

FRONT SHEET..

- **Basildon Anti-Graffiti Initiative.**
- **Crime & Disorder Reduction Category.**
- **Anti-Social Behaviour and Fear of Crime.**
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LETTER OF ENDORSEMENT

The visual impact of graffiti around Basildon has for some years been subject of considerable public comment and disquiet. For many, in particular the more vulnerable groups, it fuels a fear of crime and suggests a general deterioration of the area.

Two Basildon Police Officers, PC Darren GRIFFIN the Community Liaison Officer for Central Basildon, and PC Steve WYNN the Schools Officer for Central Basildon and Pitsea, noted this impact and drew together a number of partners under the Local Crime & Disorder Strategy for 2002/15 to deal with this ever visible problem.

The initiative is ongoing and now has Basildon District Council, the Local Youth Offending Team and the Probation Service as active partners working towards both strategic and practical, on the ground, multi-agency solutions. These efforts are based on immediate solutions but also look for longer term results.

As a result of this initiative over the past 12 months, 27 youngsters ranging in age from 13 to 21 years have been arrested for criminal damage by graffiti. These youngsters have been responsible for committing 1125 separate acts of criminal damage which under the crime counting rules amount to 210 detected offences.

Whilst these figures alone are extremely commendable, the spin-off effect of these arrests throughout the entire school population within the Basildon District cannot be under-estimated. To date there has been no detailed analysis of re-offending however there would appear to be clear evidence that of the 27 only 1 has re-offended by changing his "tag" which would make this early intervention in the criminal activity of these youngsters an outstanding success.

Peter SHELDRAKE
Chief Superintendent
Basildon Division
Essex Police

1 fully support this initiative.

John Broughton
Assistant Chief Constable (Operations)
Essex Police

BASILDON ANTI-GRAFFITI INITIATIVE.

SUMMARY.

Graffiti is a big problem across the Police District; hence two constables devised a plan to reduce its presence and make the persons responsible for it understand that it is not fun, but a criminal offence which severely blights our communities.

Many youngsters are unaware they are doing wrong when involved in scrawling graffiti. Many don't understand they could be arrested and ultimately go to Court.

This initiative addresses youngster's anti-social behaviour and associated environmental issues which graffiti causes. Sections of our community, mainly the elderly, often feel in 'fear of crime' just by its presence. It creates a negative image of our community, which is an unfair reflection of the District and the people who live and work within it.

To attempt to address these issues we needed to understand:

- (1). Persons responsible for graffiti.**
- (2). Causes**
- (3). Where and when offences were committed.**

Whilst patrolling the local community, PC Griffin and PC Wynn, saw at first hand just how big a problem graffiti actually was. Since April 2001 some 2000 photographs of such crimes have been recorded.

Ways of reducing the problem and preventing its increase were considered, including dealing with persons responsible in a positive manner.

The problem was analysed and it was recognised that to be totally effective, a multi - agency approach would have to be adopted to

provide a lasting solution. The Police were needed for crime investigation and law enforcement, the Council to remove graffiti.

Police Schools Officers went into secondary schools informing pupils of the negative effect graffiti has on the community, especially the elderly. Pupils were also informed of the likely punishments both civilly and criminally that offenders could expect.

The project now involves the Police, Council, Youth Offending Team (YOT) and Probation Service, in regular monthly meetings. These agencies provide resources as part of their "court orders". We also liaised with local magistrates with regards to sentencing issues concerning persons, i.e. restorative justice.

A database was designed to record the amount of incidents of graffiti across the district, which included the 'Tag' and location. From this persons responsible were arrested, and offences detected.

As a result of these convictions, part of the sentencing involved cleaning up graffiti from around the District. This sent out a positive message to the community, whilst also deterring other offenders and other "would be taggers".

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT.

Our aims with this project are;

- **Reduce the fear of crime caused by graffiti.**
- **Promote a positive image of the District.**
- **Address environmental issues in relation to graffiti, including anti-social behaviour.**
- **Reduce the amount of graffiti.**
- **Remove graffiti expediently.**
- **Raise awareness of graffiti as a criminal offence.**

Our objectives for the project are;

- **Develop a multi - agency approach to deal with graffiti removal.**
- **Educate young people in schools to the negative effect that graffiti has on our communities.**
- **Deal with offenders positively.**
- **Create a database to record incidents of graffiti.**

This would allow us to make these same persons address their own anti-social behaviour, which would improve the physical image of the District, help reduce the fear of crime amongst a section of our community and make the area more environmentally friendly.

From publicly available records it has been estimated that the global annual cost surrounding graffiti is currently running at £35 Billion. This includes the cost of purchasing magazines, videos, books, spray cans, the cost of removing graffiti and the cost of investigating and prosecuting those who are responsible for it.

A recent report compiled by a cross party investigation for the London assembly, estimates that the annual cost of cleaning walls and lost investment in London alone is £100m a year. It also encourages magistrates to take this type of criminal damage more seriously.

The report also reveals that London Underground believes that it will cost £10m a year to replace all of the glass that is etched with graffiti in addition to the £2.5m which is already needed annually to clear up other types of graffiti.

So what is graffiti? It can be something as simple as scratching your name on a desk, writing your name on a bus shelter or using a marker pen or an aerosol spray can. More recently, as can be seen from the above report, it has also included the etching of glass, or Dutch graffiti, as it is known.

**A `Tag` is unique to an individual and as such the user of it has sole claim to its notoriety. Graffiti communities tend to be localised and it is usually an unwritten rule that no two individuals will use the same Tag, even if the original owner of the tag is no longer using it.
(See Appendix A)**

Notoriety amongst taggers is achieved by a combination of different things. The frequency with which a tag is seen, the artistic and colour of the design of the tag and the location of where it is written. The more dangerous the location, i.e. rooftops and bridges, then the more notoriety the tagger will gain amongst his peers.

From interviewing persons who have been arrested for graffiti, it has been ascertained that there are different reasons why they carry out this particular type of criminal damage. The main reason is the choice of location, such as a subway or railway line, which is usually selected because it is somewhere that they know hundreds if not thousands of people will travel past each day and therefore see their 'tag'.

Some youngsters have low self-esteem or are under achieving at school. Graffiti then becomes their way of gaining respect amongst their immediate peers and makes them feel much better about themselves. It makes them feel valued. It gives them a sense of well being.

Others will get involved in graffiti because of the adrenaline rush that goes with the possibility of being caught whilst causing such damage. Nearly all of these youngsters have stated that they target public property rather than private property, which they then don't see as really doing anything too wrong.

Graffiti is not a new phenomenon. It is a problem that has been about for many years going back to Roman times. More recently, acts of graffiti are usually associated with 20th century urban environments and emanate from the hip-hop culture in places such as San Francisco and New York, in America in the 1960's.

Criminal Damage by means of graffiti had become a very big problem throughout the local Police District over the last two years. It in effect became a victimless crime because most of the locations where graffiti was daubed, were owned by either local businesses or the local Council and were in isolated out of the way locations, such as subways or railway lines. (See Appendix B).

The other main target for graffiti was 'road side furniture', such as electricity boxes, telephone boxes, road signs and post boxes. These were always situated where hundreds if not thousands of people would see the damage as they passed, which was the very intention of its presence in the first place. This knowledge helped increase the perpetrators feeling of high self esteem.

Not many of these incidents were ever reported to the Police, so they were never subsequently investigated, nobody was arrested in relation these crimes and the offending graffiti was never cleaned off.

In part, this not only helped the problem to prevail, but encouraged other like minded people to follow suite, in causing similar damage in those and other locations across the District.

It is important to remove graffiti as quickly as possible from a location, so as to convey the message that this type of criminal damage is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. By taking this course of action you are preventing the other like-minded people from committing the same type of crime.

The newer the tag is, then generally the easier it will be to remove it from the surface where it has been sprayed. This of course depends on the type of surface. The more porous the surface, the more difficult it is to remove it.

Youngsters who are known as 'taggers' commit criminal damage by means of graffiti. You can have as many as half a dozen 'taggers' in a 'Crew'. If a crew member from one group sees a rival crews tag in a particular location, they usually then leave their own tag and crew name there as well. The analogy of a dog marking out his territory is one that comes to mind.

From a Policing point of view we were able to measure how successful we were being in detecting the persons who were responsible for the graffiti, by the amount of arrests that were made and the numbers of crimes which were subsequently detected.

Prior to this initiative dealing with criminal damage by means of graffiti was very hit and miss.

It would only be dealt with from a Policing point of view if somebody was actually caught in the act and then the persons concerned would only be dealt with for that one act of damage, regardless of the fact that they may have been responsible for numerous other similar like offences.

The Police surprisingly do not have specific powers to stop and search anybody purely for going equipped to commit criminal damage. The Courts powers are also limited in how they can deal with people responsible for this type of criminal activity.

At the moment the maximum sentence for cases of criminal damage where the value of the damage caused is under £5000, is a maximum of £2500 and or 3 months imprisonment, but that is only if you are an adult.

If juveniles have not officially been in trouble with the Police before, then they can receive a Reprimand, final warning or go to Youth Court as punishment for their crimes. It is only when youngsters receive a final warning or above that the YOT becomes involved with them, in an effort to address their behaviour.

This does not of course prevent aggrieved parties from taking civil actions out against these offenders, although this course of action is rarely taken.

From the Councils perspective we were also able to consider areas throughout the District which had been cleaned of graffiti which were then subsequently not re-damaged. The areas that were then re-damaged could then be looked at with a view to either carrying out observations or placing cameras in situ, in an attempt to catch the persons responsible.

When looking at the problems caused by graffiti we tried not to look at the problem in isolation. From the research that we had carried out, we knew that graffiti was predominantly caused by young males of Secondary school age. To date we have not arrested one female in relation to graffiti. Locations where graffiti was found included railway lines which were extremely dangerous places for youngsters to be.

At these and other locations we found evidence of smoking, substance misuse and the drinking of alcohol. This we felt was placing a section of our local youngsters in potential danger. This meant that dealing with the graffiti phenomenon was a very real issue for us.

The problem was identified and high-lighted by PC Darren Griffin, who is a local Community Liaison Officer and PC Steve Wynn, one of the Districts School Liaison Officers. Both officers work with local youngsters in different capacities in an attempt to keep them out of the Criminal Justice System, which ultimately would have a negative influence on the youngster's futures.

A digital camera was purchased by the Police and over a period of time incidents of graffiti were then photographed and recorded on a Police designed data base. (See Appendix C).

This gave a clearer picture of the scale of the overall problem. In a very short period of time some 2000 photographs were taken and included on the database.

This enabled us to have a District wide picture of where most of the graffiti hot spots were. This was very helpful as research indicated that most of the youngsters involved in graffiti usually lived in the same area as where they were committing offences.

The local Council was contacted to get an indication of how much money they were spending on removing graffiti from their property. This figure is increasing all the time. On the local Council Tax bills for the financial year 200212003, each household (71,000) had to pay £1.55 a year, purely to cover the cost of removing graffiti.

We analysed the outlets that sold spray cans and paint pens the main tools of the trade for graffiti taggers. We then engaged with these shops and businesses in an attempt to stop the spread of graffiti. They imposed a voluntary ban on the sale of such items to youngsters who attempted to buy them and who were on their own and appeared to be under the age of eighteen years of age. Every shop that was approached to come on board with this initiative did so, small and large businesses alike.

Our reasoning was that if we could drastically reduce the tools of the trade for youngsters who were involved in graffiti, then we could start making inroads into reducing the amount of graffiti around the District.

We knew that the only means of attempting to address this particular problem long term, were via education, law enforcement and removal. The issue was addressed in Secondary schools, by explaining to youngsters that graffiti was in fact a criminal offence and highlighting the cost of this type of damage, not only to the local community but to their parents as well.

Letters were sent home to parents of all secondary age children explaining just how bad the problem was, and to point out that they could help to make sure that it was not their own children who were engaged in this type of activity.

We fully understood that parents were not going to be looking over their children's shoulders twenty four hours a day, but a few appropriate questions and comments before those same children went out, might prove very beneficial.

The local press have been very supportive in relation to this initiative and have helped by reporting relevant and supportive articles in relation to graffiti in an effort to assist the on going initiative.

(See Appendix D,E,F)

There is also a power point presentation that is available to be used at relevant meetings both internally and externally to demonstrate fully the scope of the graffiti initiative. (See Appendix G).

As part of Divisional Police training days all officers are given an input in relation to the initiative and how its implementation can help them in this aspect of their day to day work.

At this time not a great deal of work or research has been carried out in relation to the problems of graffiti, so some of the work which has been carried out is new and ground breaking. Subsequently the methods that have been employed have proved to be extremely effective.

There was no data that could be used as a starting point or as evidence of the problem, as prior to this initiative no data had been collated on this type of criminal offence at a local level.

Ownership of the graffiti problem came about because it was proactively challenged and the issues that it raised were addressed. We did not like the negative image that it was starting to paint of our community.

The cost of removing the graffiti by the local Council has already been covered. As far as the Police are concerned the costs are varied and include, Police officers time investigating graffiti, the designing of a database to record the photographs which were being taken of the graffiti, the cost of arresting and prosecuting those responsible and the cost of a digital camera.

A twenty-page paper looking at all aspects of dealing with the problems which graffiti causes and how to try and effectively deal with it, entitled 'Graffiti – The entire picture'. (See Appendix H), was written by PC Darren Griffin and PC Steve Wynn.

Initially the problems that we had were centred on engaging other agencies to work with us. This was very slow in coming to fruition and took over a year before we managed to get other interested parties sitting around a table, to take the initiative forward.

These meetings are now very well attended and are led by the local Council and the Police. The group currently includes YOT and Probation service representatives.

As a result of this group the local Council has agreed and is already taking out person's subject of court orders to assist with cleaning. (Supervised by representatives from the relevant agencies).

When the group started the Council had one dedicated graffiti cleaning team, as of this financial year, April 2002, a second team has been put in place with a third which will jointly be funded by the Council and the Town Centre Management Forum, which is about to begin work exclusively in Basildon Town centre.

The aim of this group is to high light and deal with the problems that graffiti brings with it, to widen the number of representatives on it including businesses who are regular victims of this type of crime, i.e., Royal Mail, Telewest Broadband, British Telecom and Railtrack.

Locally there tended to be a general apathy in relation to graffiti which was based on the premise of, if you don't make an issue of it then you do not have a problem. The initiative is on going and has yet to be fully evaluated.

From a law enforcement point of view some 30 youngsters have so far been arrested, ranging in age from 13 to 21 years, who were responsible for this type of damage. These same youngsters were responsible for over 1130 cases of criminal damage by means of graffiti. (See Appendix I,J).

The main thing that has been very surprising about the youngsters who have been arrested is their family background. Before being involved in dealing with graffiti there was a general stereotypical image which prevailed in relation to those persons who were responsible for committing acts of criminal damage by means of graffiti.

Out of those who have so far been arrested, 26 have had no previous convictions, cautions, reprimands or final warnings, or had ever come to Police notice before. All of them had strong supportive family units

with both parents present. Educationally, they were all above average achievers at school and their immediate peer group was of a similar standing.

Three out of the other four individuals had all previously come to Police notice and been arrested for unrelated offences, burglary, drug possession and robbery. The other individual had previously been arrested for the offence of criminal damage by means of graffiti and had received a conviction at court for it.

On our list we have another six youngsters who we still have to arrest and deal with. We know that they are responsible for at least a further 350 offences of criminal damage by means of graffiti. All of these individuals are juvenile males.

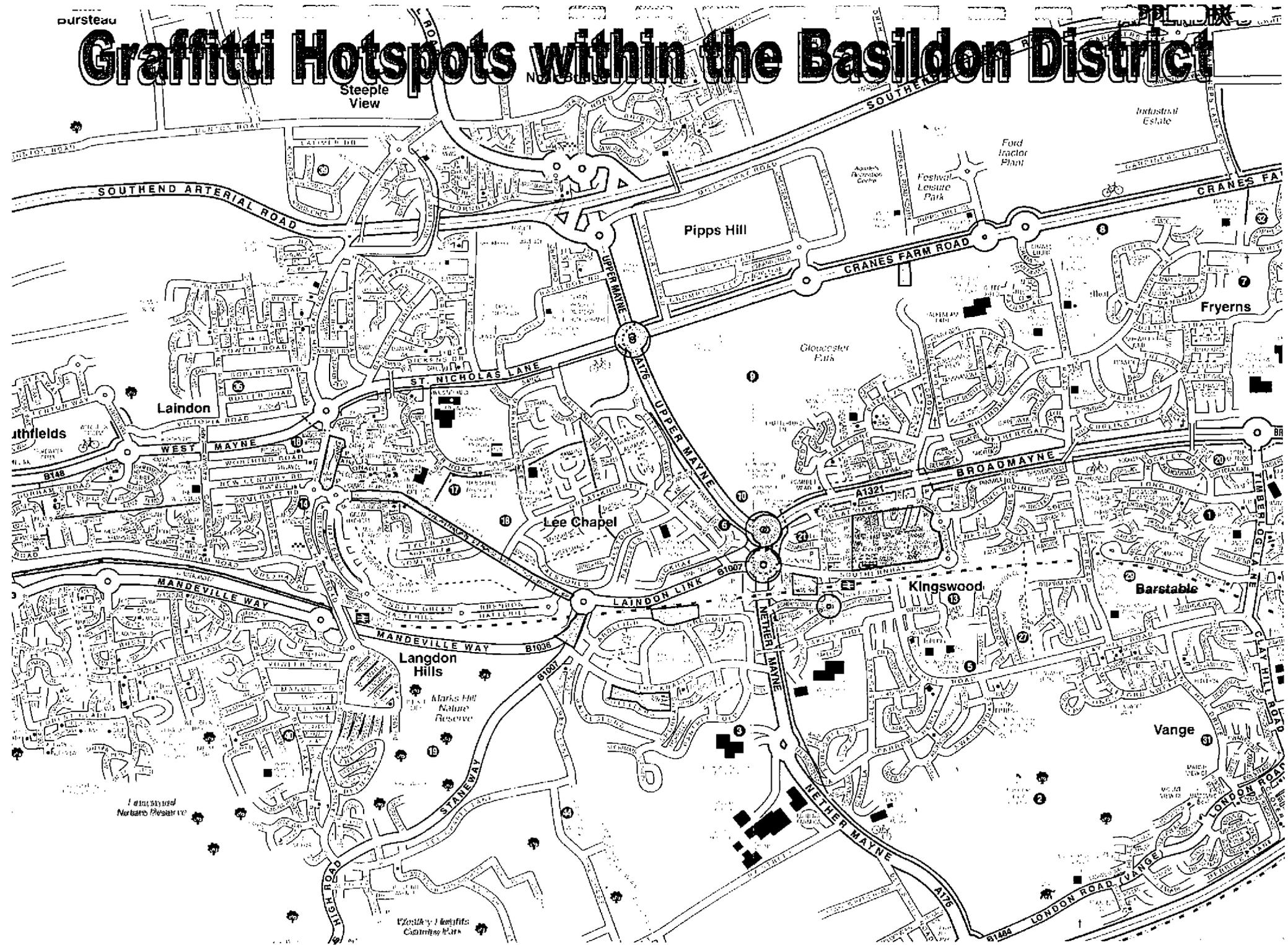
Not only has this initiative been devised at grass routes level within the Police service. It continues to be driven from that level, but with excellent support locally from senior officers who understand not only the problem but also the methods that are needed to deal with it in a sustained and effective manner.

Part of the initiative encourages patrolling officers to deal effectively with such types of criminal damage and the persons responsible for it as they now know that it is possible to obtain more detection's from such an arrest.

Officers also know that PC Griffin and PC Wynn will deal fully with all such incidents of criminal damage, so even if they do not arrest offenders at the time, they know that they can obtain details and pass these on for these persons to be dealt with at a later time.

If officers wish to deal with such incidents themselves then they can interrogate the Graffiti Database for information, which is now available on all Police computers throughout the Division. The digital camera can also be used to then photograph such incidents of criminal damage so that officers have got instant access to the actual evidence that they need for the particular case that they are dealing with.

Graffiti Hotspots within the Basildon District



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10/12/01			NEPS XCR	SUBWAY UNDER SOUTHERNHAY TO MARKET	BDC		DISC 55/026	
18/01/01			153	SUBWAY GLOUCESTER PARK	BDC		DISC 19/013	
18/01/01			153	SUBWAY GLOUCESTER PARK	BDC		DISC 191025	
19/10/01			ABAN ON	BRIDGE OVER RAILWAY DURHAM RDIMANDEVILLE WAY	EEC		DISC 441003	
19/10/01			ABB?	UNDER DURHAM RD BRIDGE TO MAND. WAY (C/DRIVE)	RAILTRACK		DISC 451026	-
			ABBO	DURHAM ROAD SUBWAY UNDER	BDC		DISC 40/012	
07/08/01			ABOE	SUBWAY UNDER HANDLEY GREEN	BDC		DISC 251029	
			ABON ON	DURHAM ROAD SUBWAY UNDER	BDC		DISC 401017	
10/01/01			ACID	ROUNDACRE	BDC		DISC 111017	
27/07/01			ACID	SAVA CENTRE CAR PARK	SAVA CENTRE		DISC 321009	
23/01/01			ALL VANDALS EXPECT	GLOUCESTER PARK	BDC		DISC 22/018	
07/08/01			ALMO	ROUNDACRE SUBWAY LEADING TO CAR PARK 14	BDC		DISC 23/018	
10/12/01			ANDREW PARDOE	SUBWAY UNDER SOUTHERNHAY TO MARKET	BDC		DISC 561007	
10/01/01			APN POIZE	ROUNDACRE	BDC		DISC 111030	
23/01/01			ARE	SUBWAY GLOUCESTER PARK	BDC		DISC 211003	
23/01/01			ARE	SUBWAY GLOUCESTER PARK	BDC		DISC 21/029	
27/07/01			ARN	REAR OF BINGO HALL	CORALS BINGO		DISC 321011	
12110/01			ASH	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	ECC		DISC 421029	
23/01/01			ASK ONE	BASILDON TOWN CENTRE	BDC		DISC 8/002	
12/10/01			AST	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	ECC		DISC 421020	
19/10/01			AST	UNDER DURHAM RD BRIDGE TO MAND. WAY (=RIVE)	RAILTRACK		DISC 461006	
19/10/01			AST DFA	UNDER DURHAM RD BRIDGE TO MAND. WAY (=RIVE)	RAILTRACK		DISC 46/014	
		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	MANDEVILLE WAY ELECTRICITY BOX	EEB	REPRIMAND	DISC 38/034	
		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	LAINDON WEST COMMUNITY CENTRE	BDC	REPRIMAND	DISC 381060	
		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	LAINDON WEST COMMUNITY CENTRE	BDC	REPRIMAND	DISC 391035	
		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	LAINDON WEST COMMUNITY CENTRE	BDC	REPRIMAND	DISC 39/038	
		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	LAINDON WEST COMMUNITY CENTRE	BDC	REPRIMAND	DISC 39/042	
		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	LAINDON WEST COMMUNITY CENTRE	BDC	REPRIMAND	DISC 39/043	
12110/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	SURGERY HOOVER DRIVE LAINDON		REPRIMAND	DISC 391048	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	SUBWAY UNDER WESTMAYNE, LAINDON	BDC	REPRIMAND	DISC 421005	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 421023	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 431006	
12110/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 43/007	
12110/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 431008	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 431015	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 431018	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 431022	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 43/022	
12/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 43/030	
12110/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD UNDER RAIL BRIDGE	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 43/031	
19110/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	BRIDGE OVER RAILWAY DURHAM RD/MANDEVILLE WAY	EEC	REPRIMAND	DISC 441015	
19110/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	BRIDGE OVER RAILWAY DURHAM RDIMANDEVILLE WAY	EEC	REPRIMAND	DISC 441019	
19/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	BRIDGE OVER RAILWAY DURHAM RD/MANDEVILLE WAY	EEC	REPRIMAND	DISC 441021	
19/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	BRIDGE OVER RAILWAY DURHAM RDIMANDEVILLE WAY	EEC	REPRIMAND	DISC 441025	
19/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	DURHAM ROAD BRIDGE TO MANDEVILLE WAY (CIDRIVE)	BDC	REPRIMAND	DISC 451021	
19/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	UNDER DURHAM RD BRIDGE TO MAND. WAY (=RIVE)	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 46/002	
19/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	UNDER DURHAM RD BRIDGE TO MAND. WAY (=RIVE)	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 46/009	
19/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	UNDER DURHAM RD BRIDGE TO MAND. WAY (C/DRIVE)	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 461010	
19/10/01		BUCHAN DAN	ATOM	UNDER DURHAM RD BRIDGE TO MAND. WAY (C/DRIVE)	RAILTRACK	REPRIMAND	DISC 461010	



Two graffiti busters -- PC Darren Griffin, liaison officer, with insp Vic Wallace and Insp Steve Wynn, schools liaison officer, are ready to crack down vandals who regularly deface areas of Basildon. **Picture: STEVE O'CONNELL TACTY**

Prison warning to graffiti 'artists'

POLICE are aiming to clean up the Basildon division with a crackdown on vandals who daub walls with unsightly graffiti.

Insp Vic Wallace is heading up an operation to compile a photographic database which will make it easier to track down so-called graffiti artists by their distinctive tags. Meanwhile, he warned that they faced prosecution and even imprisonment, if caught. Mr Wallace said: "The bottom line is that there are a lot of people in the district which are being defaced by graffiti. One of our schools liaison

By MBAR McGRATH

camera and is going round the division photographing the graffiti blackspots. We are interested in identifying and prosecuting the most prolific vandals. "People call them taggers - but they are responsible for criminal damage. This is an offence for which they can be arrested and even imprisoned." Mr Wallace said he believed graffiti gave visitors the wrong impression about the division. He added: "Basildon is actually quite a nice place to live with a lot of good things going for it, and quite a lot of economic prosperity. But when people come

gives them a negative image of the place. "We are determined to do something positive and proactive about it. "It all comes down to ownership. The vandals responsible for doing this have got to realise they are defacing somebody else's property. "I wonder how they'd feel if someone came round and sprayed graffiti on their parents' walls? "It costs money to clean up the mess - money that could be better spent on children's education." Schools liaison officers will also be visiting schools in the district to spread the anti-graffiti message, while in some cases they may also write to children's parents,

APPENDIX E

w Stefania Bianchi

Basildon District Council needs to target widespread graffiti and encourage recycling in the area, according to a report released by the Audit Commission yesterday.

The report found that although most of the services provided by the council are satisfactory, continuing problems such as graffiti and recycling need to be addressed.

Inspectors found that there is widespread graffiti and a large number of abandoned vehicles throughout the district and that only one third of residents participate in recycling. But on a positive note, the inspection team awarded the council's services two stars and said they were satisfied with the condition of the streets and the provision of parks in the area.

The commission examined a range of the council's activities, including refuse collection, street cleansing, parks, playgrounds and cemeteries. Andy Walford, acting regional director of the central region best value inspection service, said: "The district is kept clean and tidy and local people can enjoy a good selection of parks and playgrounds." But Mr Walford expressed concern about how the council will tackle important issues. He continued: "It is uncertain whether the service will improve because local people have not been consulted to identify their needs in respect of these services, and the council is unclear how it will achieve important goals, such as meeting recycling targets and converting areas of parkland to countryside."

Inspectors also recommended that the council should develop a plan to improve the performance of all services to match the top performing councils by:

- *Exploring whether other providers, such as private firms, could provide services more efficiently or to a higher quality.

- *Consulting with local people to identify their needs and plan services to meet these needs.

- *Developing a strategy for dealing with waste that will reduce the amount of waste that is created and increase recycling.

Council leader John Potter said efforts had already been made to cut graffiti and encourage residents to recycle. He said: "We have spent £45,000 on new equipment to remove graffiti across the town. The problem is that most of the worst graffiti left is on private buildings. That is not our responsibility. "But the Government is about to introduce legislation which will allow the council to rent out the cleaning equipment to local firms, so they can remove the graffiti themselves." Mr Potter said the move would also help raise money for the council.

By Kate Batson

A BLITZ on graffiti in Basildon has led to the arrest of more than a dozen youngsters who have admitted almost 600 offences, police have revealed. And officers who have been leading the crackdown say that most of the vandals responsible for the damage are children - one of whom has confessed to 120 incidents.

Police say they are pleased with the progress they are making into the problem of graffiti, but need more back-up and support in cleaning up some areas.

Basildon Council leader, John Potter said he was also happy with the success but still had reservations about the town being cleaned up. He said: "I am happy to hear of the successes in catching criminals but the problem is cleaning it off. We have already spent £45,000 to clean it up, but there is a problem when it (graffiti) is on private buildings."

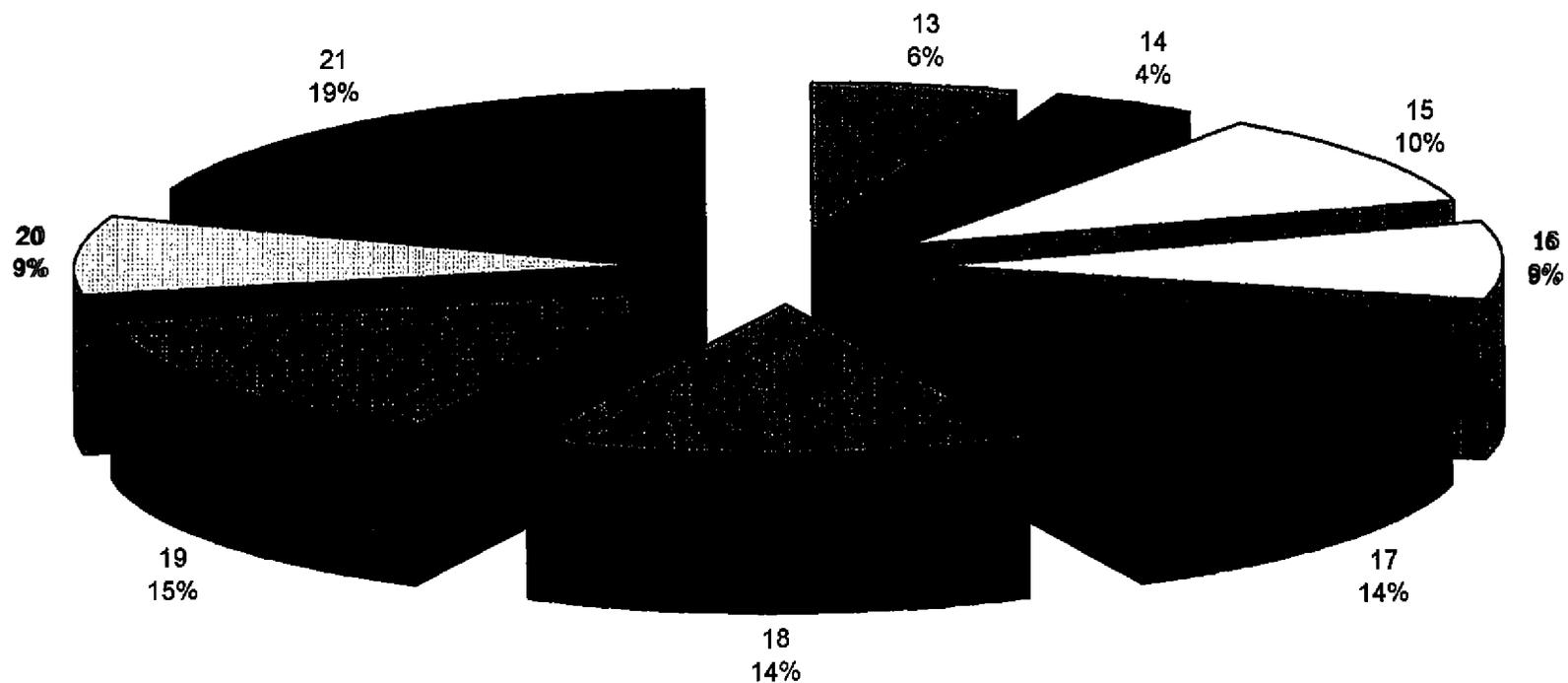
Imp Vic Wallace of Basildon police said: "We know who is doing this, and we have arrested a lot of people for damage that is really quite shocking. "We are aware of the problem of cleaning up areas that are privately owned, and we need support from landowners who we have already pressured for help."

The graffiti initiative has been conducted by PC Darren Griffin and school liaison officer PC Steve Wynn who have noticed it is mainly children causing the damage. PC Griffin said: "The fact is we have pulled these children in - and they are mainly children - and their parents are now aware of the problem and are very supportive, and this is what we need to stop this happening.

"The problem does not go away on its own and we have to continue to arrest people to put a stop to it. This should help bring criminal damage figures down, as not only does graffiti bring a negative image to the town it costs money to clean up."

Insp Wallace added: "We need to get the children responsible in to some sort of community plan to help clean up the damage they have caused."

Total Number of offences by Age of -Offenders



Age of Offender by Number of Offences

