

Lancashire Constabulary



OPERATION APPROACH

*Crime & Disorder Reduction
Category*

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Endorsed By Deputy Chief Constable Paul Stephenson

INTRODUCTION — Summary

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1. To the people of Freckleton the local Memorial Park is a poignant reminder of one of the great tragedies of the Second World War when, in 1944, an America Bomber based at the nearby Warton Aerodrome crashed onto a local primary school. A total of 61 people lost their lives, including 38 local children.
2. Through the years local residents have enjoyed the parks gardens, children's play area and bowling green. But more recently there has been an increasing problem with youths congregating in and around the area causing a nuisance. Buildings and gardens on and surrounding the park were being damaged regularly. There was firm evidence of drink and drug abuse coupled with reports from local residents of suffering verbal abuse and harassment whilst walking through the park. The volume of youths congregating there led to a very real fear of crime by the residents within this village community.
3. There was an increase in reported incidents on and around the park and a significant increase in crime, a number of which related to criminal damage but there was also an increase in violent crime, public order incidents and particularly assaults. Numerous complaints were received from local residents and parish councillors. High visibility patrols were deployed on and around the park, not only at key times when the youths were congregating, but also very early morning. This enabled officers to assess damage and discarded debris to give a clear indication of the problems and pinpoint key times of activity.
4. The local parish council were approached as partners in working to find a sustainable solution to the problem. The layout and location of the park were key factors in attracting youths. They were able to utilise the fencing, buildings and shrubbery around the park to avoid them or their activities being seen. It also afforded them an advantage over officers patrolling the area. Improved fencing and lighting was installed at key locations. Trees and shrubs were cut back giving better visibility and a dummy CCTV camera was put into the bowling clubhouse.
5. There has been a significant reduction in the numbers of recorded crimes and incidents relating to the park. The perception of the residents is that the partnership have realised a sustainable solution to the problems. The residents have returned to using the park with confidence and the fear of crime has diminished.

Description of the Project

SCANNING

Freckleton is a rural village community. Over recent years new housing developments have increased the population to around 7000 residents. Nevertheless it is a tight-knit community with numerous extended families. This spirit is reflected in community activities such as their brass band, sport and field day events, scouts and guides. The village also participates in the Local Fylde in Bloom competition for which they have been awarded a number of prizes.

The park itself is a memorial to those who lost their lives in a plane crash at Freckleton during the Second World War. It was on the 23rd August in 1944 that an American Liberator Bomber was struck by lightning and crashed onto the infants department of the Holy Trinity School. A series of explosions engulfed the school and surrounding buildings in flames. A total of sixty-one people lost their lives in the tragedy including thirty-eight local children, two teachers and seven civilians as well as RAF and American Aircrew.

Following the disaster three charity funds were established. The American Appeal for a Children's Memorial Playground and Park provided the park itself that was donated to the residents of Freckleton under the control of their local Parish Council.

The park is used by all the residents of Freckleton and consists of;

- A children's play area
- Bowling Green and Club House
- Scout and Guide buildings
- Band Room
- Memorial Garden (Rose Garden)
- Benches and Picnic areas
- Garden areas

The bowling green area and rose garden of the park is situated adjacent to the Graveyard of the Holy Trinity Church.

Problems have arisen over the years because the area is attractive to gangs of youths who congregate there causing problems for the local residents of juvenile nuisance, disorder and criminal damage.

ANALYSIS

In order to address these problems and deciding what was need the application of the PAT triangle was used to analyse the problem.

LOCATION – THE PARK

- The park commands a central location within the village and is used by all members of the community. It has a footpath through the middle giving access between the post office, library, shops and public houses situated in the village centre from the more residential areas. It is often used by elderly residents from homes adjacent to or nearby the park itself.
- The park has a secluded setting, its perimeter has a six-foot high wooden fence and it is flanked on two sides by the gardens of residential properties and on a further side by the graveyard of the Holy Trinity Church. It can only be accessed on foot by a path that adjoins the village centre and another main road within the village.
- The Bowling Green area is independently fenced within the park itself and was falling into disrepair. The wooden fence separating it from the rose garden on the park was regularly broken down and damage caused to the green and clubhouse as well as to their equipment.
- The veranda on the Bowling Green clubhouse attracted the youths who used it for shelter.
- Large hedges, trees and deep beds of shrubs around the park and Bowling Green area provided shelter and coverage.
- The lighting on the park area was poor. There were dimly lit posts along the main path and around the play area but little or no lighting around the outskirts of the park or the bowling green area.
- Incidents of damage occurred to the surrounding residential properties and adjoining graveyard.

OFFENDERS – JUVENILES

- Local juveniles and friends from the surrounding areas were using the park as a meeting place and causing criminal damage and general nuisance. It became apparent that a large number of the youths congregating there were not local to the area.
- Reports increased of public order issues occurring on and around the park involving the youths, including allegations of assault and two unconfirmed reports of attempted robbery.
- Youths on the park were drinking and evidence was found of drug abuse. Debris including large quantities of broken glass was left strewn around the park.
- It seemed to have become known as a safe area for youths to undertake antisocial behaviour without being disturbed and was attracting youths from outside the area.

- This was reflected by a number of Mispers and Target Offenders from surrounding areas that were located on the park, including individuals who were known for causing problems in their home areas.
- They would often access and exit the park by climbing over residents' fences or the adjoining wall of the graveyard.
- The youths were able to see a police presence arriving on the park before officers could see them. This enabled them coverage on their activities and the ability to vacate the area quickly.

VICTIMS — RESIDENTS

- There was a real danger posed to children playing in the park area due to the amount of broken glass and drug paraphernalia, including needles left lying around.
- On a number of occasions the children play area was completely unusable.
- There was an occasion when bottles were pushed into a grassed area by the side of the picnic benches and broken off at ground level leaving the jagged edges protruding.
- Fencing that was broken down was often used to light fires around the park, including the litterbins and picnic benches.
- The clubhouse for the bowling green was the subject of an attempt burglary and arson.
- Damage was caused to the bowling green and equipment there that disrupted the sport for the local residents.
- Local residents of the properties adjoining the park suffered with damage to their fencing, greenhouses and gardens.
- There were complaints regarding noise nuisance and litter being discarded, including into adjoining residential properties and the graveyard.
- Damage was caused to the Scout and Guide buildings, disrupting their activities.
- There were cost implications for the local council who had to continually repair the damage caused.
- Residents complained that the large groups of youths congregating on and around the central path were intimidating and that they suffered verbal harassment from them. Indeed the residents perceived that the park had become a no go area after dark and there was a very real fear of crime.
- Residents saw the behaviour of the youths as being more than just a juvenile nuisance. They saw their behaviour as having a total lack of respect for the community and what the park represented. In particular when they intruded on the graveyard. There is a communal grave where 36 children and their teacher are buried directly by the side of the wall adjoining the Bowling Green which was often walked over and litter discarded there.
- Work done by local volunteers on their flowerbeds was destroyed when the plants were ripped up. Offence was taken at this in particular, as local residents were proud of previous achievements from the Fylde in Bloom competition.

OBJECTIVES

Several meetings took place with the Local Parish Council, members of the bowling club and other residents in the community to devise a plan of action. The objectives were:

1. To deter juveniles from congregating in the park and causing nuisance.
2. To reduce crime and prevent damage to the Bowling Green Club House and surrounding gardens.
3. To reduce damage, litter and nuisance to surrounding residential properties.
4. To reduce the fear of crime within the residents of the village.
5. To increase public confidence and satisfaction.

Police resources for the area were limited. There was one ward beat officer covering the village supported by geographic patrols from Kirkham. There was a feeling amongst the residents and Parish Council that there need to be a higher police presence.

The problem was given priority on the geographic area over other issues as the local constabulary had always enjoyed a good relationship with the council and local residents. The problems they were experiencing were damaging that. Whilst being sympathetic and recognising that we cared about their problems it was necessary to find a long-term sustainable solution to them. Unlimited police patrols were neither a realistic or practical option.

The analysis had indicated that one of the main causes of the problem was the attraction that the youths had to this park. It was clearly not possible to do anything with the location of the park but it was felt that things could be done surrounding its layout to make it less attractive to the youths to congregate there.

Because it was an ongoing problem that appeared to be escalating it was felt necessary to respond immediately in some capacity whilst working in partnership with the Parish Council towards a longer-term solution.

SHORT TERM RESPONSE

- Section officers and Special Constabulary were used to patrol the park are on foot in High Visibility Clothing giving a higher police presence and to reassure the public.
- Early morning patrols were made of the park, prior to the ground staff commencing their work. This was to give a true indication of the levels and type of debris that was being discarded and to pinpoint times of activity. – This highlighted that the park was being used well into the early hours of the morning as liaison was done with the previous days evening patrols.
- Disruption tactics were employed run at peak times of reported problems. This was predominantly over and including Thursday to Sunday evenings well into the early hours of the mornings. These included approaching and speaking to the groups of youths. Raising their awareness about what the park represented as well as the community problems and the effects that their presence and behaviour had.
- Quantities of alcohol were seized and confiscated from the juveniles.
- High visibility patrols were used with a video camera and youth referral forms submitted where necessary.
- Benches were removed from underneath the veranda of the Bowling Green Clubhouse.

MEDIUM TERM RESPONSE

- Local residents were encouraged to report incidents. This had the impact of not only making them aware that we knew of the problems but that we cared and wanted to help. It also made them feel that their information was important to helping us solve the issues.
- Notices were displayed around the park, which had the impact of making the youths congregating there and the local residents that we were monitoring their behaviour.
- Officers began to get approached by local youths who had previously been spoken to on the park. It became clear that whilst in a peer group they did not challenge other individuals' behaviour neither were they happy about the offences being caused or the effect it was having on their community. This was felt to be both positive and encouraging.
- Through their information and the short-term response a number of key individuals were identified and invited, together with parents, to attend the local police station where the geographic Inspector spoke them. This again gave the opportunity to raise awareness of the effect their behaviour was having on the community and bring it to the attention of their parents.
- A number of arrests were made in relation to assaults and other public order offences in the community. Media coverage was used to put the message across that the anti-social behaviour would not be tolerated.

- Having seized alcohol and identified local off-licences from where it was being purchased visits were made and the licensees spoken to. Warnings were given over the sale and supply of alcohol to juveniles.

LONGTERM RESPONSE

Meetings with the Parish Council and members of the Bowling Club continued to take place throughout the above responses. These resulted in the following work being done to establish a longer-term response to the problems.

- Trees and shrubbery were cut back to reduce the amount of cover afforded to the youths congregating on the park.
- The wooden fencing that surrounded the Bowling Green was removed on the side adjoining the rose garden and replaced with six foot galvanised rail fencing.
- The gates onto the Bowling Green area were replaced by similar materials and securely fastened with locks.
- This enabled officers and members of the public entering the park on foot immediate visual access across the bowling green to the Club House with clear unobstructed views of what was taking place there.
- A fully working, moving but dummy CCTV camera was sited within the Club House looking out across the park and signs were put up.
- A new building erected at the side of the clubhouse was secured by design. It does not have a veranda giving the opportunity for shelter and provides a secure area where equipment to maintain the green can be stored.
- Lighting in the park area and around the Bowling Green has been improved with halogen lamps.

ASSESSMENT

Using the crime and incident logging system through 2001, up to the long term responses being put in place in September there were 19 incidents recorded of damage, disorder and assaults. From September 2001 to May 2002 this has been reduced to just one. Regular meetings take place with the parish council and the Ward Beat officer continually assesses the situation by patrolling the area.

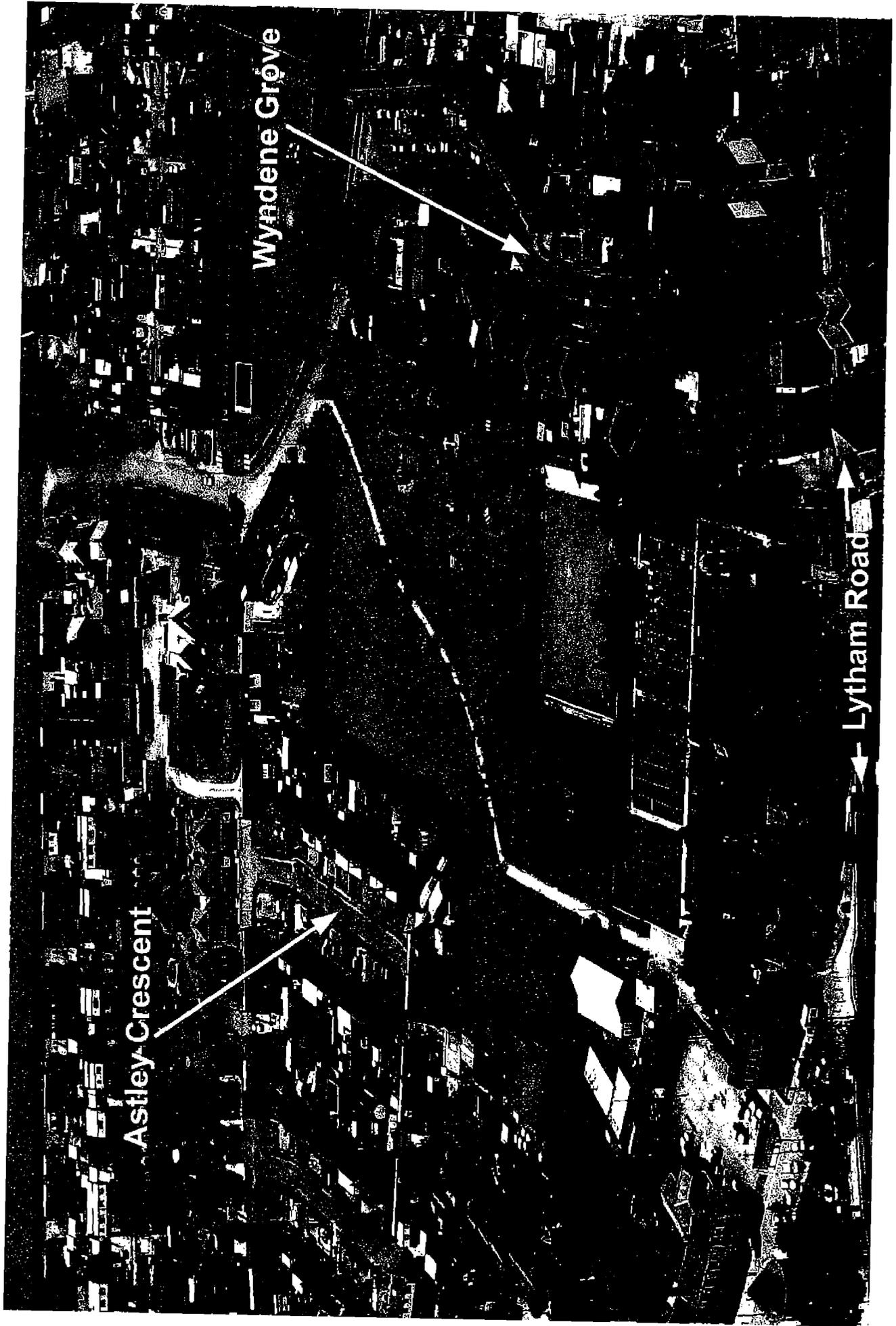
- The overall impact of the increased police presence and the long-term response measures appears to have made the park less attractive for youths congregating there. In particular the area no longer appears to be suffering with youths travelling in from the surrounding towns.
- Local residents have now returned to using the park with confidence.
- Reports of damage and nuisance have been reduced.
- Public confidence in the police has been restored.
- There has been a reduction in the fear of crime.
- Confidence of the local council has been restored.

The perception of the residents of the village is that the partnership have realised a sustainable solution to the previous problems.

This has only been achieved through a Partnership Approach.

The problems on the park could not have been resolved without the long-term response put in place by the local parish council. Those measures would not have been effective had the police not supported it through the previous response stages.

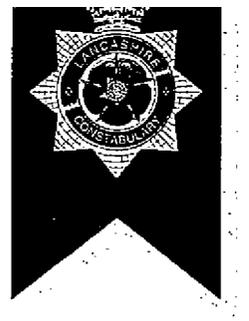
CLOSE UP OF FRECKLETON CENTRE VIEWED FROM THE NORTH



Lancashire Constabulary

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29 May 2002

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The Tilley Award 2002

As Chair of the force 'Problem Oriented Policing Steering Group' I am delighted to forward Lancashire Constabulary's nominations for the Tilley Award 2002.

There has been an enthusiastic response from the force's divisions/departments in respect of this Award, therefore the Lancashire Constabulary is submitting a total of 19 applications, all of which have been quality assured.

I personally endorse each individual entry and commend each one on its own particular merit. Many of the nominations were used as case studies in the Constabulary's own Annual 'POP' Conference that took place in May of this year.

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