

Project: Spring Gardens

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SPRING GARDENS

Executive Summary

Lytham St Annes is historically perceived to be an area where wealthy people live and retire to. Twenty six per cent of the population are over the age of sixty and ideally want a quiet retirement by the seaside.

Residents in the Spring Gardens area of Lytham St Annes have been experiencing increasing problems with young people behaving in a manner they found threatening and abusive.

This was an historic problem and as younger people grew up new generations caused the same problems. This became a repeating cycle, which seemed insurmountable.

The victims tried to speak to the youths to appeal to them but were met by abuse and disinterest. The offenders ignored the no ball games signs on the green erected by New Fylde Housing on the request of the residents and damaged bus company property. Offenders were a 20 strong group of teenage youths local to the estate along with associates from outside the area. The green was not, in reality, big enough for the youths to use and was so close to the houses it was inappropriate and threatening to residents for the youths to play there. Other victims were the Bus Company and residents of the nearby sheltered accommodation.

It was proposed to identify a suitable space at Blackpool Road North playing fields to provide a 5 a side football area dedicated to Kilnhouse estate youths. In the longer term, it would be developed into a lit, fenced in, multi use games area. Initially it was also decided to modify the bus shelter as it was old and run down and move the lamppost and BT pole to prevent other more dangerous behaviours. Ideally there needed to be a change of attitude in the youths and the residents needed help and support to work together towards solving the multitude of problems that had developed over the years. Fylde Borough Council were asked to provide land and site approval and New Fylde Housing and the Residents Association would organise starter funding in region of £400 to buy goal posts. The idea was to support the youths in providing a purpose built area and relocate them voluntarily.

The money was raised and a new 7 a side football pitch was installed at Blackpool Road North playing field. In the end the bus shelter was removed. Only buses fitted with CCTV cameras were used on the No 14 route and the lamppost was relocated. Anti climb spikes and paint were applied to the electricity sub station. New permanent 'no ball games' signs were concreted into the grassed area. A nuisance tenant and partner were evicted. Robust, and persistent high visibility police attention was given to the area via targeted patrol system and Youth Referral System forms targeted ringleaders. Police responses to reported problems dropped significantly over 2003 and in 2004 there has only been one complaint. New Fylde Housing and the Bus Company have also had less incidents/complaints.

With our focus on community engagement the lessons learnt from this initiative are being adopted as best practice across the rest of the division.

Scanning

Lytham St Annes is historically perceived to be an area where wealthy people live and retire to. Twenty six per cent of the population are over the age of sixty and ideally want a quiet retirement by the seaside.

Spring Gardens used to part of a local authority rented estate however now it has been passed on to new Fylde Housing who have sold off about fifty per cent of the housing into private ownership. The private owners of these properties have adopted the expectations and aspirations of other residents of the town and want a peaceful existence.

Residents in the Spring Gardens area of the genteel Lytham St Annes township have been experiencing increasing problems with young people behaving in a manner they found threatening and abusive. This was an historic problem and as younger people grew up new generations caused the same problems. This became a repeating cycle, which seemed insurmountable.

Analysis

Victims

The main complainants were the residents living in houses surrounding an area of grassed square close to a small number of precinct shops which have all now ceased trading apart from one Chinese take away. The victims tried to speak to the youths to appeal to them but were met by abuse and disinterest.

The buses were being attacked with the Bus company reporting bus engines cutting out, bus windows broken by missiles on passing through estate, and drivers and passengers being abused. The youths were also pressing the emergency stop button and causing problems. Once the emergency button was pressed the engine cut out and it was several minutes before he could start the engine again. The youths travelling to the area from Blackpool also used the bus giving the driver constant abuse to and from Spring Gardens.

People wishing to use public transport were also victims as they felt intimidated by the groups of youths and wouldn't wait at the bus shelter so they stood instead.

Some distance away but in full view of this area was an old peoples sheltered accommodation. The occupants had a good view of the youths activities with nothing else to do all day but look out of the window and they were disgusted and also extremely fearful that the group would move over even though they were not direct victims as such. Some of the residents of the sheltered accommodation were also passengers of the bus company using this means to get into town.

To further complicate the problem one of the youths living in a house on the square was a ringleader and his parents grew so fed up of his behaviour that they kicked him out on his sixteenth birthday. This family then became the victims of the rest of his friends.

Location

On one side of the grassland the residents are elderly, on the other are families with young children. On a third side in privately owned flats over the shops are some families with young children and one tenant who was a violent alcoholic and there was a history of domestic violence on the premises.

There was also a BT Telephone box close to the shops, which was constantly vandalised by both the youths and also the tenant above the flats.

On the fourth side is a bus terminus adjacent to an electricity sub station with a bus shelter where the youths gathered. The youths climbed onto the bus shelter and swung on the lamppost and also use the BT pole to climb onto the electricity sub station to retrieve their ball.

Offenders

Offenders were a 20 strong group of teenage youths local to the estate with associates from outside the area.

The young people were made up of one ringleader who had originally lived in one of the houses but had since moved to the neighbouring town of Blackpool. However he consistently returned bringing his new friends with him. This group attracted young people from the surrounding local authority estate. They used the bus shelter as a football goalpost and meeting place, and climbed on sub station roof to collect the ball via telegraph pole and swung on lamppost next to shelter.

Also the grassed area was not a sufficiently large enough area to play ball games and the ball was often kicked into the gardens of residents and also frequently kicked into the cars causing the fear of damage to the vehicles.

The offenders ignored the no ball games signs on the green erected by New Fylde Housing on the request of the residents. The green was not, in reality, big enough for the youths to use and was so close to the houses it was inappropriate and threatening to residents for the youths to play there.

The youths felt that they were untouchable and there was nothing that either the residents or the police or other authority could do to them.

To summarise the problem it was a collection of many different problems in a very confined areas that taken together seemed insurmountable. There seemed to be four opposing camps on each side of the square, the retired residents and the families with young children who felt the kids should be able to play. The local police officers often felt like piggy in the middle as everyone had valid points to make and everyone was right. The residents themselves couldn't agree on possible outcomes, which made it very difficult for the different agencies to put in solutions, which would solve these problems.

Objectives

As a beat officer in the community for seven years this had been a major headache. Response police officers would groan when the words Spring Gardens came over the radio because they wouldn't go just to speak to one person, the whole street came out to have their say every time.

A multi agency response was needed to identify a way forward where everyone's problems were resolved to their satisfaction. Even the young people needed an outcome that answered their needs.

The elderly residents need a quiet life and although they weren't against the little children using the grassed area they didn't want the older youths playing ball games there.

The younger families wanted a safe place for their younger children to play within sight of their houses.

The residents in the sheltered accommodation shouldn't be subjected to the daily fear of crime they had.

People using the public transport bus shelter needed to do so without fear.

The bus drivers who were subject to abuse and also although less frequently the occasional missile thrown at them breaking window in the process.

Therefore;

- The youths needed to be relocated to their own dedicated football pitch or area.
- The violent tenant needed to go as he was one of the main instigators using threats and fear of violence against other residents.
- The bus company wanted to see reduced costs in terms of repairs to buses.
- The bus drivers wanted to work in a safe environment.
- We wanted to see agreement between the various community groups.

The quality of life for people in this area is suffering because of these issues and while the majority of the problems are not our BVPI Crimes nevertheless these issues give out signals to the community that they are living in a deprived area and no one from the public sector cares about their problems. This causes resentment and anger and at public meetings it is often commented that no-one does anything about juvenile nuisance, in fact it is often top of their agenda.

Response

Partners

Fylde Borough Council
New Fylde Housing
Blackpool Transport
The Kilnhouse Residents Association
The local Youths

After consultation with the youths causing problems and also residents at the beginning of 2002 a meeting took place in April 2002 with New Fylde Housing to discuss the problem and the possibility of funding for initiatives.

Once some funding had been agreed the next step was to speak to Fylde Borough Council, the residents, New Fylde Housing and the youths together. A plan of action was formed which went some way to address the immediate issues but also to look at longer term outcomes.

The residents did some fundraising through a raffle etc and raised £400 to pay for goal posts. Fylde Borough Council provided some land in an area at Blackpool Road North, close to Spring Gardens that had been identified by the youths as being suitable and also somewhere they would be happy to go to. +In the longer term, it was planned to develop it into a lit, fenced in, multi use games area as per Hope Street park model.

As soon as the football pitch went in the problem with youths noticeably reduced for the whole of that summer holidays. They would now arrive and gather before moving on to the football pitch. However there was still a problem when they gathered at the bus stop to return home. The residents however became more tolerant as they were anticipating a more permanent solution in the longer term.

The issues surrounding the bus shelter were discussed as originally the residents had fought long and hard to get a shelter while waiting for a bus. Several options were explored including moving it or turning it around so that it would not be possible to use it as a goal post. The residents did a questionnaire that had 200 responses which said get rid of it and 4 that said keep it. Fylde Borough Council therefore removed it.

Discussions took place with Fylde Borough Council about moving the lamppost, which the youths were swinging on. This was going to be very expensive and there was some hesitation. However while these discussions were taking place the youths pulled the lamppost over and made action inevitable. The lamppost was moved two metres away.

Negotiations took place about the BT pole that the youths climbed up to get onto the sub station. BT as a matter of policy will not put anything on their poles by the way of anti climbs spikes or paint. It was then decided to approach united utilities about putting spikes on the

building, which they did. BT decided to remove the public telephone box, which had been a focus for persistent damage and thereby removed that problem.

The violent tenant was a problem as he was one of the main antagonists in the area. The owner of the property lived in Australia and on one of his return visits he was approached with a view to evicting the tenant. He had a very tight contract with the tenant, which stipulated that should the tenant be in arrears they could be evicted with twenty-eight days notice and this is what happened. This went a long way to restoring peace to the neighbourhood. His removal made everyone feel much better.

The bus company met with us to look at ways of controlling this problem. They were beginning to fit CCTV cameras to some of their buses and it was agreed that only buses fitted with CCTV cameras were used on the No 14 bus route that serviced the Spring Gardens area. The youths were informed of this and police officers would also get on the buses with high visibility clothing so that youths could see their presence. Sometimes a police car would just follow the bus through the estate. There was and is no formal arrangement however every time there is spare capacity this is auctioned. Also the Community Beat Manager and Police Community Support Officer responsible for the estate have now split their shifts so that greater coverage can be maintained.

Despite all the work being done to address the location issues the youths still returned on occasions and caused problems. By the 12th June 2003 the CBM had planned to target the ringleaders and call them into the police station with their parents to outline that they would be arrested for public nuisance if their behaviour did not stop. This intention was effectively communicated to the youths during contact on the street and in response they unilaterally decided to leave the Spring Gardens location and over time they did not return. Therefore this action remains an intention should they return. It is clear that the youths fully understand and believe the resolve and determination of local officers to target their behaviour and they no longer feel safe in being untouchable.

To summarise: The money was raised and a new 7 a side football pitch was installed at Blackpool Road North playing field. A bus shelter was removed. A lamppost was relocated. Anti climb spikes and paint were applied to the electricity sub station. A BT telephone box was removed. New permanent 'no ball games' signs were concreted into the grassed area. A nuisance tenant and partner were evicted. Robust, consistent, persistent high visibility police attention to hot spot area via targeted patrol system with full use of YRS forms to target ringleaders. Police responses to reported problems dropped significantly. New Fylde Housing and Bus Company have had less incidents/complaints to deal with. Bus users have a better experience and now use the bus stop. Youths have a proper football facility to use.

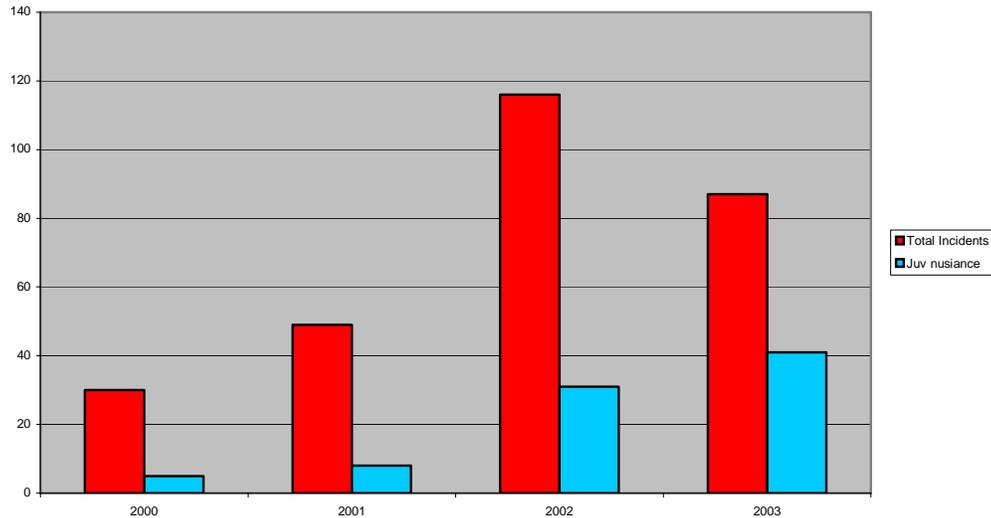
Assessment

Since the initiative begun in 2002 everyone has benefited. New Fylde Housing have now less complaints to deal with, the bus company have fewer incidents, police responses to problems at this location have dropped significantly and in the last seven weeks there have been no incidents. One of the response officers when asked said he could not remember the last time he went to Spring Gardens to deal with an incident.

The residents are much happier and residents in the sheltered accommodation are now happy to use the bus stop.

The youths when consulted said they are happy to have a proper facility to use and now feel valued. The pitch still remains unlit which needs to be developed in the longer term.

Juvenile Nuisance for Spring Gardens Location



As the graph shows in the Year 2002 there were 116 incidents on Spring Gardens including 31 Juvenile Nuisance complaints. After the above interventions in the year 2003 the figure dropped down to 87 total incidents.

Of these 87 incidents over the year 2003 the significant date of the 12th June 03 showed the full impact of the warning given regarding arrest for public nuisance became fully understood and believed by the offending youths. The second half of the year from this date forward showed further reductions as there were only 31 total incidents of which 11 were Juvenile nuisance complaints compared to the first half of the year which showed 56 total incidents including 30 juvenile nuisance complaints.

The trend is now continuing in 2004 as from the 1st January 2004 to the time this was submitted there have been only 3 total incidents (all warning messages) and zero juvenile nuisance reports.

New Fylde Housing report that their officers are now dealing with very few complaints regarding the issues on Spring Gardens. The bus company now has fewer incidents to deal with from their passengers. The bus users have a much better experience of using the buses and now feel comfortable enough to use the actual bus stop regularly.

The older residents think the peace and quiet that they now enjoy is wonderful and their quality of life has significantly improved. The younger residents with young families are now able to let their toddlers play on the grass square, which is tolerated by all the residents. The youths have a proper football facility to use that has been enhanced by goal nets which are looked after overnight by an elderly local resident who lives near to the pitch.

The chairperson of the Kilnhouse Resident Association recently commented on the work achieved by the police and said; "Keep up the good work".

In summary the objective from the outset was to reduce youth nuisance and disorder and increase public satisfaction and improve the quality of life of residents. The provision of the structured youth facility was also a goal from the outset. These objectives have clearly been achieved as can be seen from the figures in the graph as residents only complain when they are not happy.