

Graffiti update for Tonbridge Forum

24 February 2025

1. Background

- 1.1 Graffiti is regarded by most as a form of criminal damage and can be defined as ‘any inscription, marking, writing, painting or drawing, illicitly scratched, scribbled, drawn, cut, carved, posted, pasted sprayed or painted on any surface’.
- 1.2 Graffiti takes many forms including tags, slogans and political messages, advertising, cartoons, and highly colourful and complex artistic creations. Graffiti is sometimes regarded as an art form by those doing it, but by members of the public it is often seen as a nuisance and frequently associated with anti-social behaviour. It is also costly to get rid of and recent estimates put the clean-up costs for graffiti in the UK at more than £1billion.
- 1.3 The ‘broken windows’ theory is a criminological theory that states that visible signs of crime, anti-social behaviour, and civil disorder create an urban environment that encourages further crime and disorder, including serious crimes.
- 1.4 Graffiti can be considered an act of criminal damage. Under the Criminal Damage Act 1971, anyone caught doing graffiti can face a prison sentence of up to ten years or fined if the damage costs more than £5,000. If the damage caused is less than £5,000, an offender could face three months in prison or a fine of £2,500. Spray paint was also made illegal to under-16s. Any shopkeeper who sells it to an under-16 can be fined up to £2,500.
- 1.5 Tonbridge Town Centre and surrounding areas, specifically the area around Medway Wharf, have recently experienced an increase in ‘tags’ and this has been noted by Borough Council Members, business owners and residents. A previous report has been presented to Borough Council Members at the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee and a graffiti policy was developed and is now available on our website.
- 1.6 I have been asked to provide an update to Tonbridge Forum on progress made to tackle graffiti since the report to Members and this report will give details of the scale of the problem and how we have been able to tackle (some) of the graffiti.

2. What is the scale of the problem?

- 2.1 During 2024, the Borough Council’s Waste Services received 35 reports of graffiti from across the borough (it is not possible to break these figures down into more specific locations). The amount of graffiti reported to the police is also low (although exact figures are not available).

2.2 We do know however, that having graffiti in an area can make residents feel unsafe and can make an area seem unattractive.

3. How is the Council tackling the problem?

3.1 The Council's approach, as stated on our website, is that we will remove graffiti from council-owned land and public property. We aim to remove all offensive, racist and abusive graffiti on our land within 48 hours of it being reported to us. Areas on or close to main roads, main town areas and schools will be given priority. Residents can report any incidents of graffiti to us via our website - [Report a graffiti incident | User registration – Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council](#)

3.2 We will not remove graffiti from privately owned property, railway structures or telephone boxes and we will encourage residents to report this graffiti to the police or directly to the landowners.

3.3 Some residents do contact us directly about graffiti on privately owned property and where this happens, we will try to identify and contact the landowner. We can then request that they remove the graffiti, or we can potentially use Community Payback to help remove this and we have had some success in using this scheme to remove graffiti. The Community Payback scheme uses people who have been convicted of a crime by a court but not sent to prison to undertake unpaid community work (such as removing graffiti).

3.4 The photographs below show graffiti on the side of 'Cook' on Tonbridge High Street. With the permission of Cook, and following a road closure, Community Payback were able to paint over this graffiti.

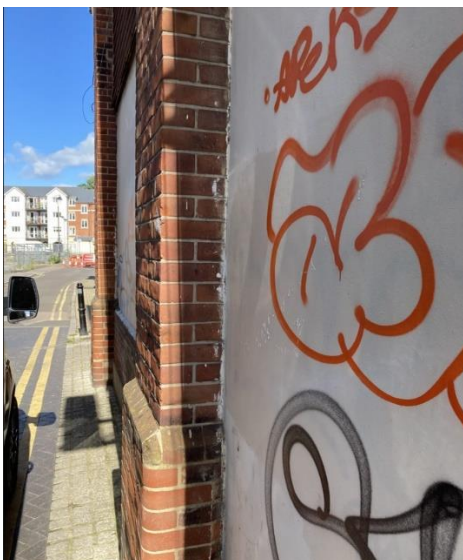


Photo showing graffiti before removal



Photo after graffiti removed (June 2024)

- 3.5 Unfortunately, not all properties with graffiti on may be suitable for removal by Community Payback, due to the position of the graffiti (e.g. too close to a road or to a river) or the need for scaffolding/ladders etc.
- 3.6 We have also had other successes in contacting the owners of properties where there has been graffiti. Most of these do want to be able to remove the graffiti from their buildings, although there is obviously a cost involved for them to do this. During 2024 I contacted the Head of Maintenance at Peacocks, as graffiti had been sprayed onto the doorway of their empty store in the High Street. He confirmed that the store was due for refurbishment and the graffiti was removed during this process. I was also able to contact Network Rail, as we had received reports that there was graffiti on a bridge by the railway line which was owned by them. Again, they arranged for their contractor to remove this graffiti.
- 3.7 I was also able to contact the Managing Director of Wharf House, who arranged for the graffiti on the side of their building to be removed. They were aware of the graffiti and the need to remove this and worked as quickly as possible to arrange for this to be cleaned. The photographs below show this removal.



Photo before removal

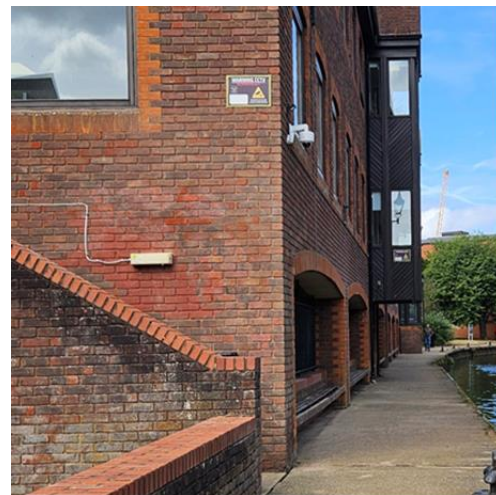


Photo after removal (August 2024)

- 3.8 More recently, I have also had success in contacting the Post Office on Quarry Hill who had graffiti on the rear of their building. They were able to arrange for the removal of this.

4. **Is there anything further that we can do?**

- 4.1 As stated above, there have been successes in removing graffiti and this should be recognised. Unfortunately, graffiti does continue to be put onto buildings around Tonbridge (and other areas in the borough), albeit on a relatively low level compared to other areas. The Borough Council will continue to remove graffiti from our property, and we will continue to encourage privately owned properties to remove graffiti as quickly as possible.
- 4.2 We have encouraged businesses to install CCTV cameras to try and stop people from committing graffiti and to try to identify anyone who does the graffiti

and to use anti-graffiti paint where possible/appropriate. We have also been working with the police to identify anyone doing graffiti. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to catch offenders, but we are continuing to try. The Police are also going into schools to talk to young people about graffiti and we hope that this might prevent some of the issues. We're also working with organisations who engage with young people on the streets so that they can also talk to the young people about graffiti and the effects that this can have on an area and on residents/businesses in an area.

- 4.3 Unfortunately, it can sometimes be difficult to identify the owner of a property and can sometimes take some time. However, once identified we would look to work with them and encourage them as quickly as possible to remove the graffiti. In some cases, we may be able to provide funding to enable them to remove this graffiti (if the removal is proving too costly for them), although this funding is limited.
- 4.4 If anyone does become aware of graffiti in Tonbridge (or anywhere in the borough) then this can be reported to the Borough Council. If we are not aware of the issues, then we cannot tackle this. Please report issues via [Report a graffiti incident | User registration – Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council](#). Any graffiti reported via the online form which is on our land will be removed by the borough council and any that are on private land are passed to me to try and contact the landowner.
- 4.5 I hope this provides reassurance that the Borough Council is working with private landowners to remove graffiti where possible and as quickly as possible and that in general, these landowners also want to work with us to remove the graffiti. If you do have any areas where you have seen graffiti, then please do report these via the online reporting form so that these can be dealt with as appropriate. If anyone does have any specific queries, then please feel free to email me at alison.finch@tmbc.gov.uk.

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