

CHAPTER 5

ASPECTS OF SAFE NEIGHBOURHOODS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A safe neighbourhood is regarded as the link between the home and the city which provides opportunities for human interaction and harmony (Gardiner 1978:5). The neighbourhood is then considered as the first line of defence against the incidence of crime. To achieve this safety, knowledge must be obtained about what aspects a safe neighbourhood consists of.

In this Chapter, an overview of the new trend of developing residential neighbourhoods, namely gated communities, will be given. Woodlands Lifestyle Estate falls under this description of a gated community according to the definitions as supplied by Landman (2000:1). Furthermore, information regarding what a safe neighbourhood consists of as well as residential burglary, a crime which is committed mostly in neighbourhoods, is supplied. The three neighbourhoods which form part of the research will also be described. This is done to sketch the background against which the HONC against crime model was developed.

5.2 RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS

Gated communities (enclosed neighbourhoods and security villages) is a growing phenomenon in South Africa, reflecting an attempt by members of the public and developers to counteract the high levels of crime described in Chapter 4. However, the increase of gated communities is not just a South African phenomenon, it has been rapidly growing over the last decade in countries such as the USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Brazil, Chile, Ireland and Saudi Arabia (Thale 2002:1; De Wetering 2000:1; Whitney 2003:1; Isaacs 1999:1-5; Burke 2001:142). Not all the security measures implemented by these gated communities have proven successful as a safeguard against crime. Factors such as inaccessibility to formal police patrols are detrimental to safety and can make these communities targets of crime. The communities involved also tend to think that physical barriers will keep criminals out, forgetting that community participation as an expression of social control is sometimes more beneficial than physical control (Rossouw 2001:6; Thale 2002:2).

Woodlands Lifestyle Estate was developed with this factor in mind. Money was therefore not only spent on security measures, but consideration was given to the creation of the ideal lifestyle in a neighbourhood where social cohesion would develop naturally amongst the residents. This would enhance the formation of the principle of **know thy neighbours and be safe**, thereby furthering the possibility to establish feelings of territoriality within the neighbourhood (Coetzer 2001:157). This style of development correlates with international literature whereby Tucker (Van de Wetering 2000:3) describes a lifestyle community as a gated enclave where the gates will provide security and separation for the leisure activities and facilities offered inside.

5.2.1 Crime versus gated communities

The CSIR (Retief 2001:16), among others, does not consider gated communities as the best solution to the crime situation in South Africa. Gated communities also do not provide protection against criminals based inside the community itself, for example teenage gangs. In Johannesburg criminals operated from the houses within the gated communities itself, escaping the attention of the guards (Thale 2002:2).

Landman (2001:1) states that the enclosed areas not only influence the people living within them, but also have an influence on the local authority in terms of their long term planning strategies and urban management. Landman (Thale 2002:2) and Leo (1997:1) also point to the fact that only a certain part of the economic sector can afford to live in these gated communities, they are out of the price range of the poor. These gated communities then reflect an urban entity which is physically and often socially as well as economically set apart from the surrounding urban environment. The privatisation of public space is starting to take place as parks and streets within these gated communities are only accessible to those who live in them (Leo 1997:2). Leo (1997:3) even goes as far as to state that as people barricade themselves off from one another, so the level of fear and suspicion of one another increase. David Wright and Gregory Saville (1998:1) also share the opinion that the new movement in the development of gated communities, wherein privacy is embodied, results in creating higher levels of fear amongst residents. Leo (1997:2) predicts that a society which consists of gated communities will become an uncaring society, prone to cruelty and indifference.

5.2.2 Pedestrian activity

The walls around these developments also have an influence on the pedestrian activities of outsiders as well as the residents living within the particular neighbourhood. The permeability of an urban area is reduced by the walled communities, and this reduction has a probable impact on increasing trip lengths for all modes of travel. Outsiders cannot walk directly through the neighbourhood and have to walk around the neighbourhood in order to reach the other side. The shortest line of travelling is no longer available. Even the residents must take lengthy trips in order to reach their destinations, as they must travel through specific controlled areas (Burke 2001:144-46). In Woodlands Estate the interior outlay of the pedestrian routes have been done in such a manner that it takes residents only six minutes to walk from the furthest ends of the neighbourhood boundary to the lifestyle centre, which is located within 500 metres from the entrance. It is however true that a vehicle travelling from a dwelling situated against the back boundary of the estate will have the longest travelling distance in order to reach the front entrance.

Image 5.1 Woodlands Lifestyle Estate