

NEWCASTLE TOMORROW – CLEAN, SAFE and FUN

City Centre Committees – A Graffiti Free Public Domain

Our Message – ACT!

This city needs to deal with the escalating damage bill caused by young men being allowed the run of our streets every night of the week and the passive permission we give to them to trash our property.

We need to stop saying we can't afford to address it and start saying we can't afford not to.

We need a comprehensive management plan to deal with the problem.

We need all the stakeholders to sign on to a common purpose.

We need the resources to do it properly because to do it with less means our efforts will be temporary and, in the end, wasted.

We need those in authority to take it seriously, to address it intelligently, to take responsibility and to provide the leadership for community participation and pride.

We need our political leaders to work with us to provide the legislative and regulatory frameworks to solve the problems and to provide funding that helps us to do the job.

This paper highlights options for a city-wide approach to graffiti management and hopefully for the development of a coordinated **Graffiti Management Plan** led by Newcastle City Council and supported by State and Federal agencies, community groups, residents, business and property owners.

What HAS to be done...

1. Prevention

There is evidence that graffiti vandalism is reduced through:

- rapid removal,
- ongoing property maintenance,
- installation of fencing that won't attract graffiti,
- careful colour choices for buildings and fences,
- improved lighting,
- improved security measures,
- consistent reporting of graffiti through a single graffiti reporting line, and
- a centralised recording system.

2. Graffiti Removal

It is widely accepted that graffiti removal should occur as soon as possible after the vandalism occurs with the goal being to ensure the vandal gets no satisfaction from the crime.

Furthermore, when the responses by different organisations are inconsistent and public and private buildings are treated differently and in different time cycles, it means that areas of the city can never be free of the ugliness.

There are also significant issues surrounding the legal position of people attempting to remove or paint over graffiti, and issues of ongoing liability for damage to surfaces or contravention of environmental regulations.

Our responses to the crime need to be unified and there should be agreed mix of simple cleaning, emerging technology, community art, broad brush painting and computer-generated colour-matching to support an efficient and cost effective program.

3. Community Engagement

This crime affects every member of our community and impacts on our sense of safety, prosperity and well being.

It creates perceptions that we take no pride in our city, that we are disinterested in our place.

It destroys business and people go elsewhere where it is clean and pleasant.

The task is beyond the individual. But by sharing information and shouldering the task together - property owners, managers and occupiers can make an impact.

Information on graffiti prevention and removal through fact sheets, removal kits and a comprehensive web page will give people the tools to make their own contribution.

A concerted community-driven graffiti reporting system would allow Council to respond with a proactive graffiti removal program rather than an ad-hoc one dependent on random information.

Heighten public awareness of programs through media support and by a school education programs.

4. Authorised Graffiti

Despite varying views on the use of authorised spots for graffiti there is an argument for extending the current approach. We need to confirm that it is not the youth culture of aerosol art that is objectionable, but the mindless destruction of our civic environment.

5. Prosecution

The detection, prosecution and suitable sentencing of vandals is inadequate.

The significance of this crime seems to be understated because it is the accumulation of multiple attacks on a wide range of property types and poor reporting systems.

Local strategies could incorporate:

- tasking police to monitor peak vandalism periods and locations
- increased surveillance through night time ranger patrols funded by local government
- CCTV in trouble spots
- Sensor lights
- Collaboration with schools and TAFE Colleges to identify writers.
- Rewards.

Relevant laws should also be reviewed to ensure that the punishment is suitable and takes into account the cost to society of treating the matter lightly.

6. Funding

It is estimated that illegal graffiti costs the Australian community in the order of \$100 million per year.

In Newcastle Council, business, private owners, RTA, Telstra, State Rail and others pay money to cover up the problem. This money, sunk into a cooperative, jointly-managed fund, should be able to be used to better purpose.

Matching grants for pilot projects with well-planned evaluation and gathering of research data needs to be asked for from government.

7. Coordination

In Newcastle there are a number of groups who could take leadership roles or contribute to finding solutions within a broader plan.

The appropriate leadership entity is Newcastle City Council through the Community Safety Plan.

Through Council's leadership, coordination of the development of a graffiti management plan should be dealt with through the Community Safety Panel and referred to the Crime Prevention Partnership.

However, a whole-of-government approach will be necessary to make any significant advances.

This includes commitment and cooperation by local, State and Federal agencies.

Newcastle City Council – The appropriate leadership entity

Newcastle Council has a Position Statement on graffiti together with a basic Graffiti Management Plan.

The Council has a positive approach to authorised graffiti and has underpinned it with an agreement for the South Newcastle Beach Skate Park aerosol art program, as well as having the Council vans decorated in mural art.

The Council, as the common body would be best positioned to establish a **Graffiti Management Plan** that includes all stakeholders and has clear instructions on community awareness and education which will be able to be used over the whole of the Newcastle Local Government area.

This plan needs to offer guidelines on:

- **prevention**
- **protection and removal**
- **strategies for community awareness, involvement and education**
- **consistent approaches and strategies to support successful prosecution**
- **develop and distribute resources for the community schools and businesses.**

Graffiti Management Plan

Under the leadership of Newcastle City Council, a coordinated, collaborative graffiti management plan needs to be developed, involving a range of programs and with the cooperation and joint funding of stakeholders. The Council's position statement on graffiti could be used as the starting point as well as information from the NSW Attorney General's Department and the Graffiti Management Plan from the City of Greater Geelong. The plan needs to be reviewed biennially with a sound audit to be undertaken at the beginning. The data gathered by the City Guides over the past two years can provide a reasonable starting point for comparison.

The plan needs to address:

1. Prevention, Protection and Removal
2. Community awareness, involvement and education
3. Prosecution.

In addition to the active steps there needs to be a range of protocols agreed between the stakeholders about information exchange and public communication. Part of the challenge for the vandals is creating a public outrage. Media coverage is satisfying.

Role of the Precincts

Property owners, businesses and inner city residents are clearly not in a position to drive the changes that need to happen.

This is a clear responsibility of Newcastle City Council and State Government.

The Precincts need to take a strong stand on behalf of the other stakeholders to ask that Council adopt the resolution of the graffiti scourge in the City Centre as core business.

On the other hand, inner city commercial property owners pay a Special Benefit Rate and expect to see outcomes for those funds. Reviews and surveys undertaken in 2007 were clear that people want the Precincts to focus on strategies designed to achieve a clean and safe city centre.

The Precincts can make a contribution in the following ways.

1. Seek Council's support in establishing a comprehensive Graffiti Management Plan for the City Centre.
2. Fully participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of that Plan including taking on the management of elements of it should that be appropriate.
3. Allocating a reasonable budget provided that the funds are matched by other participants.
4. Approaching State and Federal bodies and representatives to seek sources of funding for pilot projects.
5. Exploring options such as Work for the Dole or Community Service Orders as a means of reducing costs and engaging the community.
6. Seeking the support of the City Ambassador volunteers to continue their monitoring and reporting of vandalism.
7. Help to set up a resident graffiti watch program where local residents can 'adopt' blocks/areas of houses and report any graffiti that may appear on 'their block'. This can be done through the already existing neighbourhood groups.
8. Supporting a public communication strategy to ensure better reporting to Police or to Council about incidents.

Newcastle City Centre Committee