

PRESS RELEASE No.4

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Attn: News Desks

CAMPAIGN GROUP ASKS WHERE IS PROVEN NEED FOR COWLEY ROAD CCTV

As the council and police prepare for the Monday 19th January 2009 ceremonial switching on of the CCTV cameras on the Cowley Road, East Oxford, campaign group No CCTV asks where is the proven need for the cameras?

Charles Farrier of No CCTV said: "It should not be the role of concerned residents to prove the case against CCTV but it should be the council's role as custodian of public money to prove the need for CCTV. Where is their proof that CCTV is needed along the Cowley Road?"

There is an ever increasing number of voices calling for evidence based decision making with regards to surveillance cameras in the UK.

In 2007 Jonathan Bamford of the Information Commissioner's Office told the Home Affairs Committee 'A Surveillance Society?' inquiry that: "the actual assessment procedure, in deciding whether to establish a scheme, should be very, very rigorous. It should not just be on the basis of public popularity, or the technological capability to do it, or the financial capability to do it. What you have really got to look at is: is this really proportionate to the evil we are trying to address here? What are we trying to deal with by having CCTV cameras? Will they actually do the trick in addressing that? ... We need a proper assessment methodology there to decide in the first place whether this should go ahead."

But still the council does not see the need to prove the case for CCTV.

In their report the Home Affairs committee noted that: "Under camera surveillance in public spaces, individuals have very little control over whether or not their images and movements are captured and over how they are stored and used. This lack of choice intensifies the obligation on camera operators and regulators to behave responsibly and to deploy surveillance technology only where it is of proven benefit in the fight against crime and where this benefit outweighs any detrimental effect on individual liberty."

But still the council does not see the need to prove the case for CCTV.

The Royal Academy of Engineers in their report 'Dilemmas of Privacy and Surveillance' said: "Taken together, the available studies fail to provide evidence that surveillance brings significant benefits, or that any benefits it brings outweigh the limitations it imposes on individual rights. Hence, this brings into sharp relief the dilemmas associated with the question - what is surveillance for? How can the encroachment on personal freedoms which is the supposed price for greater safety and feelings of security be justified, when it seems that surveillance does not deliver? These are questions that need further scrutiny. The worst way to deal with them is to ignore them on the basis that it seems obvious that increased surveillance will mean decreased crime or on the basis that increased surveillance is inevitable or unstoppable. An open debate on the acceptability and usefulness of surveillance is necessary."

But still the council does not see the need to prove the case for CCTV.

In November 2007 No CCTV released a report that considers the use of surveillance cameras in the UK with particular reference to the proposed scheme in East Oxford. The report focuses on media coverage, crime statistics, the climate of fear, the effectiveness of CCTV, the Home Office's national CCTV strategy, civil liberties concerns and some specific issues related to the East Oxford proposals. No CCTV produced extensive evidence against the need for CCTV, but the council has produced no evidence that supports the need to install CCTV.

The No CCTV report states that: "Anonymity is not a crime, in fact English common law is built upon a right to anonymity implicit in the right to walk down the street unchallenged provided you are not doing something specifically legislated against."

Better community reduces crime, technology does not.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. No CCTV is a UK group campaigning against the excessive use of surveillance cameras in the UK. Their homepage is at www.no-cctv.org.uk
2. The No CCTV report into the Cowley Road CCTV in East Oxford can be downloaded from the press section of the No CCTV website - <http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/press>
3. For further information contact Charles Farrier at press@no-cctv.org.uk