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News

Now Big Brother really is watching us

23 November 2006 11:52

From today criminals will be tracked through city streets by a new CCTV system which captures images more clearly than ever before.

And the no-nonsense message to crooks was that they will be left with no hiding place after £500,000 was invested on the pioneering digital system.

Previous concerns about analogue pictures were that the images were not always sharp enough to give a positive identification of a criminal, but the new system is so powerful that a camera on City Hall can zoom in on rooftops in Tombland and record a clear image.

Launching the scheme, Norwich City Council leader Steve Morphew said: "This is phase one - we now have a state-of-the art digital system which puts Norwich at the forefront of CCTV technology in the country.

"The system gives much better quality pictures which the police can use for taking prosecutions and it will act as a better deterrent as a result.

"What we can do when we extend is get a better picture of what's going on so that there can be a much more rapid response from the police, wardens and other authorities. This gives us the potential to respond instantly."

And he warned the criminals more of the powerful surveillance would be rolled out into the suburbs, city estates and problem areas.

He said: "This system has the capacity to be extended to take in residential areas where there are hot-spots and where people want and need it."

CCTV has been playing a part in tackling crime since it was first installed in the city in 1995. Camera footage led detectives with almost no leads to four men involved in the robbery and murder of David Lucas whose body was dumped in the River Wensum in July last year. It also played a key role in the prosecution of three soldiers who were involved in an unprovoked attack on two men Outside Grecco Pizza and Kebabs in Prince of Wales Road.

The soldiers from the Household Cavalry and the Welsh Guards all pleaded guilty to charges of assault occasioning actual bodily harm after they were captured on CCTV kicking their victims as they lay on the ground.

Chief Inspector Gary Tempest said the new system would have a major impact on tackling crime.



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He said: "This is a significant development for the police. This digital equipment means we can efficiently detect the offence, find the offender on camera and extract the evidence.

"I am convinced this will increase the police's capacity to catch criminals.

"I have been very impressed by the equipment - the quality of zoomed in images and the ability of the operators to use the equipment so there are no areas where the cameras cannot go."

Insp Tempest said 40 officers were now being trained to review footage, use it to detect offences and ultimately take those offences to court.

But although the new CCTV system has been broadly welcomed, others have struck a cautionary note.

Green Party leader Adrian Ramsey said: "We are aware of the advantages that will be brought in with the switch to a digital system and there are locations in the city where CCTV will be advantageous.

"But we do need to remember that CCTV can only be a part of tackling crime other measures such as more police community support officers and ensuring there are adequate recreational facilities for young people are also needed."

Mairi Clare from Civil Rights group Liberty said: "The reality is that CCTV is often used a substitute for adequate policing.

"A CCTV camera will not prevent a sexual assault or a mugging; at best it might provide evidence that could lead to a conviction.

"Studies show that the most effective way of curbing crime is regular, consistent police patrolling and good street lighting - couldn't this money have been better spent?"

After the system was announced, the Evening News talked to people in the city. Pearl Evans, 68, from Sprowston said: "If you have nothing to hide then you don't need to be worried about the camera's being there."

But Stuart Tuck who also owns a market stall said: "CCTV maybe there on the streets, but how can the public be assured that the cameras are turned on and are working efficiently."

T - Have you been a victim of crime which has been solved by CCTV? Will the £500,000 investment in the digital equipment help combat crime in the city? Write to Letters, Evening News, Prospect House, Rouen Road, Norwich, NR1 1RE or email eveningnewsletters@archant.co.uk.

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