# Facial recognition technology aids police in Brent arrests



In a significant police operation earlier this year in Brent, North London, facial recognition technology played a pivotal role in apprehending seven criminal suspects, including individuals linked to a series of sexual offences. The police reported that the initiative was so effective that they found themselves with insufficient personnel to handle the volume of arrests made during the operation.

The deployment occurred in January in a high footfall area as part of ongoing efforts to prevent crime and enhance public safety. This marked the third usage of facial recognition technology in the borough. During a short period of 90 minutes, officers conducted live facial recognition checks on passers-by, comparing their images to a watchlist of individuals involved in ongoing police investigations. The operation resulted in seven arrests, notably targeting suspects wanted for sex-related crimes and others, particularly those affecting women and girls.

Detective Superintendent Will Lexton-Jones remarked, “The facial recognition initiative was highly effective. We ran out of police officers due to the number of arrests. In 90 minutes, we made seven arrests, most of which were of sexual offenders.” The facial recognition system operates by capturing a person's facial features and converting them into a numerical code to be matched against existing watch lists.

Champal Grewal, the Violence Against Women Lead Officer, emphasised the police's commitment to addressing violence against women, outlining proactive steps such as undercover operations and training for both police personnel and venue staff on safety and acceptable behaviour. Despite crime rates in Brent showing a significant decline over the previous year—with burglary down 18%, motor vehicle crime down 12%, and homicide down 16%—local authorities acknowledge that further measures are necessary to ensure community safety. Cllr Harbi Farah, Brent Council’s Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, reiterated the council's steadfast dedication to a zero-tolerance policy towards violence against women and girls.

However, the use of facial recognition technology has drawn criticism from human rights advocacy groups such as the National Council for Civil Liberties, commonly known as Liberty. The organisation has described the technology as a "gross violation" of human rights, stating concerns about the potential unlawful collection of biometric data from unsuspecting individuals. They noted, “The ‘maps’ that facial recognition makes of your face is unique to you. Much like a fingerprint, it is identifiable biometric data.”

In a different incident, Devon and Cornwall Police responded to reports of hazardous activities by youths at the Pillmere Estate in Saltash, where several fires were set, including one that covered approximately 40 square metres. The fires were attributed to a group of young individuals igniting deodorant cans, with firefighters managing to extinguish the flames before they could escalate into a more serious conflagration. Saltash Police expressed concern over the reckless behaviour of the youths, highlighting the potential impact on emergency services and their response times to more critical incidents. The situation prompted the local police to solicit information from the public to aid their investigation into the matter.

Coinciding with this local incident, other fires were reported across Bodmin Moor, with Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service responding late at night to multiple outbreaks in various locations. The causes of these fires are currently under investigation.

Devon and Cornwall Police have urged anyone with information about the fires or the incidents at the Pillmere Estate to come forward, demonstrating the ongoing community effort to maintain safety and address anti-social behaviour within the region.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.theregister.com/2025/03/27/uk_facial_recognition/> - This article supports the claim of facial recognition technology being used by British police, specifically mentioning its use in Croydon for crime prevention and its role in apprehending suspects.
* <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/campaigns/stop-facial-recognition/> - This site corroborates criticisms of facial recognition technology as a potential violation of human rights, highlighting concerns about surveillance and privacy.
* <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-11-13/debates/E334DF95-2313-4AAC-AA25-D34F8F7C8DD5/FacialRecognitionPoliceUse> - This UK Parliament debate transcript discusses the use and effectiveness of facial recognition technology by police forces, touching on both its benefits and concerns about privacy.
* <https://www.google.com> - This search engine can provide general information about Devon and Cornwall Police, but specific details regarding the incident mentioned (fires in Saltash) may not be directly available without further searching.
* <https://www.brent.gov.uk/your-council/brent-council-news> - Brent Council's news page may offer updates on local crime prevention efforts, including any recent operations involving facial recognition technology.
* <https://libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issues/privacy-and-surveillance/facial-recognition/> - This site further details Liberty's stance on facial recognition as a violation of human rights, providing insights into their concerns regarding privacy and surveillance.