

West Area Committee

Drinking Dens

1. Background

- 1.1 In July 2009, the West Area Committee agreed a number of actions and proposals, relating to the 'Safe' priorities. The Committee was advised of the performance management system that has recently been introduced for Local Multi Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) issues and the reporting of such issues by exception to the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Delivery Group
- 1.2 The July meeting of the ASB Delivery Group had been advised that there were a number of alcohol dens, or 'drinking dens' being considered by LMAPS. Drinking dens as referred to in this report are typically places created in undergrowth within established plantations as hidden places for under-age drinking to occur. The issue has been a regular item for LMAPS since the inception of the process. Other such 'dens' have been cleared outside of the LMAPS process.
- 1.3 It was previously reported to the ASB Delivery Group and to the West Area Committee that funds had recently been sought from the West LMAPS to enable substantial clearance of undergrowth to occur in a specific location to eradicate a drinking den. After discussion partners decided not to provide funds as it was recognised that whilst the problem might be resolved in the short term, due to re-growth, the problem would be likely to re-occur in the future. Such a funding allocation from LMAPS would have the potential to create a regular drain on the limited LMAPS financial resources, (each LMAPS has received £10,000 for the current financial year to assist with the resolution of broad range of problems and community safety matters), that are available.
- 1.4 Following discussion at the ASB Delivery Group, it was proposed that consideration should be given to alternative options for addressing this issue, for example, clearing dens at the same time as arranging detached youth work to attempt engagement with the young people. It was agreed that a Task and Finish group would be convened to consider the issue. The ASB Strategy Manager has commenced discussions with representatives of the Police, Environmental Services and the Youth Development Group and will be reporting initial findings, and the views of this Committee to the September meeting of the ASB Delivery Group.
- 1.5 Following the July meeting of the West Area Committee, the Area Lead Executive requested that a feedback report on drinking dens in the West Framework Area be presented to the September meeting of the Committee.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 Within the City of Sunderland boundary there are approximately 154 hectares of plantation in existence, the majority being in Washington. Historically broadleaved plantations were thinned on a regular five year rotational basis whereby poorly formed, dead, dying, diseased or dangerous trees were removed and the area opened up to allow better conditions for remaining trees. Regular maintenance of plantations was removed from grounds maintenance operations as a result of budget cuts approximately 15 years ago. As a result of this maturing plantations are becoming increasingly dense and a number of sites attract anti-social behaviour which can include dumping of garden and other refuse, vandalism and the establishment of drinking dens.

3. Consideration of Drinking Dens by LMAPS

- 3.1 A number of the sites have been discussed at the West and South LMAPS meetings. Brief details of some of the issues occurring within the West area are shown below.
- 3.2 In February 2007, it was reported to the West LMAPS that youths were gaining access to the grounds of a residential premise and using it as a drinking den. Removal of shrubbery resolved the problem and the item was closed in July 2007.
- 3.3 In July 2008, Police reported to the West LMAPS a seasonal problem at a school, with youths making dens in overgrown bushes and causing disorder. Environmental Services removed the bushes and the item was closed in August 2008.
- 3.4 In September 2008, it was reported to the South LMAPS that several complaints had been received concerning drinking dens along the mineral line at Farringdon. The area received an extensive clear up including thinning and clearance of bushes, and several measures, some of which are ongoing, were put in place.
- 3.5 In November 2008, it was reported to the West LMAPS that there was an increase in alcohol related youth disorder at playing fields in the Hylton Road / Ford Estate area. Complaints centred around youths making drinking dens in trees at the edge of the fields. Shrubbery thinning and removal has since been undertaken on several occasions though the item remains as an open item on the LMAPS agenda pending further assessment of required works.
- 3.6 In February 2009, it was reported to the West LMAPS that overgrown shrubbery was providing cover for youth related ASB in the vicinity of an industrial premise. This item had previously been considered by LMAPS between August and November 2007. Extensive work had previously been undertaken but the problem had re-occurred. Further assessment in June has resulted in an agreement that the plantation shrubbery will be thinned though this will not be undertaken until September due to other commitments.

4. Environmental Services response to Drinking Dens

- 4.1 Environmental Services Litter team currently removes identified drinking dens or areas of fly tipping. Additional monies secured through the Strategic Investment Plan fund this. In addition, problem areas, which have been previously identified as hot spots have been placed on a regular programme whereby, litter / fly tipping is removed.
- 4.2 A number of problem sites, some of which are included in section 3 above, were thinned and cleared in the West Framework area during 2008/09. General site locations and costs of thinning works / clearance are as follows:

Thorney Close area	£2,220
Playing fields, Hylton Road area	£8,880
South Hylton area	£6,660
Playing Fields, South Hylton area	£4,440
Silksworth Lane area	£6,660
Mineral line, Farringdon area	£8,880
Mineral line, Barnes area	£4,350
Pennywell area	£4,440
Playing fields, Nookside area	£5,880
Ford area	£2,220
Total Cost	£54,630

5. Police response to Drinking Dens

- 5.1 The Police response to drinking dens is undertaken by the Alcohol Field Intelligence Officer (AFIO). This is a recently created dedicated role within Sunderland Area Command. The AFIO is responsible for research, collation and development of local intelligence in connection with the sale of alcohol to and consumption of alcohol by persons under age of 18 years. The AFIO provides a link with the Neighbourhood Policing Teams and partners, to support enforcement, targeting of individuals, points of sale to persons under 18yrs and areas frequented for consumption of alcohol by persons under 18yrs.
- 5.2 A number of Police operations have recently been undertaken within the City, one of which was in the West Framework area. The operations included surveillance of premises and challenging offenders during evening hours. Additionally a number of proactive high profile patrol operations (based on previously recorded alcohol related juvenile anti social behaviour incidents) are currently ongoing, several of which are in the West Framework area.
- 5.3 The AFIO maintains good communication links with Environmental Services to share information and intelligence in relation to locating and destruction of drinking dens and Neighbourhood Policing Teams can direct extra patrols in these areas.

6. Options for responding to Drinking Dens.

- 6.1 As described above, the current response to the issue of drinking dens comes from both the Police and Environmental Services and LMAPS meetings have also discussed a number of dens. Whilst the Police response is aimed at cutting the illegal supply of alcohol to young people, the Environmental Services response is to clear sites and cut back undergrowth. However, without regular maintenance, this cannot provide a long-term solution in itself due to re-growth so problems can re-occur. In attempting to solve the problem of drinking dens there is also no engagement with the young people who create the dens so there is a danger that whilst a drinking den problem might be 'solved' the problem might merely be moved to another locality. It is also acknowledged that clearing drinking dens will not eliminate the problem of young people consuming alcohol. Rather it is likely that young people would continue to drink in less visible areas, which may potentially place them at higher risk.
- 6.2 Option A – Continue as at present to respond to service requests from the existing budget, clearing sites as they arise and re-visiting them when problems re-occur. If this option was considered there will be no implications for the Committee.
- 6.3 Option B – Use enhanced budget to undertake clearance of plantations, so reducing the potential for establishment of drinking dens. If this option is considered there would be serious environmental issues arising. There would also be financial implications for the Committee in funding such a clearance.
- 6.4 Option C – Re-introduce a planned maintenance programme for those plantations identified as drinking dens to minimise the opportunities for such dens to be created. This would help to reduce ASB from such sites. There would be financial implications for the Committee in funding such a planned maintenance programme.
- 6.5 Option D - As above, but extended to all plantations. As well as helping to reduce ASB from such sites, this option would also have environmental objectives in helping to provide safe and appropriate recreation areas, helping to protect and promote the wildlife value and the landscape value of the plantations. This option could also be used

to involve the local community in the care and management of the plantations. There would be financial implications for the Committee in funding such a planned maintenance programme.

- 6.5 Option E – Financial implications of Option C and D above could potentially be reduced if some of the planned maintenance works were to be undertaken by offenders working in the community as part of community payback. This option could be considered as an enhancement to option C above and would require input from the Probation Service, though this would need to be explored to see if it was practicable.
- 6.6 Option F – Provide a youth work response to engage with the young people constructing and using drinking dens at the point when dens are first identified. This could be undertaken by providing additional resources to provide a fast response, using detached youth workers to engage with and hopefully divert the young people from ASB. This could be undertaken in a number of ways, for example by using the contracted youth teams operating in the area, or via the Street Teams who are currently engaging with young people to publicise the XL Youth Villages, or by utilising an organisation such as SAFC Foundation who have a proven track record in engaging with disenchanted young people. This option of engagement with young people would also have the benefit of enabling young people in need of support to be referred to the Youth Drug and Alcohol project (YDAP). There would be health and safety considerations to be taken into account with this option as youth workers cannot be expected to engage with young people who are under the influence of alcohol. There would also be financial implications for the Committee in funding this option, which could also include any one of the other options above to remove the rubbish left / cut back the trees, etc
- 6.7 Option G – As an enhancement to Option F above, if engagement with young people is successful, youth providers (and the engaged young people), to work with Licensing Section to undertake test purchases of off-licenses in the area.
- 6.8 The Safer Sunderland Partnership problem solves using a prevention, early intervention, enforcement and treatment / rehabilitation model, considering issues from a victim, offender and location perspective. It is therefore agreed that a rounded approach to tackling this issue must be taken, including tidying up the environment, offering support to young people and where necessary using powers to challenge inappropriate behaviour. I

Proposal

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| <p>a) Provide in-principle support to options F and G, pending a further report on cost implications, and which organisation would be best placed to deliver such an intervention;</p> <p>b) Provide in-principle support to options C and E, pending a further report on cost implications</p> |
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