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TOWN AT RISK OF ANOTHER RIPPER

The former head of CID in South Yorkshire has voiced his fears for the safety of prostitutes in Doncaster and warned that the town has created the kind of environment in which a second Yorkshire Ripper could operate.

The chilling comments came from Michael Burdis, a former Detective Chief Superintendent of South Yorkshire Police, who labelled the Thorne Road area as the worst area of its size in the county for attacks on prostitutes.

The comments come just a year after 19-year-old prostitute Rebecca Stephenson was murdered by 'family man' Ronald Beardmore and a week after a man was arrested and released on bail in connection with the alleged indecent assault of a prostitute on Balmoral Road.

Mr Burdis' comments were revealed in a letter he wrote to a new campaign group aiming to get prostitutes off the streets of Doncaster.

In his letter to the Residents Against Street Prostitution (RASP) action group, Mr Burdis, who has investigated over 100 murders in 40 years as an officer, said: "Prostitutes are more likely to feature as the victims of murder or serious sexual assault than any other group within the community and the prostitutes of Doncaster are no exception.

"The record over the years of the Thorne Road area and its surrounding streets from Christ Church to DRI is not good.

"There are numerous instances of attacks on prostitutes, with some of them proving fatal. I would suggest that over the last 30 years there are more instances of major crime related to prostitutes in the relatively small area between Thorne Road and Copley Road, extending along Beckett Road to Wentworth Road than in any other area of similar size in the county." Mr Burdis, who was awarded the Queen's Police Medal for distinguished service, added: "For much of the five years of Sutcliffe's reign of terror, Doncaster Police officers were engaged in surveillance in the town's red light area and a number of the officers were seconded to work on the investigation itself.

"I have no doubt that crimes of a similar nature could easily be repeated in the future. The similarity of the locations in Doncaster, Sheffield, and particularly Leeds is striking, even today after 30 years."

Mr Burdis, who also worked on the inquiry into police failures to catch the killer of murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence, told the Free Press: "If you look at the Headingley area of Leeds where the Ripper used to operate then Thorne Road is just like that type of area. "They are both very nice areas with very large houses but there's plenty of room for the prostitutes to act.

"It is easy for vehicles to pass through and there is loads of side roads for people to use. The fear that I have is that prostitutes that act here and work here are in danger. "They are a very vulnerable group of people and they bring violence to an area where it ought not to be." Sergeant Steve Butler of the town centre Safer Neighbourhood Team said: "We are acutely aware that the problem is not improving on the Thorne Road corridor and will continue to work with residents and partner agencies to tackle anti-social and criminal behaviour.

"To this end there will be patrols seven nights a week in the area in response to these residents concerns.

"This sustainable operation will support the ongoing partnership work with Streetreach who are nationally acclaimed for their diversionary work.

"This coupled with the neighbourhood response teams, community safety wardens, police community support officers and police should see an improvement in the area."

He added: "I would not want to draw any parallels with the Yorkshire Ripper and find that this reference could be construed as increasing public concern of what is a safe area.

"There have been competing demands which have pulled resources away from the area however prostitutes and men who drive in the area wishing to pay for the sexual services of this vulnerable group will be rigorously pursued.

"The police have a good partnership with the CPS and are working to agreed protocols to pursue Anti Social Behaviour Orders. I would encourage residents to contact the police with any information they have in relation to car details and registration numbers of kerb crawlers.
"Police officers will investigate any offence that is brought to our attention."