

Blackburn turns around Bonfire Night bad behaviour

Youngsters in a community once branded a “war zone” over Bonfire Night disorder have been praised after this year’s events passed without incident.

The chairperson of the Blackburn Bonfire Night Action Group heaped praise on young people in the village following this year’s event.

The action group was set up in 2019 following a surge in anti-social behaviour in the village the year before.

Alison Kerr said: “I think we are quick to criticise but slow to say ‘well done’ especially to our young people.”

There were several incidents reported around West Lothian on Bonfire Night itself and one person was reported vandalism of a fire engine vehicle in Blackridge, while in Edinburgh riot police were deployed in some areas to control an outbreak of firework related violence.

But there were no incidents of disorder in Blackburn.

After the problems in 2018, villagers were encouraged to take a stand against firework thugs and report anti-social behaviour to the police.

In the months before the 2019 event the community came together to develop a range of diversionary pursuits for teenagers in the village, which proved a success.

In a statement to the local area committee this month Alison Kerr said: “As Chairperson of Blackburn Community Council, Community Action Blackburn and partnership centre management committee I would like to highlight the positive behaviour in the village on bonfire night.

"I believe Blackburn was one of the quietest communities in West Lothian and not one of the worst.

"Year on year the community has endured anti-social issues along with members of the emergency services coming under attacks whilst carrying out their job.

"This year was very different, and I think we are quick to criticise but slow to say 'well done' especially to our young people.

"I know there were incidents prior to bonfire night however on the actual evening it would appear things were quiet especially at the skatepark where there was no bonfire."

Station Commander Jim Robertson of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service confirmed that the ward had been one of the calmest areas on Bonfire Night for fire crews, with few incidents reported.

In her report to this month's meeting of the the Whitburn and Blackburn Local Area Committee Blackburn, Michelle Murray, the council regeneration officer who first worked with the community to develop the action group back in 2019 said: "The group resumed its meetings in September and continued to meet until after bonfire night. It put together an action plan of activity involving promotional materials and raising awareness to be delivered in schools, youth groups and various community sessions along with using social media platforms to extend the reach in the community."

Sessions were delivered in partnership by Community Regeneration Officer (CRO), Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT), Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue (SFRS), Community Learning and Development (CLD), Youth Acton Project (YAP) and local residents.

She added: "It was reported on the night by all services and the community that there had been a marked improvement in

behaviour this year from previous years. “

A drop-in session was delivered on the evening of the 5 November from the Partnership Centre. This was staffed by CLD Youth workers allowing staff from West Lothian Youth Action Project (WLYAP) to concentrate on street work.

Approximately 30 young people attended the evening and enjoyed hot dogs and pool games. WLYAP engaged with 43 young people in the evening. The BBNAG has recognised the positive behaviour in the area through a statement from the Chair of the Community Council, Community Action Blackburn, Partnership Centre Management Committee being released on social media commending the young people.

The success of the BBNAG through partnership working with the community, council and emergency services was studied by MSPs as part of their work to develop the recent firework legislation, with ministers and MSPs visiting the village and talking to those involved in the project.

Chairing the local area committee Councillor Mary Dickson said: “It’s a good, positive story to see there has been improvements.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter