

## ALLEYGATING PROJECT

Organisation	Safer Merseyside Partnership
Trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents' Association contacted police to ask if they could help to sort out problems of burglary, assault, drug taking and anti-social behaviour in their area</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To reduce the number of burglaries and other crimes, e.g. assault, drug and alcohol misuse, prostitution.</li> <li>To build a sense of community.</li> <li>To encourage others to move into the neighbourhood.</li> <li>To create employment and training opportunities for substance misusing individuals and the unemployed.</li> </ul>
Tools/techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-agency working between crime and disorder, health improvement and economic agencies.</li> <li>Consultation with local authority planning department, statutory agencies and residents groups.</li> </ul>
Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agencies committed to the project and each other.</li> <li>Strong project leader with a 'vision'.</li> </ul>
Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to go through Magistrates' Court to apply for closure of a right of way.</li> <li>Trade-off between crime resistant properties of gates and aesthetic appearance.</li> <li>Car crime and 'bogus official' crimes can show a slight increase in the gated areas and burglaries be displaced.</li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burglaries have reduced by 50% in the gated areas and other forms of anti-social behaviour reduced.</li> <li>An enhanced sense of community has been realised.</li> <li>Increased demand for housing in the gated areas.</li> <li>Long-term unemployed found work and drug misusing individuals employed in manufacture of gates.</li> </ul>
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bottom-up multi-agency approach to problem solving and a 'community champion' ensures commitment.</li> <li>The rooting of access ways through a development can have a significant impact on crime.</li> <li>Joint working and multi-agency collaboration is essential.</li> <li>Changing public space into private space reduces neglect.</li> <li>Crime reduction initiatives should be linked with training.</li> </ul>

### Synopsis

This case illustrates a project designed to increase resistance to crime in the form of burglary, alcohol or drug misuse, prostitution, arson and fly-tipping. The case analyses a project set up by the Safer Merseyside Partnership to restrict access to the rear of terraced houses by the installation of self-closing, lockable metal gates placed at strategic locations within the alleyways. A Residents' Association from a deprived area of inner Liverpool approached the police asking if they could help address the high level of burglary and anti-social behaviour in their area. A new police superintendent from London suggested Alleygating, as he had seen it work on previous schemes. The 5-year project is traced through the consultation stages with the Local Authority Planning Department, the community and statutory services providers, through the design, development, manufacture and installation of the gates themselves and the subsequent management of the gating system by residents. By January 2001, 200 gates had been installed at 20 sites protecting some 3000 properties. As a result, burglaries in the gated areas have reduced by approximately 50% and anti-social behaviour has been substantially reduced.

## Background to Alleygating Project

In 1993 a Residents' Association from a deprived area of inner Liverpool contacted the Merseyside Police and asked if they could help to sort out problems in their area. The area, which consisted of older terraced housing, suffered from a very high burglary rate and significant levels of anti-social behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse, prostitution, arson and fly-tipping. They sat down around a table and discussed these problems with the local police. A new police superintendent had just joined the force from London and he suggested blocking off the alleys which ran along the back of terraced houses using gates. Open alleyways create access to the rear of houses via which the majority of burglaries take place. They provide an extremely vulnerable area in which other criminal and anti-social activities can be carried out unseen and an easy means of escape if detected. Filthy alleyways also induce a sense of apathy amongst residents and an increase in the fear of crime. Figures 1 and 2 show typical ungated alleyways in inner Liverpool prior to the project.



*Figures 1 and 2: Typical alleyways before gating*

The Head of the Safer Merseyside Partnership, Martin Newton, explains the thinking behind gating:

“If you stop access to unauthorised people, it impacts on all types of crime. But you also increase the quality of life for the residents by reducing the fear of crime as well as the level of actual crime. This fear causes stress and impacts on their health. They develop a ‘shut door’ mentality and won’t go out. We wanted to bring people back into the community.”

As a result of the discussions, the Safer Merseyside Partnership, which includes the Merseyside Police Authority, Merseyside Fire Department and 5 local councils, agreed to fund a gating project for this area as a pilot scheme. This case is based on an interview with Martin Newton, Head of the Safer Merseyside Partnership.

## Design Process

## Consultation

The consultation process was the most difficult and time-consuming stage of the project. A huge variety of people, agencies and organisations needed to be consulted. The first stage of the consultation process was to talk to the local residents. Each resident in the area to be gated was written to explaining the reasons for the planned scheme and inviting them to a meeting to explain what the scheme would involve and to allow them to ask any questions about the scheme. Gating cannot take place without the permission of all residents, hence obtaining their written approval was the first stage. Council landlords, social landlords, private landlords and absentee landlords also had to be consulted and their approval obtained.

The erection of alleygates also impacts on the statutory service providers. They need to be able to obtain access to the alley after gating. Therefore consultation was necessary with Manweb (the local electricity provider), North West Water, British Telecom, British Gas, the refuse collection service and all the emergency services (police, fire and ambulance) to gain their approval and develop mechanisms to achieve this necessary access.

Only at this stage was the formal application for gating put in to the Local Authority Planning Department. Most alleys are 'rights of way' and therefore have to be the subject of a legal closure order at the Magistrates Court. Evidence had to be collected to demonstrate the need for gating.

The whole process to this point had taken some 3 years.

## The design, manufacture and installation

The gates had to be designed to:

- Restrict access to the back of people's homes.
- Make it very difficult for criminals to climb over them.
- Be robust, long lasting and resilient to attack.
- Be low maintenance.
- Give an unrestricted view down the alley.
- Be easy to operate by residents.
- Give value for money.
- Be aesthetically acceptable.

The gates themselves, the gate frames, including the hinges, the closing slammer, the top roll bar, the lock itself, the hinge mountings all needed specifying. The main vulnerability is the locking mechanism. The lock was modified after the first installation so that it now fits inside the hollow frame to ensure that there are no footholds to help criminals climb over the gate nor is there any opportunity for damage from a weapon such as a sledgehammer. The mesh of the gate is close-knit so that it cannot be cut by wire-cutters, whilst allowing clear visibility down the length of the alley. The hinge has been modified from the original design so that it provides no footholds and the roller bar at the top is covered with anti-vandal paint so that it is not possible to get a purchase on it, again a design feature to prevent criminals climbing over the gate. The gates needed galvanising to ensure that they were long-

lasting but this had a tendency to warp them and allow space for a screwdriver to be inserted by the barrel enabling the gate to be forced open. This problem also needed

addressing and a private sub-contractor was chosen to carry out the fabrication and hot-dipping of the gates. However, gates were needed in various sizes since the openings which they were to bridge were not of a standard size. Hence an innovative scheme was set up to produce the individual gates from the fabricated parts.

A key feature of the alleygating project is the involvement of previous offenders in the project. Recovering substance misusers are employed to cut the steel strip, assemble, weld and install the gates. Newton explains the thinking behind this approach:

“This reduces the motive of known offenders and individuals at risk by providing them with alternatives to crime and challenges their addictive behaviour”.

Prior to installation a public meeting was called to tell the local residents what was going to happen and issue each household with a key.

The process from the initial residents' plea to the police to the installation of the first gate took 5 years, but the impact was remarkable as can be seen from Figures 3 and 4, which show three typical alleyways after gating.



*Figures 3 and 4: Typical alleyways after gating*

### **Servicing the Gates**

After installation the gates become the responsibility of the residents. The public meeting described above also gave the Safer Merseyside Partnership an opportunity to help the residents to sort out the management of the new gating system. For example, advice had to be given to them about compiling a list of residents who could be contacted by the emergency services if access was needed; agreement had to be reached between the residents about how they were going to deal with opening the gates on 'dustbin day'.

### **Tensions**

With time, some minor problems have revealed themselves arising from the design and management of the alleygates. The hot-dipping/galvanisation process has resulted in some of the locks being misaligned and therefore vulnerable to being picked by criminals with the appropriate tools. The gates were also causing problems for feline access and might have to be redesigned to include a 'cat flap'. In addition, the need for master keys by fire services, refuse collectors etc. leads to an excessive availability of keys, with the potential for them to be copied illegally. Once copied, of course, a would-be thief would have access to all the gates.

## **Impact**

The alleygating scheme has resulted in many tangible and intangible benefits. It has achieved long-term crime reduction, effective protection of property, and the 50% reduction in burglaries has resulted in a huge reduction in demand on Local Authority, Police and Fire services. It has also led to a reduction in fear of crime by residents, a sustainable community involvement and employment and training opportunities for local people, particularly recovering substance misusers. For example, an independent study conducted by the University of Liverpool of four particular streets found that, since the introduction of gates:

- reporting of burglaries increased from 33% to 100%
- take up of household contents insurance increased
- graffiti and vandalism are seen as less of a problem than before
- residents are less afraid to leave their houses empty and more residents would go out alone at night.
- 50% of respondents think it is a safe place to live, compared to 37% previously
- there has been a reduction in the number of void properties, and an increase in the demand for and value of property

In short, the scheme has had an enormous impact well beyond that of crime reduction. There is a slight note of caution in that there is some evidence of initial crime 'displacement' of around 12%. For example, the level of car crime in an area newly fitted with alley gates may increase slightly, as might the number of burglaries in areas just outside the newly gated area. However, this seems a short-lived problem, which reduces after the gates have been up for a few months.

## **Lessons Learned**

The initial project was a great success culminating in the first installation in 1998, and plans went ahead to introduce gates into other high-crime areas of Liverpool. A new organisation to run the alleygating projects called Local Solutions was set up, which has developed booklets to explain to residents the whole process of setting up and running an alleygating project scheme to help residents of terraced areas to initiate their own schemes. By June 2001 it is planned that there will be 500 gates installed.

The whole process which first took 5 years has now been reduced to around an amazing 8 weeks by increased community involvement and excellent joint working

between all the organisations involved in the project. The key to the success of the scheme is the total commitment from all partners involved and was summed up beautifully by Newton as he explained, “we dream gates!”

### Contact Details

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### References, Related Case Studies and Further Reading

Beckford, C. (1997) The Alleygater's Guide to Gating Alleys. Crime Prevention Design Advisor: Metropolitan Police.

The Safer Merseyside Partnership (2000) What “Alleygating” Means for Health Improvement & Crime Prevention. Safer Merseyside Partnership: Liverpool.  
[www.merseyworld.com/smp/](http://www.merseyworld.com/smp/)

The Safer Merseyside Partnership (2000) A Partnership Approach to the Installation of Gates to the Rear of Terraced Properties in Kensington, Liverpool. The Safer Merseyside Partnership: Liverpool.

## Classification Index

Ekblom's crime classification	Misappropriation (burglary), misbehaviour (violence against the person, arson, alcohol or drug abuse, fly- tipping)
BCS crime classification	Burglary and others such as arson, alcohol or drug abuse, fly-tipping.
DAC	Improving high crime areas.
Primary motivation	Reduce crime and improve community.
Type of designer	Industrial designer, architect or engineer.
Approach	Problem-solving.
Sector	Public spaces
Location	Alleyways
Author	Anne Tomes

DAC – alleygates