

## **Bath Graffiti Partnership**

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# Bath Graffiti Partnership

## Summary

In January 2001 PC Huw Morgan, who was the beat manager for Larkhall in Bath, became aware of a rising tide of graffiti on his beat. As a result of his investigations into the problem it became clear that graffiti was becoming endemic throughout the City of Bath.

The financial impact of graffiti can be enormous. It is estimated that two juvenile offenders are responsible for graffiti costing over £500,000 to remove. Much of their damage has been to the rail network and British Transport Police estimate the cost of disruption to the rail network for cleaning at £2,000,000.

In addition to the costs of removal studies show that graffiti has a disproportionate effect on residents 'fear of crime' and on the perception the area gives to visitors. There were real concerns that the increase in graffiti could trigger a spiralling decay in Larkhall and other areas of Bath.

In the 'world heritage centre' of Bath graffiti will have additional financial implications with its effects on tourism.

From the outset it became clear that this was a major problem that the police alone were unable to solve. The problem oriented policing model was used to engage other agencies in a joint strategy to reduce graffiti in Larkhall, and later throughout Bath, and partners continue to be engaged to this end.

The objectives of the graffiti partnership are to:

- ***Reduce the amount of criminal damage to public and private property caused by graffiti writers***
- ***Reduce the impact of graffiti on an area through swift removal***

The Graffiti partnership brought together a number of public and private organisations including;

- Avon and Somerset Constabulary
- British Transport Police
- Somer Housing
- London Road Partnership
- Southgate Centre Management
- Bath Conservative Association
- Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Council
  - Youth and Community Development
  - Cleansing Department
  - Enforcement

These organisations developed a range of measures to combat graffiti tackling the three sides of the POP triangle;

**Victim** - provision of free cleaning services  
**Offender** - prosecution/diversionary/educational activities  
**Location** - environmental changes to mask/deter graffiti

The vast majority of damage caused by graffiti has previously gone unreported to police or to the council, which makes empirical evaluation of the scheme's impact difficult. Once the council's graffiti removal service was publicised reports of graffiti to the council rose from 24 in the year 2000 to a peak of 68 in a single month in February 2003.

By September the partnership's activities had reduced the number of requests for cleaning to 9 and visual surveys suggest that there has been a considerable reduction in the impact of graffiti across Bath.

## Beginnings

In January 2001 PC Huw Morgan was working as a beat manager for Larkhall in Bath. He was approached by a family in Avondale Buildings, Larkhall who complained about graffiti which was covering the wall of their house. Utilising his skills as an evidence gatherer Huw photographed the wall and then repeated the photograph six weeks later. This evidenced a marked increase in graffiti on this wall over the period.

The effect of the problem on the family living in the house was so severe that they were considering moving home.

Once alerted to the problem Huw became aware of infestations across his Larkhall beat. After carrying out visual surveys on his own beat to establish the extent of the problem, Huw extended his survey across the City of Bath.

It was immediately apparent that graffiti was a large and growing problem and one that could not be solved by police action alone.

A SARA was born.

## Scanning

### Local Survey

In order to assess the impact of the problem photographic evidence of graffiti in Larkhall was collected. In all 70 photographs were taken of 45 sites with 150 separate pieces of graffiti. Bath and North East Somerset Council estimated cleaning costs at £2,250.

Many of the buildings in The City of Bath are built from local Oolitic Limestone that is pale cream in colour and is porous. This light coloured stone offers a tempting canvas for graffiti writers but is difficult to clean without damaging the stone itself. Cleaning is consequently an expensive and time-consuming job.

Damage caused by graffiti, although all too visibly evident, was rarely reported to police or to the council.

Year	Crimes Reported to Police	Requests for Council Cleaning
1998	Nil	7
1999	2	15
2000	1	24

Although the council figures would tend to indicate a rising trend it is clear from the visual surveys that reported incidents are the tip of the 'graffiti iceberg' and little can be determined by measuring reported instances. Indeed the police could have claimed success with a 50% reduction in graffiti from 1999 to 2000. Since the inception of the project there has been a huge increase in reported graffiti but this is largely owing to detected crimes following research in to the activities of arrested offenders.

The photographic survey of Larkhall was thus extended. Photographs were taken of 412 sites where residents stated graffiti was present that had not been there two years previously. Some photographs

contained more than one piece of graffiti and the total number of instances was in excess of 1000. The council estimated labour time of over 500 hours to clean off the graffiti and costs in excess of £25,000. A tag that takes the writer seconds to spray can take half an hour to clean.

### **National/International Research**

At the time the project began there were no schemes in the Avon and Somerset area to combat graffiti so it was necessary to look nationally and internationally at how the problem was tackled.

In March 2001 Huw Morgan attended the first 'International Graffiti Conference' in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Through the conference and with the assistance of British Transport Police, who have developed expertise in the field, we were able to develop a deeper understanding of the problem of graffiti and of the nature of 'graffiti writers'.

Graffiti falls in to three main types;

#### ***Political/Social***

Messages with a particular political or social message from 'Stop the War scrawled on an advertising hoarding to more complex designs.

#### ***Works of 'Art'***

There is no doubt that some graffiti is 'art' but most is vandalism.

#### ***Tagging***

Scrawling of a signature or 'tag'. Almost all of the graffiti in Bath was of this type.

A tag is a signature unique to each graffiti artist and is a nickname or pseudonym. They vary from quickly scrawled marks with marker pens or shoe whitener to complex designs with spray paint. Other materials used include stickers written at home and then plastered on walls and the highly dangerous hydrofluoric acid used to etch glass.

Each 'writer' will have one or more tags and they often work in groups or 'crews'. A complete tag will often include initials of the 'crew' as well as identifying the writer.

Graffiti writers are not bound by territory but will often travel to commit their damage. They are proud of their work and will usually keep albums of photographs of their work at home and the 'writer' will occasionally be included in the photograph.

Graffiti writers keep in touch with each other through the Internet. There are a number of websites based in Bristol and Cardiff that are regularly contributed to by 'writers' from Bath.

Most graffiti writers are young males from 14 – 25 years old.

A graffiti writer is able to build and enhance a reputation through;

- a) frequency with which a 'tag' is seen
- b) artistic design and use of colours
- c) use of dangerous or difficult to reach locations

This research provided a valuable insight into the minds of the offenders and suggested two things of particular importance to the effort to combat graffiti.

1. The vast majority of the graffiti problem in Bath is likely to be the work of a small number of prolific individuals.

2. Offenders keep unprecedented records of their crimes and in depth investigation of their activities is likely to provide excellent evidence for a large number of offences.

Research has shown that actual levels of crime sometimes have little relationship to the levels of fear of crime in a community. Graffiti is self perpetuating and often linked to other kinds of damage. There is extra 'street cred' to be gained by using stolen materials to tag and this again leads to more crime.

### **Local Impact**

Bath and North East Somerset conducts a 'voice box' survey every year of a panel of residents in order to gauge public opinion of its services and environment. Notable in the survey of 2000-2001 was that;

- ❖ 24% of respondents considered that the council should treat the 'environment' as its top priority.
- ❖ 80.6% of respondents considered tourism to be important to the local economy
- ❖ 30.7% of people considered that dirty/unclean/littered streets might discourage visitors
- ❖ 70.6% of people considered that the area could be improved by higher standards of tidiness/cleanliness

This local data links with the British Crime Survey which asks people how they perceive crime in their neighbourhoods. In 2000, 32% of respondents identified that graffiti and vandalism was a problem, compared to 26% in 1998 and 24% in 1996. This shows that nationally graffiti was a growing problem.

### **Analysis**

Having established that Graffiti was a significant and rising problem in Bath and nationally, a task group was put together in order to implement long term solutions to the problem.

Bath and North East Somerset Council, who are already a partner in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, were clearly going to be a major partner in this initiative. They are the organisation with responsibility for many of the open areas in Bath and for young people through their Youth & Community Development Department and Education. They were to become an enthusiastic and active partner.

Three councillors represented the various residents in areas of the city most affected.

Other partners included W S Atkins (the main contractor on the Batheaston by-pass), Somer housing (a private company who manages the council's housing stock), Bath Chamber of Commerce, the London Road Partnership and Bath Conservative Association.

The British Transport Police who have considerable responsibilities in Bath and the surrounding area were invaluable in bringing their knowledge and expertise to the table. Railtrack property and rolling stock are considered by 'writers' to be prime sites and consequently the British Transport Police were able to provide invaluable advice on how best to tackle the enforcement issues and gain maximum success from police investigations. As well as advising our officers, they have shared the pro-active duties with Avon and Somerset Constabulary officers and provided additional covert resources.

The partnership met and considered the graffiti problem. It was unrealistic to aim for total eradication of graffiti but research of the nature of graffiti and graffiti writers suggested that a considerable reduction could be achieved.

The partnership sat down to consider the research on the problem and to form actions to deal with the problem. The first step was to define what we wanted to achieve and what our aims would be.

Actions fell in to three key areas;

- ❖ Removal of historical graffiti
- ❖ Preventing current graffiti writers from continuing their activities
- ❖ Preventing other young people from becoming involved with Graffiti in the future

Historical graffiti could be tackled with a rigorous cleaning programme by the council and by utility companies which suffered a disproportionate amount of damage. Private home owners needed to be encouraged to have their property cleaned and this was achieved by offering a free service by government funding of the council cleansing department.

Preventing graffiti writers from continuing their activities visits all three corners of the VOL triangle.

### **Victim**

- Ensure fresh infestations are immediately removed to deny the work or the graffiti writer exposure

### **Offender**

- Arrest and prosecute the perpetrator – graffiti writers are a tight knit group and news of prosecutions will spread fast
- Diversionary activities
- Use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to re-enforce sentencing

### **Location**

- Environmental changes such as planting and fencing to prevent walls being visible and subject to damage
- Provision of legal alternative sites

In addition to effects some of these measures will have on those already engaged in graffiti, education packages would be prepared to prevent those in the most vulnerable groups from becoming involved in this destructive activity.

A list of actions agreed at the start of the project is at *Annex C*

## **Response**

### **B&NES Council cleaning programme**

B&NES Cleansing Department have obtained a grant of £70,000 annually to clean private residences and private business premises. This funding has enabled them to provide two full time cleaners and their equipment.

Referrals are received through the council's 'Action Line' either by telephone or through the council's web site. Since January 2003 this service has been provided free to victims and the scheme has been widely advertised in the local media and through the Council's web site.

Abusive or obscene messages and images or new occurrences of "larger" items - i.e. those that take effort & planning – are removed immediately wherever possible. Other calls are graded with target times for removal;

Priority 1 – City Centre locations – target of removal within 7 working days.

Priority 2 – High Visibility Locations on routes in to City Centre – 10 working days.

Priority 3 – Other areas – removal within 14 working days.

These targets are met in the majority of cases. Speed of removal is weather dependent and any slippage of the targets can be put down to wet weather which reduces the effectiveness of the chemicals used.

The Council cleansing department has cleaned over 500 sites since the scheme began and report that many sites that suffered repeated damage at the beginning of the scheme are now clear for long periods.

Two pictures removed so report could be sent electronically.

*Fig.1 Graffiti Removal in Action at Beazer Garden Maze – June 2001 to January 2004. This site adjoins Pulteney Bridge and is one of the most prominent tourist areas in Bath. City Centre. This illustrates the futility of attempting to remove all graffiti as a 'tag' is visible on the metal bin in the foreground of the later picture.*

Bath and North East Somerset Council also employs a team of community wardens. They have been trained and equipped to remove the lower level of pen written graffiti and can fulfil this function where they find prominent or offensive graffiti or to combat emerging problems where young people congregate.

Private companies such as British Telecom, W S Atkins, Royal Mail, Transco and Western Power Distribution have agreed to clean graffiti off their installations. The Council's Action Line and Web Site give advice and have links to these companies and they have agreed to prompt cleaning.

#### **'Free Wall'**

The Graffiti Project has ambitions to create a 'free wall' to provide an outlet for the artistic expression of graffiti writers.

There has been some success with small projects where private companies commission graffiti writers to decorate a wall. The most prominent example is Bath Rugby Club who asked graffiti artists to decorate a wall at the Recreation Ground.

A site for a permanent 'free wall' is yet to be found. Although it will be of some help experience shows that the major graffiti problem is not painting of complex works but of quick scribbles – the thrill of which is that it is against the law.

#### **Reducing Impact through Planting**

##### *'Denying Criminals the Use of the Wall'*

Bath and North East Somerset Council have adopted a policy of covering walls in prominent locations with prickly planting in order to cover potential graffiti canvases and prevent access to walls. This has been particularly successful on the banks of the river Avon.

Pictures showing wall previously covered in graffiti and now clear with hedge across.

*Fig 2 – An example on the scenic towpath of the River Avon where planting has prevented graffiti.*

Bath and North East Somerset Internet reporting form is at *Annex B*.

## **Education**

Bath's first Schools Police Officer PC Rachel Anderson has started work this term at Culverhay School in Bath. She has given fresh impetus to the campaign to educate young people against graffiti.

By educating young people before they reach the usual offending age of 12-15 it is hoped to ensure they see graffiti as vandalism and do not become part of the graffiti culture.

## **Police Enforcement Action**

From the team's research it was clear that a small number of offenders were having a huge impact on the amount of graffiti in Bath. Police enforcement action was therefore seen as a vital ingredient in the cocktail of anti-graffiti measures.

There are few crimes where the criminal will keep a photographic record of their crimes in their house let alone display their crimes on web sites.

These factors have enabled positive police enforcement action and post-arrest investigation to have a significant impact on the amount of graffiti around Bath.

There are believed to be only 10-12 regular graffiti writers in Bath. They are a close knit community and police action quickly becomes known to other writers and has a significant impact on the instances of damage in the area.

A dedicated officer (on light duties) has daily contact with British Transport Police Officers to monitor new graffiti and to plan enforcement Action.

Results from arrests this year include;

### **Offender A**

A 32-year-old male who received an adult caution for one offence of writing a tag on a nightclub's condom machine.

Since his arrest his tag has been identified across Bristol and Bath and he is believed to still be at work. He is now a prominent target for BTP as his 'tag' frequently appears 'track side'.

### **Offender B**

A 20 year old male identified as a prolific tag writer mainly in Weston area of Bath. He is also known to do larger scale pieces.

He was arrested in June 2003 as a result of intelligence. A warrant was executed at his home address. Numerous items of graffiti paraphernalia were found. Offender B was photographing and cataloguing his work and was exhibiting on web-sites.

Cleaning costs attributed to this offender are estimated at £60,000. British Transport Police estimate the costs to the rail network in train delays and cancellations at a further £394,000.

He has been charged with 3 offences and is going to be indicted for another 10 with 40 other offences to be taken in to consideration. He is shortly to appear at Bristol Crown Court and expects to receive a custodial sentence.

Since his arrest there has been evidence of him committing similar style damage (reversing his tag) and investigations are continuing although the level of damage caused by him has reduced dramatically.

It is hoped to apply a post-conviction Anti Social Behaviour Order which will run for ten years.

### **Offenders C and D**

Two boys 14 and 16 years old who are believed to be responsible for 70% of damage that is evident around Bath at present. They are also writing regularly on BTP property in Bristol and Bath and have been active in Wales and other surrounding force areas.

The boys are brothers from a settled and affluent family living in Bath and have no previous criminal history.

They have been arrested and released on police bail pending collation of all of their material.

They are believed to have been responsible for ten times the damage caused by 'Offender A' in Bath and five times the amount on British Transport Police jurisdiction.

The impact of their activities on the rail network is estimated at £2,000,000 with cleaning costs of £500,000. They are prolific writers scribbling their tag on any available clean surface and carpeting areas with their scrawl.

They are also believed to be obtaining paints and materials wholesale and distributing to local 'writers'.

Prior to their arrest the council were finding 30-40 tags per day most of which were theirs. Currently they are finding around ten per week, none of which are linked to offenders C and D.

Offenders C and D are regular contributors to graffiti web sites and have boasted that they will increase their activities as a result of police action. This threat has not been carried out.

It is anticipated that they will appear at Bristol Crown Court.

Other less prolific offenders have been arrested and dealt with during this period and have received penalties ranging from fines to cautions.

It is believed that these persons have severely curtailed their activities as a result of information they have received about the severity of sentences expected for the more prolific offenders.

### **Assessment**

There is no doubt that the Graffiti Partnership have had a significant impact on reducing the far reaching effects of graffiti vandalism in the Bath area.

Visual surveys and information from Bath and North East Somerset Council staff engaged on the project confirm that the quantity and prominence of graffiti is greatly reduced.

There is still graffiti in Bath and the partnership never set itself the aim of completely eradicating it as this would be impossible to achieve.

Quantitative assessment of the scheme has been difficult to achieve.

An initial idea was to gauge the success of the project through the council's tourism office by gauging numbers of visitors. There has in fact been a reduction in the number of visitors to Bath this season

but the major influence in this is believed to be cancellation of visits due to delays in the 'Bath Spa Project'. Although 'graffiti' is believed to have an impact on visitors, other factors such as exchange rates and the weather are believed to have far greater influence.

Police crime figures are of little use. In 2003 there were 47 crimes for criminal damage by graffiti – an increase of 4700% since 2000. The majority of these crimes were drawn as a result of police enquiries and are detected crimes. The 47 crimes in 2003 are of course nowhere near representative of the true damage being done by graffiti.

By far the best quantitative assessment of levels of graffiti in Bath is obtained from the B&NES Action Line which records requests for cleaning of graffiti in the three priority categories.

Priority 1 – City Centre  
Priority 2 – Major Trunk Routes  
Priority 3 – Elsewhere

Extrapolating a graph of these figures indicates the effectiveness of police and council action and landmarks in each activity can clearly be seen at *Annex A*.

January – February 2003;	Peak owing to advertising of free council removal
April – June 2003;	Large reduction in requests for cleaning owing to police success in targeting prolific offenders and speedy removal of graffiti (advertising of council services continuing throughout this period)
December 2003;	Prominent offenders charged in December leading to a decrease in calls in January 2004

Analysis of these figures re-enforces visual survey evidence.

**The partnership is working!**

## **Conclusion**

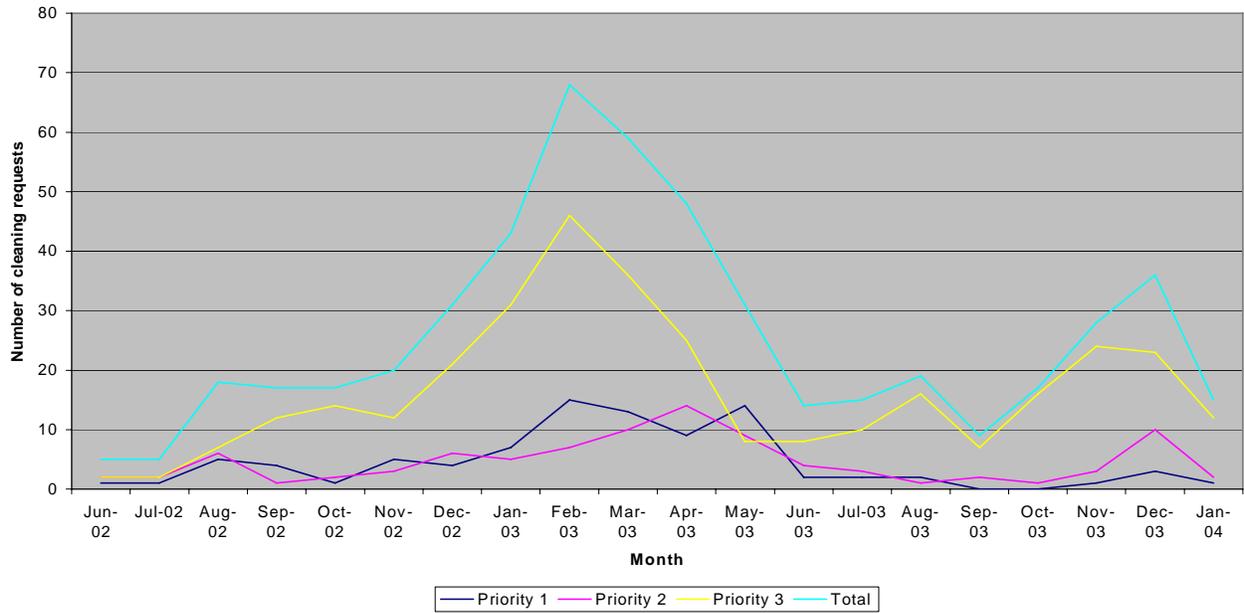
The Bath Graffiti Project is an excellent example of police agencies, public and private sector organisations and the public working together on shared goals to make a difference to the quality of people's lives.

Bath Police are already sharing knowledge gained from the project with other police forces and local authorities.

We acknowledge the expertise and experience provided by the British Transport Police without whom this project could not have been such a success.

Annex A

Graffiti Removal Scheme



Annex C List of Partners and Agreed Actions

<b>Partners</b>	<b>Victim or Resource</b>	<b>Agreed Action</b>
Action Line (B&NES)	Resource	Record calls of graffiti and forward to Cleansing Dept. and police.
Adshel	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their equipment in target area.
W S Atkins	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their property in target area.
Avon and Somerset Constabulary. Bath Police	Resource	1.) Chair Partnership. Record all evidence of graffiti. 2.) Work with education on programme aimed at new generation. 3.) Investigate, detect (where possible) and prosecute offenders.
Avon and Somerset Constabulary. Bath Scientist	Resource	Monitoring and finding statistics plus researching information.
Avon and Somerset Constabulary. Bath Specials	Resource	1.) Identify graffiti sites in areas not covered by neighbourhood watch and send to action line. 2.) Monitor cleaned sites and immediately report re-infestation to action line. 3.) Identify affected private dwellings and inform them of subsidised cleaning offer.
Bath Crime Prevention Panel	Resource	Donated £500 to help fund the project.
British Telecom	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their equipment in target area.
Bath Transport Police	Victim / Resource	1.) Act as liaison for rail companies. 2.) Share information of database and deal with offences in their jurisdiction in Bath.
Community Safety Officer (B&NES)	Resource	1.) Main B&NES representative. 2.) Act as liaison with other council Departments. 3.) Obtain and verify research data and

		<p>act as consultant to whole partnership.</p> <p>4.) Donated £500, from B&amp;NES to help fund the project.</p> <p>5.) Identify possible site of legal wall.</p>
Cleaning Department (B&NES)	Resource	<p>1.) Clean off all council owned properties in target area as given by action line.</p> <p>2.) Clean off private housing at subsidised cost when requested by occupier.</p> <p>3.) Act as consultant to other cleaning agencies with regards to unique properties of Bath Stone.</p>
The Courts	Resource	Award Reparation and compensation when appropriate.
Culverhay Youth Action Group	Resource	Paint over and help clean specific graffiti sites.
Education	Victim / Resource	<p>1.) Clean off graffiti affecting their property.</p> <p>2.) Help identify offenders.</p> <p>3.) Work with police in education programme aimed at new generation.</p>
First Badger Line	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their property.
Local Councillors	Victim / Resource	<p>1.) Represent views and interests of individual victims.</p> <p>2.) Assist with informing residents and other councillors of cleaning action being taken.</p>
Neighbourhood Watch	Victim / Resource	<p>1.) Identify graffiti sites on their area and send to action line.</p> <p>2.) Monitor cleaned sites and immediately report re-infestation to action line.</p> <p>3.) Identify affected private dwellings and inform them of subsidised cleaning offer.</p>
Norwich Union	Resource	Donated £500 to help fund the project.
Probation Service	Resource	Work with Youth Offending Team in providing an appropriate programme of reparation for identified offenders.
Royal Mail	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their equipment in target area.
Southgate Centre representing The Chamber of	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their property in target area.

Commerce		
Tourism	Victim	Measure impact of initiative on tourism in Bath.
Transco	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their property in target area.
Wessex Water	Victim / Resource	Monitor and clean all their equipment in target area.
Western Power Distribution	Victim / Resource	1.) Monitor and clean all their equipment in target area. 2.) Donated £500 to help fund the project.
Youth Development (B&NES)	Resource	1.) Work as liaison between partnership and the main writers, even with a view to inviting a writer to join the partnership. 2.) Help steer writers into seeking a legal wall for their work.
Youth Offending Team	Resource	Work with probation in providing an appropriate programme of reparation for identified offenders by liasing with Cleaning Dept. as to best sites and locations.

*Appendix C*