



SECURITY BY DESIGN

Richard Hilson argues how the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design can help architects reduce vulnerability and enhance user confidence

The introduction of Martyn's Law, for the first time ever, creates a legal duty for those responsible for publicly accessible premises to consider and prepare for the risk of terrorism. The implications of which start at the design phase, and for architects and specifiers this means proactive design thinking is embedded from RIBA Stage 1 onwards.

Drawing on statutory guidance and emerging regulation – including the evolving oversight role

of the Security Industry Authority (SIA) – there's an opportunity for security to be reframed more as a design-led discipline. Martyn's Law marks a clear cultural shift in how we can think about safety, responsibility and the role of design in protecting people going forward – and there's nothing stopping good design making places safer without them feeling intimidating or closed off. This shift also means poorly designed spaces will no longer be neutral and the difference between compliance and true resilience

Paul Doyle deliberately used his vehicle as a weapon during Liverpool FC's championship parade in 2025

will increasingly come down to the quality of design thinking applied at the earliest stages.

Driven by tireless campaigning from individuals such as Martyn's mother, Figen Murray OBE, the law – *Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025* – is, at its core: “for people, by people.” It is rooted in lived experience and loss – and that human context must remain central to how the industry responds. Martyn's Law introduces a tiered ‘protect duty’, requiring organisations to implement proportionate and ‘reasonably practicable’ measures to reduce vulnerability to terrorist threats. It will evolve through bodies such as the SIA, reinforcing accountability across the sector but compliance alone is not enough and in my belief, there's a pressing need for security to become a design-led discipline, seamlessly integrated into the fabric of a space, rather than layered on as visible or intrusive infrastructure.

One thing we can't do is allow compliance to become a checklist exercise. A poorly considered layout and unclear circulation can undermine even the most robust procedural plan. The challenge now, I believe, is about whether a space has been designed to perform under pressure. In essence, security should not make places feel hostile or restrictive rather it should enhance confidence and support usability.

THE ROLE OF CPTED

One of the most effective frameworks for achieving this balance is Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED is not a new concept, it dates back to the early Sixties and is based on the simple but powerful idea that the design of a space can influence behaviour, reduce opportunities for harmful activity and increase the perception, and reality of safety.

What Martyn's Law does is bring urgency to these long-established principles turning what was once best practice into something more mandatory. The reason why it is topical now, is because its four core principles align closely with Martyn's Law.

Natural Surveillance

Designing spaces to maximise visibility where people can see and be seen, through open sightlines, lighting and active frontages. This increases situational awareness and reduces concealment opportunities.

Natural Access Control

Carefully considered entry and exit points that guide movement intuitively and reduce vulnerability while maintaining accessibility.

Territorial Reinforcement

Environments that look and feel owned are more likely to be respected. Subtle design cues – such as changes in materials or landscaping – help define public and private space, encouraging a sense of ownership and control. This works well when there's community art, and landscaping that give it a local identity.

Maintenance and Management

Well-maintained environments demonstrate oversight and care, deterring malicious activity and reinforcing public confidence. It sends the message that someone has bought into this, and ensures it's looked after and monitored.

As we stand here today, under new legislation, design teams must be able to show that security risks have been considered and addressed in a proportionate way. This places significant weight on early-stage

decisions – from site layout and circulation strategies to material choices and perimeter definition. As such, security must be embedded from the outset, influencing how spaces are planned, experienced and managed.

This is where the distinction between good and poor design becomes critical. A well-designed space naturally guides behaviour, reduces ambiguity and supports response. A poorly designed one creates friction, confusion and vulnerability – conditions that no amount of retrospective intervention can fully resolve. This includes designing for intuitive movement and safe crowd flow, minimising hostile vehicle access and creating environments that are easy to monitor without feeling overly surveilled.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT REACHING A FIXED DESTINATION, BUT ABOUT EMBEDDING A MINDSET

ACCESS, PERIMETER AND INTEGRATED PROTECTION

Over the years, one of the toughest considerations in CPTED is the integration of access control and perimeter protection into the overall design. The most obvious answer is to create fortress-like environments, but that goes against the design ethos of CPTED.

So we find ourselves at a crossroads post Martyn's Law, but we are still able to embed protective measures into landscape and architectural features, and use tested, security-rated solutions that can detect, deter and delay threats, which are addressed without compromising aesthetics or usability. The real test is, can protection be embedded so effectively that it is felt, but not seen?

It will also tackle vehicle-borne risks – an increasingly common concern, highlighted in Liverpool last year when Paul Doyle “used his vehicle deliberately as a weapon” after it was believed he followed an ambulance through a road block during Liverpool FC's championship parade.

The National Protective Security Authority (NPSA) provides very good guidance on hostile vehicle mitigation (HVM), including a public realm design guide on designing for public spaces with consideration for HVM.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGE

A defining feature of Martyn's Law implementation is that it prioritises preparedness culture over physical kit. Emerging guidance consistently emphasises the need for organisations to understand the nature of the terrorist threat and, crucially, to plan how they would respond in the event of an incident. This subtly moves the conversation away from a purely defensive, hardware-led approach towards operational readiness. CCTV, HVM and access control are still integral, but they are only part of the picture. Equal weight is being placed on staff training, awareness programmes and the rehearsal of procedures, ensuring that responses are embedded and actionable

rather than theoretical. In this sense, the most secure spaces of the future may not be those with the most visible security, but those where people, processes and places work seamlessly together under pressure.

This has clear implications at RIBA Stage 1, where early design decisions can either enable or constrain that culture of preparedness. Designing for Martyn's Law is about creating environments that support clear communication, intuitive movement and effective incident response. It should be understood less as a counter-terrorism measure and more as an extension of health and safety thinking – embedding resilience into the everyday operation of spaces.

A POORLY CONSIDERED LAYOUT CAN UNDERMINE EVEN THE MOST ROBUST PROCEDURAL PLAN

Similarly, responding to the requirements of the legislation demands expertise, innovation, and robust, security-rated solutions. It's not a 'one size fits all' scenario – the tiered system respects a venue's size and purpose, and designers and specifiers will no doubt design and plan accordingly. Developing these capabilities responsibly requires sustained investment and specialist knowledge and the focus from all of us working in this industry needs to be on responsibility, not commercialisation.

We must also ensure we are designing to meet today's requirements, but also anticipating the risks and expectations of tomorrow. We have a duty to contribute our expertise to safer environments,

support clients in meeting their obligations and helping to rebuild public confidence in shared spaces.

And these public spaces are absolutely fundamental to social, cultural and economic life. Their value lies in their openness, accessibility and ability to bring people together.

This is not about reaching a fixed destination, but more about embedding a mindset – one that challenges the status quo and remains alert to the challenges that lie ahead. As future threats evolve over the next three to five years, so too must our approach. As Sun Tzu famously observed: we cannot rely on past formulas for future success – we must adapt to new realities and those that are yet to unfold. The question, then, is not whether we can meet the demands of Martyn's Law, but whether we are prepared to lead beyond them ●

MARTYN'S LAW EXPLAINED

Martyn's Law, also known as the Protect Duty, is proposed UK legislation aimed at improving public safety from terrorism. It requires venues and organisations to assess risks and implement proportionate security measures, such as staff training and emergency planning. Named after Martyn Hett, a victim of the 2017 Manchester Arena attack, the law seeks to ensure better preparedness and response to threats. It is expected to apply to publicly accessible locations like arenas, shopping centres and event spaces. The law is likely to come into force later this year, following final parliamentary approval and a phased implementation period for affected organisations.

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There's a pressing need for security to be seamlessly integrated into the fabric of a space

