

FROM: NO CCTV (www.no-cctv.org.uk)

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Attn: News Desks

-- BEGINS --

BBC breaches charter with one sided CCTV debate

On Wednesday 12th August Radio 4's Reality Check programme looked at the growth of surveillance in the UK with particular reference to the cameras on the Cowley Road, East Oxford.

The BBC has a responsibility as a public service broadcaster to present both sides of the argument and to not take sides. Section 44 of the BBC's charter agreement states:

“The BBC must do all it can to ensure that controversial subjects are treated with due accuracy and impartiality in all relevant output “

In this programme that was clearly not the case and consequently they are in breach of their charter.

No CCTV has had an active campaign in Oxford fighting the installation of the Cowley Road cameras since October 2007. No CCTV produced a comprehensive report into the Cowley Road CCTV scheme [1]. Yet the BBC did not invite us to take part in the programme. The result was a mix of pro CCTV propaganda and lies.

The panel members discussing CCTV were: Oxford's CCTV poster girl Jan Bartlett who owns the Premier Lettings agency on Cowley Road, Thames Valley Assistant Chief Constable Nick Gargan (former Chair of the ACPO Peer Review Group looking at legislation and guidance in relation to covert investigation), Isabella Sankey (policy director of Liberty) and Dr Ian Brown (Senior Research Fellow at Oxford Internet Institute).

The programme opened with the host Justin Rowlett being shown the cameras near the Manzil Way play area on the Cowley Road. Jan Bartlett explained the life changing impact that CCTV has had since the cameras were installed in January:

“What we've noticed is since the cameras have been up it's just been fantastic. As you can see people can sit here safely now. You could not have done that six months ago and now we can come out here at lunchtime, the children are safe, we used to see all sorts of weirdos hanging around here watching the children play which is really really worrying.”

No one on the programme is able to challenge this vision and so CCTV is presented as an effective crime fighting tool and creator of utopia. The Cowley Road was not a crime ridden no go area. It has the same friendly laid back atmosphere now that it had before surveillance cameras were introduced.

Assistant Chief Constable Gargan is asked whether cameras help prevent crime. It is no surprise that Gargan thinks they do, he says:

“Their performance in preventing crime is pretty clear, their performance in detecting crime is really very clear indeed and ... er ... we in the police hear, across the United

Kingdom, we hear from communities who want to have these cameras, they know that they'll make them safer but they certainly make communities feel safer too and we will do what the community asks us to do."

This is the same Assistant Chief Constable Gargan that told the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 'A Surveillance Society?' inquiry:

"Having spent many a long and, frankly, boring hour watching CCTV coverage live in town centres and city centres, it is amazing how little impact they seem to have on the behaviour of all but a very few individuals who are very conscious of the cameras and play up to those cameras." [2]

The reality is that the performance of CCTV in preventing crime is pretty clearly abysmal. Several studies have confirmed this. The recent Campbell Collaboration evaluation of CCTV found: "the evaluations of CCTV schemes in city and town centers and public housing [...] as well as those focused on public transport, did not have a significant effect on crime" [4].

But Radio 4 listeners were not presented with this information.

When Dr Ian Brown tries to bring a touch of reason into the debate, by referring to some of the studies into the effectiveness of CCTV, Bartlett springs back into attack responding:

"[...] you're telling me it's a coincidence that those lovely cameras went up and all of a sudden our life is regained. We've got our park back, we've got our streets back."

More unsubstantiated pro camera vitriol and time for Liberty to come back into the debate - Isabella Sankey finishes the job off:

"I wouldn't say for a second that that's necessarily a coincidence. I think what's interesting about your case is that it was the community that came together and decided that they wanted cameras..."

At this point all the programme's claims to be a Reality Check or to involve "people closely involved in the issues" didn't just go out of the window but into the next universe. The policy director of Liberty, who does not live in Oxford, is not part of that community, and is not against CCTV, tells the Radio 4 audience that this CCTV scheme is particularly good because the community wanted it! Liberty clearly didn't do their homework either - nobody from Liberty contacted No CCTV before the programme or bothered to find out the views of "the community". No CCTV has campaigned along the Cowley Road and the vast majority of people we have spoken to in the community have been against the cameras. Local Green councillors tell us that they have received no letters in support of the CCTV cameras only letters against. Once again none of this was reported in the programme.

The Cowley Road was also featured in a recent BBC television programme 'The truth about crime' which was recorded before and as the cameras were installed. Once again the pro CCTV view was represented. 'The truth about crime' did interview No CCTV but the footage did not feature in the broadcast programme. Clearly there are a lot of people working hard to ensure that the Cowley Road cameras stay in and the BBC it seems is playing its part.

-- ENDS --

References:

[1] See http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/docs/No-CCTV_Interim_report-Cowley_Road_v1_2.pdf

[2] See <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmhaff/58/5802.htm#evidence>
[3] See <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldselect/ldconst/18/1802.htm#evidence>
[4] Effects of Closed Circuit Television Surveillance on Crime - http://db.c2admin.org/doc-pdf/Welsh_CCTV_review.pdf

[An extended analysis of the Reality Check programme can be found at http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/blog/bbc_breaches_charter_with_one_sided_cctv_debate.htm]

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. No CCTV is a UK group campaigning against the excessive use of surveillance cameras in the UK. Their homepage is at www.no-cctv.org.uk
2. For further information contact Charles Farrier on press@no-cctv.org.uk