

Ashford & District NHW

‘Watching out for each other’

Minutes of the meeting held at Tescos Park Farm, Ashford on Tuesday 5th April 2022

**1. Welcome, introductions & apologies:**

1905 hours, meeting commenced, the Chair welcomed those present, and the Secretary relayed apologies from non-attendees. Introductions were made and new Coordinator – Steve Hill (Church Yard Passage) was welcomed.

**Present:**

Steve Hunt – Chair, Harvey Road, Willesborough

Andrew Judd – VWLO/Acting Secretary, Park Farm South

Keith Uncle – Chilham, Old Wives Lees (also now a Parish Councillor)

Steve Hill – Church Yard Passage, Ashford

Peter Webb – Shadoxhurst

Guy Wilson – Longbridge, Broughton Lees, Ashford

John Leek - Three Fields Development, Tenterden

Michelle Leek - Three Fields Development, Tenterden

Clive Leewarden – Bramley Gardens, Ashford

**Apologies received from:**

Adrian Lidgett - Biddenden

Jen Aldington – Cot Lane & Headcorn Rd, Biddenden

CI Nick Sparkes – District Commander (Ashford) Kent Police

Roger Wheal – Treasurer, Lawn & Hurst Close, Tenterden

Colin Groome - Abbot Way & Kiln Field, Tenterden

Graham Bailey – Willesborough

Martin Chambers – Wittersham

Bob Bowen-Nelmes – Park Farm

Maurice Kirkham – Smithy Drive, Park Farm

Alan Witt - Charing

PCSO Laura Langridge – Ashford CSU

1. **Minutes of and matters arising from the meeting held on** **21st October 2021**

There were no queries or matters arising, the minutes were agreed.

**3.Update from Chief Inspector Nick Sparkes** – read by AJ

Dear Chair, Members,

I would like to apologies for the short notice unavailability due to a change in personal circumstances.

Firstly, I would like to start by thanking all of you as Neighbourhood Watch members for your time and contribution.  Volunteers work and partners are so important to the shared responsibility to making our community safer.  And I see on a regular basis the benefit of the NHW scheme in action.  Only last week in Tenterden we had identified an arrested a suspect for theft of an industrial leaf blower within 24hrs, charged and remanded him to court the next morning.  All through NHW reporting and evidence.  This is replicated across the district.

Ashford has seen a period of reasonable crime reporting stability, and while we are returning to a pre COVID normality, where crime dropped significantly, the numbers reported are less than expected.  Positively we are arresting more individuals as a % of those recorded crimes and solving more of them more consistently than we were 2 years ago.  Current crime trends include:

* A decrease in rural burglary
* A rise in theft from motor vehicles (property left in cars on show and tools overnight)
* A recent drop but overall reoccurrence of damage caused by catapults

I know catapults are a common complaint.  It is not an offence to possess a catapult in law.  It only becomes an offence if the person has intent to use it to cause damage or harm or uses it to cause damage or harm.  The latter is easier to prove if we detain people.  The former is much harder as it’s based on someone’s thoughts and effectively requires them to tell us the truth.  However.  We have had some successes in the town area and Singleton with targeting known individuals, patrolling, and issuing Community Policing Notices.  I would draw your attention to Peter New’s petition to seek Government change in the law on possession of catapults to make it an absolute offence (with a defence of reasonable excuse - i.e., in the act of coming to or from fishing); what we need to stop is people carrying these as an acceptable item.

We have been lucky enough to receive the support of the Kent Police PCSO task force, which is currently deployed into the Stanhope area to combat violence, ASB and criminal damage.  The work there has seen a noticeable reduction in crime

Further we are in the final stages of the Safer Streets 3 project in Ashford with our partners Ashford Borough Council, which will see improved safety measures including CCTV, a Safety App, Active Bystander training and Smart Tag deployed to keep people safe.  Again, this work along with Government GRIP funding to reduce violence has seen a reduction in crime already and I have no doubt will go on to do more good.

We are currently undertaking a timely review of what Neighbourhood policing will look like going forward in line with an HMICFRS recommendation.  This will include engagement and will ensure we have a community policing model fit for the future.

Finally, I appeal as ever for you to report crimes and information to use.  Crimes can be report via 101, 999 or online.  Information and intelligence can be shared on My Community Voice, or Crimestoppers, or online chat.

Thank you again for your support and time.  It does make a difference

Kindest regards

Nick Sparkes

District Commander

Ashford

The Chair thanked CI Sparkes for his update

**4. Chair’s Update – Steve Hunt**

The Chair stated that it was good to see members in person and hoped the days of Zoom meetings were now in the past. He explained that there was very little to currently update other than he attended the County Neighbourhood Watch Chairs meeting recently. The only update from that meeting was that a new Members Guide has been produced by Canterbury NHW Assoc. (see VWLO’s report).

**5.Treasurer and Secretary’s positions**

Th Chair stated that the Secretary and the Treasurer had stood down at the AGM and despite AJ sending out a message for volunteers no-one had come forward. AJ was temporarily covering the role of Secretary but due to other personal commitments was not able to take this role on permanently. Roger Wheal the Treasurer stated he would remain in post until a replacement is found. Coordinators were asked to advertise the two roles.

**6**.**Treasurer’s report**

Roger had kindly sent through an update by e-mail:

Cash at bank - £446.66

Petty cash - £3.17

There have been only three transactions since 12th July2021, they were:

12/7/21 £25.00 for website licence/access

21/7/21 £143.88 – Zoom access

11/2/22 £25.00 for website access/licence

The website was discussed as it wasn’t widely known that one existed, **Action – AJ** would view website and report to the Chair. (**Action complete** – website is only small in scale, not really of any assistance currently and hasn’t been update for several years, Chair updated for raising at next meeting.)

**7. Volunteer and Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator’s update**

1. Membership. AJ explained that membership had been static other than the link members gained via the Community Safety Shops in County Square which he had attended. Also, the only new scheme was Church Yard Passage, Ashford which Steve Hill had reinvigorated since Mark Vidler resigned. Thanks were given to Steve for taking this on. General membership Countywide has been similar as there is little interest in starting new schemes, the public would appear to prefer to sign up as individual members without any Coordinator responsibilities. Whilst it is always good to welcome new members it is disappointing that new coordinators are not coming forward; this is not just an Ashford issue.

2. Messaging. AJ explained that Kent Police had instructed that the current e-mail messaging system which is used to update all coordinators daily with details about local crime, crime prevention and Kent Media releases will cease on the 1st June 2022. The My Community Voice (MCV) system would then be used to sent out all messages. There was a great deal of confusion and disappointment regrading this news. AJ stated that to receive messages in the future members would have to sign up to and join MCV individually, there was concern that this would not happen across the board with all members and could have an impact on members numbers as persons accessing MVC and the messages sent would not have to be NHW members. Members were also confused with the relationship between MCV and Our Watch (OW). Some had attempted to join MCV but were not able to due to their membership of OW because effectively they are the same system run by Neighbourhood Alert. Members stated they would copy the MCV information and cascade to their members therefore not necessitating their members having to sign up to MCV. AJ stated Kent Police wished for as many NHW members to sign up to MCV as possible. AJ stated he would update the Committee at the next meeting regarding progress towards the 1st June.

3. AJ thanked the current NHW messaging team of Chris Young, Steve Bartlett and Karen Cook who between them provided daily, relevant messages to the whole of East Kent NHW. Chris will receive a special commemorative Queen’s Jubilee Coin in recognition of his excess of five years as a Police Volunteer.

4. Referring to the previous requests for replacement “No Cold Calling” stickers AJ said that new ones were now available, and a number had been brought to the meeting for those present to disseminate to their members.

5. Members Guide, the new Kent NHW Member’s Guide has now been completed by Canterbury NHW Assoc. and would be available soon

6. Dates for Police Engagement meetings will soon be released, and AJ will notify NHW Coordinators when they are.

7.As mentioned previously NHW have joined the Community Safety Unit during recent School holiday periods within a pop-up shop provided by County Square, Ashford. These proved to be very well attended and thanks go to PC Danielle Archer for organising them and Police Volunteer Peter New for his attendance during some of the days.

8. AJ updated the meeting regarding Operation Horizon, the new build initiative which is being led by Police Volunteer Peter New. The project is continuing its success in 100% membership for most of the newly built estates within the District. The same issues are however being experienced as far as coordinators are concerned, as members do not wish to coordinate the schemes themselves. There are currently 80 new builds schemes in the area. Other NHW Associations are joining the initiative such as Folkestone and Canterbury

9. Events. AJ will be attending the Kent County Show on the 8th July 2022 and will present a NHW stand. The Kent Police Open Day will again be going ahead this year and NHW will have a stand on the 2nd and 3rd July 2022, this will take place at the Kent Police Training School, Sutton Road, Maidstone

10. Bid. The bid of £15,000 to the Kent Police Property Fund which was previously mentioned has not been approved. This bid was made by the County Chair Peter Rolington and considerations are being made as to how an alternative bid can be made.

11. AJ stated he had brought stickers and literature for coordinators to the meeting as it had been so long since meeting in person, these were displayed on a table within the room.

**8. Crime prevention report from PCSO Laura Langridge**

Laura had given her apologies and provided a report of which AJ read the headlines. He stated that the full report would be attached to the minutes. Laura was thanked for her report.

**Livestock Worrying -** Spring is upon us, ewe's may be pregnant / had their lambs and may become territorial. It is an offence for a dog to worry livestock on agricultural land, under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953. Livestock means cattle, sheep, goats, swine, horses, or poultry (including fowls, turkeys, geese, and ducks).

* Dogs who are ordinarily calm and focussed can become distracted and behave differently when in a rural environment where their sense of smell and chase instinct are easily stimulated.
* Plan before walking in the countryside. Take treats with you to keep your dog focused and serve as a distraction if they become interested in livestock.
* Always keep your dog under control
* Don’t pass between and separate adult sheep or cows from their young. They may act aggressively to protect their lambs or calves.

**Bicycle theft** - Bicycles can be some of the easiest vehicles for thieves and vandals to target. Protect yourself from becoming a victim by following some simple steps:

* Get a good bike lock
* Lock your bike to something secure, even if only for a few minutes and avoid isolated places - leave your bike where a potential thief can be seen
* Lock up removable parts (e.g., wheels) and take light fittings with you
* Have your bike's frame security-marked or engraved
* Take a clear colour photograph of your bike and make a written record of its description, including any unique features
* At home, keep your bike in a secure garage or shed and keep the door locked

**Burglary -** Homes with no security measures in place are five times more likely to be burgled than those with simple security measures. Good window locks and strong deadlocks can make a big difference.

Taking just a few steps can make a big difference in keeping your home safe from burglary. Here are a few tips:

* Lock your doors and windows every time you leave the house, even when you're just out in the garden, remembering to double-lock UPVC doors (lift handle and turnkey)
* Hide all keys, including car keys, out of sight and away from the letterbox (remember a device could be used to hook keys through the letterbox)
* Install a visual burglar alarm (as part of a suite of prevention measures - a burglar alarm on its own will not prevent entry to your home)
* Install good outside lighting
* Get a trusted neighbour to keep an eye on your property
* Leave radios or lights in your house on a timer to make the property appear occupied
* Make sure the fences around your garden are in good condition
* Secure bikes at home by locking them to an immoveable object inside a locked shed or garage
* Keep ladders and tools stored away; don't leave them outside where they could be used to break into your home
* Ensure side gates are locked to prevent access to the rear of the property
* Ensure rear fencing is in good repair
* Improve natural surveillance at the front of your property i.e., trim high hedges
* Mark your property with postcode and house number and register your property for free with <https://www.immobilise.com/>
* Consider joining or forming a Neighbourhood Watch scheme
* Remove valuables from view of ground floor windows
* Store any high value items (i.e., jewellery, passports) in a properly secured safe or bank vault

**Doors and windows**

* In most burglaries, the criminals broke into the house or flat through the door, either by forcing the lock or kicking it in. Make sure your doors are strong and secure. Consider fitting a bar for extra strength; a locksmith can advise you on how best to do it.
* Glass panels on doors are particularly vulnerable. If you have one on your door you could replace it with laminated glass, which is stronger. You can also buy a film in a DIY store that you can stick over the glass to make it harder to break.
* Home security and DIY shops sell inexpensive, key-operated locks to fit most kinds of windows. Fit window locks with keys to all downstairs windows and those upstairs that are easy to reach.

**Going away on holiday**

Make your home look like someone is living in it:

* Use automatic timer-switches to turn your lights and radios on when it goes dark
* Cancel any newspaper or milk deliveries
* Use the Royal Mail's 'keepsafe' service - they keep your mail for up to 2 months while you're away. Mail sitting on your doorstep is a sign that you are away
* Trusted neighbours may be able to help you by collecting your post, opening, and closing curtains and they could park their car on your driveway
* Avoid discussing holiday plans on public social networking sites - burglars can use any information you post on there to their advantage

**Moped / Scooter theft -** ‘Lock, chain, cover’

Lock - Use a disc lock to help secure the front brake disc, or a grip lock to secure the brake and throttle controls. You could also use a D lock on the front wheel to stop it being wheeled away.

Chain - Thieves often steal a bike by breaking the steering lock and wheeling it away. Use a chain lock through the back wheel (the front wheel can be removed). Secure your bike, with the lock taut to an immovable object such as a ground anchor or street furniture. This will stop thieves from cutting a lock trailing on the ground using an angle grinder. If this isn’t possible, thread the chain through your bike frame and back wheel.

Cover - Thieves often ‘shop’ for particular bike models. Using a cover instantly makes it less attractive to them. A cover also provides another time-consuming obstacle for the thief.

Unfortunately, security measures can’t guarantee your bike won’t be stolen but, by using multiple security measures, you can make it harder and less attractive for thieves.

For security products for your scooter, motorcycle or moped search the ‘Accredited products’ page on the ‘Secured by Design’ website – this is a Police approved website.

Remove the keys - Thieves are often opportunists and so they will look for bikes that are quick and easy to steal first.

• Always use the steering lock and remove the ignition keys, even if you are close by or away for a few minutes. It only takes a few seconds for a thief so don’t make it easy for them.

• Never rely on just using your steering lock to secure your bike as thieves can break the steering lock and simply wheel the bike away.

Fitting an alarm can be a deterrent to thieves

• Consider fitting a Thatcham-rated 1 or 2 alarm system with tracking, immobilisation, anti-grab, and movement sensors can help protect and trace your vehicle.

• A quality Thatcham approved, professionally fitted alarm system will not only put off thieves but could also reduce your insurance premiums.

• Marking as much of your bike as possible will make it more difficult for criminals to sell parts on, and therefore less attractive to steal. It will also help police identify parts and return recovered stolen bikes.

• There are a range of bike marking providers that you can use.

• Fit a garage door defender or upgrade garage door locks.

• Garage and shed alarms as well as low level dusk to dawn lighting will also enhance security. Fitting a ground anchor also provides extra security.

• Motorcycle lockers are also available to store your bike at home.

• Park it in an area near to your home where it’s well overlooked with good lighting.

**Car thefts -** Locking your vehicle, even when filling up or parked on your drive, greatly reduces the possibility of it being targeted by an opportunist thief. Even if you have locked your vehicle, check you haven’t left any windows or the sunroof open.

It is illegal to leave your vehicle running unattended while you de-ice it or warm it up in cold weather. If someone takes it while it’s left like this, your insurer won’t pay out because you won’t be covered.

Keep the keys safe - Vehicles today are by and large more difficult to steal than ever unless the thief can access your key or fob to clone them. Keep your keys safe, out of view when at home, and away from your front door. It’s not uncommon for car keys to be stolen from inside your home by thieves fishing for them with a stick and hook through the letterbox.

When not in use, keep your electronic car key in a security pouch to prevent it being scanned by thieves to open and steal your car nearby.

Park responsibly - It’s always advisable to avoid parking in dark and secluded areas. It’s worth an extra five or ten-minute walk if it means your vehicle is left in a well-lit and busier street. And if possible, always try to park in illuminated and staffed car parks.

Watch for illegal tow trucks - Thieves often attempt to lift vehicles from the street, literally. So, if you see a tow away crew acting suspiciously – especially if their vehicle isn’t branded or if they’re not in uniform – then please report it immediately.

Car parks with height-restricted entrances help prevent illegal tow trucks and removal vehicles. And fitting a Thatcham rated category 1 or 2 alarm system with tracking, immobilisation, anti-grab, and movement sensors can help protect and trace your vehicle.

Fit good in-car security locks - Bear in mind that built-in steering locks aren’t necessarily thief-proof. Many can be forced and broken. Fitting a Sold Secure steering wheel, gear lever or clutch pedal security device can give your vehicle added protection.

Double-check electronic locking - Electronic devices can be used to jam the electronic signal from your key fob to lock your vehicle. Always manually check your vehicle has locked before walking away. If unsure, lock it manually.

Before you buy, check for cloning - Changing the identity of a vehicle, known as vehicle cloning, can be as simple as adding stolen number plates. When buying a vehicle, always check the DVLA V5 document and make sure the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) on the vehicle is the same as on the document. Make sure you check more than one of the VINs as well as the engine numbers on the vehicle.

Be aware of test drive thieves - Test drive thefts are where a thief answers an advert for a vehicle sale pretending to be a genuine buyer. When they meet the seller, they ask for a test drive and never return with the vehicle. Take steps to avoid this by going with the prospective buyer on any test drive and don’t leave anyone alone with the vehicle and its keys. Ask any potential buyer for contact details and to see their driving licence and insurance. Never leave the vehicle keys in the ignition – keep hold of them.

**Heating oil:**

Increase prices of fuel is likely to see an increase in fuel thefts so it is important that steps are taken to secure heating oil tanks. Thieves are attracted to the remote location of many heating oil tanks and can steal thousands of pounds worth of oil quickly and discreetly.

• Get a tank alarm and a sign above the tank to alert thieves that the heating oil tank is alarmed

• Install CCTV

• Security lighting may interrupt and draw attention to any thieves and hopefully deter them

• Put gravel around the tank - the gravel makes the surrounding area noisy. The noise may draw attention to anyone accessing the tank and may even deter thieves before they do any damage

• Ensure the tank is not visible to anybody passing by, as thieves will often visit neighbourhoods to look for suitable tanks to target

• Keep the tank locked. If the inspection cap does not have eyelets to enable the tank to be padlocked, then purchase locking bars for other points of access

**9. Feedback from Coordinators**

**SH – Willesborough,** generally quiet with no crime or ASB to report, local event – street party in June to mark the Queens Jubilee.

**GW – Longbridge**, Willesborough, currently has 20 members out of 56 homes. Stated residents were aware and helpful re NHW and crime prevention.

**CL – Bramley Gardens** – all residents were members, quiet with no issues to report.

**SH – Church Yard Passage, Ashford** – 11 members joined scheme, he has several commercial premises within his area. On going noise from persons passing within the area at night despite the locking gate at the High Street access point.

**KU – Old Wives Lees**, stated he had been working with the PCSO regarding ASB noise coming from the playing field from several youths, would appear that only one person has complained re the noise. Chilham Square will be closed for the Queens Jubilee.

**SL & JL – Three Fields development, Tenterden**, ASB has been occurring in the Church View area, children performing Tik Toks (Knock Down Ginger!) causing a nuisance.

**PW – Shadoxhurst**, - speeding is a consistent issue through the village, speeds of up to 80mph have been recorded on the Speed Indication Device (SID), this has obviously caused concern, but Speed Watch is looking to continue within the village but would appreciate Police support.

**AJ – Park Farm South**, membership slowly growing, no crime or ASB to report other than the regular motocross noise from the Cloverleaf during weekends. ABC are being provided details of when the events are taking place and are in the process of taking action against the landowner.

**Alan Witt – Charing** via e-mail -As for my report, there is nothing that I know of other than my own burglary when irreplaceable objects were taken including family medals and my ‘dog tag’ that I wore in the War in case I became separated from my parents or we were killed.

It may be of interest to Committee members that Charing has welcomed, and I mean welcomed, refugees from Afghanistan at the Hothfield Holiday Inn and also the currently empty Pym House sheltered accommodation is being prepared and maybe offered to refugees from Ukraine.

**10. Forthcoming events** – as previous updates from AJ

**11. Any other Business** – no AOB raised

**12.Date of next meeting -** was agreed to be **Tuesday the 12th July 2022**, at Tescos, Park Farm, Ashford.

*Thanks were given to Mr Nick Fox, manager of Tescos, Park Farm, Ashford, for providing the accommodation and refreshments for the meeting.*

**13. Meeting closed** at 2040 hours