



■ The big payback – men taking part in the community clear up in Laindon

Picture: LOUISE MORRIS VZC4J\_7

# Criminals learning error of their ways in public

CONVICTED criminals are paying their debt to society – and the community – by cleaning up one of Basildon's biggest estates.

The team of men has been tidying up the Five Links estate in Somercotes, Laindon. They have been cutting shrubs and trees, planting flowers, sweeping up and cleaning graffiti.

The unpaid work forms part of their punishment dished out by courts for a range of offences from assault to drink driving.

The "community payback"

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scheme sees offenders carry out manual work while wearing bright orange bibs with the initiative's name on the back. The team is managed by the Essex Probation Service.

Chris Watson, Essex Probation's area manager, said: "The scheme manages offenders who are working for the community as part of a court order.

"About £2million worth of

work is done every year for the county.

"This is a win for the community, in both the work that is done to improve our surroundings, and to make them safer, and in the sense the offenders learn skills which will aid their search for jobs later and help reduce crime.

"We are delighted at the work we're doing with St George's Housing to enhance the area at the Five Links Regeneration Project.

"Hopefully it will make resi-

dents feel safer and proud of their surroundings."

One 19-year-old, from Stanford le Hope, who was taking part in the clean-up after being ordered to complete 180 hours' unpaid work following an assault conviction said: "I've got 70 hours left.

"I've definitely learnt my lesson. Having to wear this bib is really embarrassing, but it does teach you a lesson."

The team was brought in to help clean up by the Community Safety Action Zone, which is run by the Basildon Crime and

Disorder Reduction Partnership and aims to cut crime and improve life for residents in trouble hotspots. The group wanted help to improve Five Links.

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