

DRAFT
Park Street Neighbourhood Watch
Open Meeting
18th October 2016

Attendees: Peter Tiffany, Dennis Cowan, Angela Turner, PC Clare Lapenna, Julie Lloyd plus 33 members of the public

Introduction

Peter Tiffany chaired the meeting. He began by describing the recent shrinking of the committee - for a variety of reasons - from 10 active members to only 4. Dennis is intending to step down as Chairman.

The reduced committee will find it increasingly hard to deal with the processes around newsletter delivery. Although the last issue was delivered electronically, this was only a pilot initiative.

It was suggested that existing members of the committee should be re-elected. This was proposed by Margaret Rolfe and seconded by Doriel Watson.

Peter welcomed PC Clare Lapenna who is part of the neighbourhood team that covers Park Street and neighbouring areas. Clare is a point of contact for crimes and other police matters.

Clare Lapenna's talk

Clare began with providing information on selected crime figures in the area –

Dwelling Burglaries

| | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| St Stephen | Last 6 months 11 (5 last year) |
| Park Street | Last 6 months 4 (13 last year) |

Criminal Damage (currently targeted issue)

| | |
|-------------|---------------------------------|
| St Stephen | Last 6 months 21 (15 last year) |
| Park Street | Last 6 months 38 (29 last year) |

Theft from Motor Vehicles (currently targeted issue)

| | |
|-------------|---------------------------------|
| St Stephen | Last 6 months 24 (10 last year) |
| Park Street | Last 6 months 8 (1 last year) |

Distraction Burglaries

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|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Park Street | Last 6 months 0 (2 last year) |
|-------------|-------------------------------|

Drugs Related

| | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| St Stephen | Last 6 months 6 (3 last year) |
| Park Street | Last 6 months 5 (6 last year) |

Overall burglary is down by one third across the whole region.

Clare asked for help from residents in bringing down crime. To report a crime in progress, call 999. To report suspicious activity, call 101. Try to provide as much detail as possible e.g. vehicle registration number where applicable.

Clare gave several tips to help avoid becoming a victim of crime.

Burglary in general -

- Lock windows, especially downstairs.
- Lock all windows when property unoccupied.
- Double lock uPVC doors on exiting.
- Keep keys (house, car) out of sight.
- Keep sheds secured and tools out of sight.
- Be especially vigilant during peak risk time 16:00-19:00
- Keep side gates locked.
- Maintain fences in good condition.
- Fit timer light.

Distraction burglary –

- ‘Not Sure, Don’t Open The Door’.
- Don’t deal with doorstep traders.
- Check ID (even for police).
- Note 7 days ‘cooling off’ period for work exceeding £35 cost (which must have a contract and work must not start within that time).

Residents are asked to spread the word about this advice.

Clare suggested downloading tracking apps to help tracing mobile devices if stolen.

Current crime peaks are mainly for shop lifting, criminal damage and theft from motor vehicles.

The advice to avoid the latter is to ensure the vehicle is always locked and that no items are on show. Peter Tiffany highlighted the need for caution with contactless keys. Owners should ensure they are familiar with the mechanism required to be secure and to position the keys carefully, out of range, within the home.

Clare gave information about Jane Flemons, a newly appointed ‘Wildlife & Rural’ police officer. Her remit includes fly tipping, harm to animals, dangerous dogs and loose horses. Fly tipping is handled alongside the council. Call 999 if witnessing an incident in progress, otherwise inform the council (but do not interfere with the waste as it will be photographed *in situ*).

Doriel Watson stated that no action had been taken about fly tipping in the last year so hopes the situation will improve in the future.

Methods employed for attempting to reduce fly tipping include installing cameras in ‘hot spots’. Reports from the public will help in siting the equipment. Spot checks are performed on vehicles carrying waste.

There have been 480 fly tips in St Albans since August.

Question: Is there any effect from recycling centre closures?

Reply: A 40% increase has been observed in this area.

There are currently 3 prosecutions in progress and 38 lines of enquiry.

Residents should note that if they give waste to unlicensed persons, even unwittingly, they may be liable for a fixed penalty notice of up to £400.

Question: Who should be informed about abandoned caravans?

Reply: Report to the council.

Question: Are immobilisers on modern motor scooters of real value?

Reply: They are worthwhile. A useful police contact for such matters is Ian Dowse who specialises in vehicle crime prevention.

Clare reported that there has been a spate of antisocial behaviour in the Mayflower Road park. Residents are encouraged to report details on vehicles in that area. Crime prevention material has recently been distributed in Mayflower Road.

Dealing with loose horses (i.e. identifying their owners) is a current priority.

Speeding in Tippendell Lane, Mount Pleasant Lane, Shenley Lane (London Colney) is being targeted. During October, traffic calming measures are scheduled for these locations in the form of SIDs (flashing speed signs).

Doriel Watson will provide registrations of vehicles she sees speeding and swerving into the horse field/verge to avoid an accident.

A suggestion from a member of the audience was to have a 'Beware of the Dog' sign to deter intruders (whether a dog owner or not).

Peter welcomed Julie Lloyd from Herts Police.

Julie's presentation

Julie introduced herself. She is based in Welwyn Garden City and her responsibilities include Neighbourhood Watch for the region, fraud prevention and cybercrime prevention.

Julie highlighted the importance of being aware of avoidance measures for cybercrime. There is more chance of being a victim of cybercrime than of burglary.

Julie began with an overview of computer terminology, explaining hardware, software, malware and cybercrime. Then fundamental advice was given to help avoid becoming a victim of cybercrime.

Ensure internet security software is installed, switched on and kept up to date.

Update operating system versions promptly.

Take great care with passwords

- Choose 'strong' passwords.

- Use different passwords for different purposes.

- Keep passwords secret.

- Do not write them down except in coded form.

- Consider using a Password Vault system.

- Define a system that works for you.

- Don't select 'Remember Password' (especially on public computers).

- When entering secure data look for a green padlock and https: prefix in the address.

Backup data in case an attack is successful (ideally 2 copies – one on the cloud and another on a portable hard drive stored separately from the original device. This is also potentially useful in case of accidental loss or damage to your device.)

A useful source of information is the Get Safe Online website (www.getsafeonline.org).

Keep mobile devices physically secure and protect with a PIN.

Avoid disclosing more personal information than necessary.

Protecting your email account is particularly important as it is the key to many other services.

Assume that public WiFi (e.g. in coffee shops) is insecure (even if password protected). Do not use public WiFi for anything confidential.

Be aware of being overlooked/overheard in public places.

Always verify people's identity on the internet and 'phone.

Email is very vulnerable to attack.

- Look for clues that may indicate a fake email – e.g. suspicious sender addresses or non-personalised greetings.

- Never click on attachments unless confident of the sender.

- Never click on links within an email that lead to a log in – type the official address into the browser instead.

- Enable 'show file extensions' in Windows. This may reveal file extensions such as '.exe', '.vbs', or '.scr' – which should be avoided.

- Watch out for phishing emails – purporting to be from banks for example.

Be cautious when shopping online.

- Use reputable companies (check reviews).

- Use recognised payment methods such as PayPal or Worldpay.

- Credit cards payments offer the most protection.

- Do not make direct bank transfers.

Never reveal confidential information over the 'phone to incoming callers. Ensure your line is disconnected before attempting to call to check with your bank (etc.) – wait 5 minutes or call a friend first.

Be wary of unsolicited financial offers – they may be legal but unsuitable.

Be cautious about free trials as they may lead to subscription traps – again not illegal.

Be aware of the dangers of ‘Webcam Blackmail’ (Sextortion).

If you become a victim of Ransomware – i.e. demands for money to decrypt files (damaged by inadvertent clicking of a dodgy link or attachment for example) – do not pay. Report to the police cybercrime team who may be able to advise alternatives.

Question: Is https: always secure

Reply: Only if linked to a reputable site.

Park Street Pickers Report

Dennis Cowen gave an update on litter picking activities since April. The biggest single project was Birchwood, yielding 40 bags of litter! Overall, 434 bags have been collected this year and 1376 since the start of the initiative.

Doriel Watson reported that she collected litter in the horse field. Dennis asked ‘lone rangers’ to report their bag counts too.

Dennis showed the ‘Great and Green’ award that was presented to Park Street Pickers by the Herts Advertiser.

Anti-littering messages have sometimes appeared on nearby electronic highway signs.

Question: Robin Boswell asked will the vandalised Park Street Lane litter bin be replaced?

Answer: Yes.

Peter Tiffany highlighted that the next litter pick is 20th November and is linked with Sustainable St Albans week whose theme this year is food waste.

Dennis also mentioned that vandalised street signs will be dealt with by the council.

Closing Business

Peter Tiffany spoke about newsletters. When paper copies are delivered, coordinators are provided with distribution lists. The preparation of these lists is very time consuming and Peter asked for assistance with this task by coordinators creating their own lists.

Blue Light has volunteered to print newsletters (i.e. for the last issue) on demand from coordinators to deliver to those members who do not have online access.

Peter received an OWL award at the 10 year anniversary event.

Question: Who should be notified about signs that are obscured by foliage?

Answer: Cathy Kennedy said Herts county council's Highways should be contacted by phone on: 0300-123-4047 or via their [fault reporting website](#). Cllr David Yates offered to follow up the current problem.

The meeting closed at 21:58 (is this a record for the latest finish?!).