

Submissions**The Castle at Taunton**Anti Social Behaviour
June to September 2019

- 12.06.18 Man with blood on his head and no top ran into Hotel and up to corridor on first floor. When asked to leave, he refused and shouted at Brazz Manager, claiming his parents were staying in the Hotel. He left the Hotel prior to police arriving.
- 04.07.18 Four teenagers came into the Hotel, making a mess in the toilets, running riot and dragging toilet roll all over the public areas of Hotel, spitting from the top floor onto the reception table and tore curtains and curtain pole from the wall.
After they left the Hotel they were seen throwing rocks at a homeless man and were reported by a member of the public
- 04.07.18 2.30pm Distressed and rude man came into Hotel to purchase a book. He became very agitated and was rude to the reception. He said he was bipolar and not taking his meds, he then left. Returned at 6pm and was very rude to Receptionist again insisting they book various taxis for him.
- 16.07.18 A dishevelled female ran into the Bow Bar, which was not open to the public, she ran round the bar and ran out again, saying she was just checking the bar door. She returned a short time later and shouted abuse at the receptionist, then took some magazines and accused the receptionist of being a thief
- 28.07.18 A very drunk lady came into reception lobby and wanted to charge her phone in lobby. Was very rude and abusive when asked to leave.
- 31.07.18 A resident guest complained that they felt very intimidated when walking around Taunton, due to number of Homeless and drunk/drugged people around the town, particularly the beggars and drunks outside Castle Bow.
- 21.08.18 NAME REDACTED came into the Hotel and ran around public areas and function rooms switching all the lights off.
- 27.08.18 A man entered the Bow Bar and stole a member of staff's wallet.
- 29.08.18 Castle staff members had to call an ambulance for a very drunk man who had passed out under The Castle Bow, he was unresponsive & Castle staff stayed with him until ambulance arrived.
- 31.08.18 A very intimidating man, with a "tear drop" tattoo under his eye and a tag on his ankle, walked into reception and became very aggressive and verbally abusive with reception and front office staff when refused access to a telephone to make a call.
- 01.09.18 Early hours of the morning, a man was trespassing in our car park and grounds and refused to leave, when asked to do so by Night Porter. He wanted access to the Hotel and when refused he then sat on the chair outside the front door screaming and shouting abuse.

- 03.09.18 A party of three people had drinks and dined in Brazz. They were quite loud and disruptive and asked by restaurant manager to be mindful of other diners. They then ran off without paying their bill.
- 05.09.18 Early hours of the morning, a lady came to front door to ask if we had any rooms. The Hotel was fully booked but the lady asked if she could come into reception, to ring around and try to find another Hotel, as she was very frightened outside by herself. The Night Porter allowed her access but she soon became very distressed and upset, saying that she had already had contact with the police earlier, due to a domestic incident. She became increasingly distressed; the Police did come to collect her.
- 06.09.18 NAME REDACTED attempted to gain access to The Hotel several times but was prevented.
- 09.09.18 A man gained access to the kitchen area and eventually to the Staff Lockers, a member of staff's wallet was stolen.
- 18.09.18 Resident guest commented that he was really shocked by number of homeless, drunk and "high" people he encountered when walking through town. He said he was bothered and hassled several times and was surprised how bad Taunton's antisocial behaviour problems are.
- 22.09.18 NAME REDACTED came into public areas and was walking around reception; she was very aggressive when asked to leave.
- 24.09.18 Police were called to deal with two homeless people, a man and a woman who were screaming, shouting and swearing at each other on Castle Green. The woman who was on crutches then started smashing something with her crutch. Guests were leaning out of their bedroom windows watching and recording this.
- 01.10.18 A man came in and asked to use the phone and the toilet. Reception said this was not possible but he ignored them and used the toilets anyway but did leave quietly straight after.

Crime in Taunton & area

I regret that my commitments in Court have prevented me from attending this important meeting.

My comments are based upon my experiences as Resident Judge of Taunton Crown Court since March 2013.

Crime statistics

1. There has been a considerable reduction in the numbers of cases coming before the Crown Court over the past few months. In my experience this is not as a result in a reduction in crimes being committed but is as a result of the following factors:
 - (i) The requirement that those suspected of criminal activities and who are arrested must be charged within 28 days has led to a significant reduction in cases coming before the Courts. This is because those suspects are then released 'under further investigation.' The lack of police resources means that these cases are frequently put to one side whilst new matters are investigated, put under further investigation and so on. At a meeting with Resident Judges the Chief Constable told us that last year Avon & Somerset Constabulary had 3,000+ cases that were under further investigation.
 - (ii) There has been a significant decrease in cases alleging rape or serious sexual offending because of the need to fully carry out proper disclosure involving the examination and interrogation of mobile phones, social network sites and so on. Again a number of high profile cases demonstrated that full and proper disclosure did not

always take place (potentially leading to miscarriages of justice). The police and the CPS are now ensuring that disclosure is fully and properly dealt with in such cases. Again however the lack of resources has meant that there has been a significant decline in the number of such cases coming before the Courts whilst proper disclosure is carried out.

Public perception and impact

2. I am not able to comment on the public perception and impact of crime generally, save that the Victim Impact Statements that I see in almost all cases demonstrate the significantly damaging effects that crimes have upon the victims and their families. This is something that all sentencers have to take into account when determining an appropriate sentence within the Sentencing Guidelines.

Closed circuit television

3. The use of CCTV footage in Court together with the increasing use of body worn camera footage from the police has a considerable and beneficial effect upon the detection of crime (and arguably its prevention). Individuals involved in episodes of anti social behaviour or violence in the town centres may (if not too adversely affected by alcohol or drugs) think twice about behaving in such ways because of the presence of CCTVs.
4. Defendants when confronted with the evidence provided by CCTV and/or body worn camera footage often plead Guilty whereas absent such evidence they contest the matter no doubt hoping that potential witnesses may fail to attend Court and/or fail to give evidence sufficient to lead to the conviction.

5. It is essential in my view that CCTV equipment should be properly funded, maintained and operated at all times if it is to have any meaningful impact on the reduction of anti-social behaviour in the towns.

Rough sleepers

6. There has been a massive rise in the number of homeless and rough sleepers throughout the County. In a recent document sent to me one Local Authority stated that it was proud of the fact that, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary, it only had 7 rough sleepers in its town, all of whom were known to the Council. Such a claim is demonstrably wrong in the town in question.
7. The continuing reductions in Local Authority funding have led to a massive rise in street sleepers or those forced to 'sofa surf'. Often they are the least able to cope for themselves and are often addicted to drugs.
8. The removal of funding from the Somerset Drugs and Alcohol Service has led that organisation to withdraw its regular drug testing regime and which formed part of the basis for successful Drug Rehabilitation Requirement Orders being imposed by the Courts. With the removal of this testing those addicted to drugs lost an important element leading to compliance with and enforcement of the DRR's. The addictions continued and crime consequently committed to fund the habit.

General crime and anti-social behaviour issues.

9. In terms of relatively minor offences of assault and anti-social behaviour generally the availability of cheap alcohol is undoubtedly the root cause of such offending.

10. The majority of those appearing before the Courts are in the approximate age range of between 16 and 24 and male. Putting it simply they often grow up and out of criminal activity.
11. The cuts to Social Services budgets, to the provision of youth services etc and to support services generally have inevitably led to an increase in feckless youths becoming involved in criminality.
12. Those families and areas likely to be associated with such activity are easily identifiable and extra resources put into such families and areas will undoubtedly be beneficial in the long run.
13. I am conscious however of the damaging and continuing effects of government cuts year upon year and the impossible task being asked of the police, the CPS, the NHS and local authorities. Each of these organisations is in my view seriously under resourced and the consequences of this are all too clear in the criminal and anti-social behaviour that leads to the appearance of some of the offenders in Court.

In my judgement it is only when proper resources are applied to tackle these issues that there will be a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour and we can all live in the sort of towns and society that we would wish. Lack of money whilst not the root of *all* evil is certainly a significant contributor to it.

His Honour Judge Ticehurst

Resident Judge

Taunton Crown Court

14th February 2019



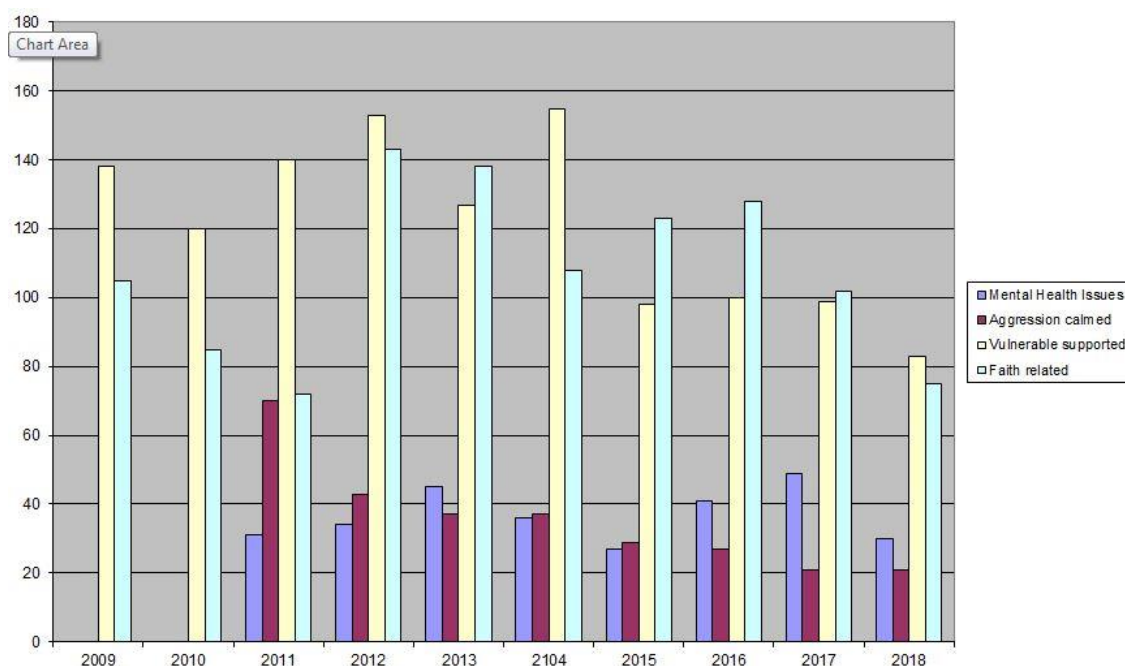
Feedback from Taunton Street Pastors with 2018 Statistics included

I am pleased to share some statistics evidencing of the value of the Street Pastor teams which currently operate in Taunton town centre on Saturday nights and other special occasions, as well as on the Halcon and Priorswood estates. Our 2018 data has just been published (January 2019) but it must be appreciated that the numbers alone cannot adequately represent the impact on individuals' lives as God uses street pastors to listen, care and provide practical help as well as respond to enquiries about spiritual issues and personal faith.

To give you illustrations that are up to date: On 15 December 2018 our team prayed at the start of the evening for indications from God of where we should look to see His opportunities. Among other signs we were given pictures of a pair of walking boots and dancing Christmas trees. As the evening progressed we were led to meet a homeless man who sought prayer following the death of his brother from sudden adult death syndrome last week and the further distress he is experiencing at the death of his friend's 3 year old daughter. On conclusion of the prayer the street pastors were amazed to see a pair of walking boots sitting on the pavement bedside him (they were not his).

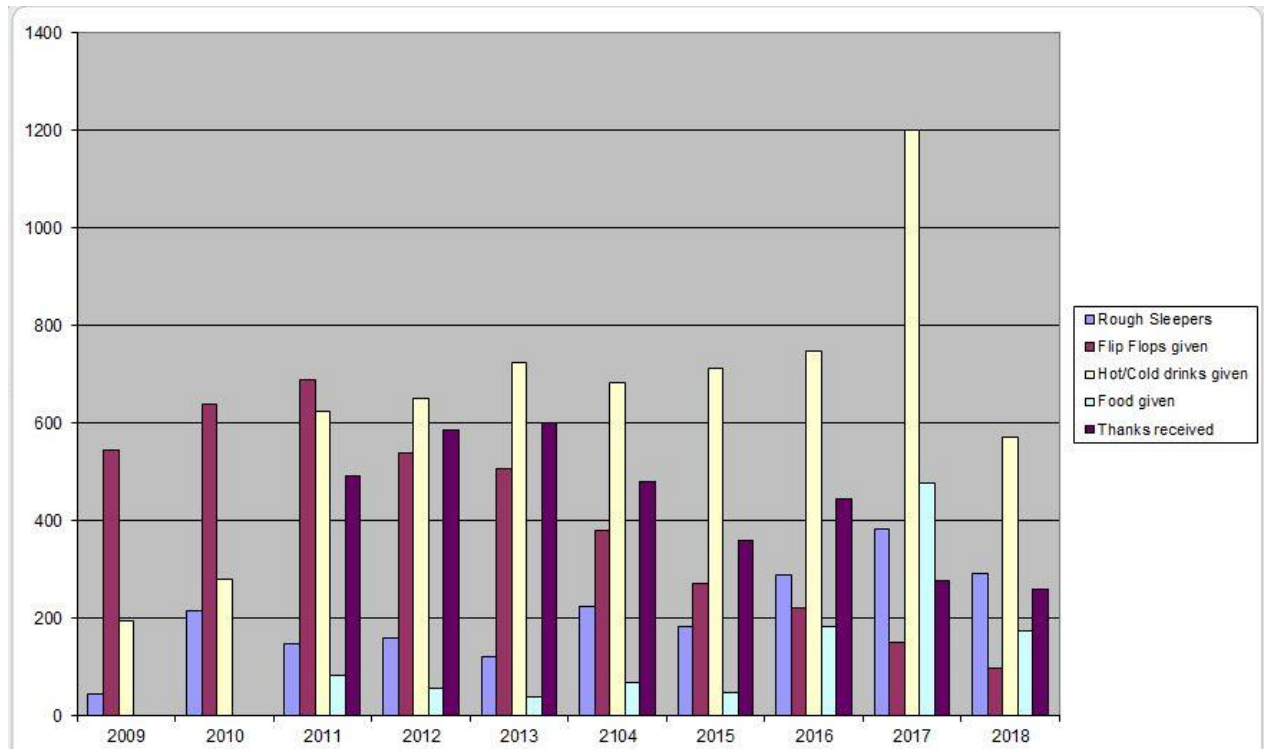
In the early hours of the same morning one team was drawn into conversation with three men one of whom wanted to discuss the existence of God – As some other street pastors prayed for their colleagues engaged in the discussion they looked up and saw that the team and the men were standing under the town centre Christmas illuminations depicting Christmas trees at a jaunty angle!

Since launching Taunton Street Pastors in 2008 we have trained and commissioned 129 Street Pastors for service



In those eleven years we:

- picked up nearly 20,000 glass bottles and cans from the streets, avoiding injured feet and harm from these potential weapons
- signposted 348 people to agencies that can help them sort out a personal problem or issue
- enjoyed conversations with nearly 1,200 people about issues relating to their beliefs
- had 2,355 encounters with people who were sleeping rough on the streets of our town and have offered a listening ear, blankets, hot drinks, food and signposting to supportive agencies/organisations
- gave away 4,167 pairs of flip flops to women to avoid injured feet from broken glass
- gave away more than 6,450 hot drinks and bottled water calmed situations down with the offer of 5,332 chewy sweets
- dispensed nearly 500 foil blankets or hoodies to prevent hypothermia
- conducted nearly 301,000 hours of patrols, night and day seeking to listen, care and help.



Our time is given free of charge without prejudice but, if we had been paid the current minimum living wage for just the hours patrolled in 2018, it would have cost £17,000

The team and individual members have received several awards for their service over the eleven years of operation, most notably the Queen's Award for Voluntary Groups,

the equivalent of an MBE for teams awarded in 2014 and an MBE awarded to our Coordinator in December 2017.

It is important to note:

- Not everyone can go out on the streets – some pray, others support financially. All are part of the team
- Town centre teams go out every Saturday night patrolling and frequently offering a free street cafe through until the early hours, working with anyone and everyone – clubbers, party goers, diners, dealing with those who are impacted by drink or drugs, the homeless, the vulnerable, victims of crime, etc.
- By being a very visible presence, we stop bad things happening, reassure and most of all just get alongside people and chat/listen
- We save lives including suicidal situations – see one such example below
- We also work in the Halcon and Priorswood estates weekly – This is increasingly important as statutory services are withdrawn yet Christian volunteers are a stable and constant presence
- It costs approximately. £11.5k to operate Taunton Street Pastors for a year. Key items of expenditure are our co-ordinator for 1 day/week (like most schemes, we pay for this from donations by churches and individuals), insurance, premises rental, running training courses for potential Street Pastors, running refresher training (all team members are highly trained and have to undertake compulsory refresher training every 3 years), providing hot drinks and water, flip flops, sweets, foil blankets, etc.
- Across the year we typically:
 - engage with thousands of people
 - have 300 encounters with rough sleepers
 - address 40 mental health situations
 - give out 600 drinks
 - give out hundreds of sweets, often to calm aggressive situations
 - give out 100 pairs of flip flops
 - have 100 faith-related conversations
 - constantly pray for our town and see answers to prayer every night
- We maintain a great relationship with most people and enjoy a strong reputation among many groups including CCTV operators, door staff, the police, etc.
- Since Autumn 2018 Taunton Street Pastors have been working with their counterparts in Bridgwater to respond to the influx of some 6,000 largely male workers engaged in the construction of the Hinkley C Nuclear power station. A grant from the Hinkley Community Fund has enabled us to appoint an administrator for a few hours each week to release our coordinator for this developmental work over the next three years.
- Both Bridgwater and Taunton Street Pastor teams are made safer and are better able to help others as a consequence of the generosity of the Sedgemoor CCTV centre who have gifted the radios used by each team. Although the previous (SWBAC) CCTV scheme made radios available at a discount, the funding was always a challenge and the gift and ongoing maintenance of the Sedgemoor-provided handsets is invaluable and ensures that the Street Pastors are networked to the doorstaff, police and others who are on the same radio channel in each town. The CCTV operators have expressed their appreciation of the Street Pastor's services on numerous occasions and

welcome SP trainees to the Bridgwater-based control centre as part of their initial training. Any threat to the continuation of this provision could seriously jeopardise the safety and therefore the viability of the SP teams.

- Street Pastors experience a real sense of frustration when they encounter people with mental health issues or homelessness late at night when the statutory agencies are unavailable. Whilst the teams have considerable local knowledge of where to signpost people to, it is heart-breaking to have to conclude a patrol and go home to a warm bed and a caring family knowing others don't have those basic needs met. In situations where there is a serious mental or physical health need the SP teams are able to try and make contact with the ambulance service or the council's emergency duty team. It has been good to see the development of a partnership in recent weeks between churches, council and health agencies to offer a night café on very cold nights.

It is important to reiterate that the numbers given above cannot convey the significance of the ministry. Perhaps the following extract from the patrol report of 4 November 2018 brings it home better than most:

'As the team walked down North Street with the intention of calling into Mambo and Zinc nightclubs, but a fairly inebriated gentleman approached them and said there was a guy by the river threatening to "top himself". The team assured him they would investigate, initially thinking whoever it was he was referring to had moved on, but upon reaching the Brewhouse Theatre car park, they heard hysterical screaming coming from the area behind Morrisons, adjacent to the footbridge.'

'There was found to be a young man floundering in the river and unable to use the lifebelt someone had thrown to him. SP Ian immediately rang 999, SP Joanna tried to calm the lad's hysterical girlfriend and the team leader held the rope which the lad in the water had subsequently managed to cling on to but, in his state of panic, didn't have the desire/ability to pull himself to safety. Two men came and lay prone over the edge of the wall, with other folk anchoring their legs and managed to reach 'J' and haul him to safety. The leader supplied a SP jacket to cover him as he had been in the water for 20-25 minutes altogether, until the Fire, Police and paramedics arrived shortly afterwards, then he was placed in an ambulance and taken to hospital. The team then returned to Base and we all prayed for the situation, thanking God for a good outcome.'

A week or so later I found myself sharing this account with someone in a matter of fact way, saying, 'It's what we do.' My listener then pointed out that this is one family which wouldn't have an empty place at the Christmas table and wouldn't have to suffer the pain and anguish of a suicide which inevitably sends ripples out into the family and friends of the person lasting years, even affecting subsequent generations.

You will appreciate that a summary, even of this length, cannot do justice to the remarkable catalogue of encounters enjoyed by street pastors in parts of our community that hitherto the church has struggled to penetrate. If friends who value our work have an opportunity we would be pleased to offer a presentation with testimony highlighting more about the service we offer and the remarkable stories we have to tell.

We are grateful for the generous support by many people and charitable bodies over the years. We recognise the many calls on public and charitable funds but ask that you will feel able to continue to partner with us in this remarkable opportunity to demonstrate Christian compassion and care to anybody and everybody.

Thank you

Adrian Prior-Sankey MBE
February 2019

Coordinator, Taunton Street Pastors
and Ascension Trust Representative
Home: 01823 253 463
Mobile: 07973 252 346
web: www.taunton.streetpastors.org.uk



1 – R. Mudge

Dear Sir

Having seen the article in the Gazette please see my response below

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes - I can not recall the last time I was able to shop in town without hearing drunk people swearing and arguing. On one occasion I witnessed a drunk male drop his trousers and defecate in the street between willow and Halifax. This was at 3pm. Town full of people I was with with 6 and 8 year old daughters.

I have seen drunk males getting into fights in the town - near to McDonalds and north street where many grouped together with duvets and belongings. Furthermore I have seen 'packages' which I can only assume to be small packets of drugs being openly passed to each other in daylight in the town.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

I used to go into the town Center at least once a week. I haven't been into Taunton since Christmas - this is directly due to the anti-social behaviour which SCARES my children so they also do not want to go into town - I now use internet shops.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem

Drug use and dealing

Drunkenness

Public Order - swearing and fighting

Aggressive begging

Kind regards

2.

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

As a former Police Officer of 23 years and former member of the town centre team i feel that it is unsafe to take my young family into the town given the presence of aggressive beggars, street drinking and drunkenness, open and unashamed drug dealing and use to the point we will travel to Bristol to shop, the town centre is feral and has been declining over the last few years

I lay the blame for this squarely at those in the Police who have the responsibility of Policing the town, there open neglect has caused the situation and there constant inability and unwillingness to deal with these problem individuals perpetuates the situation, i have written to both the MP and PCC, the MP never replied, the PCC told me crime wasn't her responsibility

When i did meet with a chief inspector and an inspector i was given rubbish about more police resources and corporate buzzwords which i feel totally unacceptable and i feel lied too by those in charge least of all an inexperienced sergeant in the post whose clear lack of interest or leadership is a reason the problem continue

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre

Yes I don't bring my family there and i hear nothing but negative comments about the feral state of the town centre

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

The open consumption of alcohol and drunkenness together with the use of controlled drugs, the presence of gangs of youths around McDonald's who are half hearted challenged by useless Police officers who just walk away and leave the problem to continue

And most of all the ineptitude of the Police namely the sergeant and inspector who must be brought to account

S Mudge

3. – C. and M. Douglass

-- in answer to your survey on anti social behaviour in Taunton I visited Taunton yesterday and will not be doing it again for a while!

Not just crime and antisocial behaviour, the town itself !Parking charges are high and the public toilets are not fit for use. The toilets by the library are disgusting, daren't take a child in there !

Yesterday two of the toilets were so filthy and full of goodness knows what, and another had somebodys bedding and belongings in it, couldn't tell if anyone was under the bedding but I didn't want to get too close ! Taunton has a lot of problems which need to be looked at, and it has nothing to do with the cuts in funding,before anyone uses that as an excuse

4. – G Colins

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Just last week i was at the ATm and one of the rough sleepers came up to me and another older lady and in a very grough voice shouted ' you owe me money' "i want it now" really hassling us. I was on a mobility scooter

I have seen a poor teenager give money to a beggar and suddenly he was surrounded by many of them all with hands out surrounding him

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

My wife does not feel safe in town, and we do not come in at night which we would do if there were not so many "homeless" about

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

It's the begging, the violent begging , i have seen man handling to try to get money. We have so many "homeless' well they beg and say they are home less when really they have a home. They have 2 sets of clothes, the nice ones and the dirty begging ones. Being constantly hassled and seeing them in all the doors is unnerving

5. – A. Hancock

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes. As a loss prevention employee for one of the town's largest retailers, I deal with crime, specifically theft and threats of violence regularly both inside and outside of the store.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton?

No but given my close proximity to my employer in the town centre and the fact that I'm a familiar face to a lot of shoplifters, I consider my own safety a lot more carefully than I used to. We haven't seen a decline in the amount of customers we see through the doors but having spoken with some of them, its clear that there are concerns amongst people about what state the town will be in in the future if

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

We all know that drugs and homelessness are the root cause of a significant amount of crime in this town. Certain small businesses provide a market for stolen goods which encourages desperate people to steal in order to buy drugs from dealers. In their desperation, they can become violent. Its an incredibly vicious circle. This is a national problem that cannot just be solved at a local level.

With the resources made available for policing at the level they are, the provision of Street Wardens is a crucial part of making people feel safe and secure in the town centre. They link in with the public, retailers, the police and the control centre in Bridgwater, they have a vast amount of local knowledge and help deter crime from occurring.

We need to create a robust network involving the whole town (charitable organisations included) in which information can be shared and we can work together to deter and reduce crime and there needs to be a concerted effort to tackle illegal markets involving drugs and stolen goods.

Ultimately, engagement with retailers is key. Debenhams, Marks and Spencer, TK Max and Sainbury's. Our losses combined are eye watering and the council needs to take their perspectives seriously if they want our high street to survive. I would encourage them to contact them immediately.

6. – P. Messy

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes I have, not being British I have been told to Fuck off back to my country!
(Apologies for the swearing).

I have witnessed more than 5 times drug dealing (between the hours of 8.30 and 7.00pm), the most shocking one was in front of my kid school (Northtown) at 8.35 in the morning.

Witness in front of my all family a gentleman high on spice on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of Morissons Car Park. Tried the reach out to my local council and he passed the buck...

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Not me as I have business there as I need to be there, but some of my client have told me that they are scared in parking in the multi storey car park, they are also not comfortable with all the rough sleepers and beggars in town and come less or try to avoid Taunton. I have been trading for 5 years in Taunton and my local delivery have gone up by 60%. People are willing to use the Town but not willing to come in town.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

Drugs,

Sleeping rough,

Kids not being social and do not care about others...

I will gladly come and share all these point if invited.

7. – C. Rowan

In response to the questions concerning crime in Taunton, I am affected by crime for five out of every seven days, every week, as I work in the town centre. I find it harder and harder to do my real job, as I now spend so much of my working day, chasing drug and alcohol addicted thieves from the shop where I work. If I leave the shop for a lunch break, I am constantly pestered for money or cigarettes, by these same people. Up until last week, there were two wardens who were a great help to all the retailers, but apparently, someone, somewhere, decided they were not necessary! There is also a health issue with these people, apart from discarded needles, they all seem to think it's ok to use anywhere as a toilet, Goodlands Gardens, alleyways such as down the side of HSBC bank, behind Mambos. Seeing all I do see during the working day, there is no way I would venture into the town centre at night. The biggest problems i feel are the number of homeless, alcohol or drug dependant people that now live here. I know there is a place which is supposed to help these people, but i think there is a difference between helping and enabling. In my opinion, giving them clothes, food and even a bed at night is not helping them, it just enables them to carry on stealing, to get money for drugs and alcohol. These people need proper help, to change the way they live. It's also a well known fact around the town, that they take their stolen goods and sell them in the perkin warbeck and at a hairdressers down East Reach, so why is nothing done about this? I am getting to the point where I have had enough of the abuse I get from these people and the shop cannot sustain these levels of loss for much longer. I only continue because I need the money I earn to keep my house. I often feel that I just want to cry.

8 – T. Ball

Hi,

I felt compelled to write having seen details of the review you are taking, in the Somerset Gazette online. My reason for this is due my being aware of how the situation is deteriorating (as I live locally, in central Taunton, in the Wilton area) and also because of a particular incident in December.

1: have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes. In December I was walking into town on my own in the middle of the day, as I was walking alongside Hatchers I became aware of something drawing attention in the distance outside Boots. I quickly became aware that it was because of two women and a man, clearly under the influence of drugs shouting. They appeared to all be friends, and they were listening to the man recalling something that had happened to him, he was really shouting and swearing, and was very animated. This was attracting a lot of attention by passers-by understandably, not only due to their aggressive and loud behaviour, but also the fact that they could barely stand, they were so intoxicated.

As I was walking (quite briskly) and I came into their eye lines, one of the females, for some reason, took a beeline for me. She then started screaming at the top of her voice "what's she looking at ?" I was horrified to realise she had singled me out of

everyone, and despite her friends initially ignoring her she persisted. She became quickly more aggressive screaming "what's she f***** looking at? Her over there!" Her friends turned to look at what she was screaming about, and the man grabbed her arm to stop her coming over towards me. At this point I was incredibly scared at what she was going to do, but fortunately for me it was a very busy day (just before Christmas) and I was able to disappear into the crowd, and get as quickly as I could into the rear of the Orchard shopping centre, and just hope and pray she hadn't seen which direction I had gone. I walked as far as Marks and Spencer's, and once inside, and sure they hadn't followed me I took a breath and gathered myself. I phoned my husband who advised I phone the police and report them, but I said I would if I saw them again... fortunately I didn't.

I am a woman in my 40s, I don't consider myself sheltered or frail in any manner, but this experience was genuinely terrifying. What makes the whole thing worse is this is town where I live.

Although what shouldn't be taken lightly is the fact that on that day there would have been countless visitors to the town Christmas shopping, seeing these people behaving in this way, and we will never know how many people said " I'm not going back there, it wasn't very nice" it's a terrible impression for families in particular.

I am so concerned at how bad things are becoming (particularly with drug users, usually in groups) that I am considering whether this is somewhere I want to live, if I can't feel safe walking on my own in broad daylight.

Would somebody please address the very real problem we have with homeless/drug users and aggressive beggars in Taunton.

2: Does crime and ASB affect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Yes, if I am on my own.

3:Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

As I have said before, drug use, aggressive begging and homelessness are the main problems we have. All three usually go hand in hand. Is there a reason why These people are choosing to come to Taunton - very often from outside the area, what is attracting them? There is clearly an incentive for them to stay here, and perhaps this should be reviewed, some of these people are very unpleasant. We do have a much bigger problem it appears than other towns of our size.

Could somebody please address this sensitive and uncomfortable issue, as unfortunately it is a blight on our lovely town.

Kind regards

Mrs Ball

9 – G. Delahay

Dear Sir,

Could the council tell me when are they going to do something to stop cyclists cycling

on the pavement in this town. I'm not talking about 5 year old children what I see today is grown

adults on our pavements and one of these days someone is going to be seriously injured.,it's

about time something was done about this behaviour. The council have a duty to to the public to

keep the pavement safe at all times, to be honest my wife and I don't feel safe walking in town

anymore. Hope the council take a good look at this problem as this is a form of anti-social behaviour which is unacceptable, don't you think .

10 – S. Wilson

1. Occasional abuse when donations not made when requested by various beggars on the Street.

Distress when the street speakers are using loudspeakers and ranting and raving at everyone.

It's horrible when the store detectives are chasing thieves and confronting them in the Street.

It's also horrible to see drug users in doorways, before Christmas there was a drug user in the door way of the office where I work totally out of it, I called the ambulance which took over 30 mins to come, because this person was a regular user and know to them.

2. I have to come into Town to work . I would not contemplate coming in during the evening due to drunk and disorderly behaviour and abuse by beggars. I will not walk home anymore from work as Station Road and the bottom of Cheddon Road and the Station area are horrible to walk through as a women on her own. It's unpleasant and intimidating.

There is very little if any police presence in the Town except for the Police on Horseback occasionally - lovely to see but what's the point? Walking policemen would be more effective.

3. I can sit and look out of my window into the centre of the Town and regularly see drug dealers selling drugs. This also happens early in the morning when the benefits are paid by the Post Office.

Taunton has become a horrible town, full of homeless people and drug takers. Such a shame it used to be such a lovely town.

Recent comments by Ian Liddell-Grainger highlights the problems in our Town.

S Wilson

11 – F. Houchen

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes - I have personally been involved in dealing with a shoplifter and have witnessed an assault.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Yes - Honestly I prefer to go to Cribbs where the problems seem less evident.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

1. Homeless persons who are clearly in need of drug dependency or mental health support. Many of course are just homeless.
2. Lack of policing and security for stores and shoppers.
3. Aggressive individuals, who increasingly seem to be a feature of Taunton town centre.
4. Shoplifters.

12 – P. Rowland

Hi there. I'm giving you feedback you have requested regarding anti social behaviour in Taunton.

I've lived and grown up here since 1968, and have noticed a massive change in recent times last 5 years or so.

1) I recently was verbally abused by some scruffy down n out character whilst walking down station road into town on a Saturday evening for no reason. It was obvious from his accent that he was from the north of England maybe Manchester. After I ignored this individual he began the same verbal attack on another guy on the other side of the road.

2) There are now certain routes where I try to avoid walking due to the anticipation of crime or ASB. I used to walk anywhere without a care in the world but sadly Taunton has changed for the worse 3) I feel the biggest problem by far is the homeless drug takers in every disused shop doorway throughout the town most of whom are not from Somerset in the first place.

Since the closure of the police station it's got worse as these people are aware of it, not that they care anyway.

We have beggars in every street corner, I was asked for money 3 times in a 5 minute walk from canon st car park to Magdalen lane, and twice more walking past KFC.

The riverside walk along the front of Morrison's toward the bandstand and under priory bridge road used to be beautiful but is now been taken over and inhabited by various groups of drug and alcohol users who have set up on benches and under the bridge with sleeping bags etc. These are often very intimidating with their noise and their foul language and general appearance.

I could go on but this will suffice for now. Hope this information is of use for your meeting

13 – M. Sekules

To Whom it May Concern,

With response to the recent post in the County Gazette regarding the request for accounts of how anti-social behaviour and crime has affected local people, I am happy to provide the following account which I hope will be of help.

Firstly, I moved back to Taunton after living for 10 years in Boscombe, Dorset which has a reputation for a high crime rate, homelessness, poverty and drug abuse. Although I'd never experienced any issues, I moved back here with my children to give them a safer environment in which to grow up in. Unfortunately, the opposite has happened.

Not long after, I became involved in SWAG after my friend's daughter received a needle stick injury in Victoria Park, near East Reach and the work we did opened my eyes to the various problems Taunton has, especially with drugs, the lack of police resources and within the street people/homeless community. Now with my fiance owning a business on East Reach, it's become obvious to me that even since SWAG completed it's mission in getting the two legal high shops shut down, things have continued to get worse and worse, especially with the use of Spice and heroin which is in evidence everywhere.

Since the beginning of 2018 alone, my fiance has been threatened, witness to assaults, harassed for money on a daily basis, witness to drug dealing and abuse whilst trying to run his business. This, with the constant social media posts, reports in the Gazette about thefts, assaults, anti social behaviour in town naturally made me fearful about my own safety and that of our children. So, when back in October when I was due to meet up with a friend for coffee in town, I asked my fiance to drop me

and our baby as close to the cafe as possible so I wouldn't have to walk through East Reach. He dropped us off at the back of Fight Worx, by Crown Walk, I put my then 6 month old in my baby carrier on my chest and we walked through to the high street to go to Costa. During that 30 second walk from car to coffee shop, a man shouted abuse at my baby and I, threatened us with violence and spat in our faces. This is obviously being now dealt with by police as well as, I understand, an amalgamation of multiple charges. Whereas before I felt unsafe whilst in Taunton, this confirmed to me that I am indeed unsafe and as a consequence, I no longer feel able to come into town. As a mum with four children, including a new baby, living in quite a remote village, this has significantly impacted on my life. This has been made more so since my fiance was assaulted outside of his business a week before Christmas, a day before our eldest's birthday.

The individual who assaulted my baby and I is, I believe, currently sleeping rough, with a collection of addictions and unmanaged mental health issues. I believe his circumstances have been the same for years and have unchanged. I know that he is just one of many volatile people that are in a similar situation with seemingly no way of progressing through life and so carry on causing distress to the community in which they live. I spent a significant amount of time volunteering with RAFT and unfortunately, we encountered issues there with very aggressive, threatening individuals who sleep rough, demanding items from our warehouse and ourselves personally and generally being abusive. This contributed to me leaving the organisation.

Whilst involved in both organisations/campaigns, I liaised with TAH/ARC and whilst I have huge respect for the work they do and have done, I feel they are out of their depth and much of their good intention is lost under firefighting and dealing with issues they aren't really equipped to adequately deal with. We have a friend who slept on the streets of Taunton for 5 years and wouldn't reach out to ARC because he was too fearful of the clients that are housed in Linley House or who hang around the vicinity. Fortunately for him, he was able to get off the streets on his own accord but I wonder how many others have avoided asking for help because of the reputation it has now accrued as a place of violence and alcohol and drug abuse. I think it's a shame that these people who do have a chance of getting back into a normal life are unable to do so because so much time and effort is placed instead in the people who can't or don't want to reach a point of 'normal life'. It strikes me that Taunton desperately needs a separate facility so that ARC can continue with their initial mission and great work.

This can't be an issue dealt with the kind hearted community of Taunton, it has to come from the council and it needs significant investment. Currently, Taunton is an attractive place to be homeless in with many places providing food and basic needs, and the drug supply is plentiful. Gangs coming from other parts of the country are coming here because of this and so, those issues are becoming worse and will

continue to do so. The depth and scale of these issues alone is terrifying. Gang culture on the streets on Taunton just doesn't bear thinking about.

All of that aside, I am one of many people that now choose to actively avoid coming into town or limit their visits because of the prevalence of antisocial behaviour. My 72 year old mum included, as she had her purse stolen from her bag a few days before Christmas which left her upset and stranded as both her bus pass and bank card had gone - she wouldn't have been able to get home unless we had driven in and picked her up.

I hope we can soon see a change and start to look forwards to enjoying our town once again.

14 – R. Sekules

To whom it may concern,

I read a post on Somerset County Gazette's page on Facebook about your fact finding mission regarding anti social behaviour in Taunton Centre and would like to take the opportunity to give you some insight into my personal experiences as a trader on East Reach and also as a member of the public.

I moved to Taunton in 2013 after falling in love with the town. I found a shop to rent at the bottom of East Reach and believed that it was a good place to invest in and set up shop. During the last five years I have learned that there is an insidious problem with this area of town and that it is steadily going from bad to worse. I have observed through my shop window the goings on; the drunks, the beggars and drug users. I have seen the individuals sleeping rough in doorways in the snow, I have had to clean up rubbish and excrement in my shop doorway. I have seen foreigners attacked and abused, one young Romanian lady heavily pregnant at the time. I have had to lock my shop door to prevent the begging and disruption that had become the daily norm. I have often been threatened with stabbing, with smashed windows and arson. This Christmas I had to face my children with two black eyes after I was savagely attacked by two 16 year olds at 11am off their heads on drugs and looking for fun by causing grief to me, I received around ten punches to the head, was head butted in the face and four kicks, also to the head. My partner and five month old baby boy were spat on in the face and verbally abused by a known drug addict and Street dweller in the town centre and my mother in law to be had her purse stolen from her bag. The last three occurrences were in the last 3 months alone.

I am daily a witness to drug deals, spice zombies, drunks urinating and members of the public being abused.

My landlord was told by the police that he had to pay for a secure fence at the back of the property because street people were using the space to deal and as a toilet or to inject drugs. My neighbour also had to install a similar gate at cost because these people were gaining access to the roof area and the risk of damage or break-ins was too high. She has since shut up shop and the property is up for sale, bless her. I have also had to install CCTV in the studio for protection against theft and violence.

I am well aware of where the local issues come from and I am very surprised that the council need to ask the public because the problem in my opinion is directly from a property that belongs to you. I am, of course talking about Lindley House which you Lease to ARC, formerly known as TAH. I have had many chances to meet with the staff and the CEO of this place and although it is the source of a lot of the problems I have to say it is not their fault. It is not their fault that they have had to evolve from a business that was set up to support homeless individuals to the only place that can provide for the poor vulnerable souls that deserve care like what was once provided by Tonevale before it was closed and they were released into "care in the community" only resulting in drug addiction, street sleeping and often as we have read, death.

I am furthermore aware that there has been an increase in drug activity in the town, it has been made aware to me by the police that gangs have made a move into our county town and in typical style are employing underage youths to move their hard drugs because they are easy to groom and can operate with relative immunity from prosecution.

Taunton has unfortunately become a hub for individuals who are caught up in drug abuse and anti social behaviour. It has become a co-dependent relationship, an easy option. TAH was set up to aid people to get back on their feet but I fear it is now hindered in doing so by habitual addicts with mental health issues that have no desire or ability to change and really ought to be kept in secure facilities for the safety of both themselves and the public. It is mentioned in the article which I am responding to that you aim to help the homeless "break the cycle of homelessness and addiction" I am curious how you intend to engage with people that do not want to change.

Lindley House itself is a tinderbox, a Warren of small rooms where most individuals smoke even though it is not allowed, I was given a tour and witnessed this first hand. There are no fire escapes and in my albeit amateur opinion it is only a matter of time before there is a fire. The windows of Lindley House are insecure and I am sure you are aware that there has been an incident last year where a service user threw themselves out of a top floor window. As a listed building I do not believe secure windows are an option and securing them also adds to the aforementioned fire risk.

Another important fact to consider is Lindley House', proximity to St James' school and Holy Trinity. The bushes of Victoria Park near St James often giving nasty surprises is the form of discarded needles used for drug abuse, not something that you would like a child's fingers to discover however there is a history of this. My partner has more insight than me in this regard having worked with SWAG to force you to close down the legal High shops that created many of the addicts we see today.

It is too easy to say that all the above is as a result of a degrade in society but I put it to TDBC that you have control over the main issue in town, Lindley House and that it is therefore your responsibility as landlords. The drug issues are not your responsibility, that lies in the hands of the overstretched police, the CPS and the courts however, once again Lindley House and ARC's satellite properties are a market place and a hub where a lot of money is placed in the hands of gangs and organised crime through the sales of drugs.

On a personal note, I would like to give you an idea of the personal effect all of this has had on my life.

As I mentioned I can no longer have an open door at work, I need to know exactly who is coming through my door. I do not feel safe at work, I take a packed lunch so that I don't need to leave the shop before I go home. This has had an obvious effect on my business with fewer people booking to have work done. I suffer anxiety in my free time, wondering how I can keep a roof over my family and food on the table, what will happen if I am once again injured as a result of an attack in this uncaring time in our political history, if I find myself unemployed we would soon land on the street and destitute. My fiancé will not shop in town in fact she avoids it like the plague, choosing to shop in safer towns like Glastonbury or Street. I am looking to move my business in the next year to a safer town which I cannot afford financially but in a way cannot afford not to. I look at the same scenario every day. Start up businesses giving it a try on East Reach and unfortunately more often than not closing before their time because the general public do not want to walk our street only to be blagged and abused or because of personal experiences much like my own.

It is important for you to note that this has not been an easy email for me to write, I am aware that in a way I am putting my head on a block but it is also important that you are made aware of these things.

In order to bring this correspondence to an end I will answer your three questions.

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes, often.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Yes, we only come into town if there is something we can't get in a safer town.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

Drug addicted beggers and the criminal youth.

16 – R. Adams

Sir/madam,

In response to a recent post on the county gazette page on Facebook I'd like to answer your questions.

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

I work in security in one of the retail outlets in the town centre so I can tell you first hand how bad it has got in the town. Theft is at an all time high, the same faces everyday causing problems in the town centre. No police presance. We had the street wardens which I thought did a great job supporting areas of the town and passing on information to Cctv control and the police to try and help with the issues but now they are not around the problems in the town seem to be worst as there is no deterrent for these people. I've seen drug deals taken place in full view of everyone and I have scene on a number of occasions drugs actually being used in shop doorways with nothing but a coat covering the individual while they inject/take drugs metres from the public including small children.

In my opinion as the police resources are so stretched it was a silly move to remove the street wardens as like I stated they did such a great job at deterring crime and communicating information. Now the town has become an awful place to walk through again.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Like I said above I work in the security industry so I see first hand how bad the town has got. On my days off I avoid the town centre and instead I venture to Bridgwater or similar which I now believe to be a better place to live.

On behalf of my mother who often visits the town, well she doesn't feel comfortable going into the town centre anymore as the anti social behaviour not just with the homeless being intimidating towards her and other older shoppers asking them for money in an aggressive manner but the mass of youths that seem to congregate around McDonalds area making my mother and other shoppers cross the road as they cannot get passed these youths.

Once again like I said previously, the street wardens were invaluable at helping to deal with these issues as the police presence in the town is slim.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

For myself I believe the biggest issue is the mass of youths that congregate around the McDonalds area visiting shops and shop lifting and making passersby feel uncomfortable.

There is also a massive problem with homeless/ drug users and drinker in the town which are now unmonitored unless passed to Cctv by a retail outlet.

The street wardens need to be a permanent fixture in the town to help deal with these issues.

They gained a lot of respect from members of the public and shop owners when they had a presence in the town and definitely contributed to a drop in anti social behaviour.

I was very shocked to hear when they were no longer a familiar site within the town centre.

Hopefully they will be reinstated soon as I cannot see there being a stronger police presence within the town in these struggling times.

17 – J. Taylor

To whom this may concern,

Recently reading through the Taunton Gazette I was amused when I came across an article regarding the sudden acknowledgment to the clearly obvious issue regarding anti social behaviour. The ASB crisis has been in Taunton for some time and many parts of Taunton are now a no go area due to the crime rate. I myself have raised concerns particularly in the location where I live concerning drugs, criminal damage, theft and continuous harassment mentioning this to Taunton council and Taunton police which is like dealing with two children in a playground unable to take any sort of responsibility for anything. I have videos, photos, emails and texts logs of police phone calls for the countless times I have tried to resolve issues but getting no where. Crime rate is poor because no one seems to work together and use

resources that could resolve issues. Personally me and my family are continuously let down by Taunton Council from support with crime issues, housing options, benefits, council tax and much more. Taunton has become a undesirable location to leave with an outdated look.

18 – S. Hill

We would like to add our experiences to your list.

Since the time of the un-necessary takeover of the Taunton radiolink by Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton has started to suffer significantly more with issues that directly affect our business as a retailer on the High Street. In summary begging, homelessness, theft and antisocial behaviour have all increased making our customers think twice about visiting Taunton.

Every day, but particularly in the morning, we (along with many other retailers) get visited by people who only visit us to try to steal goods which presumably they go off and sell. These people are rude, threatening and as well as cost us directly with stock loss, also deter our customers from visiting while they are in store. We have had to change staffing levels simply to increase our presence every morning to try to deter these unwanted visitors from either entering or thieving.

At least once a day the High Street is plagued by arguments, shouting, offensive and threatening behaviour from the same people. They often appear to be under the influence of something and completely inapproachable. This causes the street to empty of shoppers during the disturbance, and no doubt makes them think twice about returning. This is having a massive impact on our sales levels. Thankfully we are also connected to the Orchard shopping centre where we have a protected environment for shoppers to visit us from. This protected shopping centre demonstrates that where suitable security is present that shopping can still be pleasant, but that the public streets are much less desirable these days.

An example of unwanted behaviour was just this past Sunday, when an apparently homeless man made his base for half an hour or so on the benches outside our store and started shouting incessantly at passersby. Comments he angrily shouted at people included:

- "I hate children" - aimed at parents walking by with young children
- "You're all scum" aimed at a group of people trying hard to walk by quickly and ignore him

There was also offensive leering at lone-women walking by; spitting; and other generally disturbing behaviour. Hardly surprising that we have no customers visit while this is going on. Interestingly all of this is taking place within a few metres of a CCTV camera - but was anyone watching or reacting? The behaviour only ended when the man had scared everyone away and moved on of his own accord.

In general our customers often comment on the shouting, the begging, the drug dealing, that goes on in plain sight. Our staff feel intimidated and concerned when these people enter our store. They also have concerns walking to and from work. The recent incident in Tesco where a member of staff was injured has obviously made our staff and customers very aware of the potential risk some of these desperate people pose.

The lack of SBAC's data sharing system means we have lost our group's platform to share information or report issues as a group, and the continual reduction in policing is now having a much greater effect than when SBAC was around. Sedgemoor's radio system is more expensive, has no data sharing, and from our understanding has far fewer members making it less of a useful resource. It is such a shame TDBC did not insist Sedgemoor continue monitoring SBAC's radios as they had done when SDC started monitoring the cameras - a move that can now clearly be seen as nothing more than being in the interests of SDC's own purses rather than the good of Taunton's town centre.

A change of approach is essential for Taunton to return to becoming a nicer place to visit. The continual decline of footfall in the town centre must at least in part be attributed to visitors' unwillingness to visit due to the unpleasantness we all endure on a daily basis. I am sure retailers have enough problems trying to survive without the extra problems these issues are causing, and it must be an extra reason for the multiples to seriously consider their future in Taunton when stock losses are so high and footfall is so low, which if any of those national names start leaving will only lead to further problems for the town centre.

I hope something is done by the council before it becomes too late, and Taunton becomes a very different place.

19 – S. Petrich

I would like to add that the most stressful part of my job, as a retail manager in Taunton, is the challenge of dealing with aggressive and often organised individuals and groups of potential shoplifters. We are a small team of women who do feel vulnerable when faced with regular confrontation. It shouldn't be like this. The begging in town is also blatant and intimidating for my colleagues and customers.

I'm sure we'll support the new proposal, we're lucky that our company is generally happy to be lead by us in the stores. Bottom line is that the customers want to be able to walk the pavements without fear of being harassed or worse. Since our refit we have had lots of comments from our customers like "so now you'll be able to see what everyone is up to" so they are clearly aware that theft is a problem. Our shrink has not really altered but we do invest hours in manning the front door, under the guise of welcoming, in an attempt to keep the wrong people out..... but we really shouldn't need to guard our doors, should we?

>

> Our neighbours Treds have been hugely affected this year. I believe they support the proposal too. Their shop has had its front window smashed 3 times this year. Their lease is up for renewal soon too so let's hope they don't pull out of Taunton too.