

OTAS INSIGHT · SC-002

Vehicles and crowds at winter markets: what the official guidance says

Tactical

Strategic

By OTAS Insights · Published by OTAS Live Ltd · United Kingdom (road traffic law sections: England, **Correct as of 20 October 2026** Wales and Scotland)

Official guidance asks winter market and parade organisers to plan vehicles and crowds together: keep site traffic away from the public, base any vehicle security barriers on a security risk assessment, and design them around how people actually move [1][2][5]. Barriers can slow crowd flow, and a poor layout can seldom be fixed by staff on the day [1]. Agree road closures early with the council and police, and ask your police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser for advice [5][6][13].

Key takeaways

- **The threat level:** SEVERE since 30 April 2026, meaning an attack is highly likely. It is not a warning about any particular event [11][12].
- **Two risks, one plan:** everyday site traffic is a safety risk, hostile vehicles a security risk. Plan both in the same traffic management plan [2][5].
- **Barriers and flow:** NPSA says plan for about 10% lower flow through a straight bollard line at busier times, and more where the line is angled, flow is two-way or the barriers are bigger. Avoid corners [1].
- **Temporary barriers:** the police National Barrier Asset can be requested by public bodies and commercial organisations [2][4].
- **Martyn's Law duties do not apply this winter.** The SIA expects them to start in spring 2027 [10].

Why this matters now

Christmas markets, light trails and parades open from mid November, often in streets and squares that carry traffic the rest of the year. Counter Terrorism Policing says festive markets and other winter events can be an attractive target, and offers free vigilance materials [13]. The UK threat level has been SEVERE since 30 April 2026 [11][12]. Our Insight on the threat level explains what that means for events. This one covers vehicles.

Two kinds of vehicle risk

Site traffic. Deliveries, traders, service and emergency vehicles move around and through event sites. HSE says organisers are responsible for managing the risks from transport on site so that people do not come to harm [5].

Hostile vehicles. Hostile vehicle mitigation (HVM) is the security discipline that reduces the risk of vehicles being used to cause harm. ProtectUK says it rests on security risk

assessment, security planning, design and risk-based measures [2]. We do not describe attack methods or site measures here, and nor should your public communications.

The two meet at the same gates and routes, so plan them together.

Keep people and vehicles apart

HSE asks event organisers to [5]:

- keep pedestrians and vehicles apart, with one-way systems where possible and as little reversing as possible
- finish work-vehicle tasks in public areas before the audience is admitted
- route trade, waste and service vehicles outside public areas where possible
- plan entry and exit for emergency vehicles



- use trained banksmen and traffic marshals, and set it all out in a traffic management plan.

Barriers and crowd flow

NPSA studied how crowds move through bollard lines at UK event venues. Its guidance applies the lessons to other busy places too [1]:

- **Flow.** At low densities, below about 0.4 people per square metre, bollards make little difference. At busier densities, NPSA recommends planning for about 10% lower flow through a straight line of slim bollards that people walk through head-on, in one direction. Where the line is angled, flow is two-way, or the barriers are larger than bollards, NPSA says treat them as obstacles, which removes more capacity [1].
- **Position.** Avoid corners and junctions. Queues and food kiosks next to a barrier line raise density, so rethink where people wait and buy [1].
- **Behaviour.** Cups on bollards, people sitting on them and staff standing at them all slow the flow further. Keep groups from gathering just before the line [1].
- **Design first.** NPSA says "a poor design can seldom be offset effectively through operational management" [1].
- **Vehicle gates.** Gates in a barrier line that are opened by hand can build pedestrian queues, which may push people outside the protected area [1].

For queues near roads, ProtectUK advises keeping them away from live traffic and the kerb edge, and planning queue routes where vehicles do not normally go [3].

Where barriers come from

ProtectUK lists options from total traffic exclusion to temporary portable barriers, and says measures should meet appropriate standards for vehicle impact, design and installation [2]. Ask suppliers for evidence that a product is rated to a recognised vehicle impact standard and installed as tested. The police National Barrier Asset is a stock of temporary barriers available to public bodies and commercial organisations at relatively little cost [2][4].

Roads and the law

In England, Wales and Scotland, the traffic authority can make an order to close or restrict a road for an event, and separate powers allow traffic orders to reduce danger connected with terrorism [6][7]. HSE says only the police, or people under their direction, can regulate traffic on the public highway, with limited exceptions, and that road closures start with the local authority [5]. Northern Ireland has its own road traffic law.

Martyn's Law

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) became law on 3 April 2025, but its duties are not in force yet. The SIA expects them to start in spring 2027 [10][14]. A qualifying event needs 800 or more people

present at once and checks that people have paid or hold tickets [8]. A free street market is unlikely to qualify, but a ticketed part such as an ice rink is treated as a separate event [8]. Take advice for your own event.

What to do

Tactical: market, site and operations managers

- Put deliveries, traders, emergency access and any barrier line in one traffic management plan [1][5].
- Finish vehicle moves in public areas before opening [5].
- Keep barrier lines clear of stalls, queues, seating and gathering groups [1].
- Open vehicle gates only when needed, so queues do not push people outside the protected area [1].
- Keep queues away from live traffic and the kerb edge [3].
- Watch the layout at busy times and adjust it [1].

Strategic: organisers, councils and directors

- Base decisions on a security risk assessment, and ask your police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser for advice [2][13].
- Start road closure talks with the council and police early [5][6].
- Use barriers rated to a recognised standard, or ask about the National Barrier Asset [2][4].
- Check that barrier design, operations and emergency plans fit together [1].
- Check whether any ticketed part of your event could be a qualifying event under Martyn's Law [8][10].

Action box

Level	Do this
Tactical	One traffic plan, vehicle moves before opening, barrier lines kept clear, gates opened only when needed, queues away from traffic.
Strategic	Risk assessment and police security advice, early road closure talks, rated barriers, plans that fit together, Martyn's Law check.

Frequently asked questions

Do Christmas markets need vehicle barriers by law?

We found no general legal requirement. Official guidance says measures should follow a security risk assessment for the site [2]. Ask your police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser.

Will barriers slow the crowd down?

They can. NPSA says plan for about 10% lower flow through a straight bollard line at busier times, and more where the line is angled, flow is two-way or the barriers are bigger. Avoid corners, queues and kiosks at the barrier line [1].

Can an event organiser close a road?

Not alone. The traffic authority makes road orders, and only the police, or people under their direction, can regulate traffic on the highway. Start with your local authority [5][6].

Does Martyn's Law apply to my Christmas market this year?

No. Its duties are not in force yet, and the SIA expects them to start in spring 2027. Free, open events are unlikely to qualify, but ticketed parts may [8][10].

Where can we get temporary barriers?

From suppliers whose products are rated to a recognised vehicle impact standard, or through the police National Barrier Asset [2][4].

What we don't know yet

The exact start date for the Martyn's Law duties and the content of its final guidance for events. NPSA's flow figures come from sports venues. The full report sets these out.

This article is general information, not security or legal advice. It summarises official guidance in general terms and does not replace advice from your police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser, a qualified security adviser or your council.

Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes EPGN, sells event operations services.

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OTAS Insights: otas.live/insights/

Full report (PDF): <https://otas.live/insights/vehicle-security-at-winter-events/vehicle-security-at-winter-events-full-report.pdf>

Related OTAS Insights: the threat level and event security this winter, <https://otas.live/insights/uk-threat-level-severe-winter-events/>

Work with OTAS

Planning a winter market, parade or outdoor event this season?

[Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help](#)

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All web sources were opened and checked on 20 October 2026.

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