

Rural Matters



Rural policing in Kent – a magazine for residents and businesses

Summer 2024



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**Kent
Police**



New joint forces action



3,655 power tools seized



Heritage – thefts alert

Plus the latest news on rural and environmental policing in Kent

Welcome to Rural Matters

Welcome to Rural Matters. See inside for the latest on the Kent Police Rural Task Force. There are now more officers countywide dedicated to tackling and preventing crime in the countryside. We've the latest news on how these officers, partners and colleagues are working to protect and support Kent's rural communities. Email your Rural Task Force team – rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

Rural Inspector		Rural Sergeants		Rural Crime Co-ordinator	
	Inspector Tom Mepstead 07977 519099		Sergeant Darren Walshaw 07870 252185		Sergeant Ross Haybourne 07815 501373
			Doug Robertson 07972 004578		

North Division – 07528 989095

- PC Marc Pennicott
- PC Paul Williams
- PC Beth Ninnim
- PCSO John Cork



West Division – 07580 236308



- PC Nick Lingham
- PC Anna Verrall
- PC Luke Jordan
- PC Tom Smith

East Division – 07980 978202

- PC Harry Callaghan
- PC Mike Sutton
- PC Matt Lehman
- PC Amy White
- PCSO Debbie Fields
- PCSO Ian Norton

More rural contact information, see back page.

Report non-urgent crime online

-  Go to www.kent.police.uk/report
-  Report a crime, incident or non-injury collision in minutes
-  Receive your confirmation email and reference number immediately

Anyone with information about suspected crime can contact the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously by calling **0800 555 111** or using the anonymous online form.

Crimestoppers.
0800 555 111
100% anonymous. Always.



X account

Your Rural Task Force PCs have a X account [@KentPoliceRural](https://twitter.com/KentPoliceRural)

The team regularly Tweets updates on what they've been doing and any live incidents.

Follow for the latest news and information.



Latest news

New South East police partnership – joint approach to disrupt rural criminals

Working together to create a hostile environment for those committing crime in rural areas is the aim of a new partnership between South East police forces.

The South East Partnership Against Rural Crime (SEPARC) was launched in 2024 to protect rural communities by sharing intelligence and specialist skills across borders and through joint operations.

SEPARC will bring combined action against agricultural, wildlife, environmental and heritage offences – including working with the National Rural Crime Team around serious organised crime.

Increasingly organised criminals are targeting rural areas, particularly with thefts of construction and agricultural machinery, high value and off-road vehicles and GPS equipment from tractors, including GPS domes and screens.

Police operations will disrupt criminals using the roads networks and ports and work with businesses and local residents around crime prevention – including fraud, rogue trader and scam updates.

The Rural Task Force in Kent now has more officers who work with local communities to deal with livestock offences; anti-social behaviour; agricultural crime; poaching, illegal fishing



Kent Police Rural Task Force officers checking agricultural vehicles in transit at Dover Port

and hare coursing; offences around the coast and on the county's waterways.

They are supported by local police teams and increased intelligence sharing with Sussex, Hampshire and Isle of Wight, Surrey and Thames Valley, the forces in SEPARC. During a week of action Rural Task Force officers joined those from the National Rural Crime Unit and the Port of Dover Police to check export lorries loaded with plant/machinery. They

have also worked with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency looking for stolen farm equipment.

Superintendent Pete Steenhuis, said: 'Tackling rural crime is a priority for Kent Police and we recently increased the size of our Rural Task Force. We regularly work with neighbouring forces across the South East. Criminals don't recognise county borders so it's important we work together in this way.'

One tracking device leads to discovery of 3,655 suspected stolen tools

Police searching for a single stolen power drill with a tracking device attached discovered over 3,655 suspected stolen items.

They included four vehicles and six caravans. The items were seized and seven arrests made in the Cranbrook area. Kent Police Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne said: 'We hope to reunite as many of the items as we can with their rightful owners as soon as possible.'

Among them was a quad bike and numerous power tools, including 848 drills, believed to be the biggest tools seizure of its kind in the county. The caravans are

suspected of being stolen from Sussex, Southampton, Bristol, Wales and Staffordshire and tools from inside and out of the county.

It's estimated the combined value will exceed £500,000. The original victim attached trackers to tools after being repeatedly targeted by thieves. A search for a stolen drill led Rural Task Force officers – joined by Thames Valley colleagues – to execute a warrant on 26 April. Those arrested, aged 17 to 44, have been bailed as investigations continue. Sgt Haybourne said: 'A comprehensive list of items will be released to the public in due course. Anyone



wishing to claim anything listed will need to provide proof of ownership or proof of purchase. We anticipate this to take a considerable amount of time and thank people for their patience while we undertake the task.'

Tradespeople are advised to mark property, take photographs, and record serial numbers. Officers also advise timely reporting of any theft, with as much detail as possible. Learn more securedbydesign.com



Diggers, excavators and trailers recovered – arrests

Machinery suspected of being stolen across Kent has been recovered by Rural Task Force officers. Three arrests have been made. Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne said: 'We have recovered a number of items of plant machinery and believe there may be more suspected stolen machines linked to this investigation.' It follows reports of excavators stolen from a quarry in Wrotham between December 2023 and March 2024. The team have subsequently located three stolen trailers and excavators from Sheppey and Marden and suspected stolen power tools. Anyone with information call Kent Police on 01634 792209 ref 46/50252/2

Wildlife targeted – catapults and ball bearings seized from boys

Catapults and more than 60 ball bearings were seized by officers from two teenage boys following reports wildlife was being targeted in the Paddock Wood area. They were also alleged to have been aimed at car windows. The officers from Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Unit stopped the pair and found two catapults, 62 ball bearings and metal nuts. The boys' parents were contacted.

Three ewes die after dog attack in field

Three sheep were left dead after a dog attack in a field near Gravesend. The incident was the latest in a number reported countywide this year – where out of control pets have led to deaths or serious injuries to sheep – including pregnant ewes and lambs. A large black and white spaniel type dog was seen around 9.20am on 6 May attacking the sheep on land in Halfpence Lane. Three ewes were left fatally injured and others needing treatment. Investigating PC Nathan Colman, said: 'This was a very distressing incident and an investigation is underway to identify the person who should have been in control of the dog at the time. Offences of this kind have a significant impact on farmers, particularly during lambing season.' Anyone with information call Kent Police 01474 366149, quote ref 46/73465/24 or Crimestoppers anonymously 0800 555 111 or via the online form on their website.



Protecting livestock – signage available

Owners are urged to keep dogs away from livestock, on a lead near farm animals and be aware of where their dogs are at all times while on countryside walks. Property owners near fields where livestock are kept are also asked to ensure their gardens are secure, so pets can't escape. The Rural Task Force has signage available for any livestock owners who have footpaths near their grazing fields. Contact the team for more information.



Farm Watch – helping track down stolen property

The Farm Watch alert system has proved very effective in helping police track down stolen property. The app is an effective way to share information with Rural Task Force officers directly and since the scheme started it has grown to over 1,800 members. The app ensures information is passed on quickly so officers can act swiftly – resulting in stolen property recovered fast and offenders stopped. Anyone interested in joining their local Farm Watch group email the RTF at rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

Farm Watch WhatsApp is a tool to share information directly with the team and not to be used to report crime. Any crimes should be reported in the usual way; **999** if a crime is in progress or **101**.



Angling agreement to tackle illegal fishing



The launch of Op Clamdown 2024, Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Scott pictured centre

Kent Police is signed up to Operation Traverse – a long standing partnership working agreement to tackle illegal fishing and criminal behaviour. It sees Kent Police working with key partners like the Environment Agency and Angling Trust. Rural Task Force Rural Crime

Co-ordinator Doug Robertson said: 'The trust have trained volunteer bailiffs who act as the 'Eyes and Ears' on riverbanks and lakes in Kent and report incidents and suspicious activity.' There is a specific focus – Op Clamdown – in the coarse fishing season from 15

March to 15 June, which Kent Police has been involved with for 12 years. Kent Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Scott joined those involved to launch the latest Op Clamdown campaign this year. Kent Police signed up to Op Traverse in 2019.

Nuisance drivers and off-road riders targeted

The Rural Task Force and other police teams are continuing to take action against nuisance vehicles and reckless off-road riding. They recently targeted anti-social behaviour in Medway and North Kent – such as off-road riding across green spaces and large gatherings of nuisance vehicles disturbing those living nearby. Rural Task Force officers, Medway's Beat Team and special constables patrolled across green spaces in Chatham and Gillingham to identify those riding recklessly, without insurance or not displaying a licence plate. Officers spoke to a number of people – including some seen unloading off-road vehicles in preparation to use on footpaths and open spaces. A bike was seized in Hoo after it was reported being seen used anti-socially. Police issued several Section 59 warnings to motorists – which means their bikes will be seized if they are seen causing a nuisance with their vehicles again. Partners from Medway Council supported the operation.



Officers talking to drivers in Ebbsfleet

Dartford's Community Safety Unit were also at Ebbsfleet after reports of persistent ASB involving car drivers meeting in the Castle Hill area, causing a hazard to other road users and excessive noise disturbing those living nearby. Both Medway and Dartford are areas protected under a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO). It includes restrictions like

driving in a convoy, racing, performing stunts, revving engines, wheel spinning and playing music. Inspector Mick Hayes, of Medway CSU said: 'Both PSPOs have been introduced following public consultations and we will continue to work closely with the council to ensure the order is enforced. We'll continue to tackle this issue proactively.'

Village homes cut off after cabling theft – two arrests

Suspected stolen telecommunications cabling was recovered by police after villagers were left unable to use devices or the internet. Homes in Mereworth were cut off when around 500 metres of cable was stolen overnight between 9-10 May, causing around £3,000 of damage to farmland. Detectives identified several vehicles suspected to be involved, with one later seized. Less than 24 hours later, two men in their 20s were arrested and a search led to the recovery of cabling and tools. One man was charged with theft and criminal damage, the second was bailed pending further inquiries.



Off road vehicles marked at young farmers' event



Rural Task Force Police Community Support Officers John Cork and Debbie Fields attended the Ashford Young Farmers Lambing day event at Wittersham.

They were able to advise people about My Community Voice, a two-way engagement tool with Kent Police (see page 7) and give advice on crime prevention.

They also spoke to farmers about any concerns and three off-road vehicles were security marked.

Thefts of quads and ATVs increase – check security

Owners of ATVs and quad bikes should check security measures.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'Vehicles such as 4x4s, tractors, quad bikes and ATVs are tempting to thieves if left unattended. Always remove keys from ignition and store the keys in a safe place.'

- Avoid leaving vehicles in fields. Secure them to an anchor point such as a wall or inside secure buildings.
- Consider security lighting, CCTV and alarms.
- Security mark vehicles. Photograph any distinguishing marks, keep a record of chassis, serial numbers and make and model to help identify them.
- Consider a tracker device to help in the recovery of the vehicle if stolen.

Working with coastal communities and partners – wildlife protection



Rural Task Force officers and PCSOs continue to work closely with partners on ongoing issues of wildlife and sea life disturbance around Pegwell Bay.

Officers from the RTF recently met with the National Coast Watch to discuss some of the issues, such as the inconsiderate use of jet skis and boats.

Rural Task Force officers patrol on the coast and work with Thanet District Council,

Kent Wildlife Trust and the Sandwich Harbour Master to ensure animals – such as seals – are protected from disturbances.

This includes advising jet skiers on responsible use. The area is under a Public Space Protection Order and anyone riding one posing a risk to wildlife can be fined; a Community Protection Warning issued or be arrested if offences continue.

Rural Task Force Sergeant

Darren Walshaw said: 'It is important people keep their distance, from all marine mammals and seabirds. They are sensitive to disturbance so if you come into contact with them, move away quietly.'

'Those using boats or jet skis are asked to travel at a no-wake speed of under 5mph when near the cliffs. If you see a colony of seals or groups of birds, slow down and go around them.'

First community event at Dover Castle

Rural Task Force PCSOs were at Dover Castle recently for their first community engagement event at the location.

It prompted plenty of interest – from local families to visitors and foreign language students.

Children enjoyed sitting in the police vehicle and the team were able to provide advice on crime prevention and staying safe.



Appeal to help find stolen bronze statues

Officers are seeking help in tracing three large bronze statues stolen from a garden in the Ashford area.

They were reported stolen between 4am on 4 April 2024 and the following day from the garden of a property in Stonehill, Sellindge. Two of the heavy

statues feature deer and the third, two people at a wishing well.

Anyone with information should contact Kent Police on 01843 222289 ref 46/55577/24 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or via their online form.



Intruder in 90-year-old's home claimed to be police officer

An intruder confronted by a 90-year-old in her home, claimed he was a police officer.

Police have issued an image of a man they'd like to identify in connection with the incident in the Tunbridge Wells area. The pensioner heard the intruder upstairs after returning to the house from her front garden. When challenged it is alleged he said he was a police officer before leaving empty-handed. He may have had a front tooth missing. Residents are advised to ensure doors are locked and windows shut if they are away from their home, for example while gardening or working in sheds or outbuildings.

Anyone with information contact Kent Police 01622 604100 ref 46/58816/24 or Crimestoppers anonymously 0800 555 111 or via the online form.



Wheel stolen last summer recovered and returned

A distinctive heavy wheel stolen from a vintage traction engine last summer has been traced and returned.

The wheel was taken from a 1901 Burrell traction engine from a field in Woodchurch in August 2023. Police appealed for information and the wheel was recovered in the Coxheath area in March. It has now been reunited with the owner.

Property marking – secure, record and retain

Marking property helps officers trace and return it if people are victims of rural crime.

Check security measures are appropriate and in good working order and that property is marked, recorded and records retained.

Anyone interested in having property marked free of charge email rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

Help find camouflage off-road vehicle

An off-road vehicle painted with camouflage detail was stolen in Ruckinge near Ashford. The theft was reported on the evening of 12 April and 11.25am the next day in the Bromley Green Road area.

The Kubota RTV 900 was reported being driven away and last seen entering a byway off Hornash Lane towards Church Lane.

Anyone with information contact Kent Police 01843 222289 ref 46/60360/24.



MCV is a two-way engagement tool brought to you by Kent Police.

Be the first to find out what's happening in your area.

Use the QR code to find out more.



Or visit the website:

MyCommunityVoiceKent.co.uk

Partnerships

Key partners working with Kent Police to keep rural communities safe

Crime Rural Advisory Group

CRAG formed in 2012, brings together main rural stakeholders, including the National Farmers Union and Country Land & Business Association – representing a large percentage of land occupancy countywide.

web: www.btfpartnership.co.uk email: michael.bax@btfpartnership.co.uk
phone: **Michael Bax 01233 740077**

Kent Association of Local Councils

KALC is a not for profit membership organisation serving member parish and town councils and parish meetings in Kent and Medway. It offers training, advice and services to member councils. KALC works with rural officers to disseminate information on their behalf, and to gather crime information from towns and parishes.

web: www.kentalc.gov.uk email: kalc@kentalc.gov.uk phone: **01304 820173**

Country Land & Business Association

The CLA is the membership organisation for owners of land, property and businesses in rural England and Wales and has been safeguarding the interests of landowners, and those with an economic, social and environmental interest in rural land for more than 112 years. The CLA South East Office works closely with the Kent Police to help achieve these aims

web: www.cla.org.uk email: southeast@cla.org.uk phone: **01264 313434**

Kent Fire and Rescue Service

KFRS is responsible for delivering fire and rescue services to more than 1.7 million people. Each year fire officers deal with around 16,500 incidents including road crashes, house and barn fires and more than 2,400 non-fire rescues. KFRS works with the Kent Police, NFU, and CRAG to provide safety and risk reduction advice to support the agricultural business community.

web: www.kent.fire-uk.org email: enquiries@kentfire-uk.org phone: **01622 692121**

Historic England

Historic England is a public body which looks after England's historic environment. There are over 400,000 protected sites and buildings in England and Historic England works across a range of partnership to prevent the loss and damage to our shared cultural heritage. Former Kent police officer Mark Harrison advises the organisation and works closely with rural officers and CRAG.

web: www.historicengland.org.uk
email: southeast@HistoricEngland.org.uk
phone: **01483 252020**

National Farmers Union

The NFU champions British farming and provides professional representation and services to its farmer and grower members. Around 70 per cent of full time farmers are NFU members. They aim to support Kent Police to engage with members' extensive local knowledge, working in partnership with CRAG and other stake holder organisations.

web: www.nfuonline.com
email: isobel.bretherton@nfu.org.uk phone: **01730 711950**



Need to report a crime?

Do it
online



Report non-emergency crime
24/7 using online services
kent.police.uk/report



A quicker way
for you to
report crime
and incidents



Receive email
confirmation
and reference
number
immediately



Access **Live Chat**
by the blue circle in
the bottom right corner
of any Kent Police webpage

Countryside Code

Remember

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Leave all gates as you found them
- Keep pets under close control
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone

