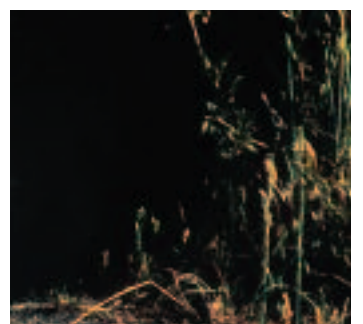
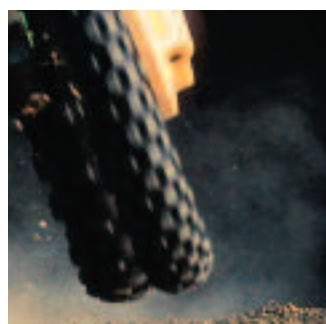
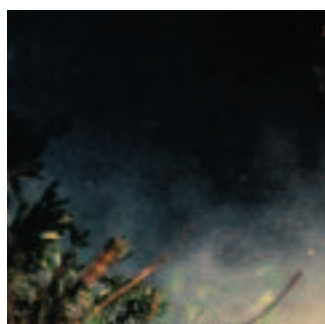
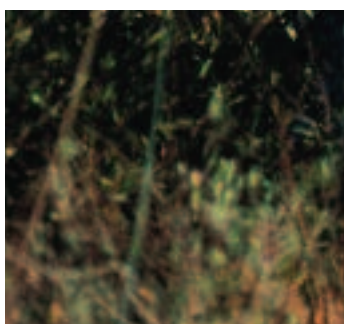
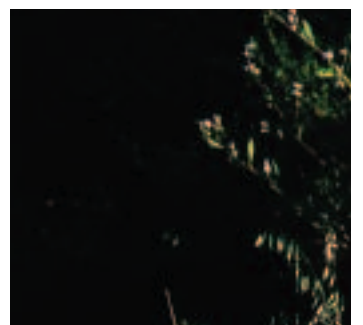
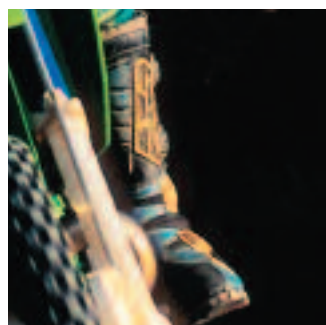
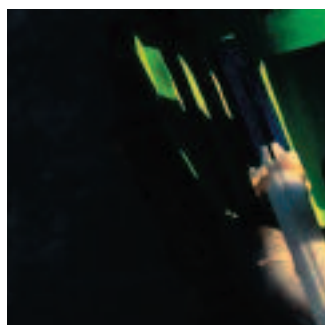
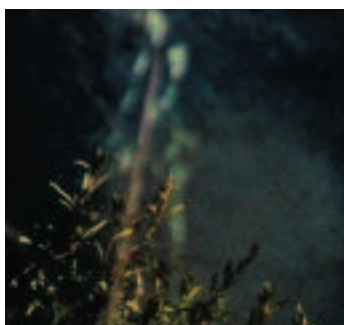
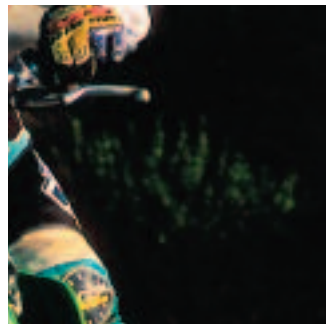
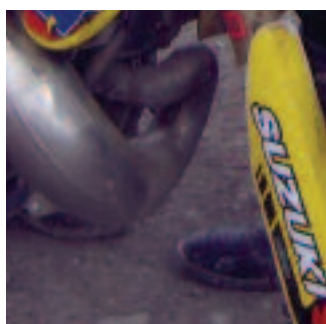
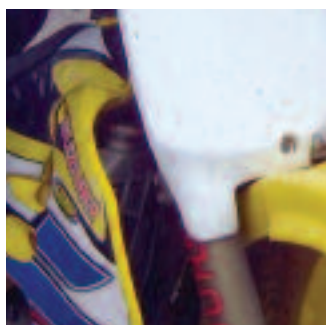
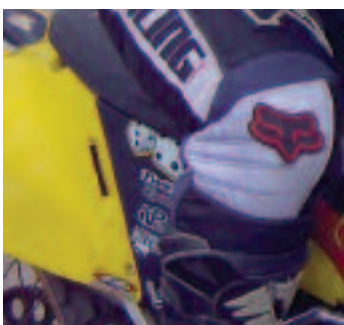
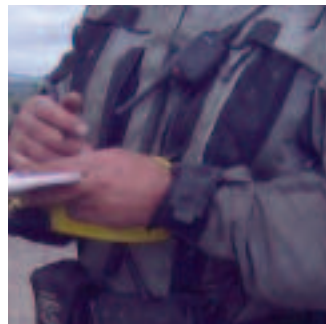
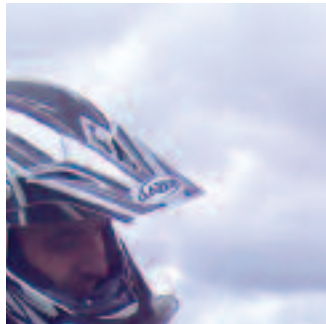


# Scrambling to Success

The Problems and Solutions to illegal off-road motorcycling in Greater Manchester  
**Summary document**





## Introduction

The Red Rose Forest Partnership initiated this study, which examines the current problems caused by illegal off-road motorcycling. A steering group from across Greater Manchester came together to co-ordinate the work and ensure that the whole range of issues were brought together and addressed. The study could not have taken place without the financial support from the Forestry Commission and others.

Illegal off-road motorcycling has for many years been an issue for those responsible for developing and managing greenspaces. There have been small successes in tackling this problem, but often these successes are short lived and can simply result in moving the problem onto another site. Until now, no one had looked at the problem in its entirety or on a Greater Manchester wide scale. In addition there was a political commitment to look at whether legal site provision could provide part of the answer. This shift in attitude has in part happened by the feeling that others solutions were not having the desired effect.

The backing of Greater Manchester Against Crime (GMAC) was sought to bring in a wide range of expertise from across the conurbation, to look at the extent of the problem and to identify possible solutions.

It has proved to be a an issue that touched a wide range of professionals from Greater Manchester Police, Youth Offending Teams, Greenspace Managers and dedicated motorcycle enthusiasts with nowhere legal to carry out their legitimate sport.

The final report gives an indication of the extent of the problem and a range of solutions that can alleviate it. It is clear that there is no single, quick and effective fix. What is needed is a co-ordinated approach over several years from site design, enforcement, youth engagement and legal site provision before lasting change will be seen.

■ A copy of the full report is available to download from [www.redroseforest.co.uk/publications.html](http://www.redroseforest.co.uk/publications.html)

## The Current Situation

Illegal off-road motorcycling has been an ongoing problem facing communities and land managers for many years. However, the current level of off-road motorcycle nuisance has increased alarmingly over the past few years, as we have seen a doubling of overall complaints to Greater Manchester Police (GMP) between 2003 and 2004. Perhaps unsurprisingly, weekend afternoons and early evenings record more complaints than any other time.

While some of the increase may be due to greater reporting of complaints, a comparative survey recorded 23 incidents of activity on a single day while there were 27 complaints received by GMP. Only one incident could be found to be occurring in both sets of data. This represents 84% more activity than received complaints. Extracting information on incidents and activity is difficult as there is no specific Police Incident Code for this type of activity and greenspace managers do not consistently report incidents. This can be due to a resignation to the problem and lack of perceived solutions, as well as the result of other work pressures taking precedence.



The issue is starting to attract increasing political and community interest, to the extent that many communities are now rating this problem above burglary and street robbery. Despite the fact that the cost to quality of life and wasted officer time is large, both are extremely difficult to quantify. The cost of physical damage from motorbikes on greenspace, however, can be quantified and runs into tens of thousands of pounds over single weekend periods.

Fatalities of off-road motorcyclists do occur infrequently, but more frequent is the incidence of harassment, threats and actual violence from illegal motorcyclists to others. Evidence is also appearing which suggests that a backlash is occurring and threats to off-road motorcyclists from members of the community appear to be rising at certain hotspots.

**When considering who generally makes up the off-road motorcycling community, four main off-road motorcycling user groups have been identified. The first two account for the vast majority of the problem;**

- 1** Young people without adults present. Mostly males in their teens riding on sites local to where they live. The bikes they ride are often in a bad state of repair and may be stolen. They would be unlikely to use a legal site if provided.
- 2** Adults on off-road motorcycles. These are predominantly males in their 20s and 30s who will often travel large distances with their bikes in vans at weekends to congregate at suitable sites. They commonly have motocross or enduro bikes and spend a large amount of money on vehicles and other motorcycling paraphernalia. This Group may be more amenable to using and paying for a legal facility if it were available.
- 3** Children with parents present may use local sites or come along with the above group as part of a family outing.
- 4** Adults on road legal machines. These generally use trail bikes on the road and may take the opportunity where it arises to have a short off-road excursion as part of their outing. Also in this group are younger riders in their late teens and early twenties who will use scooters and Supermoto style machines on surfaced off-road routes like the Trans Pennine or Outwood trails.



As the number of incidents being reported is increasing, so to are the pool of off-road machines, with annual sales doubling nationally since 2000. This does not include mini bikes. Complaints involving mini bikes have rocketed from 0.3% of all complaints in January 2004 to 13% in January 2005. As many people across different communities are able to report anecdotally, the mini bikes are fast becoming a major problem, not just on greenspace sites, but in alleys and housing estates.

**Legislation for enforcement is not lacking but is spread across several Acts of Parliament, which can make consistent levels of application a real challenge.**

The GMP off-road unit can be recognised as a focal point for expertise within the force, but this unit has recently been reorganised. Due to conflicting priorities, particularly at weekends with the need for traffic cover at sporting events, the off-road unit's expertise cannot always be drawn upon effectively, and they now undertake relatively few off-road campaigns throughout the year.

In addition to enforcement conducted by GMP, local authorities do have enforcement tools at their disposal which can be applied. Planning legislation is regularly used to prevent sites developing on private land, and though used less commonly at present, Noise Abatement Orders have proven effective in other parts of the country.

In addition to enforcement, physical exclusion barriers are used on many public greenspaces in an attempt to secure sites against illegal off-road motorcycling. Physical exclusion is costly, particularly as vandalism can often render barriers ineffective and in need of repair or replacement.

One key concern with moving too far towards extensive physical exclusion is that it can also prevent legitimate users gaining easy access to a site. For example, providing access points to allow access for horses but restrict motorcycles is particularly problematic. A further consideration is the recent Disabilities and Discrimination Act, which has implications for those designing access onto and around greenspaces. Unfortunately, currently there isn't a clear interpretation of the Disabilities and Discrimination Act, which causes problems when site managers come to apply such legislation practically.

A further strand which is examined closely within this study is the role that diversionary engagement activities play in offsetting illegal motor activity on greenspaces. Community motor projects do exist sporadically, but these are commonly focused on cars as a way of reducing car-related crime. Such projects do have a positive impact on local problems and a few are beginning to focus on motorcycles.

The practicalities of legal site provision are examined closely within the report, as there are no permanent legal sites within Greater Manchester at the present time. Trials clubs and a few motocross clubs do operate events on private land using a different site for each event. Legal off-road highways and Rights of Way are limited and set to decrease with new legislation, which will impact significantly on available recreational space currently used by green lane motorcyclists on street legal machines.

## Solutions

A blind-eye has often been turned when confronted with the problems caused by illegal off-road motorcycling. However, the statistics clearly demonstrate that a do-nothing/usual service scenario is no longer an option. While there have been some good local examples of dealing with this problem it is generally unco-ordinated, inconsistent and fails to take a partnership approach using the full range of tools available. A commitment to resolve this issue needs to be supported at the highest level by organisations in Greater Manchester. Many still view this simply as a motor vehicle problem but it is more consistent with Anti Social Behaviour issues, and should be recognised as such.

A full time post of Off-Road Motorcycle Champion is needed for Greater Manchester, who can push forward a Greater Manchester strategy, co-ordinating activities between partners. In addition, each Local Authority/Police Division should establish an off-road motorcycle sub-group as part of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Groups to co-ordinate resources and campaigns at a local level. This Group as a minimum should include a Councillor, Environmental Health Officer, senior Police Officer, Youth Offending Team member and senior Leisure Services Land Manager.

An education and publicity campaign needs to be put together at a Greater Manchester level. This Campaign needs to be co-ordinated centrally and supported by a plan for dissemination at all levels. Thankfully much of this work has recently been picked up by Greater Manchester Police Authority. They are now working to raise awareness at a community level, with potential offenders, motorcycle organisations motorcycle dealers and at a wider city region level. Also needed is the creation of a central information point, which can act as a one-stop shop for general information surrounding off-road motorcycling and a signpost to other organisations, where necessary.

General enforcement against off-road motorcycling by GMP is hampered by lack of knowledge regarding current legislation and best practice on how to implement these given a specific situation. A Force-wide protocol and training for all Police and Community Support Officers is a clear recommendation. The expertise of the Off-Road Unit would be invaluable here. This would need a reprioritisation of their current workload. A regular and specialist site enforcement role, particularly at weekends is also needed. Local Authorities could make greater use of Noise Abatement Orders, along with selective use of ASBOs and the Housing Act.

Clever boundary design can reduce illegal motorcycle access problems, but there is a clear need for a new range of heavyweight design boundaries and access controls to be tested across the sub-region. Standard signage and notices across the sub-region would also be of use. A clear and concise interpretation of the Disabilities and Discrimination Act 1995 is needed, highlighting how it relates to restricting access to off-road motorcycles. All these matters should be brought together into a site manager's design guide.

Part of the solution should be offering community education projects involving motorbikes at a local level. A Business Plan focused on the development of projects across Greater Manchester should be put in place and agencies such as Learning & Skills Council included. Work needs to be done in engaging potential funders of these education projects. The preferred type of motorbike used as part of these projects should be trials bikes which are quiet, relatively slow and teach control and discipline.

**Locally based action plans using the Home Office Crime Reduction Toolkits should bring all these various elements together.**



## Legal Site Provision

Experience from other areas demonstrates that site provision does not wholly eradicate the problem of illegal off-road motorcycling. It does provide for that section of the off-road community that ride on illegal spaces for lack of legal facilities. It is acknowledged that there will be those who are not inclined/able to enter into formal provision arrangements. However, in reducing the level of illegal activity, enforcement could be focused on the 'problem' element more effectively.

**Site promoters and developers have to start from the premise that the type of activities that can be safely accommodated and offered on an off-road site are not exactly the same as the character of most illegal off-road motorcycling. There are three areas where this is most apparent:**

- The casual roaming free nature of off-road motorcycling cannot be provided in an off-road driving site.
- Some types of activity will only be available using machines provided/hired on site.
- Some types of activity will only be available within the confines of a club structure.



Site selection is not only fraught with technical problems, but will undoubtedly generate political issues as well. Obtaining planning permission for permanent sites will be the first hurdle. Linked to this is the problem of noise, which is a particular problem for motocross. If these can be overcome, it is recommended that there should be no direct management of the facility by a public body. However some resources in the way of land rental or initial capital injection may be appropriate. This should allow the public body an on-going stake in the operation, enabling some social provision to be offered at the site. This will also distance public bodies from the complex liability issues involved in site operation.

The motocross sector is the most difficult sector to provide for but is likely to have the greatest direct impact in reducing illegal off-road motorcycling. Developing more motocross practice sites on private land organised by a club operating within the 14/28 day ruling, should be further developed. This would initially require partners to support the establishment of a motocross association across Greater Manchester to take on this role. In addition, there is probably the market demand for two commercially run motocross/racing quad practice tracks in Greater Manchester. Careful site selection is required as noise will be a significant issue.

A single well-located commercial site for road-legal and low powered machines also incorporating 4x4 vehicles and quads, would provide an off-road experience with less noise issues. While it is unlikely to provide as much direct impact in reducing illegal activity, it would allow off-road access to a broader section of the community and provide significant regeneration and tourism benefits. Partners should explore the business case for this in more detail.

The trials sector is better catered for with Back Cown Quarry, near Rochdale, which is close enough to cater for current demand in the sub-region. This site could offer an immediate site solution for motor vehicle projects operating with young people, which require a site to practice on. Trials clubs should be supported in securing further temporary venues. The use of public body sites to showcase this discipline and attract young people should be considered.

**Blind-eye sites should not be considered.**

## Conclusion

The production of this report marks a critical point in the Partnership's work on this issue. It is vital that a co-ordinated approach continues, and that the recommendations are considered by all partners. It is no longer possible or acceptable to turn a blind-eye to this issue, and maintaining a consistent, co-ordinated approach is the only way to work towards a feasible solution.

A final point that needs to be made is the need for all parties to continue to emphasise the importance of personal responsibility. Whilst there are measures that can be undertaken to reduce risk such as, information provision, practical site security work, enforcement and potential site provision these are merely tools that can be employed by broad partnerships. Off-road motorcyclists need to understand the legality of what they are doing and take personal responsibility for the risks which go with that activity.



GMAC is an innovative and unique business partnership model, conceived developed and delivered by all 10 Crime and Disorder Partnerships in Greater Manchester. GMAC is built on five critical elements - Quality Data , Information Technology , Strategic Analysis , Core Decision Making Documents and Effective Resource Management through Partnership Business Groups .

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**redroseforest** is an environmental regeneration initiative. It is a partnership of The Countryside Agency, the Forestry Commission the Boroughs of Bolton, Bury, Trafford and Wigan and the cities of Manchester and Salford. Over 40 years we are planting more than 25 million trees, across 292 square miles of the area with the help of local communities, businesses and partners, as the framework for a programme of regeneration and renewal that will make Greater Manchester a greener and more satisfying place to live.

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