

Community Meeting with Sussex Police

Crowborough Community Centre, Pine Grove

16th October 2018

Sponsored by Wealden Labour

Notes from Road Safety Breakaway Group (with some additional information)

The group was asked to look at two issues: unsafe roads and parking enforcement within the Crowborough area.

Roads:

It was widely agreed that there are a number of dangerous roads in Crowborough – largely, but not exclusively, because of through traffic speeding across the town.

These roads include: Beacon Road, Crowborough Hill (especially at the junction with Montargis Way) Church Road, Green Lane and the Town Centre - particularly Croft Road and the High Street.

There was a general view that Crowborough urgently needs traffic calming measures.

It was pointed out that Crowborough now appears to be the only town centre in the area lacking a 20mph speed limit.

Richard Stogden (ESCC Crowborough councillor responsible for highways) was a member of the group and was asked to explain this. He confirmed he had asked for a 20mph limit but the police blocked it.

It was proposed that there should be a 20mph speed limit covering an extended town centre zone plus a separate zone at Jarvis Brook.

There was concern about the A26 Beacon Road - this road is unique in not having a blanket 30 mph within the built up area of the town (it is fragmented into 50, 40 and 30 mph stretches).

A 30 mph limit has been repeatedly requested and petitioned for, but was also vetoed by the police.

Extended 30 mph limits (including A roads) at Uckfield, Halland, Eastbourne, Tunbridge Wells, East Grinstead etc highlighted again the inconsistency and lack of safety measures on Crowborough roads.

Two members of the group who campaign on road safety in Crowborough, both confirmed Sussex Police's Mark Dunn as the officer responsible for blocking safety requests.

Footpaths:

There is an issue with maintenance of footpaths on Beacon Road, largely due to overhanging vegetation. This problem is likely to become worse given that drivers are being encouraged to park on this road following the loss of most of the car park north of the community centre.

The group suggested that residents of the affected properties lining Beacon Road should put into a central 'kitty' to pay for regular cutting back of trees and shrubs, to keep the footpaths safe.

Note: Local councils have a legal duty to deal with this - overhanging vegetation is best reported to ESCC via FixMyStreet.

Pedestrian crossings:

Controlled pedestrian crossings on Western Road and a further crossing on Crowborough Hill (by Grange Close) were proposed, to make it safer for pupils walking to Beacon School. Jarvis Brock urgently needs a controlled crossing to replace the dangerous zebra crossing on Crowborough Hill.

Cameras:

It was suggested that there should be CCTV on the traffic lights at Crowborough Cross to record those jumping the lights. Ideally there would also be a speed camera outside Lidl, but if this not possible then there should be at least a flashing speed limit sign in that spot.

In general, there is a total lack of speed limit enforcement in Crowborough and surrounding areas.

There is only one fixed camera in Crowborough (on the A26 at Goldsmiths Leisure Centre) and this is ineffective as the speed limit here is far too high: 40mph limit with the camera set well above this.

There is one mobile camera location within the town: on Crowborough Hill. Requests for further locations have been turned down by the (unaccountable and uncontactable) Sussex Safer Roads Partnership.

No one can ever recall seeing enforcement of the 40mph blanket limit on the town's adjoining Ashdown Forest. In the past year there has been 227 deer collisions, with speeding being a key factor.

Community Speed Watch and Operation Crackdown

There was no appetite for forming CSW groups, as people felt they would be abused by drivers and unsafe. Others felt CSW was a sop to residents, when it is the clear duty of Sussex Police to enforce the law of the road.

Operation Crackdown is widely promoted by Sussex Police for the reporting of anti-social driving (and other vehicle related issues). But it was noted that the OC website is poorly designed and not fit for purpose (see FixMyStreet for an example of a reporting website that works well).

Parking:

Currently there is a parking free-for-all in Crowborough with a total absence of enforcement. Many residents had tried reporting dangerous parking to the police, but this had rarely been acted upon.

Recently photographed: three cars fully parked at the same time on the pavement outside Waitrose, and a driverless DPD delivery van parked on pedestrian crossing zig zags outside WH Smiths. Reported but no action taken.

There is total political confusion regarding parking in Wealden district.

The online reporting system (Operation Crackdown) does not appear to work on many browsers and there are long waits to get through to 101. Suggestions for dealing with dangerous parking issues, such as parking on junctions, were:

- A monthly police patrol (carried out on different days and different times) that focuses on parking and issues penalty notices for illegal parking

- Building a new car park for commuters, who clog up the roads around the station and make them dangerous
- Upgrade the OC reporting system
- Reinstate PCSOs

Parking restrictions are needed on Mill Lane - with the Mead House development now started and the Community Hub opening soon, the daily gridlock already occurring will get worse.

At the end of the meeting Anita Turner advised that if residents do not see action taken over their reports of dangerous parking, they can contact her directly.

Other issues and suggestions;

- Dangerous manhole cover at the end of Queens Road
- Install a roundabout at the bottom of Montargis Road
- Commercial vehicles drive too fast through the town – is there a way of warning them?
- Limit further building near Western Road, as this is a tricky road to negotiate at the best of times and permission already given has guaranteed grid lock here.

At the end of the meeting, residents were invited to put themselves forward as a representative on the Sussex Road Safety Partnership.

(Notes written by Angie Smith and Brendan Clegg)

Notes from Youth Breakaway Group

The issues as people saw them were antisocial behaviour which, while not illegal, might concern vulnerable people and actual crime which some felt was on the rise due a lack of police presence.

It was felt that teenagers were unsupervised and bored with very few activities for them in the town.

Ideas for providing distractions were:

- A motor workshop/racing track to harness energy and desire to work on motors and perhaps drive them
- Youth clubs – there used to be ones in the town but there's apparently little money and volunteers to do this
- Sports clubs – Perhaps the existing ones could be encouraged to reach out into the community
- Volunteers – should Crowborough have a register of willing helpers who could be called upon?
- Ask the young people what they actually want.

Of course, as in every group, the common cry was for PCSOs – particularly at peak times, i.e. Friday and Saturday nights. One couple of mothers reported that their sons were attacked and hospitalised near the Cross at such a time.

The feeling is that PCSOs get to know local families and can monitor situations preventing further issues.

Gareth Owen-Williams

Notes from General Issues Breakaway Group

1. Focus was supposed to be rural affairs but there were no takers on this so we were a small group talking about local policing generally.

2. Concerns that were raised about present policing :

- Parking issues - No deterrent because they are not followed up
- 101 not working very well. People therefore not bothering to report crime. This could question the veracity of the crime statistics
- PCSOs had not been seen by anyone in the group in recent times
- The warden (paid for by the town council) was thought to be of little value. His personal appearance (in terms of the presentation of himself) criticised too.
- There is a sense that there is continual withdrawal of the police. First it was the villages and now it's the towns like Crowborough
- Eridge speed camera not been seen for a long time

3. Main theme - It was thought that you cannot police a town properly without local police and PCSOs who know the town and its people. If community policing was brought back, many things could get nipped in the bud before they escalated. If the people of the town feel they get no help, or little interest from police based elsewhere, they will stop asking for it and lose faith in the police service.

4. A few thoughts on using resources differently.

- Police Commissioner resources to be reduced and money put back into actual policing
- Could Special Constables be brought back?
- Are there too many specialised police? If a few more community police were available could they nip in the bud some crimes that end up with the specialists?

Chris Hinton

Notes from the Community Engagement Group

A group discussion was led by Wealden Prevention Team Inspector Jon Gross. He commenced by outlining the priorities for Sussex Police as set out within the 2018 Police and Crime Plan.

The plan identifies four key objectives, the first two of which are:

- Strengthen Local Policing
- Work with local communities and partners to keep Sussex Safe.

The plan provides the challenge to Sussex Police to:

1. Ensure local policing is accessible

2. Provide effective specialist capabilities to support local policing
3. Maintain engagement in the delivery of local policing services to improve public confidence
4. Encourage and support local communities to prevent crime and disorder.

Inspector Gross outlined the policing model in terms of Response, Investigations, Prevention and specialist capabilities - all of which serve Crowborough in different ways.

Those present are fully aware of the reduction in funding and resources in recent years with the most notable features being the move away from ward assigned PCSOs and the recent increase in precept for police funding.

Inspector Gross provided detail of how this was translating to a recruitment of 800 constables over the next four years - which is predicted to yield a net increase in the establishment of the force by 200 constables – some of which will make their way to Prevention teams across Sussex.

The general feeling of those present was that Crowborough has suffered a loss of a dedicated police presence in the town. This has led to a loss of confidence in policing.

Key issues raised in the discussion:

1. The process of **contacting Sussex Police to report issues is problematic**. A number of examples were given of lengthy waiting times to get through on the 101 number. This results in frustration at what is considered poor customer service and a general cynicism that reported reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour are attributable to the public not bothering to report incidents or terminating calls before they answered due to lengthy waiting times.

The group were provided assurance that improving 101 performance was a priority for the Sussex Police Contact centre.

Suggestions from the group included the development of an APP for people to report crime.

(Note: This facility already exists for reporting hate crime.

A link can be found on the Sussex Police website: Self Evident hate crime reporting app:
<https://witnessconfident.org/self-evident-app>)

2. **Op Crackdown** - also considered cumbersome to report issues – (similar issues as per the Road Safety Group above).
3. **Police Station** – members of the group were keen to understand what the long term plans are for Crowborough Police Station. It is widely accepted that the station is not in the best location to promote a tangible link to the Town. Discussion was had regarding Wealden Prevention Team maintaining a more regular patrol presence from the Police Station – which Inspector Gross stated he was keen to support within the context of resourcing a presence across Wealden. Discussion also took place regarding the Wealden Prevention Team exploring the possibility of having some facility to conduct engagement activity in and from Pine Grove offices in the future.

4. **PCSO engagement** – some in the group felt that the increase in precept money levied from Crowborough residents should result in dedicated Crowborough PCSOs and officers. Inspector Gross stated that a return to ward based staff would not result from this funding but recognised the value of regularity and continuity of contact with the Crowborough community by members of his team. It was suggested that a regular point of contact for the business community (via Chamber of Commerce) would be one helpful way that such contact could be achieved.

Jon Gross