

SPECIAL REPORT

We try to look out for each other

Just press button to summon help

■ Neighbourhood Watch-style security goes digital

EXCLUSIVE

by Danny Boyle
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CHISLEHURST shopkeepers are to get high-tech panic button systems to call for help and warn their neighbours about shoplifters and gangs.

Traders in the High Street will now be able to send secret messages to each other when they are in danger or spot trouble.

They are the first in the borough to get the digital security system, designed to unite them against crime and anti-social behaviour – and provide back-up at the touch of a button.

About 50 shops, pubs and restaurants will be kitted out with AlertBoxes, which are the size of a digital radio and can be hidden under the counter.

When they want to warn their neighbours of suspicious activity, they press an orange button, which will send the alarm to every box on the local network.

However, pressing the red button sends an urgent request for help in an emergency, such as a burglary, serious youth disorder, fire or illness.

Witnesses

Details of which shop sent the message means traders will be able to go to their assistance and act as witnesses or call 999 if necessary.

Sgt Joe Mooney, who organised the project, said: "It is for absolutely anything, from groups of troublemakers to



■ Sgt Joe Mooney is confident the scheme will deter troublemakers

shoplifters or just groups of people who have had a drink and cause residents or businesses problems.

"If a shopkeeper presses the button, they will have people on the scene straight away to help.

"When they receive a message, the first thing they'll do is look out the window, which will also help generate witnesses for us."

Sgt Mooney, who heads the Chislehurst Safer Neighbourhoods team, said: "We hope troublemakers will hear

Businesses on the alert

■ The AlertBox system is like a digital neighbourhood watch designed to unite local businesses electronically.

■ Traders can keep the box, which is the size of a radio, hidden out of sight but close at hand if they feel uneasy

■ If they feel at risk or are alerted by suspicious or rowdy behaviour in or out of their shops, they can send their neighbours WARNING or HELP messages.

■ Every nearby business with such a box is then sent the shop's name, address and telephone number so they can check on their neighbours and offer support or call the police.



■ We hope that troublemakers will hear about this and soon realise there's no point in getting up to no good here

– Sgt Joe Mooney

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The system, which has cost Bromley police and council more than £10,000 in Chislehurst, and was due to be installed this week, could be rolled out to other areas if successful.



■ A good idea, says Wrattens antiques manager Maureen Brown

TARGETED by anti-social youths and petty thefts, Wrattens antiques shop is one of those in Chislehurst set to benefit from the scheme.

Manager Maureen Brown said: "It seems a very good idea. We get some trouble outside the shop with kids and we have a few bits and pieces stolen every now and then.

"We try to look out for each other where we can, but it's sometimes difficult when you're busy with customers. This is just going to help because we'll know when our neighbours need help."

AlertBox commercial manager Kam Kanda said: "It makes businesses realise their neighbours are seconds away if they need them.

"If they just feel uncomfortable or uneasy about something, they can press a button and have someone to reassure or help them.

"It is all about tackling crime and the fear of crime before it becomes a big problem."

Plea for CCTV to keep out yobs



■ CCTV plea by Mark James, John Charlisle and Sgt John Kemp Picture: Jamie Gray pd117038 Buy this picture from kentonline.co.uk

HUNDREDS of Petts Wood residents have petitioned the council to install CCTV cameras to cut crime in the area.

Businesses have collected more than 1,000 signatures campaigning for preventative measures to be installed along the Queensway and Station Square area.

Last year, a mobile CCTV unit recorded almost 350 crimes ranging from criminal damage to robbery at the proposed site and now, businesses want permanent cameras installed.

Mark James, chairman of the Safer Neighbourhood panel, said: "Local businesses have reported an increase in anti-social behaviour over the past couple of years and we think this will act as a

deterrent to those who think they can come into the area and cause trouble."

The council is looking into the possibility of allocating funding towards the scheme, but no decision date has been confirmed.

The petition also has the support of the Petts Wood Safer Neighbourhood team. Former police officer John Charlisle is chairman of the local business association that has led the campaign.

He said: "We haven't got a major problem with crime in the area, but there are a few undesirables that are coming in because they think they will not get caught. These measures will go a long way to put a stop to that."

IN BRIEF

Meetings to help keep you safe

CRAY Valley East Safer Neighbourhood Team is holding a police surgery at the St Mary Cray Village Hall, in St Mary Cray High Street, on Tuesday, March 27, between 11am and 1pm.

■ PLAISTOW and Sundridge Safer Neighbourhood Team is holding a police surgery at the Trinity United Reform Church, in Frelands Road, on Tuesday, March 27, between 2pm and 4pm.

■ BICKLEY Safer Neighbourhood Team is holding a police surgery at the Southborough Lane Library, on Thursday, March 22, between 2pm and 4pm.

Suspect blaze in derelict house

A BLAZE in a derelict house in Orpington is under investigation. Part of the ground floor of an unused house in Chalk Pitt Avenue was destroyed by fire on Thursday night.

Firefighters from Bromley and Sidcup attended the scene at 10.18pm.

Police are treating the incident as suspicious.

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