

housing safe communities

an evaluation of recent initiatives

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London: Safe Neighbourhoods Unit

CASE STUDY ASSESSMENT

CHALKHILL ESTATE

MULTI-STOREY BLOCK MANAGEMENT **Ate** SECURITY

INITIATIVE *Kendrick*

Estate description

Chalkhill Estate is a large estate of deck access and low rise dwellings located in Wembley, directly to the south of Brent Town Hall. Construction of the estate started in 1969, and the first residents moved into the system built blocks in 1971.

The estate comprises just under 2,000 units — 1,281 in 30 medium-rise deck access blocks and 700 low-rise dwellings (houses, flats and maisonettes). It is bordered to the north and west by main roads and to the south by a railway line. Access to the blocks is by means of a complex system of footpaths.

The deck access part of the estate consists of 30 concrete clad blocks of five to eight storeys linked by continuous high level access decks at every third floor. The blocks form large courtyards, most of which are partly open on one side. The site layout is probably one of the most confusing in the country because all the blocks are more or less identical in appearance, and most of them adjoin at an angle of about 120 degrees. As a result, many people lose their sense of direction when walking through the site or along the access decks. There are estimated to be about five miles of access deck, with many interconnections, changes of direction and concealed or under-lit spaces. The layout therefore contains many of the ingredients for an environment where crime is easy to commit and residents' and visitors' anxieties are heightened.

The two multi-storey garages are no longer used for cars because of security problems and parts of them are used for recreational and community purposes.

Housing officers estimate the estate's population at between 4,500 and 5,000. A lighting survey of Chalkhill South Kilburn and Stonebridge Estates, conducted by the Safe Neighbourhoods Unit in 1988 identified the following proportions of ethnic minority households: 39% Black/Afro-Caribbean and 19% Asian (Safe Neighbourhoods Unit, 1988). Chalkhill Estate has a higher than average concentration of manual workers and low income households, along with significantly higher levels of unemployment and significant concentrations of lone parents and children under five years. The estate has a higher than average child population — about one-third are 18 or younger (Brent Council, 1983).

Table 26: Residents expressing fear of being a victim of crime (%)

| Crime category | Chalkhill | South Kilburn | Stonebridge |
|--|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| Burglary | 87 | 78 | 77 |
| Damage to home or property | 85 | 73 | 71 |
| Attack | 82 | 74 | 71 |
| Racial harassment | 53 | 33 | 41 |
| Assault | 47 | 32 | 40 |
| Sexual assault (<i>women only</i>) | 70 | 57 | 58 |
| Sexual pestering (<i>women only</i>) | 70 | 57 | 58 |
| Sexual pestering (<i>women only</i>) | 67 | 52 | 60 |

Source. MORI, 1990

A Safe Neighbourhoods Unit survey of residents (Safe Neighbourhoods Unit, 1988c) indicated that crime on the estate, together with fear of crime, is perceived to be a serious problem by residents. The report noted that both reported crime figures and the survey findings suggested that the estate suffers from an above average rate of street robberies and assaults. Robberies on the estate account

for 10% of robberies in Wembley Police Division, compared with only 3.5% of burglaries. However, the general view is that crime levels on Chalkhill are no worse than other estates of a similar size

A MORI (1990) survey *found* that a significant majority of residents on the estate (81%) were dissatisfied with security compared with just over half on the Stonebridge Estate (51%) and the South Kilburn Estate (52%). Brent's two other large priority estates. Residents' fear of crime was found to be greater on Chalkhill than for the other two estates for almost every crime category examined. Although the police do not consider burglary to be a particular problem compared with robbery and theft, the MORI survey shows that burglary is a particular concern of residents. The survey found that 59% of residents are dissatisfied with estate lighting, compared with 33% who are satisfied. A number of routes on the estate were Identified In the previous Safe Neighbourhoods Unit survey as being regularly avoided by residents because of anxiety for their personal safety. These included estate roads and public footpaths where lighting is poor, and Forty Lane which borders the estate to the north. Groups identified as being particularly concerned about crime Included women, especially Asian women, and disabled residents.

Although a police anti-drugs raid carried out in November 1990 has focused attention on the estate's drugs problem. Council officers and tenants consulted for this case study stressed that much of the drugs activity and dealing involved people from outside the estate.

The estate has a number of long-standing housing management related problems, notably high levels of voids and persistent squatting. The MORI survey revealed high levels of resident dissatisfaction with some key estate services (although the repairs service was not investigated).

Table 27: Resident satisfaction with Council services (%)

| Service | Satisfied | Dissatisfied |
|----------------------|-----------|--------------|
| External maintenance | 28 | 50 |
| Cleanliness | 11 | 87 |
| Lifts | 23 | 68 |
| Caretakers | 34 | 44 |
| Community facilities | 29 | 19 |
| Pent levels | 16 | 73 |
| Rent payment | 68 | 7 |

Source: MORI, 1990

Problems are also caused by the housing of large numbers of ex-psychiatric patients and people with drug dependency problems on the estate. A general lack of resources means that many of these residents are not receiving the support and care they need.

Description of initiative

Over the past eleven years, there have been two major initiatives aimed at improving Chalkhill Estate. The first of these involved a two phase programme of physical and management improvements to the deck access sector of the estate. The second has involved efforts to establish an Estate Management Board based on the model advocated by the Priority Estates Project. This case study will largely concentrate on the physical and management changes for the deck access blocks.

Phase 1 Improvements

The first phase of improvements to the deck access blocks was implemented from 1980 onwards in an effort to reduce levels of crime and vandalism on the estate. In the Phase 1 Improvements, the access ways were divided into sections by security doors controfied by phone entry systems In an attempt to restrict access to those residents who lived in that section. The access ways were also redecorated and fitted with carpets and seating. These improvements were carried out with only limited consultation with residents. The scheme failed from the start, largely because the phone entry system was Ineffective as a barrier against anyone who really wanted to enter or walk

through the access ways. On many blocks, the security doors are either broken or missing and the seating areas have been extensively vandalised.

The Chair of the Chalkhill Tenants Management Board described the failure of the Phase 1 improvements as follows: 'As soon as the corridor doors were provided and keys issued, the squatters broke down the doors or harriers. Now about 10% of the accommodation in the Improved blocks is occupied by squatters.'

Another improvement measure attempted at the same time was the construction of firefighting routes alongside the blocks. However, because of the problems of crime and vandalism associated with parked cars, many residents chose to park their cars on the firefighting routes, where they could be seen from the windows of the flats. This blocked the routes for emergency vehicles.

The failure of the Phase 1 improvements has been largely attributed to lack of tenant consultation about the closing off of access ways and to the poor quality of equipment. Double leaf timber doors were used, with a wide leaf for normal pedestrian use and an additional narrow leaf to allow refuse trolleys to pass through. The narrow leaf was extremely vulnerable to damage, rendering the controlled access lock on the wide leaf ineffective.

Phase 2 Improvements

The second phase of improvements was prompted by the failure of the Phase 1 improvements and continued concern about robberies and assaults on the estate. The Phase 2 scheme was inspired by the success of a pilot concierge scheme introduced on Gloucester House on the South Kfiburn Estate. From 1982 onwards, the Tenants Management Board which represents tenants on the estate, worked with volunteer architects to produce preliminary designs. This resulted in the preparation of a scheme in conjunction with the Council's architects and the Council's Joint Neighbourhood Unit, with funding from the Department of Environment's Urban Housing Renewal Unit.

Blocks F1 to F4 (141 dwellings in total) were selected for the initial pilot scheme, as their design meant that they were particularly suitable for separation as two pairs. However, the police point out these four blocks have traditionally experienced relatively low levels of crime in comparison with those blocks towards the centre of the estate. It should also be noted that the four blocks are directly opposite Brent Town Hall, although it is not known whether this influenced the final decision.

The Phase 2 improvements involved the division of the blocks into two physically separate sections which were renamed *Halcyon* and *Paradise Courts*. A reception area and lift lobby was created at the centre of each section by completely enclosing the gap between the two adjoining blocks. In addition, a new fire escape stair was constructed at the end of each block.

There are two layers of access control in each block. At the main entrance, access is controlled by means of a phone entry system and supervised by means of a CCTV camera linked to the concierge office. Tenants gain entry by means of a magnetic key. Secondary phone entry systems control access to individual landings, again supervised by CCTV cameras. CCTV cameras also monitor movements within each landing and at the fire exit doors. CCTV monitoring within the block is therefore fairly comprehensive.

The concierge service operates between 9am and 11pm from Monday to Friday. Between 11pm on Friday and 12 noon on Sunday the reception is covered by a security firm. After 11pm on weekdays and after 12 noon on Sundays entry to the blocks is controlled by the phone entry system.

There are four full-time concierge staff, operating on a split shift system. Although their main role is that of security and access control, they also provide general assistance to residents — for example, passing on messages and taking in parcels. Their duties also include recording day-to-day requests for repairs.

The concierge staff are managed directly from the neighbourhood office, which can create difficulties during the evening when the office is closed. It was noted that fire doors are frequently left open, even though there are warning lights at the control desk.

Next phase

The Council has recently been given the go-ahead to extend the scheme to a further four blocks on the estate, with priority likely to be given to blocks D3 and D4. The police regard these blocks as having particularly high crime rates.

Cost of scheme

Revenue costs

The four concierge staff are employed on Scale 3 of the local government salary grades, yielding annual estimated staff costs of around £52,000. This figure does not take account of office running costs.

In addition, the private security firm is paid £20,412 per annum for providing cover at weekends.

Capitol costs

The costs of the access and security improvements were as follows:

- Two new entrance cores £1,120,000
- Four new escape stairs £700,000
- Total £1,820,000

This works out at around £13,000 for each of the 141 dwellings. For the proposed works due to start in 1991, unit costs will probably be increased by around 50%.

Other estate services

Caretaking on the improved blocks is operated on the same basis as the rest of the estate. Caretaking throughout the estate was re-organised and increased in April 1991 following widespread dissatisfaction with the service. Housing management is decentralised, with one principal housing manager, two seniors and five estate officers, each managing a maximum of 350 properties. The neighbourhood housing office deals with all housing management tasks except for allocations and housing benefit. As yet, there is no estate budget for Chalkhill, although this would be introduced if the proposal for an Estate Management Board goes ahead.

When asked about the services received from the local office, 58% of respondents to the 1990 MORI survey said they are dissatisfied, compared with only 32% who are satisfied. 53% of respondents consider staff in the office to be inefficient, compared with only 38% who feel they are efficient.

Although, at present, the estate *only* has a small base for plumbing and electrical repairs there are plans for a local repairs base to deal with all day to day repairs on the base.

Policing on the estate has been increased considerably. In July 1989, the home beat police team was increased from two to six officers. (In 1987 the estate had only one beat officer). In November 1990, there was a large drugs raid on the estate. Following the raid a mobile police station was opened, staffed around the clock. Residents were also balloted on whether or not a permanent police station should be established on the estate.

Crime changes

The police beat for Chalkhill Estate comprises the medium rise blocks together with the small area of low and medium rise housing on the southern edge of the estate. During 1990, the estate accounted for 3.5% of burglaries, 10% of robberies and thefts from the person and 6% of autocrime for the Wembley Police Division as a whole (Metropolitan Police, 1991).

No figures are available for burglaries and robberies in the four affected blocks prior to the implementation of the phase two improvements. However, both police officers and council officers reported a distinct drop in the number of burglaries on the blocks following the introduction of the improvements. During 1990 only one case of burglary was reported in these blocks, and this involved a theft from a cupboard rather than the burglary of a dwelling. During the first ten months of 1990, the number of burglaries on the blocks had apparently increased, although the police would not release actual numbers.

The police consider that the increased burglary rate during 1990 may reflect a degree of laxness on the part of concierge staff, particularly in relation to fire doors being left open. Nearly all the burglaries reported in the blocks occurred between 5am and 6pm when many residents are out at work. Landings tend to be virtually deserted during the day and there is no surveillance from flats. Consequently flats are very vulnerable to burglary once the block has been entered.

According to the police, no robberies were reported in either of the blocks during 1989 and 1990. Only four blocks, out of a total of twenty six, in the unimproved part of the estate had experienced no robberies during the same period. A significant number of robberies also occurred in and

around the *entrances* to blocks in the unimproved areas.

Although *these* statistics would appear to support the view that the Phase 2 improvements have reduced crime. It is not possible to estimate the extent of this reduction on the basis of available data. The police suggest that the crime rate has historically been lower in the northern blocks on the estate (blocks A1 and A2, F1 to F4, C2 and C3). Robberies in particular tend to be concentrated in the middle of the estate, reflecting the high degree of pedestrian movement between the north eastern and south western corners of the estate.

The police consider that the concierge scheme has helped to reduce drugs related activities in the affected blocks, although, again, drugs problems have tended to be concentrated towards the centre of the estate where the main meeting places are located.

The police state that there has been an overall reduction in the level of both recorded burglaries and robberies on the estate since 1989. The reduction has *been* particularly significant for robberies, which have declined by 75% over the past two years.

The police were not prepared to supply crime rates for the estate. They did, however, provide figures which illustrate changes in crime rates for both the estate and Wembley Police Division between 1989 and 1990.

These figures suggest that burglaries and robberies on the estate have declined in relation to overall Divisional figures. Whereas burglaries increased by 16% across the Division, burglaries on Chalkhill Estate declined by 49%. Robberies and thefts from the person declined by 10% across the Division and by 27% on Chalkhill Estate. On the other hand, although autocrime increased by 15% in the Division, on Chalkhill Estate it rose by 52%. However, in the absence of details of the number of crimes involved, it is impossible to assess the significance of these trends.

The police consider that the intensive policing strategy introduced onto the estate in July 1989 has had a significant impact. Following the increase in policing on the estate, robberies have increased significantly in surrounding areas, for example, to the north of Forty Lane to the north of the estate, and to the south in Neasden.

Other evidence of crime reduction

Council officers, police officers and tenants representatives offered conflicting views about the initiative's effects on crime.

The Neighbourhood Housing Manager noted that there had been no reports of break-ins since the scheme's introduction, and that the blocks are considerably more secure than previously. The Chair of the estate's Tenant Management Board confirmed that tenants on the block feel a greater sense of security. There has been virtually no graffiti or vandalism on the blocks since the scheme was introduced, and communal areas, including the lifts, are generally clean.

There have *been* very few transfer requests from the blocks and properties only become temporarily vacant when residents move out or are evicted for rent arrears or other breaches of the tenancy agreement, such as keeping pets. There are no squatters on the improved blocks.

However, the above assessments must be viewed in the light of the increase in the number of burglaries on the blocks during 1990, and the police's view that the blocks have never been particularly noted for high burglary rates in the past. In the absence of a detailed *survey* of residents' views, detailed management data and crime figures relating to the periods before and after the Phase 2 improvements, it is difficult to make a confident assessment of the overall impact of the improvements on the blocks. However, it would appear that previous assessments of the scheme (notably the case study produced by the Institute of Housing and RIBA in 1989) have not provided an adequate evaluation of the scheme's success.

Consultations carried out for this case study have revealed a number of areas of concern which would merit further investigation. These mainly relate to the role of the concierge staff rather than to design or physical security considerations:

Supervision of fire exits

Although the concierge are alerted if these exits are left open, it would appear that residents regularly leave and enter the blocks by the fire exits. This may explain how non-residents are gaining access to the blocks to commit burglaries.

Concierge cover

The Chair of the Tenants Management Board noted that problems are caused by the lack of 24 hour cover and the high turnover of concierge staff. The lack of 24 hour cover means that security

equipment can be open to abuse, and equipment has been damaged in Halcyon Court. Lack of effective cover at night and at weekends also makes it difficult to effectively prevent access via the fire exits. The reception areas also close down when the concierge staff go for lunch, are on a break or visit the housing office.

It was also pointed out that there is a high turnover of concierge staff and there are often significant delays before replacement staff are appointed. Many of the block's original concierge staff have since moved on to similar positions in other authorities. For example, a former Chalkhill concierge was recently appointed as a concierge supervisor on the Barbot Street Estate in the London Borough of Enfield.

The role of concierge

Although in theory the concierge staff have a broader role than security, in practice it appears that they spend most of their time on surveillance duties. The *narrow range* and repetitive nature of many of the concierge duties may contribute to the high staff turnover.

Assessment of quality of evaluation

Although the Phase 2 improvements appear to have had a positive effect on crime rates on the four affected blocks, it would appear that the effects have not been as straightforward as was suggested in a previous case study included in *Safety and Security in Housing Design — A Guide for Action* (Institute of Housing and Royal Institute of British Architects, 1989).

That report stated: 'The prevention measures in phase 2 have virtually eliminated crime and vandalism in these four blocks of the pilot project.' However, the police have pointed out that the four blocks have never traditionally had high crime rates. Crime figures for 1990 also suggest that burglary rates on the four blocks are rising.

However, the data made available for this case study does not allow any definitive conclusions to be drawn about the scheme's impact on crime and fear of crime. The scheme was originally selected as a case study on the understanding that the local authority was about to undertake its own evaluation of the scheme. However, the evaluation did not go ahead. As a result, very little data is available on *any* management savings. The police felt unable to supply actual crime figures for the estate (all figures provided were in the form of percentages).

In view of the concerns being expressed about the current operation of the scheme, it is also important that any hard data gathered on management savings and crime levels is accompanied by information about the views of existing residents on the effects of the scheme on crime, fear of crime and other outcomes.

Postscript

Police figures for crime allegations were more recently collated by the Council's Community Safety Officer for a number of the Council's housing estates, including Chalkhill. These showed that in the 12 months up to June 1993, Chalkhill's burglary rate (24 per 1000 population) was very similar to the borough average (25 per 1000) and its rate of thefts from motor vehicles (15 per 1000) somewhat lower than the borough average (20 per 1000). However, Chalkhill's rate of street robberies/snatches (14 per 1000 population) was substantially higher than the borough average (8 per 1000).

This pattern of average or below average property crime rates but relatively high rates of street robbery/snatches is repeated on other estates which have had security improvements such as St Raphael's, South Kilburn, Church End and Roundwood. This emerging trend is giving grounds for concern within the council and police service that measures to improve the security of dwellings and vehicles may be leading merely to offence displacement.

A major estate regeneration programme was due to begin in 1994. This is likely to involve demolition of a substantial number of the blocks on the estate.

Source material:

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