

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Does Neighbourhood Watch Work?

Many people on the Suburb often ask the question 'how successful is Neighbourhood Watch?', or 'has Neighbourhood Watch really made any worthwhile contribution to the reduction of crime especially when one continues to hear of burglaries and attempted burglaries on the Suburb, cars being broken into or vandalised, and even people being assaulted on their way home?'

Burglaries

The Police say that burglaries in the Goldens Green area generally have dropped by 30% over the past 12 months which they attribute almost entirely to the growth and effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch. But then one hears of a spate of petty burglaries in some part of the Suburb and one can't help querying the statistics and asking whether burglaries are really significantly reduced, and the Police will say 'Yes, burglaries are, indeed, down by 30%; these are some of the remaining 70% of burglaries that are still taking place!' So, perhaps one needs to consider this statistic in a bit more detail.

The fact is that a good, well run Neighbourhood Watch — where neighbours are alert and where the majority of houses have burglar alarms, locking windows and other security precautions, and where householders have marked their property and are displaying the yellow and black 'M.P.' stickers — will have succeeded in reducing burglaries by far more than 30%. Probably a reduction of 70%, 80% or even 90% is nearer the mark! Whereas a Neighbourhood Watch that, perhaps, displays four Neighbourhood Watch stickers and otherwise is a Neighbourhood Watch in name only, probably contributes almost nothing to the reduction of crime.

This is the conclusion that is reached when Police are questioned more closely about these burglaries and it turns out that, almost invariably, break-ins occur where the windows of houses are not properly secured with window locks (or where the wooden window frames are rotten) and where they can be quietly jammed open without disturbing the occupants of the house. Invariably, also, the houses have not got burglar alarms and have not got 'marked property' stickers displayed.

Of course, there are always exceptions where such a conclusion is knocked for six — an aggravated burglary takes place in a wealthier part of the Suburb where armed robbers break into a house that apparently has almost everything including burglar alarms, private security guards, grills on every window and dogs patrolling the grounds. But then, that sort of a house often isn't in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme anyway!

So, it can probably be said with some confidence that, if you are in an active Neighbourhood Watch and if you are genuinely conscientious about securing your home, marking your property and being alert, your chances of having a break-in really are very considerably reduced. As far as burglary and attempted burglary is concerned, yes, Neighbourhood Watch really can claim to be successful.

Motor Vehicle Crime

Presently, however, it is not possible to be nearly so confident about the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch in combatting motor vehicle crime which is on the increase. Much of this crime seems to be totally mindless. After all, why should anyone want to go to the trouble of breaking into a modest family saloon in order to steal a run-of-

the-mill type of radio or cassette player which will probably only fetch a few pounds on the open market? But, perhaps before drawing any general conclusions, it is first necessary to analyse motor vehicle crime in greater detail. It would seem to fall into six main categories:-

- **Wheels.** Firstly, there are those thieves that can remove all four wheels from a car at the speed of a team tackling a racing car at a pit stop. It might seem surprising that there is such a demand for car wheels without the car itself to go with them! But each wheel and tyre of a new Daimler, Jaguar or Mercedes will sell



Hampstead Way, and four wheels gone overnight!

for some £400 to £500. Even the wheels and tyres of a new small family saloon will probably fetch £100 to £200 each. And so, clearly, this is a lucrative business. The answer, of course, is to fit a wheel locking nut to each wheel, a set of four costing less than £20.

- **Stereo systems.** All radio and stereo systems are at risk. It is a relatively easy operation to take a sharp knife, cut round the rubber surround of the rear window and then remove the whole window with a suction pad. If you have a cheapish car radio worth, say, less than £100, you may not consider it worth taking any great precautions — although a sticker saying you have a car alarm could well act as a deterrent. But, if you have a stereo system worth, say, £600 or more, the only answer is to have an expensive car alarm activated by movement of any description inside the car. These alarms invariably have a small red light that glows or flashes inside the car warning the potential thief that such an alarm is fitted.

- **Belongings in car.** Then there is a certain type of petty thief who will be attracted by any object left visible inside a car. A plastic bag containing rubbish could be enough to invite a brick through your car window and a quick snatch and grab. The answer, quite simply, is never leave anything on display in a car. Always hide it in the boot or take it into your house.

- **The joy ride.** Another type of thief is the joy ride. He is probably young and may steal your car as a cheap and convenient form of transport until, assuming you have a petrol locking cap, your petrol runs out. An unlocked car is even more tempting to this sort of thief and keys left in the ignition — even only for a few moments — are a positive invitation to him!



- **The professional.** Then there is the professional thief who will steal your car, invariably to use, either for re-sale or for use in a particular crime. There may be little you can do to prevent the professional gaining access to your car but a car alarm, especially an electronic one, could be a considerable deterrent. And etching your registration number on all windows will be likely to deter the thief who steals to resell — respraying is not a big job, but changing all the window glass is.

- **The vandal.** Finally there is the mindless lout who may be motivated to damage your car for reasons varying from wanting a 'bit of a giggle' to the fact that he may hate you for being successful or different to him. If you can't lock your car in a garage, do put it under a street light where it can be seen, and hope that you or your neighbours may be alert and report any characters that appear suspicious.

The conclusion on motor vehicle crime must be that, at the present time, it is difficult to prevent. But, if you keep what is perhaps your second most valuable asset in the road outside your house, do consider whether there are not one or two ways, as mentioned in this article, which could contribute to protecting it.

Assault

On the whole, assault is not a crime of major proportions in this part of London. People don't get mugged or beaten up round here to the same extent as they do, apparently, in areas such as Brixton. However, that is little comfort to the young woman who was so seriously assaulted in Temple Fortune Lane earlier this year, and older people and women often have a considerable fear of assault and are often afraid to go out of their homes regardless of the statistics.

There are a whole series of common sense rules and actions which people, and especially women, can take to mitigate the risk of assault and these are best explained in special meetings for women which the Police will arrange to advise them on personal safety.

Conclusion

So, in reply to the question 'has Neighbourhood Watch contributed to the reduction of crime?', the short answer must be 'Yes, significantly in those Watches that are effective'. But there is still undoubtedly an enormous job yet to be done requiring the active cooperation and participation of all of us on the Suburb.



9th September 1988

Dear Sir,

For the successful conservation of any area, positive action is needed in addition to the strictest control over alterations and new development. In the absence of clear objectives policy becomes directionless.

It is a lamentable fact that seventeen years after the Shankland Cox study attempted to provide such a framework for the future conservation of the Garden Suburb, there is still no agreed long term estate management policy for the area.

Accordingly I am assembling a list of specific objectives for the environmental improvement of the Conservation Area for eventual adoption by the Trust, Residents' Association and Barnet Council. The aim is to set out a flexible but clear set of realistic objectives and priorities for positive enhancement, which once adopted will provide a focus for funding from both public and private sources.

Proposals which have already been identified include:

1. Floodlighting of St. Jude's, The Free Church and the Institute.
2. Revision of the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest to provide greater protection for more buildings.
3. Reinstatement of lost architectural features, such as the original children's pavilions in Asmunds Place.
4. Reinstatement of road verges in certain streets from tarmac to grass.
5. Restoration of the axial tree planting in Central Square and other formal avenues such as Northway.
6. Restoration of the open spaces on the west side of Central Square and on the L.E.B. sub-station site at the junction with Northway.
7. Replacement of concrete bollards with oak posts and the use of traditional posts and chains in areas of intense parking pressure such as the Market Place.
8. Reinstatement of the original gates to Big Wood at Temple Fortune Hill.
9. Extension of the existing beech hedges to screen St. Jude's car park from Heathgate.
10. Completion of the perimeter yew hedge to the Open Air Theatre, Little Wood.
11. Exposure of the Suburb War Memorial to permit full view from Southway.
12. Reinstatement of original timber Suburb signposts.

Sensible recommendations or ideas for other environmental improvements should be sent to me in writing by 15th November.

Philip H. Davis
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A cheque for £300! Young Oliver Brignall and Isabel Hardman dream of all the toys and sweets they could buy with their giant cheque.

But the toddlers were passing on the money to a more deserving cause: the children's kidney research unit at the Royal Free Hospital, Hampstead.

Oliver and Isabel, with their mummies, presented the cheque to consultant paediatrician Richard Trompeter, who heads the unit at the hospital. The unit depends heavily on public donations to buy essential equipment.

The two children were from the Pavilion Children's Centre, a group for the under-threes which meets four mornings a week at East Finchley library from 10 am until 12 noon. The money was raised by a raffle at the centre's annual summer festival.

Deborah Hofman, chairman of a committee of mothers who run the Pavilion Children's Centre, said: 'We're all lucky that our children are fit and healthy. We wanted to help those who aren't so fortunate'.

The Pavilion Children's Centre was started five years ago by a group of mothers in Hampstead Garden Suburb who realised there were no facilities for the under-threes and their mothers in the area. The group normally meet at the Pavilion in Lyttleton Playing Fields in the Suburb. They have been in their temporary home at East Finchley library for the past year while Barnet Council carry out essential roof repairs and re-wiring work to the Pavilion.

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