

16 January 2024

Off Road Vehicles Update report

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Resilient Communities

1. Aim

Dealing with illegal off-road bikes is a priority for the administration and they have given their full support to tackling the issue. On the 24th of November 2022, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a discussion in relation to off-road biking and the issues associated with it. Chief Superintendent Dolby was present for the discussion and provided information regarding crime, damage, and anti-social behaviour (ASB) caused by or resulting from the use of off-road vehicles (ORVs) in Walsall. The Environment Overview and Scrutiny committee supported a commitment to partnership approaches to tackle this issue. Since that meeting the council, police and other partners have worked together on Operation Adhesion a series of multi-agency interventions which have made use of innovative techniques such as drones and fixed wing aircraft to apprehend and engage with those riding the vehicles.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 For the Committee to note the prioritisation of the Council, Police and other partners in tackling off-road vehicles scourges in the Borough.

3. Report detail – know

- 3.1 Operation Adhesion was launched in November 2022. The aim of the operation was to use key skills within the Safer Walsall Partnership and beyond to gather evidence, identify offenders and formulate an effective approach to deterring future ASB and/or criminal use of vehicles.
- 3.2 A series of ‘all out days’ were organised focused on areas where intelligence suggested the ORV issue was a serious and regular problem. The all-out days started primarily with the police neighbourhood teams, police drone team, community protection staff and healthy spaces staff. Council staff functioned as eyes and ears describing where the vehicles were being used thereby enabling the police to deploy drones and patrol hot spots to locate and apprehend the vehicle riders.
- 3.3 As the year progressed the ‘all out’ days and planning meetings widened in scope. In March 2023, the police were able to book the national fixed wing police aircraft to give an even greater view of the large areas of land covered by these ORVs and were supported by the police drones and traffic units. Sustrans and

the Canal and Rivers Trust became more involved due to the impact on their land and assets. The council distributed off road bike information posters to primary schools, secondary schools, and family hubs to reinforce the message about the dangers of these vehicles. Posters and signs informing of the law around riding ORVs and the consequences for failing to comply were erected at key points in various parks and open spaces around the Borough. The information leaflet was also included in the May/June edition of the Walsall Pioneer magazine the link to which is as follows <https://digital.magmgr.com/Preview/Index/2654316#page/90> .

- 3.4 The 'all out' days and subsequent follow up activity by neighbourhood police units resulted in the seizure of over 40 ORVs. Several arrests were also made including those seeking to obstruct the police in the course of their duties.
- 3.5 Press interest coupled with promotion on social media led to positive feedback on the work being undertaken by the partnership.

Express & Star

Three arrests and several bikes seized during police operation targeting illegal biking in Walsall.

Below is a link to an online press report relating to Operation Adhesion
<https://www.expressandstar.com/news/crime/2023/09/18/three-arrests-and-several-bikes-seized-during-police-operation-targetting-illegal-biking-in-walsall/>

Birmingham Mail

Off-road bikes in Walsall seized as lout riders cause havoc on estates.

Below is a link to an online press report relating to Operation Adhesion
[Off-road bikes in Walsall seized as lout riders cause havoc on estates - Birmingham Live \(birminghammail.co.uk\)](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/central-birmingham/off-road-bikes-in-walsall-seized-as-lout-riders-cause-havoc-on-estates-15812318)

- 3.6 Sadly on the 27th of July 2023 a seven-year-old girl Katnis Selezneva was killed in a collision with an off-road bike in Turnstone Road, Bloxwich. The rider of the bike a 14-year-old boy was subsequently arrested. The tragedy served to highlight the very real dangers of these vehicles and why the work of partner agencies is so important in tackling the issue.
- 3.7 On the 12th of October 2023 Chief Superintendent Dolby and Danielle Knowles the councils Locality Tasking Officer presented the work conducted as part of Operation Adhesion to a meeting with the OPCC and this was met with a favourable response.
- 3.8 On the 20th of October 2023 Operation Advance took place and saw staff and officers from every policing department both locally and from a force level working together to deliver 24 hours of intensive policing operations in Walsall. Partners including Walsall Council supported the police in this Operation and video footage was published showing Inspector Pete Poolton and Councillor Garry Perry crushing several bikes that had been seized in operations locally.

Below are two links to video footage posted on social media (X)

<https://twitter.com/WalsallCouncil/status/1715397467087438081>

- 3.9 In 23/24 funding was awarded to the borough by the Home Office (through the OPCC) to support targeted activity in ASB hot spots. It was determined that locally this would include supporting operations targeting ASB associated with ORVs in key locations. Funding was allocated centrally towards the purchase of a further police off road bike and equipment/training associated with it and to support specific off-road operations in the borough. This includes, where possible, support for operations which have successfully been undertaken using the fixed wing aircraft and which have led to the seizure of a number of ORVs used anti-socially in Walsall. The total allocation to support this work was £23,357.
- 3.10 In January 2024 partners will once again be meeting to discuss the programme of activity for the year ahead and assessing other ideas which could make the interventions more successful. This will include considering the use of smart water and liaison with Youth Justice and similar services to ensure that enforcement is not being conducted in isolation and a whole system approach is taken to dealing with those involved in this activity.

4. Financial information

This work involved in this project continues to be met from within current resource.

As stated in 3.8 external funding from the Home Office is being used wherever possible to supplement any additional work which may be required such as purchasing a new off-road bike for the police and additional hours for use of the Police fixed wing aircraft.

5. Reducing Inequalities

ORVs are an issue that was highlighted by 85% of respondents to a survey relating to off-road biking and took into consideration the fears raised by residents under We Are Walsall 2040 in relation to crime and disorder in their areas. The noise can affect whole communities and spoil their enjoyment of their locality and their own homes and have a negative impact on mental health. The physical danger of ORVs being used unlawfully on roads and open spaces, parks and canal towpaths can be significant and lead to severe injury and fear of using facilities which should be available to all members of the community. ORVs can sometimes be used in crime or are stolen vehicles themselves therefore creating fear and detriment to many of our communities.

6. Decide

The committee could choose to prioritise other areas of work following a year of positive success regarding ORVs. However, it should be noted that despite the

positive work undertaken there are still significant problems with ORVs in some parts of the borough.

In general partners still see massive benefit in tackling this issue and are keen to broaden the scope, add new partners to the working group and consider other avenues to reduce off road riding including diversionary activities to stop youths becoming involved in this activity.

7. Respond

Any recommendations made by the committee will be fed back to the working group who organise the interventions around ORVs. Feedback on the success of the operations conducted during 2024 can be fed back to committee at a future date to be determined if that is required.

8. Review

The issue of ORVs as with all crime and ASB is monitored through certain governance arrangements. At a strategic level, the Safer Walsall Partnership Board has prioritised ASB for 2024 and a working group has been set up to look at key issues across the Borough – this includes ORVs.

At an operational level there is both a working group who look at ORV issues specifically but also a North Walsall and a South Walsall Locality Tasking meeting where partners come together to discuss issues of concern. ORV nuisance can feature on their agenda for liaison or referral to the ORV working group too.

Background papers

None

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