

**MARDEN QUARRY PROJECT**

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## **Marden Quarry Project- Summary**

The Marden Quarry was a disused site based at the centre of a relatively prosperous and well-populated area of the coastal town of Whitley Bay.

The word quarry can often evoke negative images, thoughts of industrial dereliction and decay. A void that can be filled by opportunists and moulded to suit their purpose. At the beginning of 2002 it was apparent that this potential community resource had been occupied by a disorderly element. This occupation led to at the very least the majority feeling uncomfortable in the environment which had effectively become a 'no go' area for the majority of the community.

In the best traditions it was the reported cruelty to wildlife at the quarry that evoked widespread disgust and proved the catalyst that has brought us down the present path.

The immediate police response led to the arrest and conviction of the offenders. The local Community Beat Managers consulted locally and co-ordinated local reaction.

The resulting analysis of events and incidents surrounding the quarry led both police and the local community to decide that a line was to be drawn in the sand and that the usage of the Quarry was to be transformed from that of a drinking den for a disorderly minority to a well used and valued community resource for use by all sections of the community without fear.

This was to be achieved by environmental changes.

The Friends of Marden Quarry was formed. Funding of £170,000 was successfully secured on a matched funding basis from English Nature and a project manager employed.

Almost immediately the list of priorities decided upon by the Friends were acted upon. The whole community became galvanised into action with Police, Local Authority, Councillors, schools, conservation groups, residents and even the Mayor all contributing personally to the changes to the Quarry that were eventually to lead to its return to use by the whole community.

## Marden Quarry Project – Scanning the problem

### **The Quarry**

The Quarry is located in the heart of a heavily residential area. Since exploitation was complete the quarry was allowed to flood creating a lake environment surrounded by undulating wooded areas. The area had been designated as a nature park, but had not benefited from any concerted management and was allowed to exist with a minimum of intervention from the local authority and water board as necessary to remedy urgent matters. There was no development plan or strategy.

### **The Neighbours**

The quarry is surrounded on three sides by established quality housing in a generally prosperous area. To the East the border is met by what is several sporting amenities including football pitches, cricket ground, tennis courts and even an ice rink. This area effectively provides an unbounded area that annexes into another housing estate that is high-density local authority housing with high indices of social deprivation.

At the east of the Quarry across the road is a conveniently sited off-licence.

### **The users**

At the beginning of July 2002 the quarry was generally used by four identifiable groups.

1. *Dog walkers.* As indicated the area is well populated and bordered by housing. The quarry provided the ideal location to exercise the dog. In essence it was not important to the users that this was a nature park but merely that it was an open space to exercise the dog.
2. *Groups of youths.* The youths were not entering the Quarry with binoculars and guides to flora and fauna in hand. More likely an ominous plain carrier bag laden with cans. To these groups the Quarry was a haven from authority not an oasis of nature.
3. Big waters Angling association.
4. *Wildlife.* The quarry, by its sheer nature, benefits from a relatively healthy population of birds including swans.

### **The Incidents**

In the year 2001 there were 35 incidents associated with the Quarry. In 2002 this increased to 36.

An examination of reported incidents in 2002 reveals the following. That 70% were reports of youth disorder. 5 involved cars being abandoned and two involved cruelty to animals and air weapons.

Incidents were mostly reported by local residents passing by or through the park (often after walking the dog).

The majority of incidents occurred on a seasonal patten. That is to say during the warmer – summer- months from May to September and usually between 7-9pm.

It was cruelty towards a Swan in the Quarry during the summer of 2002 that proved to be the catalyst to action. The sight of the injured swan spurred an outcry amongst the local community.

Both local Community Beat Managers had established contacts amongst users and interested parties. Feedback about the incident was unequivocal – a response was needed proportionate to the hurt felt by the community.

## Marden Quarry project – Analysing the problem

### **Matters relating to the location.**

Important factors relating to the location were perceived as follows

1. That it is a relatively unregulated and unlit area offering extensive cover within the heart of a residential area.
2. Covert access is relatively easy via its western boundary
3. That no individual body or organisation had strategic control of the site.
4. The site appeared unkempt and unmanaged – fostering a sense of dereliction and an open invite to disorderly elements.
5. Local availability of alcohol.
6. Vehicle access is easy via a main road. Once inside the confines a tarmac road leads to a hidden area offering an ideal dumping area for cars.

### **The victims**

Certainly the most vociferous were the immediate neighbours to the quarry. They were subject to the anxiety of seeing what they described as 'gangs' of youths entering the quarry for what they assumed would be unlawful purpose. These observations had a very real impact upon their quality of life. Their anxieties impacted upon their behaviour. Most obviously by deterring them from using the quarry – particularly on summer evenings (when, of course, one would most want to use such a place) and also from discouraging others using it.

Alongside the local residents are those groups who would use the Quarry if it were to be perceived as a safe and inviting environment. Schools, nurseries and nature lovers and those out for a stroll.

The fact that the Quarry was seen as a blot on the landscape with all its associated problems and anxieties meant that the whole community and reputation of the area suffered. There was an ambient perception of lawlessness surrounding the quarry that impacted directly upon the sense of community safety.

Not least of all was the wildlife within the Quarry Park. The injury to one of the swans in the summer of 2002 was an all too tangible realisation of the situation.

There is also a sense in which the youths using the Quarry, often at night and under the influence of alcohol, could be perceived as victims at their own hands. The mere possibility that one of these youths may end up in the quarry's water with the obvious risk of a fatality raised much anxiety. Those youths who were using the quarry quite lawfully also became victims of the reputation earned by others.

### **Offenders**

Those using the Quarry Park at the apparent expense of everyone else were young persons aged 12 to 18.

The larger number of youths who, naturally gathered in the Quarry were using it in exactly the manner one would expect – climbing trees, making camps and having the odd adventure

However, it was the seemingly inevitable activities of the minority that impacted upon everybody else. The Quarry offered perfect cover for some groups of youths to gather and consume alcohol and cannabis. Once under the influence of such substances their behaviour would then deteriorate and so bring us to the situation of summer 2002 and the displacement of 'legitimate' users.

The links provided by the Metro light rail system enable youths in Tyne and Wear to be very mobile. This coupled with text messaging means that groups can converge very rapidly on any suitable location.

Whilst there was generally a transient population of youths one persistent offender was identified – he himself became the subject of another Problem Solving project.

### **Marden Quarry Project – The Response**

So much for understanding the problem. What about doing something about it.

Clearly at the heart of the problem are some fundamental questions about youth culture and their substance abuse. Whilst it was clear that part of the response was to be directed towards their behaviour it could not become central to the response. To impact seriously on youth culture would not be achievable by this project alone.

The focus of the response was therefore directed to changing the environment of the Quarry and, thereby, its use. To displace the disorderly element.

However, the impact of the injured swans and the need to apprehend offenders so as to establish public confidence in the Quarry site meant that a short-term and immediate response was required.

#### **The short-term response**

1. *Cruelty to animals.* The swans were captured and transported to Berwick Swan sanctuary where they made a full recovery. An operation was planned and executed utilising covert observations. This resulted in the arrest of two offenders on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2002 under the Wildlife and Countryside Act for shooting at ducks with air rifles. This was after two weeks of observations by Community Support Team. On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2003 they were both convicted and fined a total of £520.
2. *Disorder strategy.* Following observations high profile uniform patrols were deployed at problem times, usually 7-9pm and concentrated on weekends.
3. *Alcohol.* All local off-licences were visited and advised regarding enforcement of existing legislation.
4. *Press strategy.* Liaison with local press about the successful Operation. The intention being to provide re-assurance and deter further offences.

#### **The Longer-term strategy**

1. *Establishing an interest group* to progress development of the Quarry. In the wake of publicity surrounding injury to the swans local Beat Managers PC Mick Surtees and PC Ian Gillie were able to exploit the situation by bringing together people with an individual and organisational interest in the Quarry. The group *Friends of Marden Quarry* was formed. This was made up of local councillors, local nature lovers, local Community Beat Managers and the Geographic Inspector and council employees. The *Friends* were headed by Mary Carruthers and properly constituted. Once constituted the group, mindful of the necessity of funding to achieve any of its goals set about securing funding as a matter of priority.
2. *Environmental changes.* A process of environmental scanning was undertaken by the group with the assistance of the Crime Prevention Officer. Priorities identified were
  - Establishing secure boundaries
  - Put barrier in place to prevent vehicular access to lower reaches
  - Establish paths
  - Additional fencing
  - Clean up of site (rubbish)
  - Establish ban on consumption of alcohol
  - Establish actual and potential user groups
  - Establish Quarry watch Scheme

It was immediately apparent that the task was considerable both in terms of time and cost.

3. *Funding.* The whole project was given a considerable boost at an early stage with the securing of substantial funding via English Nature of £170,000. It was decided by the group that the funding should be best exploited and progress most rapidly made through the appointment of a project manager. Eventually Will Hog was appointed by December 2002 to the post on an 18m contract. He was accommodated in a Portakabin on site provided by the local authority. A copy of his project plan can be seen at Appendix 1.

### **Achievements of The Friends of Marden Quarry**

*Securing the boundaries.* Substantial new fencing was established at the most vulnerable Eastern boundary of the Quarry. This did initially raise some tensions with English Nature who did not see the erection of metal fencing essential to the project. They were eventually persuaded otherwise by Will Hogg.

*Installation of barrier.* In April 2003 the Local Authority in the Guise of Jim Cowans fabricated and installed a barrier at the head of the access road. Keys available on site for those who require access.

*Clean up of site.* One of the earliest participation events on the site was a mass litter collection. This event saw lots of local volunteers including the Mayor with other Councillors and police officers. Much positive press coverage was achieved – as well as tons of rubbish collected. The site was being reclaimed in more than one sense.

*Ban on consumption of alcohol.* As early as November 2002 negotiations commenced with Mike Brannigan and the local authority legal department about having the Quarry designated under the Crime and Disorder Act as a none drinking area. This was eventually achieved in October 2003 and signs put in place establishing the fact.

*Policing disorderly youths.* This ban has been enforced through enhanced patrols. To date one person has been reported for a breach. In addition concerted policing of the Metro system through Operation Memphis Belle has reduced the number of youths intent on disorder travelling into North Tyneside to sites such as the Quarry.

*Quarry Watch.* This was established by April 2003. Signs have been posted to all the entrances to the quarry. They advise of all the appropriate agencies involved in the Quarry and who to contact in what instance. This has two effects. Firstly to indicate to any users that this site is not derelict but is managed and monitored. Secondly it reduces the demand on police resources by directing users to the appropriate agency where assistance is needed.

*Establishment of paths and fences.* The use of voluntary labour from local colleges and universities, conservation groups as well as those engaged on Community Service Orders has meant that the maximum progress has been made on the making of new paths and fences. This has had considerable impact on the appearance and use of the quarry.

*Liaison with local schools.* Community Beat Manager Ian Gillie has attended local schools giving talks about the Quarry and educating them re issues of animal welfare and the purpose of the quarry. As a result schools such as Southridge and Marden High School have contributed directly to the project. Indeed that involvement has been to the extent that they were invited to a civic reception in February 2003.

### Marden Quarry Project – Assessment

The objective of this project was to change the use of the quarry by introducing environmental changes. To displace the disorderly element by the infusion of legitimate and law abiding users.

Throughout the successful establishment of a user group *The Friends of Marden Quarry* much has been achieved. Particularly as a result of substantial funding having been obtained. The Quarry has been established as a local amenity for the use of all. Events such as bat and moth watching are commonplace. Local schools visit the site as part of their curriculum activities and local universities even attend the site regularly.

Further evidence of the success of the project is borne by the level of reported incidents to police. These are as follows

2001 – 35 incidents

2002 – 36 incidents

2003 – 14 incidents.

This represents a reduction of 61%. There have been no abandoned cars at the site since the installation of the barrier.

The lessons learnt from this Problem Solving Module have been carried over to two other schemes within North Tyneside. *The Friends of Churchill Playing Fields* and *The Friends of Brier Dene* have already been established and constituted. These projects will benefit from the lessons learnt on the Quarry.

The achievements of the Friends of Marden Quarry were recently acknowledged by the Mayor of North Tyneside at a civic reception held in February 2004 to celebrate its success and contribution to the local community.

## Marden Quarry Project Appendices

1. Photos of some of the volunteers
2. Examples of press coverage

Appendix 1

Photos of some of the volunteers



# Over £170,000 ploughed into town nature reserve

By David Hodgson  
North Tyneside Council has announced that it will spend more than £170,000 on a major programme of work to improve the town's nature reserve. The work will include the creation of new habitats, the removal of invasive species and the installation of new water features. The council hopes that the work will attract more visitors to the reserve and help to improve the local environment.

Start on nature park revival

TODAY sees a new

Quarry will get a facelift

MORE than £170,000 is to be ploughed into a

## Litter pick up

A MAYOR will be throwing aside his robes to take part in a litter pick this weekend.

North Tyneside Mayor Chris Morgan will be joined by MP Alan Campbell and North Tyneside Deputy