

Neighbourhood Watch

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

The first regular Neighbourhood Watch article appeared in the Autumn 1987 issue of Suburb News, just five years ago, and so it is appropriate to report what has happened over this period and to take stock of the situation.

The first Suburb Neighbourhood Watch was formed in 1984 or 1985 and, by 1987 there were 23 watches covering some two-thirds of the houses on the Suburb. Today there are 48 Suburb Watches nominally covering 3,738 of the 3,800 houses (98.4%) and 665 of the 1,400 flats (47.5%).

However, not all Suburb houses are covered effectively as there are a few Suburb Watches that have virtually ceased to function. For instance, Hogarth Hill Watch – which includes Childs Way, part of Willifield Way and Wordsworth Walk – Southway Watch, Thornton & Middleway Watch and Vivian Way Watch – which includes Devon Rise, Harford Walk and Totnes Walk – exist, to all intents and purposes, in name only and are almost totally inactive due to the fact that no one in these Watches is prepared to take the lead and be the Co-ordinator. The closure of some of these Watches is now being actively considered.

If these Watches are discounted, the coverage of the Suburb by the remaining 44 Watches is 77.4% with 3,362 (88.5%) of the houses covered and 663 (47.4%) of the flats covered.

Less than half the flats are covered by Neighbourhood Watch partly because no one in the remaining flats is prepared to take a lead and partly because there appears to be a misplaced belief among flat-dwellers that they are somehow less at risk than those who live in houses. Major blocks of flats at risk and not covered by Neighbourhood Watch are Emmott Close, Queens Court and The Orchard, as well as those in Lyttelton Road and Temple Fortune.

What Neighbourhood Watch has done

Over the past five years, Neighbourhood Watch has set out essentially to do two things: firstly to communicate to Suburb residents generally and to Neighbourhood Watch members in particular, the nature and extent of crime in the area, how it takes place and the threat that it poses to residents; secondly to explain precisely what each family need to do to protect their home, their cars and themselves. It has done this through numerous articles in Watch newsletters and in Suburb News as well as at many public and in-house meetings.

This process will continue. But now all Suburb residents should know precisely how to secure their homes against burglary, how to secure their cars against theft, of what to be suspicious and how to get a quick police response. Now residents have only to contact their Watch Co-ordinator, the Crime Prevention Officer or a police beat officer for this advice.

What has been achieved

Five years ago the NW11 and N2 postal districts of London were regarded by insurance companies as being extremely high risk burglary areas. In fact, they were ranked among the highest risk areas in the country. Now, NW11 is one of the lowest, with N2 not far behind. NW11 is in the lowest of ten burglary risk categories in London, and N2 is in the second lowest risk category.

Of course, Neighbourhood Watch cannot take all the credit for this. We are extremely

fortunate that our local police, with whom we work closely in partnership, have for a number of years put the reduction of burglary as their top priority and they have been most effective in achieving this objective. For instance, last year they arrested 125 burglars which, considering that most burglars are each responsible for more than one burglary and some for a considerable number, means that they were able to clean up an appreciable number of burglaries. However, the police believe that they can do even better than this and, earlier this year, they launched a special burglary squad based at Finchley Police Station which has already had some notable successes and will without doubt make a significant further contribution to apprehending these criminals during 1992.

Nevertheless, the members of Neighbourhood Watches can certainly take some credit and Hampstead Garden Suburb has, in fact, now got the reputation of being at the forefront of the Neighbourhood Watch movement in this country. But, if this is so, there are three major factors that contribute to this successes.

The Police. Not only do the local police and Neighbourhood Watch work closely together with the same priorities, but we are extremely fortunate in having the genuine and wholehearted commitment to and support for Neighbourhood Watch of our local police from the Chief Superintendent, through all ranks to the police officer on the beat to a degree that is probably far more extensive than elsewhere.

The Residents Association. Then, unlike most other parts of the country, we are supported by a firmly established and competent Residents Association that not only gives Neighbourhood Watch considerable moral support as well as contributing significantly to the costs of our photocopying, but also carries out in a most effective manner all the duties of a pressure group representing the concerns of residents to the government, to our MPs, to the local authority and to others. In other parts of the country, where there is no residents association, many of these matters have to be dealt with, probably less competently, by Neighbourhood Watches thereby deflecting Neighbourhood Watch from carrying out its main task of reducing or preventing crime.

Suburb Residents. But considerable credit is also due to the great majority of responsible Suburb residents who are now far more security conscious than they were five years ago. Of course, the 230 Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators and Wardens have played a special part in getting the message across with the result that more and more houses and cars are being made safe with burglar alarms and other security devices. It is also gratifying that over one-third of all Suburb houses have taken one of the most cost effective steps of all by marking their valuable goods with their postcodes and house numbers and displaying marked property stickers thereby statistically reducing by fifteen times their chances of being burgled. There are now large numbers of Suburb residents who



know how criminals operate, who know what they need to do to protect themselves and their neighbours and who take correct and responsible action depending of each circumstance.

The Future

Unfortunately there are still some 250 burglaries a year and vehicle crime has increased to a record level of over 600 incidents a year, making an annual total – with other crimes such as theft, indecent exposure, robbery and criminal damage – of over 1,100 crimes on the Suburb altogether.

At least three-quarters of all the burglaries and at least three-quarters of all the vehicle crimes are preventable and would not occur if the advice which is heeded by the majority was acted upon by all. But very regrettably there are still a minority of Suburb residents some of whom are just forgetful, some of whom don't care and some of whom are just thoroughly irresponsible,

thereby encouraging the criminals and putting the majority of us needlessly at risk.

So, the tasks of Neighbourhood Watch now are two-fold. On the one hand there is the task – with the help and support of you, the majority – of educating new residents in the basics of security and continuing to encourage the minority to be more responsible. On the other hand there is the ongoing task of informing you of new crime trends, changes in police organisation or priorities, and of new security ideas and initiatives. But, more and more, this latter task must be combined with another important part of Neighbourhood Watch, which is to encourage a sense of community and all that makes for

good neighbourliness. The "Meet the Police" evenings mentioned elsewhere in this issue are a particular example of this. PL Peter Loyd says that three factors have contributed to the success of Neighbourhood Watch. He could not say of course that his own dedication has been the most important factor. Ed.

INSIDE JOB

Prisoners at Coldingley jail in Surrey are producing neighbourhood watch signs in their workshop.

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB

Mervyn Miller and A. Stuart Gray

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB was described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner as 'the most nearly perfect example of the unique English invention ... the Garden Suburb'. Founded by Dame Henrietta Barnett in 1907, after a long campaign to protect the open land north of Hampstead Heath from the indiscriminate development, the Suburb was planned by Raymond Unwin, with Edwin Lutyens responsible for the Central Square with its twin churches and Institute. Unwin, with his partner Barry Parker, had recently planned Letchworth, the first garden city, while Lutyens, after a decade of designing country houses, was anxious to participate in the 'high game' of classical architecture and civic design. The built environment of the Suburb thus encapsulates a unique blend of Arts and Crafts informality and meticulously detailed Queen Anne and Georgian style.

Life in the Garden Suburb, particularly in the early years, attained an idyllic quality, and many active residents' groups were formed. During the inter-war period a more commercial approach was evident and the tranquillity of the Suburb was shattered by the routing of the Barnet by-pass, now the A1, through its northern sector. Following extensive war damage, the post-war period was dominated by the takeover of the original Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust and the sale of its assets. Following residents' action, the Trust was reconstituted and continues to administer and 'outstanding' Conservation Area.



In this new book an appraisal of the architectural and planning achievements of the Suburb is set against an entertaining account of its enfolding, varied history. The authors are supremely well qualified for their task and their book will stand as the definitive account of the Suburb for many decades to come. In addition to its value to social and architectural historians and town planners, its profusion of splendid illustrations alone will ensure enduring popularity for the book among all who have known or have lived in the Hampstead Garden Suburb.

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB will be published in the Autumn as a handsome, well-produced volume, with over 150 illustrations, 20 in colour, and will be £19.95.

If you would like a copy please complete the coupon below and return it to the Trust Office together with a cheque for £19.95. We shall deliver the book by hand as soon as it is published. For addresses outside the Suburb please send us an additional £2.50 to cover packing and postage.

ISBN 0 85033 805 0

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