



Securing Vacant Properties from Vandalism, Squatters and Arson can save tens of thousands of pounds

VPS Security's range of services and expertise gives clients access to the best 'fit-for-purpose' solutions to protect and secure their properties, and make significant savings for repairing subsequent damage from trespassers or weather

Site: Former Bilborough Baptist Church, Nottingham

INTRODUCTION

Vacant properties awaiting sale or redevelopment- can impact negatively on the environment in several ways, falling into disrepair, or at the prey of vandals, squatters, or worse, suffer an arson attack. The average costs of repairs are estimated to average at around £25,000 but can vary widely from a few thousand pounds to hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Every day, 60 fires occur in or next to an empty property in the UK, and since 2012, when squatting in residential properties became a criminal offence in Britain, vacant non-residential buildings have been targeted for squatting.

Churches are closing monthly across the UK, and many of them have lead roofs, attracting metal theft, and may also have or be perceived to contain stain glass windows or artefacts of value inside. In this case, the former church at Bilborough, near Nottingham, was a modern build rather than a heritage site, but was still subject to regular attacks from vandals and curious trespassers.

- A Northwold, Norfolk church that had just spent £250,000 in renovations, had further damage to its roof prevented by an alarm system
- The theft of about 20 tonnes of metal from All Saints' Church, Houghton Conquest, near Bedford, is estimated to cost £400,000 to repair and replace.

After sustaining several attacks, the East Midland Baptist Trust Company instructed VPS Security Services to conduct a security risk assessment and make recommendations for protecting the site.

THE CHALLENGE

From the outside, the former church building was clearly closed and empty – it was also beginning to show signs of neglect, with overgrown and untidy grounds, and damaged fencing, and was in an area with easy access from all sides. As a consequence, it was attracting more and more vandalism.

Squatters and vandals can strip properties left vacant and unprotected, causing tens of thousands of pounds of damage.

Dozens of examples of the potential costs recorded in the last 6 months of 2018 include:

- A church at Elmswell near Bury St Edmunds which was severely damaged by rain after thieves stripped its roof slates led to £35,000 worth of repair works
- A fire being treated as arson hit a church in Royston, Hertfordshire (picture right)





SMART PROTECTION: A MULTI-SOLUTION APPROACH

A VPS inspector checked the premises both internally and externally, and the surrounding grounds. The subsequent recommendations were implemented by a two-man team over four days.

- VPS SmartAlarms fitted in the main church building and in the house behind the church as these were both targeted and damaged by youths
- A perimeter fence that was damaged by youths using the church yard as a cut through to the local housing estate, was fixed
- The house to the rear of the church was fitted with custom steel screens
- The VPS team also fixed a damaged roof in an annexe building with custom steel as this was a fall hazard and had been previously targeted and damaged
- The grounds were overgrown with shrubs, weeds and long grass, so VPS provided a full grounds tidy and cutback, to help smarten the area
- All windows and doors were secure

VPS SmartAlarms are designed in-house specifically to protect vacant properties – they can operate with no external power source, and can be linked to sensors or cameras to provide visual verification, automatically transmitted if an attempted breach is detected. They trigger warnings as soon as a site is broken into, not only to those attempting to enter a building, but also to the accredited VPS 24/7 remote video monitoring centre, with a video stream clip where possible of what triggered the alarm. VPS SmartAlarms can also include a flood

warning mechanism in case of a burst water pipe or flooding.

Regular inspections of the property were carried out as part of the plan, to ensure the entry points remained secure and to report any sight or trace of an attempted breach.

What VPS Security say: “Every situation is different, so we assess each site on its own merit and calculate the best and most cost-effective tailor-made solutions. It’s easier to see in hindsight, but often if an empty property is left unsecured or not regularly inspected, the costs for repairs can mount up. In this instance, for around a charge of £4,000 the client has probably saved that many times over in reduced repair bills. We were glad to be able to recommend and offer EMBTC a smart protection solution that in the long run will not only save them money, but also enable greater probability for a sale or redevelopment of the site, whilst also offering insurance compliance”

Ross Carroll,
Head of Risk Management,
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