

**West Cumbria Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership**

**Tilley Awards 2004**

**Tackling Street Light Vandalism through a Youth Video Project**

Force            Cumbria Constabulary

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## **Tackling Streetlight Vandalism Through a Youth Video Project**

### **A Pops/CDRP initiative using the SARA model**

#### **Summary**

Streetlight vandalism is rarely a Police priority. Largely unnoticed, it never gets the attention given to other forms of crime. Yet its effect on crime, fear of crime and other issues is well-known and well-documented. This initiative concerns itself with this often-neglected tool in the Crime Reduction toolkit : reducing damage to streetlights themselves and thereby making more effective use of an existing resource.

The problem had been identified by Cumbria County Council, (Highways Department), who brought the matter to the West Cumbria CDRP. Initial scanning confirmed the hotspot to be the small town of Maryport (pop. 10,000). Subsequent analysis was based primarily on county council data as 84% of data was unrecorded by the Police. The profile of the problem was that of a large area of Maryport being affected typically by a young male offender, causing damage with stones and air rifles. In essence, a culture had developed in which this activity had become commonplace in the town.

A discussion on whether this problem needed a response was also considered. We then decided on the key question of response which is... 'How do you engage young people in the subject of streetlights ?' The subject matter is not 'sexy' and for a project to work and have kudos with young people an alternative approach was needed.

The solution was to use an arts-based project based in the town that already had credibility with young people. The response was based on engaging young people from two youth clubs based in the area to produce a video of the streetlights in the town. It would focus on young people and what it meant to them by role-playing some of the issues. The young people responded by choosing issues of robbery, drug dealing, assault, electrocution and road safety.

To assess the response, a six-month evaluation was completed in which a damage reduction of 88% was seen at Maryport, despite an increase in reported cases elsewhere in West Cumbria of 18%. The assessment looks at why this occurred, the possibility of displacement and lessons that can be learned from the experience.

The project has since been developed further by delivering the message to local schools. The County Council is also about to fund a similar youth diversionary project based on the latest hotspot as determined in the six month evaluation.

## **Introduction - The West Cumbria CDRP Problem-Solving Framework**

The West Cumbria Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) is a multi-agency task group serving the Allerdale and Copeland district council areas. Its primary purpose is to serve the community safety strategies of the respective areas. To facilitate this, the partnership is split into seven task groups. Each task group focuses on hotspot areas and uses the SARA model in terms of action plans.

One such task group is the anti-social behaviour task group. This addresses issues not only of anti-social behaviour but also of criminal damage, which was specifically highlighted as a concern in the Copeland and Allerdale Community Safety Audits (2002) (References 3, 4).

In light of this, the anti-social behaviour group has included criminal damage as part of a wider remit on anti-social behaviour. The group meets on a monthly basis and into this issues of damage are forwarded for discussion from partner agencies and the community at large.

## **Scanning – A Hidden Problem Emerges**

In June 2002, the anti-social behaviour group was contacted by Mike Nicholson (Capita dbs Ltd), in respect of a problem that had arisen when they had been auditing vandalism of streetlights in West Cumbria. The figures that they had obtained showed a significant increase in damage with a strong hotspot at Maryport, a small town of 10,000 people. As a result he was invited to the following meeting on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2002 to discuss this issue.

In the meantime, Police crime data was checked to see what information we had on the problem.

At the meeting Nicholson presented seven months of data covering the period December 2001 to June 2002. During this period Capita dbs staff had reported 177 cases of vandalism. By comparison the Police had recorded 27 incidents of criminal damage giving an under-reporting of 84% to the Police. As a result of information supplied by Capita dbs, the anti-social behaviour group agreed to conduct an analysis of the data prior to the next meeting in order to define the problem. A decision would then be made on whether to respond and if so, what response would be suitable.

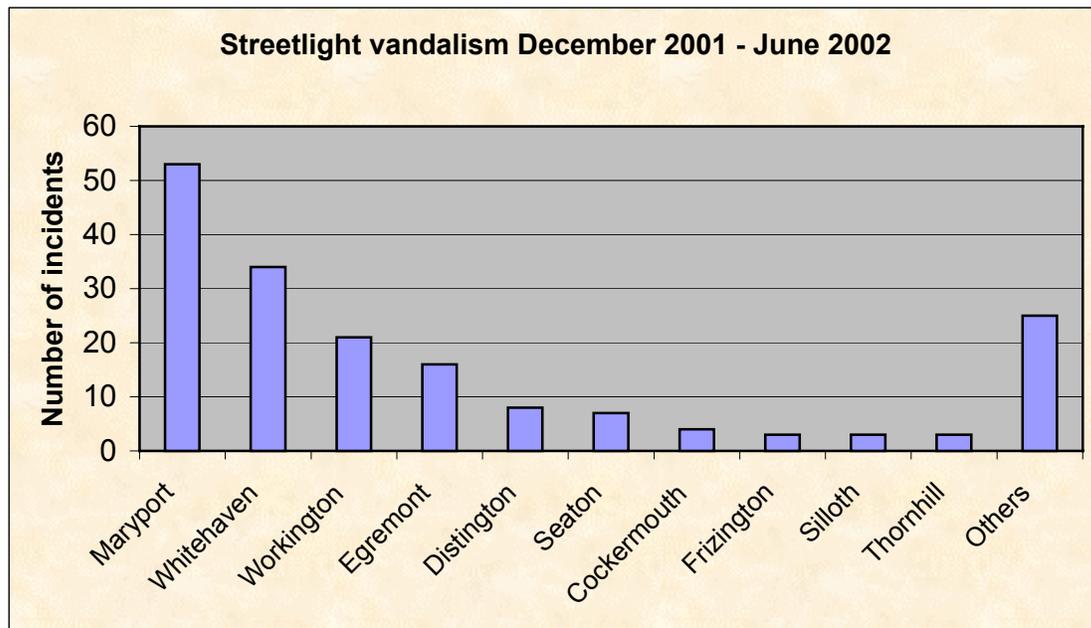
## **Information Analysis – Defining the Problem**

The basic information supplied by Capita dbs included offence location, the type of damage (eg. to light, base or other), and date on which the damage was reported. In order to analyse this data, it was then collated on a spreadsheet.

### **A/ Location**

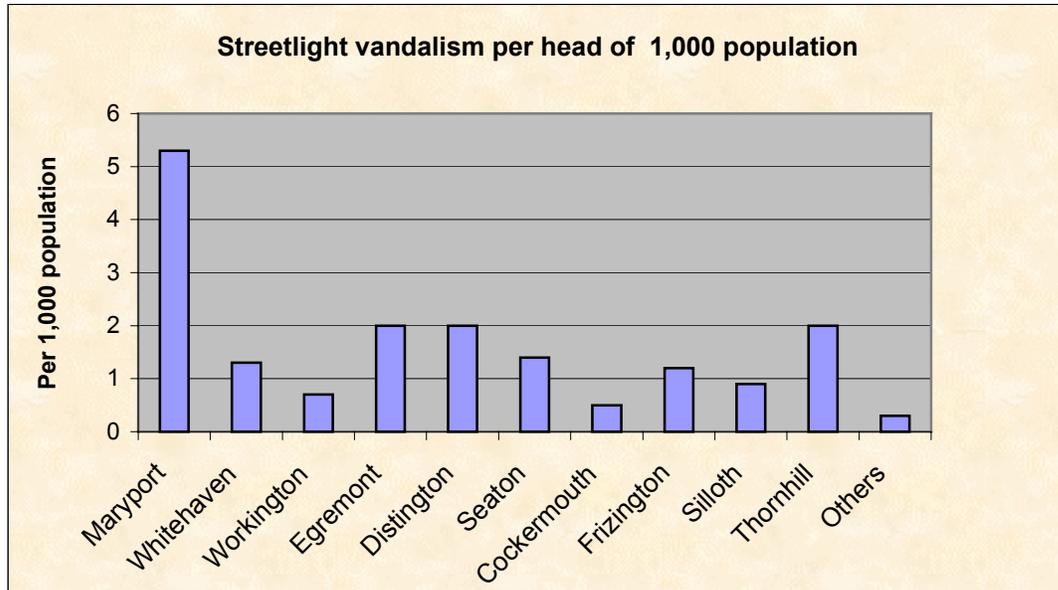
The first way chosen to analyse the data and confirm Nicholson's observations was to analyse by location of the offence.

In terms of geography, West Cumbria is a largely rural area with nine small towns ranging from around 6,000 to 27,000 people with the remaining population in smaller villages and rural areas. Whitehaven and Workington both have similar populations of around 27,000, after which Maryport with a population of 10,000 is the next largest town. With this in mind, initial analysis focussed on the major towns and villages (Figure 1).



**Figure 1**

However to take into account the size of populations, the next level of analysis looked at damage per head of population. This clearly demonstrates that the hotspot is Maryport with a fairly equal rate of damage within the other towns (Figure 2).



**Figure 2**

Having now chosen Maryport as the hotspot, further analysis was undertaken to find which streets were considered to have the highest levels of damage. It was hoped that by identifying a small number of streets, a solution could be focussed to this targeted area. However, after the analysis, it was found that of the 53 cases of damage there were 32 different locations. The peak location, Sandy Lonning had eight cases (14% of the total), the next nearest Church Street had only four (7 % of the total).

This had a clear implication on the subsequent response, as it ruled out simple target hardening or directed police patrols. It was evident from this analysis that an approach covering the whole town would need to be adopted.

**B/ Time of Damage**

A major problem with the streetlight damage statistics was that the figures could not be accurately evaluated in terms of temporal analysis. Unlike most Police recorded statistics, which contain accurate time references within which the offence could occur, the recording procedure for the highways department is rather different. The primary reason for this is that due to the nature of the offence, the time in which it could have been committed is normally measured over a period of several days or longer. As a result, it was decided to look at the offence within calendar months to see if there were seasonal trends.

The result of the time analysis (Figure 3), was rather unexpected. Although there is a clear hotspot in January, a significant part of this can be explained in that the Christmas period damage would primarily be recorded in early January. This would explain reduced December levels of

damage and an increase in January. When this is taken into account, a relatively even level of vandalism can be seen throughout the year.

This has serious implications for a problem-orientated approach as the solution to the problem needs to address the full year and not just the darker months of Winter where it was assumed the problem lay.

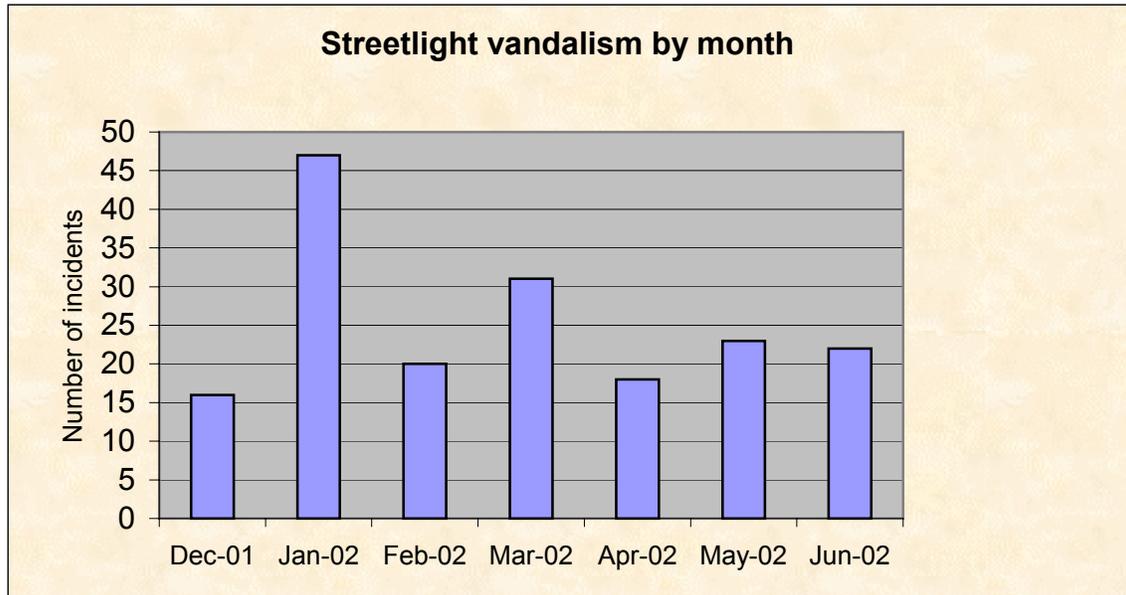


Figure 3

C/ **Modus Operandi**

When the modus operandi of all data was analysed it was found that the majority of damage was a result of missile throwing at the lights along with use of air weapons, (which was confirmed by Nicholson who reported air gun pellets being found in light casings). The full damage list is shown in Table 1.

Damage type	<u>West Cumbria</u>	<u>Maryport</u>
Damage to light (eg.by stone, air rifle)	122	(47)
Theft of photoelectric cell and damage	28	(5)
Damage to base plate exposing wiring	12	
Column pulled down/forced over	8	
Road Sign lighting vandalised	3	(1)
Zebra crossing light vandalised	2	
Traffic bollard lighting vandalised	2	
Total counts of damage	177	(53)

Table 1

## **D/ Offender Profile**

During the baseline statistics period, there was only one detected case. This involved a ten-year-old male offender. However, in the previous five years there were 18 detected cases of air rifle damage across Cumbria of which 14 (78%) were committed by under 18's. Seven of these were committed by those 14 or under and all the offenders were male.

Similar incident reports by members of the public, regarding stone throwing by youths, have a high male youth profile. However, a search of crimes did not reveal any detected cases.

As most of the damage to streetlights in Maryport was committed by stone throwing or air rifles, it would seem appropriate to target male youths under 14 as a typical offender. This would also allow younger youths to be included in the initiative as a long term preventative measure.

The Allerdale and Copeland Community Safety Audits (2002), back this up and highlighted the fact that 40% of all types of criminal damage was by school age youths with 88% offenders being male.

## **E/ Fear of Crime**

Whilst it is right to focus on the details of the offence, an often-neglected area is the environmental impact on the local community of a particular crime.

These are often referred to as 'quality of life' issues and are difficult to measure, although citizen's panels accumulate data on a district council and county basis. These do give some indication of the importance of fear of crime and consistently show that the issues are given a high rating as 'very important' or 'important', (References 1, 2).

Specifically in relation to Maryport, this issue was addressed in the late 1990's with a significant upgrade of street lighting. This improvement involving the erection of new lights took place in the Nethererton area of Maryport where campaigners had long been complaining about lack of safety in the area caused by poor lighting. This upgrade was completed in 2001 and had since been the subject of vandalism in line with the rest of the Maryport area.

As such, fear of crime issues can be addressed by tackling the problem of streetlight vandalism.

### **Why respond?...Is it really an issue?**

The important question of whether to respond was also considered by the anti-social behaviour task group. After all, there are many competing pressures on resources. Why should a project to reduce streetlight vandalism take priority over other areas, especially one that previously had almost no impact on Police crime figures?

However, the clear links between effective street lighting and crime reduction give a clear lead as to the effectiveness of street lighting as a crime reduction tool, (as shown in references to comparison with CCTV and personal safety (References 1, 2)).

This is particularly important in Maryport where the three district council wards of Netherhall, Ellenborough and Ewanrigg have the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> highest burglary dwelling rates within the entire county of Cumbria which contains 168 wards, (Reference 4). Given the reduction in crime potential by addressing the issue of street lighting, the group decided that a response to the problem should be made.

### **An Evidence-Led Response**

With an agreement now reached about a response, the key point was to decide how best to achieve this using the victim, offender and location triangle.

An operational policing response was judged at best to have a short-term effect. Further more, with such a diverse range of locations and a lack of good information as to when the damage was occurring, it would probably be ineffective.

Target hardening was judged to be costly, unsightly and impracticable in such a diverse range of locations.

As a result a suitable response was based on the following evidence:

- The response should be targeted towards the hotspot of Maryport. However, if the intervention were successful an output would be to use it in other geographical areas. (Evidence: Statistical analysis – Location data)
- As there is a lack of good information as to when the offences are occurring, an educational initiative based at changing a localised youth culture of streetlight damage could be effective (Evidence: Statistical analysis – Temporal analysis data)
- Although straight forward damage to the light is the most common damage in Maryport, other issues such as theft of photocell and damage to base plate could be included on the basis of evidence in other areas of West Cumbria. (Evidence: Statistical analysis – Modus Operandi)
- The target age range should be male youths under the age of 14 yrs, although an educational project should also be aimed at those who would be coming into the target age range in the next few years, so as to provide sustainability to the project (Evidence: offender profile)
- The CDRP felt that it should be a positive project engaging young people rather than alienating them through a ‘finger wagging’ negative approach. This would be achieved by looking at the positive side of streetlights through personal safety (streetlights reduce crime and fear of crime), electrical safety (not tampering with base plates), and road safety (damage to road signs). (Evidence: CDRP Anti-Social Behaviour meeting, October 2003).

One final point was made to assist with this intervention and the project delivery.

The CDRP decided that it should be delivered by an agency able to work with young people and would have some kudos within the youth culture. With this in mind, the Maryport Arts Project CA15 were approached with a view to running a video project on streetlights in Maryport. They had a proven track record and had previously undertaken video work within Maryport involving young people although this had no relation to crime reduction.

After several months of consultation, a project brief and costings were agreed between the CDRP and CA15. An action plan was then drawn up to cover the project (Appendix 1).

## **The Intervention**

The project was to be an educational video project, focussed on Maryport where the young people were empowered to express their views. The thought process behind this was to discuss the topic in an indirect manner using video as a medium to approach the issue and at the same time make it a fun and innovative project to work on. The key medium for undertaking this was to go out into Maryport and video the range of different streetlights and then return to the youth clubs and role play scenarios relating to the effect on them by damage to the streetlights.

To enable the young people to have ownership of the project, CA15 allowed them to choose what they wanted to role-play. The subjects they chose included robbery, drug dealing, assault, electrocution and road safety. The three full day sessions were carried out during July 2003 in both of the main youth and community clubs that exist in the Maryport area. There was limited Police involvement with a single invited visit from the Community Sergeant for the area. From a CDRP point of view, the project was 'hands off', allowing CA15 full reign to look at the issues.

Although the project finished in July, the subsequent production of the completed video took to the Autumn with the launch on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003. Appendices 2 and 3 cover the press release for the launch and contact details regarding the intervention.

The launch was well attended with over 40 young people, along with CDRP representatives. Two videos were launched during the evening. One was in a short 3-minute advert format. The second lasted about 12 minutes and included the various role-plays.

Whilst neither video could claim to be a 'slick' production, the youth work did engage the young people to look at the problem. Completing the video was seen as the most important aspect of the project rather than producing a definitive video for panacean use round the country.

## **Assessment - A Success but Lessons to be Learnt**

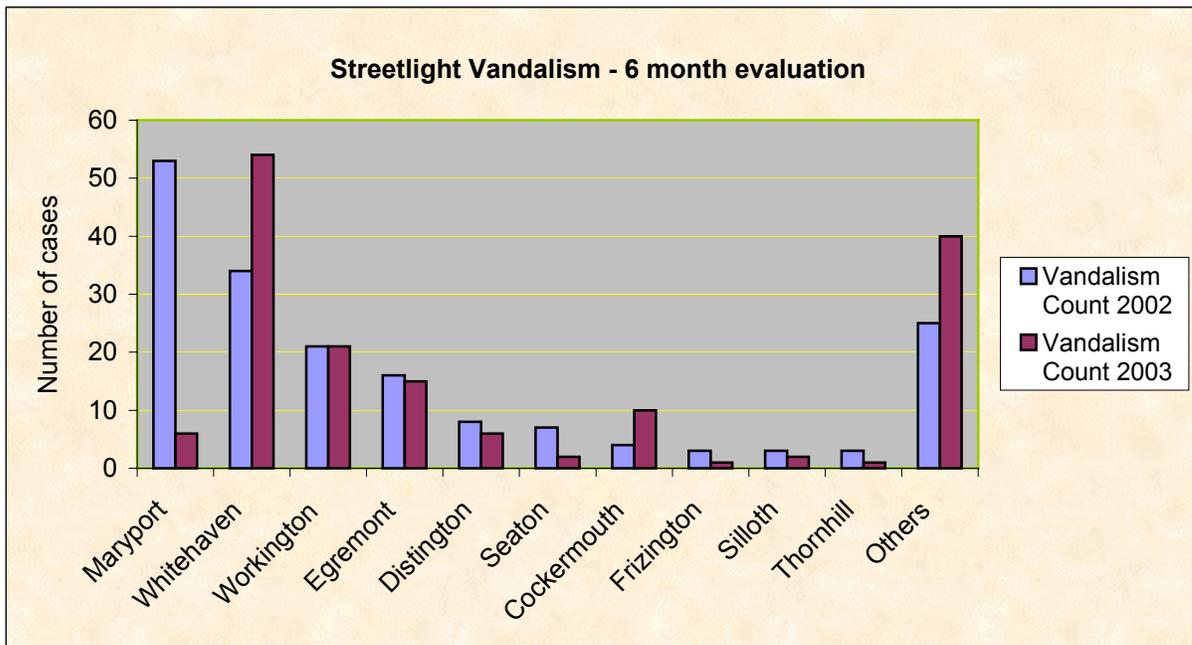
The assessment began at the start of the project, comparing baseline details of all ten towns and villages that had been identified in the initial scanning process. This allowed not only changes in Maryport to be measured over time but also to compare it with nine other towns where no intervention took place. The changes that occurred are shown in Figure 4.

The substantial reduction in damage by 88% in Maryport was unexpected, especially as the level of damage rose by 18% overall if the Maryport figures are excluded.

In relation to these changes, there are some key points to note.

- With the exception of Whitehaven, most areas kept a consistent level of damage
- The column labelled 'others' relates to the small towns and villages that fell just below the ten leading areas in the baseline statistics. Due to the large number of these places, small fluctuations can have large cumulative effects. (eg. Keswick, Wigton, Millom etc).
- Displacement between Maryport and elsewhere is unlikely, especially Whitehaven, as the offender profile suggests a young school-age male who is unlikely to travel to commit this type of offence.
- Although the figures are believed to be accurate, the reporting process through Capita dbs as well as the monitoring process will leave some discrepancies. However, this should balance out over the six-month period.

- Allowing for routine fluctuations it is highly unlikely that all the 88% reduction could have been accounted for by localised random changes.



**Figure 4**

The key question arising from this assessment is why has the project been successful. These are some of the likely possibilities.

- The two youth clubs selected already existed and were located within the problem area. This allowed targeted work to commence immediately without the need to get a group of youths together. They included a range of young people, some of whom were likely to have been involved in streetlight vandalism in the past.
- The arts group CA15 were based in the area and had good links with the young people in the community. This allowed work to be established quickly and without the build-up of barriers that may have occurred had other agencies led the work (eg. Police).
- The project was seen as fun and interesting. The young people saw it very much as 'their' project and had obviously enjoyed being part of it. This was very evident at the launch.

There are also lessons the CDRP learnt that could be used in similar interventions:

- The 'hands off' approach worked well but when it came to the video production, the draft was quite different from what was intended. In future more discreet monitoring would be needed.
- A key output from the Action Plan was to roll-out the video to other schools and youth groups across West Cumbria. This has happened around the Maryport area but outside this there have been mixed views by the CDRP as to how effective a Maryport-identified video would be, especially across an area with strong territorial links.
- The process involved in obtaining the video through the CA15 led youth work was far more important than the finished video. It is this process that is more easily transferred to other projects rather than expecting the video produced in Maryport to have the same effect in other geographic areas.

### **Streetlight Damage - Post Evaluation Developments**

The action plan included subsequent rollout of the project to the surrounding area if it proved successful. It became obvious early on that this was going to be the case. The video has now been offered to every primary school in the area as well as to the Town Centre Manager for Maryport. However, there have been some changes over what had initially been envisaged when the project was first set up.

A key change was that in the initial project it was believed that the completed video could be used throughout West Cumbria. However, the video is so closely identified with Maryport that within the fiercely territorial nature of the West Cumbria towns the effect would be muted outside the target area. However, the principle behind this initiative has been accepted as good practice by a number of agencies.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> 2003, Steve Heywood County Council Highways Manager referred to the project as good practice and following early reductions in problems at Maryport, it was featured on Radio Cumbria as a way forward on the issue.

In January 2003, Cumbria County Council was applied to for funding to run a similar project - possibly using video as a medium - for reducing instances of streetlight damage in the Whitehaven area.

Finally, as a result of the highlighted under-reporting of incidents to the Police, all recorded incidents by Capita db's are now faxed directly to a crime input location. This means that this previously under-reported crime could now be assessed in the same way as other crime trends within West Cumbria.

## Appendix 1: Action Plan

Objective	Action	Input Target	Output Target	Milestone Target	Outcome Target	Responsibility	Timescale
Reduce level of streetlight vandalism in Maryport	Confirm funding for project	Funding for project of £3,090 from Safer Communities (single pot)	Obtaining funding	Funding to be confirmed asap. Ideally by 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2003	Reduction of streetlight vandalism by 10% based on 2001-2002 baseline	Stuart Burgess	April 2003
	Commission artist to work with young project and produce video	Commission Artist to carry out work	3 full day contact sessions at Boys Club and Ewanrigg and Netherton and production of video	To start programme after Easter 2003		Stuart Burgess	September 2003
	Press coverage and distribution of video	Compile list of other target areas and produce press release	Press launch and subsequent rolling out of programme	Press Launch by October 2003		Stuart Burgess Annette Nevins	On-going roll out from October 2003



## Appendix 2

CUMBRIA CONSTABULARY

PRESS OFFICE

Tuesday 23 September 2003

### Maryport Streetlight Initiative

An initiative to reduce damage to streetlights comes to fruition in Maryport at 6.30pm on Thursday 2 October 2003 at the Community Centre, Ennerdale Road, Maryport.

**The project was commissioned after a survey of streetlight damage in West Cumbria, had shown that 30% of all streetlight damage in West Cumbria occurs in Maryport. This amounted to 53 cases during a seven month period last year. By comparison the next highest was Whitehaven which with a far larger population had 34 cases.**

To tackle this issue the West Cumbria Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) funded the Maryport Arts Project CA15 to work with young people at the Ewanrigg and Netherton Youth Club and Maryport Boys Club to look at the issues.

Artist Debby Akam was brought into help the young people produce artwork and a short video of Maryport showing some of the issues with vandalised streetlights. It is planned to use this as an educational film for use in Maryport and the surrounding West Cumbria area.

CA15 Project Co-ordinator Jane Donaldson said, "We have been able to involve over 40 young people and their response has been really great. It has given the police and us a chance to talk about issues of vandalism to lampposts and has given the young people a chance to voice their ideas and concerns, in a relaxed environment. Involving art and artists is a great way of tackling these kind of issues in a positive way."

Pc Stuart Burgess (Community Safety Officer) states, "The damage to the streetlights in Maryport is a major concern for community safety and with the onset of longer nights we hope this project will lead to a reduction in damage to streetlights".

#### **NOTE TO NEWS EDITORS/REPORTERS:**

All media are invited to attend, see the artwork, video and talk to the young people.

For more information please contact Jane Donaldson at Maryport Settlement Tel : 01900 816952, or Pc Stuart Burgess Tel : 01900 844185.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Intervention - Contact details**

Project management - CA15 Arts Project – Jane Donaldson (Co-ordinator)  
Maryport Settlement  
High Street  
Maryport  
Tel: 01900 816952

Video Artist: Debbie Akam

#### **Locations**

Ewanrigg Boys Club	3 full day contact sessions
Ewanrigg and Netherton Community Centre	3 full day contact sessions

Project dates: 10<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003  
Video Launch: 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2003 at the Community Centre

Cost: £3090 (including all planning, production, equipment and editing)

#### **References**

- 1/ Street lighting effectiveness as a crime reduction tool compared to CCTV  
<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/cctvminisite19.htm>
- 2/ Home Office Personal safety advice  
<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/personalsafety3.htm>
- 3/ Copeland Crime and Disorder Audit 2002  
<http://www.copelandbc.gov.uk/Copeland-TheCouncil/Community-Safety/default.htm>
- 4/ Allerdale Borough Council, Crime and Disorder Audit 2002  
<http://www.allerdale.gov.uk/show.asp?PageID=354>