

Technical Assessment of A414 Underpass Adjacent Tesco Store, Heybridge

Introduction and Overview

In response to community concerns regarding public safety in the vicinity of the above location the community safety partnership was asked to take a lead on assessing the site in terms of crime prevention and environmental design. The nature of the offences which occurred in June 2014 and more recently in January 2015 have had a big impact on the community and have raised the fear of crime for users of the area. A recent petition has requested improved lighting, CCTV and a reduction in the shrubbery in the immediate vicinity of the underpass. The site comprises of land owned by a number of different parties with various levels of responsibility. It should be noted that the community safety partnership had already identified this area for environmental improvement and continues to work with partners to address this as a restorative justice project. Additional police and park ranger patrols have been requested where and when resources permit. The lighting of the footpath is subject to the part-lighting arrangements introduced by Essex County Council a number of years ago and therefore the lighting is switched off at midnight.

The Assessment

The site assessment was carried on Thursday 5 February 2015 between the hours of 16.30 – 17.30hrs in order to view the area during day and night time hours. The conditions were dry with clear skies. The multi-agency assessment team comprised of the following four officers:

Spencer Clarke: Maldon Community Safety Partnership Manager

Roy Read: Countryside & Coast Team Leader – Maldon District Council

Sergeant Phil Morley – Essex Police

Alice Burlington – Community Safety Development Officer – Maldon District Council

The main purpose of the assessment was to identify and highlight any concerns, and make recommendations on how the underpass and surrounding environs can be changed to improve community safety, reduce the fear of crime and increase natural surveillance. The recommendations are graded as high, medium and low priority in terms of improving the area.

The footpath from the Tesco footbridge to the Mill Lane junction benefits from adequate street lighting. All lanterns on the footpath were operational and working, and were spaced to give adequate light levels for general purpose. However, the lighting at the underpass was not working and in the opinion of the assessment team it has not been operational for a number of years and has been subject to vandalism. This area was very dark and in light of the recent incidents the team considered this a high risk in terms of vulnerability.

The shrubbery in the vicinity of the underpass was overgrown and had some impact on the natural surveillance of the area and aesthetic appearance. However, it was noted that full removal of vegetation may encourage young persons to use short cuts to cross the busy A414 and in light of the fatality of a young boy in 2013 this should be discouraged.

The installation of CCTV has been requested by members of the public. Whilst this would provide a deterrent for any potential offenders it would be difficult and expensive to cover the full area with vast areas of land being in close proximity where further offences could occur. However, a more localised scheme to cover the underpass only could be considered.

Recommendations and Current Progress

The lighting of the underpass is considered **high priority** in terms of restoring public confidence. Therefore, it is recommended that the structure owner, Essex County Council, takes advice from the Essex Police Crime Prevention Tactical Advisor & Architectural Liaison Officer in relation to installing vandal proof lighting to provide good levels of lighting. This should be done as a matter of urgency. Whilst the street lights covering the footpath areas were considered adequate it would be beneficial to improve the lighting and increase the light levels to improve public confidence. A new scheme would probably prove cost prohibitive but the existing lanterns could be replaced with high pressure sodium pathfinder lanterns which would have an immediate effect. This could be explored by the Maldon Highways Panel or as a joint venture between Essex County Council, Maldon District Council and Heybridge Parish Council. This is considered **medium priority**. Consideration should also be given by Essex County Council to remove the street lighting in this area from the current part-lighting arrangements.

Removing overgrown shrubbery in the vicinity of the underpass was considered **medium priority**. These works were completed by the Highway Rangers on Wednesday 11 February 2015 under the supervision of the Countryside & Coast Team Leader. Removal of overgrown shrubbery along the full length of the canal path was not considered necessary and would require consent from a variety of different landowners. However, this is a point for further discussion and considered **low priority**.

The installation of CCTV to cover the full area would be challenging in terms of cost and installation. However, a stand-alone recorded system covering the underpass only would prove beneficial in terms of public confidence and as a deterrent for criminal activity. This would require the consent of the structure owner, Essex County Council and there would to be discussions concerning the on-going maintenance, ownership and liability for such a system which would probably be prone to vandalism in light of its remote location. Again, this is considered **low priority**.

Next Steps

This assessment will be circulated to key parties for comment and a multi-agency meeting will be arranged to discuss what actions can be taken and prioritised to ensure that public confidence is restored. The meeting will include representatives from Maldon District Council, Essex County Council, Heybridge Parish Council, Essex Police and the Canal Company.

The partnership feels it is very important to obtain the views of local people in light of the impact that the most recent incident has had on the local community. Therefore, the partnership agreed to meet a local resident, Kelly Sanger, who had taken a lead in calling for local action. This initial meeting took place on Friday 13 February 2015 with Mrs Sanger and another resident. They were very pleased with works completed to date and the above recommendations were also discussed which they agreed would be a good move forward. In addition to the recommendations noted above they also raised concerns about the level of lighting for the unlit footpath which connects the

underpass with the footpath on the A414, and the unlit area at the Heybridge end of the footpath adjacent the next road bridge. They also stated that they would like to see overgrown vegetation removed to the extent of the Tesco footbridge.

The partnership will also continue to progress with the restorative justice project to improve the aesthetic appearance of the underpass. A meeting was held with Essex Youth Offending Team on Thursday 12 February 2015 who have agreed to support the project once risk assessments have been signed off by the structure owner, Essex County Council.

Spencer Clarke, Community Safety Manager – Maldon District Council

spencer.clarke@maldon.gov.uk or spencer.clarke@chelmsford.gov.uk