

Businesses fight back against crime with CCTV... and WhatsApp

Rosie's Vineyard in Elm Grove, Southsea, was previously targeted

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BUSINESSES hit by a crimewave of more than 160 burglaries committed in just a few months are hitting back – with a WhatsApp group.

Restaurants, shops and pubs have been targeted in Elm Grove, Albert Road and the wider Southsea area by thieves breaking in.

Now police and firms working together in the area have been praised for cracking down on the issue – with a sharp reduction in non-domestic burglaries reported in the area.

Businesses have clubbed together in a WhatsApp group run by Simon Docker, who has seen his business hit five times. He asked *The News* not to name the business over fears of further burglaries.

He said from a peak of three to four burglaries a week in March, the numbers have dropped to just three firms burgled last month.

Mr Docker, who recently made a deputation to the city council, said: 'It's gone right down, from 20 in March down to three committed in Southsea in October.'

‘We got to the stage with three or four a week, targeting small businesses, but even bigger places like Waitrose and charity shops.’

Businesses, ward councillors and police recently met, with a briefing from Superintendent Jason Kenny, police commander for Portsmouth, and Inspector Marcus Cator.

Portsmouth City Council has put in place temporary CCTV covering the area, but there have been calls for more to be installed.

Cllr Lee Hunt, Central Southsea ward member, said: ‘A lot of people have been shocked and upset and indeed quite frightened.’

‘A lot of credit has got to be given to Simon Docker. We as members of the council have got to keep the pressure up. They’ve reduced enormously but that’s no comfort to someone who does get broken into.’

‘We need businesses to look forward, they deserve protection.’

Around 40 to 50 suspects had carried out the burglaries, but not as a co-ordinated group, Cllr Hunt said police had told the meeting chaired by Portsmouth South MP Stephen Morgan.

The businesses’ WhatsApp group allows them to share information quickly among themselves.

Cllr Donna Jones and Cllr Linda Symes have set up a Traders Support Group for traders to join.

Cllr Symes said: ‘We are urging businesses to get in contact with us to join the Traders Support Group including market traders.’

‘It’s only by working together we can ensure crime in Southsea is mitigated and those committing the crimes are brought to task.’