

Children targets of quarter of robberies

CHILDREN under 16 were the victims of a quarter of robberies reported in Bristol over the past seven months, the *Evening Post* can reveal.

A new wave of crime is seeing youngsters targeted by gangs of teenagers for the latest fashion accessories or gadgets such as iPod music players, state-of-the-art mobile phones or designer sunglasses.

Leading police officers in the city say they are becoming increasingly concerned about the growing trend.

Gangs of boys and girls, some as young as 12, have been targeting parks and other areas popular with youngsters, robbing other teenagers for the "must-have" accessories.

As the picture on our front page shows, some teenagers can leave the house with more than £1,000 of accessories on them.

Police say those who take their MP3 players and mobile phones with them, wear designer gear or ride expensive top-of-the-range mountain bikes inadvertently make themselves a target for robbers.

Officers have told the *Evening Post* that many of these items are then sold door-to-door on many of the city's estates, including Southmead, Hartcliffe, Withywood, Knowle West and Shirehampton.

At the height of Bristol's street robbery problems three years ago, the crime was largely driven by drug addicts needing cash to score their next fix.

In 2002, there were about 120 robberies every week.

And while many robberies are still carried out by drug addicts, there are now just under 30 robberies a week on average following a major crackdown.

Since April this year, there have been 972 reported robberies in Bristol - around four every day.

About a third of these have been so-called child-on-child robberies involving under-18s, with just under one in four involving children under 16.

One 13-year-old girl, who cannot be named for legal reasons, has recently been charged with carrying out 14 robberies on youngsters in Redland.

Parks in Redland and Fishponds have become the biggest problem areas for the police.

Police today issued a warning to teenagers that they would prosecute everyone who was in a gang which targeted youngsters, even if only one or two of them actually carried out the robbery.

All gang members present at the scene can be charged with robbery as their presence is helping to intimidate the victim.

Parents were also urged not to allow their youngster to go out with expensive fashion accessories.

Robbery facts (reported in Bristol since April 1, 2005):

- 23 per cent of victims are school children.
- Almost 63 per cent of robberies take place in the street.

Comment Page 10

Here comes the carrot

Controversial artwork gets the go-ahead from council

Landmark: How Silica, the controversial public artwork planned for the centre of Weston-super-Mare, will look



AN attempt to cancel a controversial £280,000 public artwork planned for the centre of Weston-super-Mare has ended in failure.

North Somerset councillor Mike Bell last night called on his fellow members to ask the executive to reverse the decision to proceed with the Silica scheme on Big Lamp Corner, dubbed "the carrot on the corner" by its critics.

But only six supported him and the vast majority of councillors voted against his proposal.

Mr Bell, a Liberal Democrat member for the Weston West ward, presented a 589-name petition which he collected on his personal website opposing the 26-metre high illuminated spire at the start of the full council meeting.

When the time came for his motion to be debated, he described the sculpture as a waste of money.

Mr Bell, the executive member for finance and performance, said: "My view is that this particular artwork is that it's a design I don't like. The amount of money being

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spent on this particular project - taxpayers' money - isn't justified."

He was supported in this by Councillor Richard Tucker (Lab, Weston East) who said the money could be spent on far more worthwhile projects, such as a community centre on the Maltlands development in his ward.

But Councillor John Crockford-Hawley (Lib Dem, Weston Central), chairman of the west area committee which gave permission for Silica last month, said North Somerset's contribution to the scheme was only £20,000, which would not go far on other things.

He said art should be "controversial and stimulating" and added: "Once it is up it will become quite a focal point for the central part of Weston. The sooner we can get it up the better and we can appreciate just what it is. If it continues to be controversial, so be it."

Tory group leader, Councillor Mike Roe (Weston Clarence and

Uphill), said the whole council had approved the principle of public art at Big Lamp Corner and that it should be chosen by a working group made up of councillors, business people and representatives from the local arts scene.

He said that if it scrapped Silica, the council would lose credibility from other potential investors and plans to regenerate Weston "may go down the pan". He added: "We make decisions as a council and we should stick to them."

Councillor Peter Kehoe (Lib Dem, Yatton), the executive member for children's services, said: "We mustn't chicken out."

Silica, which will include a bus shelter and retail kiosk, will stand at the junction of High Street, Regent Street and Meadow Street and should be in place by March.

It was designed by Nottingham-based artists Wolfgang and Heron and is being funded through various bodies including the South West Regional Development Agency, the Weston Regeneration Partnership, North Somerset and Weston Town councils and Weston Tourism.

Couple 'shot, then battered to death'

THE jury in the murder trial of two brothers from Weston-super-Mare has heard how a husband and wife were repeatedly shot before being battered to death in their Cornwall home.

Brothers Robert and Lee Firkins, aged 32 and 30, from Exford Close, Weston-super-Mare, have pleaded not guilty at Exeter Crown Court to the murders, which took place in November 2003.

The injuries that killed Graham,

Fisher, 60, and his 53-year-old wife Carol were blows to the head with a blunt instrument such as a lump hammer or sledgehammer, the jury was told.

The Bonfire Night killings happened as the couple were about to sit down to an evening meal in front of the television in their cluttered bungalow.

Mr Fisher was found on the floor of the kitchen in his blood-spattered home, on the A99 near Wadebridge,

Cornwall. He had been shot three times.

His wife was shot once in the hand and left a trail of blood through the house before being shot again in the back and the neck as she tried to escape.

Home Office pathologist Dr Gyan Fernando said Mrs Fisher was shot in the right lower back, the top of her left shoulder, and in her left hand and wrist.

The trial continues.

IN BRIEF

Visit led to a court no-show

HENBURY: An 18-year-old who told a court he failed to turn up for a hearing because he was visiting his sick grandmother has been remanded in custody.

Luke Sarkozi, of Richeson Close, Henbury, was due to be sentenced last Friday after admitting going equipped for theft between May 16 and 18 this year.

But he failed to show up at Gloucester Crown Court and a warrant for his arrest was ordered. Judge Carole Hagen remanded him in custody until December 9.

Assault is admitted

WESTON-SUPER-MARE: Kenneth Poursain, 52, of Walliscote Road, pleaded guilty to common assault on Beth Adams in April this year when he appeared at Bristol Crown Court. He also admitted causing her actual bodily harm in July last year, but denied one allegation of causing harm and an allegation of theft. Judge Simon Darwall-Smith adjourned the case for sentence.

Bosses blamed for death

BRISTOL: A lorry driver from Bristol died in a head-on collision because the other driver fell asleep at the wheel after working excessive hours, a court heard.

Both Anthony Best, 62, from Hartcliffe, and Mark Chadbourne, 47, died in the crash.

Winchester Crown Court was told that Mr Chadbourne's bosses, Raymond Knapman and Robert Legg, forced their drivers to work beyond the legal limit.

Woman's purse stolen

KEYNSHAM: A disabled woman from Bath had her purse stolen while she was shopping in the Cancer Research UK charity shop in Keynsham last Thursday.

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