

To: Scrutiny Committee

Date: 27 March 2017

Report of: Head of Community Services

Title of Report: Graffiti prevention

Summary

Purpose of report: To update the Scrutiny Committee on activities aimed at preventing graffiti in the city.

Key Decision: No

Executive lead member: Cllr Dee Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety

Report author: Alison Cassidy, Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Team - Case Manager

Background

1. The Scrutiny Committee requested a report to update them on activities aimed at preventing graffiti in the city. Doug Loveridge the Street Scene Service Manager presented a report on graffiti removal to the Scrutiny Committee in April 2016; a reactive report on graffiti. The current report presents a proactive approach to preventing unwanted graffiti.
2. Graffiti appears in different forms; tagging (where a person has an identifiable signature), defacement and street art. Graffiti can be identified as criminal damage when it is unwanted; however it is extremely difficult for the police to prosecute a tagger as they have to be caught in the act. The police and ASBIT attempted to tackle the problem using civil remedies. Three taggers were issued with Community Protection Notices in 2015, but again a breach could only be actioned if they are witnessed. It was clear that a different approach was needed and ASBIT looked to other areas, in particular Bristol, which has a long history of intervention, to bring back good practice. Bristol are hosting their 7th street art festival, Upfest, this July. It is attended by over 300 street artists from all over the world and attracts 35,000 visitors. Tagging has not been eradicated in Bristol

however it has significantly reduced. Its street art is world renowned.

3. ASBIT organised an Appreciative Inquiry to ask the public, stakeholders, taggers and street artists how they could collectively tackle unwanted graffiti. The event in November 2015 was attended by over 70 people including Jack Ritchens from the Oxford Wheels project. He works with the young people who were involved with Meadow Lane free wall site. The attending street artists put forward a convincing argument to having a free wall site which would enable them to demonstrate their form of art within a controlled environment. They in turn would be able to self-police within their community to reduce unwanted tags on buildings and properties.
4. The outcome of the event was to provide a free wall space for the street artists. A disused toilet block in South Park was identified in January 2016. It continues to be well used by street artists.
5. In 2016 Tesco awarded a £8K grant for artwork in North Oxford at Elizabeth Jennings and Frenchay Road Bridge. An artist was commissioned to paint murals. Once the artwork was completed it was then treated with a graffiti resistant varnish. It has not been targeted and it is unlikely for an art piece to be vandalised with tagging.

Update

6. In the past year there have been some incidents of washable paint on trees in South Park and is believed to be connected to a public event. In addition a bus stop near the site has been targeted; the bus company have been made aware. In reality a free wall site will not prevent all graffiti however the free wall has been utilised and to good effect. The street artists say there are very few places for them to demonstrate their art form. They would like to use the underpasses which are currently being vandalised, for example under Donnington Bridge, BMW underpass and the Rose Hill/Littlemore underpass.

Current Proposals

7. The Murco garage closed in November 2016 and a temporary wooden wall was erected around the site. It had not been targeted by taggers until the 4th March. A working party is being established to consider the Murco site as a potential, temporary, free wall. It is anticipated another Appreciative Inquiry will be held with invites to stakeholders, taggers, street artists, Councillors and schools. St Gregory the Great and Oxford Academy have both shown interest in being part of the project. Councillors Simm and Henwood have also given their support towards a street art project at this site. It is expected that there will be an eclectic mix of art on the wall which has relevance to Cowley and its residents.
8. The Community Centre in Barton presents as worn and unwelcoming. Lauren Parker, Great Estate Project Surveyor, is meeting with ASBIT to discuss a street art project. The meeting will discuss how members of the community, including the young people, can be involved in deciding what will be created. The underpasses in Barton will also be discussed as potential free walls for street art.

9. Polly Smart, Graffiti Removal Supervisor, is supportive of additional free wall space around the city. She attended the original Appreciative Inquiry and has been involved in working with ASBIT throughout the project. She has also agreed to be involved in the Murco Garage site project.
10. Andrew Manson a local street artist who sells his art work in the Town Hall has been a huge supporter of free wall space. He has been instrumental in the success of South Parks free wall space and was commissioned to provide an art piece for the Common People Festival. He is currently working out of West Oxford Community Centre and has worked with Mathew Arnold School to produce art work at the front of West Oxford Community Centre. The funding from this came from Councillor Pressel. Andrew is applying for funding from Oxford City Culture Fund in order to complete a piece of art to support the Cowley Road Carnival. He is eager to be involved in extending the free wall space in Oxford and is the main contact ASBIT have with local graffiti/street artists.
11. Oxford City is not without street art. Excellent examples of can be viewed on Cowley Road, Stockmore Street, Marston Street and in the side roads. It can be said that this has added to the vibrancy and diversity of the area for example local school children from Oxford Academy have recently completed a street art tour with Youth Ambition.
12. ASBIT are looking at existing structures for further free wall sites. We would also consider temporary structures such as hoardings, for example local school children have designed and painted a hoarding erected outside West Oxford Community Centre. Once free wall spaces are available the artwork will follow. The police will be informed of any further free wall sites and continue to work in partnership with ASBIT. They are fully supportive of the new way of tackling unwanted graffiti.
13. It is proposed for appropriate spaces to be made available and to be used freely by professional artists, graffiti writers, beginners, charity teams, arts and schools projects. ASBIT will continue to monitor the success of the free wall sites to ensure they do not encourage further unwanted tagging.



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List of background papers: None