

Community Safety

Policing and Neighbourhood Watch

The consultation process revealed that almost three-quarters of respondents were concerned about the fear of burglary or theft and that 10% had been victims although they had failed to report the crimes to the police. In general, people were much less worried about the fear of mugging, vandalism or harassment although a small number claimed to have been victims and failed to report the fact to the police. There was evidence of similarly unreported car crime in the villages although only 40% expressed concern at the risk.

In spite of this, a small number of residents said that safety and security fears prevented them from leaving their homes and participating in communal activities. One dog-walker said that, during the dark evenings, she took her dog to Ilminster by car rather than risk walking on the unlit Seavington roads or playing field. Other respondents would not let their children go to the playing field in the evening meaning that they had little play during winter evenings. However, there was strong opposition to the suggestion of extending permanent street lighting in the villages; preservation of the rural ambience and avoidance of further light pollution were cited in support.

These statistical findings were accompanied by numerous comments on the perceived inadequacy of policing in the area, poor response when the police are contacted and lack of any regular police presence. A question on peoples' willingness to pay an extra increment of Council Tax for improved policing drew very adverse remarks regarding the existing very high police precept and its regular growth at a far higher rate than general inflation or family incomes.

The mobile police station which intermittently visits the Millennium Hall was considered a waste of resources since it added no tangible value to the community.

The inclusion of the City of Bristol, some 60 miles distant, within our police area was seen as wholly negative in its effect since it drained cash and manpower to an urban and crime-riddled area which required regular and intensive policing to the detriment of our rural community. The perception of the impact of Bristol on local policing has been confirmed by historic press articles and statements by the police themselves. It is proposed to contact other villages in the area to use the public debate on the Government's proposed re-organisation of police forces to attempt to remove Somerset Police from the stranglehold of Avon and Bristol to a more appropriate, rurally minded, police authority.

Although the monthly village magazine carries regular articles on the, long established, Neighbourhood Watch scheme the survey and discussion revealed surprising ignorance regarding the way the scheme works. Further, the apparent police neglect of the scheme had caused many to doubt its utility.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
B 1	Arrange a village briefing and question & answer session from a senior police officer	Parish Council
B 2	Contact other villages to coordinate protest about inadequate policing and attempt to secure removal of Somerset Police from resources stranglehold of Avon and Bristol to a more appropriate police authority	Parish Council
B 3	Re-educate villages about function, membership and operation of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme	Neighbourhood Watch coordinator
B 4	Consider lighting the village playing field during the early part of winter evenings to permit children's sport and safe dog-walking.	SPFA
B 5	Establish a working group to set up a "Good Neighbour Scheme" which could escort vulnerable residents to village functions and regularly check on their welfare	PCSG

Motor Vehicle Speeding

The consultative process found that three-quarters of village residents were concerned about the safety implications of the speed of motor vehicles passing through the villages. This concern extended not only to the speed of traffic in both directions through Seavington St Michael, but also to the lower volume of traffic passing along Water Street, Townsend and Scott's Hill in Seavington St Mary.

There was particular concern over the speed of traffic as it passed the Millennium Hall and Playing Field which regularly exceeds the 30mph limit; it was felt that an enforced 20mph was necessary here and possibly elsewhere where children are regularly forced to walk on or cross roads which have no footpath or identifiable crossing points.

There was recognition and appreciation of the Parish Council's work in arranging for a Community Speed Watch scheme with a radar speed-gun and the work of the volunteers who operate the scheme. This had resulted in a trial of an automatic "Speed Visor" which advised motorists that they were exceeding the current 30 MPH limit. It was, however, noted that these efforts at speed control had, so far, excluded Seavington St Mary.

There was a general lack of support for provision of "rumble strips" or "speed humps" but strong support for permanent flashing advisory speed signs and "pinch

points” associated with the village entrances proposed in the following section of this plan. The latter, if sensibly sited, were felt to give a much more effective warning of danger than static village signs as well as forcing a speed reduction on traffic. Further, “pinch points” might deter some Ilminster bound traffic which could use the A303 and approach Ilminster from the west. The classic highway authority objections to such pinch points are not seen to be valid on a road which was recently declassified from “B” to “C” status by the same authority.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
B 6	Seek installation of permanent flashing advisory speed signs in Seavington St Michael and Seavington St Mary	Parish Council
B 7	Seek 20mph speed limit in appropriate places within both villages; particularly in Water Street to protect children accessing the Millennium Hall and Playing Field	Parish Council
B 8	Expand scope of Community Speed Watch scheme to cover Seavington St May	Parish Council
B 9	Seek “pinch points” on entry to the village areas, to be associated with the proposed Village entrances	Parish Council

