

WEST BANK PARK - HOLGATE



TO: Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety,
City of York Council
FROM: Friends of West Bank Park
www.westbankpark.org

RE: Proposed Public Spaces Protection Order for West Bank Park

As the organisation representing the local community's interest in the management of West Bank Park, we appreciate the opportunity to influence the decision as to whether the park should be made subject to a Public Spaces Protection Order. We have met with CYC's Paul Morrison and PC Antonelli to learn more about the case for the PSPO and discuss our concerns around it.

Vandalism has been one of our most significant concerns over recent years, particularly since the park gates have been left unlocked at nights. This is largely committed by young people aged under 18. We greatly value the police's role in monitoring antisocial behaviour and, when criminal acts can be verified, taking the necessary action to punish them. We appreciate that the current options available to the police limit their ability to prevent further incidents, and that a PSPO might make it easier to do this.

However, we remain very concerned about the proposal to restrict gatherings of three or more people in the park. We understand that this would only apply to groups behaving in an antisocial manner, and then only with police discretion. Nonetheless, 'antisocial behaviour' is a loosely defined concept, and pre-emptively dispersing young people because they look like they might commit criminal acts is a step we would be reluctant to take. Despite our faith in the judgment of most police, there is the potential to criminalise normal teenage socialising, and make young people feel unwelcome in the park. There are very few welcoming public spaces open to young people to spend their free time. Moreover, we suspect that groups dispersed from West Bank Park might be likely simply to move elsewhere.

We have sought to consult with the young people who would be affected themselves (as it is unlikely that any of them will have been aware of the council's consultation process), but have not been able to find any on recent evenings in the park. We urge the council to seek the support of local secondary schools in communicating with pupils to encourage them to enjoy and respect public spaces.

If the PSPO is indeed implemented, we ask to be consulted further on the wording of any signage that goes up in the park. We are very averse to any bald statement that groups of three or more people are not allowed. On the contrary, we want to encourage people to use the park for their meetings, sports, parties, gatherings, and socialising.

We have not been aware of any significant problems caused by either cycling or dogs off leashes and do not feel the need for any further regulations to be put in place to limit these activities. For children in particular, the park is a safe and traffic-free place to practise cycling, and the existing restrictions on dogs off leashes seem to be adequate to minimise inconsiderate behaviour. We would support a ban on alcohol on the basis that it, too, is enforced with discretion.

Yours sincerely,

Cath Heinemeyer

On behalf of
Friends of West Bank Park