

# Good Graffiti, Bad Graffiti? A New Approach to an Old Problem



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Good Graffiti, Bad Graffiti? A New Approach to an Old Problem.

Written by Dr. Fiona Campbell

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Methodology</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3. Attitudes towards Graffiti</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4. Attitudes towards Reporting Graffiti</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5. Ways to Encourage Reporting</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>6. Current Mechanisms for Tackling Graffiti</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>7. Graffiti Walls</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>8. Conclusions</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>27</b>

# Executive Summary

**Graffiti refers to any marking illegally made on walls and other surfaces. Across most of England, graffiti is not a major problem. However, it is much more common in areas such as cities and where it does occur can act as a drain on local authority resources. Affected areas may also start to feel run down and even threatening, creating a poor impression not only of the place but of the people living there.**

The aim of the research described in this report was to understand the public's attitudes towards graffiti and what would encourage them to report it to their local authorities. It was also used to gather evidence on local authority responses to graffiti including graffiti walls. The report is likely to be of interest to local authorities, housing associations, transport authorities and any other land managers who want to deal with the problem of graffiti as the findings presented here can be used to inform their approach.

Key findings are summarised below.

## **Public Attitudes towards Graffiti**

- People had the same attitude towards graffiti regardless of which group they belonged to (i.e. older family, younger family, young people).
- Some types such as community projects and graffiti art were regarded as legitimate or permissible. Others such as tagging, etching and offensive graffiti were seen as more objectionable.
- Problems such as dog fouling and fly-tipping consistently detract from the quality of local environments. Graffiti, on the other hand, could improve certain urban environments such as disused or derelict land, underpasses and building site sidings, provided it was of good quality.

## **Reporting Graffiti**

- Local authority employees were the most likely to report graffiti, followed by their stakeholders and local businesses. The public were the least likely to report graffiti although parents, older people, young people and people belonging to affluent socio-economic groups were perceived as having a greater vested interest in seeing graffiti removed.
- Graffiti was more likely to be reported if it was low quality (e.g. tagging), racist or offensive; if it was on somebody's property, a respected site in a valued location that people used frequently, or in more affluent or gentrified areas.
- Factors that discouraged reporting included poor perception of a council's performance, the feeling that it would not make any difference and a lack of understanding about what works.
- To encourage members of the public to report graffiti the right reporting mechanism must be in place. It must be quick, easy to use, confidential and free. People also

need to see evidence that reporting makes a difference.

- Anti-graffiti campaigns must be targeted. They should focus on tagging and other low quality forms of graffiti, graffiti on private property and areas that are well-used and valued.

#### **Local Authority Responses to Graffiti**

- Local authorities faced a number of common challenges when cleaning graffiti such as gaining access to the site or obtaining the owner's permission to clean it. Money, however, was not a challenge. Graffiti was regarded as a high priority by councils and the budget was made available to deal with it.
- All local authorities who took part in this research shared a common graffiti policy: zero tolerance, at least for tagging.
- Local authorities' strategy for dealing with graffiti typically included a telephone reporting line, partnership working and achieving a balance between enforcement, removal and prevention.

#### **Graffiti Walls**

- The public were generally in favour of well-managed graffiti walls. Local authorities were more ambivalent as they saw the pragmatic implications of running such schemes. These often did not occur to the public.
- There was mixed evidence about the success of graffiti walls. Some were admired art works or had become important parts of the community. Others preceded a downward spiral in standards, making the graffiti worse and causing other problems.
- Case studies suggested that graffiti walls were more likely to succeed if: the initiative was rooted in the community; the wall was in an area that was patrolled or staffed; respected youth leaders were engaged in the project; there was a tacit contract with local youth groups to manage the wall; and there was a clear understanding regarding the conditions of usage.

Taking all these findings into account, ENCAMS recommends that the first step in a local authorities' strategy to deal with graffiti should be to enable their employees, stakeholders and local businesses to report it. Public campaigns can be run but to maximise their chances of success they should be

targeted on parents, older people, younger people; tagging; private property and locations that are well-used or valued. Graffiti walls should be approached with caution and whether they are used is a matter for local authorities to decide, although this research offers some useful pointers as how to increase their chances of success.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 What is Graffiti?

Graffiti was first observed in Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, although more recent forms emerged from the subways of New York in the 1980s. Since then it has spread across the world, acquiring a culture of its own that includes codes of conduct, values and language<sup>1</sup>.

The term graffiti refers to any “informal or illegal marks, scratchings, carvings, drawings or paintings that have been deliberately made by a person or persons on any physical element comprising public spaces”<sup>2</sup>.

There are a wide variety of forms and styles of graffiti, of which ENCAMS recognises six basic categories<sup>2</sup>.

- **Juvenile** – generally takes the form of “x loves y” type messages or lists of first names. They are usually written with felt-tip or marker pens.
- **Tags** – stylised personal graphic identifiers depicting names or nicknames, which are often large and in bold colours. Tags can be pictorial, drawn free hand or using stencils, and are usually painted with spray cans or drawn with marker pens.
- **Scratches** – marks caused by the deliberate use of a sharp instrument to cut into painted surfaces, wood, plastic, brick etc. However, if these scratches form words, then they should be classified as ‘juvenile’ or ‘tags’ as appropriate.
- **Ghost** – graffiti which has been partially removed or has faded to such an extent that it has lost its initial visual impact.
- **Contentious** – any graffiti which could be offensive to particular members of the general public. This would include any obscene, racist, political or religious graffiti.
- **Stencil** – any graffiti which has been sprayed through a stencil, unless it is deemed that it forms a ‘tag’ (see above).

Almost anything can serve as a medium by which to create graffiti including paint, marker pens, chalk, pencils, knives and other sharp instruments<sup>1</sup>.

Traditionally, it was assumed that graffiti writers came from socially disadvantaged

backgrounds. Available evidence does not, however, support this<sup>3</sup>. The London Assembly Graffiti Investigative Committee established in 2001, found that the economic, social and ethnic background of an individual was largely irrelevant in determining whether they became a graffiti writer. Age, on the other hand, was a more important factor with tagging predominantly carried out by young males aged between 11 and 16 years, with the more advanced pieces created by older writers.

There is no single causal factor where graffiti is concerned, and writers are likely to have highly individualised motivations for undertaking it<sup>3,4</sup>. However, the need to be seen and to achieve respect amongst peers is often central. Other motivations include artistic expression, the influence of popular culture, boredom and bravado.

In short, graffiti is a complex phenomenon. Only by achieving a full understanding of its culture and history; the economic, social and environmental conditions under which it occurs; and public attitudes towards it will any strategy designed to control or eradicate it prove to be successful.

## 1.2 Is Graffiti a Problem?

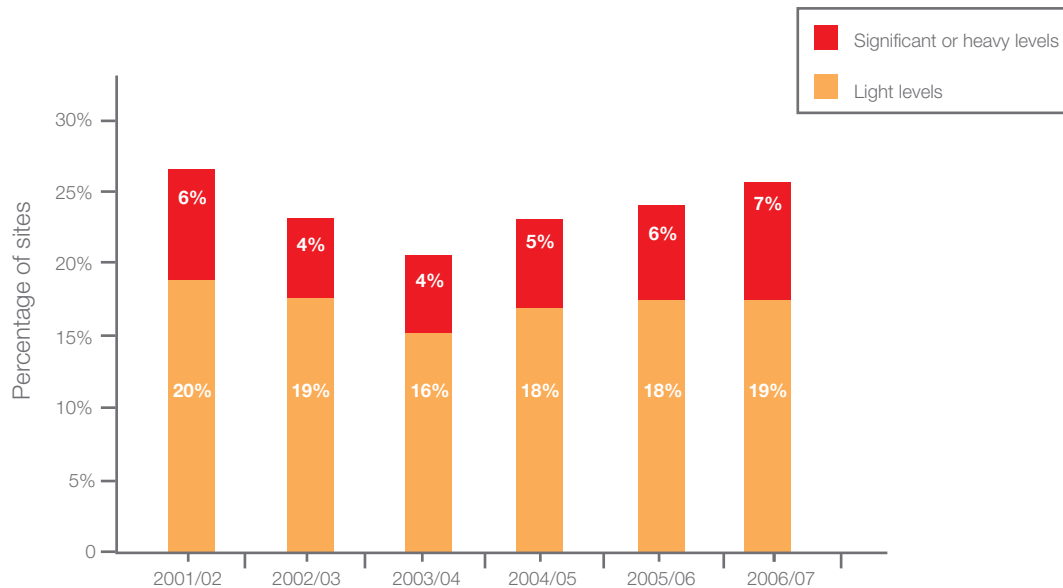
The best source of data on graffiti and the extent of the problem is ENCAMS Local Environmental Quality Survey of England (LEQSE). Commissioned by Defra in 2001, LEQSE is the single most definitive survey of the state of cleanliness in England. It also monitors different types of environmental crime across a range of land uses.

In the most recent survey (2006/07), graffiti was found at 26% of the 19,000 sites surveyed. Most graffiti was light and unlikely to be noticed by people passing through an area. However, there were hotspots where significant levels of graffiti were found. These included back alleys, footbridges and subways (19%); public open spaces (13%); transport interchanges (13%) and secondary retail and commercial areas (10%). Within these areas, graffiti was more likely to be found on walls (10%) and posts and poles (7%).

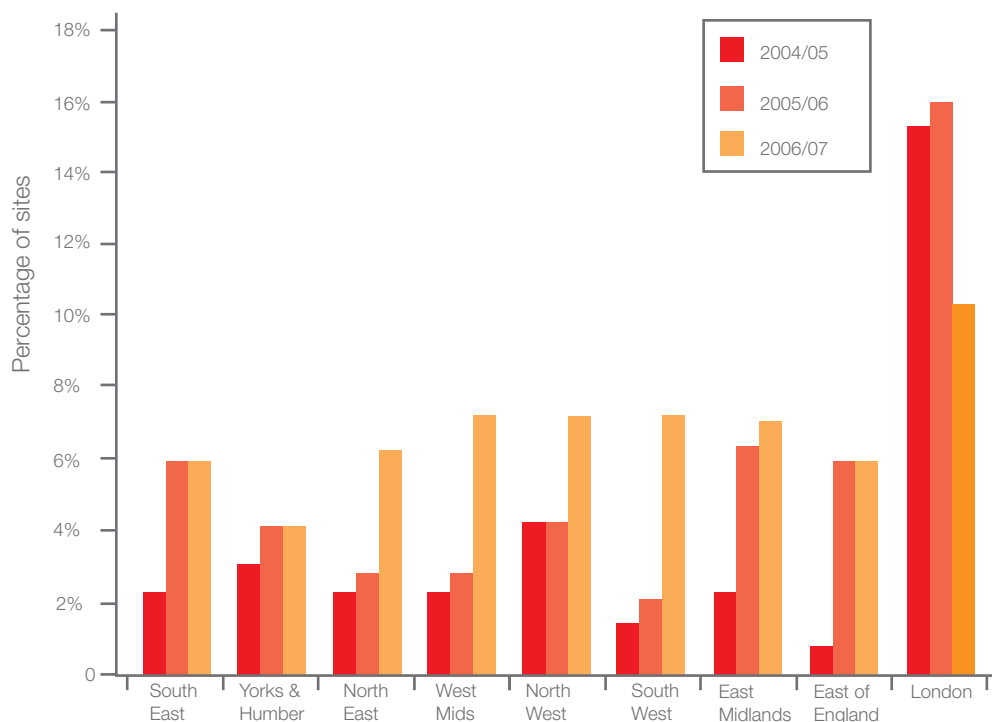
While the percentage of sites affected by graffiti showed a slow but steady decline between 2001 and 2003, between 2004 and 2007 incidence has started to rise again.

Of all nine English regions, London is the most affected by graffiti (significant levels: 10% in London versus 7% for England overall) but in the past year has managed to reverse the trend shown by every other region. Between 2005 and 2007, the percentage of sites affected by significant levels of graffiti in London dropped from 16% to 10%.

### Percentage of Sites with Significant and light Levels of Graffiti



### Regions Affected by Significant Levels of Graffiti



There are several different types of graffiti. It is often assumed that tagging is the biggest source because owing to its size, colour and location it is often the most noticeable. At 31%, it only contributes some of the problem. Furthermore, tags declined as a component of graffiti from 37% to 31% between 2004 and 2007. A much bigger contribution is made by juveniles marking walls and other surfaces to communicate with other individuals and the social groups to which they belong. In 2006/07 this contributed 46% of the graffiti problem<sup>5</sup>.

Data about people affected by graffiti is collected by the English House Condition Survey (EHCS). Commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the EHCS provides an overview of the type and condition of housing in England; the people living there; their views on housing and their neighbourhood. The results of the 2005 EHCS<sup>7</sup> indicated that 2.3 million households (11%) experienced significant problems related to the upkeep, management and misuse of surrounding public and private buildings or space. Problems included graffiti and vandalism, litter and rubbish dumping, unkempt areas, and nuisance and danger from congested car parking. Problems with upkeep were more likely to be experienced by people living in more deprived Neighbourhood Renewal Funded areas (15%), Market Renewal Pathfinder areas (30%), northern regions (14%), city or other urban centres (18%) and homes that don't meet decent standards (15%) than elsewhere (11%).

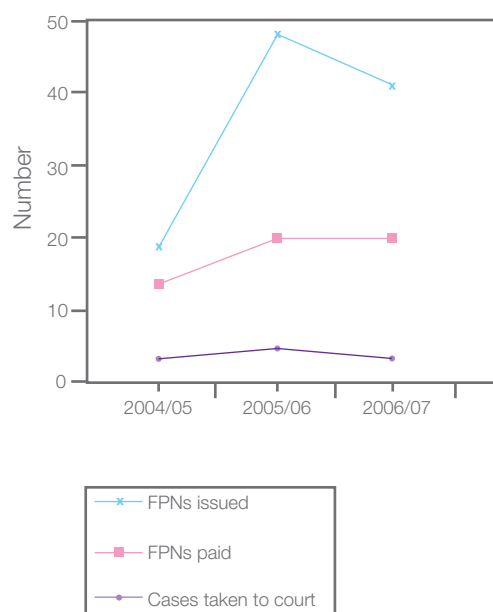
Given these findings, it is not surprising that in surveys to determine public attitudes towards local environmental quality issues, graffiti is consistently rated as a concern. In a survey undertaken by Mori in 2003<sup>8</sup>, graffiti was the third most important issue affecting local residents' quality of life (21%) after litter and rubbish (33%) and dog fouling (27%). It is also something that one in ten homeowners would like to see eradicated by 2025<sup>9</sup> (cf. 56% want to see burglary eradicated, 8% the closure of post offices). Graffiti affects people because it makes their neighbourhoods appear run down and neglected; creating a poor impression not only of the place but the people living there, especially to visitors<sup>9</sup>. Many people also

believe that graffiti indicates an area is unsafe and may attract other types of environmental crime such as litter and abandoned vehicles<sup>3</sup>.

Dealing with graffiti commands a considerable amount of local authority resources – both time and money. In a survey undertaken by ENCAMS, local authorities were asked about their response to a range of local environmental quality issues during the period April 2002 to March 2003<sup>6</sup>. Of those that responded, 89% indicated that graffiti was a problem: either a major (20%) or a minor (69%) one. Just under half had a hotline to report graffiti (46%); staff/team to deal with the problem (47%); an agreed response time for non-offensive graffiti (39%), or had undertaken action to tackle graffiti in the last 12 months (44%).

Enforcement is another way in which graffiti can be dealt with. However, between 2004 and 2007 only 108 fixed penalty notices were issued to graffiti writers. Of these, on average, 58% have been paid and only seven cases have been taken to court following non-payment. These figures, which were collected by Defra, probably reflect how difficult it is to capture graffiti writers in the act.

### Graffiti Fixed Penalty Statistics





Calculating the cost of graffiti is extremely difficult. Local authorities measure expenditure in different ways and the cost of removing graffiti is not always reported separately from that of street cleaning. Staff time, campaigns and prevention activities may not be included. Furthermore, any figure will not take account of the cost to individuals and businesses; the detrimental effect of graffiti on property values; lost investment opportunities, or the impact on custom<sup>2</sup>. With these cautions in mind, ENCAMS asked local authorities to estimate how much they spent dealing with graffiti during the period April 2002 to March 2003<sup>6</sup>. Average spend was £75,000 per local authority. The majority spent less than £10,000, whereas 14% spent £80,000 or more.

Local authorities are not the only land managers who must tackle graffiti. It is the most widespread form of vandalism on railway land<sup>1</sup>, whilst etching constitutes a major problem for transport operating companies. According to the British Transport Police, it costs the London Underground an estimated £10m per annum to replace all the glass that is etched as well as the £2.5m required to clear up other types of graffiti<sup>3</sup>.

Graffiti writing is not without risk. The London Assembly Graffiti Investigative Committee identified a number of risks including spray paints that may be inhaled or come into contact with skin, and are also highly inflammable<sup>3</sup>. The Committee found that fatal disputes have occurred between writers and that graffiti may lead to involvement in other types of crime such as shoplifting. Finally, many writers operate in areas of danger (e.g. bridges, rooftops, railway properties, tube tunnels) to acquire greater respect for their writing amongst their peers.

### **1.3 ENCAMS Work**

ENCAMS believes that graffiti is a significant problem affecting the quality of people's environments and satisfaction with where they live. It is also expensive to deal with once it has occurred and prevention is extremely difficult. Since 2003, we have delivered a programme of work to tackle the problem of graffiti. This included a high profile media campaign, training courses and a CD-Rom knowledge bank containing resources land managers

need to tackle the problem of graffiti.

In 2007, we decided to undertake market research that would provide others with the information they needed to run their own campaign. The aim of the research was to:

- (i) examines attitudes, perceptions and opinions of the general public, local authorities and young people (through the Young Advisors Service) towards graffiti;
- (ii) draw out current views on mechanisms used to report graffiti and possible future strategies;
- (iii) establish the drivers behind reporting graffiti and identify the characteristics of people who are likely to report it through a simple segmentation;
- (iv) gather opinion on possible strategies to increase reporting of graffiti; and
- (v) gather evidence on the effectiveness of graffiti walls through case studies.

It was decided to focus the research on the public who experience graffiti in the places where they live and work, and on local authorities who deal with it on a daily basis, rather than the graffiti writers. As it felt that it would be easier to mobilise these groups to take positive action to prevent or deter graffiti than it would be to convince graffiti writers to desist from this activity.

### **1.4 What is the Purpose of this Report?**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the research and suggest how it can be used to run an anti-graffiti campaign.

### **1.5 Who is this Report For?**

The report is likely to be of interest to local authorities, housing associations, transport authorities and any other land managers who want to deal with the problem of graffiti as the findings presented here can be used to inform their approach.

**Participants quotes are verbatim and do not necessarily reflect the views of ENCAMS.**

## ENCAMS Graffiti Media Campaign



In October 2003, ENCAMS launched a high profile media campaign. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of the negative impact graffiti had on communities and businesses and the part it plays in fear of crime. Members of Parliament were asked to endorse the campaign on behalf of the residents and businesses in their constituency.

The graffiti campaign proved to be extremely successful and was covered in almost every national news programme and by numerous regional radio stations. The story generated so much interest that it went global with articles featuring on websites from India and Australia

One hundred and twenty three Members of Parliament signed up to the campaign, pledging:

**“Graffiti is not art – it’s crime, making our neighbourhoods look squalid, damaging people’s property and when it’s racist or offensive, it causes fear and heartache. On behalf of constituents and all right-minded people, I back this campaign and will do all I can to rid our community of this problem.”**

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Case Study Areas

Four case study areas were chosen. The selection process was based on a number of criteria as outlined in the table below.

A case study approach was chosen so that we could get different views from different people on the same graffiti hotspot.

Criteria (E = essential, D = desirable)	Wellholme Park, Calderdale	Bournbrook Recreation Ground, Selly Oak	Parsloes Park, Barking and Dagenham	Northbrooke Park, Lewisham
Significant graffiti problem (E)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Graffiti wall (D)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Involved in Olympic 2012 improvement scheme (D)	✗	✓	✓	✓
Good geographic spread (E)	North	Midlands	South	South
Good mixture of land uses (E)	Small town	Inner city	Inner city	Outer suburb

### 2.2 Sample and Methodology

#### 2.2.1 Local Authorities

Within each case study area, depth interviews were undertaken with between four and five local authority representatives. Local authority representatives were either environmental managers or belonged to graffiti cleaning teams. Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes during which time a number of topics were covered including: existing strategies for dealing with graffiti from prevention to enforcement and removal and views on public attitudes towards graffiti.

#### 2.2.2 Local Residents

Two focus groups were conducted with residents living within a two mile radius of each case study area. Participants were recruited from a range of life stages to reflect local demographics. One or two local business owners were also included in each focus group. They ran small shops and were also local residents.

Focus groups lasted approximately an hour and a half and contained up to eight people. The discussion covered the following points: attitudes towards graffiti and the impact it had on people's lives; what people thought was being done about graffiti and what they thought should be done; barriers to reporting graffiti; and campaign ideas.

#### 2.2.3 Young People

Six depth interviews were conducted in each case study area (except Barking and Dagenham) with members of the Young Advisor Scheme. Interviews lasted half an hour. The topics covered were the same as the focus groups. The Young Advisors Scheme consists of young people aged between 15 and 21. They are trained consultants employed by community leaders and decision makers such as local authorities, housing associations and their partners. Young Advisors provide advice and guidance about what it is like for a young person to live, work, learn and play in their neighbourhood.

# 3. Attitudes towards Graffiti

## 3.1 General Attitudes towards Graffiti

Irrespective of which group participants belonged to (i.e. older family, younger family, younger people) they had the same attitude towards graffiti. Some types were regarded as legitimate or permissible; others were seen as more objectionable.

## 3.2 Attitudes towards Different Types of Graffiti

Participants' responses revealed that they saw different types of graffiti as sitting on a spectrum ranging from low quality and less acceptable at one end to high quality and more acceptable at the other end.

Although members of the public recognised broadly similar types of graffiti to those recorded by ENCAMS through LEQSE, the language they used to describe them was not the same. Nor was the way in which they grouped individual types. For example, the public used the term 'tagging' to refer to stylised signatures but also to juvenile scribbling and scratching. They referred to contentious graffiti, which they called offensive, and they also recognised two further categories: 'community art' and 'graffiti art'. Throughout the rest of the report the language used by the public to describe graffiti has been adopted rather than the conventions used by ENCAMS that were described in the introduction.

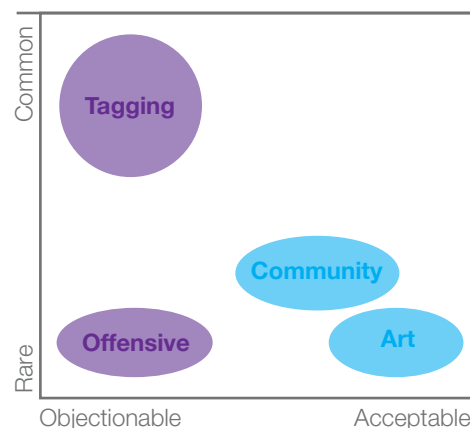
According to the public, graffiti described as tagging, etching and offensive were the most unacceptable forms. They made people feel uncomfortable and insecure about an area and were felt to drive businesses away. They were described as mindless, messy, destructive and ugly. Most people wanted to see this form of graffiti eradicated.

Graffiti described as 'community art work' sat in the middle of the spectrum. Examples included memorial displays and youth art projects. They were often sited in parks, youth centres and on the sides of business properties. They had permission and hence were not strictly graffiti. They could be officially sponsored (e.g. when they appeared on building and development sites) and were felt to have some value to the community.

The most acceptable forms of graffiti were those pieces of art created by figures such as Banksy and Ekto. They were often pictorial representations but also included large, colourful tags. Although illegal, they were appreciated by the public and could have legitimised other, less acceptable forms of graffiti.

Each of these types of graffiti did not, however, occur with the same frequency. Tagging, one of the least acceptable types, was the most frequent. Offensive graffiti, although unacceptable, was not encountered very often. Community art work was infrequent, as was graffiti art. Furthermore, the boundaries between community art work and graffiti art was often blurred and it was not easy to tell them apart.

### Graffiti Mapping



Each of these different types of graffiti is described in more detail below.

### 3.2.1 Tagging



Tagging (which also included scribbling, scratching and etching) was predominantly associated with teenagers who had graduated from etching their names on their school desks. Many different reasons were given for tagging including: boredom caused by young people hanging around; personal branding or a way to leave a mark; the buzz of doing

something dangerous or not permissible; territorial marking; flirting and to show support for a particular football team. In a few cases the motivation was malicious. For example, racist messages or personally vindictive graffiti found on people's doors and cars.

"It doesn't look nice, it makes the area feel crappy."

Young Advisor

"It would make you drop litter because you see the scribbles."

Young Advisor

Taggers did not earn the respect of anyone in the community including some young people. Tagging was believed to be deliberately defacement of objects and part of a far wider social issue - that of young people hanging around with nothing to do.

### 3.2.2 Community Art Work



People were undecided about the impact of community graffiti art projects but felt that they were generally positively motivated and some thought they provided a way to tackle the graffiti problem. They could also provide a creative outlet and be used to communicate messages about important issues such as road safety. They reflected a commitment by the people involved in creating them due to the time and cost involved.

"They got specialists in to do a warning message for kids crossing the road. It's nice to look at – old people go 'wow'."

Young Advisor

"Really good – although some horrible little gits have tagged all over it so you can't see the faces."

Young Advisor

### 3.2.3 Graffiti Art



'Graffiti art' is a term used to refer to pieces that take a great deal of time, effort and skill to produce. They are distinguished from other types of graffiti by their attention to detail, shading, layers, patterns and outlines and are often seen as public art. At its most extreme, 'graffiti art' is the realm of renowned figures such as Banksy who often have a strong message to communicate. The motivation for this type of graffiti was perceived to be positive and constructive, although the notoriety of the figures involved can also legitimise other forms.

"It's really cool. I'd like to hang out there – it looks professionally done. I'd shake their hand if I met them because they've used their talent in a good way."

Young Advisor

Participants believed that this type of graffiti was undertaken by true artists who would not respect taggers.

### 3.3 The Effect of Graffiti on the Local Environment

Unlike problems such as dog fouling and fly-tipping which are consistently seen to detract from the quality of local environments, graffiti was seen to improve certain urban environments such as disused or derelict land, underpasses and building site sidings. It brightened up drab areas or features, but it needed to be of good quality.

In spite of this, there were some types of graffiti such as offensive messages, tagging, juvenile scribbling and etching, participants felt were unacceptable no matter where they occurred.



## 4. Attitudes towards Reporting Graffiti

### 4.1 General Attitudes towards Reporting Graffiti

Irrespective of which group people belong to (i.e. older family, younger family, younger people) they all shared the same reasons for reporting or not reporting graffiti. There was, however, some anecdotal evidence to suggest that certain groups were more likely to report graffiti than others. The most likely to report graffiti were local authority employees and council partners followed by local businesses and stakeholders. The public were least likely to report graffiti although there were perceived to be differences between groups.

Each of these groups are considered in more detail below.

#### Propensity to Report Graffiti



#### 4.1.1 Local Authorities and their Public Sector Partners

Local authorities and their partners in the public sector were seen as a key reporting mechanism. Primarily because their staff could be easily enabled to report graffiti, were more aware of the need to report graffiti and had a professional interest in improving local environmental quality.

In local authorities, council members were often the biggest sources of reports about graffiti. They were regularly out and about in communities which meant they were more likely to see it. They were also on the receiving end of complaints from local residents. Many local authorities were already harnessing this.

Lewisham believe that council staff are far more likely to report graffiti than the public. As a result they have issued employees with mobile equipment and the software necessary to make reports. This scheme was first developed with members of the public. It was later rolled out to employees who, the council realised, were more likely to see and report graffiti.

In Calderdale, the graffiti team are working with other parts of the council to identify reporting agents such as street wardens and town centre ambassadors, and health and safety officers who inspect playgrounds.

#### 4.1.2 Local Businesses and Stakeholders

Local retailers were also likely to report graffiti because they had a vested interest in maintaining and increasing the flow of shopping traffic through an area and were concerned about the negative affect created by graffiti. They could be strong advocates for protecting local areas and active reporters of graffiti.

Housing estate managers were also more likely to report graffiti because they wanted to reduce crime on their estates and provide safer, better quality living spaces. In some local authorities they had even been provided with faster access to reporting lines.

#### 4.1.3 Public

Members of the public were seen as the hardest group to engage in reporting graffiti. However, parents, older people, young

people who are already engaged in their communities and people belonging to affluent socioeconomic groups were all seen as having a greater vested interest in seeing graffiti removed. They were also more likely to notice it in the first place.

Parents wanted to create a positive environment in which to raise children and were often heavy users of parks and other public places where graffiti could be an issue.

Older people were often more concerned about antisocial behaviour and its impact on the local community. They were often long-term residents who felt a greater deal of ownership over their local area. They were also perceived by others as having more time on their hands to report graffiti.

Some young people were actively and positively engaged in their communities. They had the potential to influence their peer groups who may be involved in graffiti and could act as ambassadors.

Those living in affluent neighbourhoods wanted to keep their areas 'nice'. They had higher expectations of council services and could be a vociferous and demanding group.

## 4.2 Factors Affecting Graffiti Reporting

Some factors were likely to increase graffiti reporting, while others decreased it. These are described below.

### 4.2.1 Type and Severity of Graffiti

Tagging or graffiti that was seen as ugly, meaningless or deliberate defacement of property was more likely to be reported. Racist or offensive messages were also upsetting and likely to be reported but were rarely seen, partly because of a local authorities commitment to removing this type of graffiti and to do so rapidly.

### 4.2.2 Location

Graffiti would be reported if it was on somebody's own property, a respected site such as a church or a school, bus stops or valued locations frequently used by the public, and more affluent/gentrified areas where it was more noticeable.

### 4.2.3 Personal Impact

People won't report graffiti if they don't care about it, and they will only care about it if it has a personal impact on them, if it is on their personal property or in a place they use or value.

### 4.2.4 Expected Experience

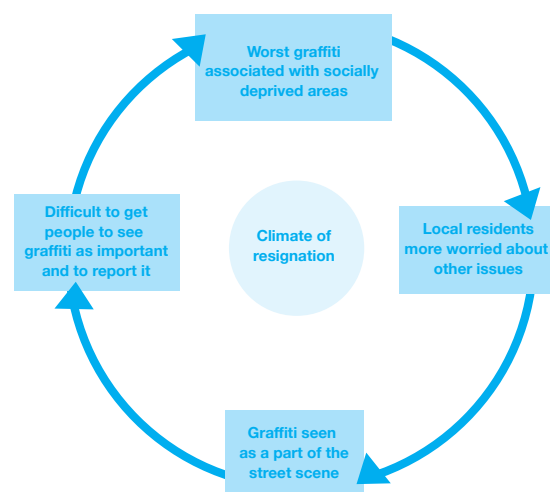
People are deterred from reporting graffiti because they don't know who to call. Or they believe that if they call the council they will be on the phone for a long time, giving details, or will be passed around from department to department.

### 4.2.5 Expected Outcome

People don't report graffiti because they believe the council will take a long time to respond. They don't have confidence in them. They don't believe, either, that cleaning graffiti is an effective means of prevention. It simply creates a 'blank canvass' so that it can be done again.

### 4.2.6 Climate of Resignation

Local authorities had noticed that areas often most affected by graffiti were not the ones that reported it most. This was because a climate of resignation had set in. Areas affected by graffiti were often socially deprived. Residents were more worried about other issues such as health and money. Graffiti didn't impact on their lives and was simply seen as part of the street scene. Changing attitudes and encouraging reporting could be extremely difficult under these circumstances.



### 4.2.7 Understanding of What Works

Local authorities and members of the public had different views about what works when dealing with graffiti and this could create barriers to reporting. On the one hand, the public thought that if graffiti was removed it would simply reappear. A clean space was an invitation to more graffiti. They thought that enforcement was key, but acknowledged that it would be difficult to catch people in the act. Local authorities, on the other hand, felt that speed was important when dealing with graffiti. The faster graffiti was removed the more deterred the writer would feel about undertaking any more.

Young people, on the other hand, had a greater understanding of the psychology of taggers. They believed that taggers were looking for profile and recognition. If tags disappeared quickly they would be frustrated. They might also go elsewhere.

Factors that encourage reporting	Factors that discourage reporting
Tagging	Not on own property
Racist or offensive graffiti	Not in a place people use or value
On own property	Don't know who to call
On a respected site	Poor view of council's performance
In a valued location that people use frequently	Climate of resignation
In more affluent or gentrified areas	Poor understanding of what works

# 5. Ways to Encourage Reporting

## 5.1 The Right Reporting Mechanism

There are a number of requirements that a reporting service needed to fulfil to be effective.

It needed to be quick and easy to use. Many people assumed that they would call the council to report graffiti but were concerned that the experience would be time-consuming and frustrating. If there was a dedicated number then this would make people more confident in the service, but they would need to know what that number was and believe that their report would be dealt with quickly. Also, because reports were likely to be made spontaneously when a person was out and about the reporting mechanism had to be readily accessible. Text and telephone services met these requirements.

The service also needed to be confidential. Younger and older people, especially, were afraid that if they reported graffiti there would be recriminations by the perpetrator.

The service needed to be free, particularly if a call was placed from a mobile phone.

People also needed to see an outcome as they were cynical that reporting made no difference. Evidence that it does should be made available.

### 5.1.1 Text Messaging Through a Mobile Phone

Texting a picture of graffiti was seen to be an easy, quick and convenient reporting method. It provided a visual image the council could use to locate graffiti and it could encourage reporting, especially amongst younger people. However, from a local authority point of view, picture messages could be vague and of little use as they might not pinpoint the precise location of the graffiti. A text message would be far better, although members of the public thought it might be onerous and exploited by pranksters.

Lewisham Council uses mobile phone technology to enable reporting of graffiti by staff. Staff can download software onto their mobile phone that enables faster processing of a job by the graffiti team because it captures information about the location of the incident.

### 5.1.2 Telephone

People wanted to be able to call the council. It was a convenient and easy method, especially if there was a dedicated number and it was free. The caller would have to supply information about the precise location of graffiti while on the phone and because the caller would have to talk to another person this service was seen as less likely to be exploited by pranksters.

### 5.1.3 Internet

Some people wanted to enter information about graffiti on a web form or via email. However, it was recognised that not everybody had access to the internet.

In the past, Barking and Dagenham Council have used their website to allow members of the public to report graffiti. However, they found that the reports were often vague and incidents difficult to track down. On the other hand, their website was a good means for the council to publish before and after pictures to demonstrate reports were being dealt with.

## 5.2 The Right Campaign Message

The campaign message must communicate information about the reporting mechanism. It must also motivate people to act. This could be achieved by tailoring the message around the type and location of graffiti.

### 5.2.1 Reporting Mechanism

Local authorities need to publicise their services in an area. If they are being seen to do something this can help address issues about poor perceived performance. The service could be advertised on the side of graffiti vans, dust carts, refuse sacks, in local newspapers, in leaflets distributed to schools, by street cleaners, and on flyers. Higher levels of publicity could also be obtained by getting graffiti crews to do talks in schools. Councils should also work with local businesses to agree reporting standards via a charter.

### **5.2.2 Type of Graffiti**

Campaigns that focus on all graffiti including community art work and graffiti art will not work. Instead campaigns should focus on tagging and other low quality forms of graffiti. They could also focus on offensive graffiti although available evidence suggests this is dealt with rapidly by local authorities and as a consequence rarely encountered.

### **5.2.3 Location of Graffiti**

Campaigns that focus on locations where graffiti could be interpreted as improving local environmental quality (e.g. underpasses, derelict sites), locations people do not use or value, or locations that people are indifferent to or think someone else may be responsible for (e.g. transport routes) are likely to have little effect.

Instead, campaigns should focus on private property such as a person's home, business properties, and areas that are well used and valued (e.g. bus stops, play grounds, parks, churches).



## 6. Current Mechanisms for Tackling Graffiti

### 6.1 Barriers

Local authorities faced a number of common challenges when cleaning graffiti although money was not one of them. Graffiti was a high priority and the budget was made available to deal with it.

#### Barriers to Cleaning Graffiti



If the initial report lacked detail it could take some time to find the site. Even when the site was found it was not always possible to clean the graffiti. If it belonged to a public utility company, for example, local authorities could not clean it and they also experienced considerable difficulty convincing utility companies to undertake the task themselves as they did not regard it as a priority.

Access was also an issue, especially where businesses were concerned. Businesses often wanted graffiti cleaned outside of normal working hours and local authorities did not always have shift workers to do this. Resident parking also created access problems when cars were parked too close to affected sites to permit use of the necessary chemicals.

Red tape could also cause problems. Local authorities had to serve a notice on property owners before they cleaned graffiti. This passed on responsibility for any resulting damage. If the owner of the property was not in it could slow the whole process down as the site would have to be re-visited, often several times. Even when the owner had been contacted, some did not want the graffiti removed because they believed that it would happen again and next time it would be worse. Businesses were also reluctant to pay for graffiti removal.

Finally, graffiti teams were often subjected to abuse by groups of children and young people hanging around. This meant that they had to try and clean at certain times, when they could avoid this happening.

Encouraging more people to report graffiti would not solve these problems. In fact, it could make them worse.

## 6.2 Graffiti Policy

All local authorities who took part in this research shared a common graffiti policy. That was zero tolerance, at least for tagging. This policy was informed by the view that if graffiti was left it encouraged writers to do more, and it fuelled public fear of crime. The goal was therefore to remove it rapidly. Government guidelines drove cleansing schedules so that racist and offensive graffiti were removed within seven hours or 24 hours where shifts did not allow for overnight working. All other graffiti was cleaned within a week.

## 6.3 Graffiti Strategy

In general, the manner in which local authorities dealt with graffiti had evolved over time on a trial and error basis, and reflected the local problems they encountered.

In 10 months Barking and Dagenham Council had gone from two to three dedicated graffiti crews. There was an additional operative to clean cable boxes and unpaid community work was provided via the probation team who worked four days a week.

Lewisham Council had a graffiti team that consisted of five staff. The equipment they had available for use included two blast cleaner vehicles and two vans for painting. They also equipped and trained residents to clean it up themselves.

Birmingham City Council had one graffiti crew paid for by the Council and four crews paid for by wards via Neighbourhood Renewal Funding that finished in March 2008.

Four years previously Calderdale Council had one graffiti crew. Now they have two.

There were, however, some commonalities between how councils dealt with graffiti.

### 6.3.1 Telephone Reporting Line

Telephone reporting lines were the main drivers of a graffiti team's workload, with reports entered onto a database. Teams also proactively cleaned what they saw en route to a site and retrospectively entered them onto the system. They also visited hotspots on a regular basis.

Barking and Dagenham Council had a dedicated number for graffiti, a graffiti hotline and email address. Housing estate managers were given direct access to their database to report incidents.

Lewisham Council employed a dedicated website for reporting graffiti ([www.lovelewisham.org](http://www.lovelewisham.org)) and publishing the results. Reporting also took place by staff via mobile devices with picture messaging and a telephone hotline called ENVIROCALL.

Birmingham City Council had a dedicated number for reporting graffiti and a website linked to a database.

Calderdale Council had a single number for street cleaning services, a graffiti hotline and an email address.

### 6.3.2 Partnership Working

Local authorities understood the need to broker close working relationship with other parts of the council as well as external bodies and agencies to tackle graffiti, although the depth and reach of these networks varied. Partners included town planning teams, parks and leisure teams; enforcement bodies such as the police, street wardens and community safety teams; youth representatives such as schools, youth groups, youth offending teams and probation teams; transport service providers; utility companies; and housing associations.

### 6.3.3 Enforcement, Removal and Prevention

Local authorities spoke about the need to balance efforts to deal with graffiti where it occurred (i.e. removal, enforcement) with preventing it from happening in the first place. Any approach had to use both tactics.

Although graffiti teams did not have any enforcement powers they were working to strengthen relationships with those that did. However, it was acknowledged that culprits were very hard to catch so this approach would not work alone.

Calderdale Council worked closely with the police on projects to identify taggers. A poster was developed and handed out by young people to local businesses to display in shop windows.

Lewisham and Barking and Dagenham Councils in partnership with their probation teams used offenders to clean graffiti up and undertake community service with graffiti teams.

Preventative efforts to tackle graffiti ranged from taking away the opportunity to facilitating community art projects and graffiti walls. Removing the opportunity for graffiti consisted of removing blank walls; preventing access to sites; and restricting the supply of materials and tools used to do graffiti. Surfaces could also be modified to make it more difficult to do graffiti and make surfaces easier to clean. Other approaches included the upskilling

of taggers through workshop activities and educating them about the impact of graffiti. Diversionary activities have also been used including graffiti walls and community art projects. Local authorities were generally positive about the effectiveness of all these methods.

Barking and Dagenham Council transformed a vandalised football changing room into a community art work through an urban art projects led by the graffiti artist Ekto. They also worked closely with the police to gate alleyways including 1,000 metres of perimeter fencing around the park.

Lewisham Council have used graffiti walls but achieved mixed results. Education initiatives that they have employed include anti-graffiti messages communicated through their Clean & Green schools programme.

Birmingham City Council worked with their parks and leisure team and architects to advise them on blank walls likely to attract graffiti (e.g. changing rooms, sides of buildings) and encouraged the growth of plants to cover walls and use anti-graffiti paint. They approached their town planning team with a view to removing underpasses and alleyways, while local residents check and clean street signs affected by graffiti through their Street Champions Programme.

Project Brighthouse is an unofficial graffiti wall in a skate park managed and policed by young people. Calderdale Council also plan to run workshops with young people to teach them how to do graffiti in a controlled environment.

# 7. Graffiti Walls

## 7.1 General Attitudes towards Graffiti Walls

There were many arguments in favour of graffiti walls. They were perceived to provide a legitimate outlet for writers: if they could do graffiti without fear of caution they would not do it illegally. Graffiti walls could also be used to communicate important messages to young people about, for example, drugs and drink driving. They could help to solve wider social issues, such as those caused by young people hanging around, and could have a positive impact on local environmental quality. It was felt that graffiti walls might also encourage better quality work more generally, and that taggers would leave the wall alone out of respect for the artist.

On the other hand, it was felt that legitimate walls took the buzz away from doing graffiti. At best all they succeeded in doing was displacing the problem to another area. At worst, they encouraged it. Graffiti walls set a bad example and could mark the start of a downward spiral in local environmental quality caused by writers who tagged en route or immediately next to a site.

The public were generally positive about graffiti walls and more likely to see the benefits. They thought that if well-managed they could make an important contribution to a neighbourhood. Local authorities were more ambivalent and this ambivalence was born out of pragmatism. They saw the practical implications of running such a scheme, whereas the public did not.

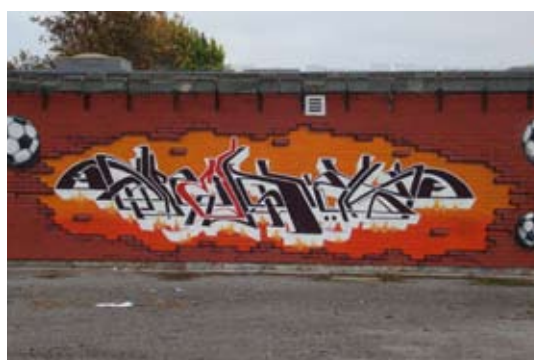
## 7.2 Graffiti Wall Case Studies

### 7.2.1 Parsloes Park, Barkingham and Dagenham

Young people in Barking and Dagenham had asked their local authority for a graffiti wall. Their request was backed by a number of local councillors. In time, a respected artist, Ekto, was commissioned to lead the project, which involved a wall in Parsloes Park surrounding a football changing room. Ekto recruited young people to help him with the project. Once it was finished, the wall was displayed to the mayor and councillors and an article run in the local newspaper. The artist is paid to keep the wall clean and although it has not been tagged, local authority operatives claim that it has attracted greater tagging to the park. Nonetheless, the ongoing cost of

the wall is still less than the cost of cleaning it was before the start of the project (i.e. £2,500 versus £7,000 per calendar month).

In parallel with this project, the council ran workshops to train young people to be urban artists. Antisocial Behaviour and Youth Offending Teams recruited 50 attendees.





### 7.2.2 Project Brighthouse, Calderdale

During a local event, a group of free runners approached a parks manager at Calderdale Council and asked for a graffiti wall. The council unofficially allowed a Green Flag Park to be used for the project, with a wall inside the main park acting as the site. However, this angered the park's bowling club who were afraid the graffiti would spread to the tennis courts. Calderdale Council facilitated a meeting between the young people and the bowling club. Following this meeting it was agreed that the young people would be allowed to do graffiti as long as it was contained within the skate park where it would be in keeping with the environment.

The group has since been constituted and has applied for grants. One grant was used to make a short film to promote the scheme, another to run a workshop. Occasionally, the graffiti spills over into the children's play area but the young people police the wall themselves and clean up any incidences of overspill. The project is felt to have contributed to a 50% decline in the number of graffiti incidents reported to the local authority.



### 7.2.3 Selly Oak, Birmingham

Many of the participants were unclear, but it appears that a recreation park in Selly Oak was made a legal graffiti zone by Birmingham City Council in 1984. The site itself was a wall at the back of the park, by the baseball courts, overlooked by a cul-de-sac. A voluntary youth project was set up to work with graffiti artists and an informal code of conduct was developed. Prior to undertaking the graffiti, sketches had to be submitted to the youth worker for approval. The site was cleaned annually.

Although initially successful, the project has not been actively managed since 1994 and anecdotal feedback from residents suggests it has made the problem worse. Tagging has now spread to almost every available surface in the park and there are more kids than ever before hanging around.



### 7.2.4 Lewisham

Lewisham Council has achieved mixed results with graffiti walls. The Mayor has recently declared a zero tolerance policy on graffiti and, consequently, they are not seen as a part of the Council's anti-graffiti strategy as they move forward.

#### 7.2.4.1 Northbrooke Park

Northbrooke Park used to have a 30 m long graffiti wall. It was removed four years ago for a number of reasons. The people using it quite often came from out of the area, travelling up to 10 miles at a time. The park was not staffed or patrolled. Discarded empty spray cans became a problem and taggers began to tag the wider park area including trees and footpaths. Local residents and park users objected to the graffiti problem.



#### 7.2.4.2 Bellingham Green

This graffiti wall stands in the middle of a housing estate in Catford. All users are known to the community which helps with self-policing. The area is also well-patrolled by community support officers and covered by CCTV, which means it is closely monitored and controlled. It is only used by young people living on the estate and although the graffiti is not of particularly high quality there are few reports of overspill.

#### 7.2.5 Factors Affecting the Success or Failure of Graffiti Walls

From the case studies a number of factors emerged as critical to the success of graffiti walls.

Graffiti walls were more likely to succeed if the initiative was rooted in the community, particularly amongst young people. The most successful examples of graffiti walls were those that were managed by young people and subsequently adopted by the council.

If the wall is in an area that is patrolled or staffed it will reduce the likelihood of overspill or misuse. Alternatively, young people can be given the responsibility for self-policing the wall.

Engaging respected youth leaders is critical to success of any project of this kind. A respected graffiti artist can set a high standard of work and encourage others to do the same.

There should be a tacit contract with local youth groups to manage the wall and the wall should only go ahead if it has the permission of local residents.

There must be a clear understanding with graffiti writers regarding the conditions under which it can be used.

Finally, there must be a long-term commitment from the local authority as abandonment of the scheme can mark the start of a downward spiral of decline in the immediate neighbourhood.

#### 7.2.6 Measuring the Success of Graffiti Walls

It is extremely difficult to measure the success of graffiti walls in terms of reducing the wider graffiti problem. Most local authorities relied on subjective measures including anecdotal feedback from local residents often collected by MPs and Councillors. Also from graffiti teams whose familiarity with the area can highlight the spread of tagging. More objective measures included BVPI 199 and records from their reporting database.

## 8. Conclusion

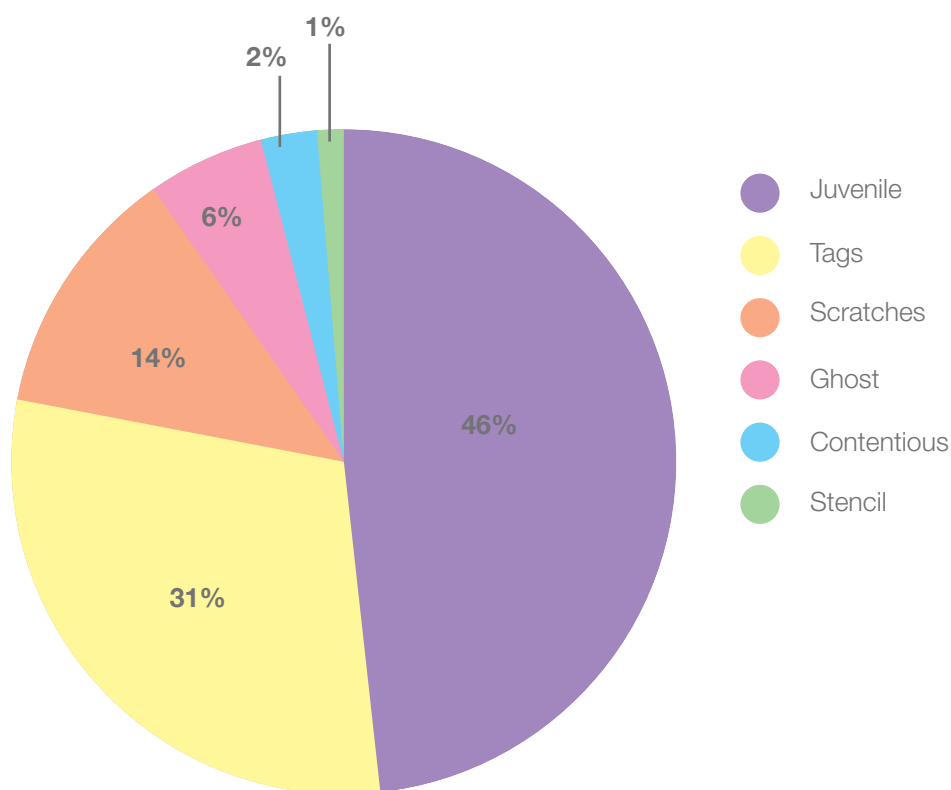
Traditionally, ENCAMS has viewed graffiti as a blight on neighbourhoods, particularly urban ones, where it can fuel fear of crime by making a place feel run down and threatening. The purpose of the research described in this report was to understand the public's attitudes towards graffiti and what would make them report it. It was anticipated that this information could be used by local authorities should they chose to run an anti-graffiti campaign. The research also considered local authority responses to graffiti including graffiti walls with a view to identifying and sharing examples of good practice.

The results described in this report confirmed some of our original assumptions about graffiti. It also challenged others and contained a number of surprises.

This research supports previous studies in that it demonstrates the public do not like tagging. They regard it as messy, tantamount to vandalism and believe it makes an area feel squalid. They are, however, more favourably disposed towards community projects and graffiti art that at its most extreme is undertaken by figures such as Banksy. They perceive this type of graffiti to be of a better quality than tagging and to be positively motivated. It can enhance certain environments, communicate important messages and deal with wider social problems such as those caused by young people hanging around.

Although the public profess a liking for this type of graffiti, it is worth pointing out that actual examples are very rarely encountered by the surveyors responsible for ENCAMS LEQSE. According to LEQSE, ENCAMS survey of the state of cleanliness in England, graffiti stencils of the type used by Banksy are found at only 1% of sites (community art projects are likely to have been granted permission so would not be recorded through LEQSE as an example of graffiti).

### Proportion of Graffiti



Whilst the public say that they like some types of graffiti there was, however, a strong theme running throughout the research that can be summarised by the statement ‘not in my back yard’. This could mean that while the public can appreciate more artistic pieces of graffiti they might not be so accommodating if they appeared on the side of their house.

The research also uncovered significant differences between what local authorities and the public thought about graffiti and what would be effective in dealing with it. The public believed that reporting graffiti to their local authority was a waste of time. Even if the local authority did clean it off, it would simply create a blank canvas on which to start again and next time round the problem would be worse. Local authorities, on the other hand, saw speed as one of their most important responses in their strategy to deal with graffiti. If graffiti could be removed rapidly it would leave the writer feeling frustrated as their main motivation was to be seen and to achieve respect amongst their peers.

Another important difference was that whilst the public saw some types of graffiti as permissible, even attractive, local authorities had a zero tolerance policy. This was driven by the belief that to leave graffiti only encouraged it and fuelled fear of crime. The public also thought that graffiti walls could be an important part of a neighbourhood and could help deal with the wider graffiti problem if well-managed. Local authorities, on the other hand, saw the practical implications of running such a scheme and were more cautious.

The final surprising finding was that while there may be some members of the public that have a vested interest in graffiti being removed and for this to happen rapidly, local authorities would achieve far better results by equipping and encouraging their own employees, stakeholders and local businesses (employees don’t just have to belong to graffiti teams. They can also include environmental health officers, highways inspectors and housing managers). This does not mean that the public cannot be campaigned to with an anti-graffiti message. They can be but it is important to ensure that the correct steps are taken to maximize the campaign’s chances of success.

The first step is to identify the reporting campaigns’ target audience. This will not be

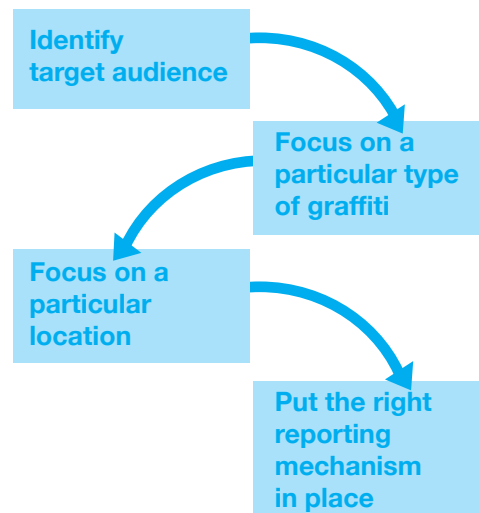
the entire population. Rather it should focus on parents, older people and younger people.

The second step is to focus on a particular type of graffiti. The public like graffiti art and community projects so these should be avoided. Offensive graffiti is also rarely encountered so unlikely to be a good basis to build a campaign on. Tagging, on the other hand, is frequently encountered and more objectionable.

Third, focus on a particular location. Campaigns should be targeted on private property, or places that are well-used and valued. Getting the public to report graffiti when it appears in a location they do not use or value will be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Finally, the right reporting mechanism must be in place. This should be quick, free, easy to use and confidential. A telephone hotline best meets all of these requirements. It is also important that local authorities provide evidence to show the public what difference reporting makes. This could be done through a website or the local press and leaflets.

### Running an Anti-Graffiti Campaign



A public campaign can run alongside an initiative to empower local authority employees, their partners and local businesses to report graffiti. Whether it should also employ a graffiti wall is a matter for the local authority to decide. However, local authorities should approach graffiti walls with the upmost of caution and only embark on them if they can ensure the success criteria and have sufficient time and resources to dedicate to their upkeep not just for a year, but for many years to come.

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