

Chief Inspector Ian Swallow
Kent Police
Margate Police Station
Margate
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CT9 1HL

30th April 2024

Dear Chief Inspector Swallow

Graffiti and related criminal damage in Thanet

I have monitored the surge in tag graffiti in this area over the last 18 months for my local residents' group, Friends of Spencer Square ('FOSS').

A. Email/letter circulation

Following my 101 call of 27th April 2024, I am sending you this intelligence report in the hope that it will assist Kent Police in investigating this matter. As it will be of concern to residents and businesses generally this letter is being copied to other stakeholders, councillors and our local MPs (who are, of course, also joint presidents of Thanet and East Kent Chamber of Commerce).

B. Executive summary

I attach digital photographs I have taken labelled with the date on which they were taken (see Att.1–Att.14). This is a small fraction of tag graffiti in Thanet I've seen in the last 18 months (some of which has been cleared) but it all follows the same pattern. Tag outlines appear overnight (mainly weekends), followed by others, 'fill-ins' and 'over-tags' until a new hotspot is established.

When I started my monitor role I assumed (like most people) that myriads of different tags pointed to hundreds of teenage taggers competing with each other to 'claim territory' and investigating and prosecuting offenders would involve a lot of police manpower and other obstacles.

However, based on the evidence set out under sub-headings **C-J** below, I now believe that c. 90% of tag graffiti in Thanet is by just two adult taggers: '7Days' (reported to Kent Police c. 2 years ago by Councillor Trevor Shonk with video footage of him in a graffiti incident in Ramsgate) and 'catneil' (reported by me to Thanet District Council ('TDC') on 27th March 2023 (ref. 1315139) in response to an appeal for information re another graffiti incident in Ramsgate which was caught on TDC's cctv).

From the tags in Att.2.1&6, Att.4.1, Att.9.3, Att.10.2-5 and Att.12.5 as well as Catneil's Instagram account - *catneil.33* - it is clear that he is a prolific graffiti tagger in Thanet. I believe that 7Days uses multiple graffiti tags and is even more prolific.

C. Simultaneous appearance of different tags in the same paint

In Att.1.6 'Moth', 'B' (upside down) and the butterfly appeared c. 30 minutes after I saw the wall blank and there were no teenagers in the area as, on a separate occasion, is the case with '7Days' and the tag above it. 'MOTH', the butterfly and 'B' in Att.6.5 also appeared overnight as did the tags in Att.7.7-14. In Att.13, 10-15 appeared within a week or so of 1-9. There are many other examples.

D. Overlapping tags

The standalone 'Jews' tag in Att.7.2 (the first racist graffiti I reported to TDC for clearance) is very similar to the 'Yewz' tag in Att.3.1 which is joined to '7Days' in the same letter style and paint as are the '7Days' and 'PNK' tags in Att.4.2 and the 'AWOL' and 'PNK' tags in Att.5.4. The 'PNK' and '7Days' tags within the pink shape in Att.13.2 are also in the same letter style and paint. In Att.14.1 'AWOL' is incorporated into the larger 'PNK' tag. In Att.14.5 the 'EXAM' tag with a reversed 'E' is incorporated into the large 'PNK' tag on the van. There are many other examples. 'PNK' has also signed larger multiple tag assemblages (see, for example, Att.12.8).

E. Location and positions of tags

Although schools and recreation areas are heavily targeted most of the graffiti tagging in Thanet is indiscriminate and locations with listed buildings like Vale Square and in the vicinity of Waitrose (see Att.8.7&10) have been targeted as much as run-down areas. Some tags, however, are too high to be accessible to most teenagers. For example, the cat tag in Att.12.2 (the only graffiti in the arena) and the 'PNK' tags in Att.3.7,9&11 and Cecil Square opposite TDC's HQ (not photographed) are only accessible via fire escapes or scaffolding. The 'PNK' tags in Atts.13.1,5&15 also suggest an adult tagger who is physically fit and is familiar with the dangers of live rail track.

F. Same detail in different tags

A lot of the graffiti tags have the same dripping paint as 'AWOL' and 'PNK' in Att.3.8 and 'Jews' in Att.8.2. For example, the 'EXAM' tag on the bus shelter in Att.8.8 (which has a similar letter style and size to the 'YEWZ' tag etched into the bus shelter in Att.14.2). The 'SIOR' tags in Att.3.1 have an arrow at the end like other 'Yewz' tags, for example Att.3.6 & Att.1.4, 'BORO' in Att.1.1 and 'MOTH' in Att.3.2. The tag in Att.13.3 incorporates the small crossed 'V' tag at the top in Att.3.13 and middle of Att.10.6. These suggest that these taggers are the same person.

G. Reappearance of same tags after 8 years

The 'BORO' tag in Att.1.1 and the red matchstick man below the blue '7Days' tag in Att.1.2 (which appeared within days of each other) first appeared in Addington Street, Ramsgate c.8 years ago.

H. Collaboration between different taggers

In many of the attached photographs the tags of 'catneil' and '7Days' and his alias tags appear together (for example, see the cat and 'Dave' in Att.2.6, the cat and the man's head in Att.4.1, the cat crown and 'PNK' in Att.8.10 and the cat tag and 'Yews' in Att.9.3). Furthermore, Catneil's Instagram account promotes many other graffiti tags. I believe that this is evidence of a collaboration between serial taggers with a common agenda.

I. Online article pointing to an agenda to graffiti Thanet

I have traced an article on online magazine 'Cene where Catneil brags about his agenda to graffiti Thanet and the soft touch of the police.

In the article (in which he stays anonymous as 'catneill') he says 'Generally, I get on with the police. You can't avoid the occasional slap on the wrist, but that stuff never bothers me – I know the mission is righteous.'

J. Graffiti 'event' at 101 Northdown Road, Margate

Many people adversely affected by Thanet's graffiti blight will find the above statement outrageous but Catneil has now gone further and is presenting a graffiti 'event' which promotes the work of taggers who have trashed local highway signs (see Att.3.12), suggesting he now feels untouchable!

His cat tag is on the road sign in the poster promoting the event as is the tag 'Dave'. 'Dave' is identical to the tags which have recently appeared on traffic signs (see Att.10.7 and Att.11.1&2). This suggests that 'Dave' (probably an alias tag for Catneil or 7Days) is not only promoting the event but has also trashed the road signs featured in it! It is also noteworthy that a mural in Ramsgate recently erected at considerable expense by Hold Creative Spaces CIC has been damaged to create space for one of his posters (see Att.3.15-17) and other quality street art has been graffitied by him (see Att.9.4).

Vandalised highway signs featuring in the event are similar to Thanet's many obliterated traffic signs and street names (see, for example, Att.5.1-2 and Att.3.14), official notices (like those in Att.2.2&6 and Att.6.7), police knife amnesty collection boxes (see Att.12.1) and BT junction boxes, lamp posts and street furniture generally. All this vandalism is consistent with Catneil's 'Chaos From Order' slogan (see Att.10.4).

I reported this event by email to KCC's highways enforcement team on 23rd April 2024 but there is still time for Kent Police to investigate it and gather further evidence.

K. Community impact

Thanet is rapidly becoming the 'graffiti capital' of Kent and the blight on the area has adversely affected me. I can no longer walk for 3-minutes from home without seeing the moronic graffiti of the two above taggers. I no longer shop in Margate Old Town as I just associate it with their graffiti which is on every other building from Margate Station to the town centre and in Margate High Street (as well as every other piece of street furniture, sign or post box) and have reduced rail travel to Canterbury as virtually every piece of rail furniture from Margate to Canterbury West has been hit by their tags.

I have spoken to hundreds of local people about graffiti tags and no one has said anything positive about it. Even without local media coverage it is clear to me that there is widespread concern public concern about the issue. In addition to the many residents, businesses and community groups adversely affected by it, schools are also victims because most people think that school children are responsible and are therefore blaming the schools.

L. Call for police action

I am calling on Kent Police to make graffiti a higher priority and, in particular, to investigate and take appropriate action against the above taggers before they completely deface Thanet. It is to the credit to Kent Police that it has had a lot of success in tackling organised serious crime such as drug-dealing but I believe that organised 'low-level' graffiti crime on an industrial scale also has a seriously adverse impact on the community.

I appreciate that Kent Police will wish to consult with various stakeholders in the community in reviewing its priorities but I expect that those copied with this letter may wish to make representations.

I look forward to hearing from you in response and, meanwhile, I would be happy to assist with any queries arising from this letter.

Yours sincerely

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