

## Community Impact Statement - Graffiti

### Background

- Graffiti is defined as 'Any informal or illegal marks, drawings or paintings that have been deliberately made by a person or persons on any physical element comprising the outdoor environment, with a view to communicating some message or symbol etc, to others.'<sup>1</sup>
- Materials commonly used to create graffiti include pens and spray paints, while etching involves scratching into glass, plastic or paint using sharp implements or using chemicals to burn or dissolve a surface.
- Creating graffiti is an act of criminal damage under Section 1 of the Criminal Damage Act 1971.<sup>2</sup>
- Blank walls, street furniture, lampposts, telephone boxes, bus shelters, road signs, monuments, bridges and railway property are all common targets for graffiti.
- Local authorities are responsible for removing graffiti from public property. However, for any cases on private property, the burden and cost of cleaning the problem falls to the owners.

### Scale and cost of the problem

- Street cleanliness surveys undertaken by Keep Wales Tidy showed that graffiti was present on an average of 4.6% of streets across Wales in 2018-19.<sup>3</sup> This ranges from small pen scribbles, tags and etching to extensive examples which are clearly visible and obtrusive. However, it does not include community art murals.\*
- It has been reported that acts of criminal damage - ranging from vandalism and graffiti to arson - happens somewhere in Wales every seven-and-a-half minutes on average.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2015, the Guardian reported that removing graffiti cost the UK £1 billion per year.<sup>5</sup>
- Graffiti is one of the most common forms of vandalism with business premises.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2007). *Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse and Associated Guidance 2007*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> Moss, C and Jones, H. (2019). *HOW CLEAN ARE OUR STREETS? All Wales Local Environmental Audit and Management System Report 2018-19*. Available: <https://kwt.eu.rit.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=25600629-fd94-4f62-9d8c-f6579a0da8e0>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

<sup>4</sup> Wales Online. (2004). *Vandalism costs Wales millions*. Available: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/vandalism-costs-wales-millions-2435107>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

<sup>5</sup> Cathcart-Keays, A. (2015). *Is urban graffiti a force for good or evil?* Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jan/07/urban-graffiti-force-good-evil>. Last accessed 15-10-20.

<sup>6</sup> Business Wales. (2020). *Vandalism*. Available: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/business-crime/tackling-crime/property-crimes/vandalism>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

## Problems with removing graffiti

- Removing graffiti presents a number of challenges:<sup>7,8</sup>
  - Painting over the graffiti can be the simplest solution but can take many coats if the graffiti has been applied in dark or bright colours.
  - Paint removal often involves using harsh chemicals.
  - Thinners can just spread the graffiti which makes the problem look worse or can react with plastic leaving a cloudy appearance which cannot be rectified.
  - Unpainted porous surfaces tend to absorb solvent-based spray paints meaning that they often require pressure washing.
  - Cleaning graffiti from brickwork is particularly difficult and time consuming.
  - Surfaces such as pointing or mortar can be damaged during the process, which leads to further problems needing repair.
  - When the graffiti is engrained into the surface, sandblasting may be required.

## Impacts on the local community

- In a 2010 survey to the Welsh public, 51% of people said that graffiti had a negative impact on the look and feel of an area, while 19% of said they regularly saw graffiti in their local area.<sup>9</sup>
- Graffiti has been referred to as *'visual pollution'*.<sup>10</sup> According to a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, neighbourhoods with environmental problems like graffiti are *'...depressing, both emotionally and because extensive problems depress levels of care, as well as standards and expectations'*.<sup>11</sup>
- The local community can feel especially threatened by offensive or racist graffiti. It is recommended that graffiti of this nature is prioritised for removal within 24 hours.<sup>12</sup>
- Graffiti is an example of a Signal Crime - *'a criminal incident that causes change in the public's behaviour and/or beliefs about their security.'*<sup>13</sup> This means that graffiti can increase the fear of crime, making people feel unsafe in their communities. There have been concerns for instance,

<sup>7</sup> The Real Cleaning Co. (n.d.). *How to remove graffiti*. Available: <https://www.realcleaning.co.uk/blog/how-to-remove-graffiti/>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

<sup>8</sup> ECMS. (2018). *How to Remove Graffiti from Various Surfaces Correctly*. Available: <https://www.ecms-ltd.co.uk/how-to-remove-graffiti-from-various-surfaces-correctly/>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

<sup>9</sup> Beaufort Research (2010). *Litter in Wales: Understanding Littering and Litterers*. (Unpublished).

<sup>10</sup> Vanderveen, G. and Van Eijk, G. (2016). Criminal but Beautiful: A Study on Graffiti and the Role of Value Judgments and Context in Perceiving Disorder. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*. 22 (1), p107-125.

<sup>11</sup> Hastings et al. (2005) *Cleaning Up Neighbourhoods: Environmental Problems and Service Provision in Deprived Areas*.

<sup>12</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2007). *Op cit*.

<sup>13</sup> Cardiff University. (n.d.). *Crime and Security Research Institute*. Available: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/crime-security-research-institute/publications/research-briefings/the-signal-crimes-perspective>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

that bus stop sites severely covered with graffiti within Bridgend county have discouraging local residents from using the local bus services and damaging the service's image.<sup>14</sup>

## Wider impacts

- The cost of graffiti is far more wide reaching than that of removing it.
  - Repairing the damage caused by a spray painter who tagged stations and trains in Cardiff and Bridgend during autumn 2019 cost £6,700 and meant that the train had to be taken out of service to be cleansed.<sup>15</sup>
  - A study looking into the health impacts caused by cleaning agents used to remove graffiti revealed tiredness, headaches and symptoms affecting airways, eyes and skin in the graffiti removers compared to the population controls.<sup>16</sup>
  - Three graffiti taggers were killed by a train in south London in June 2018.<sup>17</sup>
- The Broken Windows Theory suggests that disorder and crime are linked in a developmental sequence. This is illustrated by means of the presence of a broken window: *'...if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken...serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behaviour goes unchecked'*.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, since the presence of graffiti make an area look neglected, it can attract other anti-social behaviour, leading to other crimes such as fly-tipping. Research has shown, for example, that more than double the amount of people littered in an area covered with graffiti tagging, compared with when the area was free of graffiti.<sup>19</sup>
- Research shows that crimes like graffiti have a *'significant negative impact'* on house prices.<sup>20</sup>
- Graffiti is a blight to our communities and has the potential to affect Wales' image as an attractive holiday destination.

<sup>14</sup> Bridgend County Borough Council. (2003). *Local Area Bus Strategy*. Available:

[https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/media/4096/local\\_area\\_bus\\_strategy\\_labs\\_2003.pdf](https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/media/4096/local_area_bus_strategy_labs_2003.pdf). Last accessed 13-10-20.

<sup>15</sup> Hughes, M. (2020). *Vandal caused thousands of pounds worth of damage to trains and railway stations*. Available:

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/vandal-caused-thousands-pounds-worth-17707092>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

<sup>16</sup> Langworth, S. et al. (2001). Acute health effects common during graffiti removal. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*. 74 (3), 213-8.

<sup>17</sup> BBC. (2018). *Railway graffiti: Props, respect and death*. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-44523953>. Last accessed 13-10-20.

<sup>18</sup> Kelling, G. and Wilson, J. (1982). *Broken Windows The police and neighborhood safety*. Available:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/304465/>. Last accessed 14-10-20.

<sup>19</sup> The Economist. (2008). *Can the can*. Available: <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2008/11/20/can-the-can>. Last accessed 14-10-20.

<sup>20</sup> BBC. (2004). *House prices boosted by low crime*. Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4085769.stm>. Last accessed 14-10-20.

\* **Note:** A distinction should be made between general graffiti (which is the focus of this document) and street art. Community art murals and other street art (Banksy being a notable example) has been shown to bring benefits to the local community, including building community engagement, developing urban regeneration, increasing house prices and attracting visitors.<sup>21, 22, 23, 24</sup>

Jones, H. Keep Wales Tidy, October 2020.

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<sup>21</sup> URBACT. (n.d.). *Street art murals for urban renewal*. Available: <https://urbact.eu/street-art-murals-urban-renewal>. Last accessed 16-10-20.

<sup>22</sup> Garlick, H. (2020). *Graffiti for grown-ups: how street art is pushing up house values*. Available: <https://www.ft.com/content/0f2d2e7c-78b4-11ea-bd25-7fd923850377>. Last accessed 16-10-20.

<sup>23</sup> Sorrel, C. (2016). *How Street Art Raises Neighborhood Housing Prices*. Available: <https://www.fastcompany.com/3059595/how-street-art-raises-neighborhood-housing-prices>. Last accessed 16-10-20.

<sup>24</sup> Fyfe, W. (2019). *Banksy artwork in Port Talbot sold for 'six-figure sum'*. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46910294>. Last accessed 16-10-20.