

TACKLING THE NIGHT TERRORS

CCTV and higher profile policing are set to be the main weapons as Banff bids to fight back against "mindless" anti-social behaviour which is blighting the lives of residents, businesses and tarnishing the town's image.

The crackdown on the late night drunken antics has been welcomed by those on the frontline faced with the consequences of the rowdy behaviour.

Banff's senior police chief has revealed that eight anti-social behaviour penalties have already been slapped on offenders for breaking the peace, including urinating in public.

And Inspector Mark McLaughlin has vowed his officers will continue to do all they can to target those responsible.

The police chief has had a bid for mobile CCTV cameras accepted by his superiors and locations for these cameras will be discussed over the coming weeks.

Banff and District Community Safety Group has thrown its weight behind the campaign by local residents and business owners to stamp on the problem.

That follows a report in "The Banffshire Journal" earlier this month which revealed the scale of the town centre problem.

Fed-up residents took their concerns to the safety group's meeting in Macduff last week and left reassured that a concerted effort will be made to help them tackle the problem.

Nick Dolphin, group chairman, urged the community to work with the police.

"Community safety is not just a matter for the police and involves a community effort if it is to be truly effective in the long-term," he said.

FOOLISH

"We can never eradicate people who get drunk and are sick on the pavements and it would be foolish to think that we could, but at least we should be able to contain and control it to make sure people's lives are not plagued by it."

Smashed windows, cars vandalised, broken glass, yobs urinating through letter boxes and against buildings, noise and general rowdiness have been the norm for residents for the last 18 months.

A four-pronged blitz on the problem was agreed at the meeting which will be reviewed in a month's time.

That includes: • Mobile CCTV cameras to catch offenders in the act. The bid by Insp McLaughlin

by CHRIS SAUNDERSON

has been accepted since last week's meeting.

• All calls relating to anti-social behaviour in the High Street and area around the castle flagged up to ensure an even speedier police response.

• More frequent and higher visibility foot patrols.

• Residents and business owners keeping a log of all incidents and writing to the licensing board with concerns over problem drinkers.

Local resident Joe Woods told the group: "I have not had a night's sleep on a Friday or Saturday since I moved into my house 18 months ago.

"I feel like I want to go out there and speak to them but do you really want to tackle 12 to 15

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who have had a little bit too much to drink?" he asked.

Ian Maryan, who runs The Gables guest house, said: "It is a regular occurrence every Friday and Saturday. We need more foot patrols, not just officers cruising by in cars along the High Street.

"It would deter the boy racers and the mindless, brainless vandalism that goes on."

High Street bed and breakfast owner Tracy Knott has installed her own CCTV cameras at the front door of her Trinity Manse premises to try and deter troublemakers.

"We dread guest coming to stay on a Friday and Saturday night. One guest had a canoe on top of his car and this guy in his 40s tried to get the canoe off the car. That kind of behaviour is not going to make people come back to Banff," she said.

Insp McLaughlin said patrols in the area had been stepped up following the initial complaints and that had seen a reduction in the number of incidents.

He said police resources were stretched at the weekend, particularly in the period when the pubs and clubs close.

"It is a case of trying to get my officers in the right areas at the right time. There have been efforts but whether we can sustain that, time will tell," he said.

However, he revealed that he has also submitted a bid for two extra officers for foot patrols in the problem area at key times.

The residents and business owners called for CCTV to be deployed in the area.

Mr Maryan said cameras had successfully curbed problems in the Low Street area of town.

Insp McLaughlin said: "The cameras did work in Low Street and when they were initially installed one or two people were charged with vandalism and disorder.

"This is not a problem that is going to disappear overnight and is something we are going to have to keep chipping away at."

However, the inspector was keen to stress that anti-social disorder was not unique to Banff.

"Every town and village through the UK suffers this problem. Compared to the crime they have in Fraserburgh and Peterhead our problems are just a drop in the ocean. It is still one of the safest places to live in Aberdeenshire."

Mr Dolphin said the anti-social behaviour had broader implications for Banff.

"There are a number of organisations in Banff trying to improve its profile and make it a better place to live, work and visit. It is giving the town a bad image," he said.

Mr Woods welcomed the positive response from the community safety group.

"It is encouraging what is going to happen but the proof will be in the pudding. The last time when the article came out we could see a reduction for a couple of weeks and then it came back again."

The crackdown on anti-social rowdies will be reviewed at next month's meeting of the community safety group.

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