




Visit Credit check to access your credit report
Free 30-day trial



Search:

Guardian Unlimited
Web

GuardianUnlimited

Home	UK	Business	Audio	Podcasts	The Wrap	News blog	Talk	Search
The Guardian	World	News guide	Arts	Special reports	Columnists	Technology	Help	Quiz



Search this site

Response

Our talking cameras are calm and polite, not shouting and bossy

Our pioneering CCTV scheme has made residents feel safer and kept our town tidier, says Barry Coppinger

Wednesday April 18, 2007
[The Guardian](#)

Martin Wainwright ([Talking CCTV cameras accuse wrong person, April 12](#)) and Charlie Brooker ([CCTV cameras that shout at you? All very well, but I have a much scarier idea, April 9](#)) both wrote about Middlesbrough's initiative, which I have day-to-day political responsibility for.

Sorry, Charlie, our CCTV cameras don't "shout at you". Nor, Martin, do they "boom" at people; nor are they "bossy". Our operators are professionally trained and communicate with the small proportion of the public who carelessly litter the town centre - or are engaging in other forms of antisocial behaviour - in a calm, polite and effective way.

Article continues ▾

Advertisement

Martin, Charlie and Guardian readers will be aware, of course, that there's no human right to commit crime or engage in antisocial behaviour. Public attitudes to CCTV have changed substantially over recent years. In my five years in this role we've had no complaints from residents or visitors regarding intrusion or infringement of privacy or civil liberties.

Charlie's "nightmarish" scenario of "faceless electronic scrutineers" may not hold quite as much sway if you've just happened to turn the corner into a drunken brawl, or a violent domestic dispute about to break out. (For the record, this is not seen by us as a substitute for proper neighbourhood or town-centre policing, both of which are alive and with us in Middlesbrough.)

Our simple idea has been trialled since the end of last year - nine town-centre cameras within our 150-strong network have loudspeakers attached. Three operators monitor them from a state-of-the-art control room. Most local people support the introduction of the system. Our last borough-wide survey indicated that 95% of residents felt safer. The response to the "littering" talking-CCTV interventions has been virtually 100% positive.

Martin refers to a misunderstanding when a resident put a McDonald's wrapper in the bottom of a pram and the CCTV operator "mistakenly thought she had dropped litter and boomed out a reprimand". I've written to the resident to apologise, if that is the case, although our local evening paper, who'd spoken to her, reported that she supported the talking CCTV idea. A German TV crew spent four days filming here before finding a resident who'd say they opposed it.

We estimate that 60-70% of challenges to town-centre antisocial behaviour made through this process are successful - the other incidents being swiftly referred through our online links to our partners in Cleveland police. The town centre now needs to be swept only four times a day instead of six.

None of this has gone unnoticed. The Home Office is now rolling out this initiative to 20 locations across the country. There's no reason why our success can't be repeated elsewhere - which presumably explains why our council's press office received 200 inquiries from across the world on the day it was announced. Used properly, CCTV can make an important contribution to making the streets of Middlesbrough safer for residents - and, of course, visiting journalists.

- Barry Coppinger is Middlesbrough council's executive member for community [safety](#)
barry_coppinger@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Comments

BriscoRant

April 18, 2007 2:49 AM

Coppinger's arguments sound fair, but was there

enough public discussion on surveillance before the cameras went in - and has there been any independent evaluation after? So let me put some counter arguments.

First, Cop argues that as it saves money, it is justified.

But you know .. it was always going to begin, something like this. When the surveillance really started - something no one really wants - they were not going to announce "you're all being watched from now on, do as we say, please, or we'll report you to the cops". Which, as Coppinger tells us, is what is actually happening. Softer reasons were going to be used, to get the cameras in place, and while people get used to them. Such as telling people they were polite, and saved public money. And of course, cleaner streets for citizens.

You can get almost anything though these days, if you tell people it saves public money.

In this way, birthrights are sold.

And as for it taking 4 days, to find Citizens of Middlesborough, to say publically they disliked surveillance. Has Coppinger perhaps forgotten Auden?

In "The Unknown Citizen", Auden reminds us how, when the State becomes oppressive and citizens fall silent - the State will try to say that the silence is really assent.

THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN

" (To JS/07 M 378
This Marble Monument
Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word,
he was a
saint,.....

[and the clincher lines]

...Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard."

<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15549>

Mike Brisco.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

suraci

April 18, 2007 6:09 AM

"Ken Walker was known as one of the leading critics of current Mayor Ray Mallon when he was leader of the council, and is one of the few Labour councillors bright enough to know what's going on in an extremely murky local council. LW reckons making him a martyr isn't going to help the local Labour party - he will almost certainly win if he stands as an independent."

<http://labour-watch.blogspot.com/2006/06/former-labour-leader-of-middlesbrough.html>

Erimus Housing Limited have been involved in a controversial redevelopment of parts of Middlesbrough, involving the demolition of resident's houses. Some of the councillors allegedly have links to Erimus. Those who do not have links seem reluctant to challenge those who do.

<http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:2da1y9w1NAEJ:www.epicview.net/commonDemo/pdf/collected.pdf+Barry+Coppinger+declaration+of+interests&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=4&gl=uk&client=firefox-a>

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

Janino

April 18, 2007 7:09 AM

Firstly, I am sure the good people of Middlesbrough will be very impressed that Councillor Barry Copping took the time to respond to the Guardian, spending hours pouring over drafts from the council's tax payer funded press office until he had a response that made him proud. But he (and his dedicated team of spin doctors) have missed the point, not by a bit, but by a huge gapping chasm.

Many of us are naturally horrified at the prospect of an over efficous, bitter council worker (they are quite often so- continual public contempt for them makes council workers behave in an resentful and sour manner towards us plebs)has their beady eye on us, waiting to pounce when even a percieved infringement of their anally retarded rules take place. It's been said many times aboput councils, but I'll state it again: haven't they got anything better to do? What every happend to being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Surely some of this funding should go to community resources to stop anti-social behaviour, this has been proven to be effective in so many towns and cities across the world, but no, the Home Office will only give out the funds if they are used for CCTV, ridiculous!

When will common sense prevail and a holistic approach be adopted by government to solving societies ills, rather than slapping the band-aid of CCTV on the infested wound of crime and anti-social behaviour.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

whatithink

April 18, 2007 7:28 AM

This man is the scum of the earth and so are the people who work with him on his nasty Orwellian nightmare. It is terrifying that we employ people in the state sector with zero comprehension of the idea of having any respect for their fellow human beings, but we do. He belongs in prison.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

CommanderKeen

April 18, 2007 7:31 AM

If you look at the Home Office report on the effectiveness of CCTV you find that it only has a very marginal effect on crime prevention and most likely moves the crime to areas where there is no CCTV. So we are suffering a massive infringement of our civil liberties for a grossly ineffective policy just so a few corrupt council members can be seen to be doing something.

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hors252.pdf>

I wonder if the nations entire CCTV network could be made unfeasibly expensive over night if every person in the country were to request all footage of themselves under the freedom of information act.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

marydole

April 18, 2007 8:45 AM

CommanderKeen:

Thanks for the link! It will be used :) .

As for the ever-expanding horror of New Labour's surveillance society - can I suggest we vote the effers out, (at a local, national and European level)?

Show them that lies and repression, however polite, don't pay.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

squeezyhamster

April 18, 2007 9:13 AM

This man is the scum of the earth and so are the people who work with him on his nasty Orwellian nightmare.

I couldn't agree more. I mean, talking CCTV. It puts the man in a league of his own...North Korea, Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, Darfur, DRC, Zimbabwe, Chechnya, Afghanistan...the people involved in these little fisticuffs are mere sideshows to the Dreadful Invasion Of Our Civil Liberties that is the Orwellian Nightmare of a chattering camera in Middlesborough. Mr Coppinger, take a bow and your place in history alongside Hitler, Stalin and the rest.

FFS. Get a grip.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

supermollusc

April 18, 2007 9:39 AM

Let's put CCTV cameras in everyone's homes; after all this would stop child abuse, domestic violence and lots of other activities. Anyone who might oppose this suggestion is clearly in favour of those transgressions and should be locked up

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

ThatPaulBloke

April 18, 2007 1:49 PM

"...may not hold quite as much sway if you've just happened to turn the corner into a drunken brawl, or a violent domestic dispute about to break out..."

Does the honoured gentleman have any evidence that a drunken brawl can be halted by a the voice of a camera asking politely if they wouldn't mind ceasing that anti-social behaviour and behaving like decent chaps, please?

As far as I can see these cameras are there for the most minor of infractions only, e.g. littering, and, yes, the cameras can still provide evidence blah, blah, blah, but the old ones did that too without needing the ability to reprimand people. This appears to be another move in the same direction as speed cameras - what should have been a support system to assist law enforcement will instead become a cheap and largely ineffectual replacement for it.

By the way, if the residents of Middlesborough love their cameras so much and clearly love their town, who's dropping litter for the cameras to shout at in the first place?

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

drengskap

April 18, 2007 3:57 PM

"Let's put CCTV cameras in everyone's homes; after all this would stop child abuse, domestic violence and lots of other activities. Anyone who might oppose this suggestion is clearly in favour of those transgressions and should be locked up."

Well said, supermollusc. After all, if you've nothing to hide, then you've nothing to fear...

Do people like Barry Coppinger really not see how sinister and authoritarian their policies are, or do they just not give a toss?

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

RedCanuck

April 18, 2007 5:45 PM

It is bad enough that the British government has put in 1984-style Orwellian talking TV cameras.

It is even worse that no one in Britain has really objected. Sheep.

Something like this would not pass in North America, because in both Canada and the United States we have a written and legally binding Constitution which protects the rights of the people against unwarranted intrusions by the state.

Whether Britain goes Tory or Labour, it seems to be highly illiberal. If the Liberals in England had any sense, they would be up in arms about this, and perhaps campaigning for a written British constitution to curtail the powers of government. If the Queen can sign off on the Canadian Constitution and Charter of Rights She can surely do so for Old Blighty.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

herbertbauer

April 20, 2007 10:47 AM

"Every Step You Take" is an excellent new documentary about CCTV video surveillance in Britain (it has just premiered at an Austrian film festival, coming to Britain soon). I've seen it, and was very impressed - excellent research, and finally, the topic is covered in a balanced yet critical way.

Check out the trailer and details:

<http://www.EveryStepYouTake.org>

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

LittleTyke

April 20, 2007 2:09 PM

The introduction of talking CCTV represents a new low in Britain's descent into the Surveillance Society, about which the Information Commissioner and many others have been warning for some time. As for getting schoolchildren to participate in the voiceovers, though that may be a different council to yours, this is alienation and mind control on a grand scale, just as the Nazis sought to turn children against their parents and friends and denounce them

for some imagined or trivial "crime", for the good of the State.

Mr Coppinger may think his officials are polite now, but just wait until the jobsworths and officious little Hitlers in other council talking-CCTV initiatives see what fun they can have by bossing people around and getting paid for it. What he is engaging in is the thin end of a wedge that will inevitably lead us as a nation on to a very slippery slope indeed. Would he, for example, welcome CCTV in the home, and if not, why not? It's only a further extension to what we have been asked to accept so far.

The general public deserve to be treated with consideration as human beings by other human beings, not by faceless robot voices booming at them from on high. Soon, I am sure, there will be a backlash against this authoritarian streak that has infected Britain from the top down over the past ten years. I would rather see a chocolate wrapper dropped in innocence than have this Orwellian nightmare thrust upon us. It is not the British way.

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

MbroLabourless

April 20, 2007 6:17 PM

"Copp-out-in-ger" as he is better known by the people of Middlesbrough would be better employed supporting Boro home owners going through enforced relocation by MBC in their attempts of gentrification of the town rather than giving out MBC spin over Orwellian Cameras - view <http://www.mallondictatorship.com> and <http://www.homeregeneration.com> for details

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

[Offensive? Unsuitable? Email us](#)

Advertiser links

[ProAdventure® UK - Activity Holidays](#)

Proadventure offers activity holidays for adults in North...

proadventure.co.uk

[Activity Breaks at the Manor House Hotel](#)

With a vast range of sports and leisure facilities, a unique...

manorashbury.co.uk

[Tours in US, Canada and Mexico](#)

Eighty-one adventure and active tours. Small international...

suntrek.com

[HDTV](#) | [Football](#) | [Medical Insurance](#) | [Credit Cards](#) | [New Car](#)

[Printable version](#) | [Send it to a friend](#) | [Save story](#)



[Join our dating site today](#)

Guardian Unlimited © Guardian News and Media Limited 2007