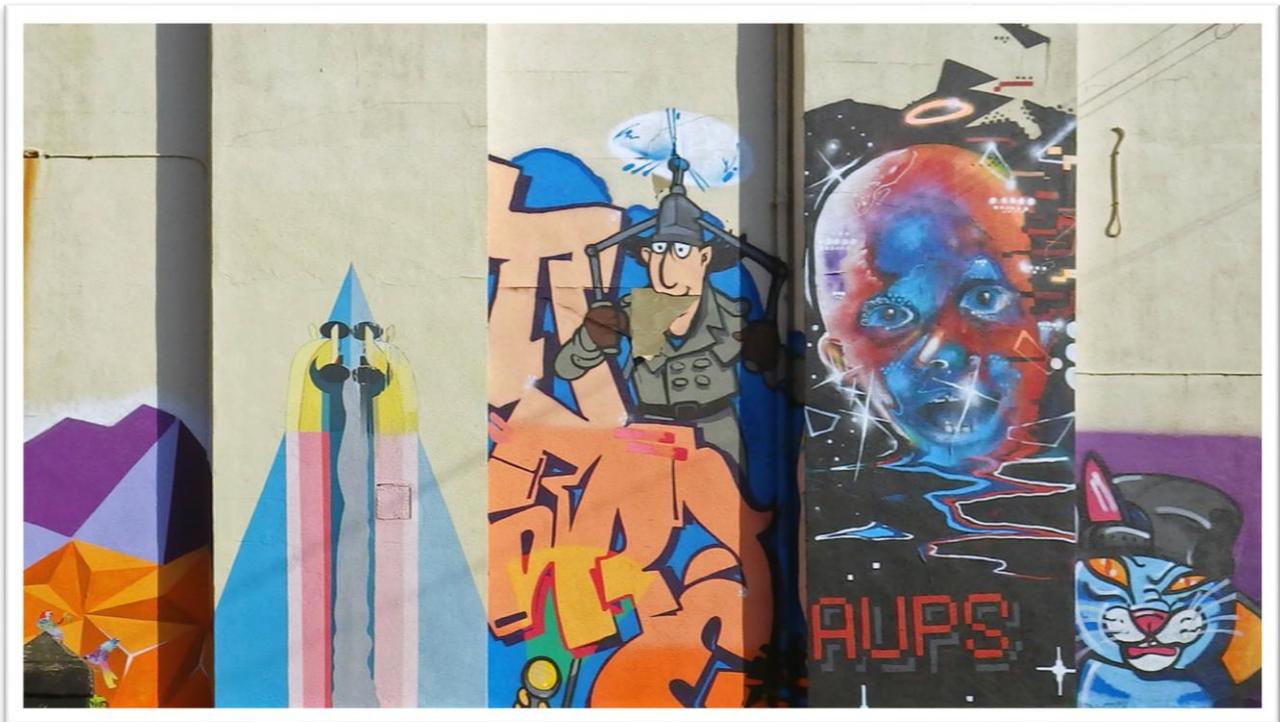




Conservation, protection and improvement of the Bexhill built environment; caring for the past, present and future.

Bexhill Heritage Graffiti Art – Survey Results, Consultation, Research and Policy



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Introduction

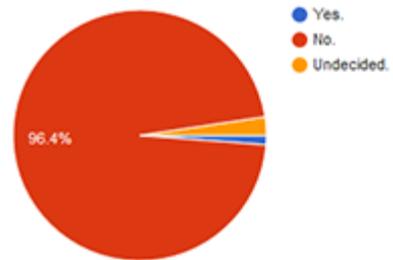
In July 2020, all Bexhill Heritage members were sent a survey form and an introduction to the subject of graffiti. The purposes of the survey were to elicit members' views on:

- Illegal graffiti.
- The legal graffiti art at 10-12 Egerton Road.
- The proposal for further legal graffiti art in other Bexhill locations.

Members' Views

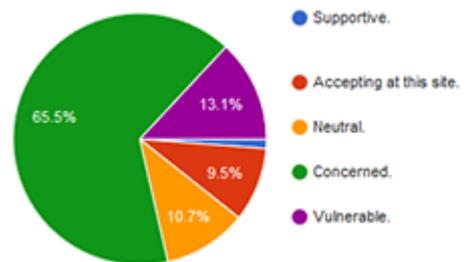
1. Do you like the illegal graffiti that has been painted in the pedestrian underpass at Wickham Avenue?

Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming majority (96%) of Bexhill Heritage members responding to the survey disapproved of the illegal graffiti example provided in the questionnaire.



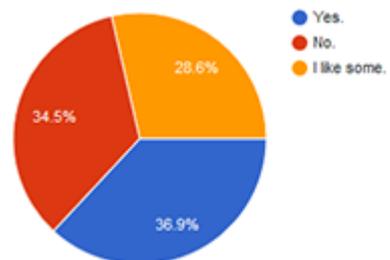
2. How does illegal graffiti make you feel?

There was very significant concern about illegal graffiti such as that shown in the Wickham underpass example. 66% of respondents believed that allowing illegal graffiti to go unchecked would encourage its spread while 13% indicated that they felt 'vulnerable' and would be unlikely to use the defaced underpass.



3. Do you like the legal graffiti art now provided at 10-12 Egerton Road?

Bexhill Heritage members were broadly supportive of the graffiti art images in Egerton Road. 65% liked all or part of the legal graffiti art while 35% did not like it. One respondent distinguished between the 'Wickham Butterfly' which she liked, and the Egerton Road images which she did not like. Another respondent described the Egerton Road images as 'threatening' while another felt they were 'juvenile'. It is possible that, had different images been used in Egerton Road, Bexhill Heritage members may have been even more supportive.



4. How do you feel about young people adding or superimposing their own designs on the wall?

38% of Bexhill Heritage members approved of young people adding their own designs to the legal graffiti wall in Egerton Road but 49% disapproved. Of those who were negative or neutral, most felt that the wall undermined the purpose of the Town Centre Conservation Area while many were concerned about issues of guidance and supervision.

5. W.Ave Arts plan to develop further sites for legal graffiti art across the town. How do you feel about more legal graffiti sites in Bexhill?

Bexhill Heritage members were split in their responses to this question. Most of those who supported the W.Ave Arts initiative did so on condition that graffiti art sites avoid heritage buildings and conservation areas. While the majority are prepared to support the W.Ave Arts initiative, many have concerns about its 'direction of travel'.

W.Ave Arts Response

Bexhill Heritage committee members met with Carol Cook from W.Ave Arts and Councillor Hazel Timpe representing Bexhill Gets Creative to discuss the survey results. We were pleased to learn that district councillors are consulted about any W.Ave Arts proposal to develop legal graffiti art in Bexhill.

Carol told us later that: "W.Ave Arts is about bringing people together in the form of art, it has always been our intention to take areas that are neglected or previously tagged and transform them into a talking point. Free accessible art that isn't in a gallery, that you can enjoy if you wish to at your own leisure". She went on to tell us that there were 'no intentions' to develop further graffiti walls for 'the public to paint' but she did want to 'generate something creative'. "Art", she said, "is the vehicle of producing a stronger community and tourism. It has a positive impact on how people feel and promotes positivity and wellbeing".

W.Ave Arts policies and proposals are set out on the group's Facebook page: [fb.com/WaveArtsBexhill](https://www.facebook.com/WaveArtsBexhill). Anyone is welcome to comment.

Research Evidence on the Impact of Graffiti Art and Graffiti Walls

In September 2020 Canterbury District Council brought together the results of research on the impact of graffiti on towns and cities in the UK and overseas. Canterbury's conclusions were that:

- Graffiti walls such as the one in Egerton Road tended to cause problems of 'overspill' graffiti on nearby walls as well as increasing anti-social behaviour. Graffiti wall initiatives were more likely to increase illegal graffiti than to reduce it.
- Graffiti art such as the 'Wickham Butterfly' and the octopus on the Sovereign Light Café, was likely to be respected especially if young people worked alongside professional artists to create the images.
- Canterbury District Council's full report is on the Bexhill Heritage website: https://bexhillheritage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/docs/Canterbury_District_Council...pdf.

Your Committee's View

The committee are pleased that the survey and the meeting with Carol and Hazel, has led to greater understanding of graffiti art, and of the opportunities and potential threats it poses. We hope that constructive dialogue will continue.

We welcome W.Ave Arts' contributions to Bexhill's townscape through their imaginative and accomplished work in Wickham Avenue and Sackville Road, and on the walls of the Sovereign Light Café.

We support W.Ave Arts' plans to involve young people in the design and implementation of future projects alongside accomplished artists.

We are encouraged that W.Ave Art's proposals are considered by members of Rother District Council prior to implementation.

We commend Canterbury District Council's recent research to W.Ave Arts, and officers and members of Rother District Council. We believe this research has important lessons for Bexhill and can help point us in the right direction on this sensitive issue.

We urge our police, schools and local authorities to do their best to eradicate illegal graffiti.

We strongly recommend that the existing graffiti wall be removed from the Town Centre Conservation Area and be relocated to a more appropriate site. We are encouraged that there are no plans to create further such walls in the town but, in the light of the Canterbury research, would prefer the idea to be abandoned.