

## Crime on Graffiti

**Graffiti – originally a noun to describe ‘scratching onto a property,’ has attracted the attention of both the police and art dealers. It has been used to mark territory, express political opinions and create pieces of art. From Basquiat to Banksy, this controversial artform has resulted in much public debate. Is graffiti art or crime? Should it be legalised or should we protect our blank urban canvas?**



Birmingham city council has taken a ‘zero tolerance’ stance within its walls and the residents of Birmingham have mixed feelings about this issue and how they should solve it.

We interviewed Councillor Martin Mullaney who was inspired to set up a graffiti festival for young people:

**Are there any designated areas where people can feel free to**

**graffiti in Birmingham?**

“The short answer is no.”

“You’ve got your graffiti tags, where teenagers go around doddling their little tag on street furniture and then you have got your graffiti artists who are more interested in the style of the art.”

“You can talk to lots of graffiti artists who want to stay legal. What I’ve tried to do in the council is say, ‘Look you’ve got a split between these two and we need to set up some legal spaces for them.’ One thing I don’t want to have is teenagers on railway lines or on rooftops when they just want a few hours to do some art.”



**Do you think graffiti should be legalised and why?**

“There used to be the Selly Oak Park on Bristol Road where graffiti was permitted. Set up in 1985 by a group of graffiti artists who were fed up with the tagging in Birmingham, who got permission from the council to let them paint the walls on this park.”

“They were also employed as youth workers and they said, ‘As soon as you walk into this park, you do not tag. The walls at the top are for the more experienced artists and the bottom walls for those starting out.’ ”

“They ran little courses and it got kids away from tagging and into the art scene. It ran successfully for 10 years until the council decided, in their wisdom, they would get rid of these artists.”

“They (council) said ‘If you do this, graffiti is going to explode and you cannot control what is going on in this park.’ The council got rid of this and well, graffiti exploded. On the new buses, railways – everywhere.”

So what do the residents of Birmingham think about how to solve the solution of legal-eager graffiti artists?

**What do you think about graffiti in general?**

“It’s not that bad unless you do it on someone’s property” – Cara Harrigan.

**If you were to allocate a place for graffiti where would this be in Birmingham?**

“Near the Custard Factory (Birmingham’s arts and media quarter) and some smaller areas around the city too” – Cara Harrigan.

“There should be an area that can be seen as many people as possible or on the blank walls surrounding construction sites” - Vijay Modi, Accountant.

“Where least people go” – Sean Jameson, 16yrs.

**Why should it be legalised?**

“Just because it’s nice to see artwork amongst the commercial retailers” – Claire Smith, Youth Worker.

“Although it *can* make a mess around the city, I like it because it adds more colour to the city” – Sean Jameson.

**If graffiti was legal do you think it wouldn’t happen as much?**

“It would be better graffiti because you’ve got people at the start practising all the time and because they don’t get encouraged to get better then the level of graffiti stays the same. If it was legal, people would have more time to practise and get better” – Vijay Modi.

**1 comment**

graffiti  
If there are only two places where graffiti is legal, those places would be the SoHo or the Speaker's Corner.  
Sam from The United States, 04 December 2011 22:59

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