

STAFFORDSHIRE RURAL CRIME FORUM

Friday 15th March 2024

Amerton Farm

Stowe-by-Chartley

commencing at 11am

MINUTES

Present:

Graham Morley DL (Chair) Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire and previous Principal/ CEO of South Staffordshire College – Rodbaston **(GM)**

Eunice Finney FRAGS Managing Director of Amerton Farm Ltd, the host and sponsor of the event **(EF)**

Rt. Hon Sir Gavin Williamson CBE MP Member of Parliament for South Staffordshire **(GW)**

Chief Supt Emily Clarke Commander – County Local Policing Command, who is representing the Chief Constable **(EC)**

Paul Brown Chair of the Staffordshire NFU and sponsor of the event **(PB)**

Barbara Hurdle Chair of Stowe-by-Chartly parish council **(BH)**

Sylvia Gibson Clerk for Stowe by Parish Council, took the minutes of the meeting.

Present:

Ben Adam the Crime Commissioner, Staffordshire Police

Inspector Scott Gidman Staffordshire Police

PCSO Gareth Higgins Staffordshire Police

Jermey Lowe Staffordshire NFU County Adviser - Also sponsors of the event.

Oliver Cartwright NFU Media Manager (Regions) is responsible for all media coverage,

Janette Prince Midlands & East Regional Board Chair for NFU Mutual

Several Group Secretaries from around the county.

Cllr Peter Coote, Cllr Kevin Byrne, Cllr J Harnett, Cllr Richard Rayson, Cllr Barbara Hurdle (on the panel) and **Cllr Eunice Finney** (on the panel) from the Stowe by Chartley Parish Council – who also sponsored the event.

Cllr Frances Beaty and **Cllr Karine Aspin** Stafford Borough Council

Cathie Hurdman -County Organiser Staffordshire Federation of Young Farmers Clubs.

Paul Bryan- Stafford River Link

Graham Ashford of the Farming Community Network

Apologies:

Anna Goodwin representing **HJ Lea Oakes** a sponsor of the event.

Tom Nadin the Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, working closely with Staffordshire Police regarding business crime.

Victor Kelly Chairman of the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association

Richard Williams - Staffordshire and Birmingham Agricultural Society

Sarah Parrott and Rosie Madders- Staffordshire Farm Secretaries Association

Sarah Faulkner from the Staffordshire NFU

In attendance in the audience there were 56 individuals, including farmers and rural residents locally and from across the county of Staffordshire.

GM welcomed everyone and made it clear that he was pro-Staffordshire and pro-Staffordshire police. He reminded everyone that the courtyard at Amerton Farm is in the centre of Staffordshire. He then introduced the panel, as above and explained why this forum was taking place – because of the recent and increased impact of rural crime. He then went on to welcome various members of the audience who all spoke throughout the meeting and will be identified when what they said is mentioned in the minutes.

Without further ado, various members of the audience were invited to give their personal experiences as victims of rural crime:

Person speaking	Description of events	Reaction received at the meeting, if applicable and by whom
Debra Goodwin, Gayton Mill Farm, Gayton	Debra has lived in Gayton for a long time. Until now she and her family have not felt the need to lock up. Last year a quad bike was stolen. “A lack of police presence increases people’s feelings of vulnerability. It is difficult to communicate with the police. There are impacts on mental health.” They are more security-conscious now	EC “When these incidents happen we have a duty to investigate.” She will take this case back to see what went wrong. The police recommend that each farm undertakes a “Security Self Assessment” test. Some preventative measures can be impactful. We need to make improvements GW acknowledged that when Debra spoke, she touched on themes which will permeate the whole meeting. Feeling sure that you

		can talk to someone and having a police response are important. Staffs police have had challenges in terms of response times. These are improving but people need action. Resources is also an issue. Every day crime should be picked up. There will be extra police personnel. Thieves need to be aware of the impact of their crimes. EC If someone's life / property is at risk, someone from Staffs police will attend within 10 minutes. By getting there fast the police have a better chance of solving the crime.
Richard Rayson spoke on behalf of Stuart Bartam, Meadow Hurst Farm, Grindley and David Gregory Plough Farm, Drinton	The family has lived in Grindley for over 140 yrs. On 17.10.23 2 cows went missing and were separated from the herd. 1 of the cows was slaughtered with its remains being left on the road. This was traumatic. This was reported and a police officer attended the next day. It is difficult to stop this happening in a rural location. A neighbour found 2 of his animals wandering around. There is no policing to prevent this from happening. Also a neighbour was broken into on two occasions and a large quantity of red diesel was stolen.	GM Expressed his concern that meat slaughtered in this way, is entering the food chain. PB There is a lack of follow-up or interest in the theft and slaughter of animals by the police. He knew of someone who had a £60,000 caravan and tools stolen and there was no intention by the police to come out and investigate. This is a top-down issue and a major problem which needs solving. Gangs are operating and rural crime has to go up on the Police Resources Agenda. BH The incident to which Richard Rayson refers to was horrific. My daughter keeps farmers informed as to what is happening
Edward Holdcroft Drinton Lane Stowe-by-Chartley	On 2.2.24 a car came onto the drive, spun his wife's car around and wrote it off. All the gravel from the drive was	EC A decision was taken to reduce the number of police stations as

	scattered everywhere. They phoned 999 and 4 police officers attended and were helpful. 2 days later they were tipped off as to who had carried out this crime. Mr Holdcroft was asked to attend a police station to give the police some information but this is difficult since there are only 3 police stations in Staffordshire.	a lot of things can be dealt with online and there was a reduced footfall in stations. Some police vehicles can be used as mobile police stations. GW He thanked Ben Adams (the Crime Commissioner, Staffs Police) for getting some stations re-opened. There has been a high deployment of police in Stoke on Trent and in Cannock. He would like to see more police officers out in the community. EC Some police stations have re-opened and there are 10 bases in Stafford. It is correct that there are only 3 front desks now. The norm now is for police officers to come to you.
Roger Poynton Bowage Farm, Grindley .	He has been involved in a neighbour dispute for 3 years, He has contacted the parish council and he has received a response. 28 police officers have been involved. On 13.6.22 he was rugby-tackled to the ground by one of his neighbours, He rang 999 and, in spite of his injuries, he was told to go to Stafford (presumably to a police station). He requested a police presence and he got 2 police officers.	EC Said that she couldn't comment on a particular case but the police have to base their decisions on what they are told and they have limited resources
Eunice Finney Amerton Farm Stowe-by-Chartley	Between June and September 2023 there were 6 crimes: a pygmy goat was stolen and 4 other goats. 4 Hereford calves were slaughtered on site and their heads and guts were strewn everywhere. The police put this on Facebook. 1 quad bike was stolen and later retrieved. They have had midnight joggers on their courtyard. In that case the police arrived quickly. Everyone on the farm is terrified. She has had trespassers on her land in the Stafford area.	PB Last week 2 tractors were stolen. "You never see a policeman". Some vehicles have trackers on them. Stolen vehicles are going off to gypsy camps and going abroad on the black market. 5 years ago the police were dealing with crime but not now BH If you live in Stowe-by-Chartley parish you can contact your

	Generally, getting a response from the police is difficult. There have been 18 crimes within a two mile radius of Amerton Farm in six months and it has involved 7 victims. One victim was unfortunately not present to give their account of events.	local parish Councillor whose names are on the web site: https://stowe-by-chartley-pc.gov.uk The parish council is also considering “live-streaming news” GW There are repeat crimes – if it has happened once it may happen again. “Most of what we are talking about are classified as “Business Crimes” but in the case of rural crime, farmers live on site. Business crimes need to be taken seriously. Very few people ever get prosecuted. It is so much more than a property crime. It really comes down to the police RESPONSE but it is also about PROSECUTIONS. The more prosecutions the more crime will go down.”
Richard Simkin Essington Hall Farm, Essington, Nr Wolverhampton	They have 200 acres with a farm, shop and restaurant. They have experienced fly tipping, theft of livestock and power tools plus shop lifting. There have been illegal encampments. The farm shop was raided and the perpetrators were looking for cash. You get a poor response if you dial 999.	
Piers Bratton Church Farm, Norbury, Stafford.	He is a dairy farmer and they were broken into 5 years ago. They rang the police who sent a team of forensics who collected fingerprints which led to a prosecution BUT recently, at 4.00 a.m. they were disturbed, They phoned the police who directed them to 101. (which is a poor response by comparison) A vehicle was stolen and he claimed on his insurance.	PB It’s a problem about how resources are used. He would like to see officers to be trained to respond to these kind of thefts. He would like Emily Clarke to be more involved. Cameras could be used. Vehicle thefts disrupt a farmer’s business. Farmers should not have to pay for security to counter the problems of society. Serious crimes like the illegal slaughtering of animals

		should be followed up by quality staff.
Geoff Barton Canalside Farm. Great Haywood, Nr Stafford	They suffer from juvenile crime and one customer had his car stolen from the car park. If you call 101 or input the crime on the 101 web site, you are always asked "Is this a business crime?". Tools, alcohol from the farm shop were stolen and there have been problems with travellers on their car park.	
Matthew Brewster Bickford Grange Farm, Penkridge	He farms on the Shropshire border. The Shropshire police are very good and better than the Staffordshire police. With the Staffordshire police, no-one is brought to justice. Someone is going to get seriously hurt. Farmers are not always aware when criminals are around (because crimes usually occur at night). He has had a truck stolen and there have been 4 incidents since Christmas on this farm.	
Jannette Prince Forestside Farm, Marchington and Midlands & East Regional Board Chair for NFU Mutual.	Resources and manpower seem to be the main problems for the police and Jannette asked if the Staffordshire Police could engage more with a better use of technology.	
Hannah Cains Sutton Mill Farm, Cleverley, Wolverhampton. NFU Group Secretary Wolverhampton & Bridgenorth	She has had quad bikes stolen and lambs shot and left in the fields. All incidents have been reported and have led to a conviction if the West Mercia Police have dealt with them. They seem to be better than the Staffordshire Police because West Mercia Police have a handle on what is happening. She described an event which happened in Penkridge (Staffordshire) and was solved by West Mercia Police. She recommended that Staffordshire Police looks at what West Mercia Police is doing. West Mercia police works very closely with farmers.	

After each farmer / resident had given their account of what had happened to them, there were general comments which are mentioned below:

EC wondered if any of the animal slaughter was to do with religion. This idea was rejected and participants said that the main reason for the animal slaughter was to supply meat to the food chain. Emily went on to say that Staffordshire police have a task force and that they have to work with partners. There are some positives: "One of our Rural Network Officers will come to work with you." They can park vehicles at strategic points and they have drones. For me, it is also about getting out and about in the community."

Matthew Brewster said that the police need to know how tracking systems work and the law when using agricultural equipment..

ACTIONS

GW said:

- the police need to understand rural crime and the scale of it. For example a £200,000 vehicle can be stolen and there does not seem to be a proportionate reaction.
- Criminals will go where they think that policing is at its weakest
- "I will go back from this meeting and talk to Ministers to see if anything can be done."
- There used to be a Rural Crime Panel in Parliament but it has been described as "defunct" so he will try to set it up again. He will also sit down with the Chief Constable and other Staffordshire MPs and a small number of people from the rural community and ask for an ACTION PLAN to be drawn up.

PB said that:

- he would like to ask the Chief Constable to look at these serious crimes which are now being committed on a massive scale.
- We need a National Rural Crime Network which would incorporate cross-border co-operation.
- We need people in rural areas to feel that they are being looked after. He is going to lobby and ask for more resources.

EC said that:

- she would take everything back and that would lead to officers having an increased awareness of rural crime.
- She would like a Rural Crime Strategy
- she wanted everyone to leave the meeting knowing that she will look at opportunities to improve the lives of people who live in rural Staffordshire.

Ben Adams, Crime Commissioner, Staffordshire was asked to sum up the meeting.

He extended his thanks to Eunice Finney and thanked everyone who had spoken. “We have made considerable progress from where we were three years ago. What I have heard today are real issues concerning rural crime. As regards the theft of vehicles, any vehicle can be black-marketed to Ukraine etc. This is organised crime on a scale that we have not seen before. In the case of CODSALL, 95% of crimes are being carried out by people from WOLVERHAMPTON. 60-70% of youths are more worried about organised crime (if they don’t come back with a stolen vehicle, for example) than they are about the police.

He said that he was aware that rural crime is different because if it happens on a farm, farmers live on site and they do not know when they go out in the morning, whether their animals will still be there.

The cost of policing and fire fighting has gone up by 19% in the last three years. We need more officers, and we need to use technology to help us.

In terms of **ACTION** he said:

“I will hold the Police Constable to account. We should have meetings like this every 6 months. We need to look at statistics too – if a particular sort of crime is up then we need to think what we are doing about it. **COMMUNICATION and CONTACT** are his two most important issues.

Eunice Finney FRAGS, Managing Director of Amerton Farm summed up the meeting by saying:

COMMUNICATION and CONVICTIONS are the two things most important to her. She acknowledged that many opinions had been shared and that she was grateful to Graham Morley, to Sir Gavin Williams M.P. and to Emily Clarke, Paul Brown and Cllr Barbara Hurdle for attending the meeting. Victims of rural crime need to work together with the police, in partnership, to get this sorted out. She also thanked the sponsors: H J Lea Oakes and the NFU. She proudly announced that this year is the 40th anniversary of Amerton Farm

The meeting closed at 12.30 p.m.