

Home Office ‘Safer places: a counter terrorism supplement’ consultation

Response by the Royal Institute of British Architects

July 2009

Introduction

The Royal Institute of British Architects is one of the most influential institutions in the world, and has been promoting architecture and architects since being awarded its Royal Charter in 1837. The 40,000-strong professional institute is committed to serving the public interest through good design. It represents 85% of registered architects in the UK through its regional structure as well as a significant number of international members. Our mission statement is simple – to advance architecture by demonstrating benefit to society and promoting excellence in the profession.

General statement

The RIBA supports the intention of the ‘Safer Places’ strategy. In particular the RIBA welcomes the document’s attempt to de-myth ‘fortress city’ and bunker type architecture that many have suggested will result. In general the call for proportionality is welcomed.

However there are several issues contained within the document that we feel need clarification (including what proportionality entails in the context of Counter Terrorism) for architects to be able to confidently engage with designing in counter-terrorism measures.

Consultation questions

Proportionality -Will this guidance enable counter-terrorism design to be delivered through planning decisions at the local level which are proportionate to the risk?

Proportionality in counter-terrorism design is very important and we suggest more is included in the document to explain what proportionality means in this context. It should emphasise that proportionality is related to risk, therefore before deciding upon a response, the risk to a scheme or business from terrorism must first be assessed. A proportionate response can then be judged to be that which is appropriate when taken as a whole alongside other risks of a scheme that need to be met, such as flooding or fire.

This assessment of risk and judgement of appropriate response must be done with the client, who ultimately decides what an acceptable or unacceptable risk to their business is. If the client and/or design team demonstrates that they have undertaken this process, the planning system should acknowledge that a proportionate response will have been delivered.

CTSAs should recognise that a client or scheme’s level of response to their advice will be contingent on financial constraints and on the other risks to their businesses, which may occur more frequently than a terrorist attack.

We also suggest that one of the initial aims of the CTSA should be to raise awareness of general design-related criteria, which should be considered in early stage of the planning process.

Also, to emphasise that effective design is achieved only by successful integration of client management strategies.

Does the content under section 1 adequately set out the nature of the threat and why designing in counter- terrorism measures are needed?

Greater clarity as to what a ‘crowded place’ is and is not would go some way to address Counter Terrorism ‘creep’ scepticism over the extent to which counter-terrorism measures are needed and will be implemented. While we accept there is no easy ‘cut off’ point, typologies of places that can be considered ‘crowded’ should be more clearly identified. This would also help clarify the types of projects architects and clients should consider.

Broad outlines could be considered both by occupancy (ranging from several hundred in a place of worship or small music venue, up to several hundred thousand at an outdoor festival or multiple sports event) and also density (where the activity / focus encourages close proximity of significant numbers of people).

These could also be sub-divided in to two categories by physical attributes;

Permanent places of assembly, including but not limited to -

Outdoor venues (stadia, racecourses, racetracks, spectator sports complexes)

Indoor venues (arenas, theatres, cinemas, concert halls, exhibition and convention centres, shopping centres, nightclubs, places of worship)

Temporary places of assembly – generally short duration outdoor events overlaid to otherwise public domain or private land, including but not limited to -

Temporary ticketed event venues: festivals (Glastonbury), annual shows (Chelsea Flower Show), exhibition events (Red Bull air race), golf competitions, trade shows and exhibitions.

Temporary open access event venues: parades (Lord Mayor’s Show), road races (London marathon), exhibition events (Red Bull air race). These types of events may have localised ticketed facilities for particular groups, but otherwise attract a transient audience.

The broad outlines should also distinguish between *public* (all the above) and *private* crowded places (for example offices).

Because the document does not distinguish between these distinct typologies of crowded places, there is risk of scepticism towards the risk being unidentifiable and therefore counter-terrorist threats in general are not worth responding to.

Does this document provide sufficient information to persuade you of the importance to integrate counter-terrorism measures into new developments, including the public realm?

We would agree with the guidance advice that each project must be considered on its own merits for an appropriate design and management response. The importance of integrating Counter Terrorism measures into new developments should depend on the risk, which will be specific to a scheme.

Advice received from police and independent security advisors always emphasises that malicious intent is creative, and will aim to circumvent known counter-terrorism measures. Advertising some specific measures taken on projects may not actually benefit either the project or future developments.

Does the guide adequately explain counter-terrorism and where it fits in the planning system?

The document is ambiguous to the status of its authority in the planning system. While the guide says it is a non statutory document, in some places the guide uses phrases such as ‘must consider’. We appreciate the guide is trying to compel maximum action whilst not being a statutory document, but the tone of the language has potential to unduly influence planning decisions and avoid planning officers who may give more weight to the document than its legal status suggests.

Our second concern relates to the practical ways in which Counter Terrorism advice will sit in the planning system. In the document preferred police involvement in the planning process range from development plan documents through to submission of planning application.

Early consultation with CTSA's may prove beneficial up to and at the scheme design stage. However, “preferred police involvement” at the stage of “submission of planning application” would potentially significantly alter schemes already worked to an advanced stage, and which would have already considered a number of other factors in the planning process. We feel including CTSA involvement at this stage could cause undue negative impact on a scheme.

A more appropriate stage for CTSA's and/or security consultants to be involved after the development plan would be at the detailed design stage where initial Counter Terrorism concepts need to be translated to detail.

We would question how information available to CTSA/NATSCO will filter down to local authorities, local planning office and to architects? Is this a linear process or will the onus be on architects to self-identify projects?

The Safer Places document states that CTSA's will operate through existing Police Architectural Liaison Units (ALUs). We would ask whether this is the best delivery method to ensure consistency and transparency of CTSA advice given that the capacity of ALUs vary across the country.

Real experiences of CTSA's from architects and developers vary significantly across the country. Serious questions remain regarding the degree of leverage that CTSA's will have when talking to architects, and particularly to planners who make the final planning decision. There has been more than one case of planning permission being turned down after Counter Terrorism issues were raised by CTSA's to local planning officers. Our concern is there is not enough consistent training of CTSA's to judge proportionality of their advice in relation to other concerns of the project to an architect/design team. Nor is there consistent training of local planning officers so

they can fairly judge the proportionality of CTSA advice or objection in relation to the overall scheme.

Since much of Counter Terrorism is specialist and not easily accessible or understandable to architects or planning officers, there should be recourse to other security experts. We suggest that the register of security advisors should have equal standing in the document so that, if a project has employed a security advisor to address specific CTSA's, this should be included and taken into account by the planning officer.

Does the document adequately reflect that counter terrorism is one of a number of issues considered within planning and that planning decisions often represent compromises between competing priorities?

The document should re-iterate many existing security guides' advice (including Natsco and Green Guide), that security measures must never compromise user safety.

Analogous to our comments on proportionality and risk; the document should reflect more explicitly that Counter Terrorism is one of many issues considered within planning, and planning decisions should consider Counter Terrorism in proportion to other issues, such as sustainability or inclusive design, and not as a separate technical issue.

Planning is not the only forum for compromise, and other factors not within the control of the design team (for example - operational strategy, budget allocation) can also impact on the integration of preventative and mitigation measures.

Are the counter-terrorism design principles helpful and comprehensive?

Those principles set out are helpful but we feel there is a disproportionate emphasis on vehicle-borne attacks. There should be more or equal weighting of advice on biological, electrical, nuclear threats and their design response principles.

There is a danger that by over-emphasising one type of threat and response - the traditional 'physical' hardening of buildings and public places – architects and designers believe cities will be 'fortified' and reluctant to engage with the issues. There is also a danger that design teams/clients treat the other non-physical threats as less 'severe' when addressing those risks could be more appropriate and/or cost effective.

There may be a need to clarify liability. Although no one yet has been sued for not taking on specific Counter Terrorism advice, it has been suggested (explicitly in Argus Professional training material) that cases of manslaughter are possible if architects have chosen not to take Counter Terrorism advice and a major terrorist incident occurs in their scheme.

What costs, if any, including staff and training costs, do you think would be incurred if you were to redesign your building to take account of the principles set out in the guidance?

No comment

Do you think there is likely to be additional construction costs for buildings designed in line with this guidance? If so, please state what those costs would be.

It would be difficult to say that costs would not be incurred from counter-terrorism measures. However, with careful consideration and design, Counter Terrorism design can be conducive to other security features and/or public realm design, such as public seating or landscaping, thereby mitigating some of the additional construction costs.

Additionally, if the risk is assessed and recommendations established at an early stage, the physical elements can be incorporated and acknowledged as part of the scheme requirements. Does this then count as ‘additional construction costs’?

However in many large scale projects, which may take several years to design, gain planning approval and build; during which the assessment of threat and recommendation of appropriate counter terrorism measures may change significantly over the development period, this can increase project costs for latter stage changes or upgrades in physical protective measures significantly.

Lastly, the document does not give distinct advice for retro-fitting existing buildings, but in these cases any Counter Terrorism measurements would be additional and potentially costly, especially in listed buildings.

Annexes A and B – Do the annexes enable you to understand the range of technical counter-terrorism design measures that are available and might be needed to reduce the vulnerability to terrorist attack?

As per our comment on design principles, there should be equal emphasis on threats other than vehicle borne to reflect the changing nature of terrorist attacks.

We suggest that specific structural and technical advice may be counter productive, and it would be more useful for the document to outline general principles. This would also be more consistent with the other document message that each case should be considered on its own merits.

For example the recommendation to ‘avoid large spans’ might be challenging in public realm design where, often, venues and stadiums are designed with large spans to accommodate large crowds in mind. In these cases, Counter Terrorism measures are implemented in other ways and we recommend that Counter Terrorism design measures are considered in a holistic approach rather than through specific measures.

Case Studies Annex F – Do these provide sufficient inspiration to produce innovative counter-terrorism design solutions?

When communicating the Safer Places agenda it is important that images illustrate good Counter Terrorism design. The images in this consultation document still reflect a fortress nature rather than unobtrusive interventions such as landscaping or use of seating as vehicle barriers.

Case Studies Annex F - Are there any more good counter-terrorism design case studies that can be used from within the UK?

Are there any other suggestions and comments you have in relation to this supplement?

We feel more should be mentioned regarding retro-fitting. In existing tight urban typologies, how to integrate CT design if necessary with other concerns of the built environment will be critical.