

Barnsley Safer & Stronger Communities Partnership

Alleygate Advice

What are Alleys?

Alleys, snickets, ginnels, passages: call them what you like, they are really useful. They provide easy access to the rear of properties and stop you having to carry gardening or DIY materials through the house.

Alleys were originally designed to let coalmen and rubbish collectors get along the street. Now, many alleyways are hardly used. Deliveries to the back of the house are much less common, and rubbish bins are usually collected from the front door. Now that alleyways are not in regular use, they provide opportunities for burglars to steal from your garden and home, and can be the focus for anti-social behaviour.

The Alley and the Thief

How to get in is one of the most important things on a burglar's mind when planning to steal from you. Burglars prefer to break or sneak into a house through the back door or window or at the side.

A criminal can use an alleyway without being seen, even in broad daylight. If thieves know the alleyways in an area well, they can also use them as escape routes.

Putting a gate in the alley helps keep burglars out.

What you can do about it

A lockable gate to the alley that burglars can't climb helps to keep down the number of burglaries. In some parts of London, it's been proved that a gate can bring down the number of rear access burglaries by up to 90 per cent.

Preventing burglary isn't the only good reason for putting a gate in. It can also prevent:

- Fly tipping
- Littering
- Graffiti
- Dog Fouling

- Anti-Social Behaviour

There are positives to be gained from installing alleygates too:

- Safe play areas for children
- Control over the space
- A feeling of shared ownership amongst the community

Setting up a Scheme to install Alleygates

Ask your neighbours to help with organising and deciding what to do. Get your local Crime Prevention Officer and Neighbourhood Watch scheme involved (see the end of this leaflet for contact details).

Get a timetable for getting things done. One of you should write to everyone who has a right to use the alleyway. Explain that you want to put a gate in the alleyway and why it is a good idea.

Ask for volunteers. You might be lucky and live near experts such as a solicitor or a builder who want to get involved. The volunteers might turn into an Alleyway Committee with a chairperson, a treasurer etc. It doesn't really matter whether they want to become a formal committee (except in the case of an adopted alley). A Residents' Association could also help - if there isn't a Residents' Association, this could be the beginning of one.

Who owns the Alleyway?

There are usually only two kinds of people and organisations who can own an alleyway: either your local authority or one (or more) of the people who live in your street.

Alleys the local authority has adopted are known as footpaths, and the public has a right of way to use them. The Highways Authority is responsible for keeping them clean and usable. If you want to put in a gate, you will limit the public right of way. To allow you to do this without breaking the law, the Highways Authority has to agree to 'de-adopt' the footpath. You might have to agree to take over the maintenance of the alleyway from the Highways Authority and to set up a Residents' Association. There will probably be costs involved for making these changes, and the people who live in your street will probably have to pay them. Contact Barnsley MBC to find out about de-adopting a public right of way and the costs associated with this (see the end of this leaflet for contact details).

It can be hard to know who owns a privately owned alleyway. Sometimes two houses both own half of it. Sometimes one house owns the alleyway but house on the other side has the right to use it. The deeds to your home should tell you whether you own all or part of the alleyway and your legal

rights to use it. If the rights seem complicated or unclear, ask a solicitor to look into it.

Sometimes, ownership of the alley is unclear. The original builders may still retain ownership and, perhaps 80 years later, the building company has ceased to exist. The Land Registry should be able to clarify ownership.

Consulting your Neighbours

You need to write to everyone whose home backs on to the alleyway to find out if they support in principle the idea of putting in a gate. Include a tear-off slip with the letter to make it easy for them to answer. Here is an example letter:

Dear Neighbour

Re: Gating our Alleyway

I am writing to you to ask that you consider the installation of security gates to our alleyway to which you have shared access.

In other areas, the installation of alleygates has resulted in significant reductions in thefts from properties. Alleygates also provide other benefits such as preventing littering, dog fouling and graffiti from occurring.

There are many factors that need to be investigated, so I am just seeking your in-principle approval at this stage.

Once I have this for all residents affected by the proposed gates, I will arrange a meeting with the Police Crime Prevention Officer. I will confirm any costs and specific details of the gates with you before proceeding.

Thank you in anticipation

.....
I agree/ disagree to the gating of my alleyway. I understand that I will be supplied with a key and will continue to enjoy full access along the alleyway.

Date :

Name :

Address:

Signature :

Alleygate Costs

The biggest stumbling block to having alleygates installed can be the cost. However, this needs to be balanced against the financial and emotional cost of a theft or break-in.

Hopefully all your neighbours will agree to the alleygate scheme, the more people that sign up to the scheme, the cheaper the costs will be.

Don't forget that the cost of the gates may also include:

- Solicitor's fee
- Local Authority fee
- Land Registry fee
- Insurance
- Maintenance costs

All these need to be included from the start so that you inform your neighbours about the right amount of money rather than having to go back for more at a later stage. There might need to be an annual fee to cover the costs of updating the locks, painting or maintenance. Again, let people know how much this will be before asking them to agree to pay towards the gating scheme.

When you know how many of your neighbours support the scheme and much the alleygates will cost, write to your neighbours again asking them if they still support the proposal.

If full support is received then:

- Visit people personally to collect their contributions.
- Open a special bank account so that all money is going to a 'gating fund' not to one person.
- Give everyone a receipt for his or her contribution.

Alternative Sources of Funding

If your neighbours support the idea of an alleygate scheme but are unable to pay towards it you may wish to consider the following:

- Your Area Forum officer might be able to advise of any local funds that exist that you could apply to (see the end of this leaflet for contact details).
- Local business might be interested in sponsoring a gate. Write to them and find out.

Designing the Alleygate

The gate's appearance is an important consideration. The final choice should not compromise effectiveness, and while a timber gate may seem an attractive alternative, it is unlikely that its performance will match that of a steel gate.

The right design for you depends on the size and shape of the alleyway. It also depends on what the people affected want and how much money they can raise. The design of your gate should, where possible, take account of the wishes of the residents. Get neighbours and their children involved in contributing towards a design.

Whatever your gate is made of and looks like, it must be designed with the following key features in mind. Whoever builds your gate make sure you share this advice with them.

Anti-climbing

Make sure the gate has no centrally located horizontal bars or anything that could give the burglar a foothold.

Natural surveillance

The gate should not be solid – it must give a clear line of sight down the communal alleyway.

Strength and ease of maintenance

Steel that has been treated against rusting is the best material for a gate. Timber will need regular maintenance and is not as strong.

Locking

The lock should 'slam to lock'. This is known technically as an automatic deadlocking mortice latch. Ordinary mortice deadlocks can be left unlocked, and ordinary padlocks that are not built in to the gate can go missing, which both makes your alleyway insecure and means the gate is constantly banging against your or one of your neighbours' walls. Every gate should have a different lock so that if a key is lost there will be no need to change all the locks. The lock should be contained within the frame about half way up the gate.

Self-closing gates are not a good idea, because they can cause problems when people are trying to take in wheelbarrows or bicycles, or when bulky items are being delivered.

Each gate in a scheme should have a different lock, Remember you will have to order enough keys for everyone in your street, plus some spares.

Height

You can have a gate 2 metre high without planning permission if your alleyway is not immediately next to a road that cars drive along. If you want a higher gate, you will need planning permission.

If your alleyway does join to a road that cars use, you cannot have a gate more than 1 metre in height unless you get planning permission. For example, if you live in a terrace without front gardens and want a gate that is flush with front walls of the houses, you will need to get planning permission.

Where to site it

If you can, put the gate at the outside end of the alleyway so that if someone tries to climb it they can be seen from the street. If the alleyway starts between two houses, it needs to be put where the garden walls of the two houses cannot be used to give the burglar a leg up.

The finish

Galvanised steel gives a grey finish. If the people who live along the alleyway do not want a grey gate, it can be painted. It must be left to weather for six months before painting. It should then be primed with a suitable lead-free metal primer and then given an undercoat and the topcoat of the chosen colour.

Lighting

It would be beneficial to position a low energy bulkhead lamp above the gate to illuminate any attempts to climb over the gate after dark.

Other Ideal Specification Factors

- The gate should open inwards.
- All the sections should use minimum 3mm thick steel.
- Surrounding the gate is an outer box frame (like a door frame) measuring 40mm x 40mm. This is topped by 150mm blunted rods. The rods can be welded to the top of the gate instead of the frame having a top. If a top section is included, it should be removable so that any bulky items can be taken down the alley. Fixing for the top section should be accessible only when the gate is open. The side parts of the frame should be fixed to the wall (or post) through the frame using heavy duty fixings. These fixings should only be accessible when the gate is open.
- The gate's outer box frame also measures 40mm x 40mm.
- The box section uprights for the gate are smaller, measuring 25mm x 25mm. The gap between them should be 100mm.
- The total height of the gate, if your alleyway does not join onto a street open to traffic, should be a maximum of 2 metres, unless you have planning permission, the ideal height is 2.4 metres. If the gate is higher than 2 metres, this extra height should come from increasing the height of the gate rather than adding a separate steel section above.
- The steel should be galvanised to prevent rust.
- The hinges should not provide footholds and should be designed so that the gate cannot be lifted out of its hinges.
- For taller or wider gates, you may be advised by the manufacturer to increase the gauge of the steel from 3mm to 4mm.

- A rubber strip should be fixed to the gate or frame to reduce the noise of opening and closing. In addition, a rubber stop should be fixed to the house wall for the same reason.
- For alleyways wide enough to allow a motor vehicle through, it may be necessary to use double gates because of weight limitations. In this instance, the bolt that holds the second opening gate in position must be inaccessible when the first opening gate is closed and locked. Where a single span gate is used, it will be necessary to attach a load-bearing wheel. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to add a steel running track to ground surface of the alleyway.

Permission and Consultation

Planning Permission

You may not need planning permission if your gate is no more than 2 metres high and does not join directly to a road that is open to vehicles. It is advisable that you check with a Planning Officer at your local authority. For example, you may live in a conservation area, or the best building to attach the gate to maybe a listed building. If so, you would need permission. If the Highways Authority own alleyway, they would have to de-adopt it before a gate can be installed.

Public Rights of Way

Barnsley Council will be able to tell you if your alleyway is a public right of way. If your alleyway is a public right of way, and not designed just to get to your homes, you probably will not be able to put a gate in. The Highways Authority should be able to tell you if there are alternatives.

Providing access to your alleyway for council workers

Alleyways often contain sewers and the street-level access to them. You will need to talk to the council about how you will provided access to them if you gate your alley.

If the council collects rubbish from your alley, you will need to talk to them about fitting the gate with a lock that allows council workers in.

The Council may help remove rubbish that has built up or been fly-tipped into your alley before gates go in. The Council may also be able to force people who it can proved have dumped rubbish into your alleyway to clear it, or get someone whose land has been used as a dump to clean it up.

If you are not sure who at the local authority you should speak to about these different questions, ask to speak to the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) for your area. The EHO should be able to tell you who else to contact. The EHO might also be willing to keep copies of the keys safe to let other council workers in.

Neighbours

All residents who will be affected by a gate in the alley must agree to the gate going in. In some cases, this is compulsory. If any of the neighbours objects at first, explain that they will have a key and be able to use the alley as before. If they still object, you are advised to consult a solicitor.

Whoever owns the house that the gate will be fixed to must give permission.

If the people who fit the gate are competent, the wall should not get damaged. However, if there are problems (e.g. if the house is a listed building), instead of fixing the gate to the wall, it could be hung from metal posts sunk into the ground. You may have to make some compromises about exactly where the gate can go. Remember, lots of gating schemes have gone ahead that seemed impossible at first. Success is much more likely than not. Be positive and use tact and good humour to help you get there.

Fire safety

A gate in your alleyway can help to protect your street against arson (deliberately starting a fire for criminal purposes) as well as burglary. However, you should get fire safety advice for the street before you put a gate in. Invite the Fire Brigade to look at your plans.

The Alleygates are up. You've done it!

Well done!

Finally, arrange a meeting with residents to resolve any immediate problems with the alleygates. Decide upon how future issues will be resolved including maintenance costs if they arise.

Alleygates Advice Contact List

Crime Reduction Officers	01226 736017
Neighbourhood Watch	01226 774961
BMBC Highways (adopted highways advice)	01226 772017
Area Forum Office	01226 770770