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Update on Security in Natures Valley

In the light of recent incidents in Natures Valley we would like to inform you of what we know and our thoughts on improving security in the Valley, going forward.

Crime Incidents

The statistics on crime incidents for 2017 which were presented at the last AGM and which also appear in my written Chairman's Report proved that we actually have had an extremely low frequency of crime incidents over the last few years and even following the recent spike, we don't believe there is a reason to panic or take drastic action. The presence of Fidelity-ADT and their routine patrolling has been successful and effective.

However, as you will be aware there was recently a serious break-in at the shop with the theft of a safe containing money amongst other valuable items. The fact that they stole the safe and very little else proves that the perpetrators were professional criminals only looking for cash and other high-value items. We have heard that there were similar robberies at the Berlin Pub in Keurbooms and at Natures Way, where they broke in through the roof, and heavy safes were also stolen. All these robberies involved the deactivation of the alarm system, which requires specialist knowledge and possibly inside information. These are the type of robberies where useful information might have been obtained after the event with CCTV cameras in strategic spots.

In addition to the shop break-in, there have been four break-ins in NV during the past fortnight or so. These involved the superintendent's office and three private houses. All these properties were alarmed and with the exception of the Bitou office in Phyl Martin Park resulted in immediate response by Fidelity-ADT. The Bitou office alarm is linked to Smhart Alarms which does not provide armed response in Natures Valley. The other three were foiled by the arrival of Fidelity-ADT and it appears that nothing was stolen. Fortunately the perpetrator was apprehended by Fidelity-ADT at the 4th incident and handed over to the police. There is evidence to suggest that the same individual was involved in all these break-ins and there may well have been other break-ins at houses which are not alarmed. Such info will only come to light when the owners arrive. Unfortunately, the incidence of such crime is a fact of life and is not new or restricted to any area. We believe that the presence of Fidelity-ADT is successful in limiting the occurrence of such incidents. You may recall that when owners arrive in December there is an increase in opportunistic crime as houses become more vulnerable and pickings become more attractive.

CCTV has been suggested by a number of owners as the way forward in controlling crime in NV. CCTV may well have helped in recording the events at the shop, but if the thieves are adept at disabling the alarm system it is quite likely they would know how to deal with CCTV cameras. CCTV would certainly not have helped in preventing the recent opportunistic break-ins. We are also fairly certain that the opportunistic house break-ins are in no way connected to the very professional safe robberies. No info on the perpetrators of the shop robbery have been received from the SAPS, to date.

The NVRA has a Service Level Agreement with Fidelity-ADT which sets out their operating commitment in NV. This commitment includes 24 hour patrolling of the township with the vehicle being tracked at all times. The vehicle which is 'on duty' at any particular time is not permitted to drive out of NV. This agreement can be viewed on our website.

Security Hut at Entrance to NV

We do envisage, that when the Fidelity-ADT hut at the entrance to NV is supplied with power that the installation of security cameras to record the comings and goings at the entrance after dark, as well as at other "points of interest" such as the shop and the WTS, will be considered. Also, the feasibility of a second Fidelity-ADT guard who would be stationed at the entrance overnight will be considered. Unfortunately the issue of resolving the power supply is a case of two steps forward and one step back. The municipality have recently indicated that they are not "comfortable" with the Fidelity-ADT hut where it is as the site should be "put out to tender" to other potential suppliers of security services in NV. Although this sounds a ludicrous proposal we may have to go down this track to "legalise" the hut in the current position and thereby resolve the issue of power supply. We will be meeting with the municipality shortly to try and move forward or identify an alternative, acceptable location.

The option of sorting out the electricity supply by installing solar power is currently not an option now that the municipality are questioning the legality of the hut remaining where it is. Sadly, photo-voltaic solar panels have also become a target for thieves, the most recent being the panels installed on the roof of Natures Way, which were stolen about a month ago.

Once the hut has been sorted out, the introduction of facilities at the entrance of NV to improve security are likely to involve significant costs, which will need to be addressed with owners before any decision is taken to proceed. We have already received offers from some owners to assist with these costs, which are much appreciated. It is most important however that any proposals do provide a real and sustainable benefit to owners.

Access Control

There have also been suggestions of access-control at the entrance to NV however we believe this concept is not currently feasible or realistic, for the following reasons:

- The current state of criminal activity in NV does not warrant considering such a step.
- NV is not a gated community and public access to the lagoon, the beach, walking trails and other public facilities cannot be restricted. Operating such access control would be practically impossible in season and therefore the very significant cost would be wasted.
- The impression created of NV as an elitist enclave would be very negative.
- Access control would only be effective in controlling and monitoring vehicular traffic. Fencing off the township is to all intent, impossible. Anybody who is up to no good would find a way in, and out.
- Legislation in the Western Cape does not make provision for turning existing townships into gated, access-controlled communities.

Security on your own property

The last barrier to break-ins on your own property are the security arrangements in your own house. In NV this ranges from simple burglar-proofing to full alarm system with beams, IR and magnetic sensors and CCTV. Many houses in NV have no burglar proofing but do have an alarm system where owners rely on Fidelity-ADT to take action in the event of a break-in. This does not necessarily prevent quick smash-and-grab burglaries although the guards have re-acted with surprising rapidity over the last few years and many serious burglaries have, as a result, been prevented. Houses without alarms will always be more vulnerable.

The most vulnerable houses with alarms are those which can easily be entered by simply breaking a window or levering open a door or window or by entering through the roof. In recent times there have been a number of robberies in Plett where entry was gained through the roof. In many instance the alarm system battery and alarm transmitter were located in the roof. The robbers were able to disarm the system before entering the houses. For this reason security companies have been advising clients to install beams or IR sensors in the roof-space to prevent this from happening. Some of them are even currently offering discounts on these items.

Security Reports

Apart from what can be seen on the NV-Security Alert WhatsApp we have decided to place Security-updates on the NVRA website which will report crime statistics and most recent incidents in the Valley on a regular basis.

We will keep you up to date whenever necessary.

Regards,

Paul Erens
Chairman

Doug Blaine
Chairman, Security Sub-committee