

# Southwark chosen as 'dry run' for new house buying information packs launch

► **Controversial scheme to go national in June**

► **Packs do not contain enough info say critics**

By Jennifer Clark

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**SOUTHWARK IS being used to 'dry run' a contested scheme, which gives homebuyers information on a property.**

Home Information Packs (HIPs) were launched in the borough on Monday to test the scheme before it's launched nationwide on June 1.

HIPs, which have been criticised by some estate agents, have been launched by the government to offer

'essential' information on each property before it's bought. Consumers will have the opportunity to request a Home Condition Report (HCR), compiled by a fully trained and qualified Home Inspector.

Paul Broadhead, Deputy Director General for the Association of Home Information Pack Providers (AHIPP), who is launching the roll out said: "The aim of the roll out is to provide an opportunity to test new processes and systems and to measure consumer response - it is primarily the consumer that the packs are being introduced for and so it is important that we gauge their response and ensure that the packs work for them."

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which has already piloted the project in Bath and Cambridge, said that nine out of ten people say they are dissatisfied with the process for buying and selling a property. Currently, one in four transactions collapse before contracts are exchanged, costing approximately one million pounds a year.



The pack, which is compiled by certified home inspectors, is designed to give consumers the information they need to prevent

unnecessary spending on valuations and legal advice.

It contains 'required' documents, including a summary of the terms of sale, standard searches (local authority enquiries and a drainage and water search), and an energy performance certificate, as well as 'authorised' documents (guarantees and warranties) that are not mandatory.

But some critics claim vital information is still missing from the packs. Land information provider Landmark says that homeowners may be unwittingly living on serious contamination, and facing both liability and health risks. Property owners living on contaminated land, regardless of whether they were responsible for polluting it, could be liable for remedying the past contamination.

Landmark Managing Director James Sherwood-Rogers maintains that 'it's very important that the packs are as comprehensive as possible', and that while they are a good starting point, as yet they do not tell the whole story. The concern is that buyers will assume the HIPs are an all-inclusive guide, and will fail to

commission additional and necessary searches for certain properties. Landmark is working in consultation with DCLG to provide information about environmental issues.

Other critics argue the status of the pack could be used to by agents to put pressure on buyers, and others doubt the HIP is even useful. The National Association of Estate Agents suggests it will take weeks to compile, holding things up for the seller. Other critics fear that the trial run comes too late and will not leave sufficient time for changes before the mandatory scheme is introduced. A spokesman for the DCLG responded that the trial runs are subject to an ongoing process of evaluation, in which changes are continuously being considered.

The spokesman also pointed out that the HIP contains information about a property's efficiency based on gas bills and carbon dioxide emissions. "Southwark residents are the first in London to have key facts about the energy performance of their homes at their fingertips" he said.

# Traders welcome alert boxes

By Jon Surtees

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**TRADERS ON Lordship Lane in Dulwich have welcomed the introduction of 'Alert Boxes', which help them notify each other of potential security alerts on the street.**

The boxes, which have already been installed around Peckham Rye, The Blue Market in Bermondsey and other parts of Lordship Lane, allow shop workers to communicate with each other to warn others of shoplifters in the area or call for help with an ongoing situation.

Funding for the boxes has come from the 'Cleaner, Greener, Safer' fund that is supplied to each Community Council every year to fund specific projects in its own area.

David Isaacs, manager of William Rose Butchers on Lordship Lane has been working in shops for 30 years and said: "The Alert Box is one of the most effective deterrents that I've ever worked with."

"In Lordship Lane, a high proportion of the shops are female dominated. Every shopkeeper in the nearby vicinity can give an immediate response and be there quicker than the police could possibly be. We can deal with the situation quickly, offer support and then await police back up."

Mr. Isaacs revealed that the system has already been put



Cllr James Barber, East Dulwich Police Sergeant Paul Orhierre and David Isaacs, owner of William Rose Butchers, with the Alert Box already installed in his shop on Lordship Lane

to good use on a number of recent occasions, including once when somebody suffered an epileptic fit outside a shop on Lordship Lane.

The owner of the shop hit the alert box and somebody from a nearby business with first aid knowledge was able to get to the scene and stay with the person until the

estimates are that the first round of alert boxes helped to cut crime in the area by 58% in their first year of operation.

"As well as boosting the fight against crime, these boxes help to build relations between local stores and are especially useful in helping stores run by just a single person to feel safer."

**"We can deal with the situation quickly, offer support and then await police back up"**

ambulance service arrived.

East Dulwich ward councillor, James Barber also threw his backing behind the scheme saying: "Alert Boxes are a simple means of helping local stores to warn each other about shoplifters and other trouble in their area. Police

"Alert boxes are proving their worth in both large and small stores across East Dulwich. I'm already talking to my colleagues across Southwark about the scheme and we hope that it can be rolled out across the borough."



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