Guerrilla gardeners stage a sit-down protest

FED up with London's pavement benches being removed by councils, anarchists have taken matters into their own hands.

Disguised as workmen in high-visibility vests and overalls, the "Guerrilla Benchers" have installed seats around the West End.

Councils say they have had to get rid of their benches to discourage drunks, rough sleepers and teenage gangs from congregating.

One "Bencher", calling himself Agent Bristly Pioneer, said: "We'd like more of a bench culture, where people can sit down, watch the world go by and do nothing for a while."

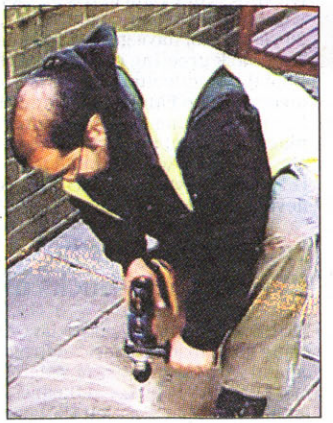
The group first targeted Shaftesbury Avenue, where they claim "two or three "seats have been removed. Agent Pioneer said: "We just drilled some holes in the ground, put benches in and sat down and had a cup of tea, then went for a fry-up." The seats were removed after the group mentioned their work on a website.

PATRICK SAWER

A Camden spokesman said benches were removed "often at the request of residents, schools or churches because they are being used for anti-social behaviour, sometimes because of environmental schemes or they are an obstacle to a new pavement layout".

Other guerrilla action has included a group who planted trees and flowers in neglected public space in south London.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: Page 12



On the bench: the "Guerrilla Benchers" arrive in the West End with a new seat, drill the holes for the holding bolts, right, and put their work to the test, left

Sit-down protest

A NEW breed of anarchist is at large. Cunningly disguised as council workmen, the "Guerilla Benchers" go about the West End installing park benches — purchased in garden centres — in open spaces where they have been removed by councils to curb anti-social behaviour. Anarchism has traditionally been associated with violent anti-globalisation protests but we welcome this most civilised protest and its small contribution to making London a more congenial city.