

Vehicles and crowds at winter markets

What the official guidance says about site traffic, vehicle security barriers, crowd flow, road closures and Martyn's Law. Full report

Tactical Strategic

Correct as of	20 October 2026
Applies to	Organisers, councils and site managers running winter markets, parades and outdoor events where crowds and vehicles meet
Version	1.1
By	OTAS Insights. Published by OTAS Live Ltd
Review	Internal wording check by OTAS Live Ltd. Not reviewed by a security adviser or solicitor
Review due	20 January 2027, or sooner if the threat level or Martyn's Law dates change

Read this first. This report is general information for event professionals. It summarises published official guidance in general terms. It is not security advice for any particular site and does not replace advice from your police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser, a qualified security adviser or your council.





Contents

1	Summary	3
2	Why this matters now	3
3	Two kinds of vehicle risk	4
4	Barriers and crowd flow	4
5	Where barriers come from	6
6	Roads and the law	6
7	Martyn's Law	6
8	What to do	7
9	Tools	8
10	Frequently asked questions	8
11	What we don't know yet	9
12	Sources	9
13	About this report	10

About this report. It expands OTAS Insight SC-002 with the official guidance on site traffic, vehicle security barriers and crowd flow, where barriers come from, road closures and Martyn's Law, with actions for the Tactical and Strategic levels, a planning checklist and a steward briefing. Section 11 lists what we could not confirm. To ask for this report in another format, use the contact details on the OTAS Insights page.

1 Summary

Christmas markets, light trails, ice rinks and parades bring dense crowds into streets and squares that carry traffic for the rest of the year. Official guidance treats vehicles as two linked risks: everyday site traffic, which is a safety matter, and hostile vehicles, which are a security matter [2][5]. This report sets out what the published guidance says about both, in general terms, so that organisers, councils and site managers can ask the right questions early.

It draws on guidance from the National Protective Security Authority (NPSA), ProtectUK (Counter Terrorism Policing), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Security Industry Authority (SIA), and on the relevant legislation [1][2][5][10]. In line with that guidance, it does not describe attack methods or the security measures at any site.

It is general information for event professionals, correct as of 20 October 2026. It is not security or legal advice.

At a glance. What the official guidance asks of winter events.

- **Plan vehicles and crowds together.** Site traffic and hostile vehicle risks meet at the same gates and routes, so put them in one traffic management plan [2][5].
- **Design barriers around people.** 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, and keep queues and kiosks away from the line [1].
- **Design comes first.** "A poor design can seldom be offset effectively through operational management" [1].
- **Use rated products or the national stock.** Measures should meet appropriate standards. The police National Barrier Asset is open to public bodies and commercial organisations [2][4].
- **Roads need the authorities.** Road closures are made by the traffic authority, and only the police, or people under their direction, can regulate traffic on the highway [5][6].
- **Martyn's Law duties do not apply this winter.** The SIA expects them to start in spring 2027 [10].

2 Why this matters now

The UK national threat level has been SEVERE since 30 April 2026, which means an attack is highly likely [11][12]. It is a national judgement, not a warning about any event. Counter Terrorism Policing's winter vigilance campaign says festive markets, pantomimes and concerts can be an attractive target, and encourages organisers to work with their Counter Terrorism Security Adviser (CTSA) on messaging for their event [13]. Our Insight on the threat level covers reporting, briefing and response. This report keeps to vehicles.

Most winter markets are built in a few days on public land, with traders, deliveries and service vehicles working right up to opening. That makes the separation of vehicles and people, and any barrier planning, a build and operations question as much as a security one.

3 Two kinds of vehicle risk

3.1 Everyday site traffic

HSE says event organisers are responsible for making sure the risks created by transport on site are managed so that people do not come to harm [5]. Its checklist asks organisers to [5]:

- assess the risks from vehicles on site
- keep people and vehicles apart, using a traffic management system with one-way routes where possible
- keep reversing to a minimum
- plan entry and exit for emergency vehicles
- finish all tasks involving work vehicles in public areas before the audience is admitted
- design the site so that trade, waste and sanitary service vehicles reach their points without passing through public areas, where possible
- use trained banksmen, signallers and traffic marshals
- set all of this out in a traffic management plan.

HSE also says not to let unauthorised people drive vehicles on site [5].

3.2 Hostile vehicles

ProtectUK describes hostile vehicle mitigation (HVM) as a protective security discipline that reduces the risks from vehicle borne threats, from vandalism to attacks by determined criminals or terrorists [2]. It says HVM is based on security risk assessment, security planning, design and the deployment of risk-based measures, informed by the threat, the consequences, the vulnerability of the location and the needs of the owner [2].

HVM measures include deterrent communications, security awareness, incident response planning and training, operational security, traffic exclusion and management, and physical obstructions such as vehicle security barriers and traffic calming [2]. In other words, barriers are only one part.

The official pages describe how attacks can be carried out. We do not repeat that detail, and organisers should keep it out of public communications too.

4 Barriers and crowd flow

4.1 Plan barriers with the crowd in mind

NPSA's guidance on vehicle security barriers (VSBs) at event venues asks operators and designers to take a holistic approach, so that [1]:

- the level of physical protection is appropriate
- the effect on pedestrian movement is as small as possible
- the site stays accessible for all users
- the measures fit operational plans, local pedestrian behaviour and emergency plans
- no new hazards or unintended consequences are introduced
- neighbours and stakeholders are engaged early and throughout.

Most event venues choose permeable bollards in areas of high footfall, as they affect crowd flow less than larger obstacles such as gates [1]. NPSA recommends a site assessment of crowd flow, using tools such as desktop studies, observation, video surveys, validated crowd simulation and trials with temporary barriers [1].

4.2 Flow and density

NPSA's findings come from observing crowds at fifteen events at eight UK venues between 2017 and 2022. Most were sports venues, but NPSA says the principles may also help other events and busy areas [1]. At lower densities, below about 0.4 people per square metre, the barriers are not likely to affect flow much. 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]. It says it is good practice to test the layout and monitor its effect on flow once installed [1].

4.3 Where to put them

- **Avoid corners and junctions.** Turning, crossing and meeting points lower flow and raise density [1].
- **Watch queues and kiosks.** Food kiosks, their queues, signs and people meeting near a barrier line all raise density. Reconfiguring waiting spaces and food and drink positions may help, and this may only become obvious when the area is watched at busy times [1].
- **Make barriers easy to see.** NPSA says a barrier should contrast clearly with its surroundings in all lighting conditions [1]. Winter events run in the dark.
- **Mind flat tops.** Litter and glass can collect on flat-topped features, so assess slip, trip and fall hazards [1].

4.4 What happens around them

NPSA found that flow drops further when bottles or cups are left on top of bollards, people sit on low bollards, bollards are taller than 1.2m, or staff stand at the barriers [1]. Static groups gathering just before a barrier line can affect flow more than the barriers themselves, so NPSA recommends proactive crowd management to keep that area clear [1]. But it also warns that "a poor design can seldom be offset effectively through operational management" [1]. Get the layout right first.

4.5 Vehicle gates in a barrier line

Where barriers open to let vehicles on and off a site, NPSA says the way they are operated should not build up pedestrian queues. If it does, people may walk outside the protection to avoid the queue, putting them at higher risk from vehicles [1]. Where pedestrians are held while a vehicle passes, they should be held behind the barriers [1].

4.6 Queues near traffic

ProtectUK's guidance on queues, written for elections but stated in general terms, advises keeping queues away from live traffic and roads, or at least away from the kerb edge, planning queue routes where vehicles do not normally go, and closing vehicle access to shared spaces while queues are present [3]. Winter markets often have queues at entrances, rinks and popular stalls, so the same points apply.

5 Where barriers come from

5.1 The options

ProtectUK lists a range of traffic exclusion and management approaches for publicly accessible places, from total traffic exclusion and controlled vehicle inclusion to footway protection, traffic calming, semi-permanent protection, temporary portable barriers and doing nothing [2]. Which applies is a risk-based decision for the site. ProtectUK notes that repeatedly renting temporary barriers is expensive, so places that host events regularly may consider pre-installed or semi-permanent schemes [2].

5.2 Standards

ProtectUK says physical measures should meet appropriate standards for vehicle impact performance, design and installation [2]. Ask suppliers for evidence that a product is rated to a recognised vehicle impact standard and that it will be installed as it was tested. A barrier that looks solid may not be rated.

5.3 The National Barrier Asset

The National Barrier Asset (NBA) is a stock of surface-mounted temporary HVM barriers held by the National Vehicle Threat Mitigation Unit (NVTMU), a police unit within the National Counter Terrorism Security Office [2][4]. ProtectUK says it is available to the public and private sectors at relatively little cost [2]. Since a framework awarded in January 2024, eligible users include public bodies and commercial organisations as well as police forces [4]. Ask early, as availability for busy dates is not published.

5.4 Advice

Your police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser is the first point of contact for security advice on a public event [13].

6 Roads and the law

In England, Wales and Scotland, section 16A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 lets the traffic authority restrict or prohibit the use of a road for a sporting event, social event or entertainment held on the road, to let the public watch it, or to reduce disruption. Before making the order, the authority must be satisfied that the event cannot reasonably be held other than on a road [6]. Section 22C allows traffic orders and notices for the purpose of avoiding or reducing danger connected with terrorism [7].

HSE says that in nearly all cases only the police, or someone under their direction, can regulate traffic on the public highway. In some police force areas, but not in Scotland, the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme lets approved organisations direct traffic. To apply for a road closure or diversion, speak to your local authority [5]. These sections do not extend to Northern Ireland, which has its own road traffic law.

7 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, which will regulate it, expects them to start in spring 2027 [10][14].

When the duties start, a "qualifying event" will be one where the public have access, it is reasonable to expect 800 or more people present at the same time, and measures are in place to check that people have paid, hold tickets or passes, or are members or guests of a club [8]. Where those checks apply only to part of the premises, each such part is treated as a separate event [8].

That means a free, open street market is unlikely to be a qualifying event in its own right, but a ticketed area within it, such as an ice rink, a ticketed grotto or a paid concert, may be, if the numbers are reached. For enhanced duty premises and qualifying events, the Act will require public protection measures, so far as reasonably practicable, relating to monitoring, the movement of people, physical safety and security, and information security [9]. Take advice on your own event before next winter.

8 What to do

Tactical

- Put deliveries, traders, service and emergency vehicles and any barrier line into one traffic management plan [1][5].
- Finish vehicle moves in public areas before the public are admitted, and route trade and service vehicles outside public areas where possible [5].
- Keep barrier lines clear of stalls, queues, seating and gathering groups. Brief stewards to keep people moving there [1].
- Operate vehicle gates so they do not build pedestrian queues, and hold people behind the barriers while vehicles pass [1].
- Keep entry and stall queues away from live traffic and the kerb edge [3].
- Check barriers are easy to see after dark, and clear litter and glass from flat tops [1].
- Watch the layout at busy times and adjust it [1].

Strategic

- Base vehicle decisions on a security risk assessment, and ask your police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser for advice [2][13].
- Start road closure and traffic management talks with the local authority and police early [5][6].
- Where barriers are needed, use products rated to a recognised vehicle impact standard and installed as tested, or ask about the National Barrier Asset [2][4].
- Make sure barrier design, operational plans and emergency plans fit together, and engage neighbours early [1].
- Budget for barriers as a recurring cost, or consider a longer-term scheme with the landowner [2].
- Check whether any ticketed part of the event could be a qualifying event when Martyn's Law starts [8][10].

Action box

Level	Do this
Tactical	One traffic plan, vehicle moves before opening, barrier lines kept clear, gates that do not build queues, 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.

9 Tools

9.1 Planning checklist

When	Check	Who
Now	Security risk assessment started. Police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser contacted	Strategic
Now	Road closure or restriction discussed with the local authority and police	Strategic
Now	Barrier source agreed: rated product and installer, or National Barrier Asset request	Strategic
Before build	Traffic management plan covers deliveries, traders, service and emergency vehicles and any barrier line	Tactical
Before build	Queues, kiosks and seating kept away from barrier lines and corners	Tactical
Before opening	Vehicle moves in public areas finished. Banksmen and marshals briefed	Tactical
Each day	Barrier line clear, visible after dark, flat tops cleared. Gates operated without building queues	Tactical
Busy times	Layout watched and adjusted	Tactical

Table 1. Planning checklist. Adapt it to your risk assessment and the advice you receive.

9.2 Steward briefing (about 1 minute)

"Tonight vehicles and people are kept apart. Your post is _____. Keep the line of barriers clear: no one sits on them, nothing is left on top, and people do not gather right in front of them. If a queue starts to form near the road or the barrier line, tell _____. Vehicles only come through gate _____ when _____ says so, and the public wait behind the barriers while they pass. If you see anything that worries you, report it to _____ straight away. Any questions?"

10 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].

11 What we don't know yet

- **Start date for the Martyn's Law duties.** The SIA expects spring 2027 and will confirm the date [10].
- **Final guidance for events.** How the regulator will apply the qualifying event test to mixed free and ticketed sites in practice.
- **National Barrier Asset availability.** Lead times and availability for particular dates are not published [4].
- **Flow figures for markets.** NPSA's figures come mainly from sports venues. Market layouts with stalls and dwell may differ [1].
- **Northern Ireland.** This report does not set out Northern Ireland road traffic law.

12 Sources

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

1. National Protective Security Authority (NPSA), 'Vehicle Security Barriers at Event Venues: reducing the impact of Hostile Vehicle Mitigation on spectator flow' (last updated 15 September 2025). <https://www.npsa.gov.uk/specialised-guidance/hostile-vehicle-mitigation-hvm/vehicle-security-barriers-event-venues>
2. ProtectUK (Counter Terrorism Policing), 'Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM)' (ProtectUK publication date 14 July 2026). <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/advice-and-guidance/risk/hostile-vehicle-mitigation-hvm>
3. ProtectUK, 'Vehicle as a Weapon (VAW)', election security guidance (ProtectUK publication date 26 March 2024). <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/advice-and-guidance/security/vehicle-weapon-vaw>
4. ProtectUK, 'National Vehicle Threat Mitigation Unit' (NVTMU and the National Barrier Asset). <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/advice-and-guidance/security/national-vehicle-threat-mitigation-unit>
5. Health and Safety Executive (HSE), 'Event safety: Transport'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/transport.htm>
6. Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, section 16A, prohibition or restriction on roads in connection with certain events (England, Wales and Scotland). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/27/section/16A>
7. Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, section 22C, traffic orders for the purpose of avoiding danger connected with terrorism (England, Wales and Scotland). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/27/section/22C>
8. Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, section 3, qualifying events (not yet in force). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/10/section/3>
9. Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, section 6, enhanced duty premises and events: public protection measures (not yet in force). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/10/section/6>
10. Security Industry Authority (SIA), 'Understanding Martyn's Law and the SIA's role as regulator' (published 17 July 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-martyns-law-and-the-sias-role-as-regulator>
11. MI5, the Security Service, 'Threat levels'. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threats-and-advice/terrorism-threat-levels>

12. Home Office and the Home Secretary, 'Threat level increase following antisemitic terror attack' (news story, 30 April 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/threat-level-increase-following-antisemitic-terror-attack>
13. ProtectUK, 'Winter Vigilance Campaign Digital Toolkit' (Counter Terrorism Policing). <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/digital-toolkits/winter-vigilance-campaign-digital-toolkit>
14. Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, introductory text (Royal Assent 3 April 2025). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/10/introduction>

13 About this report

Published by OTAS Live Ltd. General information only, correct as of 20 October 2026. It summarises official guidance in general terms. It is not security or legal advice 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.

Corrections: if you spot an error, tell us using the contact details on the OTAS Insights page and we will correct it and update the 'Correct as of' date. To ask for this report in another format, use the same contact details.

OTAS Insights: otas.live/insights/

Work with OTAS

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

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

Version 1.1, 20 October 2026. Review due: 20 January 2027, or sooner if the threat level or Martyn's Law dates change.

OTAS Live Ltd. Registered in Scotland, company number SC755102.