



# South West Chilterns Community Board minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the South West Chilterns Community Board held on Wednesday 2 October 2024 in Fawley Village Hall, Fawley, Bucks, RG9 6JA - Parking at What3Words; Field parking: responded.tanks.packets and restricted parking at the village hall: name.dares.reliving, commencing at 6.30 pm and concluding at 7.55 pm.

### **BC Councillors present**

M Turner (Chairman), C Heap (Vice-Chairman), D Barnes, A Collingwood, D Johncock, S Kayani and D Watson

### **Town/Parish Councils and other organisations present**

A Batten (Marlow Bottom Parish Council), C Burslem (Medmenham Parish Council), L Coldwell (Hambleden, Ibstone & Turville Parish Council), N Sargent (Fawley Meeting), M Midtown (Marlow Bottom Parish Council), M Barber (Police and Crime Commissioner),

### **Others in attendance**

M Devlin (Buckinghamshire Council), J Hunt (Resident), M Fogle (Resident), Lady McAlpine (Resident), L Johncock (with Cllr D Johncock), H Beck-Burnidge (Resident), M Hunt (Resident), J Binning (Buckinghamshire Council), T Evans (Buckinghamshire Council) D Roberts (Buckinghamshire Council), T Ellis (Buckinghamshire Council)

## Agenda Item

### **1 Chariman's Welcome**

Mark Turner (MT) welcomed everyone to the meeting. For those that didn't know what Community Board were, MT advised that they brought council groups, organisations and local people together. Their aim was to look at local issues and find ways of improving them. Community Boards tried to:

- Represent the voice of local people.
- Capture thoughts, ideas and suggestions.
- Bring together key community partners and residents.
- Identify local needs and worked to produce creative solutions, like for example the recent refurbishment of Fawley village hall which was part financed by the Community Board.

MT confirmed that the structure of Community Board would be changing next year. We currently had 16 but this would change to eight and the Board areas would be slightly bigger. The Boards would remain strong supporters of the Police and Fire Brigade and would try to maintain a bridge with a flow of data and communication. MT added that the Board was also the conduit for petitions, and that was the reason for this meeting for the speed reduction in Fawley.

MT welcomed Dave Roberts, Head of Highways, our councillors representing areas of the Chilterns and local Wards around Marlow, and Matthew Barber, our Crime commissioner for the Thames Valley. Ben Fogle was unable to join the meeting to read the petition being presented as he was working overseas.

## **2 Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

Apologies were received from Buckinghamshire Council Councillors Neil Marshall, Jocelyn Towns, Stuart Wilson, Penny Drayton and Councillors Sue Wagnor, Wooburn and Bourne End Parish Council, Tim Bingham, Wooburn and Bourne End Parish Council and Joy Morrissey MP, Richard Parker and Olwen Elliot.

Declarations of Interest: MT declared an interest as he had some years ago put in a request for a speed limit change in Fawley, the topic for the petition.

## **3 Notes of the Last Meeting - 28 February 2024**

The minutes of the meeting, dated 28 February 2024, were approved by the South West Chilterns (SWC) Community Board.

## **4 Community Matters**

Buckinghamshire Council update – Service Director Tony Ellis (TE)  
See report attached to the meeting minutes.

TE confirmed that he was the Service Director for IT (Integrated Technology) at Buckinghamshire Council (BC), so for those new to Community Boards, Service Directors were allotted to support the Boards, and he was attached to the South West Chilterns. TE then summarised the update – see links in the full report for further information on each:

### **Consultations**

- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation:** This consultation had closed on 12 September 2024. TE stated that BC had responded to the Government to its proposals to increase housing.
- **Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP):** This was open until 13 October 2024. The consultation aimed to identify priorities for enhancing and expanding cycling, walking and wheeling networks across Buckinghamshire, one of the priorities being to promote healthier lifestyles.
- **Money Matters Budget Consultation:** Ran until 13 October 2024. TE said it was an opportunity for residents and businesses and other local stakeholders to give their views on the Council's spending plans for 2025/26, and it aimed to find out which services should be prioritised. TE emphasised the significant financial

pressures councils across the country were under due to rising costs and added demands on services. In particular at BC, social care costs had escalated even further in recent months due to more vulnerable adults and children needing help. With continuing pressures on household budgets after a period of high inflation and other turbulence, it was important that residents told the council how they wanted to see their council tax spent during the next financial year.

- **Healthy Aging Strategy:** Residents aged over 40 who lived, worked and/or studied in Buckinghamshire, were invited to share their opinions. This will run until 4 November 2024. The feedback would help shape the priority in the coming year.
- **Taxi Licensing Best Practice Consultation:** Run until 24 November 2024, which was to review the taxi licensing policy following a best practice guidance update from the Department for Transport (DfT). The consultation covered driver applications, vehicle requirements, accessibility, private hire operators and CCTV in licensed vehicles.

#### **Campaigns:**

- **Pension Credit:** TE said that eligible older people should be encouraged to apply. This followed the government's decision to discontinue universal winter fuel payment. Pension credit offered support for a range of household expenses, and many pensioners were not aware and not claiming it - only 60% of eligible people currently claimed countrywide. TE said it was important that given the change by government, people claimed that credit (where appropriate). Additional support was also available through BC's Helping Hand for those that didn't qualify for pension credit but were also struggling financially.
- **School Attendance:** This had been in the news and BC had launched a campaign to help improve school attendance, highlighting the importance of children's regular attendance to improve their wellbeing, learning development and mental health. The campaign aimed to reverse the trend of increasing absences since the covid pandemic.
- **Skills Bootcamp:** Available in Buckinghamshire, offering courses in various fields, such as cyber security, TV/Film and more. These bootcamps aimed to enhance career prospects and support businesses.
- **Fostering Campaign:** The "If you Can" campaign had been running for a number of months and continued. It highlighted the skills and traits required to make be a foster carer in Buckinghamshire. The council had over 500 children needing safe and loving homes. Foster with Bucks offered 24/7 support, extensive training, competitive financial allowances, a generous perks and benefits package and much more to help give children the best care.
- **Check Before you Travel:** TE said we had all seen the increase in traffic in Buckinghamshire due to utility repairs, aging pipes, Broadband, major projects like HS2 and East West Rail, and on top of that, emergency roadworks which often the council couldn't control and difficult conditions due to the rain. The campaign aimed to remind all residents to look at the information available via the "Check before you Travel" link on BC's website to see what was going on locally.

### **Petition – E-petition 20mph Fawley**

MT confirmed that the petition stated that “We the undersigned petition the council to change the speed limit through Fawley village from 60mph to 20mph. The road was shared with pedestrians, children, dogs, horses and cyclists. It was the ‘pavement’ through the village. We were the only village in the Chilterns that remained a 60mph and someone was going to get seriously injured or worse.”

MT stated that the petition attracted 9,152 signatures, which was high for a small village of some couple of hundred people. However, Ben was a TV adventurer and those that had seen the debate on television had jumped to his support, hence the additional people. Dave Roberts (DR) and Neil O’Leary (who wrote the report) had been assured that the majority of people in the village had signed the petition.

Dominic Barnes (DB) advised that DR would present the highlights of the petition report instead of going through the lengthy version. MT said that the full report would be circulated - the full report was available on the council’s website.

DR said that he wanted to provide some background on Buckinghamshire Highways thinking on how the report was produced. From their perspective, it made no difference on how many signatures signed the petition as they would follow the same process, and in addition, had in this case reviewed the existing data that was available. DR stated that they would not do a full assessment of everything that was happening and would not commission any new surveys, as these would need to be done in conjunction with the Community Board and funding would be required.

DR advised that what they had arranged in response to this petition, was to involve their Network Safety Team, and the Network Safety Manager, Neil O’Leary (NOL), an expert in this area. NOL had visited Fawley and had assessed all the information available, much of which was accessible publicly, as well as that held by Highways. NOL had driven and walked the five approaches into Fawley and made his own assessment of the characteristics of the roads coming into the village, and he had reviewed the accident data which was both on-line and available from the Police. He had also looked at ordnance survey speed data, which gave average speeds, so he had completed a thorough assessment to get to the position they were in.

Most people that lived in Buckinghamshire, travelled through rural areas and knew what the issues were, and had a good understanding as a road user. DR said that he wouldn’t go through the full detail in the report on the features of the village as that was already known but highlighted that it was slightly unique in that it was quite dispersed, although it had attractions like the village hall and school. It didn’t however meet the immediate criteria that was set by the Department for Transport (DFT) or Highways polices, to identify this village as somewhere which qualified for a 50, 40 or 30mph speed limit.

DR appreciated that many people would ask why you would put a national speed limit on a rural road. He advised that the national speed limit was very common on rural roads, and was not a target in Fawley, as many who drove through understood the average speeds were very low - they were mainly below 20mph.

We also need to consider what would be achieved in lowering the speed limit. DR said that in some areas, changing the speed limit would have an impact on speeds, but 20mph generally didn't. He stated that you needed to have a way of slowing the traffic as well to change the perception of drivers, because the vast majority drove to the perception of the road that was in front of them. There were exceptions and these would happen regardless of what the speed limit was.

The assessment therefore concluded that the most effective way to deal with the issues in Fawley, was not to change the speed limit, but to review potentially the signage, and try to improve driver perception when accessing one of the five roads into Fawley to change driver behaviour. DR however felt that realistically this would be limited as there were already very narrow roads and hedgerows right up to the road edge, so placing signs was difficult but not impossible, so a signage review could be completed.

DR added that this would also apply to a speed limit sign. If the speed limit was changed in Fawley, you would have to follow a legal process which involved a public consultation, a change to the Traffic Regulation Order, and installing the appropriate signage, which all cost quite a large sum of money. If the community believed however that this was a priority for them, regardless of the recommendations from Buckinghamshire Highways, and wanted to pursue the next steps in doing a speed review in more detail, they could progress this through the Community Board. DR confirmed that it would be a very expensive process to follow. DR said that having speed tubes down measuring 24 hours per day for two weeks, may prove that the average speeds were very low with the occasional evidence of a motorist driving at a dangerous speed.

DR stressed that carrying out a speed review did not automatically lead to a change of speed limit. He reiterated that a public consultation process would have to be followed, and another report would then need to be completed to agree what would be gained and if it met the criteria, and to ascertain if it would be supported by the Police. This would be a journey, with a number of steps, which would be costly (approximately £30,000 to £50,000 depending on what was required in terms of signage and outcome of the consultation). DR stated that if the community were to spend any money to put in solutions to address this problem, it would be more sensible to implement the measures that were more likely to make a difference, rather than changing a speed limit, which in Buckinghamshire Highways professional opinion, would not change the speeds.

DB (Local Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport) stated that if the community paid for the tubes, it would cost £1,075. He though went back to what DR had said earlier in that it may gain more accurate data, but the conclusion would most likely be the same.

**Question:** Marina Fogle (MF) felt that the reason why Highways would not change the speed limit was because it would cost too much money. She understood

opinions that changing the speed limit would not change the way in which people drove, and said this was subjective, but all that lived in the village felt this was one of the things they could do to protect themselves and their families. MF asked why the speed limit could not be changed, what was the point of having 60mph, who was in favour of it and what did it achieve?

**Answer:** DR said it was not because Highways did not want to spend money to save accidents happening accordingly – that was not the case at all. There was a road safety budget, which was currently allocated by the highest priority and where the most needs were. The budget was used to tackle where accidents were going to happen, they had happened and were likely to happen again. If there could be a speed limit change and there was the available budget to change the speed limit in Fawley, the recommendation would still be the same as it was thought it would not alter driver behaviour and the characteristics of Fawley. This was the view of the road safety professionals with 30 years' experience, dealing with exactly this type of issue. DR said he had the same view and that his background was highways maintenance, transport quiet lane projects, and driver behaviour and how you amended that. DR stressed that changing the speed limit in Fawley would not make any difference to driver behaviour, it was about the road they were driving on and their perception, with the position of houses and overhanging trees, where the light was coming in, and the quality of the paving etc. He acknowledged that some drivers would drive inappropriately through Fawley, but the speed limit would not change this. Driver education could and campaigning with groups like the delivery companies could be considered.

DR's personal view when working more closely on rural and quiet lanes was that the national speed limit for rural lanes was probably not appropriate, but that was a DfT decision, and if the change to the national speed limit was 40mph instead of 60mph on a single-track road, this would be a good step in the right direction. Local authorities around the country received many requests for speed limit changes, largely in rural areas, and whilst money shouldn't be an issue, it was, as there were limited budgets. Changing signage and reducing speed limits costs money. Putting in signs were also unsightly and urbanising, and nobody would want to drive in Fawley seeing sign after sign.

MF stated that Fawley currently had national speed limit signs. DR confirmed that Fawley only had one at the entrance to each road. MF added that most people gauged the speed limit from the "bleeping" from their vehicles, and sat navs were increasingly being used for every journey, which calculated journey time. So, the signs were less important than changing the speed limit, as the vehicle alerted you to the fact that you were driving over the limit. DR acknowledged this and said that dealing with sat navs needed to be considered industry and society wide. Some basic research was carried out as part of this report, and NOL had contacted a number of delivery companies to find out if they used an algorithm that said - if you were driving to Fawley, which was a 60mph speed limit, would you allow time based on 60mph. DR said the response was that they categorically did not, and the driver had to drive to the conditions they found ahead of them.

DR said that he had experienced some delivery drivers in urban and rural areas that did not adhere to the rules of the road, and believed that they still wouldn't if there was a speed limit sign or bleeping from their sat nav. There might be some future technology which could reinforce that you were driving in a rural area, and if there was a way which prevented the use of signs, which could be transmitted onto google maps etc. instead, this would be helpful in the future.

MF believed it was cheaper to change the speed limit because the technology already existed. Currently, it said to those driving in Fawley, that they could drive at 60mph, and although it had been reported that drivers did not drive at this speed, as a road user living in the village, she had encountered people racing through. When she approached them, their response would be that they were travelling at 40mph, so it did make a difference. DR noted this and said that the evidence was anecdotal, which was why another speed assessment should be considered if local people felt that the evidence collected from the ordinance survey was incorrect, and that there were a significant number of people driving faster than conditions allowed.

**Comment:** Sophie Kayani (SK) felt there was a bigger picture and thought Highways should recognise that there was an issue with speeding in Buckinghamshire. SK said she lived on a main road in Bourne End which was supposed to be 30mph, and for the 22 years she had lived there, she believed it was not the speed people were driving at. SK had driven to Northamptonshire and found pockets of very similar villages which were 20mph, so she did not understand why as a county we were not addressing this problem. Alex Collingwood (AC) stated that item 3.10 of the report confirmed that the average speed was 20mph on all five roads, so we were already at this speed. Unless the speed was reduced to 10mph, AC asked why you would want to put up a sign. He added that when driving to this meeting, he was only driving at 10mph at best, then a deer jumped out and a car came the other way, so he physically couldn't drive at 60mph. SK disagreed and said she drove at 20mph and thought there was the ability to drive faster and that it was about mindset.

MT advised that the majority of people that drove in Fawley lived in this village. The only time this changed was if there was a blockage on the A4155 (for example), where cars met up on the roads and spent most of the time stationary, trying to get past those vehicles reversing back. So when "means" speeds were referred to, this formed part of the calculations, and for someone to speed through the village would not affect this data and could be misinterpreted. Furthermore, things frequently happened, and over the summer months there were roadworks which stopped the traffic as people had to reverse as there was nowhere to pull in. However, during a recent parish meeting at the village hall, a Tesco van flew past and was travelling at approximately 40mph because the road was straight, and the sat nav said it was 60mph. MT appreciated what DR had said and that he could only deal with figures, but he agreed with SK.

SK said she had witnessed a child hit at 20mph. Thankfully it was on a 30mph road where there was traffic due to a crash on the M40 and M4, so it was gridlocked as everyone was diverting through Bourne End. This was a horrific experience for the

child and his mother, so that was why she thought speeding should be reviewed in the county.

**Comment:** David Watson (DW) confirmed that he'd had some experience of changing to 20mph on a road in Bourne End. The process end to end took seven years and he did not realise it would take as long (this was from raising the concern, an initial meeting and raising a petition). DW thought the council should listen and be more responsive, particularly as a high amount of money was paid towards Council tax. He felt TRO costs could be saved by combining with other projects. DW was alarmed by the report and felt this matter should not be closed. MT believed that this issue would not go away, and said that one of the key things to look at was the effects of 20mph in Wales and Oxfordshire. He also thought it would be worth carrying out a speed assessment to obtain firmer figures which would be a matter for Fawley Parish Council to consider and discuss with the Community Board.

**Question:** Carol Heap (CH) enquired about the data in the report. It showed average speeds and asked if the individual recordings were available.

**Answer:** DT confirmed that it was data that came from an Ordnance Survey which was collated from people's mobile phones, so as it travelled, speeds were recorded. Therefore, there were no individual recordings which was why the next stage was a speed survey/assessment.

**Question:** Jonathan Hunt (JH) asked if other local Chiltern villages, with speed restrictions of 20mph, had met the first criteria, or did they have to go through the long process.

**Answer:** DR advised that most of them would have met the criteria as Buckinghamshire Highways had conducted an extensive area-based speed review in 2010/11. All the speed limits were assessed and were set on what was appropriate to that village, based on the guidance at the time. MT confirmed that Fawley was not assessed so there was no data. He added that one of the things mentioned in the report was that Fawley did not have any houses that were close to the road. MT felt that was an unusual thing to say as there were cottages further along the road. Furthermore, North End had no houses close to the road and they had a 30mph speed limit and bordered South West Oxfordshire. SK stated that in her Ward in Hedsor they did not receive the 20mph speed limit change immediately and had to take extra steps to achieve this.

**Question:** JH asked if the council differentiated between a village, like Lower and Middle Assenden, which were a two-way road and single track. He was astonished that there was a speed limit on a two-way road but not a single track.

**Answer:** MT advised that decisions had been made by different councils. DR added that in Buckinghamshire, he thought their standard to qualify for 30mph was that there had to be 30 houses within a 500-metre stretch. Fawley had qualified as a village because it had a church, there was a village centre, and it was dispersed. He didn't think it was the only village in the Chilterns that still had a national speed limit. DR also believed that the report said some houses in Fawley were set back, but



not all.

In addition, DR advised that in terms of Assenden, which was part of Oxfordshire, the County Council set aside £10 million to allow those with a 40mph to reduce to 30mph, and in certain places 20mph. The Road Safety team were however watching Oxfordshire very carefully to see what the impact was, although the results at the moment were very patchy. He stated that it was fact that if a child was hit at 20mph they would survive, but at 30mph they were unlikely to survive. That however did not influence the policy in Buckinghamshire, because it was about the speed limit itself, and for it to be of any use, traffic had to be going at that speed already or measures had to be taken to bring that traffic down to that speed. The Police were very firm on this and disagreed vehemently with Oxfordshire and would not enforce unless 20mph was serving the community. Therefore, there were the odd places in Buckinghamshire where there was 20mph, but adherence was not good.

**Question:** AC asked for clarification, that the next stage would be for a more detailed assessment of speeds. MT said this was correct if we were prepared to pay. MT enquired if this would be for five sets of tubes for each entry point. DR advised that the cost was determined by the resources installing and removing them and was not necessarily about the cost of the tubes themselves. He said two would probably be required given that the roads were in close proximity.

**Question:** Hilary Beck-Burnidge asked how the Montessori school was considered in relation to the necessary criteria. DT said it was a factor and was noted in the report. **Comment:** Matthew Barber, Police and Crime Commissioner, stated that in terms of the 20mph speed limit, it was not that the Police would not enforce and would do so for any set speed limit. The Police however did not have the additional resources to enforce, so if the speed limit was 20mph or 30mph, they would be seen as self-enforcing. The Police did not receive additional money for more speed vans or patrol police officers. If there was a real risk of speed on a rural or urban road, then that's where the police checks would be carried out.

**Comment:** AC believed that the speed assessment should be carried out so that there was proper evidence to make an informed decision. MT agreed and said that an application may submitted to the Community Board. MT emphasised that when he put in an application to Highways in 2021/22, the anticipated cost for signage was £12,000 – that costs would now escalate.

MF asked why it was so expensive. DT confirmed that it was not just about the sign as an underground search had to be carried out to check the utilities because there was a degree of excavation. A signage review would initially have to be carried out as the DfT guidance had to be followed.

Lady McAlpine enquired if it would be acceptable for residents to purchase the signs themselves from places like Amazon. DR confirmed that all Highway signage had to follow DfT regulations and could only be installed by the Highways Authority.

Information signs, such as those put up elsewhere in conjunction with the British

Horse Society for horse warning signs, could work very well in Fawley in the correct location, and didn't require excavation or to be risk assessed etc.

**Question:** SK enquired if there was Community Speedwatch in Fawley. MT said they did not because legally you could only do this for speed limits up to 40mph. DR stated that there were a lot of regulations around this. MT highlighted that one of the issues with the Highways report was that Community Speedwatch was recommended. DR believed that this was in reference to if there was a lower speed limit and what you could then do to monitor speeding issues.

- Public Questions – there were none received in advance.

## **5 Presentation - Thames Valley Police**

Did not attend.

## **6 Presentation - Police and Crime Commissioner**

An overview of MB's presentation is as follows:

- MB introduced his role as the Police and Crime Commissioner. His role was not operational and could not direct the Police. It was about forming strategy, finances and oversight and accountability of the Police.
- A new Police and Crime Plan was recently adopted which set out the priorities for the Police for the next four to five years. This covered three very broad areas - Protecting Communities, Protecting People and Protecting Property.
- This included road safety and reiterated there was not the additional resource to enforce lower speed areas. He acknowledged the 20mph in Oxfordshire, some areas in his view were appropriate and others not. He did not deny there were some risks on some of our roads and over the last 22 years (from the stats that were available), 640 people had died on roads in the Thames Valley that were 30mph or 20mph (he could not include 20mph for that length of time because it did not exist for that period). In the same period, 1,600 people had died on roads of 40mph or more. Therefore, from an enforcement perspective, those officers on the front line who saved lives, the focus was around the faster roads. This did not necessarily include motorways and dual carriageways, but those roads of 40mph, 50mph or 60mph was where lives would be saved.
- Work was being done with local authorities on designing our speeds/roads and reviewing the big risks, such as mobile phone use, alcohol and drugs. Drug driving was currently matching drink driving.
- Other enforcement included no insurance which was relatively easy to enforce as Police vehicles were fitted with ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) which could check the insurance database and identify those without insurance. However, it was not just about insurance compliance – there was a strong correlation of those that did not insure their vehicles and those that had committed other offences. For example, a driver had been recently pulled over and was found to have committed a serious assault, so he was put in custody. Therefore, this enforcement was not just about road safety, it was also about other criminality.
- MB confirmed that they had doubled the amount of Neighbourhood Police

Officers over the last 12 to 18 months and that would continue. There had been Neighbourhood Teams for quite a while who had been relocated to deal with emergency response policing to cover new in-service officers that were being trained. There was now less of that, which meant those teams were getting to know their communities.

- In terms of PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers), there was money for this resource, but the problem was recruiting because the starting salary for a PCSO was very much the same as a new PC (Police Constable) and if an individual wanted to start a career in the Police, then they would want to be a PC where they had progression and career development. There was very little career development as a PCSO and found the best to recruit were those coming out of the military and/or more senior in years, who did not want the responsibilities of a PC, but had some life experiences. They tended to stay in these roles for longer as they were not looking for that career progression. A huge part of a PCSO was to engage with their community.
- With regards to Special Constables, who were volunteer Police Officers who had the same powers as regulars and made a valuable contribution to policing. Special's brought valuable skills with them from their day jobs, so for rural crime, many were farmers and game keepers who could deal with matters around hair coursing, which a more urban individual may not understand there was a recruitment drive for Specials at the moment.
- For the Protecting People priority. With regards to knife crime, which was a significant risk but quite low in the Thames Valley because it was seen as a safe place to be in accordance with the National Statistics. The Thames Valley was low on the table for serious offences, and knife crime had come down over the years. MB advised that part of his role was to speak to families that had lost loved ones due to knife crime and was keen that numbers were kept as low as possible.
- Another area of work was around "Needed Justice", so not changing the rules or the law in particular, but enforcing the rules that there were there already, to try and cut through some of the malaise of the criminal justice system. For example, over the last 18 months for knife possession offences, you would be arrested, charged, remanded overnight and in front of the magistrate the next day. This would probably be thought by many as common sense, but this was not happening before and still not elsewhere in the country for a simple offence for possessing a knife. MB said that he had seen a big shift in the Thames Valley which made a difference – he gave an example of a case in Slough where a man was stopped with a knife and some drugs. Drug offences were slow to prosecute because you had to send the drugs away to be tested before you could charge (depending on the type of drugs found). This individual was taken to court the next day, where he pleaded guilty and then subsequently charged, which meant he was immediately off the streets whilst the drug test was carried out and could be tried again whilst he was in prison.
- 25% of the workload for response officers was domestic abuse. It happened in every community, and if you looked at the crime stats, violent offences included this and was the biggest issue for the local police area. Domestic abuse was hugely under reported because it happened behind closed doors. MB had

worked with several charities who supported women (although not exclusive to women but largely them) and the risk was not any higher than 20 to 40 years ago, and arguably could be lower. For example, a lady who MB spoke to recently, who was in her early 80's, had just announced that she was subject to domestic abuse all through her married life. The only reason she was announcing it now was because her husband had just passed. At the time, when she was married and in her early 20's, she tried to talk to her mother, sister and friends, and no one was interested, and if she had tried to report this to the Police, they probably would not have been interested either. So, the fact was that the Police now did respond to cases of domestic abuse, and understood better coercive control, physical and financial control. Technology made it easier for people to offend in terms of domestic abuse, as 30 years ago it would have been difficult to follow someone around, whereas now you can follow a person quite easily through the technology we have.

- For Protecting Property, MB said the Police had not done as well as over the last 10 to 15 years, partly because from a professional policing perspective, crimes such as knife crime, rape and domestic abuse, were a priority rather than a bicycle (for example) being stolen. However, policing should be inclusive, as the biggest issue with public confidence was that people felt if they called the Police, they would not necessarily do anything. MB felt that they needed to improve in this area. In addition, burglary had been reported as peoples biggest concern, but reports had come down significantly since the pandemic, partly because more people were staying at home. MB stated that pre-pandemic, reports were down to 1970's levels of burglary and post pandemic 1960's levels.
- Vehicle crime took a whole host of different forms. From the high end, there were crimes of millions pounds worth of goods being stolen from the back of lorries and truck stops. There were also thefts from vehicles parked in beauty spots, those stolen off drives for keyless vehicles, and sometime burglaries to steal keys to take the car off the drive. Vehicle crime is however down in the Thames Valley, but more work was to be done in the next six months with various industry insurers, as a strategy and plan were required to be developed to continue this trend.
- Shoplifting was another concern. There had been a significant increase in reporting, which MB thought was good as he knew that retailers were not always reporting. Some of this again was around confidence in policing, but some was down to company policy where there was no reporting for low value items. The police therefore had a reputation for failing to investigate which was not true. The Police however were rolling out a new reporting system for retailers where they could share CCTV with the Police and other retailers, because prolific offenders were often hitting many businesses, and if the police did not have the full intelligence picture, it was harder to charge through the criminal justice system.
- Linked to Protecting Property was cybercrime which was a real risk and challenge for everyone and local territorial police. On-line crime from someone in South Asia was difficult for the Police to manage in Thames Valley, so there was work being carried out nationally to collate some of this information. MB stated that there was a huge amount that could be done to prevent it and recommended

changing passwords. Having three random words as your password, was better than having one with your mother's maiden name, your pet's name or children's birthday. Having different passwords for different platforms was advisable, because many people, even if they had a complex password, may use the same one for everything. This made it easier for scammers, allowing them a huge amount of access, with the potential to spend a vast amount of people's money.

**Question:** MT raised concerns in the news around prison space and asked if we had enough in the Thames Valley.

**Answer:** MB stated that prison space was a national problem, and being national it made it more complex. He believed prison space was being added in Kent which was good for the national capacity. However, for prisons in Bullingdon and Aylesbury, you could not just move everyone over as this caused a knock-on effect. The biggest prison in the Thames Valley was Bullingdon which was designed for 20% remand prisoners (those that were going through the court process) and 80% resettlement prisoners, so you would be in Bullingdon for several years and would be there until the end of your sentence. The probation service would then help to find those at the end of their sentence for new jobs and homes. Currently, because of the delays in courts, 70% of the prisoners in Bullingdon were remand prisoners, which presented a huge challenge as little rehabilitation work could be carried out for the smaller number of resettlement prisoners. Therefore, the issues are not just about space, it was also the backlog in the system. MT believed this would be a problem for the rest of the year before things improved. Bullingdon had a brand-new house block, with about 250 new cells being built. Aylesbury had 80 prefab cells (ie. a secure portacabin) which was stacked up in the prison yard. These had a life span of about 15 years verses a new build which was 100 years. In fairness, from a front-line policing perspective, it didn't change anything. It was very clear in Thames Valley that they would never get to a situation where there was no point in arresting someone because they couldn't be placed. There had been no significant problems with space in courts and police cells. There had been a couple of times where prisoners had been sentenced who had to go to a police cell before going to prison, and there had occasions where there had been delays in getting some prisoners to court and police officers had to take them rather than the prison transport service. MT reiterated that it was a challenge but should not affect police operations.

**Question:** MT asked how many Specials we had in Fawley because one of their biggest problems was rural crime. There had been a report of a suspicious vehicle lurking around local farms (that evening) so information was being exchanged on a WhatsApp group. Therefore, if someone was arrested, would they be locked up.

**Answer:** There was a Rural Crime Task Force who operated the area and knew the local farmers. This team should double in size this year, which would result in the second largest team in the country. MT said this team served several purposes – they were specialists and had knowledge in rural crime offences, like hair coursing, and had very good equipment, ie. night vision, ANPR on their vehicles, unmarked vehicles and drones. The team were also passing some of their knowledge and

expertise to the local Neighbourhood teams so they could support the rural crime team on investigations etc. There were also dedicated rural crime WhatsApp groups which Police officers and PCSO's were part of to gain local intelligence. This didn't take away the need to report crimes through to 101 or 999. MT stated that if there were any local WhatsApp's groups which the police weren't involved in, to let him know. **Action:** All to MT

**Question:** David Johncock (DJ) asked about Neighbourhood Policing as his local team had gone down to one PC and a PCSO, which changed regularly, so there was no continuity and rarely saw a police presence in the local community. DC said there had been various promises made from Chief Constables, but nothing came to fruition which was very frustrating.

**Answer:** MB advised that numbers were on the up. He said it was easier to keep PCSO's in one place, although part of the problem was that Policing National recently had a huge recruitment drive, so many PCSO's took that opportunity to join the force to become Police Officers, so this left the organisation with many gaps. The national drive had now finished, although still recruiting on a slower scale, so there was no reason for PCSO's to move around. In terms of PC's, this was a bit more challenging as you could not stop them progressing their career, so there was a trial which Thames Valley were part of, to professionalise Neighbourhood Policing. There were lots of specialisms in Policing, like roads policing and firearms etc., and Neighbourhood was the default. So, if you were not a specialist you would be placed in this area, which hadn't helped the reputation in the force as a good career. MB wanted to change this and raise the profile with Neighbourhood Policing being the absolute bedrock as that's what the community wanted to see. He wanted to raise the importance and invest in terms of specialist training. It was therefore hoped that officers would want to stay in these jobs for longer but there were no guarantees.

DJ said that if he went back 10 years, there were very senior PSCO's who were on their second or third career, and they were excellent as they had life experience, and could deal with young people in particular which was a problem locally. He commended the police if that calibre of officer was being sought. In terms of the PC's, some previously loved what they did, had some empathy and could work with the community. More recently, they did not have these skills, and it showed because they did not get the reaction as the previous PCs did. Therefore, employing the right people for the jobs was important.

**Comment:** SK added that she agreed with DJ. In addition, SK said that domestic abuse was a number one risk in Buckinghamshire, the second one was child exploitation which was happening in our neighbourhoods because we did not have those local PC's that really understood our young people. SK stated that education and early intervention from the Youth Offending Service was implemented to bring in the required support (even if a crime had not been committed), but ultimately that exploitation was still taking place. The people exploiting these young people were extremely clever and there wasn't any support, so it was a vicious cycle.

**Answer:** MB agreed it was a challenge although he said there was some support out there. Some of the changes that were now taking place were that the Neighbourhood Harm Reduction Teams were linking with schools to drive up consistency. There was also a Youth Worker who used to work in Oxfordshire who was joining his team temporarily, looking at all the interaction that existed with schools. Previously there had been local Neighbourhood Teams working with primary schools, using a softer approach in terms of messaging, there was the Safe Drive Stay Alive Road Safety campaign which went into secondary schools, there was the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (VAHT) prevention partnership on knife crime, and schools may have carried out some work on drugs, so consequently, there were slightly different messages going out to different age groups and different schools. The idea now was to design a proper curriculum with teachers/schools for those young people between the ages of nine and 11, to agree age-appropriate messages. MB said they would not practically get to every child in every school year, but if over a three-year period they could work with all the primary schools to try and reach every child, and then move to the ages of 11 to 13 and agree plans for them too, it would be developed properly.

SK agreed that there was the curriculum, but said there were vulnerable teenagers out in the community. This may be due to their home life, domestic violence or because they were neurodiverse, and did not have access to that support and understanding, so consequently we had these issues. DJ stated that he had applied for funding from a different Community Board to bring in youth workers, to try and stop anti-social behaviour, and similarly, SK said at school level she was using their money to employ those people to provide that support of wrap around care which our young people deserved. MB did not disagree and thought it was a joint effort. He believed that the local authority should manage the youth work element, and the Police needed to meet halfway and do the enforcement and engagement. DJ said he chaired a local Neighbourhood Action Group, but due to the very little interaction with the Police, they could not implement the various initiatives they would like to. MB said he could help with that issue. **Action:** DJ to contact MB

## **7 Date of Next Meeting**

5 March 2025 – venue to be confirmed.

The Proud of Bucks Awards is on 14th November 2024. MD said she would be circulating information to everyone shortly and that the North West Chilterns would be joining for a combined celebration. MT said it was basically an event for those that had been voted local champions and CH said that everyone was invited.