***Fairhurst v Woodard*:**

**Neighbour Wins Security Camera Data Protection Case**

In a series of disputes between neighbours Dr Mary Fairhurst and Mr Jon Woodard, over Mr Woodard’s house security system renovations which included security cameras and a Ring doorbell, a judge has held that Mr Woodard’s security system broke data laws and contributed to the harassment which led to Dr Fairhurst moving home.

It was found that Mr Woodard’s Ring doorbell captured images of Dr Fairhurst’s house and garden while the security camera mounted on Mr Woodard’s shed captured almost the whole of Dr Fairhurst’s garden and her parking space. In addition to video and image footage, the cameras collected audio data which Judge Melissa Clarke believed was “even more problematic and detrimental than video data” as it could capture the private conversations of neighbours.

Ring doorbells can pick up sound from 40 feet away enabling residents to turn their area of the neighbourhood and public space into surveillance hotbeds.

In conversation with Mr Woodard, Dr Fairhurst found that all data from the cameras were viewable by Mr Woodard on his smartphone or smartwatch in breach of the Data Protection Act 2020 and UK GDPR.

On one occasion, Mr Woodard sent Dr Fairhurst an image of her taken from the driveway camera claiming that there was a “suspicious stranger” loitering near his property. Judge Melissa Clarke determined this action as a threat and one of many examples of Mr Woodard utilising his security system to harass his neighbour.

In his defence, Mr Woodard claimed that his security system was put in place to prevent or detect crime which was claimed to be legal under s.1(3)(a) of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. However, this was dismissed by the judge.

Amazon, the owner of Ring, has released a statement stating that customers must “respect their neighbours’ privacy, and comply with any applicable laws when using their Ring devices”. Furthermore, Amazon stated that there were privacy settings on the Ring doorbell to turn sound recording on and off.

The Information Commissioner’s Office has also stated that “*Lots of people use domestic CCTV and video doorbells. If you own one, you should respect people’s privacy rights and take steps to minimise intrusion to neighbours and passers-by*.”

The data privacy case of *Fairhurst v Woodard* (Case No: G00MK161) continues an ongoing conversation around the normalisation of domestic surveillance within our communities as the rise of relatively affordable home surveillance technology suggests that courts will be dealing with more data protection cases to do with security systems.

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