

LOCAL CRIME SOLUTIONS

BOROUGH / PROJECT :

Hillingdon Council Designing out subway crime



PROBLEM :

A poorly designed 1980s pedestrian subway was attracting anti-social behaviour, including indecent exposure and mugging type offences. A serious incident used to take place two or three times per year. The most serious of which was an assault on an elderly woman that led to severe head injuries.



SOLUTION :

Various organisations, led by Hillingdon council, came together to deliver physical improvements, with the aim of making pedestrians feel safer and so reducing the opportunity for crime and anti-social behaviour.

BACKGROUND :

In the mid-1980s, the A312 Hayes by-pass was constructed to relieve traffic congestion on the busy Yeading Lane and Coldharbour Lane and to take traffic away from Hayes town centre. Several residential roads running east to west, across the new road, were reduced to no through roads to enable the new trunk road to be built, and four subways were built to allow foot traffic under the A312. Unfortunately one subway in particular was poorly designed for safety, with high grass banks on either side of the path, poor lighting and a total lack of natural surveillance, being out of sight from any nearby housing or road. Cans and bottles in the undergrowth indicated that open air drinking was prevalent in the area.

This led to high levels of local concern about the safety of the pedestrian subway, and frequent reports of robbery and other types of assault in the area. Concern was high in that a junior and infant school and a children's centre are sited in Carlyon Road West, and the subway is the only realistic route of access for parents and children.

Following an assault in 2008 on a woman in her 60s - in which she received severe head injuries and was robbed - the Safer Hillingdon Partnership made this a priority area for improvement.

ACTIONS :

The council formed an effective working relationship with TfL, suggesting and campaigning for improvements. TfL officers lobbied senior management to make this a priority area, including a comprehensive site safety survey.

Key actions:

- upgraded street lighting was installed
- dome mirrors were erected to improve visibility around corners
- foliage was extensively cut back to reduce hiding places and make the area feel looked after
- Community Payback were employed to cut back undergrowth adjacent to the cycle path leading away from the subway alongside the culvert
- extensive landscaping took place to improve sight lines for users of the underpass. This involved reducing the height of the banks on both sides so that the entrance of the subway can be seen from the top of the path, and vice versa
- a palisade fence was erected at the top of the bank to remove a possible hiding place
- the council responded to a petition from the local Residents' Association, heard by the Cabinet Member for Community Safety on 4/10/10. The petition requested the installation of CCTV cameras at a pedestrian subway. CCTV had initially been ruled out on the basis that permanent CCTV would be too expensive (given the remote location and connection difficulties) and impossible for TfL to monitor effectively. Hillingdon Council's Community Safety Team and TfL officer came up with a solution, where TfL would pay for the purchase of wireless CCTV cameras and their running costs for four years, after which ownership would transfer to the council. This was agreed in writing.
- The Council's CCTV manager services and maintains the cameras, and images are viewable by both the police and the Safer Neighbourhood Team.
- The CCTV cameras act as an effective deterrent and reassurance.

As it was (2008)



How it looks today



Reduced embankments, CCTV and upgraded street lighting all provide reassurance



OUTCOMES :

- A marked drop in reports of assaults or robberies in the area. While the size of the area means hard statistics are difficult to provide, anecdotal evidence suggests that people using the subway tend to say they find the area much improved and safer, with increased confidence in the council, the police and TfL.
- The Community Safety Team has been in regular contact with the local stakeholders (local schools, residents associations and ward councillors), communicating by letter and in person at least twice per year to keep them informed about what is being done. Replies have shown their satisfaction with the improvements.
- Further improvements will include clearance of the culvert of rubbish which has been thrown into it, and the tidying up of an area owned by the council following purchase of the last house in the road when the A312 was built, with defensive planting to provide a natural barrier to unauthorised access to the rear of houses.

FUNDING :

Transport for London (TfL) paid for the installation of CCTV and embankment reduction; London borough of Hillingdon paid for the maintenance of the cameras and the continuation of wireless airtime after four years; Community Payback undertook the grounds clearance at no cost.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT :

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