

## 'Huntsmoor House'

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### Summary.

#### Scanning.

- Prostitution, Drug Dealing, Robbery, Burglary, and Anti-Social Behaviour were common problems at Huntsmoor House. Gang members would hide knives and weapons in the garden and fights were commonplace.
- The problem was raised by the local community police team, under pressure from the housing officer, who was taking complaint calls from residents
- The standard police dispatch response to the crimes reported had been largely unsuccessful.
- A 'POP' response was needed due to the disproportionate amount of crime in a concentrated area.
- Offenders were non-residents coming to Huntsmoor House to commit crime and loiter, where residents were being victimised and harassed.

#### Analysis.

- Crime data came from police reports and records of complaints to the housing officer.
- Residents were interviewed about the impact of crime, many wanted to move away, nearly all had suffered somehow.
- The fear of crime was real.
- Offenders were Prostitutes, drug dealers, and young gang members.
- Property is elevated from street level. Without a driveway.
- The sides and rear gardens are dark and secluded.
- Sheds and bin stores were being used by prostitutes.
- There were multiple places to hide weapons and stash drugs etc.
- Previous police interaction was limited to reactive investigations and local patrols.
- Police Patrols were at a disadvantage because offenders could see them coming and make off easily.
- Huntsmoor House has views over the locality but almost zero natural surveillance to the rear where 80% of crime was occurring.

#### Response.

- I learnt from analysis that the draw to Huntsmoor House was the privacy it afforded Offenders to commit crime with impunity.
- I sought help from Local Authority and Housing Agency budgets with responsibility for site management to undertake works using their own contractors.
- Funds were limited so works had to be targeted for maximum effect.
- I drew up plans and plotted arcs of view, assessing what physical features were inhibiting surveillance.
- Residents were consulted before changes were implemented.
- I looked outside of the problem area, and saw wider need – or risk displacement. Funds were secured to extend works to surrounding areas.

#### Assessment

- Natural Surveillance was increased.

- Plants and shrubs were removed, denying dealers and place to hide drugs.
- Walls, bin stores and sheds which once afforded prostitutes the privacy to operate were removed.
- Lighting was improved around the gardens and alleys
- Calls for Police stopped. Residents cancelled requests to be re-housed.
- No immediate displacement was observed.

## **Description.**

### **Scanning**

Huntsmoor House is a block of 12 residential apartments in Orpington, a small town within the suburb of Bromley, South East London, England. This part of London is Policed by the Metropolitan Police on the Bromley (PY) Borough Operational command unit (BOCU). The PY BOCU typically posts 18 responder Officers per shift. The area is also patrolled by the Cray Valley East ward safer neighbourhood team who have one Sergeant, four constables and two community support officers.

Cray Valley East ward suffer from some of the highest crime statistics in the wider Bromley Area, while being one of the smaller sub divisions or 'wards'. (APPENDIX CRIME Web link and MAP)

Huntsmoor House has two main entrances to the front and an enclosed garden which wraps around the rear and the sides of the property. Each entrance accesses six apartments without internal corridors between each side. The whole apartment block is raised above street level on a steep embankment. It can only be accessed via a pedestrian ramp.

The criminality at Huntsmoor House was brought to my attention by a local Police 'Safer Neighbourhoods' officer. It had become a local crime hotspot and the property had been earmarked for regeneration. The crime occurring at Huntsmoor House had caused concern for of all of its stakeholders, not least the residents – many of whom had asked to be re-housed.

Police Information reports and crime records for Huntsmoor House indicated that in the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 to 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018 there had been 42 incidents involving Police. (APPENDIX CRIME PIE CHART) I believe this figure provides a conservative idea of how bad the issues there were – not forgetting that in general terms 40% of crimes are never reported. I thought it was significant that many of the calls were anonymous calls to Crime stoppers' .These calls, I believe were most likely generated by intimidated residents.

Information from residents and surrounding shopkeepers showed that the problem was a local constant and that it was taking place night after night. The incidents mostly occurred in hours of darkness throughout the week – and the offenders were predominantly white and aged between 14 and 25 years of age.

The spelling of Huntsmoor House was an unforeseen issue while I was collecting and collating data. Variations on the spelling were; HUNTSMORE, HUNTS MORE, HUNTSMOORE and HUNTSMURE, all of which were searched for in pursuit of accurate crime figures to create a baseline from which to start. Some of these variations on the spelling were actually discovered looking at post being delivered to the property.

Additional data obtained from Affinity Housing was drawn from complaints by residents of Huntsmoor House. These complaints included; intimidation, the smell of drugs being smoked, the stairwells being used as toilets, the shouting swearing and constant litter including used condoms and needles in the sheds, bin stores and around their garden.

It was apparent that no one had taken all of the data available from these sources and commenced a proactive problem solving approach to crime at Huntsmoor House.

Because the crime rate was constant in spite of regular reactive police involvement I decided to take Huntsmoor House on as a Problem Solving Exercise.

Partners who shared the problem at Affinity Sutton and Clarion Housing confirmed that there was a budget for regeneration and improvement works, which would be made available upon review of any reports etc. that were to be submitted. Together we decided to aim to reduce the problems at Huntsmoor House by 30% subject to quarterly review.

### **Analysis.**

I started by conducting an environmental visual audit (EVA) during daylight hours. I decided to go alone without the input of any stakeholder etc. This was so that I could see Huntsmoor House and its surroundings with a fresh without being offered opinions or concerns that could distract me.

From the street looking up at Huntsmoor House it was immediately apparent that the embankment up to the block was unusually steep, with a pedestrian footpath zig-zagging up the double sets of entrance doors (IMAGE 1. APPENDIX). Walking from the street to the front door for someone of reasonable fitness takes at least a minute, and a run / sprint, or foot chase after an offender would be especially difficult with Police Body Armour, a duty belt and boots on.

Still looking up from the street I saw that there were lots of bushes that a person could easily hide behind. The bin store doors were broken and open, the side and back communal gardens were hidden from view, which explained why the majority of the crime committed here at Huntsmoor House was taking place either in the rear garden. I spoke to a resident who told me that she had requested to be re-housed because of the crime going on. She said that she wouldn't ever let her son play in the rear garden because she had seen hypodermic needles and used condoms inside the brick shed and bin store area which were often frequented by local

prostitutes. (IMAGE 2.(Brick Shed) (IMAGE 3. (Bin Store) APPENDIX). I noted the Brick Shed had no serviceable lock, and the door was on one hinge. The Bin Store doors were made of wood, and had clearly been repeatedly forced open, broken and repaired. The Lights inside the bin store had been vandalised with graffiti paint eliminating the light.

As I walked around Huntsmoor House, I asked myself: 'Why is the crime happening here?' 'Where isn't the crime happening, and why isn't it happening there?' this lead me to look at what the 'draw' to the area was. Research of our crime data did not highlight any intelligence that pointed towards a single reason for the unusually high amount of crime, for example there was nothing to say that a pimp, drug dealer or gang leader etc. resided within the property.

The next time I visited Huntsmoor House was at 2200hrs on a Friday night. The rear garden had approximately 8 people in, they were sitting on a wall and smoking cannabis. They were completely invisible to anyone passing by at street level, and I realised that they had been able to observe me from the moment I had parked my car down on the road. The lack of natural surveillance and poor quality or damaged lighting at Huntsmoor House was the draw! It was quiet spot to smoke drugs, and commit crime with impunity. It had a commanding view over the locality, and even if the Police arrived, they could be observed from a distance, giving offenders plenty of time to run away before the attending officers had even made it out their vehicle, let alone run up the embankment to the property.

I decided to move forward with increasing natural surveillance as my main aim so I set about plotting the physical features which inhibited surveillance from the street looking up into Huntsmoor House and its gardens. (IMAGE 4, and 5 APPENDIX)

Features such as a long low hedge to the front of the entrance doors, the low fencing the front and the walls to each side, even the solid bin store doors were ear marked as being a problem. I sought alternative options to the walls at either side of the

frontage to Huntsmoor House, and found that roll top fencing would provide anti intruder protection as well as the walls, but would also allow for easy vision through to the garden, and equally from the garden to the street. (IMAGE 6.)

The removal of the bushes to the front of Huntsmoor House gave rise to an idea; Which was that roll top fencing could be employed to create four individual smaller gardens to the front of the property. If each garden to the front was given to a resident or group of residents to adopt, then this had the chance of becoming a defined area of defensible space for the residents to care for, and take ownership of. The intended knock on effect being that some residents would police the area themselves to a degree. (IMAGE 7.) Roll top fencing wouldn't inhibit natural surveillance – and an increased presence of residents outside in their garden would (hopefully) be a deterrent to crime).

To the right of Huntsmoor house looking up from the street is a set of stairs which lead up to garages and other properties beyond. The fence was 200cm tall, and the shrubs beyond were growing over the top of that. Even in daylight hours it was an intimidating place to walk. (IMAGE 8) Because the Alley was on a boundary with Huntsmoor House I earmarked the bushes and fencing along its length to be removed too.

The brick sheds at Huntsmoor House were not used by the residents, and were known to be used by prostitutes. There was nothing inside them that suggested any caretaker or groundsman was using them for storage. Both Brick Sheds had broken roofs, where offenders had used them to jump over the wall to the front and sides of the property. The brick sheds were built up against the front walls to the garden area, so I recommended that they be demolished too.

The entrance doors were of sound construction and fit for purpose with two large magnetic locks – however the 'Tradesman's' access button was active from 0800 to

1400hrs each day, which is too large a window for any person to exploit this route into the property. To summarise the Analysis;

Huntsmoor House is like a fortress of crime. It enjoys elevated views, and it is difficult for police to get to quickly without being observed a long way off. Offenders can do as they please out of sight from the rest of the world, and the residents who have the misfortune to live there are intimidated.

## **Response**

When Affinity Sutton Housing received my report they replied within a few days and we arranged a site meeting with as many stakeholders in attendance as possible. I was able to demonstrate to them just how secluded the garden area was, and by contrast I was able to demonstrate the potential opportunity for increasing natural surveillance by replacing brick built walls with fencing, and solid doors, with security tested mesh doors, providing defensible space and additional lighting. By the time the site meeting was done our agreed collective objective was simply to open up the garden and sides of Huntsmoor House to enhance natural surveillance, create defensible space and enhance lighting levels with a view to deterring offenders who commit crime at Huntsmoor House. The housing association and local authority outlined the available budget and together with a local authority contractor we explored ways to extract the most benefit from the available funds. For example it was decided that cheaper Palisade fencing would be used to replace the walls, but roll top fencing could be used on the new garden areas to the front. On subsequent visits together with the housing officers we spoke to as many of the residents as we could and appraised them of the intended works and the overall objective. There were no negative responses once the whole scheme had been explained.

The main front doors were deemed to be fit for purpose – and because entry had never been forced, we decided to leave the old doors in place.

CCTV at Huntsmoor House was non-existent, however because the budget was limited it was shelved as an option for discussion later pending phase 1 works being complete.

'Phase 1' works consisted of;

Removal of the x2 Walls either side of Huntsmoor House.

Demolition of x2 Brick sheds to the either side of Huntsmoor House.

Removal of all fencing and bushes to ground level to the front of Huntsmoor House.

Removal of x 2 doors to bins stores.

Removal of all fencing, bushes etc. at the boundary with the alley way.

Removal of overhanging bushes and trees to the rear of the gardens along the boundary.

Fitment of Palisade Fencing to front gardens at sides of house.

Fitment of Palisade Fencing at boundary with the alley way.

Fitment of roll top fencing at 120cm height to created x 4 front garden areas.

Topsoil and turf for x4 front garden areas.

Fitment of x 2 gates within Palisade fence with digital locks to access Gardens.

Fitment of x 2 heavy gauge mesh bin store doors with digital locks.

Fitment of directional LED Street Lighting to the Alleyway.

Fitment of directional LED lighting to the sides and rear garden areas on a PIR setting.

Works were completed in JULY 2018 (Image 9, 10, 11 and 12).

## **Assessment**



Since the 'phase 1 works were completed the changes at Huntsmoor House were remarkable. From street level looking up and from surrounding areas there is now clear view into the rear garden of Huntsmoor House. The Brick Sheds were demolished which had the added benefit of widening the side gardens to the front. The alley way was bright and less intimidating, additional LED street lighting meant that a person walking into the alley way could see all along its length to the street beyond. Places where a potential attacker could lurk had been eliminated.

The bin stores no longer present a place to hide, because even once inside – you can be seen from outside right down to street level.

The 'Draw' to Huntsmoor House for local offenders had gone. Now, it is difficult to gain entry to the garden, and even once in the garden – you can be seen in plain sight from the street and the wider area. Even at night, any person in the garden is shrouded in LED Lighting, and their presence is obvious.

Initial reports back from the local safer neighbourhood officers indicated that calls to Police had all but ended, and the early feedback from residents was very encouraging. One resident told me that she no longer dreads coming home after a day at work, and now she can let her kids play out in their own garden.

Another said that they've started gardening, and planting vegetables and flowers.

An elderly resident of the road behind Huntsmoor House said now that the alley way is brightly lit and clear he has started using it to get to the local shops, whereas before it was too intimidating so he would avoid it and walk the long way around the estate taking him an extra 15 minutes.

Since the works were completed, the complaint from residents to the housing department regarding prostitution, drugs and loitering have ended.

Calls and information reports passed to Police regarding prostitution ended. The Local Safer Neighbourhoods Police officer has told me that calls to Huntsmoor

House have all but 'dried up' save for business as usual calls unrelated to the gardens etc.

This was backed up when I interrogated the police crime reporting systems and saw that in the first six months following the completion of the works the only calls to police were regarding a long term domestic violence case, and one theft from a vehicle parked nearby.

The Housing association backed this good news up even further; Complaints from Residents to the housing association had stopped saved for routine maintenance and repair requests. There was some evidence of loitering and drug taking being displaced to another residential building a block away, however this other block was also operated by Affinity Sutton and Clarion housing – who were quick to apply the relevant crime prevention through environmental design thinking there too.

The response could have been even more effective if the bin storage had been demolished, and replaced with a 'lean-to' type structure. Although the bin store doors are effectively transparent, the bin store does still represent shelter.

The use of Digi-locks on the side gates and bin store is not perhaps the best option. In time it is possible that people other than residents learn of the code and gain entry, however the Housing Association have stated that they will change the codes every six months.

My last visit to Huntsmoor House was Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May. Only one resident was available to speak to me. He resides on the ground floor in the flat closest to the alley way. The drug taking, anti-social behaviour and prostitution would have been occurring right outside his window. When I asked him about how life is now, he replied that it's much better, more peaceful – and generally a happier place to live. He said that there are always children playing in the garden now, and that there have

already been one or two BBQs enjoyed by the residents this year. Something he insists would never have happened before.

Huntsmoor House is still controlled by Affinity Sutton Housing on behalf of the London Borough of Bromley, it is no longer on the register of 'problematic sites' that require any special attention beyond maintenance.

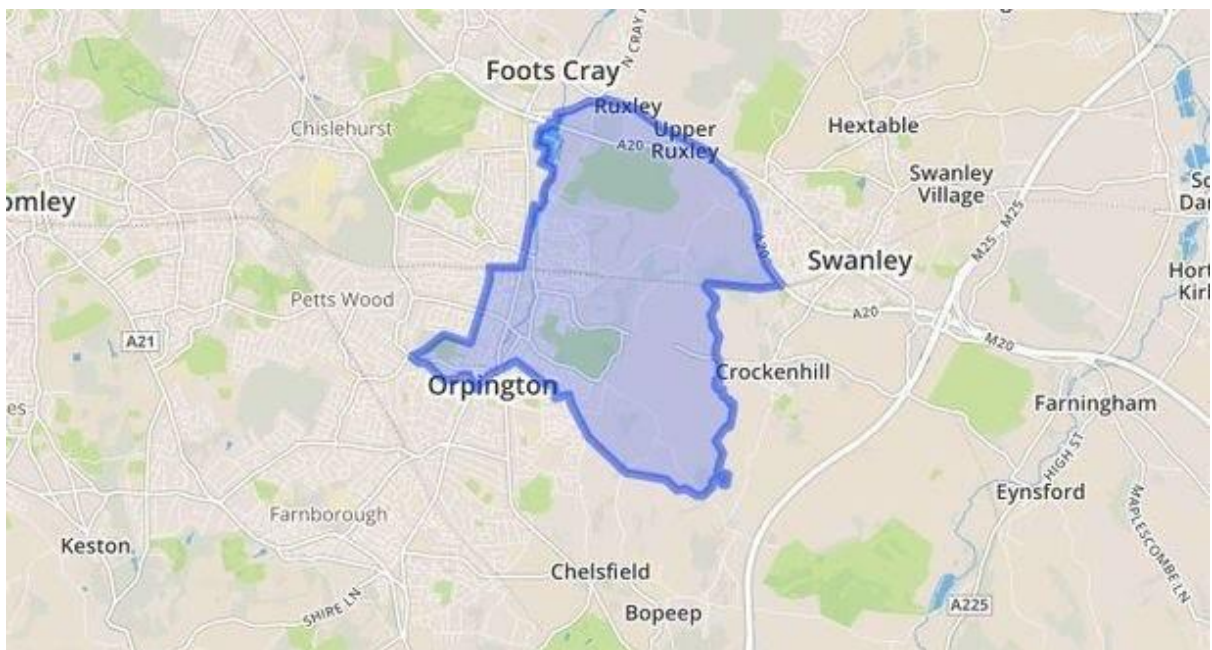


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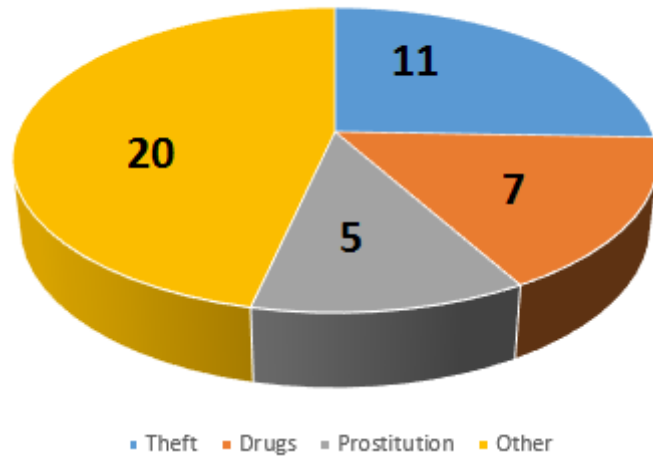
## **APPENDIX**

<https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.kentlive.news/news/kent-news/bromley-orpington-beckenhams-most-dangerous-2715379.amp>

*“There were 393 violent or sexual offences in Cray Valley East. This made up 21.12 per cent of all crime in that area and is the highest contributor. The highest month was July, when there were 40 offences of this type. Anti-social behaviour is the second highest contributor with 350 offences.”*



01 Jan - 27 Jul 2018



Huntsmoor House Crime (Police Reports 01.01.2018 – 27.07.2018)



Image 1.





Image 2. Brick Shed



Image 3. Bin Store



Image 4



Image 5



Image 6



Image 7 (Defensible Space options)



Image 8 Side Alley





Image 9



Image 10



Image 11 (including alley way)



Image 12