SAFE AND SOUND

Peter Jackson *reports on the importance of designing for security and assurance in places of worship*

Religious premises across the UK suffered an average of 13 crimes a day between July 2019 and July 2020, according to police figures collected by the Countryside Alliance. In that time, well over 5,000 crimes were committed in places of worship, confirming that more needs to be done to tackle vandalism, theft, arson and attacks on persons, taking place in these properties.

Physical perimeter security provides the first, and often only, line of defence in protecting such public buildings. The visibility of gates, fencing and CCTV is vital in deterring potential attacks. However, recent research we conducted into the security of places of worship particularly, has thrown light on a paradox where visible security is concerned.

The results revealed that over three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents feel safer with security measures in place, with

over two-thirds (67 percent) agreeing that 'lots of visible security' makes them feel safe, while 69 percent say lots of visible security increases their awareness of security risks.

Herein lies the dilemma. While the majority of respondents feel safer with security measures in place, 54 percent feel more nervous as a result of visible physical security. Furthermore, 62 percent believe it detracts from the aesthetic of the building. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) would like security to be in place, but 'not in an obvious way'. A conclusion can be drawn that physical security solutions are essential in enabling regular users of these facilities to feel safe, but the aesthetic considerations of those measures are equally important.

Interestingly, the majority of people are worried about a range of security threats at their places of worship: three-quarters of respondents identified common crimes that

cause concern. The most prevalent is vandalism (18 percent) followed by burglary, theft and robbery (17 percent), and physical attacks on worshippers (17 percent). This is closely aligned with our data on the kinds of attacks that places of worship have been targets of.

It's expected that people would be more concerned with types of crimes they have actually seen and know are possible on their sites; the results confirm this. Of the people concerned by vandalism, they are most worried about windows being broken (52 percent), damage to the building's exterior (46 percent), graffiti (45 percent), damage to burial sites (34 percent) and damage to the building's interior (32 percent). For a security strategy to win the trust of end users and reinforce their sense of safety, it should aim to protect against all these threats.

Have new security measures addressed these concerns, especially given the increased investment in protecting religious sites? Our results show that, in most cases, changes of an obvious nature have been made – immediate precautions that often don't require funding. In the past five years, a combined 67 percent of respondents noted that donation boxes and valuables have been moved to more secure locations or away from plain sight.

Almost 38 percent have seen more tightly controlled access to buildings and grounds: an essential step in protecting places of worship and addressing most of the main concerns. However, only 25 percent reported an increase in physical security measures such as fencing and gates – the lowest proportion of changes experienced, despite being arguably the most effective.

The risk of physical crimes being committed is reduced when obstacles such as perimeter fencing, gates, CCTV, lighting and other security solutions are installed.

The security measures that would make the congregation feel most secure are CCTV (42 percent), alarm systems (31 percent), gates (27 percent), better lighting (24 percent) and security fencing (23 percent).

Respondents whose places of worship are attacked most frequently (at least once a month) prioritise security fencing (44 percent) and gates (55 percent). These are significant results because, aside from CCTV, these measures work principally to protect property yet worshippers feel more secure when they are installed.

It's clear what security measures people want to see installed, but successfully designing and implementing appropriate security strategies is another issue. A survey of 274 architects conducted by Jacksons Fencing in 2019 for its report, *Setting the Standard for Security*, found that a third of respondents believe there is not enough information and resources available on designing secure buildings and sites.

Since then, a £5-million security-training fund from the Government has been announced to help faith organisations understand how to best protect their worshippers. It remains to be seen how this will be used, but supporting architects who design places of worship would be a step in the right direction.

The 2019 report also found that three-quarters (76 percent) of architects believe budget constraints lead to cutting corners with physical security, while over a fifth (21 percent) cite clients' lack of understanding of risks and threats as a challenge.

Better guidance needs to be provided to ensure that architects are specifying security measures to achieve the desired effects. These were identified in our 2019 report as: making people feel safe (54 percent), deterring potential attackers with a secure appearance (47 percent), preventing

unauthorised access (45 percent), protecting people (43 percent) and securing goods (40 percent).

From the start, designers should understand that securing a place of worship is never in isolation of the surrounding community. Consideration needs to be given to the aesthetics so worshippers feel both welcome and safe within the grounds.

A full risk assessment at the start is the key to identifying potential vulnerabilities. Places of worship vary greatly in size and available resources, and each will have unique considerations. However, there are basic, consistent guidelines on how any place of worship can be well protected so that people can meet and practise their faith safely.

Non-intrusive security measures should form the basis, starting with a reduction of access points to minimise the threat of unauthorised entry.

A well-considered perimeter solution combining enhanced security and aesthetic appeal is critical in crime prevention; ideally, the design of the fencing and gates should complement the style of the buildings. For sites in higher-risk areas, fencing certified to LPS 1175 could be appropriate. Once installed, fencing should be regularly checked

THE VISIBILITY OF GATES, FENCING AND CCTV IS VITAL IN DETERRING POTENTIAL ATTACKS

to ensure that it is in good repair and fit for its intended purpose.

Perimeter intrusion detection systems are also advisable for buildings that have become landmarks, visitor attractions or have a history of criminal activity, especially if unmanned during times of the day. In addition to this, if the initial risk assessment identifies the threat of vehicular attack, consider the installation of vehicle barriers or bollards, to protect vulnerable entry points.

Supported by positive responses relating to CCTV (40 percent say this measure would make them feel more secure) and better lighting (24 percent), an integrated lighting and CCTV strategy is recommended for sites to protect them when not in use, and to give worshippers a sense of safety during attendance.

Motion-sensor lights are particularly effective, as are photocell-activated dusk-to-dawn lights in strategic or more vulnerable areas. CCTV should be considered for two reasons: firstly, to provide security coverage of access points and, secondly, to capture (while facing away from the building) incidents of physical attack and verbal abuse.

It's also possible to take full advantage of the rapid growth of smart technology and opt for lighting, CCTV, gate and door locks, and window sensors – which can be programmed to send alerts to mobile devices. This is a good solution for buildings in remote locations or for unattended sites.

However, the least intrusive measures involve the use of existing features in the landscape for security purposes. This includes obstructive trees, noisy gravel, vehicle blocking, rocks and thorny bushes – all of which can act to deter potential criminals.

The results from our research show that, while there is a breadth of security measures that would make people

The risk of physical crime is significantly reduced by introducing obstacles such as perimeter fencing

feel secure at their place of worship, they could be separated into two groups, with one set of measures more reassuring to worshippers than the other.

The more trusted group of measures includes CCTV (42 percent), alarm systems (31 percent), gates (27 percent), lighting (24 percent) and security fencing (23 percent). The less reassuring types of measures include bars on windows (17 percent), bollards (17 percent), safes (13 percent) and metal detectors (13 percent). This shows there is no majority agreement on one solution to secure places of worship – suggesting a blend of measures is likely to work best.

An integrated security strategy, based on risk assessment is the answer and it's recommended that the principles of the five Ds of perimeter security should be followed: Deter, Detect, Deny, Delay and Defend. Here, multiple layers of security combine to protect a site, allowing for time and intelligence to develop an appropriate response.

DETER: At the outermost perimeter, it's critical to have forms of visual deterrence, such as fencing, lockable gates, lighting and signs. **DETECT:** Detecting trespassers with motion detectors, CCTV and other electronic surveillance methods. **DENY:** Manned or automatically locking security gates and turnstiles with mechanical keypads or electronic card swipe systems can manage access and on-site movement. **DELAY:** High-security fencing and gates, road blockers and interior barriers designed to slow down an intruder on foot or in a vehicle. **DEFEND:** The final and innermost ring of security usually involves the police apprehending the intruder.

We live in challenging times and the need for securing places of worship is very much on the radar. But the world of worship is changing too. Overall confidence among worshippers has been damaged in recent years, and our research reveals a disturbing picture in which crime against their buildings or their beliefs has become more commonplace. Over coming intolerant attitudes is not down to one organisation, sector or even the government. Everybody is involved.

For the security industry, we have a critical role in restoring worshippers' faith in security. It's up to us to work together to arrive at the most effective security strategies, and implement optimum solutions that guarantee places of worship are also places of safety ●

Peter Jackson, Managing Director Jacksons Fencing, has a wealth of experience valued by major organisations and government departments throughout the UK and overseas.

Perimeter barriers need to be subtle and unobtrusive while providing reassurance

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TIPS FOR SECURING PLACES OF WORSHIP

• Conduct a full risk assessment at the outset to identify potential vulnerabilities of the site.
• Acquire information on designing an appropriate security strategy from a reliable security expert.
• Work in partnership with the police and neighbours to secure your site.
• High-quality solutions should always be favoured over low-budget options: it truly is the case in security equipment and devices that you get what you pay for.

• Focus on maintaining aesthetic appeal while providing robust security with non-intrusive measures.
• Consider installing security-rated fencing certified to LPS 1175 where appropriate.
• Understand the full implications of your security measures – not least the requirement for maintenance and repair of perimeter fencing and gates, lighting, CCTV systems and access control, along with the monitoring of video feeds and data storage.

• Eliminate shaded areas with effective lighting and place lights at all doors, gates and vulnerable windows.
• Integrate CCTV and lighting systems so that they work together effectively.
• Register the CCTV system with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in order to comply with GDPR.
• Analyse the surrounding landscape for features that could strengthen or conversely compromise the security strategy.