



Protecting historic buildings from lead theft

The LSA is working in a number of ways to support people in combating lead theft.

It has been in recent discussion with a family-run security business, Protec Wells, based in Somerset. The simple but effective measures they have put in place have had a dramatic impact in the local area with attempts to steal lead from local churches much reduced.

What has been particularly effective in many cases has been the installation of Active Infrared Beam devices. The preferred system would emit four infrared beams, that will send a signal to an alarm monitoring station, and activate a high powered siren on the roof, when triggered by a human breaking the beams.

Protec Wells have fitted a number of these devices on church roofs as they are particularly effective in hostile environments where roofs are exposed to the elements as they will function between -25 to +60 degrees.

After 30 years spent running his security business, Robert Bevan has found these devices, when linked to really loud sirens, are the most effective tool he has come across for this sort of protection. Robert would recommend fitting two sets of infrared beams when a large area needs to be covered. The beauty of these devices is that it is possible to alter the sensitivity of the beams so that the alarm is only triggered by human movement and not set off by birds flying through the beams or by other animals.

Robert, said *'The active beams are a really good way of protecting roofs and other areas targeted by metal thieves because they can be set to detect movement at different speeds.'*

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Robert's advice also highlighted a number of basic steps you can take to deter thieves:

- Have a sign to highlight there is an alarm system protecting your property, positioned for example at the main gates, or the likely access points a thief might use.
- When installing your alarm, make it slightly visible from positions a thief might be viewing the property.
- Consider the possible points of access to a roof at ground level and take action to make it more difficult to gain access to the roof.
- Install collars with anti-climbing spikes around drainpipes etc. This may then lead to thieves using a ladder but will deter the opportunist.
- Grease drain pipes.
- Install robust fencing and lockable gateways if possible.
- Issue neighbours with a phone number to call if they suspect something is 'going on'.
- Advise neighbours to take note of number plates if they see an unfamiliar vehicle in the area, and to use mobile phone cameras to record information. This helps as most devices record the time and dates that are helpful if prosecutions ensue.
- Develop and distribute a communications policy to all users of a property. This should contain names and contact details of police, key holders and others to be contacted if anything suspicious is observed, and should be reviewed and revised at six monthly intervals.

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Security systems not only protect the roof, they will help avoid the consequential costs of internal property damage from rain water and the potential loss of income or disruption to the activities carried out within the property.

Cost is obviously a factor for consideration, but most of the approved systems come with a minimum one year warranty and can be 'sized' and priced according to the risks involved.

Douglas Weston CBE, Chief Executive of the Lead Sheet Association said *'At the moment it is all too easy for thieves to convert stolen metal into cash. We want to get the law changed so scrap metal businesses can no longer carry out transactions with cash and require payment by cheque or through a named bank account. This would be a significant deterrent to thieves and support the police in tracking them down.'*

'That is why on our website we are supporting an e-petition to get the matter debated in Parliament. Please visit our website to sign it and encourage others to do so. In this way we can put a stop to this theft which causes so much disruption and damage to our national heritage.'



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