

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE: RURAL CRIME

Oral Question, House of Lords

Tuesday 11 July 2023

The Lord Bishop of St Albans to ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to counter rural crime.

- **The 2022 Countryside Alliance Rural Crime Survey revealed that 97% of respondents believed that crime had been significant in their community in the past year, an increase on the 95% found in 2021. 77% thought it had increased during that period, compared to 70% the previous year.**
- **The Countryside Alliance is supporting, and helped develop, the Equipment Theft (Prevention Bill). Led in the House of Lords by Lord Blencathra, it is scheduled for its Third Reading on Friday 14 July. We call on parliamentarians and the Government to maintain their overwhelming support for this Bill, secure its passage, commence its provisions in good time and monitor its effectiveness closely.**
- **While some crimes including agricultural machinery theft are specific to rural areas, others often share similarities with their equivalents in urban areas. Nevertheless, distinct solutions are required to tackle them.**
- **We have called for a National Rural Crime Taskforce to grow understanding of rural communities' needs by government and the police, the review of the funding formula to result in increased funding and resources for rural policing teams, improved training of police and the judiciary as to the nature and impact of rural crime, and a greater determination to take rural crime and its impacts seriously.**

Background

- **As long-term campaigners on the issue of combating rural crime and a founding member of the National Rural Crime Network, the Countryside Alliance conducts an annual survey of rural communities' experiences and perceptions over the past calendar year.**

Countryside Alliance Rural Crime Survey 2022

- **Our 2022 Rural Crime Survey revealed that 97% of respondents believed that crime had been significant in their community in the past year, an increase on the 95% found in 2021. 77% thought it had increased during that period, compared to 70% the previous year.**
- **43% of respondents reported having had a crime committed against them in the past year and of those, 35% reported having experienced agricultural machinery theft. This was the second most reported crime, just 3% behind fly-tipping; it came ahead of trespass, theft from outbuildings, wildlife crime including hare poaching, and animal rights activism.**

- 54% of respondents had installed crime prevention measures in the last 12 months due to an increased fear of crime (66%) and being a victim of crime (35%). The most popular types of equipment installed were security lighting, locking vehicles and securing keys, and CCTV.
- In the 2020 Rural Crime Survey, agricultural machinery theft was reported as respondents' top priority for police to tackle. In the 2021 survey it had fallen to the third position but has now returned to the second.
- Launching the 2022 Rural Crime Survey, Tim Bonner, Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance, said:

“Crime is a blight on too many rural communities and is consistently a top priority when we talk to our members and supporters. Machinery theft, fly tipping, livestock rustling and hare poaching are far too common in many parts of the countryside to the point that many instances are not even properly reported. The Countryside Alliance’s annual Rural Crime Survey has shown us that those living and working in rural communities often feel that the police do not have a proper focus on rural crime despite it being at the top of the agenda for rural people.”

- Further details of the survey’s findings are [available on our website](#). It was also [covered exclusively in the i newspaper](#).

Legislation in progress

- The Countryside Alliance is supporting, and helped develop, the [Equipment Theft \(Prevention\) Bill](#). Led in the House of Lords by Lord Blencathra, it is scheduled for its Third Reading on Friday 14 July.
- We call on parliamentarians and the Government to maintain their overwhelming support for this Bill, secure its passage, commence its provisions in good time and monitor its effectiveness closely.
- Requiring that new agricultural machinery be fitted with a prominently visible engine immobiliser should provide a deterrent effect by making it harder to steal, thereby decreasing its attractiveness to thieves.
- Requiring dealers to keep records of sales and purchasers should make it easier for police to investigate thefts and to restore recovered property to its rightful owners. It should also make it easier for legitimate owners to demonstrate their title, should this be required during an investigation into suspected theft.
- Since the direct effects of the Bill are on product and sales standards, trading standards authorities or, in their absence, local authorities are the appropriate enforcement bodies for the offences created.
- While the Bill was not amended in Committee during its House of Commons stages, there was clarification that the Government intends to extend its provisions beyond agricultural equipment to other commercial tools. We welcome this, with the assurance that any extra time required to develop this extension will not affect the plan to implement regulations for ATVs by Christmas.

Countryside Alliance position

- On the broader issue, we recognise that while some crimes including agricultural machinery theft are specific to rural areas, others often share similarities with their equivalents in urban areas. Nevertheless, distinct solutions are required to tackle them.
- We have called for a National Rural Crime Taskforce to grow understanding of rural communities' needs by government and the police, the review of the funding formula to result in increased funding and resources for rural policing teams, improved training of police and the judiciary as to the nature and impact of rural crime, and a greater determination to take rural crime and its impacts seriously.

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