

Name: **South West Wiltshire Area Board Community Safety Group** Meeting Date: 13th February 2019
Location: Tisbury Time: 6pm

National Farmers Union Notes for the Safety Group Meeting

Please accept my apologies for being unable to attend this meeting. As requested by the chairman, please find my notes for your information as follows:

Rural Crime

Farmers in Wiltshire continue to be victims of rural crime in all its forms including thefts, arson, digital / financial crime, trespass, poaching and hare coursing for example. The NFU Mutual release an annual report of rural crime (you can view this online here: [NFU Mutual Report](#)) which shows the cost of crime on farms in the UK is rising – in Wiltshire the cost of crime to farmers rose by 46.4% from £566,201 in 2016 to £829,003 in 2017. Many farmers try to prevent crime on the property by implementing ‘medieval solutions’ such as: building earth banks and digging ditches (where appropriate); creating single points of entry to their land or property; reinforcing or blocking gates; barricading ‘strong rooms’ storing essential equipment; building high fencing around yards; and using protective animals such as dogs and geese.

Hare coursing continues to be a significant issue for our members in Wiltshire and the 2018/19 season began early as harvest was earlier than usual. As you know hare coursers trespass to access private land often cutting fences, destroying gates and hedges and causing significant damage to crops with their vehicles. In addition to illegally killing hares, coursers also react with threats, intimidation and violence if approached by landowners and many farmers believe that other crimes result from coursing, where coursers scope out farm business and come back later to steal.

We are exceptionally grateful to the Wiltshire Rural Crime team and local Officers for the hard work they do on behalf of the farming community and would like to reiterate our heartfelt thanks for their efforts. However, the National Chief Police Council ‘2018 – 2021 Rural Affairs Strategy’ shows that Wiltshire are severely lacking in resources for the county Rural Crime team, with just 1 officer (as of autumn 2018 this is actually now 2) where as our neighbouring counties have many more (Hampshire 13, Avon & Somerset 5, Dorset 20) (see the report here: [NCPC Report](#)) We believe that the Wiltshire Rural Crime Team should be better staffed and consist of one dedicated Sargent, at least 4 PCs and a number of trained PCSOs in support. We have written to the Wiltshire Police & Crime Commissioner and asked how he intends to spend the £9.1 million budget uplift for 2019/20 and are encouraging him to support the Rural Crime team. We have also raised these issues with our county MPs and are seeking amendments to the police funding formula from central government to better support rural counties.

Agricultural Vehicles

I have been asked to respond to a statement made at a previous meeting that: *“ever large contractor’s vehicles are increasingly blocking rural roads in the summer and early autumn, what influence does the NFU have on the situation?”*

The agricultural industry in Wiltshire is an important local employer and contributor to the economy, both directly and indirectly through the secondary businesses farming supports. As you may know, margins in food production are extremely tight and therefore every farming activity has to be done as efficiently as possible. This can mean employing agricultural contractors with the latest technology and equipment (benefiting from economies of scale) - or by purchasing this equipment directly on farm.

As an industry we work extremely hard to produce fresh, affordable, traceable and nutritious food, at the same time as protecting the natural environment. We are extremely lucky to be supported by the British public in this regard, who value our work on their behalf. The NFU have no desire to put this at risk, so we work hard with our members to promote safe driving practices, encouraging courteous driving, promoting the adaptation of driving style to suit the road conditions encountered. In addition to this, we explain best practice, via bespoke guidance (online, print and via a call centre). Wiltshire farmers produce more than a quarter of the South West regions arable crops, many of which are harvested in the late summer/ autumn, and they manage more than 80% of the counties land area for food and environment production. It's therefore understandable that agricultural traffic is visible on Wiltshire's road network.

Some people feel that there is an increasing number of larger vehicles and specifically large tractor/trailer combinations on the roads. However the Department for Transport has published figures which suggest an ongoing decline in the sales of agricultural vehicles (1). There have been some recent changes (2015) to the maximum weight and speed for agricultural vehicles, to bring the legislation more up to date with modern safety capabilities of these vehicles. But it is important to state that there has been *no change* to the width of agricultural vehicles allowed on the road - this is still 2.55m and is the same as a standard HGV. So providing both agricultural vehicle drivers and domestic vehicle drivers are acting safely and responsibly, taking into account the conditions of the road and their rural locality, 'blockage' issues should be reduced. We are also keen to stress to domestic drivers the importance of parking responsibly to ensure that roads are accessible for other road users and should be mindful of the farming calendar in this regard.

We understand that our road network was not designed for the modern world and all businesses and the general public have to adjust accordingly. Farm businesses are no different and they will look to avoid travelling in areas where the road network is challenging. However with our road network generally nearly always converging in areas with 'challenging conditions' – such as towns or villages - this can be extremely difficult to avoid, especially at peak times (e.g. harvest) when time is imperative to ensure food quality.

Perhaps one way of managing traffic concerns would be to implement speed limits in the most sensitive areas. This would ensure all road users slow down, giving everyone more time and making it safer for all road users – on wheels, hoof, or foot.

I hope this gives some useful background and comment on the above statement. As highlighted above, we do work hard to encourage courteous driving, but if there are specific 'pinch points' in the county please do let me know and I can communicate this to local members.

(1) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/all-vehicles-veh01#history>

If you have any further queries for the National farmers Union please do not hesitate to get in touch. I will endeavour to make the next meeting - apologies once again for my absence.

With best wishes

Andi Witcombe

NFU County Adviser for Wiltshire.