Dallmeier Electronic: safety and security for Southampton Tower Blocks

Dallmeier Electronic: safety and security for Southampton Tower Blocks. Southampton City Council received a surprising answer when it asked residents what should be improved in a group of run-down tower blocks. “We wondered whether people would want the exteriors of the blocks to be brightened up, but that wasn’t their top priority,” says service development manager Paul Paskins. “They gave us a really clear message that the most important things were safety and security – they wanted to feel safer.” The provision of comprehensive CCTV centred on Dallmeier digital CCTV products, a GDX door entry system, round-the-clock monitoring and better lighting have all contributed to achieving this aim. The new system is already having a significant impact on the quality of life there and the control centre dealt with more than 200 incidents in the first three months of operation. Typical situations include property damage, crime, breaches of tenancy conditions and youths causing a nuisance.

The new security systems have been installed as part of a £3.5 million investment in the towers at Weston Shore View. “We had quite a lot of flexibility within the scheme,” explains Paskins. Focus groups, surveys and open days were used to establish what tenants wanted. The consultation also allowed residents to view other improvements including the replacement of all of the kitchens in the council-owned flats.

“The objective of the scheme is to make the neighbourhood and blocks a better place to live,” he explains. The scheme covers six buildings that together contain 664 flats. The buildings command impressive views across Southampton Water - but were less impressive to live in. There were significant problems with crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, though the true extent was unknown, as incidents were under-reported.

CCTV Cameras and Door Entry System

Tietjen Clark was the project’s technical consultant and produced a specification in consultation with the Council. The tender was advertised and The Alarming Company won the design and installation contract covering the five identical 13-
storey blocks and one 24-storey tower.

There are two key aspects of the new system – a network of internal and external CCTV cameras recording onto Dallmeier’s DLS range of hard disc recorders and a GDX5 Commissionaire door entry system.

There are 80 internal CCTV cameras, which are fixed to ensure uninterrupted coverage of doors and foyers. All 16 external cameras are pan-tilt-zoom models to provide maximum flexibility. The door entry system also has cameras to show who is seeking entry and a further set of cameras is being installed in the lifts which are in the process of being fully refurbished.

**Crossing the Gulf**

The area is, in many respects, rather cut off, standing as it does on the opposite side of Southampton Water to the city. This isolation also presented considerable technical challenges in improving the security. CCTV images and voice communications needed to be transmitted to the control centre in the city centre.

“We looked at various ways to send the signals back, including microwaves and radio,” says Southampton City Council (SCC) technical project manager Paul Howard. “We even thought of putting in our own fibre.” “There was no easy way of getting the camera footage back individually at a reasonable price,” says Dallmeier sales manager Jason Piggott. It was better – and cheaper - to collect the feeds, rather than have separate fibres carrying signals from each camera or recorder.

Dallmeier therefore suggested installing a local area network within the site and then using a single BT fibre for transmission from one of the towers. Each block has either one or two DLS recorders each containing between 600 and 900GB of hard disc space to record its fixed cameras, while the external cameras are recorded by two DLS recorders at a single central location.
Cameras for Special Purposes

Dallmeier has also supplied some of the cameras. Its **Cam_inPix Ultra Wide Dynamic fixed cameras** were chosen for the foyers as they give extremely clear images even against the extreme sunlight shining through the glass in the doors and windows. Other cameras chosen for special purposes include the external **Forward Vision pan-tilt-zoom cameras** housed in vandal-resistant housings designed to withstand the extremes of coastal weather conditions and other threats such as external attacks. Door entry is controlled using the GDX5 Commissionaire door entry system from GDX Technologies, which is now part of **Stanley Security Solutions**.

The system provides voice and video communications between the entrances, flats and concierge. “It is PC-based and can be interrogated to give reports on any aspect of activity,” says GDX business development manager **Rob Wilson**. Access control tokens give residents automated entry, while visitors use the intercom to ask to be let in. Video cameras in the external GDX panels enable residents to see who their visitors are. This video is also integrated with the Dallmeier recorders which provide the recording locally as well as the remote display of these images.

Additional integration is currently being explored and this could include automatically tying the video recording to GDX’s data to identify which flat was being called and which token was used.

Keeping a Watchful Eye

The recorders were chosen to provide sufficient capacity for up to 31 days, though incidents can also be archived if they are needed as evidence. “Perhaps a car has been broken into, or there has been criminal damage to a block,” explains SCC community services manager **Lisa Dacruz**. “We can then review the footage, collate what we’ve got and then pass it on to the relevant agency.”

Something needing police attention might be spotted during routine monitoring. “Officers from the local station come here to view the CCTV – either live pictures or recorded footage – and we have a radio link with the police,” explains Dacruz. “In one instance, someone was seen entering a block with what appeared to be a gun.” Suspects have been successfully identified following assaults and cases of criminal damage. But it is not all about law enforcement and preventing anti-social behaviour, adds Dacruz. The scheme is also firmly aimed at providing a service for residents.
The decision to site the scheme’s control within the housing department highlights the difference in emphasis compared with the council’s main CCTV centre. “That is focussed on safety, security and crime,” explains Paskins. “We’ve got a slightly different focus, which is about making decent places to live in.” Dacruz adds: “A major part of our role is to be a friendly neighbour. We keep an eye on the elderly and more vulnerable residents.”

Camera footage and access token usage can be reviewed if someone has not been seen. Residents can call the concierge around the clock. “They can even dial in from a mobile if they are feeling a little vulnerable walking home,” adds Paskins. The concierge can control the CCTV using the Dallmeier software to watch them come home. “It gives them an added sense of security,” he says.

**Staying in Control**

The control centre runs three Dallmeier software tools as well as the **GDX concierge system**. Dallmeier’s **PView remote control software** manages the recorders and its **PGuard system** handles alarms. The **Smartgui interface** gives intuitive control of the producer’s recorders connected to the network using maps designed by the Alarming Company and icons.

The feed from Weston also includes a single analogue signal, which is used to display camera images in real time on a large wall-mounted screen. This is proving useful for demonstrating the system to the many people who are interested in its operation and is also used where several people may need to view more serious incidents whilst they are in progress.

**Looking Ahead**

„This project has proved to be a prime example of partnering and collaborative working at its best,“ says Tietjen Clark, technical director Vic Clark. „Bringing in the equipment manufacturers and installer at an early stage meant that the team was able to draw on the vast cumulative knowledge of all parties concerned. This ensured that the scheme took full advantage of leading edge practice and emerging technologies that offered best value for the client’s requirements.“
A further project to extend the scheme to a further 14 blocks, subject to resident consultation, is out to tender following the success of the Weston scheme. This is set to use radiobased transmission as the towers are dispersed across the city. “The council’s decision to extend the project to other blocks is a tribute to how well this first scheme has turned out,” says Paskins. “People have seen very quickly how successful it has been.”

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