



PREVENTING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

Review date: January 2021
Minute number G1322 refers
Next review date: January 2023

This objective of this policy is to ensure that PTC's public open spaces and playgrounds are safe places to visit, build a sense of community, provide opportunities for relaxation and escape, and the spaces they provide for exercise and recreation can be enjoyed without the fear of experiencing antisocial behaviour (ASB) or the results of ASB.

There are three main sections to this policy, the first is set out principles of acceptable use of public open spaces within the ownership of PTC, which are not already governed by existing rules or by-laws. The second to provide policy guidance to officers in adopting a best practice approach to managing the maintenance of open spaces in the context or preventing antisocial behaviour. The third is to work with community partners to address and report ASB on a ongoing basis.

Generally the incidences of ASB in open spaces is not that high; however there are significant 'hot spots'. Most notable, Love Lane Playing Fields, Bell Hill Recreation Ground and The Avenue Pavilion and Playing Fields. Significant ASB is associated with areas where young people gather, particularly at night. Much youth ASB is alcohol and drug fuelled. However reported incidents of ASB are not restricted to the night time or the youth. Low level ASB (i.e. littering, dog fouling, drinking, taking drugs etc.) can significantly affect quality of open spaces and affect the surrounding community.

1. Acceptable Use of Open Spaces

Generally access to public open spaces is available 24 hours a day. However there is not necessarily a need for certain facilities, e.g. car parks and children's playgrounds to be accessible for all of that time, especially during the night when such facilities are subject to incidents of ASB. Therefore this policy allows for specific rules relating the acceptable behaviour of users of open spaces to be implemented across all PTC own open spaces. These rules, which are supplementary to any existing rules and by-laws, include:

- (a) Use of the Car Parks is for the sole purpose of visitors to the open space and facilities.
- (b) Access to Car Parks is not permitted during the hours of darkness with the exception of access or activities authorised by the Town Council.
- (c) Smoking, drinking of alcohol, playing of music and loitering are all prohibited activities within Car Parks.
- (d) Children's playground areas are provided for the enjoyment of families and children under 15 years of age. Access to children's playgrounds is not permitted during the hours of darkness.

- (e) No person may smoke in any playground or other place in any open space in contravention of a notice prohibiting smoking.
- (f) No person may consume alcohol in any playground or other place in any open space in contravention of a notice prohibiting consumption of alcohol.
- (g) No person may behave in a manner likely to cause a nuisance to or intimidate other users of the open space and playgrounds.

By making a demonstrable statement, which could be supported by high profile publicity of the rules, about the acceptable behaviour it allows open space users, residents and council officers to be clear in what is considered anti-social and whether to challenge or report such behaviour. It also sets a baseline to report against such that if Council was to consider the introduction of by-laws or ask the relevant authorities (e.g. EHDC) to investigate implementing Public Spaces Protection Orders there would be good supporting evidence.

2. Maintenance of Open Spaces

Well maintained facilities can discourage ASB by encouraging their patronage. An open space that is well used and busy is safer as a result of self-policing by the open space users. Encouraging greater use of open spaces allows the community to take back its green spaces from the minority who misuse them, and a greater sense of ownership and responsibility brings a reduction in other forms of antisocial behaviour such as graffiti, drinking drug taking and littering.

- 2.1. Council will respond rapidly to problems such as vandalism, this sends a clear message that such abuse will not be tolerated. Council Officers have delegated responsibility to authorise repair to such malicious damage up to a cost of £2,000 per incident to ensure open spaces are kept in a well presented state. Repairs which cost in excess of £2,000 must also be approved by the Town Mayor and Chairman of both the Grounds Committee and Finance & General Purposes Committee. Such incidents will be logged in accordance with section 4(b).
- 2.2. The presence of people who are perceived to be custodians of an open space acts as a strong deterrent to antisocial behaviour, and also as a reassurance to park users that a particular space is safe. Grounds Staff carrying out their work in the parks can also give a sense of security, particularly when they wear a recognisable uniform, their presence discouraging anti-social behaviour. Consideration should be given to complementing the Grounds Staff with volunteers from the community.
- 2.3. Even in the absence of a 'custodian', clearly displayed details of someone to contact to respond to antisocial behaviour allow members of the public to take action against this problem. In addition, Council should ensure that it is easy and straightforward to report incidents of ASB through the Council's website and social media pages.
- 2.4. Reasserting the clarity of design with open vistas and clear sight lines. This means ensuring that hedgerows, trees, signs and any buildings do not create areas that are hidden from view, which could encourage ASB to develop. Therefore the scheduled maintenance of trees, hedgerows, bushes and brambles should take specific account of this requirement. Areas not already on routine maintenance schedules should be added where the possibility of creating such hidden areas is identified. If, through reports from the police or members of the community, areas are identified as harbouring ASB, they should be assessed and treated with priority by officers of the Council. Future infrastructure modifications that are undertaken on open spaces must also take this requirement into account during the design process.
- 2.5. Regular, scheduled patrols, to clear areas of litter, along with frequent emptying of bins promotes a tidy image and sense of ownership of open spaces.
 - a) Litter Bins should not be allowed to overflow and contribute towards an untidy

appearance. During foreseeable busy periods, for example, events or seasonal periods, additional plans must be put in place by officers to ensure that this work is resourced appropriately.

- b) Tenants and concession holders of facilities within PTC's open spaces must ensure that refuse arrangements do not contribute towards an untidy appearance.
- c) The placing of litter bins shall be optimised for maximum footfall. Council officers should pay due regard to the positioning of both new litter bins and when replacements are required, taking into account that an existing location might not always be the most effective. Litter bins should, primarily be sited adjacent to paths and entrance/exit points to open spaces.

3. Security Measures

Target hardening (the redesign of facilities and equipment to make them near indestructible, and less susceptible to theft, vandalism and abuse) should not be used as the only response to problems of anti-social behaviour in public space, but should be employed selectively where they will be effective, and as part of a co-ordinated approach. Such measures include:

- (a) The installation of CCTV at the Avenue pavilion, Love Lane Playing Fields and Bell Hill Recreation Ground.
- (b) The installation of fencing and physical 'padlocking' of open spaces, or parts of, children's playgrounds outside of the hours of acceptable use.
- (c) The installation of barriers or gates which can be secured to prevent access to car parks outside of the hours of acceptable use.
- (d) To removal or redesign of facilities or equipment which is subjected to repeated incidents of vandalism.

4. Reporting and working with partners

Work with partners towards reducing antisocial behaviour and crime in open spaces.

Tackling the issue of anti-social behaviour is a complex and difficult job, and requires involvement of a number of groups. When these groups work together, particularly when there is community involvement, many of these issues can be reduced or eliminated. Council should proactively work with other partners, EHDC, the police, community residents in seeking to manage ASB. At a more strategic level, regular meetings should place between the police, community wardens and officers from EHDC and others to discuss ways of tackling specific problems, and providing support to the community by engaging young people who are often involved in antisocial behaviour.

- (a) Council representatives should attend the meetings of the Community Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (CTCG), led by EDHC, to both report and understand action being taken by the statutory authorities on ASB issues. Reports from CTCG should be presented to the Grounds Committee or Full Council.
- (b) Council Officers must maintain an incident log of all ASB incidents reported by members of the community, council officers or council members. Regular reports of the incident log will be presented to the Grounds Committee by the Senior Groundsman on at least a quarterly basis.

5. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed in January 2023

Appendix A

Open Spaces and Car Parks owned or managed by PTC to which this policy is applicable

- ▶ Bell Hill Common
- ▶ Bell Hill Recreation Ground
- ▶ Bell Hill Recreation Ground Car Park
- ▶ Woods Meadow
- ▶ Tilmore Allotments
- ▶ Borough Road Recreation Ground
- ▶ High Meadow
- ▶ Paddock Way Recreation Ground
- ▶ The Heath
- ▶ Sussex Road Car Park
- ▶ Heath Road Car Park
- ▶ The Avenue Recreation Ground
- ▶ Love Lane Playing Fields
- ▶ Love Lane Playing Fields Car Park
- ▶ Penns Farm Playing Fields
- ▶ St. Peter's Churchyard
- ▶ Rotherlands Conservation Area
- ▶ Barnfield / Heathfield Link road
- ▶ Open spaces on the Ramshill Estate
- ▶ Meadows off the Causeway