

It Looks Like A Street Lamp In A Leafy London Road

With its imposing red brick houses, neat gardens and red postbox, Baskerville Road in the borough of Wandsworth is a classic example of family residences in the more affluent areas of London. But just outside a house on the corner is a new piece of infrastructure that would seem more suited to the perimeter of a maximum security prison or a detention camp. It is a CCTV camera.

- 5 Indeed, two of these rather sinister-looking structures — which appear to double as street lamps — have been installed on Baskerville Road, where homes fetch up to £10 million.

10 A sign beneath them says that they are there ‘to prevent crime and promote public safety’. This will no doubt reassure those who live on the street, who have experienced a spate of burglaries in recent years. But the extra security comes at a high cost, to which most Wandsworth residents — and the rest of the nation — are utterly oblivious.

For the strange white cameras are just two of millions which have quietly been installed throughout Britain in recent months. Made by Dahua, a Chinese state-affiliated company, they are equipped with controversial facial recognition software — a means of monitoring and controlling populations much favoured by Beijing and other totalitarian regimes around the world.

- 15 **Wandsworth and Richmond councils claimed earlier this year that the cameras’ facial recognition technology is not enabled and would not be used ‘at this point’. But as facial recognition becomes the norm — the Metropolitan Police is already trialling it on central London streets — this could change overnight.**

In fact, these devices are just the latest additions to a growing system of increasingly intrusive snooping on the UK population which is emulating China’s Big Brother approach, and being facilitated by it, too.

- 20 Britons largely assume that China — home to half of the world’s 800 million CCTV cameras — is the ultimate surveillance state. But with more CCTV cameras per person in London than in Beijing, and with residents of the UK capital being the third most watched population in the world, some now fear the UK is on a fast-track to rival China.

25 Of course, we only have to look at mainland China for a glimpse of the future of unprecedented mass surveillance.

Facial recognition technology is enabled at farmers’ markets, karaoke bars and even public lavatories in parks, where it is used to prevent users taking too much toilet paper. Someone playing music too loudly on a train, not clearing up after their dog, or arguing with their neighbours automatically creates data that could consequentially cost them the ability to book a train ticket or get a loan.

- 30 Silkie Carlo, director of Big Brother Watch, warned that ‘Britons have always closely guarded our privacy . . . but we are sleepwalking into a society where everything we do, say, or spend is tracked and monitored.

Left unchecked, Britain’s expansion of CCTV, facial recognition and surveillance, such as the devices in Wandsworth, pave the way for a dystopian state in which Big Brother is not just watching us, but listening, judging and controlling us too.