

Reducing anti-social behaviour with alleyway lighting

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Problem solving: how lighting can be used to reduce anti-social behaviour

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I am a level 4 trained crime prevention officer, working in the early intervention and prevention unit as a problem solver focusing on anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Groups of unknown individuals were gathering in an alleyway during the night, drinking, using drugs, causing noise and nuisance and discarding bottles. These were often smashed in the alleyway or thrown into the garden of a house backing onto the alleyway. The ASB was first reported to police during the pandemic lockdown. This may have prompted the report as the victim said, 'With the current guidelines, they shouldn't be gathering like this anyway'. Reports had also been made to the council and the local MP. A second incident was reported when the individuals violently assaulted a man after he confronted them, before running off down the alleyway.

Following the assault, patrols and police community support officers (PCSOs) increased their visibility in the area, which reassured the victim. However, the ASB continued and patrols couldn't always attend until after the group had dispersed. At this point the local policing team asked for a crime prevention visit to evaluate any factors that may be contributing to ASB at the location. I conducted an environmental visual audit and invited the senior enforcement officer from the borough council to join me.

Due to footfall in the alleyway during the day, gating wasn't a viable option so my primary focus was lighting. The [crime reduction toolkit](#) recommends that [street lighting](#) is considered in darker locations to enable better natural surveillance, ensuring that criminal activity and ASB are more visible. However, after surveying the alleyway, I recommended that one of the lighting columns be extinguished. My rationale was that the column was at a point on the alleyway which had no natural surveillance due to the alleyway's winding nature.

While the column in question was close to the corner of the victim's bungalow, it was not overlooked by any windows or other properties and the alleyway was enclosed by high fencing on both sides. The column could not be seen from either end of the alleyway so was in a blind spot. I believed that the light emanating from the column was enabling the perpetrators to congregate without being seen. Another two lighting columns were at each end of the alleyway and lit the two access points, enabling natural surveillance at those points.

The request to extinguish the column was questioned by the council because the advice was not in accordance with Home Office recommended guidance. Eventually, eight months after my recommendation and following negotiations with the council, who consulted with the community, the lighting column was extinguished. This was for an initial six-month trial period followed by regular two-monthly reviews.

While waiting for my recommendation to be implemented, a further 11 ASB reports were made to the police. Again, these involved drug and alcohol misuse, excessive noise from loud music, shouting and swearing, climbing fences and littering of discarded and smashed bottles. In one report it was stated that ASB was occurring at this location two to three times some weeks, but it wasn't reported due to the waiting times on 101.

During the six-month trial, no further reports of ASB were received and the victim confirmed they were happy with the outcome. There was only one report from the public enquiring about the 'faulty lamppost' and they were happy with the council's response that it had been switched off following police advice. The council is now considering removing the column permanently as there is no intention to illuminate it again.

This intervention demonstrates that the presence of lighting in an area doesn't always deter ASB. It's important to consider and assess the environment at every location to determine the best approach.

- This article was peer reviewed by Donna Grover, crime prevention advisor, Hampshire Constabulary

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