
Report To:	Planning, Leisure & Environment Committee	Date:	04 September 2023
Contact Officer:	Paula Harrison		
Subject:	Graffiti Review		

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Planning, Leisure & Environment Committee with information to consider for a review of the service standards in the removal of graffiti.

2. DETAIL

- 2.1 At Full Council on Monday 21 August, a set of public questions were raised relating to the Parish Council's policy on the removal of graffiti. Councillors resolved to consider this in more detail at this Committee. Tagging is the most common form of graffiti in West Swindon and single identifiable tags are often the most prolific. Graffiti has become more prevalent in the last three to four years.
- 2.2 Since its inception, the Parish Council has delivered the same approach to graffiti as that delivered previously by Swindon Borough Council. This means that offensive graffiti is removed within one working day of being reported, all other graffiti is subject to removal on a low priority basis, dependent on resources. Graffiti on private property is dealt with by Swindon Borough Council.
- 2.3 In practice, this means that the Parish Council team will generally tackle graffiti as a project rather than as and when it appears. The Parish Council does not have a high pressured washer to remove graffiti, so surfaces are painted over. In 2022, 12 of the 18 subways in West Swindon were painted throughout. This approach is time consuming as more than one coat of paint is required. It is also weather dependent. In terms of cost, paint for this project cost approximately £1000 and utilized around 40 staff hours.
- 2.4 Subways have different levels of porosity and different textured surfaces. All need deep cleaning before any kind of large scale painting can be applied.
- 2.4 Generally, painting over surfaces does not appear to deter graffiti. Newly painted surfaces can be re-graffitied within hours. There is reasonable evidence that formal designs and painted murals are less likely to be tagged or graffitied over.

3. OPTIONS

- 3.1 In reviewing its approach to tackling graffiti, the Parish Council needs to consider
- staff resourcing
 - the approach applied to existing graffiti versus the approach to new graffiti
 - deterring graffiti and/or focusing on removal
 - the methods for the removal of graffiti

Option One – Change removal technique

- 3.2 The Parish Council could shift away from over painting and replace with high pressured graffiti removal. This approach consumes lower staffing levels and can be used all year round. This would be a more efficient approach to graffiti removal and would assist in graffiti removal being tackled more often. A suitable pressure washer would be in the region of £3-4,000 for a vehicle mounted machine or £14,000 for a towable machine. It would be more effective to have the flexibility of purchasing a mounted machine with a separate trailer – costs in the region of £5,000.

Option Two – Increase staff resources to remove graffiti more frequently.

- 3.3 Tackling graffiti is one of the responsibilities of the Parish Council. The Parish Council team prioritises the routine work programme based on health and safety implications and the deed agreement with Swindon Borough Council. As a result, play inspection and repairs, bin emptying, grass cutting, shrub cutting and flytipping collection are the first priority for the team's routine work. There are minimal health and safety implications arising from non offensive graffiti and as a result it is tasked on a low priority basis. There is a view that removing graffiti quickly, attracts less graffiti and reduces the volume of graffiti. Any approach to improve the current response rate to graffiti will have resource implications. The Parish Council could allocate additional staff resources to enable more frequent graffiti removal. This is not accounted for or available within the budget for 2023-24.

Option Three – Create alternative spaces for graffiti

- 3.4 Parish Councillors could create spaces for graffiti such as graffiti walls. Historically these are overpainted periodically to allow new art to be applied. There are long pathways that could accommodate some form of structure e.g. Blagrove to Mannington cycle path. There is no evidence to suggest this would deter tagging.

Option Four - Anti-Graffiti Paints and Coatings

- 3.5 Anti-graffiti paints and coatings are protective barriers that can prevent materials used for tagging from bonding to a building's surface. Essentially these products work like special spray paints that create protective surfaces that graffiti tagging can't penetrate. Anti-graffiti paints come in three different coatings:
- **Permanent coating:** creates a protective barrier that doesn't allow spray paint to bond to the surface. If the surface is vandalized, only graffiti cleaner is needed for removal. Permanent coatings are often more expensive, but if properly cleaned and maintained, only one coat is needed.
 - **Sacrificial coating:** forms a clear layer over the targeted surface. If vandalized, the coating is removed or "sacrificed" with a pressure washer, along with graffiti. Once removed, another coating needs to be reapplied.
 - **Semi-sacrificial coating:** used to protect the surface pores of a wall. If vandalized, this coating can be easily removed with a combination of graffiti removal cleaner and a pressure washer. After the graffiti has been removed, an additional coating can be optional depending on its condition.
- 3.6 Anti graffiti coatings cost between £10 to £60 m² depending on the wall porosity and texture. Coatings require staff resources for the application of the coating and subsequent cleaning of graffiti. The average subway interior is 95 m². Consideration would need to be given to the treatment of entrance ways to subways.

Option Five – Create murals

- 3.7 Designed murals are generally seen as one of the most permanent ways to deter graffiti and tagging. It is particularly secure if it is combined with protective anti graffiti coating. Professionally designed murals are charged between £50 and £300 per square metre

depending on the range of elements applied.

- 3.8 It is possible to seek out a lower cost way to engage artists however there may be less control on the timeframe for work to be completed and achieving a particular standard.

Option Six – Seek external funding for local mural painting

- 3.9 The Parish Council could set an aspiration to secure funding for mural painting across the Parish. Funds such as the Landfill Communities Fund may be applicable.

There is no guarantee that funding will be secured and the timescales for grant approvals can be lengthy.

4. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Parish Council does not have any budgets allocated specifically to graffiti removal or street art. Costs of paint and chemicals would be drawn from the Consumables budget which is set at £15,000 per annum. It would be possible to vire funds from an alternative budget to create a budget for resources to support a different approach to graffiti removal. Alternatively a new budget line could be created in 2024-25.

- 4.2 The Parish Council could trial the use of coatings to determine whether these enable cleanly painted surfaces to be maintained graffiti free more easily. This may result in a cost reduction long term. It would be estimated that in terms of the cost of materials, a single subway would cost in the region of £50-£100 to repaint and £1,000 to £2000 to coat depending on the type of surface and choice of coating.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That this Committee considers the information in this report in review of the current approach to graffiti, and instructs the Parish Team accordingly.

Report Author: Paula Harrison