

Law and Order

As part of the questionnaire we asked people which of a list of crimes and anti-social behaviour concerned them. We also asked them to say which of these they had suffered from over the previous twelve months. The list and analysis of responses is set out in the table below.

Type of crime	Number of People expressing Concern	Number of Incidents
Theft from homes/attempted break in	147	7
Theft from other buildings (including garages, out buildings, cars and stables)	85	9
Theft from gardens and other land	119	5
Mugging and other threatening behaviour	28	2
Vandalism, graffiti and littering	147	23
Drunkenness, rowdiness and foul language	28	1
Trespass	25	4
Speeding	235	87
Not concerned	26	-

There was also one complaint about dangerous dogs.

Thurnham is an essentially rural community and against the national crime statistics and, indeed, compared with some other parts of Kent the figures in the final column are low. For example, between the beginning of April and mid-September 2007 there was no reported burglary in Thurnham.

As such the figures square in with the tenor of the interview the Chief Constable gave to Kent on Sunday on 1 July 2007 headed "Kent is safer now: and the

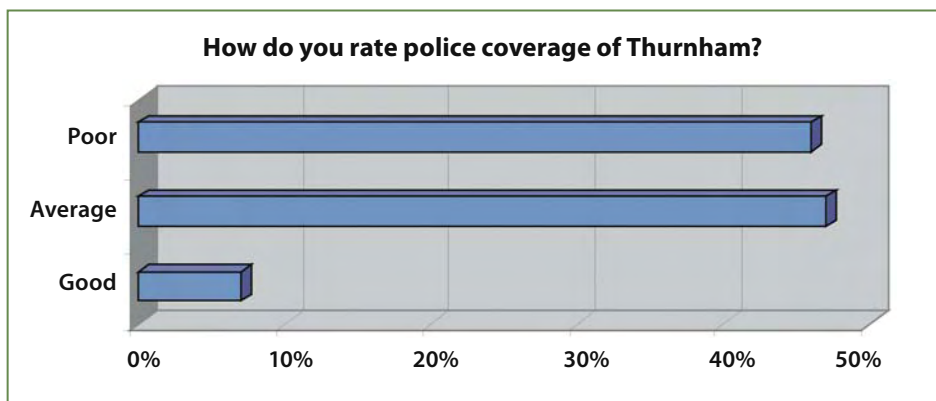


stats prove it". This recorded a welcome drop of 2% in all crime and a decrease of 0.4% for violent crime. While burglary was up 1.2%, vehicle crime was down 8.1% and motor vehicle crime down by 13.3%

On the other hand, the above table shows a concern about crime that extends beyond people's direct experiences. Thus, while only 7 thefts from homes were reported to us in the year to September 2006, 147 people expressed concerns about such crime. Such divergence between peoples' direct experience of crime and their concern is often visible at national level and reflects a whole raft of factors. People are influenced by what they read in the press and hear through radio and television.

Headlines such as "Europe's Most Violent Nation" (Sunday Times of 19 August 2007), the fact that the use of knives in street robberies has risen to an average of 175 a day, as well as what they see about them in their local communities, all have an impact on their perception of crime.

In spring, for example, there was a spate of damage to cars in Birling Avenue and neighbouring streets. That same weekend one of the windows in E J Computers opposite Bearsted Green was smashed and soon after the glass panels of the notice board at the entrance to St Mary's church in Thurnham were broken in an act of mindless vandalism.



According to Home Office statistics released in October 2007 nearly three quarters of all criminal offences committed in Kent go unsolved. Police detected a combined average of 28% of all crimes in 2006-07 – up from 19% three years ago.

People associate the prevention of crime and effective policing with a visible police presence on the ground – a view the Chief Constable endorsed in the course of his interview with the Kent on Sunday on 1 July 2007. The absence of police on the streets tends to create the opposite effect.

There is undoubtedly concern amongst residents that since Ian Gedge's retirement policing in Thurnham has become much less visible. People are aware that the arrangements for policing rural areas have changed, but the low profile policing over the last eighteen months and the absence of the police at meetings of the parish council are all matters of concern to local residents.

"Police presence in at least the rural part of the parish is, or appears, non-existent, except in response to a crime or incident. There is absolutely no pro-active/preventative role, whilst it can often be impossible to get an answer to any non-999 telephone call."

Thurnham resident

We also asked residents to tell us how they rated the police coverage of Thurnham. Seven per cent of respondents thought it 'good'; 47% said it was 'adequate' and 46% rated it 'poor'. It is clear from their responses that the people of Thurnham feel that too little is done to enforce speed limits and that because of this they can be broken with impunity. Some who had suffered burglaries thought the police response good. At the opposite extreme we received comments such as "what police coverage?"

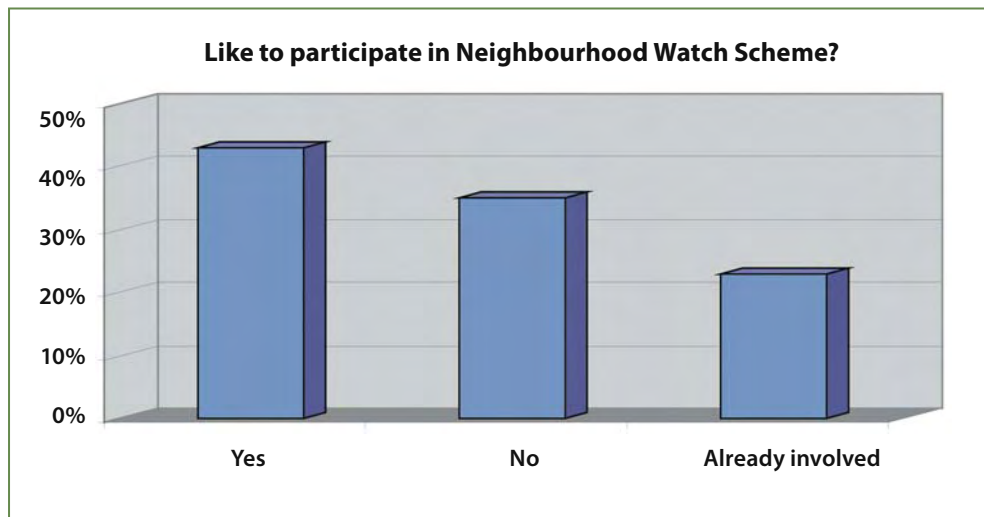
We recognize that police resources are stretched as never before and need to be focused on those areas of greatest risk. No doubt in the wider scheme of things Thurnham is not in that category and for that we should be grateful. But, as the results of our survey show, that does not stop people having real concerns.

It is against that background that we very much welcome the appointment of a new Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) for Thurnham, Bredhurst and Detling. We are, however, concerned about the shortage of funds that prevent the Kent Police from providing her with any means of transport to patrol this large and hilly patch.

We recommend that:

- **Thurnham, Bredhurst and Detling Parish Councils should continue to apply pressure on the Kent Police Authority to provide a vehicle to enable the new PCSO to get around the parishes.**
- **A notice should be placed in every parish notice board announcing her appointment, displaying a photograph and giving details of how to contact her.**
- **The new PCSO should attend meetings of the Thurnham parish Council on a regular basis in the same way that Ian Gedge used to do.**
- **The mobile police station should be moved around the parish so that it is within easy access of residents in, for example, Bearsted Park and north Thurnham as well as Caring Lane and Crismill. The times of its availability should be publicized well in advance.**
- **The new PCSO should join their opposite number for Bearsted, in the surgery he has organized on the last Saturday in every month between 10am and 12 noon at Bearsted library.**

We also welcome the fact that the Kent Police want to launch a Partners and Communities Together (PACT) scheme in Thurnham.



PACT schemes are about the police getting together with local residents and key groups within the community to assess local priorities for policing, to draw up plans to focus on those priorities and then do something about them. The police usually begin with a survey of local opinion. But given that residents have already identified their main concerns in their responses to the questionnaire we circulated (set out in the table at the head of this chapter) the police will use these findings as the starting point for this exercise.

In terms of the degree of concern expressed by local residents this points to the police focusing on:

- Speeding traffic
- Vandalism, graffiti and littering, and
- Theft from homes, gardens and other land.

One of the most encouraging things to emerge from the questionnaire was the percentage of people (23%) already involved in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. Such schemes are already supported in Bearsted Park, Weaving Street and Hockers Lane and in the Caring Lane area. A further 43% of respondents said they would like to be involved in such Schemes.

We recommend that:

- **The Parish Council should permanently display on its notice boards details of local Neighbourhood Watch Schemes; and**
- **How residents can go about joining; and do whatever else it can to facilitate the setting up and running of such schemes.**