

Luton Goes 'Best of Breed' Digital

Luton Borough Council has always been determined to work with the police and business community to ensure that crime is deterred and that measures are taken to reduce the fear of crime and promote community safety.



The Town Centre CCTV system which was installed in 1998 plays a major role in helping Luton Borough Council achieve its crime reduction objectives. Mr. Butler, who has managed the Town's Central Monitoring Centre for 10 years said: "We have been successfully using analogue recorders to capture video from our Town Centre CCTV system and it has worked extremely well. We became aware however that we were missing out on the advantages and benefits of using digital video technology."

Given the level of experience and expertise in their possession, not surprisingly Mr. Butler and his colleagues took a long and cautious look at what was available in the market in respect of digital recording solutions and analyzed what vendors were best placed to meet their criteria. There was no shortage of manufacturers keen to win such a prestigious contract. Mr. Butler added: "We got down to a shortlist of four manufacturers. With the substantial financial investment required, you only get one chance of getting it right and therefore we took our time to evaluate in some depth each of the systems from the four manufacturers. This process very deliberately included visiting a number of control rooms run by other councils to see how their digital recording systems were performing."

"Whilst we wanted to take full advantage of the very latest features and functions available with a digital system, what was of prime importance to us was ease of use of any system that we chose. Our operators have become very familiar with the simplicity of an analogue tape system and we didn't want to have to introduce them to a new system that would involve protracted training."

In conjunction with the process of updating their recording system, Luton embarked upon a parallel process to update their analogue video matrix and graphic user interface. The result of investigation and deliberation was a careful selection of true best of breed technology for the new CCTV solution. Luton's system integrators were awarded a contract to install a Synectics analogue matrix and a Vigilant Technology Elite Series Video Recording and Management solution.

Currently Luton Town Centre's CCTV system has a total of 132 cameras. 84 of which are pan, tilt and zoom cameras, whilst the remainder are fixed cameras. Most of the cameras provide surveillance covering the Town Centre but there are a number allocated to viewing activity in the residential areas of Hockwell Ring and Farley Hill, whilst there are also cameras located in car parks and in and around the Town Hall.

The solution provided by Vigilant, records all cameras at 12.5 images per second in 4CIF resolution and stores the data for a 21-day period to error resilient RAID 5 arrays. The video from the cameras is transmitted to Luton's Central Monitoring Centre where there are three Vigilant viewing stations. One of the viewing stations allows the operators to review recorded images, the second allows the Manager to have an overview of activity whilst the third is in the main viewing suite, which is available to the police 24/7 to allow them to retrieve evidence.

"We changed over from analogue to the digital video recording solution in June. By working in close partnership with Vigilant we have been able to ensure a smooth changeover and I am delighted to report that our operators have been positively surprised at how easily they are able to operate the new system."

Subsequent to the initial implementation of the recording and management system, Luton has decided to further enhance their Vigilant system implementation by taking advantage of the superb remote viewing capabilities provided by Vigilant Remote Gateway Server and Remote View software. Equipped with this enhanced application, Bedfordshire Police are able to watch real-time or recorded video and investigate incidents immediately as they occur, at anytime.