

## Criminal Gang Used Drones to Track and Rob Illegal Cannabis Farms

July 19, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



A gang has been convicted after using drones fitted with thermal imaging cameras to identify illegal cannabis farms before organising armed raids to steal the crop. The operation, uncovered by Nottinghamshire Police, demonstrates a disturbing evolution in criminal tactics, combining low—cost aviation technology with organised burglary to target cannabis cultivation sites and profit substantially.

In May 2024, Nottinghamshire Police detained six men linked to a plot in Mansfield. The defendants were caught attempting to steal around 260 cannabis plants from a terraced house on Birding Street, valued wholesale at over £22,000. Local detectives established that the group deployed drones equipped with heat-seeking cameras to scout for cannabis farms. Footage was shared with associates in London, who then travelled to carry out the raid. Officers intercepted suspects in vehicles travelling north along the M1 motorway and arrested them after dangerous driving and a high-speed pursuit.

The court convicted Andrew Thomas, Donnell Quarry, Dichrije Elliel, Khalid Omar, Golam Yackobi, and Addil Elmi for conspiracy to commit robbery; Elliel also faced aggravated burglary charges. Elliel and Quarry received five-year sentences, Thomas was jailed for three and a half years, Elmi for four years and eight months, Omar for three years and four months, and Yackobi for two years and four months. Detectives explained that the group's use of drones to locate the grows allowed them to select targets and execute raids swiftly, often without violence, though weapons such as knives were carried.

Such crimes echo earlier reports from Shropshire and Halesowen, where criminals have fitted drones with infrared or thermal cameras to scan suburban properties for cannabis farms, exploiting growers' reluctance to involve law enforcement. One unnamed offender remarked: "It is not like I'm using my drone to see if people have nice televisions, we're after drugs to steal and sell." He added that many growers were not hardened criminals, making them convenient targets.

Police witnesses emphasised that cannabis farms, often run covertly in residential areas using hydroponic lighting, emit considerable heat. This

makes them detectable from the air without specialised equipment. The criminals' choice of drone technology minimises risk and increases reach, enabling remote scouting before deploying teams to conduct burglaries.

From a broader perspective, the crime reflects the adaptability of organised criminal groups (OCGs) in exploiting technological advancements. The use of drones in both intelligence gathering and theft illustrates a shift in rural and suburban crime patterns. Det Sgt Rachel Mayfield of Nottinghamshire Police urged residents to report suspicious activities, noting that cannabis cultivation can draw organised gangs into local neighbourhoods and fuel wider criminal behaviour. Authorities recommend enhanced surveillance, community vigilance, and swift reporting as key deterrents to crime.