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Alleys, alleyways, paths and passages. Whatever name you use for the narrow walkways on housing estates, putting a gate in has proved to be a very successful way of beating the burglars.

This step-by-step guide shows you how to put a gate into an alley to protect your own street and the homes of everyone who lives there. The same steps can also be helpful for putting gates into alleyways that are big enough for vehicles to pass through. There, they can help improve the security of commercial properties and industrial centres.

Don't forget that putting a gate across an alley does not mean the homes in it do not need good door and window locks to keep them all safe. Ask your local Crime Prevention Officer for advice on making your home more secure.

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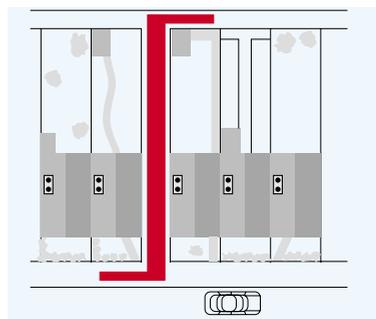
A bit about alleys

Alleys are really useful. They make it possible to get to the back doors of terraced houses. They stop you from having to carry gardening or DIY materials through the house. You might not use the word alleys. In different parts of the country, people call them: entries, ginnels, backways, snickets, passages, paths and walks, among other names.

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. The alleys that are left are often full of fly-tipped rubbish.

Many gates were taken out of alleys in the Second World War to make it easier for Air Raid Wardens to get to people's houses in an emergency. Most of those gates have never been replaced.

Alleys were not a security problem when they were built. Burglary was rare, compared with today. But now the alleyways are not in regular use, they have turned into a perfect way for burglars to steal from your garden and your home.



Access down the alley

The alley and the villain

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 into a house through the back door or window or at the side. Only 15 per cent of all domestic burglaries use the front doors or windows.

There are three main ways a burglar can get to the back of a house:

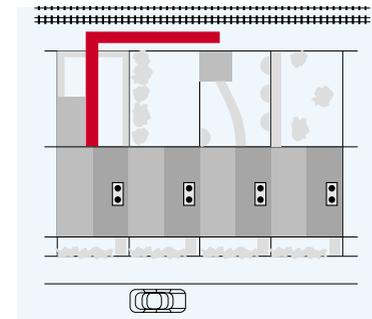
- Finding a fence or gate to climb at the side of a detached or semi-detached house.
- Crossing open land or a railway line.
- Walking along an alleyway that joins the backs of several houses. This means the burglar can get to more houses without difficulty.

A criminal can use an alleyway without being seen, even in broad daylight. They only have to be visible in public to cross the road to the next alleyway.

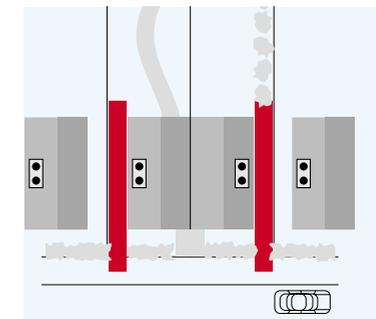
If thieves know the alleyways in an area well, they can also use them as escape routes.

Some burglars break into a house in the day, hide stolen property in the alleyway behind the house, and come back and collect it under cover of darkness.

Putting a gate in the alley helps keep burglars out.



Access from a railway line



Access down the side

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.

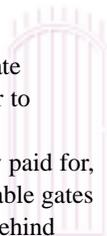
Preventing burglary isn't the only good reason for putting a gate in. It stops fly-tipping of rubbish, littering, people using your alleyway as a toilet for their dogs, and noisy and disturbing behaviour behind the houses. It helps the people in your street get their alleyway back.

Children can play safely in an alleyway with a gate in. Strangers can't get to them, and they can't run out into the traffic. Gating the alley puts you and the people in your street back in control.

Gates work

People in a small West London estate decided to make their homes harder to burgle. They asked the local Crime Prevention Officer for advice. They paid for, and put in place, three strong, lockable gates to block off the network of alleys behind their houses.

Eight more gates were soon put in place. The gates had a dramatic effect: the number of houses broken into fell from 81 to 24; the number of times burglars came back and broke in to the same homes again fell from 15 to 2. Gates are now being put in place all over the estate.



Setting up a scheme to put gates in

Ask your neighbours to help with organising and deciding what to do. Get your local Crime Prevention Officer and Neighbourhood Watch scheme involved.

Set 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. Your local police can help if you want to include details of how many crimes in the area can be linked to burglars using alleyways to break in to houses from the back.

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, see page 6). A Residents' Association could also help – if there isn't a Residents' Association, this could be the beginnings 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

These 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 your local authority to find out about the costs and whether they might be able to negotiate them.

Privately owned alleys

It can be hard to know who owns an alleyway. Sometimes two houses both own half of it. Sometimes one house owns the alleyway but the 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 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 of the letter:

Dear Neighbour,

Re: The Gating of our alleyway

Last week my neighbour was burgled. They got in through the French doors and stole all her jewellery. As you can imagine, she's extremely upset and she told me this was not the first time this has happened. I understand that the people on the other side of her were burgled too.

I spoke to the police about all these burglaries and it turns out that we've had 12 burglaries in as many months. They suggested that I write to everyone about the possibility of gating our alleyways because this has proved in other places to be very effective in stopping burglars getting in through the backs of houses.

The type of gate the Crime Prevention Officer recommends is about 2 metres high and made of steel. It's fitted with a strong lock and we would all have a key. I've included a rough sketch.

I'm happy to arrange a meeting with the Crime Prevention Officer where we can all raise questions, but I need to know how many people support the scheme in principle before inviting the Crime Prevention Officer. So, if you like the idea, please return the tear-off slip below and I will do the rest.

Thanks 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.

I also understand that I will have a key whether or not I am willing or able to pay towards the gating scheme.

I am able/am not able to help with this project.

Date: _____ *Name:* _____

Address: _____ *Signature:* _____

Designing the gate

Write to your neighbours again once you have found out how many of them support the gating scheme and how much gates would cost.

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

- Solicitor's fees, local authority fees, Land Registry fee etc.
- Skip hire and paying for rubbish to be cleared out of the alleyway
- Insurance
- Maintenance costs
- Administration costs

All these need to be included from the start so that you collect the right amount of money rather than having to go back for more.

Local businesses might be interested in sponsoring a gate. In West London, local businesses contributed a proportion of the costs because they were keen to help local residents – many of whom were their customers. Write to them and find out before working out how much it will cost people who live there.

- 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 their contribution.

There might need to be an annual fee to cover the costs of updating the locks, painting or maintenance. It can be as little as the price of a lottery ticket. Again, let people know how much this will be before asking them to agree to pay towards the gating scheme.

The design specification shown in this booklet has proved that it works. It costs about £500. However, there are other choices that cost less. For example, you can get a gate made of steel palisade uprights bolted to a metal frame or a gate made of timber. Timber will need regular maintenance.

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.

Whatever your gate is made of, it must be designed with these features:

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.

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.

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.

Height

You can have a gate 2 metres 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 to put in a gate that is flush with the front walls of the houses, you will need to get planning permission.

Where to put 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.

A design that's been proved to work

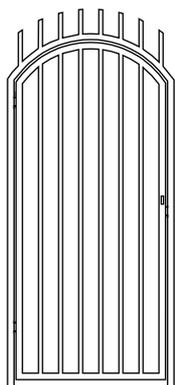
The right design for you depends on the size and shape of the alleyway. It also depends on what the people in the terrace want and how much money they can raise. The gate shown is 'preferred' because it's been tried and tested.

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 top coat of the chosen colour.

Remember you will have to order enough keys for everyone in your street, plus some spares.

Lighting

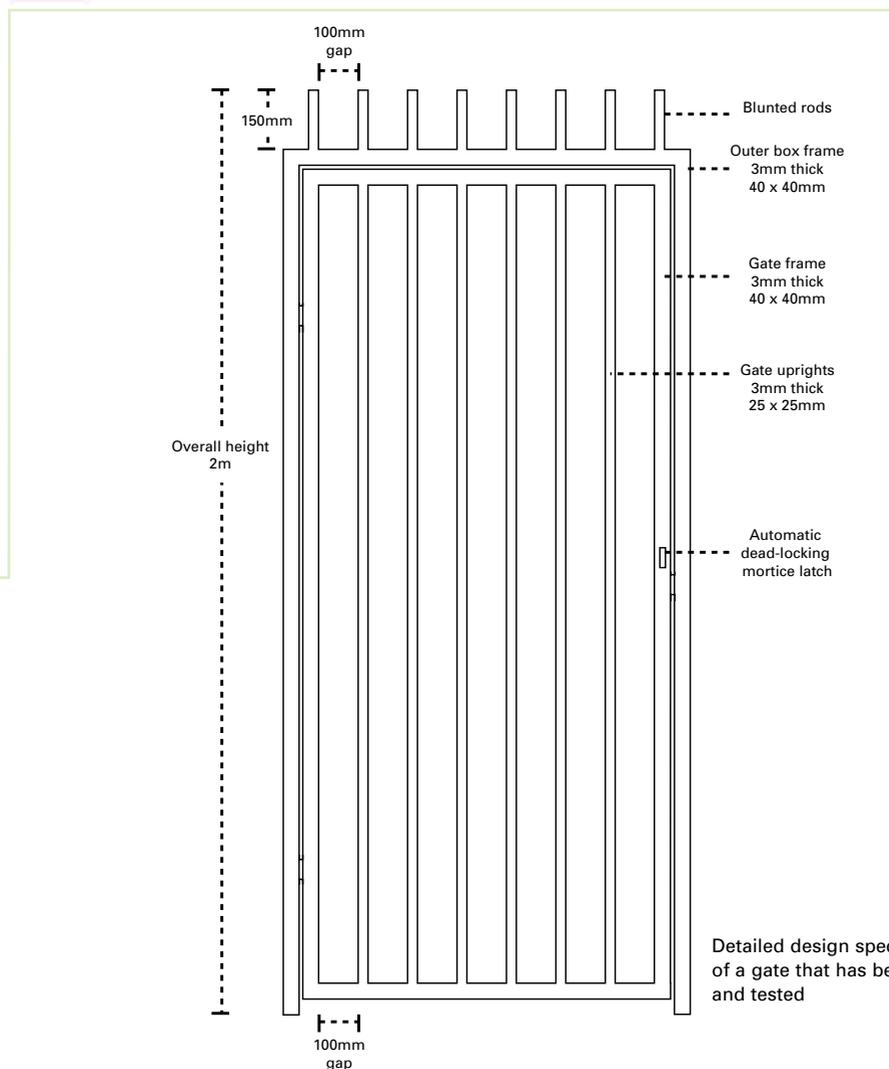
It would be beneficial to position a low-energy bulkhead lamp above the gate to illuminate any attempts to climb over the gate after dark.



Specification

- The gate should open inwards.
- All the sections should use a 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,

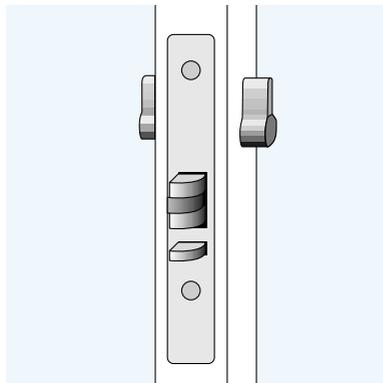
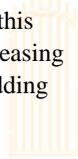


it should be removable so that any bulky items can be taken down the alley. Fixing for the top section should be accessible only when the gate is open. The side parts of the frame should be fixed to the wall (or post) through the frame using heavy duty fixings. These fixings should only be accessible when the gate is open.

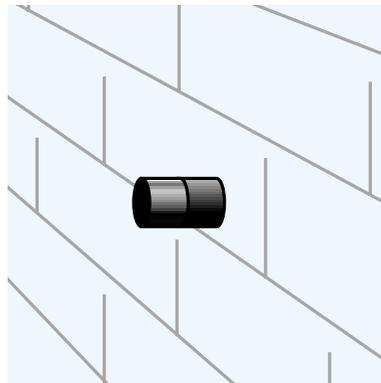
- The gate's outer box frame also measures 40mm x 40mm.
- The box section uprights for the gate are smaller, measuring 25mm x 25mm. The gap between them should be 100mm.
- The total height of the gate, if your alleyway does not join on to a street open to traffic, should be a maximum of 2 metres, unless you have planning permission. If you can get 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.

- Note that a 2m gate including the top frame may not provide sufficient headroom for tall persons. In this case, you will need to seek planning permission for a higher gate, or do not include a top frame.
- 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.

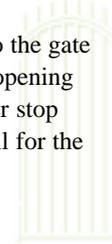


Automatic dead-locking mortice latch

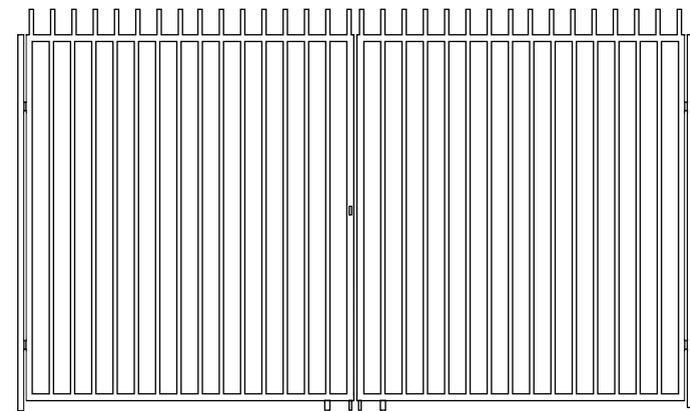


Rubber stop to reduce noise

- Lock the gate using a narrow style, automatic dead-locking mortice latch. At least two keys per household will be required. The lock should be contained within the 40mm x 40mm frame about half way up the gate.
- The gap at the bottom of the gate should be small enough to stop anyone crawling through.
- 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.



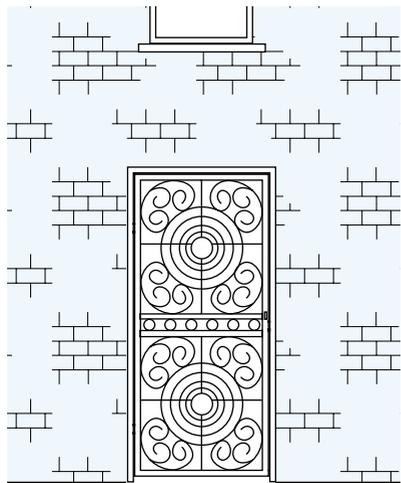
- Each gate in a scheme should have a different lock, so that if a key is lost there will be no need to change all the locks.
- For alleyways wide enough to allow a motor vehicle through, it may be necessary to use double gates because of weight limitations. In this instance, the bolt that holds the 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 the ground surface of the alleyway.



Permission and consultation

The design of your gate should, where possible, take account of the wishes of the residents. Get neighbours and their children involved in contributing their ideas towards a design.

Where the alleyway forms a 'doorway' beneath part of a building, the gate need not be designed to resist climbing. However, if there is a window directly above the gate, it should be locked. You should talk to the local Fire Brigade about locks, as they may need access to the alleyway in an emergency.



Make sure that the manufacturers of your gate know how it is to be locked. Ask them to consult a locksmith for specialist advice. Your local Crime Prevention Officer will probably be able to tell you where to find a gate manufacturer and a locksmith.

You and your neighbours will be looking for value for money. Make sure you get at least three quotes for the work. You should provide manufacturers with the same specification so that you can compare like-for-like when you get their quotations. Your Crime Prevention Officer will be able to help you draw up the specification and give you advice on where the gate or gates should be.



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 the local authority. For example, you may live in a conservation area, or the best building to attach the gate to may be a listed building. If so, you would need permission.

Many local authorities work with the police (and other partners) to reduce crime, and may be sympathetic to what you want to do. If the Highways Authority own the alleyway, they would have to de-adopt it before a gate can be installed (see page 6).

Public rights of way

The local authority 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 provide 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.

Some councils will help remove rubbish that has built up or been fly-tipped into your alley before gates go in. Some local authorities will subsidise skips for community groups; they will be able to tell you if you qualify. They might also be able to force people who it can be proved have dumped rubbish into your alleyway to clear it, or to get someone whose land has been used as a dump to clean it up.

The gates are up. You've done it!

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 (eg if the house is a listed building, see page 12), instead of fixing the gate to a 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 your street before you put a gate in. Invite your local Fire Brigade to look at your plans. The schemes in West London have all been supported and given fire safety advice by the local fire station commanders.

Well done! Think about having an 'official' launch. Invite the local press, as well as local police and the local authority. Send out a press release about the anti-crime reasons for the gate, or the community spirit that helped to put it up.

Arrange a meeting with the helpers or committee to sort out any immediate problems with the gates, and to decide how often you will meet in future.

Keep in touch with the Crime Prevention Officer or your local beat officer and ask them to keep you up to date on local crime figures. Why not write to everyone who shares the alleyway after six months or a year to let them know how many burglaries there have been (if any!) since you put the gates in? If you decide to write after a year, include a reminder of the annual maintenance fee.

Suggested timetable

The time it takes to complete a gating scheme will depend on many things – not least the size of the scheme and the residents' ability to pay. It can take a matter of weeks or in some cases more than a year.

To help you plan your scheme, here is a timetable set out over six months.

Month 1

1. Speak to your close neighbours and ask them to help. Contact the Neighbourhood Watch or Residents' Association, if you have one, and hold a meeting at your home.
2. Invite the Crime Prevention Officer or your local beat officer to your meeting and ask them to supply some crime data so you can prove to your neighbours how alleyways can be, or are being, misused.
3. Get a large-scale Ordnance Survey map that shows individual alleyways and houses. You can get a map from your local authority or call the Ordnance Survey Information Service on 0845 6050505.

4. Plot the crime details onto the map, and add any other incidents that you or your neighbours hear about. Keep this crime map up to date.
5. Send a letter to all your neighbours, and ask them to return the tear-off slip (see page 7 for an example) to let you know how many people support the scheme. The numbers of supporters should be high.
6. Visit any neighbours who haven't returned their tear-off slips and explain to them about the scheme.
7. Meet local residents who have volunteered to help.
8. See a Planning Officer at your local authority.
9. Submit a Planning Application, if you need one. Applications can take as much as six weeks to process, but a smaller project such as gating an alley may be dealt with in half the time. Try to agree a single application fee for all the gates.

10. Find out who owns the alleyway.

11. Contact the Highways Authority if your alleyway is a public footpath, and negotiate how much it will cost to get it de-adopted so you can put in a gate or gates.

Month 2

1. If necessary, make your group of neighbours into a formal committee. Elect a chair, secretary and treasurer. Decide if you should start up a Residents' Association.
2. Hold a meeting for everyone who lives in the street, if necessary. Invite the local police. Try and get everyone to agree that the committee should act on their behalf.
3. Contact the local authority about funding. Ask local businesses if they would be interested in sponsoring a gate. The sponsor's name could be on a plaque fixed adjacent to the gate, making sure that the plaque cannot be used as a foothold for climbing the gate.

4. Share out the work that the group has to do.

5. Decide on a specification for the gate (see page 10). The Crime Prevention Officer can help. Remember you will need planning permission if you choose a gate more than 2 metres high or your alleyway leads straight on to the public highway.

6. Get the specifications to at least three steel fabricators or security firms and ask them to quote a price.

7. Work out the other costs for installation, solicitor's fees, Land Registry, local authority, letters and postage etc.

Month 3

1. Open a bank account in the name of the scheme or Residents' Association for the contributions. Remember bank charges can be different from bank to bank.
2. Talk to any neighbour who still objects to the scheme.
3. Talk to the fire station about safety advice.

4. Talk to the Crime Prevention Officer.
5. Talk to your solicitor or the local authority to get support and advice on what to say to help change the minds of any neighbours who are still not convinced about it being a good idea.
6. You will have planning permission (if you applied for it in Month 1).
7. Write to everyone in the street telling them the prices quoted for making the gate and which manufacturer the committee recommends. Ask if they agree. Make sure the figure you send them includes details of the other costs and fees.

Month 4

1. Collect money from the neighbours. Give them receipts and keep a record of who paid how much and when.
2. Order the gates from the chosen manufacturer.
3. Speak to the local authority about clearing out rubbish – will they do it, or will they help to cover the cost of skips for the community to do it?

Month 5

1. Get the alleyways cleared.
2. The gates will be installed.
3. Invite the press, the local authority (perhaps the Mayor or your local councillor), a local senior police officer, the Crime Prevention Officer etc. to a 'launch' of the gates.
4. Make sure that all the residents are given their keys on the day the gates are installed.

Month 6

1. The gating committee (or whatever form the group took) should meet to discuss the gates: how was the installation? Do the gates work? Have there been any problems? If so, deal with them. Decide how often you need to meet and when you want to contact the other residents again.
2. Enjoy the benefits of living in an alleyway with the crime locked out.

This document has been updated by Calvin Beckford and Patrick Cogan, Metropolitan Police Crime Prevention Design Advisers, based on the original Alleygater's Guide written by Calvin Beckford.

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