

Summary

Responding to the first incidents on The Common in over a year, police council officers and University officers explored possible responses. They decided that the most likely to succeed would be to turn off the lights on the short stretch of path that is lit along with vegetation works to increase natural light and enable CCTV coverage by existing cameras. Street Lighting concurred that this might well be effective and was certainly worth a trial. Consultation with local residents, SCAPPS and residents' groups will take place before temporary signs are placed at all access points to the path. The lights will be switched off two weeks after this (proposed Monday December 10th). Public comments will be sought and the actions reviewed at the end of March.

Background

The Common has been free of serious incident for over a year. Two recent incidents were investigated by police and reported to the monthly Common Safety & Security meeting. This is attended by police (beat, inspectors, crime prevention) and Council officers (city safety, Common management, city patrol, communities, anti-social behaviour, gypsy liaison, reactive team). Discussions of various alternatives resulted in the option of turning off the lights along with some vegetation management being agreed by all as the action most likely to result in increased safety.

The reasons for this are listed on the temporary signs:

- It was found that people feel the entrances to the paths are safe but further down they feel unsafe but do not turn back
- Lamps that break away from entrances are often not reported and so remain off for long periods
- Extra lighting would spotlight walkers while potential attackers can hide in the shadows
- Turning off lights was trialled on The Common on the other side of The Avenue - this was so successful that the lights are now being removed
- The path will not be closed and users will be safer as users and any potential attacker have same visual range
- Tree work will be undertaken this winter to let more natural light onto the path and to push back branches / shrubbery alongside it
- Alternative routes have nearby residences or heavy traffic so are less attractive to potential attackers

A further site visit with crime prevention, Common management and Open Spaces Manager confirmed that this was a sensible course of action from a safety viewpoint. Follow-up meetings with University safety and security

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officers, estates officers and students safety forum met an enthusiastic response.

These responses were brought back to the Common Safety and Security meeting and consultation discussed. A temporary sign was drafted.

Timing

Police wanted the action taken as soon as possible before nights draw in. However we are aware that perception of safety is often different from actual safety and thus wish to ensure good consultation on the temporary signs and information about the forthcoming trial given out to as many that it might affect as possible.

Consultation timescales

It is proposed that consultation start from November 19th. Letters will be sent to all those near the path and the main alternative routes. Bassett and Portswood ward councillors, the various chairs / secretaries of the local residents' groups (Highfield and Bassett area) plus the Commons and Parks Protection Society and Hawthorns Wildlife Association will be invited to talk through the proposals with the natural Environment Manager. The Crime Prevention Officer will confirm the timetable and consult on the temporary signs with The University.

The temporary signs will be put in place on 23rd November and the lights switched off on Monday 10th December. (University term ends 14th December).

All comments will be collected and reviewed with an update on the situation provided in March 2008. We are currently investigating whether feedback could include text messages as many of the path users are likely to have text messaging as favoured option

The views of the cabinet member on the consultation list / method would be welcomed and the timescale for piloting the switch off.