

Old Windsor Neighbourhood Action Group

Chairman's annual report

November 2008

The Neighbourhood Action Group was convened following a village meeting called by the Police in July 2007. At this well attended meeting villagers nominated the following three priorities for the NAG:-

1. Abstraction
2. Anti Social behaviour
3. Parking

As abstraction is Police parlance, but not always meaningful to the general public, for the remainder of this report I will refer to Visible Policing.

The first NAG meeting was held in September 2007 and chaired by the then Neighbourhood Policing Inspector, Mark Harling. The meeting was attended by volunteers from the village meeting in July. Inspector Harling explained that the NAG was intended to do things. It is not a political platform and exists to find practical solutions to problems facing the Police and village community.

At the conclusion of the meeting Inspector Harling confirmed that the NAG was a community meeting, not a Police meeting, and should be chaired by a member of the local community. He asked for a volunteer to take over the Chairmanship of the NAG meetings. In the absence of a rush of volunteers he asked if I would take over. I agreed to do so on the understanding that I have a number of other commitments which take up a large amount of my time. Rather than see the NAG founder for lack of a Chairman I would Chair it for a finite period until it was well established.

During the course of the last year the following actions have taken place in pursuit of the previously agreed priorities.

Visible Policing.

The village is regarded by the Police and Borough Council as a low crime area. The NAG felt that this might be caused by failures to report minor crimes on the grounds that "it won't do any good and the Police won't take any action". The NAG instituted a campaign to encourage reporting of crimes and this was publicised at Parish Council meetings, Neighbourhood Watch meetings, on village notice boards and by word of mouth. This campaign has been seen as successful by the Police and figures for reported anti social behaviour in Old Windsor earlier this year showed an increase of 27%. *Source Borough asb team.* Whether this was a real increase or a result of greater reporting of incidents is open to conjecture.

It also became clear that re-deployment of village police officers to other duties was still running at a high level. At one point the village constable had spent 49% of her time during the previous month on other duties. Further discussion revealed a significant retention and recruitment problem within Thames Valley Police in East Berkshire. By moving to the adjacent Metropolitan Police area officers

could achieve a £6,000 per annum increase in salary. A letter was sent to our local MP, Mr Adam Afriyie, asking what steps the government were taking to reduce this outflow of experienced officers from the TVP and, presumably, other forces in the Home Counties. Mr Afriyie, who has responded promptly to all the Chairman's requests for assistance, wrote to the Home Secretary seeking replies to our questions. The response listed various allowances and financial packages which could be used by the TVP to stem the flow of experienced officers to the Met. Further investigation revealed that these allowances are also payable to Metropolitan Police Officers so a further letter was sent to Mr Afriyie pointing this out and he again passed on the queries to the Home Secretary. This prompted a further, and much longer, reply stating that changes to the allowances were under consideration by the Police Review Board and the Home Office were unable to comment while the PRB were considering the matter.

Consideration is being given to converting the old toilet block in St Lukes Road in to a Police post. A response is awaited from the TVP Property Services Division. This plan would enable officers to spend more time in the village as they currently have to travel back to Windsor to access a computer and complete their daily reports. It will also provide a very visible Police presence in a key area of the village.

Conclusion.

Lack of visible policing will remain a problem until staffing levels within Thames Valley Police improve. By referring the problem to the Home Secretary, via our local MP, the NAG has drawn the attention of central government to community concerns.

Action points.

- 1. Continue to emphasise the need for local residents to report crimes and anti social behaviour, so raising the awareness of problems in Old Windsor within the Borough and the Police.**
- 2. Await the outcome of the PRB deliberations and consider whether their recommendations will have a significant effect on Police Visibility in Old Windsor.**
- 3. Provide a properly equipped Police post in a central area of the village to allow Police Officers to make maximum use of their time in the village. A decision whether to proceed is awaited from TVP.**

Anti social behaviour

Much of the anti social behaviour centres on the village recreation ground which has become a gathering place for young people who aren't so much anti social as thoughtless. If the disturbance they are causing to neighbouring properties is pointed out many will react positively. The NAG felt it would be more productive to offer something more constructive for them to do, or alternatively provide a gathering place for them to meet where they won't cause disturbance to others, than waste Police time moving them on. A submission to the NAG from local residents who had suffered

disturbance was well presented and gave Borough and Police representatives a firsthand account of the problems anti social behaviour causes in Old Windsor.

The NAG and Parish Council considered a number of options and the Parish Council decided on providing facilities at the Youth Club in the form of Broadband Internet access. This to facilitate use of the laptop computers purchased from a £2,000 grant secured by Youth Club members who wrote the grant application themselves. Other ways of making the youth club more attractive, particularly to the older age group, are under consideration.

The Old Windsor Community Partnership has secured Borough grants to provide footpath lighting on the North /South path across the recreation ground. The parish Council will provide the additional funding necessary to complete the work. The Police advised that better lighting would make the area easier to Police.

A two week special Police operation took place during the summer and concluded that inconsiderately driven and unnecessarily loud motor vehicles caused a major problem in Old Windsor. One vehicle was seized and a number of warnings given to the culprits. Further special operations are being considered.

Conclusion

The village recreation ground remains a favourite gathering place for people who indulge in anti social behaviour. A number of important developments have been implemented or are planned to reduce anti social behaviour.

Action points

- 1. A case has been written for the installation of CCTV at key points in the village and has been supported by the Police. If approved it will further discourage anti social behaviour and provide additional peace of mind for those who have to walk around key areas of the village after dark.**
- 2. Members of the youth club have themselves secured Borough funding for the purchase of two lap top computers. These have been augmented by the installation of broadband facilities to allow better access to the internet. Keeping youngsters occupied is an important factor in reducing anti social behaviour and not every family has the means to provide such facilities at home.**
- 3. Plans for footpath lighting across the recreation ground are well advanced and funding has been secured.**
- 4. An application for the recreation ground to be made an alcohol free zone is also well advanced and public consultation will take place shortly.**
- 5. Complete plans, and secure funding, for improvements to the existing youth club building.**
- 6. Vehicular access to the recreation ground has been further restricted at night.**

Parking.

Most of the parking problems in the village are caused by inconsiderate parking rather than breaches of parking regulations. Much of the village was built before car ownership was the norm. The streets are consequently narrow and parking for households with two or more cars is difficult to find.

There are two different aspects of parking control.

1. Implementation of parking regulations e.g. parking on yellow lines or exceeding the allocated time limit for parking.
2. Controlling obstructions.

The first has been taken over by the Borough. The second is the responsibility of the Police. Big improvements were promised when the Borough took over parking enforcement. Despite requests from the NAG Borough parking enforcement officers are only occasional visitors to Old Windsor.

Similarly control of obstructions isn't high on the list of Police priorities. The major problem is parking on the pavement or over dropped kerbs, installed at great expense by the Borough for the convenience of the disabled, prams, push chairs or the blind and partially sighted.

Conclusions

The community must take the major responsibility by parking considerately or by being prepared to walk a few yards. The Community Partnership and the Parish Council have both found funding for additional parking at the St Lukes Road shops but it is impractical to provide additional parking in the local housing developments.

Action points

Local residents should:-

1. **Park responsibly – if you have a front drive please use it.**
2. **Pavements are for people – don't park on them.**
3. **Remember that dropped kerbs are for those with disabilities or who require access for prams and push chairs – they are not ramps to drive up on to the pavement.**

For its part the NAG will:-

1. **Request bollards to mark dropped kerbs and prevent them being obstructed by vehicles. The response from the Borough has not been encouraging so far but the matter will be pursued.**
2. **Investigate a less draconian approach to first time parking infringements such as a reminder rather than a ticket.**
3. **Press for more frequent visits by parking attendants.**