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With its miles of coastline, areas of National Park and rolling Downs, the beauty of the Sussex countryside is recognised by both visitors to and residents of Sussex. However, we know that rural communities can have different vulnerabilities when crime does occur.

Our 2018 - 22 Transformation Strategy sets out how we will strengthen local policing across Sussex as we continue to modernise, keep pace with and meet the significant changing demands on our service.

The Sussex Police Rural Crime Strategy and supporting operational delivery plan, outlines how we will incorporate rural crime and protecting rural communities into our wider approach to delivering our policing priorities.

Sussex Police takes rural crime seriously. As of 2018, a dedicated strategic and operational lead for rural crime will coordinate how we prevent, respond to and investigate rural crime to keep communities safe and feeling safe at a local level.

This strategy recognises both the specific crime types which can affect rural communities (for example, livestock worrying) as well as the unique vulnerabilities of those who live and work in rural areas, which were reflected in the results of the recent Rural Crime Survey 2018 completed by the National Rural Crime Network (NRCN).

The successful delivery of rural policing involves close working with our partners and voluntary organisations, to solve specific local issues. It also means maintaining and building close links with rural communities both in person and through digital methods.

Thank you for taking the time to read this strategy and I look forward to speaking with residents of Sussex as we work to prevent and respond to rural crime.

Nick May
Introduction and context

Sussex is a safe county in which to live, work and visit and Sussex Police is committed to protecting both urban and rural communities from harm and ensuring the county remains a safe and pleasant place to enjoy.

We have recognised that crime committed in the countryside impacts rural communities in a unique and often challenging way.

Sussex Police takes this type of crime seriously which is why we have committed to developing this rural crime strategy and plan of action to reassure our rural communities and address these challenges.

This strategy provides a framework to help deliver the Sussex Police priorities for rural communities. These are to:

- Keep communities safe and feeling safe
- Identify and protect vulnerable people
- Prevent and respond to harm
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT
Rural policing: background

Rural policing is an integral part of the service provided by Sussex Police. With a predominantly rural geography and the proximity to sensitive and rare wildlife, there is a recognised need to target those who choose to commit offences that impact on rural communities or the Sussex landscape and wildlife.

This strategy defines “rural crime” by crime type rather than geographical location.

The local policing model offers a model that is scalable and flexible, allowing us to respond to changing circumstances to effectively police rural and urban areas of Sussex. The impact of crime in these two areas can be dramatically different.

A national perspective

The 2018 NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report states 'Whether it’s the theft of machinery or livestock, or the deeply frustrating scourge of fly tipping, rural crime has a huge impact on its victims.'

NFU Mutual reported that their 2017 claims data showed that nationally rural crime cost their members £44.5m. The report highlights some emerging trends as:

- Limited police resources and repeat attacks are the biggest concerns for people living in the countryside.
- Quads/ATVs, tools, machinery and 4x4s are topping thieves’ wish lists.
- Nearly a third of NFU Mutual Agents know someone who has changed the way they live or farm as a result of rural crime.
- CCTV is one of the most common security measures being installed.

The recently released results from the Rural Crime Survey 2018 completed by the National Rural Crime Network highlighted some key points:

- The perception of policing in rural communities is poor and worse than in urban areas.
- Some of the most common concerns are not solely policing matters, for example fly-tipping and speeding. Partners, like local authorities, are less able to respond to the needs of rural communities.
- Crime and the fear of crime, is leading to emotional strain and a loss of confidence within rural communities, particularly among young people, families and farmers.
- Communities believe crime in rural areas is a big problem and is getting worse.
- Many crimes in rural communities go unreported especially by business owners, because they do not feel anything will be done.
- Most residents and businesses in rural communities believe they are being specifically targeted and believe the crime is organised.
- Farmers and agricultural businesses face challenges and don’t feel supported.
- The financial impact of crime is substantial for residents and businesses.
- Rural victims feel angry and perceive they are not listened to by authorities. The extent of crime is making rural communities feel vulnerable.

In summary rural communities feel misunderstood and that services do not match their needs. The risk is that if nothing is done there could be a loss of trust in local policing and partner agencies.
Specific crime types covered by this strategy

- **Agricultural crime** constitutes any statutory or common law offence which may be committed against people in agricultural communities, their lands, businesses and property (property includes plant and agricultural machinery and animals such as livestock and horses). Agricultural communities are those who live within a rural area as defined by the Office of National Statistics 2011 Rural Urban Classification to Super Output level and are involved in the agriculture industry.

- **Heritage crime** constitutes any offence which harms the value of heritage assets and their settings.

- **Wildlife crime** constitutes any unlawful act or omission, which affects any wild creature, plant or habitat.

It is important to note that although these crime types predominantly occur in rural areas, they can also be carried out in urban areas.
Unique vulnerabilities, challenges and impact factors

There are additional considerations when dealing with crime occurring in rural locations. Rural communities have unique vulnerabilities and impact factors which need to be taken into account when providing an appropriate policing service, which have been considered in the preparation of this strategy:

- Rural communities can be more isolated from core services such as police stations, health care, social care, banks, shops, public houses and public transport networks.
- Some geographically isolated rural communities may feel self-sufficient and disconnected from police services, other than in an emergency need.
- Industry specific terminology used by rural communities can be misunderstood by police officers and staff leading to an inappropriate police response.
- Crime and incidents are under-reported within rural communities.
- Access to communication services such as broadband and mobile phone signals is more challenging in rural locations than in towns and cities and can restrict reliable communication. Where broadband is available in the countryside, it can be almost 50% slower than the equivalent urban service.
- Criminal acts which lead to the closure of shops or banks, even temporarily, can have a devastating effect on rural communities, where the nearest alternative can be many miles away. Some residents of rural communities may also miss the social interaction of shops and local businesses hit by crime.
- Rural areas are more likely to be inhabited by a more mature population than the average town or city.
- Risk assessments show that there is an increased risk to rural populations from fraud, intimidation and distraction-burglary type offences.
- With more individuals in rural locations working from home, crime and anti-social behaviour often affects both the home and the business of the victim.
- Victims of domestic abuse in rural areas can be more isolated, with reduced physical access to specialist support services. One of the key characteristics of domestic abuse is to isolate the victim from friends, family and independence, which is more achievable in a rural location.
- Rural roads are often narrower and more winding than their urban counterparts and street lighting is sparse.
- Wildlife is often found on rural roads, increasing the risk to both road users and the animals.
- With farms having to diversify in order to bring in additional revenue streams, there are more businesses operating in secluded, isolated rural locations. These are often located within converted farm buildings with no road names, alarms and in some cases no mains power.
- Farm machinery and agricultural plant equipment is highly portable and moveable, it is also extremely expensive. This makes these machines attractive to criminals who are able to steal them without being seen or detected. These machines are moved out of the country quickly and efficiently by highly organised criminal groups.
- Agricultural fuel storage (oil and diesel) are targeted by criminals in times of rising fuel prices.
- Wildlife and heritage crime often takes place with few witnesses and is frequently committed by highly organised, closed criminal groups. Groups commonly use social media and internet messaging systems to organise their criminal activities.
• Organised crime groups operate in the countryside to earn significant sums of money. Hare coursing, poaching, agricultural plant and vehicle theft, theft of prize coarse fish, illegal shellfish collection all have links to highly-organised criminal groups. These groups operate their criminal enterprises by exploiting others and are involved in modern slavery, human trafficking and fraud. They also use the latest technology and encrypted messaging services to organise their activities.

• Internet sales sites are a trading ground for stolen goods or endangered wildlife; criminals using these platforms disguise their activities which makes tracking these sales a challenge.

• Sussex has numerous tidal and freshwater rivers, as well as 137 miles of coastline. These environments fall prey to poachers and thieves looking for valuable fish or items from marine wrecks.

• Non-native invasive species are estimated to cost the UK economy £1.7b per annum. Many of the offences committed in relation to these species are unintentional, however they have far reaching and costly consequences.

These additional impact and risk factors need to be taken into account by the police and applied to every aspect of the investigation process when dealing with reports from rural communities.

Unintentional offending

Some of the offences that occur within rural areas are unintentional. It is unlikely that an individual walks their dog with the intention of the dog worrying livestock. It is equally unlikely that someone clearing their garden or fish tank and throwing a non-native, invasive species into the garden waste would intentionally contribute to the growing issue of non-native invasive species damaging the environment. Part of the role of rural policing must be to communicate the impact of behaviour of this type.
Rural crime: the national policing perspective

The 2018-2021 Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs national strategies have recently been agreed by the National Police Chief’s Council.

These two sister strategies identify strategic aims for each area.

The wildlife crime strategic aims are:

- Enhance the conservation of wildlife
- Develop strong partnership and stakeholder working
- Raise public awareness of wildlife crime
- Embed a wildlife focus into policing culture
- Improve recording of wildlife crime
- Improve wildlife crime legislation with proportionate sentences
- Secure future funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU)
- Develop information sharing agreements with key stakeholders
- Tackle organised crime groups

The rural affairs strategic aims are:

- Safer rural communities
- Enhanced public engagement
- Increased public confidence in the police
- Empowered communities
- Strong partnership working
- Raised profile of rural affairs
- Embedded rural focus into policing culture

“Sussex Police recognise the impact of crime on rural communities can be devasting to livelihoods, families and individuals. To ensure we understand and address these challenges, we must work with those who shape our rural communities.”

Sussex Rural Crime Strategy: Local policing style

Working within a county that has a diverse geographic makeup means that policing is a challenge. Sussex Police serves cities such as Brighton which attracts thousands of visitors. At the other end of the scale, police officers also need to cover the sparsely populated rural landscape which presents very different challenges.

The Sussex Police Local Policing Model has three distinct teams providing a local policing service to all areas of Sussex – Prevention, Response and Investigations. Teams are not constrained by district geographical boundaries and resources are deployed on a nearest/most appropriate resource basis. Supporting these teams are force, regional and national units who all work together to keep communities safe.

NATIONAL
- National Crime Agency
- National Police Air Service

REGIONAL
- SE Regional Organised Crime Unit
- SE Counter Terrorism Unit
- Support Services

FORCE
- Public Protection
- Roads Policing
- Firearms
- Major Crime

PREVENTION

INTEL

INVESTIGATION

RESPONSE

The Sussex Police Local Policing Model
"Working with partners in providing a holistic approach to tackling crime in rural areas is far more effective than the police acting independently. This is why we are building our Sussex Countrywatch partnership to support rural communities and keep the countryside a safe place to live, work and visit."


This strategy has allowed Sussex Police to incorporate rural policing into a ‘business as usual’ approach, without the need to create specialist teams.

Sussex Police has a number of Wildlife and Rural Crime Officers (WRCO) who have received additional training to deal with rural incidents.

Sussex Police have developed our own initial training course which allows us to train officers in rural crime. Twice a year, rural training days are provided to either refresh existing or train new skills.

It is anticipated there will be at least one WRCO on duty per shift across the Force area to provide advice and guidance to the first responder attending.

Sussex Police has volunteers working directly on rural crime with additional volunteers being recruited. These volunteers provide an essential service in providing data surrounding incidents and calls and also completing a weekly rural information bulletin on our community messaging platform.

Superintendent Emma Brice provides strategic leadership of agricultural, environmental, heritage and wildlife crime supported by Sergeant Tom Carter who is dedicated to the role providing operational oversight. We work closely with the other Police Forces in the South East region and also national units such as the National Wildlife Crime Unit, National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service agricultural plant and machinery officers to combat crime within this portfolio.

By providing a ‘business as usual’ approach to rural policing, Sussex Police is seeking to raise the organisational knowledge of rural crime through continuing professional development. This means that any officer or staff member will provide an effective initial response to rural issues, regardless of whether a WRCO is available.

Our approach allows Sussex Police to manage incidents and direct resources to where they are most needed. It also allows us to maintain a cadre of officers and staff trained in rural crime. We can provide preventative measures from our prevention teams, immediate response to reports from our response teams and provide an investigative capability from our investigations teams.

We work in partnership with other organisations and agencies to protect and support the most vulnerable individuals from harm. A new rural crime partnership has been established, bringing together Sussex Police and partners working within the rural setting to combat rural crime. The partnership is called Sussex Countrywatch and will support rural communities and keep the rural landscape a safe place to live, work and visit.
Rural crime: the Sussex police perspective

The model for tackling Rural Crime in Sussex
Resourcing rural crime in Sussex

A local policing service in Sussex
A local policing service in Sussex is now delivered through three thematic areas; Prevention, Response, and Investigation. More information on these areas can be obtained through the Sussex Police website www.sussex.police.uk.

Volunteers
Volunteers play a key role in Sussex Police. Members of the community giving their time to support policing within their community either in the role of a special constable or as a police volunteer enable Sussex Police to access and deploy skills which would otherwise be unavailable. The role of volunteer can be incredibly rewarding for the individual, the community and the organisation.

Partnerships
Partnerships with other organisations provide the most effective way of policing. By approaching a problem from multiple angles we have the best chance of succeeding. Partnering with other enforcement agencies in a symbiotic relationship allows both agencies access to information and resources which would be siloed without a partnership. Equally partnering with non-government organisations has a similar outcome.

Police Wildlife and Rural Crime Officer training on a local farm in partnership with the National Farmers’ Union
Sussex Rural Crime Strategy: objectives

This strategy seeks to:

- Provide an effective policing service to the rural community
- Make our rural communities feel safer
- Build effective partnerships to respond to the needs of rural communities
- Increase the confidence of rural communities in the police
Sussex Police priorities

As outlined in the introduction of this document, the Sussex Police priorities are to:

- Keep communities safe and feeling safe
- Identify and protect vulnerable people
- Prevent and respond to harm.

In order to keep communities safe and feeling safe we will:

- Use the Sussex Police website, 'In the Know', social media and public engagement events to spread crime prevention advice to rural communities.
- Use the principles of Citizens in Policing (voluntary roles within the police service) to tackle rural crime by making the best use of special constables, volunteers and community interaction.
- Work with rural stakeholders and public members on a new Sussex Countrywatch rural crime partnership to prevent and disrupt criminal activity.
- Encourage rural communities to speak with their local Prevention teams to share intelligence.
- Work with partners to increase reporting in rural communities.
- Continue to work with the Crown Prosecution Service wildlife crime trained prosecutors to build effective prosecutions.
- Develop a toolkit to offer rural crime prevention advice.

In order to identify and protect vulnerable people we will:

- Identify the most vulnerable individuals and groups within our rural communities and provide support to protect them from crime.
- Identify key vulnerable rural locations to provide a targeted policing service.
- Ensure that as an organisation we understand the impact of crime on rural communities and provide an appropriate service from the first point of contact.

- Improve our communication links with rural communities.
- Increase access to and the visibility of the police through community engagement events.
- Use community messaging and social media to keep communities informed.
- Seek feedback from rural communities and use this to improve our service.

In order to prevent and respond to harm we will:

- Raise the organisational knowledge of the specific vulnerabilities of rural communities and agricultural, environmental, heritage and wildlife (AEHW) crime and continue to develop this knowledge.
- Work with partners to build, develop and action intelligence to target individuals and groups who cause the most harm to our rural communities.
- Continue to work with other police forces and partners across the South East region and nationally to disrupt and target individuals and groups committing crime across borders.
- Use the latest technology to build intelligence on criminal activities and disrupt organised crime groups.
- Develop intelligence surrounding individuals and groups committing crime.
- Utilise powers to confiscate or recover criminal assets obtained via illicit means.

For further information on rural crime and details on how to contact Sussex Police, please visit the Sussex Police website at www.sussex.police.uk.
Appendix

Sussex Geography
Sussex is a picturesque county with a rich history and a diverse mix of seaside holiday towns and cities, rolling downland and ancient woodlands.

In addition, the county is home to busy urban areas and commuter towns such as Crawley and a major international transport hub – Gatwick Airport.

Sussex Police is responsible for these varied and diverse communities.

Brighton and Hove on the south coast sits midway in the Sussex coastline and is a progressive city with a diverse community attracting international tourism. Nicknamed ‘Little London-by-the-Sea’, the city is densely populated, and defined by an urban conurbation which is bounded by the chalk hills of the South Downs National Park and the sea. To the east and west of the city, there are traditional seaside fishing towns such as Bognor Regis and Eastbourne, along with pretty rural cities and villages like Chichester and Rye, all of which attract holiday visitors.

The South Downs is the UK’s newest National Park with easy access via roads and public transport and attracts high numbers of visitors annually. The South Downs is sympathetically farmed with livestock and arable fields, which change throughout the seasons, bringing colour and interest and enhancing the natural beauty of the area. The South Downs is an all-year-round visitor attraction. The largest portion – 404 square miles – of the national park is contained within the Sussex border.

Sussex Landscape
With 197 sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) in Sussex there is national recognition that the wildlife and the geology of Sussex requires protection.

It is believed that the ancient forests which covered the South Downs were removed around 3000 years ago and have for thousands of years been used for the grazing of livestock, primarily sheep. This has resulted in the short grassland that we see today, making the South Downs one of the most important chalk landscapes in the country. The lowland calcareous grassland hosts a wonderful array of species which play a significant part in the rich biodiversity of the area. Rare plants, insects, birds and animals have all made their home within the South Downs.

During the Second World War, changes in intensive farming practices were implemented, designed to maximise food production, which led to the loss of much of the UK’s traditional countryside. What remains is a vital national and international habitat – making parts of the South Downs an extremely valuable and important asset.

Rural areas in Sussex are accessible, with easy public transport links from urban centres into rural villages and the countryside. The National Park has its own bus links from the coast into the park. Accessibility is constantly improving with the National Park Authority investing in attracting tourism and accessibility. Tourism plays a key role in ensuring that conservation is sustainable and economically viable. However, the rise in the popularity of the South Downs and visitor numbers presents its own challenges to policing the area.

The county has 137 miles of coastline, many rivers, including two of the fastest flowing rivers in the UK – the Arun and the Adur. The county has four river valleys, multiple harbours and beaches with an active commercial and recreational fishing and watersports leisure community.

Sussex Heritage
With 14639 named heritage assets, Sussex enjoys a rich and colourful history, with stunning historic buildings like Bodium Castle and Chichester Cathedral, along with historic parks and gardens such as Wakehurst Place, the sister garden to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Archaeological discoveries show that the Sussex Downs has been inhabited for thousands of years, including supporting a large population during the Romano-British times. There are important national nature reserves such as Kingley Vale, an incredibly significant archaeological site which also has an ancient yew forest – one of the finest in Europe, containing a grove of ancient trees forming some of the most ancient living things in the country.

Iron-age hillforts such as at Cissbury, Chanctonbury and Mount Caburn occupy the landscape and provide a unique insight into human history and the habitation of the region through the ages.

Numerous ships have foundered off the Sussex coast and their wrecks attract dive historians and recreational divers alike. They continue to yield insights into both our military and maritime trading history.
Sussex Rural economy
578,000 acres of land in Sussex is managed by farmers. This represents 62% of the county and incorporates most of the National Park. Farming and agriculture are worth £140 million to the county’s local economy. Farming provides full time employment to 8500 people and employs thousands of seasonal workers. The Sussex countryside supports 333,000 sheep, 96,500 cattle and 26,500 pigs. Sussex farmers produced 140 million litres of milk in 2017 and sufficient wheat for 918 million loaves of bread.

Sussex also has a thriving glasshouse industry, with an annual retail value exceeding £1 billion, providing employment to the equivalent of 7000 full-time staff.

Diversification by farmers has greatly contributed to tourism growth. Many farms open their doors to holiday lets and farm visits alongside larger country estates such as Goodwood who play host to internationally recognised events such as the Goodwood Festival of Speed and numerous horse race meetings. Goodwood is also the landlord for internationally renowned Rolls Royce motorcars who have their purpose-built factory on the estate.

Sources

NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report 2018

NRCN Rural Crime Survey 2018

NFU Combatting Rural Crime

Non-Native Invasive Species
http://www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm

DEFRA