


# Country crime file

Images of the countryside on our television screens usually depict rolling hills, quaint village shops and the only crimes committed relate to groups of children 'scrumpling' apples. The reality for rural forces that crime hits country communities, it may differ from typical urban problems, but the affects can be as devastating. John Dean reports on a scheme in north tackling such issues.

 Three forces have been working together to combat rural crime across country communities in the North of England.

Darlington Police, part of Durham Constabulary, is forging strong links with three rural neighbourhood watch groups in its area. The initiative has also involved the neighbouring police forces of North Yorkshire and Cleveland which have experienced similar problems with criminals travel-ling across borders to commit crimes.

## Crime concerns

Darlington is a market town to the south of the Durham force area, surrounded by largely agricultural flatlands, punctuated by a number of farms and riding stables as well as a string of small villages.

Darlington Police has always worked with the rural community but has recently strengthened that relationship, forging links with all three groups, whose members range from farmers and stable

owners to people living in the villages.

One of the groups involved in the work is Countryside Crime Watch (CCW), set up more than a year ago, and is run by founder and co-ordinator Brian Pavey, a Darlington gamekeeper. Mr Pavey has been involved in rural watch groups in the area for more than a decade.

Three neighbourhood watch groups have started operating over recent years to address local concerns about crime.

For Mr Pavey, a key motivation is giving people in rural areas a sense of confidence that if confronted by criminals on their land, there is help at hand.

'We know that a lot of criminals travel across force boundaries from county to county and this link-up with Cleveland and North Yorkshire Police is a good idea. It's about sharing intelligence about their activities. The sense of isolation that some people experience living in rural areas has been reduced,' he says.

'When I first got involved in this kind of thing a few years ago, there were maybe one or two incidents of rural crime a day in this area. CCW members have only had three significant incidents over the past year.'

The kinds of offences highlighted by local farmers include the poaching of pheasants, rabbits, hares and deer, often carried out by gangs of men with lurcher dogs and carrying firearms. In addition to the trespassing, the farmers were concerned at the damage sometimes caused to fencing by the intruders.

But it was not just poaching which caused concern; it was the likes of house burglaries and thefts of equipment, including quad bikes from farms and horse-riding tack from stables. There was also evidence of drug taking on the land.

Like the other groups, CCW activities include using mobile phone texting to share information with members, running covert surveillance operations in conjunction

with the police and helping members purchase competitively-priced security equipment such as improved lighting and better security systems.

Conscious that many of the criminals targeting farms in the area were coming from the neighbouring urban sprawl of Teesside, CCW and Darlington Police recently arranged a meeting with officers from Cleveland Police, whose area includes Teesside, and North Yorkshire Police.

The idea was to ensure that CCW members received, and supplied, good quality intelligence on the travelling gangs, including noting down details of suspect vehicles.

For community safety officer PC Clare Addison, of Darlington Police, one of those involved in the meeting, the partnership between all the local watch groups and police is crucial.

PC Addison said: 'The meeting with CCW and the neighbouring forces was an example of working

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together. We had been sharing intelligence with Cleveland for a year-and-a-half and now there is a North Yorkshire element to what we are doing as well.

'We have three rural groups in the Darlington area and all of them work with us, passing on intelligence about rural crime. We also work on covert operations with the groups.'

Cleveland officer DC Dave Sanders, based in Stockton, and another of those at the CCW meeting, said: 'There is no mindset among criminals that they reach a force boundary and stop. Our message is that we are all sharing information about them, which is very important because the criminals may be involved in other offences.'

A major emphasis for Cleveland Police is tracking down the villains who travel from its area to export crime. For North Yorkshire, it is more a question of working out who is crossing its borders into the county to commit offences.

PC John Wilbor, based in Richmond, North Yorkshire, said:

'One of the big problems we have - and it is a universal problem - is break-ins at sheds and garages and, hopefully, this link-up is a way of curbing the criminals' movements into our area. Links like this allow us to create good communications with rural communities and obtain information.

Mr Pavey explains: 'The key to our success is the planning that goes into it. When we do covert operations with the police, they are mapped out in detail so we know where everyone is. We have been gathering pieces of intelligence, whether it is cars parked where they should not be or people trespassing on the land, and passing it onto the police.'

'We log everything: it may not mean much at the time but it all adds up and helps police build up a picture of what is happening. If you see a vehicle parked somewhere when a robbery takes place, that information may turn out to vital.'



**Brian Pavey, who founded Countryside Crime Watch (CCW) and PC Clare Addison, from Darlington Police.**

The other watch groups in the Darlington area include Rural West Watch, which has 70 members, uses a ring-round system to alert members to crimes and works closely with local beat officer PC Julian Brown.

The group has run intelligence-gathering operations with counterparts over the border into Teesdale, in the west part of the Durham force area. Officers in that area have run a highly effective rural crime initiative for many years.

Darlington Rural Watch, which was established several years ago. Its members include farmers, rural residents and business people.

One of the initiatives run by Darlington Police was a response to the high number of thefts from horse owners in rural areas around the town.

To tackle the problem, the police visited a shop, in the Mowden area of Darlington, to offer owners the chance to have their equipment security chipped.



The event was part of Saddle-trac, a national crime prevention scheme, and the chips meant that equipment, such as saddles, were given a unique code number.

PC Addison said: 'Over the past year, police in Durham, Cleveland and North Yorkshire have dealt with numerous incidents in which horse tack has gone missing from liveries and yards.'

'This scheme means that a very small chip is inserted in a piece of equipment so that when the item is recovered, it can be returned to its owner.'

Further north in the Durham Constabulary area, a similar initiative has cut rural crime in the Derwentside area.

Farms in the district take part in Farmwatch and police say there have been big reductions in theft, criminal damage and robbery.

It is one of many schemes part-funded by Derwentside Community Safety Partnership, which aims to further reduce crime in the district by 15 per cent over the next three years.

Launched in July last year, Farmwatch now has 274 farms signed up to the scheme and numbers continue to grow.

Successes include:

- Reduction in total theft of 11 per cent
- Vehicle crime decreased by 12.5 per cent
- Vehicle theft and TWOC down 19 per cent
- Criminal damage to vehicles down 30 per cent
- Robbery reduced by 17.5 per cent.

In addition, the scheme is part of Operation Idaho, an ongoing inter-force rural initiative including Durham, Cumbria and North Yorkshire Police. It combines high-profile policing in rural areas, crime prevention and collation of intelligence.

Information gathered has already resulted in the recovery of a JCB digger and agricultural machinery, including a tractor, from two separate crimes with a total value of £50,000. A recent initiative has been making Smartwater available to farmers, which enables them to mark their property so it can be tracked if stolen.

Brian Donkin, Farmwatch Derwentside co-ordinator for Durham Constabulary, said: 'Rural crime has been a problem in the past in Derwentside with incidents such as thefts of horse boxes and quad bikes. Now our intelligence gathering through Farmwatch has meant we are working smarter to prevent thefts and catch offenders.'

Sgt Peter Dawson, head of the Consett Community Beat Team, part of Derwentside, said: 'This is about community reassurance and reducing crime.'

His colleague, PC Alan Patterson, said: 'Many farmers and their families feel isolated and a target for thieves. We hope that through keeping in touch with both the police and neighbouring farms, they will feel reassured and less vulnerable.'