

Leicestershire Police Rural Specials Team.

Leicestershire Police have always recognised the impact of crime on rural areas and it is an area the force continually seek to develop and improve. Whilst some national rural groups are against a definition of rural crime as they feel that the creation would be counter-productive, analysts support the Force having its own definition as it will assist in identifying hot spot locations and trends enabling the Force to target highlighted areas of concern. The National Police Chiefs' Council Rural Affairs Strategy highlights three areas which affect rural communities:

- 1) Rural Crime
- 2) Wildlife Crime
- 3) Heritage Crime

All crimes in a rural location are assessed and includes all those affecting farming communities, including agricultural machinery theft, livestock rustling, fuel theft and fly tipping which we support local partner agencies to tackle.

Wildlife Crime is any action which contravenes current legislation governing the protection of wild animals and plants. This includes hare coursing, fish and deer poaching, badger baiting and bird of prey persecution. In 2019 we received 40 reports of such incidents and in 2020 (to date) we have received 22. Over 40% of the incidents were graded as requiring an emergency response. When emergency and priority response is combined this becomes 66%, demonstrating that very few reports are not attended. In comparison, Lincolnshire Police receive reports of 800 in a year.

Heritage crime, as defined by Historic England, is any offence which harms the value of heritage assets and their settings. Heritage assets are sites which are considered to have value to the heritage of England. Such sites include listed buildings, scheduled monuments and registered battlefields. In Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, we have over 8000 heritage assets.

Outlined below are the specific plans the force has developed based on the above national approach, however it should be noted that rural areas of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland benefit from Dedicated Neighbourhood Policing Teams, Neighbourhood Patrol Officers and Criminal Investigation Departments just like any other area. The Force rural crime development plan is led by a Chief Inspector within the Local Policing Directorate. They are supported by a Sergeant who coordinates and ensures activity is supported in line with the plan.

Neighbourhood Policing Area Rural and Wildlife Officers – across six of the Neighbourhood Policing Areas which consist of rural locations, have invested in training both Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers to undertake this role. The training provides an enhanced awareness of crimes which are more likely to affect rural areas and provides a bespoke and more tailored approach to both prevention and investigation. An example includes the purchase of night vision goggles with funding via the Community Safety Partnership to locate potential offenders.

Rural Specials Team has recently been launched as detailed in Force social media releases. The Special Sergeant also works for the National Farmers Union so brings experience and a different perspective to the policing response. The team will support the Neighbourhood Policing Area Rural and Wildlife Officers in providing not only a response to incidents but also a high visibility deterrent by targeting their patrols in line with Force analysis.

Heritage Crime Volunteers support Dedicated Neighbourhood Teams (DNT) by the development and activity of highlighting and preventing Heritage Crime. The Heritage Crime Team have concentrated mainly on church lead thefts. They have designed a risk assessment form which was sent out to over 300 churches. Visits have been undertaken to a number that were considered high risk or who were subject to a lead theft. The team work in partnership with Historic England. Their work has been recognised with the giving of £500 grant for use in the procurement of tactical equipment to help reduce such crime. Last year, the Force held a seminar for Church Wardens with over 100 attending and receiving crime prevention guidance and promotion of the benefits of joining Neighbourhood Link.

Some of the tasks they assist with include:

- The maintenance of information relating to local Heritage Sites & Crime
- The development of new initiatives in conjunction with Force Heritage Crime Lead
- Arranging and attending meetings with DNT and other agencies where appropriate
- Sharing of relevant information with appropriate agencies via newsletters, email etc.
- Promoting Crime Prevention events etc. in conjunction with other Police Support Volunteers
- Assisting at property marking events
- Visiting Heritage locations to give crime prevention advice where appropriate
- Carrying out assorted research with the support of Historic England

Rural Crime Support Volunteers provide support to the Neighbourhood Policing Area Rural and Wildlife Officers. Recruitment of further volunteers is currently taking place. They provide support in a number of ways:

- analytical work
- visiting properties to give crime prevention advice
- promoting Rural Watch

Dedicated Police Operations have continued to develop and provide resources to operations in a bid to tackle specific crime types and areas of concern. These have included Op Blackthorn (response to hunting incidents), Op Galileo (response to hare coursing), Op Arable (response to rural crime in Market Harborough and Rutland), Op Vestry (response to metal thefts in Market Harborough, Melton and Rutland) and Op Vitality (response to increase in thefts in Melton District).

On 23 November 2020 the Force commenced a week of highlighting their response to crime and disorder affecting rural communities; the launch of the Rural Specials Team was part of this. The following articles have been published on the Force website and across their social media platforms:

Launch of Rural Specials -

<https://www.leics.police.uk/news/leicestershire/news/2020/november/leicestershire-police-launches-brand-new-rural-specials-team/>

North West Leicestershire Rural Team -

<https://www.leics.police.uk/news/leicestershire/news/2020/november/a-spotlight-on-the-north-west-leicestershire-rural-team/>

Heritage Crime Team -

<https://www.leics.police.uk/news/leicestershire/news/2020/november/police-volunteers-protect-countys-heritage-sites/>

Farmers and theft of GPS units -

<https://www.leics.police.uk/news/leicestershire/news/2020/november/rural-officers-remind-farmers-to-remain-vigilant-to-thefts-of-gps-units/>

Haystack fires - <https://www.leics.police.uk/news/leicestershire/news/2020/november/do-not-underestimate-the-impact-hay-stack-fires-can-have-on-victims/>

Plans for future development which include:

- Development of a Rural Toolkit
- Revamp internal rural crime website so that more officers and staff can access important information, guidance and signposting support
- Introduction of rural crime workshops
- Continue to recruit more volunteers to support this area of business

Analytical work has been tasked based on crimes reported which could be compared with the findings from recent Force surveys undertaken. The analysis concluded that those who live in urban communities are four times more likely to be a victim of crime than those that live in a rural area; therefore, they remain safe places to live. However, the Force are not complacent as the activity outlined above and continued investment demonstrates.