

Statement Number 1

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PUBLIC FORUM STATEMENT- DOWNS COMMITTEE- BUS SHELTER MAINTENANCE

Travelling to work in the late 1980s I saw increasing damage to the lovely little Downs Bus Shelter, and, in my then role as Chairman of the Sneyd Park Residents' Association, I obtained permission from the City Council to start repairs on its unique structure.. With £2,300 raised from Sneyd Park Residents plus a top up of £800 from the City Council, appropriate timber was purchased from Wickham & Norris Timber Yard and extensive repairs carried out by myself and three SPRA colleagues during the summer of 1991. This was followed by an official opening and "ribbon cutting ceremony" by the Lord Mayor Cllr. Peter Abraham.(before and after photos attached)- ***It was during the rebuilding that I learnt that the shelter had been built in 1938 as the first Bus Stop linking the Tramway terminus at the top of Blackboy Hill with the country bus service I.***

Following the restoration, the Downs Rangers handed over the remaining timbers which I still store in my garage. More importantly, I resolved to maintain the shelter from that point on and repair any damage within 24hrs of it taking place - ***From 1991 I have visited the shelter almost every Sunday morning before 8 am to remove the rubbish of Saturday night, wash away the urine etc. and inspect the shelter for any graffiti or damage and take appropriate action..***

Over the years not only have I had to repair vandalised roof edging tiles but on one occasion spent 6 hours to removing extensive graffiti and re-varnishing the rough timber cladding on the rear of the shelter.

On one memorable occasion about 15 years ago I was confronted by the sight of all the ridge tiles strewn over the pavement with nails sticking up. These I replaced the following week using a ladder to access the ridge of the shelter.

Over the years, damage has been sporadic due, I presume, to the fact that it was repaired almost as soon as it occurred. In addition, in the summer of 2014 I was able to raise £250 from the Neighbourhood Partnership to purchase 12 x 1 metre specially sawn oak feather boards which I used to replace original timbers at the rear of the shelter.

However at the end of May 2019 I was extremely disturbed to find extensive damage to a number of the cedar edging tiles (see photo). The damage took me some 4 hours to repair and, judging from the rubbish littering the shelter, had been caused by individuals returning home via Miss Millies takeaway on Blackboy Hill and consuming food, alcohol and drugs on the premises followed by deliberate acts of vandalism. I therefore e-mailed the Chief Constable on the 31st May with a request for help from the Police to find the culprits. This produced a rapid response from Sgt Callum Allan on the 4th June saying he had spoken to Beat Manager PC Steve Harding and PCSO to follow up the matter.

I did report that, in an effort to identify personalities and times, I had spoken to Mr Michael Burnett a supervisor at Miss Millies who said he would keep an eye on the shelter on his way home after closure at 3 am each Sunday morning. At that stage I told the Police I thought that the vandalism by individuals was occurring early Sunday morning, a "false trail" which I corrected in October.

On Sunday 16th June after cleaning the shelter I contacted Sgt Allan to report that, on the way home, I had seen more results of vandalism where the contents of the Downs Changing Room bin had been emptied on the grass and the large drum rolled over to the opposite pavement. Before returning home, I returned the drum to its correct position and refilled it with its contents...

Things "quietened down" during the following months and then similar acts of vandalism to the roof of the shelter recommenced on 18th August and the 1st and 8th September. (see photos).On many occasions not only was the shelter left in a mess but the vandals seemed to take pleasure in smashing vodka and beer bottles on the pavement by the Bus Stop and littering the grass beside the shelter. To avoid serious injury to morning joggers and pedestrians and their pets, I spent as much as half an hour to remove the shards of glass before disposing of them in the Downs Changing room Rubbish Bin on the way home. In my opinion such disregard for the public safety was as serious as the vandalism to the shelter itself and was reported to PC Harding when it happened.

In late September in discussion with PC Harding I asked him if the Police could provide CCTV coverage near the shelter to observe any criminal activity. This produced negative response and the suggestion that I should write to First Bus CEO James Freeman which I did on the 1st October. Whilst sympathetic, Mr Freeman said that the shelter was the response of the City Council and should be tackled by them.

Things started to make sense when, during clear up in late September, I found a Miss Millies receipt timed at 9.20 pm among the other rubbish. By coincidence a passer-by on the 6th October said he had seen a group of teenagers in the shelter between 9 and 10 pm. On Saturday 19th October I, therefore, decided to investigate these reports and parked my car in the sliproad near the Downs Water Tower so that I could observe anyone in the shelter. True to form I could see a group of teenagers who, judging from the regular flashes of light from the shelter were igniting drugs. I therefore decided to drive round the Triangle and return via the shelter and on approaching saw a lad jump up to hit the edge of the roof. As I drove slowly by the shelter, about 5 or 6 males and females shouted abuse as I drove by. I subsequently parked in the slip-road and rang 999 in the hope that I could call out a Patrol car. Sadly, the responding officer said they were busy in the City Centre. I don't know whether the Policier appeared after my departure from the scene as I drove home at 10 pm as I received no follow up from the Police.

Having had various communications with the Police and in particular on the Saturday 19th October I have been frustrated that the criminality and vandalism goes unpunished. However, combining my observations in October and the similarity of each case of vandalism in the summer I am certain that the same group of teenagers are responsible for all the damage and my clarification of the time slot should be sufficient evidence for the Downs Committee Enforcement team or the Police to tackle the culprits..

I would also like the Downs Committee to repair the roof and reinstate the concrete plinth which is in a bad state of repair.

In frustration,

Ian Beattie MBE

Dated: - 5th January 2020

BEFORE and AFTER RESTORATION in 1991



**These pictures below represent examples of the damage inflicted during te summer of 2019.
That in May took 4 hours to repair**



31st May 2019



8th September 2019