

Executive Summary

Keep Wales Tidy has examined the local environmental quality issue of graffiti, and has reached the conclusion that the best means of addressing the problem is to adopt Rapid Removal schemes, along with enforcement and detection.

Our policy on graffiti is 'Rapid removal schemes should be adopted and maintained in order to reduce defacement caused by graffiti and remove the notoriety sought by graffiti writers through the exposure of their work. This coupled with Law Enforcement and Detection, particularly reward schemes, are the most effective methods for reducing graffiti on our streets.'

Graffiti affects 8.9% of streets surveyed in Wales, and costs local authorities thousands of pounds each year in removal and repair. Keep Wales Tidy estimates the cost of removing graffiti in Wales to be approximately £1million per year. It also impacts on people's perceptions of an area, and can lead to a decrease in investment.

The theory behind Rapid Removal initiatives is that the graffiti writer is motivated and rewarded by seeing their work displayed. In order to remove the

reward, graffiti needs to be removed or covered before it gets a high audience. Rapid Removal techniques have been successful in reducing incidents of graffiti, however the initiative has to be maintained, because when removal stops, incidents of graffiti are likely to increase.

Reward schemes have also proved successful. Southwark Council for example has seen a significant reduction in the amount of graffiti on their streets since the introduction of a reward scheme in 2003. The success of the Southwark scheme has resulted in its expansion to London, Liverpool and Manchester. Keep Wales Tidy suggest that local authorities in Wales should consider such a scheme.

Introduction

It may be art to some, but graffiti affects 8.9% of streets in Wales¹ making our streets look unkempt, putting off businesses and visitors and heightening the fear of crime². There is evidence that people's fear of crime is influenced by their impression of the area, it is believed that graffiti indicates that an area is unsafe, and is therefore likely to attract other types of crime³. Spaces that are run down because of vandalism, litter and graffiti can make people feel threatened and vulnerable.

Grffiti is part of a range of Local Environmental Quality issues that have an impact on people's quality of life. This document sets out Keep Wales Tidy's policy options on the problem of graffiti.

Background

The term graffiti originates from the Greek word *graphein* and means to scratch a message into another medium. The roots of graffiti originate in stone-age times when people carved messages into stones and walls, this type of art can be found in caves and on walls around the world. Cave paintings in Australia, the Americas and Africa go back 10,000 to 30,000 years. Graffiti writers today still use walls to paint on but their tools have changed, carving

into stones has been replaced by aerosol cans and marker pens.

Grffiti can be as varied as graffiti writers. There are many different types of graffiti, including the following:-

Tagging: perhaps the most common form of graffiti. Artists have their own 'signs' or 'tags' which identify them and are often written extensively, to mark out their territory⁴.

Pieces: these are the larger pictures more typically associated with graffiti, they usually contain large complex lettering. Generally it is considered that a painting must have three colours or more to be considered a piece⁴.

Glass Etching or Dutch Graffiti: this is when a sharp object, such as a stone or bottle top is used to scratch or etch into a surface⁴.

Writing Slogans: these are sprayed onto large blank surfaces and are often meant to be offensive. They may be racist, sexist or political⁴.

In Keep Wales Tidy's experience tagging comprises approximately 75% of all graffiti on our streets, with some pieces, slogans and glass etching.

It is generally young people who are associated with graffiti, the majority carried out by males aged between 11 and 16, however many writers carry on into their

30's creating more elaborate pieces³. Public transport is a popular target for graffiti, particularly tagging. On trains the peak time of year for graffiti is during the Easter and summer holidays. It holds the double attraction to graffiti writers of having the potential of a large audience, and also involves working in a dangerous environment, thus raising their status amongst peers⁵. The peak of problems for bus operators however, comes in September when school resumes.

Cohen's typology of Vandalism states that: children responding to *boredom* or *marking their territory* cause the majority of graffiti. Some graffiti however, is intended to intimidate, this may be used by gangs or young adults in order to stake a claim on an area. Cohen's typology also mentions those that use graffiti as a *protest* against a regime or authority, rather than a crime the graffiti is then seen as an expression. Finally, there is graffiti as an *art form*⁵.

The Problem

The problem of graffiti goes much further than the costs involved in both cleaning up graffiti, and repairing any damage incurred whilst removal takes place. Even after removal processes have been carried out, staining may remain on the surface. The type of surface on which graffiti appears

will have an effect on how easily it can be removed. If the material is porous then the graffiti will penetrate deep into the stone, making it almost impossible to remove the 'ghost staining' of the graffiti, even with repeat cleaning of the surface. This is especially a problem on historic buildings and monuments where the masonry can be fragile⁷.

Welsh Authorities spend thousands of pounds every year removing graffiti. A Keep Wales Tidy estimate puts the figure spent in the public sector at approximately £365,000 (see appendix 1)⁶. We assume that a similar figure is also being spent on graffiti removal in the private sector, so the total realized cost to Wales is more than £1 million per year.

Perhaps the most worrying problem created by graffiti is the way in which it affects people's perception of the area. Graffiti can make people feel threatened and vulnerable, especially when the graffiti is of a racist, sexist or homophobic nature. The broken window theory, developed in America, suggests that if a broken window is not repaired, other windows will soon be broken in response to the message that no one cares. It is argued that this creates a perception that crime is on the increase, as a result people become less likely to use the area. With fewer people using the location

there is less deterrence to crime, and therefore the perception of rising crime becomes a reality. An anti-graffiti campaign in Malmo, Sweden applies the 'broken window' theory specifically to graffiti with the conclusion that:

*'Illegal graffiti is the visual impression of an uncaring and indifferent society, where small crimes can lead to bigger crimes. Without exception, failure to identify the whole problem accurately and take a proactive approach in the early stages encourages illegal graffiti to continue to escalate until resources or the cost of effective control is beyond the means of many administrations'*⁸

Research shows that young people have little understanding of the impact of graffiti on others or the cost of cleaning and repair⁵. There are many reasons why people choose to graffiti. One reason is that offenders get pleasure out of completing a 'piece' without getting caught, and then from the permanence of their work. This initial 'piece' or 'tag' often leads to other offenders being attracted to the area, and what started as one 'piece' ends up being a wall covered with graffiti. Young people often choose to graffiti in order to mark their territory, but this can take on a more sinister form when gangs use it to

stake out a claim on an area and intimidate local communities and potential rivals.

A Keep Wales Tidy public opinion survey carried out in the Summer of 2003 showed graffiti as the seventh worst local environmental quality factor in Wales out of fourteen options⁹. Recent surveys carried out by Keep Wales Tidy showed that out of 736 streets surveyed in several local authorities 8.9% showed evidence of graffiti, with a 19% presence on the streets of one urban authority¹. When asked whether they felt that graffiti was a problem in Cardiff, 64% of respondents felt that it was a major problem in the authority¹⁰.

Grffiti has a huge impact on people's perception of a place, and has the potential to affect Wales' image as a holiday destination. By decreasing the amount of graffiti, particularly along the transport routes entering our towns and cities, we can encourage more visitors to the area, who support our largest industry. In 2002, Adshel removed 66,000 pieces of graffiti and flyposting from its shelters in the UK. In Cardiff alone, Adshel spends £100,000 every year in maintaining and repairing shelters⁵. People feel that graffiti lowers the tone of an area, not only making it less attractive to tourists but also to new businesses. If people feel afraid in an area they may close businesses and move away,

which increases the sense of dereliction and contributes to the downward spiral¹¹.

Options for Improvement

Several options have been piloted in an attempt to reduce the amount of graffiti on streets and transport systems.

1. Situational Crime Prevention

Situational crime prevention measures are designed to reduce the opportunities for incidents to take place and reduce any gains or rewards.

Rapid Removal has been adopted by Flintshire County Council in partnership with the police, probation, victim support and neighbourhood watch. The graffiti busting team was established in 2004 with the aim of tackling the graffiti problem in the county. Neighbourhood Wardens were employed to gather information on graffiti incidents, these then get reported to the graffiti busting team who clean every incident as soon as possible. The scheme was widely publicised across the county and members of the public were encouraged to report graffiti incidents to the neighbourhood wardens. Two graffiti removal teams were employed, the first use the graffiti busting machine and the second use paint to cover graffiti on softer materials such as wood. Hotspots for

graffiti are identified and an anti graffiti coating is painted onto the surface, any graffiti written on this surface gets washed off during the next period of rain.

Flintshire Graffiti busting team cleared 187 graffiti incidents over a period of 12 months, 17 of which were of a racist nature and up to 40 incidents were sexist graffiti¹². The cost of graffiti removal in Flintshire is approximately £18,000 per year¹². The graffiti busting team are getting on top of the problem and it is felt that the scheme is working.

Rapid Removal has also been adopted by New York City, who have set up the 'City Transport Company and the Anti-Graffiti Task Force'. The task force was set up in response to a strong public perception that the subway was unsafe, and as a result saw a decline in the numbers of people using the system. The problem of graffiti twenty years ago on the New York underground was such that passengers recall being unable to see out of the windows. Today the system is virtually clear from painted graffiti.

The initiative was set up in 1984. Staff were assigned to the terminals and yards to start cleaning the rolling stock. Those cars that had stainless steel exteriors were cleaned completely, and those that were painted were given a fresh coat. Any new 'hit' was

cleaned immediately, or if this was not possible then it was painted over or a line put through it. The initiative worked on a line by line basis and by 1989 the whole subway system was free from graffiti.

The theory behind such an initiative is that the graffiti writer is motivated and rewarded by seeing their work displayed. In order to remove the reward, and hence the motivation, it is important to remove or cover any graffiti before it gets an audience. Staff patrol and monitor each vehicle after its trip down the line. Cleaners keep a note of new attacks and these get reported to the police. Investment to tackle graffiti has to be long term. If it is cut back when the graffiti has been removed the problem can return. The London Underground Graffiti Unit for example, was first set up in 1992 in response to major problems from graffiti on the underground system during the early 1990's⁵. The unit was disbanded in 1996 because problems of graffiti had significantly declined. However, the unit was re-established in 1997 due to the rapid increase in the volume of graffiti, because the unit had lost the ability to keep on top of the problem⁵.

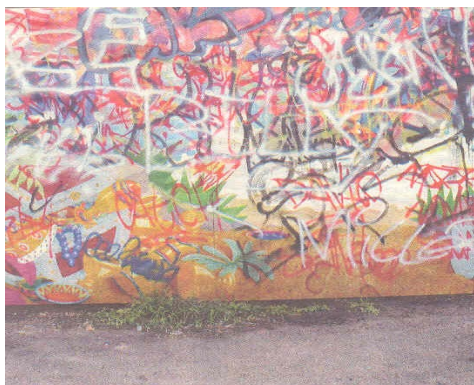
Rapid Removal is considered to be the most effective means of curbing graffiti. It is also in the interest of private property

owners to clean graffiti rapidly, helping them avoid the 'broken window theory' from becoming a reality. However, the increase in internet usage to display photographs of graffiti can mean that graffiti writers are less concerned if their work gets removed quickly, as they can still get the desired recognition from photographic records on the Internet.⁵

2. Criminality Prevention

This method has been tried at Utrecht in the Netherlands, where the presence of graffiti was making both residents and visitors feel unsafe, and was seen as a sign of the area becoming rundown. The project known as the Hall of Fame was launched in March 1999 for a year trial period. It was developed in response to recommendations made in a study by Duijjs and Ermers¹³. The paper recommended that in addition to enforcement measures introduced in 1996, there should also be a preventative approach. The aim of this preventative approach was to prevent illegal graffiti, by offering a location where people were allowed to paint. It was hoped that by making people feel comfortable with an area containing graffiti, that this would make the public feel more secure in other environments where graffiti writers had been at work. Since the project launch the number of graffiti pieces in the inner city has declined. A survey was carried out with

people living close to the area, and regular users. Most respondents said they felt safe when using the location and did not feel threatened by the presence of the graffiti. On the whole it is felt that the Hall of Fame has been a success, however graffiti has spread from the designated wall to surrounding areas, and many graffiti writers feel the need to carry out illegal 'pieces' in order to get their 'thrill'¹³.



Photograph: Western Mail – Feb 06

A similar initiative has been carried out in London where young people have been involved in setting up an urban art project with the help of The Youth Awareness Programme (YAP). It was identified that young people graffiti because they want their voice to be heard in the wider community. Engaging the young people in artwork allows them to express themselves, giving a solution to the problem. The first area targeted was a 'kick about' area in Hayes that had problems with racist and sexist graffiti. The area was cleared up and the young people were involved in the painting and artwork. The initiative proved to be a great success

and as a result similar projects have been set up across the borough. Previous initiatives focussed on removing the graffiti, but this had little effect. The YAP project has proved successful in creating a pleasant and less threatening pedestrian environment¹³.

There are attractions for young people in having access to a legal graffiti site. For some young people, the attraction of working somewhere that is permitted is that they can produce a good quality 'piece' that will not be cleaned and removed. There are many contrasting views with regard to providing 'legal' graffiti sites. Those responsible for law enforcement and public transport providers argue that providing these sites encourages graffiti and misuse elsewhere. Those working with young people identify the provision of 'legal' sites as a constructive diversionary activity and contributing to the quality of the urban landscape¹³. Police authorities have seen legal graffiti projects as a perfect opportunity for intelligence gathering, in the hope that individual graffiti writers might be attracted to such projects and captured. Projects that do co-operate with the police can sometimes develop a reputation, and a confrontational situation can develop¹¹.

3. Law Enforcement and Detection.

Cleaning and repairing graffiti and vandalism on the London Underground network costs between £2.5 and £3 million a year. The London Underground Graffiti Unit works with an approach that is based on recognition and good intelligence as the key to apprehending offenders. The team use computer software to register tags and pieces onto a database. The data allows the team to identify persistent offenders and graffiti hotspots. On the basis of this information the graffiti unit can then target specific locations and perpetrators. The unit can then present the court with evidence of all the perpetrators' other offences through tags and pieces. The advantage of having a dedicated team is that they are able to collect a volume of information regarding an individual's crimes, whereas the police are more likely to have evidence specific only to the offence for which the person was apprehended. On this basis the perpetrator may only be given a caution or small fine, although he or she may have been responsible for many more incidents¹³. A similar initiative has been set up in the Vale of Glamorgan. Barry police station has set up a database to store information relating to graffiti offences. As a direct result of the information stored on the database Barry police were able to take into custody two prolific graffiti writers from

the area. The police also approached local schools for assistance in investigating suspect offenders' text books. Press releases also took place in an attempt to resolve graffiti problems in Cowbridge. Probation and Youth Offending Teams were involved in removing graffiti from areas with a high levels of anti social behaviour¹⁴.



During 2003 Southwark Local Borough Council pioneered a poster campaign called 'Shop a tagger', where a £500 reward was offered for information that led to a conviction. When the council put up their posters and adverts in the local newspaper there was a dramatic reduction in the level of graffiti in the area. The scheme worked because:

there is no point putting a tag up if nobody knows whom it belongs to

the more prolific a tagger the more people get to know who the tag belongs to by word of mouth,

the less people know the tagger personally the more likely they are to report them to the authorities.

The success of the scheme resulted in the initiative being run in London, Liverpool and Manchester with considerable success¹⁵.

Approaches that focus solely on enforcement to control offenders have little effect on the amount of graffiti. It is very difficult to apprehend offenders because graffiti is not routinely reported to the police and it is difficult to catch offenders in the act. Schemes like that mentioned above which concentrate on prolific offenders are likely to achieve greater success, because once you have identified a writer's tag it is much easier to apprehend and prosecute that offender¹⁶.

4. Increasing the Difficulty of Offending

Graffiti offenders can be curbed by the use of vandal proof surfaces in target areas.

Anti graffiti coverings make surfaces easier to clean, difficult to write on and sometimes a combination of the two. Paint like products such as polyurethane based coatings are resistant to graffiti and easy to clean. Such products are suitable for use on steel, concrete and brickwork¹⁶. St David's Shopping Centre, Cardiff has adopted this anti graffiti covering approach. Structural columns around the outside of the building are frequently the target of graffiti writers. As a response to the problem St David's Centre has had all columns coated with a paint like product which makes graffiti removal easier, which has controlled the problem. A drawback of this method is the costs involved. St David's Shopping Centre spent approximately £35,000 on coating their external columns. However, as the Operations Manager at the shopping centre stated 'it is all relative, if the shopping centre looks clean and attractive, then more shoppers are going to choose to shop in the centre'¹⁷.

The 2003 Anti Social Behaviour Act, Section 54 as amended by the 2005 Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act, allows local authorities to impose a ban on the sale of spray paints to under 18's, with the aim of reducing criminal damage caused by graffiti writers. This act aims to make it more difficult for young people to commit the offence of graffiti writing¹⁸.

Conclusions

Graffiti causes many problems including:

- cost of removal and repair of damage,
- the way in which it affects tourists' perception of an area and
- the impact perceptions can have on local businesses and residents.

It is clear that people feel that graffiti lowers the tone of an area, making it less attractive to new businesses, causing some existing businesses to close and reducing tourism to the area. The costs of removal represent money lost to investment in local services and infrastructure ¹¹.

Several solutions have been tried at various sites in various countries, none of

which has solved the problem of graffiti, however the Rapid Removal approach appears to have been the most successful in reducing the problem. Law Enforcement and Detection has also had a positive impact on reducing graffiti, particularly the reward scheme 'shop a tagger' pioneered by Southwark Local Borough Council.

Keep Wales Tidy's policy on graffiti is 'Rapid removal schemes should be adopted and maintained in order to reduce defacement caused by graffiti and remove the notoriety sought by graffiti writers through the exposure of their work. This coupled with Law Enforcement and Detection, particularly reward schemes, are the most effective methods for reducing graffiti on our streets.'

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Appendix 1

Cardiff County Council – approx spend £70,000 on graffiti removal plus other street cleansing which requires a high pressure jet wash – Cardiff council estimate that they spend approximately £50,000 per annum on graffiti removal (large authority)

Flintshire County Council - £18,000 (medium sized authority)

Merthyr Tydfil -approx spend - £1,616 per annum (small authority) based on following figures:

Oct 05 spending = £237.50

March 05 spending = £378

Grain Busting Machine = £15,000 (about 10 yrs ago).

If we include the cost of inflation on the machine and assuming it will last 20 years can estimate that the authority spend £1,616 on graffiti removal.

On this basis we grouped the other 19 authorities into large, medium and small authorities based on population. Authorities have been grouped as follows:

- Authorities with a population greater than 150,000. We estimated that such authorities would spend between £20,000 and £50,000 and averaged this at £35,000 for each of the 4 other authorities placed in this category.
- Authorities with a population between 90,000 and 150,000. We estimated that medium sized authorities would spend between £5,000 and £20,000 and averaged this at £13,000 for each of the 11 other authorities placed in this category.
- Authorities with a population of up to 90,000. We estimated that smaller local authorities would spend between £1,000 and £5,000 and averaged this at £3,000 for the remaining 4 authorities.

On this basis we can assume that Local Authorities in Wales spend approximately £365,000 on graffiti removal per annum.

Quotes

THE war against graffiti in South Lanarkshire is being won.

South Lanarkshire Council said complaints from the public have dropped by 40% since it introduced a zero-tolerance campaign earlier this year.

Senior councillor Gerry Convery said: "This clearly demonstrates that the integrated approach being taken to remove graffiti and repaint is significantly decreasing the incidence of graffiti vandalism."

A specialist team of 12 tackles the problem with the help of funding from the Scottish Executive.

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<http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/hi/news/5020381.html>

had the suspicion that if it could

'be produced without disruption or interruption, then other undesirable events could also take place without attracting attention'.

<http://www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Research/Vandalismgraffitienvironmental.pdf>

For Fun/Play

Young people also identify graffiti as a commonly accepted way of communicating with their peers:

"just writing your name isn't really graffiti...all it is, is having a pen and letting people know where you are and where you've been"[girl in Newcastle]

"it's fun, one person gets a pen and writes everyone's name up there...sometimes they don't even write their own!" [a young woman in Edinburgh]

the perpetrator's exposure to the risks of working in a dangerous environment has become increasingly important in raising his or her status with their peers:

'gaining respect among fellow artists, whether you know them or not, involves having your own style and taking lots of risks. Street bombers or train bombers generally get their respect because these writers are taking risks and using their skills in high pressure situations. You won't get any respect from writers if all you do is paint in legal graffiti parks'

Graffiti writers have also highlighted the attraction of trains for their activities:

'in New York, we started on walls but then someone found that if you write your tag on a train, it will be transported through the city, back and forth every day and meanwhile thousands of people will see it. After that, the tags developed into large pieces or graffiti paintings to be transported across the city' [Stockholm Graffiti magazine]