people taking the place of the older ones and finding themselves in the same situation.

It was imperative that a legitimate meeting place was sought for these youngsters where the opportunity for committing criminal offences and displaying anti-social behaviour would be greatly reduced.

To achieve this would also benefit other members of the community who would be afforded a better quality of life, fear from crime and the perceived intimidation suffered at the hands of the young people.

PC Graham HARRISON, the Community Officer for the Hessle area, began to gather evidence of the problem and its causes by:

1. Examining personally all the data held on the incident logs which related to Hessle, this he did on a daily basis;
2. Liaising with the local town councillors, who were receiving complaints from residents;

3. Personally visiting each resident in order to listen first hand to the problems they were encountering;
4. Talking to the young people congregating on the street corners and listening to what they had to say about how the problem could be solved. They stated, as many do quite rightly "we have nowhere to go."

It was clear to PC HARRISON that there was a need for a long term solution to the problem and it was not feasible to keep asking the young people to "move on" without providing somewhere for them to move to which would not induce the wrath of other residents.

The solution could only be found by all agencies and local groups working together and taking responsibility.

PC HARRISON was the catalyst in bringing various departments of the local authority, including education, youth workers and the community safety officer, local town councillors, local resident groups, shopkeepers, off-licence holders and young people, together to discuss and find possible solutions to the, problems being encountered.

Short term solutions were put in place whilst the longer term ones were investigated and discussed with each group having an interest.

So far the following has been achieved in Hessle:

1. A youth shelter has now been built and is regularly used by the young people;
2. A youth cafe has been established which provides not only a meeting place but educational direction as well;

3. Quality of life has been restored to residents who no longer live in fear of these young people and who now have a better understanding of the young people in the area;
4. Calls for service for the police have been drastically reduced.

## **THE PROBLEM**

Hessle is a small town to the west of the City of Kingston upon Hull. The city and town are linked by a long straight road, Hull Road/Hessle Road, which leads to the core of the town, Hessle Square. Hessle has three main areas which youths gather to the annoyance of residents, traders and other persons going about their business.

### **1. Hessle Square**

The Square has numerous shops including those staying open late around its perimeter, a large pedestrianised area, together with a covered bus shelter providing seating.

This provides an ideal gathering point for young people who are highly visible to traders, pedestrians and vehicular access: The majority of these people find the energy and noise generated by the young people both alarming and intimidating. Complaints about the behaviour and presence of these young persons were numerous.

### **2. Cambridge Road**

Running parallel to Hull Road is Boothferry Road and young people travel in between via an old drain, which is now a footpath. This footpath dissects the numerous roads running east/west and in between. At each point road safety barriers, lamp posts and hard standing ensure that they encourage the young people to gather.

Cambridge Road is at the end of the footpath and again provides an ideal gathering point. It has the following features, hard standing, illumination, bollards to sit upon, safety barriers, telephone kiosk and late opening newsagent/off-licence.

Groups of about 70 — 80 youths regularly met at this point to the annoyance of local residents whose homes were within feet of the group.

The opportunity for conflict between the residents and young people was ever present and on occasions confrontations did take place.

### 3. **Tower Hill Park**

Tower Hill Park, also known as Memorial Park, is a small grassed area providing a small children's play area. It is situated between the cemetery and The Weir, close to late opening shops and rear tenfoots.

The park is overlooked by terraced housing, mainly occupied by elderly residents.

Local young people used the park for ball games, which the elderly found intimidating and inevitably confrontations took place.

The local Community Officer, PC Graham HARRISON, knew from experience that many of these young people became involved not only in anti-social behaviour but in criminal acts and the illegal use of drugs. The cycle had to be broken whereby once the older members of the group had either been dealt with by the criminal justice system or naturally withdrawn from gathering they were replaced by younger members who would continue in the same vein. It was no longer viable and cost effective to suppress their actions; a long term solution was needed.

## **SCANNING**

PC HARRISON began to gather evidence of the problem and its causes in a number of ways.

1. Examining personally all the data held on incident logs relating to Hessle. This he did on a daily basis to establish when complaints of nuisance crime were being made and if they followed a pattern. It also gave him the information as to whom and how many individuals were actually making the complaints. Many of the calls were made by a small minority.

2. Liaising with the local town councillors who were receiving complaints from their electors over the intimidation they were suffering and who were asking for solutions to the problems.
3. Personally visiting all residents, not just those who had made complaints, to learn first hand problems they were encountering, if any. Many of these residents were also willing to contribute in working with the police officer to find solutions.
4. Talking and listening to the young people about what they saw as the solution. They stated, as many do, that they wanted somewhere where they were able to meet without incurring the wrath of other members of the community in which they all lived.
5. Researching what facilities were available to young people. This in itself told a story in that there was a youth club one evening per week.
6. Making contact with East Riding of Yorkshire Community Safety Partnership Liaison Officer and gaining a place on the Youth Issues Group of this Partnership. This proved to be of vital assistance to PC HARRISON as it helped put him in touch with various statutory, non statutory and voluntary agencies, many of whom had information relating to the problems in Hessle and who were able to provide invaluable assistance both in the short and long term.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Location**

Hessle Square is a natural and traditional meeting place enhanced by the provision of seating and protection from the elements provided by the bus shelter, illumination and late opening stores.

Cambridge Road again is a traditional meeting place, made so because it provides the following features – illumination, concrete hard-standing, bollards and safety barriers, used for seating, telephone kiosk and late opening newsagents cum off-licence.



Tower Hill Park — self explanatory, provides grassed area facilitating the playing of ball games and central to the town centre offering late night opening shops.

### **Residents**

Cambridge Road and Tower Hill Park are close to residential areas. Many of the residents felt intimidated by the language and behaviour displayed by the young people. Younger children were not let out by their parents as they feared for their safety whilst the older group was present. The owner of the newsagents on Cambridge Road was intimidated and as such had to close his retail premises earlier, thereby causing his customers inconvenience and also the owner loss of earnings.

Elderly residents living on Tower Hill were having their quality of life severely damaged, especially so when on some summer's evenings they were unable to leave their windows open or sit in their gardens because of the noise made by the young people. Property was also damaged because of stray footballs.

Many people were affected by the young people congregating in the Square, bus passengers felt unable to use the shelter provided by the bus company, the bus company were suffering losses because of the constant damage that was being caused to the shelter. At one point drivers were refusing to drive their vehicles into The Square such was the intimidation they felt. The traders in The Square, many of whom were young people themselves, felt intimidated.

It is true to say that most of the people either living in or passing through any of the above three locations were exposed to language and behaviour which they felt was intimidating.

### **The Young People**

The young people concerned were aged between 12 and 22 years. Many were affluent with a disposable income but had nowhere to go and meet legitimately without causing affronts to someone. They felt that residents were merely trying to stop them meeting and playing football and so felt that they were being made outcasts of their community. The frequent question was asked when they were requested to move on was "Where can we go?" This, of course, was the problem, where could they go? Nobody wanted them in their back garden.

## Response

Residents from Tower Hill, being concerned about the level of nuisance to them by the young people, called a meeting, inviting the local Town Council, the Local Authority and Police. As a result of that meeting it was agreed that the play area provided for the young children would be re-sited at a cost of some £1,100, and bushes were to be planted between two cherry trees which had been used by the young people as goal posts.

This, of course, pleased the elderly residents but did not solve the problem of where the displaced youngsters could legitimately meet.

A meeting was then held for the young people, chaired by a member of the Local Authority. About twenty young people attended this meeting, their ages ranging from 12 to 22 years. It was at this meeting, in 1997, that the concept of a youth shelter and youth cafe was first mooted. The majority of the young people wanted a hard standing with a wall to kick a ball against. Lighting **was** a crucial feature, as they wanted to feel safe.

The long term solution, therefore, was to provide firstly a youth shelter and ultimately a youth cafe. Knowing that these things do not happen overnight, short term solutions had to be put into place to satisfy the complaints from both residents and young people.

PC HARRISON, initially through the Youth Issues Group of the East Riding of Yorkshire Community Safety Partnership, forged links with the youth leader for Hessle, William VODDEN. By working together and involving schools they were able to identify young people who were already involved in anti-social behaviour or who were displaying signs that this was the way they were heading. After identifying these young people they contacted the parents and held meetings with them. The parents then began to enforce 'groundings', geographical exclusions and monitoring unhealthy friendships between individuals.

PC HARRISON also visited schools, talking to both primary and secondary pupils, explaining their community responsibilities and encouraging them to play an active

part in 'Lifestyle' (a Humberside Police initiative). Some of these visits to schools were made with William VODDEN, the youth leader. By doing these visits he gets to know the children and vice versa and a useful relationship is established.

During the analysis stage carried out by PC HARRISON it was highlighted that many of the complaints about the behaviour of young children came when they were walking home from the youth club on an evening and in particular after a disco night.

Knowing that both the youth worker and, PC HARRISON were actively engaged in finding a youth shelter for them, it was fairly easy to persuade them to moderate their behaviour. In fact, they, to an extent, became self policing. Alcohol was one of the areas that was causing concern on a disco night. It was apparent they were secreting drink and either drinking prior to attending or during the evening. A joint agreement between the youth service and police was reached whereby anyone attending the disco could be the subject of a breath test. If they failed this their parents would be informed and they would be refused entry. This condition was printed on the entry ticket so everyone was aware. Alcohol found on young people was also confiscated. By and large this agreement worked and whilst it has not eliminated the problem totally it has improved the situation significantly.

To reduce the problem of young people congregating in The Square outside the shops, PC HARRISON approached the Council and was able to gain their permission for them to use half of a council owned car park for playing ball games. Hence the young people had somewhere to go out of sight from the members of the public out shopping or socialising. As the groups were all together it also helped the local police to monitor the behaviour of the group.

As a result of these small measures complaints to the police were reduced by some 44%. In April 1999 the youth shelter came into being and it was used by the young people immediately after the builders moved their equipment.

The shelter was sited in the centre of the King George playing fields which is to the south of Boothferry Road and to the west of Beverley Road, Hessle (map attached,

Appendix 1). It was built against the sports pavilion and is used not only by young people in the evenings and at weekends but also by sports spectators in inclement weather.

Despite being used by up to 75 young people at a time, with the exception of marker pen graffiti, no damage has been caused. This is remarkable considering the young people are unsupervised and the fact that they furtively consume alcohol whilst there.

Compared with the same period in 1998, calls regarding complaints about young people are down some 72%. Only 6 complaints were received in the whole of June 1999 after 6 pm in the evening.

As was expected, residents surrounding the King George playing fields were unhappy at the location of the shelter. Residents were invited to a meeting at the shelter, followed by a discussion at a local school. (Notice of meeting, Appendix 2). This meeting was attended by residents and young people alike.

Although unfamiliar with the procedure for speaking at meetings the young people gave a sound and reasoned argument defending the idea and siting of the youth shelter.

### **Concerns of the Residents**

1. The young people would be unsupervised.
2. The shelter would become a centre for drug misuse.
3. The level of litter discarded was unacceptable.
4. The noise and energetic behaviour of the young people intimidated people out walking their dogs.

## Allaying their Fears

1. The young people would be visited each evening by the local Community Officers, Special Constables or detached Youth Workers.
2. Any drug misuse was unconnected to the young people using the shelter who were in the main fit, young people with a healthy interest in sport and their own well-being.
3. A substantial and robust litter bin would be erected.
4. Dog walkers had several acres of fields within which to walk their dogs and did not have to go within 100 yards of the shelter. It was also pointed out that young people were complaining of being covered in dog dirt after playing sport in the field.

By the end of the meeting the objectors agreed that the shelter was a good idea but they were still not happy with its location. It was pointed out to them that there had been more complaints concerning young people prior to the shelter being built and that in fact the shelter had lured young people from the perimeter to the centre, several hundred yards from the nearest housing.

Some objectors were from Park Avenue, the route used by many young people leaving the shelter. Agreement was reached with the local Council that a fence would be erected at the top of Park Avenue, therefore, ensuring the users of the playing fields had to use the main gates some distance from any housing.

## Feedback from Young People

The shelter has been a huge success and is much appreciated benefiting the whole of Hessle. They are, however, mindful of the fact that spending every evening in the same shelter with the same view and same people could become boring. They would like a second shelter **to be built in a different location and work is being carried out to see if this is a feasible option.**

## **Feedback from Residents**

On the whole the feedback from residents has been favourable. A letter supporting the shelter was received by the Council, signed by some 75 people who were all in favour of more shelters being provided for the young people of Hessle (copy letter attached, Appendix 3).

## **CONCLUSION**

As far as our statistics and local knowledge tell us, by diverting these young people from crime the use of hard drugs by the same group has effectively ended.

The young shelter is providing a meeting point where opportunities for conflict or minor crime does not exist, ensuring that young people do not enter the Criminal Justice system and begin the slow descent into regular criminal activity. Alcohol still remains a problem but whereas prior to the shelter they consumed it early evening in tenfoots and gardens, they now consume out of public view and sober up prior to going home. This is not an ideal situation but at least the problem is unnoticed and causes no problems to residents.

To restrict access to alcohol, officers working in Hessle regularly check video footage at off-licences so as to be able to identify adults buying for young people. PC HARRISON is now working on introducing a proof of age card to prevent young people themselves buying the drink.

Numerous other initiatives have been introduced in Hessle with the help of PC HARRISON working in partnership with other agencies to improve the overall quality of life for everyone living, working or spending their leisure time in Hessle. The youth cafe came to fruition in late 1999 and figures for youths causing annoyance have dropped even further. At this stage it is too early to say how successful its introduction has been suffice to say calls for service have significantly reduced (youth cafe, Appendix 4).

CCTV is to be introduced in the next few months and it is anticipated that this will further reduce calls for service concerning youths gathering in The Square.

One lesson that has been learnt is that youth shelters need lighting. Unfortunately, during the winter months the shelter did not attract the young people. Two main reasons for this were the absence of lighting and the local newspaper, who carried a front page story concerning drugs which did untold damage. Many parents, believing that drugs were an inherent problem in the shelter, refused to let their off-spring meet there (newspaper report, Appendix 5).

PC HARRISON arranged for the light to be fitted and had to re-educate the young people to again make use of the shelter, which they are now doing. He also penned articles for the local Hessle Herald information paper detailing his thoughts on the newspaper article (Hessle Herald, Appendix 6).

Attached at Appendix 7 are PC HARRISON's daily figures showing date/time and location for complaints received of youths causing annoyance. Although the youth shelter and other initiatives have helped reduce the figures it is recognised that other contributory factors may have reduced the levels of calls.