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TVP non-emergency number 101

**December 2023
Burglary Update**

Dear South Buckinghamshire Resident

With the darker evenings and mornings upon us, this is the season when household burglaries have typically increased. To address this, we are seeking to engage with homeowners, to make their neighbourhoods safer. Analysis shows that a significant percentage of break-ins are committed by offenders from across the breadth of the South of England, who travel into our area to commit crime: so, coming together as a community, can offer a ripe opportunity in our collective resilience to Burglary.

The impact of having your home burgled is immense; both financially and emotionally. Yet, it is common for us to delay taking preventative measures, until someone within your immediate circle has already been impacted. However, I also recognise that a lack of time or money can also be reasons to delay investing in home security.

Rather than sending out a generic leaflet, blithely advising you to purchase an alarm, I felt it more helpful to compose this letter, which aims to give you an insight on current trends and techniques that burglars have adopted, and some practical and cost-effective measures to protect you and your household.

Following the Covid-19 Pandemic, we saw a significant reduction in the amount of burglaries within the Thames Valley region. Locally, we were able to sustain this lower level for a significant time, and buck the national trend. This was, in-no-small-part, due to the deterrent work which my teams undertake. Yet despite this, offending rates eventually began to rise again, within the last year or so. And whilst we have been able to tackle this rise, and flatten the curve, there are still areas within South Buckinghamshire where burglars continue to operate.

Working with the community

You will often hear about the police working in partnership with agencies to combat crime. Regarding Burglary, the most important partner we can work with is you. It is householders who hold the greatest influence over their home security: and not only of their own property, but also that of their neighbours, and the wider community. To support this, we have arranged for police and partners to conduct a series of visits to areas most greatly affected by Burglary, and deliver this letter, in-person. During these visits, we will have staff available to provide bespoke security advice, offering means to join or develop a Neighbourhood Watch, and completing crime prevention surveys at a street level.

Neighbourhood Watch and Neighbourhood Alerts

We continue to work closely with Neighbourhood Watch, to get more people involved in the scheme, which has evolved in tandem with advances in modern technology. A Neighbourhood Watch is a great way to get to know your neighbours so that you can build community resilience, and now the internet provides a more convenient means to network and communicate. The scheme is free and some studies have shown that you could reduce the chance of becoming a victim by 25%.

One of the best ways you can help is to join or establish a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in your area. Neighbourhood Watch schemes are owned and operated by their members, supported by the Police with crime information and advice. If you are interested then please visit the NHW website at: ourwatch.org.uk or contact: office@wdnhwatch.plus.com for the Wycombe area, valpranddnhwatch@aol.com for The Risboroughs, or nwsbe@btinternet.com for other, more Easterly, districts in South Buckinghamshire.

Over the last year we've been made aware of more and more incidents of suspicious persons and vehicles being published on social media sites; posted on local community groups, in favour of actual

reporting to the Police. These occasions might come from a well-meaning intention, but prompt notification could provide us with vital information to focus our efforts and identify offenders. We would rather locate and stop these persons and vehicles and establish that they are innocent visitors, than miss an opportunity to arrest offenders or prevent offences. You know your neighbourhood better than anyone else: If something is not sitting right with you, act on this and do not be afraid to call the police. If you think they could be actively committing burglary or theft, then call 999.

Anyone can sign up for Neighbourhood Alerts. If you would like to receive updates from the police of issues in your area then go to www.thamesvalleyalert.co.uk.

Entry

Looking at recent statistics for this area, 31% of burglars entered via the front door. From reviewing CCTV we have seen that offenders are first testing doors to see if they are actually open. In 35% of the cases the rear door was targeted, and in 24% offenders gained entry through windows.

Timings

Reviewing times of burglaries, we have established that 11% occurred in the morning, 20% in the afternoon, 32% in the evening, and in the early hours 12% occurred. We were unable to confirm exact times in a number of other cases.

Keyless car thefts

With the innovation of keyless cars, we formerly experienced a sharp increase in cars being stolen without burglars ever having entered the home. Whilst an intensified focus on this crime type has since seen numbers reduce, it remains an intermittent occurrence. Investigations have shown that criminals are approaching the front of properties and scanning car keys through the front aspect of the house. As people start to adapt to this new threat, so do the criminals.

Please be careful with your car keys, at home and when out and about, and be aware of the risks when left next to the front door, on the sideboard, or a coat pocket. Metal tins can be used to block car keys signals or signal blocker (Faraday) pouches are a modest expense and purchased on the internet. There are also more advanced solutions, for those willing to invest in their "pride and joy", including additional circuitry which will "sleep" a key which isn't in motion, or a device which turns your dashboard into a combination lock, with buttons needing to be pressed in a pre-defined sequence.

Jewellery Theft

Gold has always been seen as a desirable and valuable commodity. It is therefore unsurprising that there is an increasing number of domestic burglaries with gold being the primary objective to steal. In particular, Asian families and neighbourhoods have been targeted due to the high value gold they customarily own, which has often been passed down through many generations. Asian gold jewellery is normally the purest, high-quality gold. Thieves know that Asian families usually have large collections at home, making them a vulnerable target to an offender. Experience has shown that even a safe will not deter offenders, and my personal view is it is better to invest in measures, which stop burglars "at the door"; preventing entry in the first place.

Police intervention

Every quarter, I attend the Policing Issues Forum, where the public vote on the top 3 Neighbourhood Policing priorities. Whilst I would strongly encourage you to also attend, I can attest that, without fail, Burglary has been elected as the community's number one concern.

Your Neighbourhood teams have continued to work proactively in trying to disrupt criminals and have been leading the way in coordinating with other forces, on cross-border operations. This resulted in numerous arrests for Burglary, Theft Of, and Theft from Motor Vehicles. Offender vehicles have been identified in our police operations, utilising Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), seized and secured for forensic examinations; leading to the identification of suspects to these crimes. Similarly, we have adopted "Achilles Heel" principles, utilising various other road traffic offences, to target these offenders entering our area, such as drink/drug drive, driving with no insurance or licence, to driving with vehicle defects. This serves to deny offenders the use of our arterial road network, and frustrate their offending behaviour. Promoting this activity on social media, sends a message to any other offenders planning to offend in our area, that we will not make it easy for them. Such operations have been shown to work in disrupting all sorts of crimes and these will continue throughout the coming months. I would ask our communities to follow our Facebook page, TVPSouthBuckinghamshire, and our Twitter feed, @TVP_SouthBucks, and share our posts as much as possible; including local community groups: we believe that with your help in promoting the work, increases the visibility and sends the cautionary message to offenders.

On a daily basis, analytical data is used to direct uniformed patrols towards identified hotspot areas. Burglaries are investigated by detectives on our Priority Crime Team, and the widespread increase in CCTV and video doorbells is having a positive effect on being able to identify offenders and their vehicles, and to identify crime series.

Improving your security

There are a host of things that we can do to make our properties safer. For the sake of simplicity, I've resolved to concentrate on 5 key areas.

1: Keep your doors locked at all times. Studies have shown this is the first "port of call" for a burglar. Challenge your family when they leave the doors unlocked. This is a common problem and such a level of complacency is often what entices a burglar.

2: Use your Window locks and security film. It's all very well having window locks but are you using them. Again, this is a common method of entry, so let's make sure that the burglar can't just open it and wipe the glass away. If it is locked there will be an increased risk of DNA transfer. It's coming into winter so let's lock the window and have the key on a picture hook nearby. Additionally, security film is a fantastic means of restricting entry through a window, even when smashed, and at modest cost.

3: Keyless technology. Make sure that your keys are in a safe location where car thieves can't target them.

4: Lock your gate. Stop people from having free access to the rear or side of your house, so they are less likely to go unobserved.

5: Leave a Light On. Make it look like someone is about and your house is occupied. Use timer switches, have a radio on, or use a fake TV light display, to give the impression that you are in. Similarly, speech-activated devices can hold a variety of means to improve home security. Burglars do not want to get caught and when presented with signs which might risk compromise, can be deterred.

Security Myths

"I'm going away on holiday should I leave my curtains open or closed?" – Don't leave your curtains closed during the day. Ask a trusted friend or neighbour to close them for you when it gets dark – if this can't be arranged, and use a timer switch. Alternatively, leave curtains part open, to keep them guessing!

"If I use barbed wire or carpet gripper on my fence or gate isn't it illegal?" – There are more acceptable fence toppings available on the market such as trellis, plastic spikes or prickly plants, which won't risk some legal liability.

"No one can climb over my high hedge at the front and it gives me privacy." – Lowering the height of hedges at the front reduces the potential for a burglar to hide, by lowering the height to 1m will allow for a clear view of your front door from the road. We call this Natural Surveillance.

"I'm only going out for a few minutes do I need to lock my doors?" - Lock your door, even if out for only a short while, if you have UPVC use the double locking system. If you have a wooden door use the mortice lock.

"Will a light at the back of my house make it easier for a thief to see?" - Motion-activated lights with a PIR will alert others to a presence, and increase the chances of a criminal being seen by those who overlook the zone. Burglars don't want to be exposed to witnesses whilst they commit crime. However, if a light isn't going to be seen by others nearby, the value of drawing attention is lost.

"I leave my shed unlocked as I have nothing worth stealing." - Locking a shed makes it difficult for a potential thief to be tempted but also means that an old spade or fork can't be used to force a door or window. Check hinges on your shed too.

"If my alarm goes off my neighbours will ignore it so who will respond to it?" – Modern alarms hold auto-dialling systems, to alert a list of contacts, directly. They are now priced at a couple of hundred pounds, and wireless, so easy to install.

For further crime advice check out the following websites: www.Ourwatch.org.uk or <https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention>.

Here are some recommendations about things you can do to improve your security below. Please take a minute to go through the list and see if there is anything that you could do to protect your possessions, your neighbours and your family. How many Top Tips do you tick with your security?

1; Make it appear that someone is at home.

- Leave a light and the radio on when the nights draw in. Use a fake TV light device.
- Use timer switches.
- Do you have an internet assistant e.g. Alexa? Some have a new security App so try it out.
- Make sure your doors and windows are properly closed and have British Standard locks.

2; Improve your home security

- Camera Doorbell as most burglars will knock first. This is about the cheapest way to get CCTV.
- Install an SSAIB or NSI alarm or at least have a fake box installed.
- Get motion sensors inside your house so you can see if something is wrong whilst you are away from the address.
- Install CCTV or consider CCTV signs depending on your budget.
- Improve your locks and get window film to stop windows easily being smashed.
- Advertise your property is security marked. Use SMARTWATER /Selecta DNA window stickers.

3; Do not display your wealth:

- Performance cars will often be targeted if you have a top end car lock it in the garage.
- Do not have your keys on display on the sideboard. Keys can be fished through letterboxes.
- Get a letterbox guard or cage.
- Consider just who you are updating with the Facebook posts, when you are on holiday.
- Asian gold will be targeted. What identifies your house as a place likely to have such gold?
- Do not keep large amounts of cash at home.
- As winter holidays are approaching, try to make sure that presents are not visible to anyone outside.

4; Consider the garden

- Consider a 'beware of the dog' sign or dog bowl will make the burglar think twice.
- Padlock the side gate and close front gates.
- Secure your fences. Trellis is a great obstacle for burglars due to it most likely collapsing, consider cheap spikey fence options like prickly strip (make sure you put the signs up) This is a cheap option and can also result in us getting suspects DNA.
- Plant prickly plants at tactical places around the garden boundary.
- Burglars can use large ornaments or rocks or garden tools to break in, so look to remove opportunities and make sure you securely lock away any tools after use.

5; Look out for your neighbours

- Join the Neighbourhood Watch (NHW).
- Speak to your neighbours and tell them if workmen are coming or if you are going away.
- Be a good neighbour and conduct checks if others are going away.
- And finally if you see something suspicious call it in to the police: You know your street best.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and I hope you have found some of its contents of use. Despite the subject matter of this letter, I would wish to reassure you that South Buckinghamshire remains a safe place to live. My staff and I remain committed to keeping our communities safe and secure, and we would be very grateful of your support in doing so.

Yours sincerely



James Ellis
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South Buckinghamshire LPA