

More darkness than light

Planners must now formally liaise with the police to ensure that counter-terrorism measures are considered in all major planning applications. Jolyon Drury explains.



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Let's be under no illusions: a current security assessment from someone very senior who really knows is "More darkness than light". The continuing threat assessment from the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre is "Severe", the second highest threat level. Never mind the rights or wrongs of our campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan: that is how it is.

The ACA with New London Architecture held a successful conference at the end of January Places versus fortresses – Can and should we design for terror? at

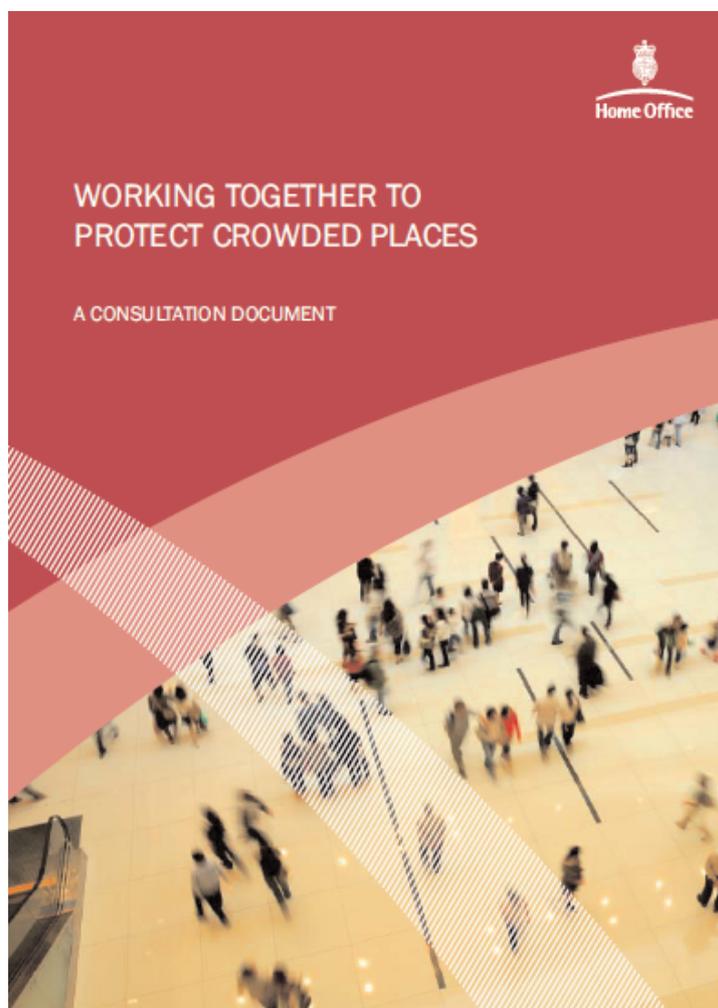
which Lord West, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Security and Counter-terrorism, presented a key note speech exactly in tune with our focus – where from his review Crowded Places he recognised that better engagement with local stakeholders was essential in order to implement the necessary protective security measures but not at the expense of disrupting the ability of business or individuals from carrying on their normal social, economic and democratic activities. To which ACA added, and to not compromise the

quality, character and architecture of our urban and rural fabric– in other words not to destroy our unique sense of place with rows of ill-considered bollards and graffiti-covered concrete barriers.

The business of planning for protection in both the public and private realms has to be initiated, monitored and regulated from somewhere: and *Safer Places: a counter terrorism supplement* with its companion volume *Working together to protect crowded places* have been issued recently by DCLG as a consultation to suggest a methodology to do exactly that from the grass roots local authority level.

The consultation closed on 10th July, and I commend these documents to you for review. The Safer Places: the planning system and crime prevention supplement provides practical advice on how best to design-in counter terrorism measures into new development proposals whilst ensuring that they are of high design quality. In parallel Working together to protect crowded places: designing-in counter terrorism measures is the most cost-effective way to enhance protective security of crowded places.

Lord West and his team have put together a methodology for ensuring that protection from terrorism is included in new developments and in crowded places in the public and private domains: crowded places being a neat descriptor for transport interchanges, hospitals, schools, markets, shopping centres, entertainment venues, places of religious and other gatherings and many more. In a nutshell, expert advisors from various levels of the security and police services are available to train design professionals (the Argus scheme) and to assist both the



professionals, developers, operators and the local authorities in the assessment of the risk, and the inclusion of mitigation in the design. There is logic for local stakeholders that the checks for the inclusion of counter-terrorist measures should rest with the planners, as it is for the police to provide a local threat assessment.

What is refreshing about these documents is a determination that security should not be exaggerated – proportionality based on sound risk assessment (the matrix is Appendix A in Crowded Places) linked to the principle that the user pays for what needs to be done. The consultation asks for comment on the level of implementation of the measures whilst suggesting a methodology: for the highest level of assessed risk –

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mandatory backed by legislation- for the next level – very strongly recommended, enforced by the planning authority- for comparatively minor threats, voluntary to the recommendation of the Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA), located within the local police force and coordinated by the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) and monitored by the planning authority. Be clear that although CTSA's have been advised to be flexible in approach to their recommendations, they can and will object to applications that ignore advice for mitigating the top two counter-terrorist categories.

Safer Places contains sections on urban design principles, such as Deter – physical and electronic measures and good management practice – Detect – alarms and visual detection- Delay – provide physical

measures to delay intrusion until expert assistance arrives. In the Appendices there is sound but not proscriptive advice on traffic management, a design approach to building management, and surveillance as a design approach, by the orientation of a building overlooking a public space for example. Under a section The Challenge there is refreshing advice against over-sensitivity to risk, a call to avoid bland and standard places (no doubt thanks to CABE) and under Conflicts for design teams to be aware of the challenge in sensitively providing

security mitigation with listed buildings with hyper-links for advice from English Heritage.

The Risk Assessment Matrix proposes a standard method of assessing vulnerability of

crowded places for local authorities, prepared by the CTSA's, in turn informing the Local Resilience Forums (LRFs). And from that the planners with the CTSA's can decide on a "do nothing" laissez faire policy, to advise non-mandatory mitigation based on Home Office guidelines: or to advise mandatory measures under statutory guidelines. or to advise mandatory measures under statutory guidelines. The RIBA has not made any friends by responding adversely to the consultation on the anniversary of 9.11 complaining that CTSA input at the planning stage (no doubt at submission) was too late, expressing concern at the consistency and training of CTSA's and of local planning officers. D I Chris Philips who heads up NaCTSO who also spoke at the ACA conference, confirmed that consultation is available at any design stage. Our

message is, as it is with any planning matter, get advice early. Of course there is bound to be animated discussion between design teams and planners on the interpretation of the threat or risk assessment as there will be cost attached: but in the end it may be the client's insurers or their own security advisors who cement the decision.

So having set out warily assuming that these documents were

another manifestation of the pervasive Nanny State, and although maintaining some reservations about how our already hard-pressed planning departments will implement the recommendations, I commend the consultation as a well thought through and sadly necessary exercise.

