

Hitchin Safer Neighbourhood Team Report

Our current priorities are:

Fly-tipping;

Vehicle related nuisance – speeding and inconsiderate driving through the villages within Hitchin Rural;

Burglary

The next Priority Setting Forum will be held over the first week in December.

Fly-tipping

In April 2021 Fly tipping – specifically along the Lilley Bottom Road and surrounding area – was made a local policing priority for Hitchin Rural, after consultation with the public and local farmers. This was kept as a priority, as public feeling was such that it was thought fly-tipping was still the main issue of concern.

The general feeling from the vast majority of people prepared to express a feeling, was that fly-tipping was increasing across the Hitchin Rural area, with more cannabis waste being dumped than ever before.

It is agreed that NHDC are the lead agency when it comes to fly-tipping, with the Police working in a support role. Therefore, when we get a report of a fly-tip from a member of the public, it gets recorded on our crime system, then all details passed to the NHDC Enforcement Team for further investigation. If during the course of those investigations Police input is required, then the local officer will assist with joint home visits and interview etc.

If the fly-tip is found by one of the SNT, and on looking through it there are no further lines of enquiry, we will fill in the on-line fly-tip report, so it can be cleared away as quickly as possible.

If the offender is still on scene and the fly-tip has been witnessed, officers will attend on blue lights and arrest the suspect. If this is at a suitable time of day, we will then contact the Enforcement Team with a view to completing a joint interview, owned by the Enforcement Team. This is because the Enforcement Team can currently get bigger fines on fly-tip offenders than we can through the CPS, which in turn acts as a bigger deterrent.

A local arrangement we have with NHDC Enforcement Team is that if the fly-tip consists of cannabis factory waste, we will always try and facilitate Police attendance as well in order to try and extract any evidence of the further crime of cultivation of cannabis.

Anecdotally a large proportion of fly-tips found with anything evidential in them at all, appear to be coming out of Luton. It is a large busy town, and our rural areas are very close and vulnerable to such activities due to their remoteness. Offenders have ample opportunity to dump their rubbish with little chance of being caught in the act.

So, what are we doing about it?

Well, we also work closely with our Rural Operation Support Team (ROST) who work out of headquarters. They have a supply of trail cameras, and we are utilising three of them at hot spot fly-tip locations throughout Hitchin Rural. These locations are discussed between the local officers and the NHDC Enforcement team, and take account of logged previous fly-tip locations. These cameras are periodically moved around every two weeks.

So far, we have not captured any footage of fly-tipping. The area is very large, and no one location is used so often that we know another fly-tip will occur in the near future. We have also previously had two of the trail cameras stolen. The problem with the cameras is, they have an infra-red light on them, that shines out to light the area so the camera can record images. The 'beam' of light is not visible to the naked eye, but the light source on the camera itself is visible at night time when it detects movement, and shows up as two red dots - much the same as on a Ring doorbell when it is activated at night. During the day the cameras seem well hidden, but at night this red light gives their location away, and if you are looking for them, they can obviously be found. But we will keep trying this tactic.

To reinforce our use of the cameras we have designed our own warning notices to go out in likely fly-tip locations:





The idea for the warning sign came from similar style notices that we have used to help deter shoplifting. The above image is scaled down so that it fits in the shelf edge where the prices are displayed.

As gateways are often used to deposit waste, we scaled up the image to a gate-top 'banner' and added suitable wording. We have yet to see if they have had any sort of a deterrent effect, but we have had positive feedback from the public.

We also have a number of joint fly-tip action days booked in with the NHDC Enforcement Team, where joint patrols will take place where vehicles that appear to be carrying waste are targeted.

Our next priority setting forum is due to be set up again in the first week of December, and if public opinion is such that fly-tipping is still a concern, we will continue with the above work.



Vehicle related nuisance

DriveSafe schemes have been set up with local residents in Gravely and Pirton, and already existed in Breachwood Green. Local SNT officers have been out with our laser speed detection device (often referred to as the speed-gun) and also with the Speed Indication Device (SID sign) indicating if drivers are within or above the speed limit. We have the PCC's speed detection van now that we can utilise, but so far any locations suggested for them to work from in the rural, they have said are unsuitable for them, due to various things like road conditions, width of road, lack of parking. We have also been thwarted by other policing priorities, such as Covid, music festivals and events – such as Baldock music festival, Electric Woodlands, Goatfest, Whitwell Steam Fair; and more recently the Insulate Britain protests that have affected PC's, PS and Inspector ranks throughout Safer Neighbourhood Policing, having an obvious knock on effect on our daily business. So any enforcement work has not been at the level we would have wanted it to be at. We do have two Rural Specials now that have managed to do some speed enforcement work with us, and we look forward to this increasing over the next couple of months also.

Burglary

Although reported burglary offences are quite low at the moment, the fear of burglary is clearly quite high within the rural community, hence it being our third priority. It also makes good sense to focus on this area, as historically as the evenings get longer we do sometimes see an increase in shed breaks and dwelling burglaries. We are increasing our high visibility patrols in the residential areas of the rural, particularly in the afternoons and early evenings as it is getting dark. We will also be trying to sign up as many people as possible to NHW and our OWL system, and carrying out Street Meets in areas where we will be offering crime prevention advice, specifically aimed at helping prevent people from becoming victims of burglary.

Other Issues

As briefly mentioned earlier, Covid still presents us with some extra work, we are still getting some Covid breaches reported through that we have to follow up on, and now we are also getting anti-vaccination protests outside schools now that the vaccine is being offered to children over 12.

Theft from motor vehicle is an area of concern, with a growing number of cars being broken into with no obvious signs of entry. A number of these will be where cars have been left unlocked, and the offender has gone around trying car doors, and searching those found to be open. Some people deliberately leave their car unlocked so as to prevent any damage if someone does try and get in. I cannot recommend this course of action – if left unlocked the immobiliser may not be activated, and the car insurance may not pay out if the car itself, or anything from it is stolen.

Some of the more modern cars have keyless entry. This is where the 'key/fob' for the car emits a signal that the car picks up when in range and automatically opens. There is a device that can pick up the signal from the key, even when the key is inside, if it is close enough to the door or window. The offender will hold the device concealed in a bag up to the front door or a window, at an address with a known keyless vehicle on the drive. Once they have the signal, it can be used to gain entry to the car. The advice is, not to put keys near to doors or windows when you get in, and get a 'Faraday Pouch' for the key, which blocks the signal from the key when not in use.

If anyone sees a person acting suspiciously, going up and down drives, but not obviously delivering anything, or holding anything up to doors or windows, please call in, and if there is any CCTV camera or door bell footage, please let the team know.

Sergeant Guy Westwood

PS 1604 Hitchin Safer Neighbourhood Team