



LET US PRAY

Peter Jackson outlines a holistic approach to protecting places of worship

The safety and sanctity of places of worship are under constant threat due to a rise in criminal activities targeting religious premises. According to the hate crime charity Stop Hate UK, religious or faith-based crimes have been increasing for the past five years. In 2021 there were over 8,730 religious hate crimes committed, an increase of 37 percent compared to the previous year.

In Jacksons Fencing's 2020 report about the safety and security of places of worship, 59 percent of respondents reported their place of worship had been targeted and only 13 percent said they felt safe.

Vandalism, theft, arson and physical attacks on worshippers have become distressingly common, demanding urgent attention to enhance security

measures. However, addressing this conundrum is not straightforward, as visible security can sometimes inadvertently generate anxiety among congregants. This article delves into the challenges of designing security solutions for places of worship, emphasising the importance of physical security while preserving the aesthetic appeal of these sacred buildings.

Recent research focused on the security of places of worship has revealed a paradox related to visible security measures. While over three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents feel safer when security measures are in place and believe that "lots of visible security" increases their awareness of security risks, 54 percent also express feeling more nervous due to visible physical security.

Furthermore, 62 percent believe that visible security detracts from the aesthetic beauty of a religious building.

It is evident that congregants appreciate the protection afforded by security measures such as fences, gates and CCTV, but are equally concerned about maintaining the aesthetic appeal of their place of worship.

The survey also identified the most common security threats that worry worshippers. The three main concerns include vandalism, burglary and theft, and physical attacks on congregants. Addressing these threats comprehensively is crucial to building trust and reinforcing the sense of safety within religious establishments. Worshippers are particularly concerned about incidents like broken windows, damage to the building's exterior and interior, graffiti and damage to burial sites.

While some immediate security changes, such as relocating donation boxes and valuables to more secure locations, have been implemented, only 25 percent of respondents reported an increase in physical security measures like fencing and gates around churches, synagogues, and mosques. However, these physical barriers are critical in reducing the risk of physical crimes. To win the trust of congregants, security strategies must aim to protect against all identified threats.

The pivotal role architects and designers play in securing places of worship is hindered by a concerning lack of information and resources in the field. Jacksons Fencing's survey involving 274 architects highlighted the existing knowledge gap, leaving them ill-equipped to design secure buildings and sites effectively. To address this issue, the government proactively allocated a £5-million security training fund specifically for faith organisations. By providing comprehensive guidance and training, architects can better cater to the unique security needs of places of worship, fostering a safe and reassuring environment for worshippers.

Embracing non-intrusive security measures is essential to strike a delicate balance between safety and preserving the sanctity of places of worship. By conducting thorough risk assessments, security designers can pinpoint potential weaknesses and implement tailored measures to address them. Employing tactics such as limited access points, discreet deterrents like obstructive trees, and noise-generating materials like gravel can bolster security while maintaining the aesthetic charm of the surroundings. This approach fosters a welcoming atmosphere while safeguarding against potential threats.

While non-intrusive measures are essential, certain physical security enhancements cannot be overlooked. A well-considered perimeter solution combining enhanced security and aesthetic appeal is critical in crime prevention. High-quality security fencing and gates, certified to meet relevant standards like LPS 1175, provide a robust deterrent to potential intruders.

Additionally, the risk of physical crimes being committed is significantly reduced when obstacles such as perimeter fencing, gates, CCTV, lighting, and other security solutions are installed. Integrating perimeter intrusion detection systems is advisable for buildings that have become landmarks or visitor attractions, or have a history of criminal activity, especially if unmanned during certain times of the day.

An integrated lighting and CCTV strategy is recommended for places of worship. Supported by positive responses relating to CCTV (40 percent say this measure would make them feel more secure) and better lighting (24 percent), this approach provides comprehensive coverage. Motion-sensor lights and

photocell-activated dusk-to-dawn lights are particularly effective, ensuring that the premises are well-lit when not in use and providing a sense of safety for worshippers during attendance.

CCTV should be considered for two reasons: first, to provide security coverage of access points, and second, to capture incidents of physical attack and verbal abuse while facing away from the building. Taking advantage of smart technology allows for remote monitoring and alerts to mobile devices, making it an excellent solution for buildings in remote locations or unattended sites.

A holistic and integrated security strategy, following the principles of the 5 Ds of perimeter security (Deter, Detect, Deny, Delay, and Defend), can provide multiple layers of protection. Visual deterrence, motion detectors, locked gates, security fencing and collaboration with local law enforcement are essential components of an effective security plan.

VISIBLE SECURITY CAN INADVERTENTLY GENERATE ANXIETY AMONG SOME WORSHIPPERS

Deter: Visual deterrence using fencing, lockable gates, lighting, and signs at the outermost perimeter.

Detect: Employ motion detectors, CCTV, and other electronic surveillance methods to detect trespassers.

Deny: Utilise manned or automatically locking security gates and turnstiles, with mechanical keypads or electronic card swipe systems to manage access and movement on-site.

Delay: Install high-security fencing, gates, road blockers, and interior barriers designed to slow down intruders on foot or in vehicles.

Defend: The final layer of security typically involves the involvement of law enforcement to apprehend intruders.

St Saviour Church in Luton, a Church of England place of worship, faced significant challenges with crime and vandalism. The absence of fencing around the rear entrance made it vulnerable to trespassers, theft and other crimes. Broken windows were a major concern for the congregation and clergy, fearing for the safety of the church building and its attendees.

Recognising the need for perimeter security, the church was keen to strike a balance between security measures and preserving the site's aesthetic appeal during the design and specification stages. Understanding the impact of perimeter security on visitors' first impressions, the church embarked on a meticulous planning process to avoid creating an unwelcoming environment. They sought fencing and gates that would seamlessly blend with the local surroundings while providing robust protection against climbing and vandalism.

To address St Saviour Church's security concerns and foster a safer environment for all, the decision was made to install a robust security fencing solution without compromising on aesthetics. Collaborating closely with Jacksons Fencing, the church opted for Barbican Imperial railings with ball top finials to encircle the perimeter.

Barbican Imperial railings were chosen for their strong design with high aesthetic appeal, featuring pales

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that protrude through the top rail and welded into position, without creating a pointed or spiked top. This design effectively prevents climbing without presenting a hostile appearance, which helps maintain the welcoming atmosphere of the sacred space. The good sightlines between the pales ensure a safe environment for all visitors.

THREE QUARTERS OF RESPONDENTS FEEL SAFER WHEN SECURITY MEASURES ARE IN PLACE

The fence's construction includes welded pale-through-rail and concealed fixings, making it highly resistant to vandalism. Anti-vandal, hidden panel-to-post connectors add an additional layer of security, ensuring that visible bolts cannot be tampered with or removed to gain unauthorised access.

The fencing solution installed at St Saviour Church replicates the traditional wrought iron railing appearance, while utilising modern, tubular construction. The fencing is robust, strong, and designed to blend seamlessly with the local environment, respecting the site's sensitivity.

To ensure unrestricted access during opening hours, a matching double-leaf gate was installed alongside the fencing. This gate allows pedestrians and vehicles to move freely, further contributing to the sense of safety and ease within the church grounds.

The security of places of worship is a shared responsibility demanding collaboration between religious organisations, architects, security experts and local law enforcement. By striking a balance between visible security measures and preserving the aesthetic beauty of sacred spaces, we can create safe environments where worshippers can practice their faith with peace of mind.

Implementing non-intrusive security measures, embracing integrated lighting and CCTV systems, and adhering to the principles of the 5 Ds of perimeter security will reinforce worshippers' trust in security and foster a sense of safety within these cherished places of worship. As we navigate challenging times, let us work together to ensure that places of worship continue to be sanctuaries of both spiritual solace and personal security ●

TIPS FOR SECURING PLACES OF WORSHIP

- Conduct a thorough risk assessment to identify potential vulnerabilities.
- Seek guidance from security experts to design appropriate security strategies.
- Prioritise high-quality, durable security solutions over low-budget options.
- Integrate security measures that maintain aesthetic appeal.
- Consider installing security-rated fencing, especially in high-risk areas.
- Regularly check and maintain all security equipment and devices.

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Physical barriers are critical in reducing the risk of physical crimes

