



**CLEVELAND
POLICE**
Putting People First

Tilley Award 2004

Title

Operation "Victoria"

Category: Crime and Disorder

Cleveland Police

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SUMMARY

Project Title: Operation "Victoria"

The problem involved a residential estate in Thornaby, concerning two streets in particular. Crime, drug dealing and antisocial behaviour contributed to a general lack of self-esteem and gave the estate a run down look. Gangs of youths were congregating in the street riding motorcycles along footpaths and sitting on raised flowerbeds. Intimidation within the community had reached such a point that some residents expressed their desire to move house.

The area was predominantly terraced housing and burglary and criminal damage were everyday occurrences. The usual burglary M.O. was to enter the rear alley, scale the back wall and break into the houses.

Wheelie bins were regularly set on fire by gangs of youths who congregated on the arrival of the Fire Brigade and verbally abused them.

The Police Inspector responsible for the area went there to see the problems for himself. Representatives of the Borough Council, Anti Social Behaviour Team, Ward Councillors and the town council were consulted with a view to identifying the main troublemakers and any environmental causes. Meetings took place with all of the residents and landlords to seek ways to improve the area and agreements were entered into. The Housing Act 1996 and the Crime and Disorder Act were brought to the attention of Registered Social Landlords and private owners who were encouraged to enforce the law.

Telephone boxes in the area were subjected to repeat vandalism and were being used by drug dealers. A pedestrianised section of [REDACTED] was reopened and telephone boxes were removed.

People less likely to bring down the area, occupied void properties and police dealt more positively with families causing major disorder and crime, the worst offenders being evicted.

Government grants were applied for to improve the security of the houses and install "alleygates" at the rear. A grant from the National Lottery was used to construct a youth centre on the estate that could handle up to 300 members.

Positive police action, the introduction of the first community wardens in Stockton, PCSO's, liaison with council street cleaning, and the formation of an Antisocial Behaviour Team resulted in the reduction of crime and disorder, the eviction of drug dealers and problem families and the reduction of calls to the Fire Brigade.

Colin White
Inspector, Community Safety, Stockton
(Former Geographical Inspector, Thornaby)

Operation Victoria

Scan

Victoria Estate in Old Thornaby is a mainly residential area with terraced houses and is generally run down. Two of the streets within the estate, [REDACTED] are particularly bad. [REDACTED] is a single length of road with terraced houses on each side and [REDACTED] is divided into three lengths of road with terraced houses on each side, plus two business premises and a mission hall. These two streets are parallel to each other and are about 40 metres apart.

Between May 2000 and November 2003 the Police and Fire Brigade were receiving regular calls to the area to deal with antisocial behaviour and crime, in particular criminal damage and arson. Drugs dealers lived there and carried out sales. Drugs were used openly in public, usually in telephone boxes. Gangs of youths, responsible for most of the crime, were congregating in the streets causing trouble and many of the residents did not feel safe. They were becoming resigned to accepting a poor quality of life and there was a general feeling that it was not worth reporting anything to the police, because they couldn't do anything.

As the Police Inspector responsible for the area, Inspector Colin White personally visited [REDACTED]

He had received letters from local residents and [REDACTED] highlighting the problems so he consulted the Cleveland Police incident reporting system [REDACTED] and the Crimes recording system. He also made contact with the Stockton Borough Council and spoke with [REDACTED]

Meetings were arranged between tenants, landlords and representatives from a number of local council departments (investment, housing, community safety) many of which Inspector White attended.

The aim of the project was to adopt a multi-agency approach to reduce crime and the fear of crime, to combat the activities of drug dealers and drug users, reduce anti-social behaviour and improve the local conditions for the residents and visitors to the estate.

Analysis

It was decided, initially, that the project would cover the whole of Victoria Estate, however, this was agreed by the partners to be unmanageable and they chose to begin by addressing the two worst streets, [REDACTED] dealing with them separately.

They decided to address the problems in [REDACTED] first and then apply the lessons they had learned to [REDACTED] and if that transfer was successful they hoped to have been able to develop a model that could be used elsewhere.

[REDACTED] contained 36 houses owned by the council, private landlords and housing associations. One association alone owned 17 of these houses, most of which were empty. Stockton Council began working with the landlords and other owners in 2002/2003 identifying 13 empty properties in the street. The poor condition of the voids and other properties led to a high turnover of transient tenants, low demand for housing in the street and a spiral into decline. The void properties attracted the attention of criminals, drug dealers and drug users. The security was poor and access was easily gained. Several small fires had been caused that could have had serious consequences. When initially contacted, all of the housing companies expressed a desire to assist in reducing antisocial behaviour and taking positive steps to deal with their own tenants. The company that owned the 17 properties failed to live up to that undertaking and many residents felt let down, stating they believed that company was not answering requests or dealing with complaints, although the company refuted this. Some of the residents expressed the opinion that this company was deliberately housing undesirable elements in the street to keep the area in a run down state hoping that they would receive a share of any funding initiated by the local authority.

When Inspector White went to [REDACTED] he found it to be in a very poor state. Several years ago, substantial improvements had been made in [REDACTED] paid for by the Stockton Renaissance Fund. The houses in the area had looked good but over a period of time they had been allowed to degenerate and were returning to their former dilapidated appearance. Two caravans, in poor condition, were parked in [REDACTED] contributing to a general run down look. Rubbish had accumulated in the street, due to children bringing council supplied wheelie bins from the back alleys and tipping them over. Many of these were set on

fire by gangs of youths who would gather whenever the Fire Brigade attended and verbally abuse the fire fighters.

The Fire Brigade were being called out, on average, every other night and the Police were called to incidents in the area at an average rate of one per day, usually to complaints of anti social behaviour but also to reports of crime, traffic and general disorder.

Some of the complaints related to the activities of family groups. A single parent female in her late twenties regularly sat on her doorstep drinking and had a string of boyfriends and regular male callers at all hours of the day and night. Two other families also regularly sat drinking in the street outside their own houses. This activity often led to drunkenness and disorder.

Another single parent family, with a mother and several children, operated an open house policy at the address with numerous children and young people having free reign in and around the house. Many of these young people merely visited the house while others habitually slept there. Police received several calls regarding a vulnerable 14-year-old pregnant female who did not live at that address but was regularly found there after being reported missing from home. When outreach workers were asked to attend the street to deal with drugs problems and anti social behaviour they were followed and intimidated by a number of youths and although there is no evidence to suggest any involvement in this by the mother in the house there is little doubt that several of those responsible could be connected to the house.

When he went to [REDACTED] Inspector White found the situation there to be much worse. This was a street containing over 100 terraced houses in three sections. A pedestrian area had been constructed at the north end of the centre section, with raised flowerbeds, turning that part into a cul de sac. This area attracted gangs of youths who rode motorcycles on the paved area, drank in the street, deposited litter and generally created a nuisance.

Incidents of crime were on the increase. In the year prior to Inspector White's arrival in May 2000 there were four house burglaries reported in [REDACTED], seven reports of damage to houses, two to vehicles and one report of theft of a motor vehicle.

In the year following his arrival there were seven house burglaries, three reports of damage to houses and one reports of theft of a motor vehicle.

In the year ending May 2003 there were ten house burglaries, nineteen cases of damage to houses and six to vehicles and four cases of theft of motor vehicles.

There were a number of known drug dealers living in the street, selling heroin. This attracted drug users to the street on foot and in cars and there was an associated increase in crime in the area, committed by these drug users to pay for their habit.

Two British Telecom telephone boxes in that street were being used to sell drugs and were repeatedly vandalised, resulting in high costs of repair.

A shop in the street that was run by a young man became a gathering point. This young man befriended many of the local youths and provided them with food and drink. There were incidents of underage drinking and anti-social behaviour but there was no evidence linking any of this to the shop.

Although most of the anti-social behaviour was being caused by the gangs of youths, a lot of the problems centred around four problem families in particular.

Family number one was a single parent family with a mother and thirteen children. Eight of them, aged up to twenty years, lived with her and five more lived away from home. These children were responsible for a lot of the incidents of antisocial behaviour and some of the crime. During the period they lived there, two of the children were arrested for burgling a hairdressers shop in the street. This family had already been under the care of each of the three unitary authorities in Cleveland and each time pressure was brought to try and bring the family under control, they moved to another area. The children had no parental control, almost never attended school and were left to their own devices a great deal of the time. There were complaints of some of the children constantly causing damage to the home of their neighbours, many of who were vulnerable elderly people. A council house tenant in a neighbouring property was so intimidated by this family that, at his own request, he was moved to another part of the estate.

Family number two was a single parent mother with a teenage son. He had a long history of anti social behaviour, crime and driving offences and had been arrested a number of times.

Family number three were well-known local criminals, also involved in the drugs scene. They had relatives who routinely visited the area to commit crime and use the house as a hiding place and storage point for their stolen property.

Family number four had moved into the area from Glasgow, where they were well known to the police for a wide range of offences including crime and antisocial behaviour.

Although there were many separate incidents in the area and a wide variety of offences it was soon realised that addressing one problem might have a beneficial effect on another. The partners identified that the problems in both streets amounted to crime, drugs and antisocial behaviour and could be corrected by addressing four main areas.

- Antisocial behaviour and crime could be addressed by tackling the activities of families responsible for many of the incident reports.
- Antisocial behaviour and public safety could be addressed by tackling gangs of youths in the street, introducing measures to prevent wheelie bins being set on fire and put a stop to the motorcycles being ridden on pedestrian areas.
- The residents had to be encouraged to help themselves. They needed a visible sign that something was being done on their behalf and see that the antisocial behaviour would not be accepted.
- Drug dealing had to be eradicated from the area by combating the dealers and discouraging visitors.

Response

An agreement was reached between all property owners in [REDACTED] that if tenants were responsible for any of the crime or disorder then the landlords would accept responsibility for enforcing the law under the Housing Act 1996.

Inspector White attended a meeting of the Thornaby Residents Association in May 2000 regarding anti social behaviour caused by youths frequenting an address in [REDACTED]. After attending a number of meetings regarding this female and investigating other problems in the area Inspector White had been addressing incidents since his arrival in May 2000. As the scope of the problem became more apparent other agencies were contacted and brought on board and a full strategy began to actively tackle the problem in Autumn 2000.

A Problem Solving Group was formed and monthly meetings were arranged. Inspector White received updates from all of these meetings with regard to [REDACTED]. The Problem Solving Group consisted of Police, a local authority Housing investment officer, a Registered Social Landlord representative, a local authority Community Safety representative, a local authority Enforcement Officer, a Residents Group member, 2 Ward Councillors and a local authority Social Services representative. Discussions about individual families were restricted to statutory agencies only.

Stockton council provided support packages to owners and landlords including empty homes grants and assistance. All of the landlords and owners were asked to sign up to a strategy entitled Police And Landlords Against Crime In Stockton (PALACIS). This would ensure robust tenancies and emphasise the reduction in anti social behaviour. An information sharing protocol was drawn up within the provisions of section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. By showing their commitment to this project, the landlords could be granted access to a government grant of £5000 per property to be used for improving the property and which included police advice on security of the houses by strengthening doors and windows. There was a single exception to this agreement. The owner of one property that was formerly a fast food shop, had retained his licence and was hoping to re-open the shop once the area had improved. Police and partners had concerns that it might become a gathering point for gangs and cause an increase in the litter normally associated with fast food outlets. The owner was approached and made aware of these concerns. He surrendered his licence and agreed to have the property converted into a dwelling.

Family number one was dealt with by liaising with Social Services and the local council. The police Child Protection Unit were also involved due to the young age of some of the children and apparent lack of parental control. Some of the younger children were taken into the care of Social Services and the remainder of the family were served with an eviction order. Following complaints from neighbours about the children the police

visited the house on a number of occasions. One police officer submitted a report that showed the children were so out of control that he was unable to hold a conversation with the parent.

The housing association that placed family number two was approached and questioned about their vetting procedure. They accepted that it was a poor decision to house such a volatile young man in that area and moved the family within twenty-four hours. Although this initially appeared acceptable the result was not as the association moved the family into a neighbouring street.

Intelligence was gathered regarding the activities of family number three and their visiting relations. A search warrant was granted and executed in the property. A good deal of stolen property was discovered along with an amount of drugs and several members of the family were arrested. Successful prosecutions followed and the family was evicted.

Family number four was dealt with in a more direct fashion. Two new Community Police officers were put in place and their brief was to deal robustly with any trouble-makers. These officers were hand picked for the task for their skills, experience and tough attitude towards law-breakers. Their enthusiasm showed the community and the family that criminal or anti-social behaviour would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

A security system existed that involved the installation of gates across the entrance to back lanes or "alleys". It is called "Alleygating" and an application was submitted to the Council for funding to install them. This application was initially rejected due to lack of funds but was later granted. [REDACTED] was one of the first streets in Victoria Estate to be "Alleygated" and was so successful that the gates are now fitted throughout the whole estate. The residents and Fire Brigade all have keys to allow access to the back lanes and the gangs can no longer bring the wheelie bins from the alley to the street. Forced entry into void properties has reduced, there has been a dramatic reduction in the amount of rubbish in the street and the Fire Brigade have not received a single call to put out a fire in a bin since the installation.

A suggestion to install CCTV cameras was rejected by the residents as they felt a certain stigma would be attached to their street being the only one in the town with cameras. Improved street lighting was also rejected, as the system already in place was thought to be adequate.

The Borough Council's Street Cleaning Department was asked to tidy up the street. They did a leaflet drop over the whole estate with a request to the residents to bring out their rubbish. This initially met with a poor response but a later campaign was more successful and the visual appearance of the streets became noticeably better. This improvement was enhanced with the removal of both of the caravans. One of the void properties had been empty for so long that it had become a dumping ground and so much rubbish had accumulated that it had become infested with rats. The council exercised their powers under the Environmental Acts to have the property cleaned and the bill was sent to the owner.

There was a police contribution to the street cleaning part of the project when police officers approached the owner of a caravan. They advised the owner that it must be moved and provided the means to move it. One of them went so far as to accompany the owner to the site where it was subsequently stored. Operation CUBIT has been used to remove abandoned cars since the earlier problems. CUBIT is the operational name of an initiative to recover untaxed or abandoned vehicles.

Two local ward councillors were contacted and they offered advice and contributed to the funding issues.

The pedestrian section of [REDACTED] had become a congregation point for the gangs and an area where the motorcyclists rode their machines. All of the residents were consulted and with their agreement this pedestrian area was removed and the road reopened. Police officers attended the area and stopped one youth riding a motorcycle. As he was found to be committing a number of traffic offences he was dealt with appropriately and the motorcycle was confiscated.

Stockton Borough Council formed an Antisocial Behaviour Team in the early part of 2002. With evidence collected from residents, wardens, PCSO's and police officers, all of the gang members were identified. The team issued 10 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC's) to the ringleaders and 2 others who breached ABC's were subsequently placed on ASBO.

There had been some suggestion that the young people needed somewhere to go where they could meet together. Outreach workers were employed to see to the needs of youths in this area. Funding had been applied for from the National Lottery Fund to build a youth centre. This funding application was granted and a youth centre was constructed on the estate about a quarter of a mile away. Known as "The Youthy" this centre has a capacity for 300 members and all of the kids in the area signed up for membership within a very short time.

The shop run by the young man was believed to be a contributing factor but without evidence linking it to the trouble it appeared that nothing could be done. Then the shop received a visit from Food and Hygiene and Trading Standards and it was realised that the proprietor was selling hot food and drink without the proper facilities and without a license. He voluntarily agreed to reduce opening hours. The owner, who was the young man's uncle, was contacted and stated he would remove the young man from the shop if there were any further complaints.

The issue of the telephone boxes took nine months to resolve. British Telecom was reluctant to remove the boxes, as they were obliged to provide them for the community. When they were made fully aware of the drug dealing that was taking place and after examining the cost of repairs they finally agreed to remove the boxes from the street.

Assessment

After the Youth Centre opened there was an initial surge of interest that accompanies any new project. Many of the members have since stopped attending but about 60 have continued to use the facility. Many of the members living in [REDACTED] have been barred from the centre due to their behaviour. These ABC's and ASBO's include an exclusion clause prohibiting them from visiting the "Youth". Several have expressed an interest in resuming their membership and may be admitted if their behaviour improves to an acceptable level. One of them, presently subject of an ASBO, has gone further and has stated that if he is re-admitted he would like to assist the outreach workers in the centre and accept some of the responsibility of running it.

The reports of anti social behaviour associated with the four families came through residents meetings. Many of these groups now report a reduction due to the removal of these families from the area. The family from Glasgow, due to multi agency positive action felt it was not worth the troubles staying and moved back to Glasgow. This had the added effect that other families and individuals, seeing what happened to that family, also moved away from the area to avoid similar treatment.

All of the void properties in [REDACTED] have now been filled and the security in these is much more robust. The majority of landlords have signed up to the PALACIS and landlord liaison schemes, the gangs no longer have the facility of easy access and hiding places available to them and rubbish is less likely to accumulate in the street. In [REDACTED] there are still 28 void properties but the council have worked with the Fire Brigade and other agencies and by improving security have reduced the number of arson attacks and anti social behaviour. In the second half of 2003 there were no burglaries reported in [REDACTED] and the numbers reported in [REDACTED] are at the lowest levels since 1999 and show a 30% reduction in comparison to the previous year.

With the street cleaning and the "Alleygating" system in place there is less rubbish in the streets, and the Fire Brigade has received no further calls of wheelie bins being set on fire since the gates were fitted. CCTV has now been installed and is welcomed.

Several drug dealers in [REDACTED] have been evicted, less people therefore come to the area to buy drugs and there is a reduction in the crimes committed by those drug users. Targeting the dealers and executing warrants that resulted in the recovery of some drugs addressed the drugs problem and a number of arrests were made. Evictions were made possible by invoking clauses in residency agreements and the removal of the telephone kiosks by British Telecom stopped drugs deals being transacted in the street.

Calls for police attention reached a peak during the period June 2002 to May 2003 but reduced during the last half of 2003. The reduction in crime can be illustrated by the fact that there have been five house burglaries in the second half of 2003, a pro rata reduction of about 30% on the previous year, three cases of damage to houses and no cases of stolen cars. Although these figures only cover seven months to December 2003 they are on target to show a reduction compared to the same period in 2002. When compared to the same period the previous year incidents of disorder have reduced by about 50%, and criminal damage about 60%.

Victoria Estate is still a difficult area for crime and disorder but the efforts within this project have helped the community to forge closer ties between themselves and the partnerships formed to assist them. The groups that were formed to address [REDACTED] have all stated that there is a marked improvement there and they are addressing [REDACTED] in much the same manner. They have found a new confidence in their ability to improve their quality of life and the offenders have been shown that crime and anti-social behaviour will no longer be tolerated.

Appendix

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Appendix 1

The following graphs show the average number of calls per month to the police, reporting crime and disorder in [REDACTED]

Fig 1 shows the average number of calls per month relating to disorder during three time periods.

1. January 2002 to May 2002
2. June 2002 to May 2003
3. June 2003 to December 2003

There is no data available prior to January 2002

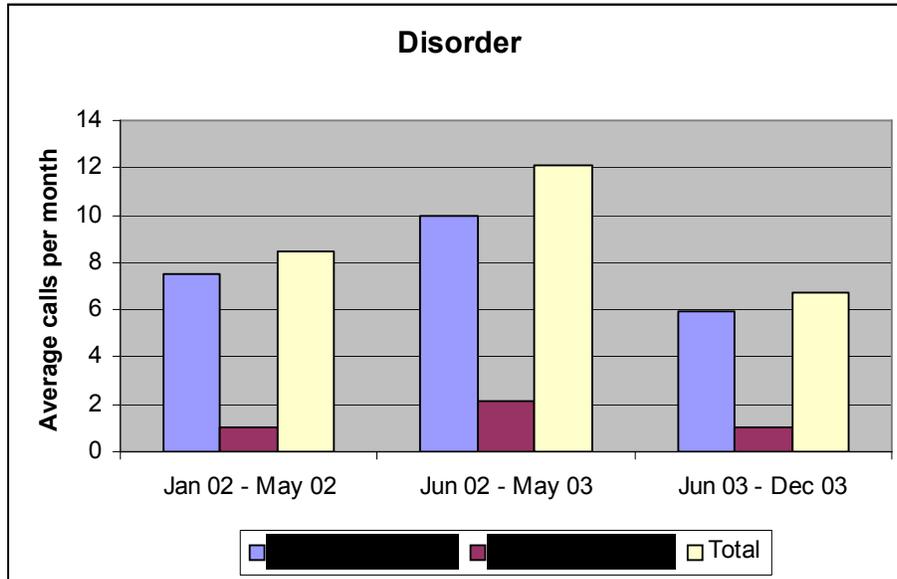


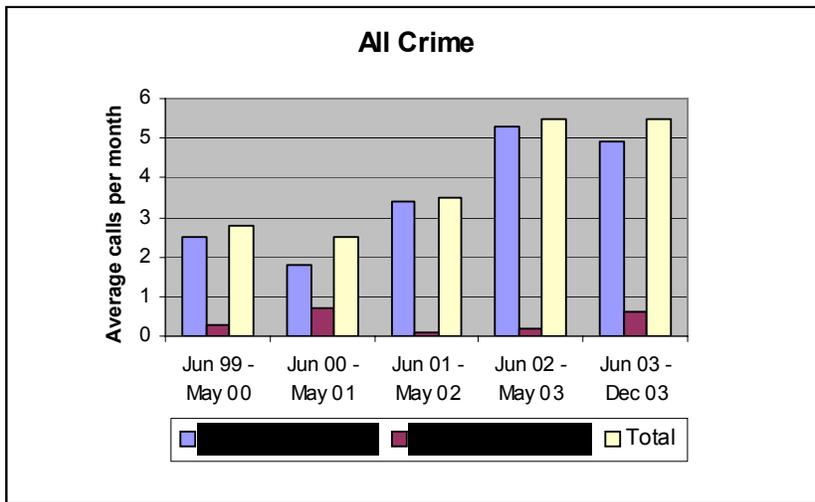
Fig 1.

Fig 1 shows the average number of calls per month to incidents of disorder in [REDACTED] for the period 2002 and 2003. During the second period there were 149 calls, reporting disorder under 4 sub headings which included 137 calls for personal/social/community disorder. During the other two periods there was a combined total of 88 calls including 73 for personal/social/community disorder.

Figs 2, 3, 4 and 5 show the average number of calls per month during five time periods.

- June 1999 to May 2000
- June 2000 to May 2001
- June 2001 to May 2002
- June 2002 to May 2003
- June 2003 to December 2003

The size of the streets relative to each other accounts for the difference between the numbers of calls.



2.

Fig 2 shows a rise in crime reaching a peak during June 2002 to May 2003. Although there is a reduction in [redacted] during the last period but the rise in [redacted] offsets that.

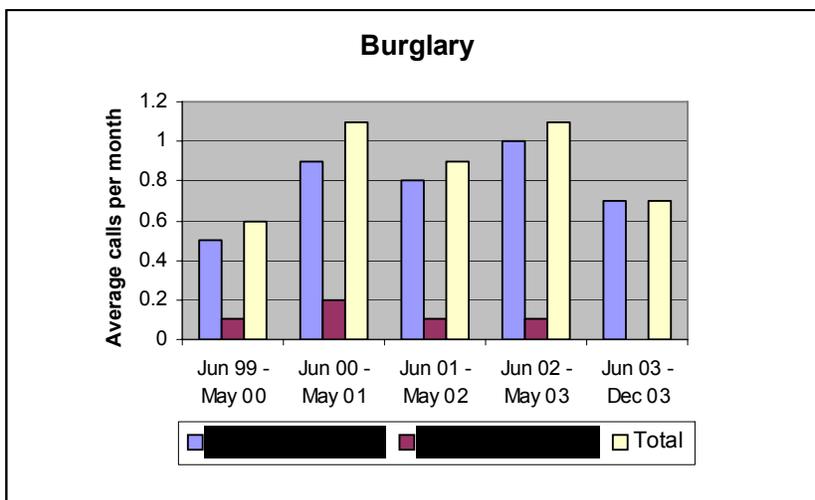


Fig 3.

The number of reported burglaries rose over a period of time to a peak during the second and fourth periods with a noticeable reduction in [redacted] and none reported in [redacted].

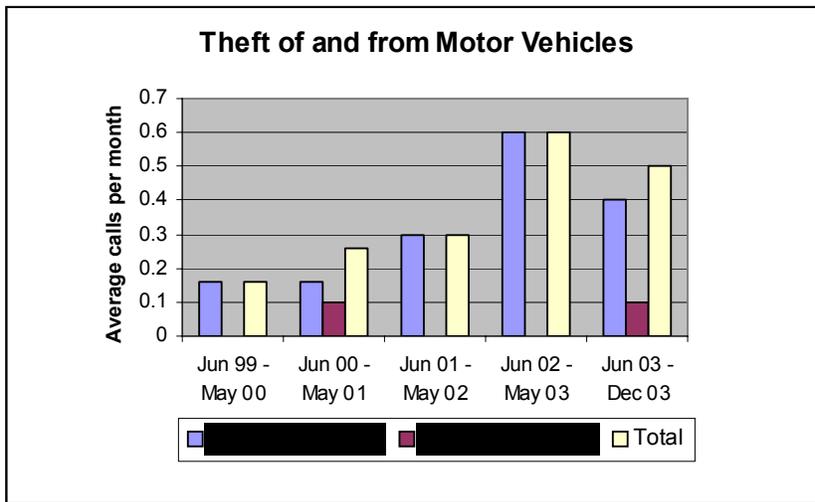


Fig 4.

Fig 4 shows that most car crime occurs in [REDACTED] with a peak in June 2002 to May 2003 and a reduction in the latter half of 2003

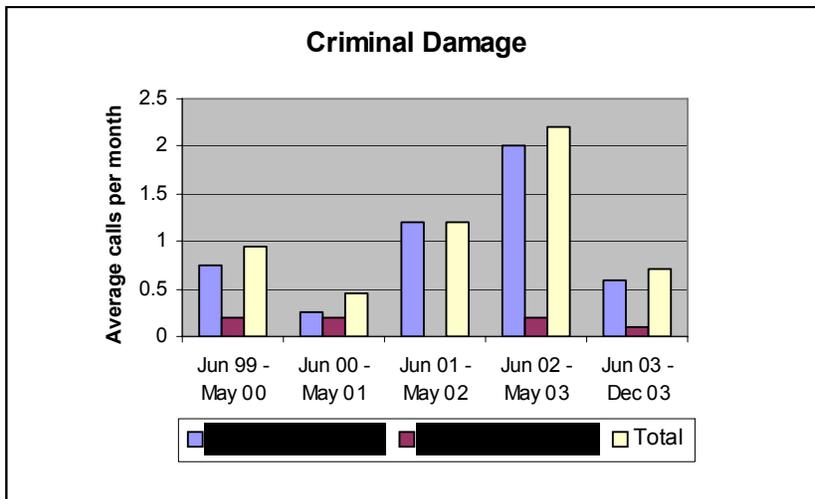


Fig 5.

Fig 5 shows that most offences of criminal damage occur in [REDACTED]. There has been a vast reduction in the second half of 2003. Over the whole five-year period approximately 75% of the offences were committed against dwellings with the remaining 25% against motor vehicles.

Appendix 2



Home Office

Home Secretary
50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT

30 APR 2003

25th April, 2003

Dari Taylor MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Dari,

Thank you for your letter of 10th April and for your support at second reading of the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill. I was sorry to hear that, despite sitting through the entire debate, you were not called to speak. However, it is good to see that you will be taking part in the detailed consideration of the Bill in Committee.

I was pleased to read of the enthusiasm and engagement of Cleveland Police in tackling anti-social behaviour, and welcome the very positive comments referred to in your letter. I have asked Bob to consider your suggestions which you made and he will reply to you in detail on those shortly.

Thanks again for being personally so committed, and for sticking it out on the day.

Best wishes,

DAVID BLUNKETT

531165/03



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Inspector Colin White
Cleveland Police
Ladgate Lane
Middlesbrough
TS8 9EH

15 May 2003

Dear *Colin*

Please find enclosed a letter I received from David Blunkett regarding my support of the second reading of the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill.

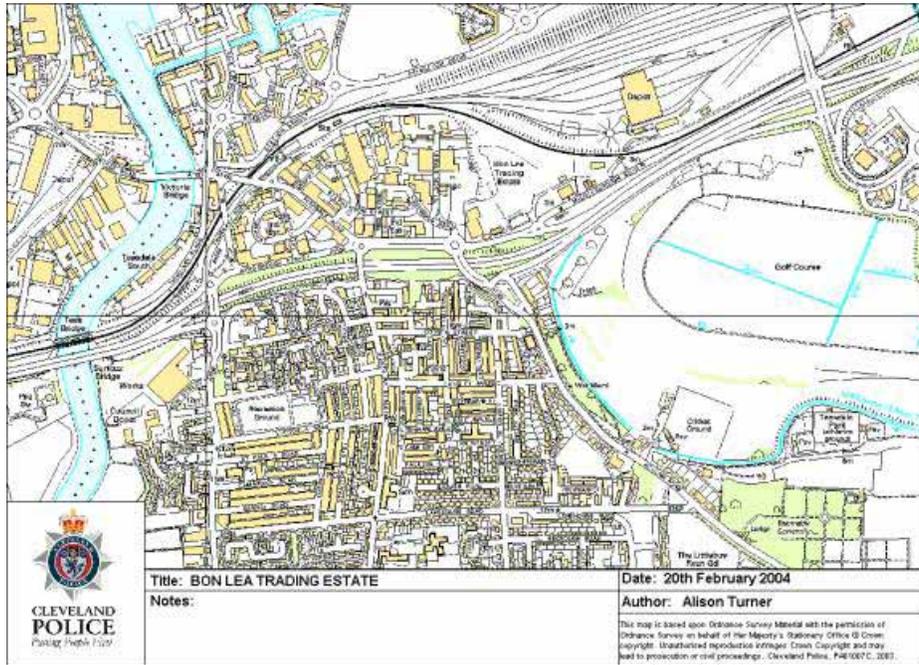
He mentions the hard work done by Cleveland Police and I believe this shows that I always praise my local force when they deserve it, believing that many do extremely valuable work.

Yours sincerely

Dari

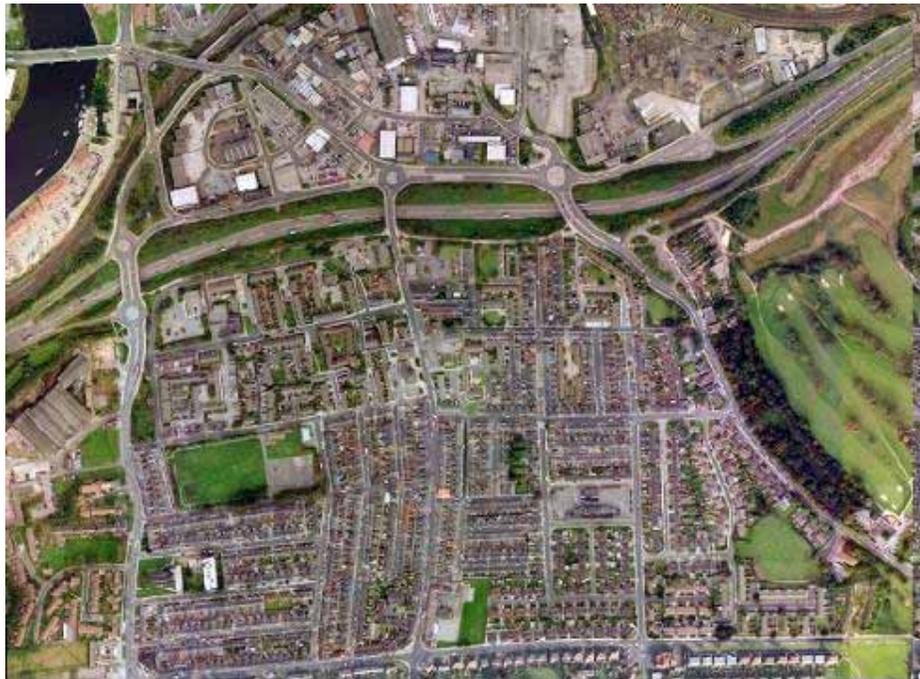
Dari Taylor MP
Stockton South

Appendix 4



O. S. map of Old Thornaby and Bon Lea Industrial Estate

Appendix 5



Aerial photograph of Old Thornaby

Victoria estate lies to the south of the A66 dual carriageway and the two streets in question are within the eastern half of the estate.

Appendix 6



Heather Blears MP, minister for police and Dari Taylor MP with Alleygates in Thornaby. March 2004
Photograph taken by the Evening Gazette.