Staffordshire
POLICE

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Father Booth
The Presbytery
St. John's Road
Biddulph
S-O-T
Staffs
ST8 6JG

Contact: David Elkington
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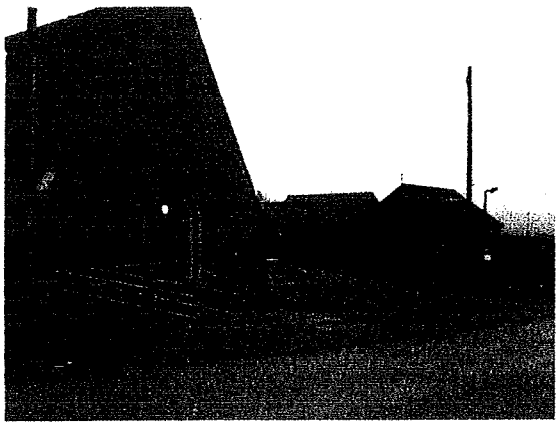
Date: 18th December 2008

Dear Father Booth

Re: Church of English Martyrs, St. John's Road, Biddulph

I refer to my visit yesterday at the request of hate crime officer PC5046 Sam Pointon following the incidents where obscenities were firstly, sprayed on the front door of the church (November 2007) and secondly, formed with snow on the side wall of the church (3/12/08). As I said at the time, if one disregards the fire at the Packmoor church which may be completely unrelated, given the locality in which the church is set, the presence of a youth club building immediately adjacent to the church and the very open nature of the frontage, I am perhaps a little surprised that the church does not suffer more incidents, not of this nature, but in general. Your decision some while ago to block off the area to the side of the church between it and the youth club with fencing and a gate was probably the best crime prevention measure that could have been taken and has no doubt contributed significantly to the lack of other incidents of either a criminal or anti-social nature.

That said, there are a number of alterations to the location that could be considered that may reduce the likelihood of negative interaction with it.



Foremost among these would be to reduce the openness of the frontage. Do not misunderstand this principle - it is an extremely long way from turning the location into a fortress. However, it is all to do with providing what we would term 'defensible space' for the church.

Currently, there is little to demarcate the fully public space of the pavement/roadway and what may be termed semi-private space of the church. The absence of either a physical or psychological barrier allows youths or anyone else for that matter to simple approach the church without having to make a

conscious effort to do so. The absence of any form of boundary treatment means it becomes to a degree part of the public domain. The introduction of some form of proper and appropriate boundary demarcation would not be intended to prevent access, but would informally declare that this not part of the public domain and should you wish to enter it, you will need to make a conscious effort to do so. A proper and appropriate boundary may perhaps be railings with gates or a dwarf wall with railings atop and gates. Careful thought would be required to get the nature and location of the boundary treatment correct. In relation to the location, I would consider that it would perhaps be along the whole of the pavement edge, extending up both sides of the slabbed paths in front of the church, with gates at the pavement, and extending up both side of the vehicular access perhaps running along the grass edge at the rear of the main rough parking area on the left, and enclosing possibly half of the green triangle of grass on the right of the vehicle entrance. I would see no need to provide gates for the vehicle entrance.

In my opinion, aesthetically it would not be deleterious to the location and would in fact improve it per se, and give much scope for additional improvement. The additional improvement could involve transforming some parts of the large green swathes of grass by adding planting borders etc. Over time such planting can also be a non-aggressive means of enhancing the boundary treatment in terms of intruder resistance. Although it is in a domestic setting, the photos below (which with the right camera equipment would have been one) show the stark contrast between what can be accomplished with some defensible space created and the unwillingness to attempt anything without it. The concept can be readily translated of course to other settings.



Another alteration that might be considered to improve the location would be to provide some lighting to the visible side area of the church. As you acknowledged, the side of the church is in relative darkness. This may also apply to the front as well if the solitary light above the doorway is unsatisfactory. Providing some floodlighting perhaps thrown up on the church rather than positioned on it, may increase the perceived vulnerability of potential offenders who may seek to commit acts of a criminal or anti-social nature. Such lighting could be disguised by planting if required. Usually offenders prefer to operate where they will not or can not be seen so this may be worth pursuing. In due course, as part of any improvements to the surface of the parking area you intimated were likely, including lighting provision as part of the scheme would be beneficial to parishioners and in crime prevention terms.

In terms of more traditional crime prevention matters, I would fully agree with your intention to add sheets of polycarbonate to the outside of the stained glass window on the hidden side of the church.

Over time, the intruder resistance of the aforementioned fence and gate you had installed at the front left of the church could be further enhanced over time with the planting externally of spiky hedging and possibly some form of well conceived arch arrangement above the smooth topped gate.

The security of the double doors at the front of the church appears reasonable. An improvement that might be considered would be to add strips of metal to the right hand door at its leading edge where the locks are located to eliminate the gap between the two doors – the intention being to reduce jemmying opportunities. Symmetrically done and perhaps using the same stain as the door, they would not look out of place.

Whilst little can be done to improve the intruder resistance of the uPVC door and windows, save adding such as polycarbonate externally, which would be a fearful and probably unnecessary expense, consideration should probably be given to installing an intruder alarm for the building, which would provide a visual deterrent (via the alarm box) as well as a physical security measure. We often suggest that adding a sounder internally as well is worth considering as it leaves offenders under no illusions that they have activated the alarm and will encourage them to flee.

For the presbytery itself, I would consider that having an intruder alarm installed would be extremely prudent. As well as providing protection for times when you are perhaps away from the area on holiday etc, it would protect at other times. For example, in the same manner that the homes of Liverpool FC players have been targeted at times when they are playing abroad, it is not outside the realms of possibility that your regular schedule of services could be used to an offender's advantage.

You mentioned that there have been occasions when you are in the church on your own and non-church attenders have wandered in for probably other than spiritual reasons. Your response has been to reduce possible vulnerability by keeping the front door locked until nearer the time it needs to be opened. This is a sensible precaution. Something that you may also wish to give thought to would be some form of movement activated warning device which picked up anyone entering the front door. This could possibly be a buzzer, which you would then be able to manually switch off during church services and when parishioners were arriving. Are people able to enter the church building undetected during church services? A possible suggestion would be to have a light added at the back of church which lit up for say 10 seconds and which would alert you that someone had entered and so prompt investigation by someone. It may even be that such a light could be positioned towards the rear of the church to be seen by a person of authority other than yourself to enable investigation. At the church I attend, such an arrangement exists with the person who operates the sound desk at the back of the church, with a simple CCTV camera monitoring the entrance hall linked to a very small view-only CCTV monitor on the sound desk. Thought could be given to arrive at a bespoke arrangement should you deem it would be beneficial.

Crime Prevention advice is given freely without the intention of creating a contract, and all comments and recommendations are site specific. Staffordshire Police and the Home Office do not accept any legal responsibility for the advice given.

Yours sincerely

David Elkington
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Crime Reduction Unit
North Staffs Police Division

cc. PC5046 Sam Pointon, Leek Police Station



Church and frontage, looking South.



Frontage, looking North.