

Residents fear jailed neighbour's return

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RESIDENTS who were plagued by a “neighbour from hell” said last night they fear he will “return with a vengeance” despite him being jailed for 18 months.

Michael Cornwell was imprisoned after ignoring a warning from a judge that he would face jail if he didn't move away from his home.

Cornwell was told by Ipswich Crown Court judge Peter Thompson yesterday that he was “a continuing threat” to his neighbours in Back Lane, Monks Eleigh and he had no option but to jail him.

But after he was jailed for 18 months, one long-suffering neighbour said: “We have been told he will be out in six months and then this will all start again. He will come back with a vengeance and with more scores to settle.

“This is not over, his presence is still hanging over us. A prison sentence doesn't seem to be the answer here, he should be kept away somehow.”

Judge Thompson said that one neighbour had described suffering six years of torment from Cornwell while another had been left “frightened and upset” by her dealings with him.

Cornwell, who admitted five offences of breaching a restraining order, will have to serve at least half the 18 month sentence giving his neighbours - a number of whom were in court yesterday - a nine month respite from his activities.

Following his sentence one of the neighbours, who didn't want to be named, was unsympathetic towards Cornwell's loss of liberty, and said: “It is nothing compared to the sentence he has put us through.”

Michael Crimp, prosecuting, said the magistrates had issued a restraining order in April last year forbidding the defendant to confront his neighbours after he was found guilty of harassment.

However, since then the 51 year-old had repeatedly breached the order by damaging his neighbour's fence and blocking the narrow back lane with his car preventing residents reaching or leaving their homes.

Cornwell, who had lived in his cottage for about 35 years, also painted his home name on the road outside his cottage and left trails of rubbish in a neighbour's driveway.

The neighbours felt so frustrated by his behaviour they had taken photographs and video footage.

Cornwell was remanded in custody for 96 days between August and December 2003 for breaching bail conditions and the restraining order.

When he appeared before Judge Thompson in February this year and admitted breaching the order the judge deferred sentence until yesterday to give Cornwell time to move away from Back Lane.

But yesterday Mr Crimp said that Cornwell had still not let or sold his house and he showed the judge photographs of the overgrown property.

He said that on July 19 Cornwell had been jailed for six weeks by magistrates, for breaching the restraining order on June 23 by blocking Back Lane with his car.

Richard Balchin, for Cornwell, said his client had been on the waiting list of several agencies for alternative accommodation.

He had also been in contact with agencies with a view to renting out his home but no one was interested because of its run down state.

He said Cornwell claimed that drugs prescribed to him after the last hearing had left him in a “catatonic state” for two months.

Mr Balchin said the defendant believed himself to be suffering from a mental illness but experts had found that he did not have any diagnosable problems, although he may be suffering from a personality disorder.

Sentencing Cornwell Judge Thompson said: “I’ve seen current photographs of your home and it is a complete tip.”

He said Cornwell had done nothing to make his property into a state whereby it could be rented or sold.

He said he was satisfied that Cornwell was not mentally ill and did not believe he had been left in a catatonic state and unable to do anything because of medication he was taking.

“I am satisfied that you are determined to stay in the property regardless of what anyone else says,” added the Judge.

He said the restraining order passed by the magistrates would continue indefinitely.

“When you are released from prison I am sure that you will go back to your property and if you continue to breach the restraining order in any of the ways you have in the past or in different ways you are likely to come back before the court.

“If you do, this will be seen to be a moderate sentence and if there are further breaches you can expect harsher sentences,” said the Judge.