



HERTFORDSHIRE

CONSTABULARY

Royston Rural Watch, Jan 2018

PC Mark Ellwood 371 & PCSO 6531 Penny Tomsett,
PCSO Chris Brabrook 6522

Sgt Guy Westwood 1604



***Our Non -
Emergency
Number 101***

On the Beat -

Allotment / Shed Burglaries

- The public is asked to be vigilant when using their allotments and report suspicious behaviour to the police
- There are crime prevention steps you can take to keep your sheds and allotments secure



Police are appealing for information and urging allotment owners to remain vigilant and secure their sheds and outbuildings after a recent spate of break-ins.

The crimes began towards the end of last year at the allotments on Icknield Way in Letchworth.

The offenders are targeting any valuable items left in the sheds but mainly gardening power tools such as strimmers, leaf blowers and rotorvator's.

PCSO Chris Brabrook from Royston Safer Neighbourhood Team said: “We are becoming concerned about the recent spate of thefts and break-ins to the allotments locally.

“I would urge anyone who tends to allotments regularly, to keep an eye out for any suspicious behaviour and to report anything that seems untoward to us via the police non-emergency number 101. If you see a crime in progress please dial 999.

“I’d also like to speak to anyone who has witnessed someone acting suspiciously in the area, or if anyone has an idea of who could be responsible for the most recent offences, please get in touch.”

PCSO Brabrook added: “I would also urge people to consider the following crime prevention advice to secure their sheds and when tending to their allotments:

- Make sure external lighting covers your garage or shed
- Secure windows internally with steel mesh or bars
- Strengthen the door
- Fit coach bolts to external door hinges
- Use a quality padlock or additional locks
- Try to store valuables such as bikes in a secure garage rather than a shed
- Where possible, store high value items in the house rather than a garage or shed
- Property mark valuable items with a UV pen
- Insure and photograph valuable items
- Chain and Padlock valuables together and secure them to an anchor point”
- Register your valuable items with New windowwww.immobilise.com It is free of charge, quick and easy to do and helps police to identify and return your property and catch criminals.
- Security mark your tools and gardening equipment If you cannot make the event but would like to get your tools marked, please contact the Safer Neighbourhood Team on 01438 757935 or

email – SNTRoystonandRoystonRural@herts.pnn.police.uk

Suspicious incident in Newnham

Police were called shortly before 4pm on Saturday, January 6 to report an incident which occurred in a residential street in Newnham.

It was reported that an 8-year-old girl was approached by two men in a BMW who asked her to get into the car.

The girl refused and went to a neighbour's house and the men drove off. They did not attempt to follow her or speak further.

Officers attended and conducted a search of the area but the vehicle was not located.

Local Safer Neighbourhood Team officers have been made aware and work is on-going to establish the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Neighbourhood Inspector Richard Lilley said: "I understand this will cause concern to parents. At this stage we have not received any further reports of similar incidents occurring in the area. If you do witness anything similar, please report it to police straightaway making a note of any registration numbers and descriptions of people in the vehicle."

Is an organised crime gang turning your property into a cannabis factory?



You may be mistaken in thinking this only happens in the big towns of our county, but Royston town and the surrounding villages have seen this happen on a number of occasions over the years. I thought I would share the below information to give you an idea of how these organised crime groups go about their business.

Below is a first-hand experience of a landlord who rented out her property for a number of months who was none the wiser what her property had been turned into.

"The whole experience was scary and stressful; you feel guilty even though you haven't done anything wrong." - This is how one woman has described her reaction to finding out an organised crime gang had turned her rental property into a large-scale cannabis factory.

Sergeant Dave Perkins from Hertfordshire Constabulary's Operational Support Group said: "Nationally, the number of cannabis 'factories' being set

up is on the increase and we are currently dealing with around one a week in Hertfordshire alone.

“These set ups provide huge amounts of money for organised crime groups and pose a real risk to our communities. Often we find that these groups are using rental properties to cultivate cannabis, leaving property managers and landlords paying a high price due to the damage caused.”

If organised criminals used your rental property you could:

- Find your property is damaged due to unauthorised structural changes, which your insurance may not cover and could result in increased premiums.
- Expose your property to increased risk of fire due to excessive cabling and flammable materials.
- Lose rent during eviction and repair periods.
- Have to deal with hostile tenants.
- Be held liable by energy suppliers for outstanding bills.
- Incur penalties, including loss of property use, property damage resulting from police raids and, in some cases, asset seizures.

Due to the nature and extent of alterations to properties where cannabis is being cultivated, there are many safety concerns. Holes may be cut into walls and ceilings to make way for wires and tubing, internal walls may be removed putting the property at risk of collapsing, floors could be sodden with water and liable to collapse under foot and there is also a very high risk of fire which could spread rapidly.

Darryl Keen, Chief Fire Officer at Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, said: “Cannabis factories are a serious fire risk and are often set up with features that can injure anyone entering the property – that could include police, firefighters or the landlord. This is usually as a result of electrical safety features being bypassed or, worse still, deliberate attempts to booby trap the building. The removal of doors, or holes cut in walls can allow a fire that takes hold to develop very quickly. We would ask the public to report any suspicions to the police without delay.”

One landlady, who wishes to remain anonymous, has spoken of the devastation caused at her five-bedroom property in a sought after area of Watford, after it was rented out. The short-term rental was agreed following contact via the Gumtree website. Cash was paid in advance and the £1,600 rent was paid every month without fail.

Having arranged the initial rental in person, the equipment and plants, as well as someone to manage the cultivation, were brought into the property.

Thanks to intelligence, the Constabulary's Operational Support Group officers were able to take action and shut the production down.

Three rooms and the loft at the property had been converted for the commercial production of cannabis, the electricity meter had been dangerously bypassed to power production. A total of 420 cannabis plants, in various stages of growth, were recovered from the premises with an estimated yield value of some £100,000.

The property owner said: "When I got the call from the police saying they had found a cannabis factory at my house, I thought it was a prank. Then they told me I would have to come to the police station.

"My first reaction when I got to the house was 'it stinks'. We had to repaint the whole house and change all the carpets and soft furnishings to get rid of the smell. The police took all the illegal stuff but we were then left with a load of wires and pots to dispose of. The place was a wreck.

"The whole experience was scary and stressful; it wasn't just the damage to the house, it was having to go through all the legal stuff. When I first got the call all I could think was how do I justify this? Am I liable? Will I go to prison? You feel guilty even though you haven't done anything wrong. It was such a huge relief when they said they knew I had nothing to do with it.

"But after that I had to live with the worry; I've met these people, they are criminals and they had my details, my address from the rental agreement, could they find me and ask for their rent back? Are they going to hurt me or my family? It was a lot to deal with and months of watching our backs, worrying for the children and being suspicious on daily basis about anybody."

A Vietnamese national was subsequently arrested, treated as a victim of people trafficking by officers and placed into care due to his age.

The original renters were discovered to be Chinese nationals using fraudulent British passports as ID and fake copies of bank statements and pay slips. They were never traced.

Sergeant Perkins said: "Working alongside our partners, we are committed to making Hertfordshire a hostile place for organised crime groups to operate. However, we also need the public to assist us in our fight by reporting any suspicious activity and looking out for the tell-tale signs that a cannabis factory is operating in your property or neighbourhood."

What to look out for?

- A strong and sickly sweet smell
- Lighting and ventilation equipment being taken into the house
- Windows always covered or blocked off

- People coming and going at all hours or neighbours you never see
- Strong and constant lighting at all hours
- High levels of condensation
- Constant buzz of ventilation equipment
- Lots of power cables around the property

If you suspect drug crime please contact police on the non-emergency number 101 or report information online at www.herts.police.uk/report.



Local Crime Information

G4E - Ashwell, Hinxworth, Bygrave, Newnham and Caldecote

- Between Tuesday 28th November and Friday 1st December whilst parked in Gardeners Lane, Ashwell. A number plate was removed from a grey Seat Ibiza. G4/17/1166 refers
- On Monday 4th December between 11.50am and 1.30pm a car was left unlocked and with the keys in the glove box. The offender has entered the car found the key and drove off. The vehicle stolen was a 2008 Silver Ford Ranger. G4/17/1181
- Overnight on Tuesday 5th December valuable Christmas decorations were stolen from a garden in Northfield Road, Ashwell. G4/17/1185 refers
- Overnight on Tuesday 5th December and Wednesday 6th December in the Walkdens, Ashwell and tyre was slashed on a car belonging to a resident. G4/17/1186

- Overnight on Thursday 7th and Friday 8th December a van parked in Bear Lane, Ashwell was broken into. Power tools were stolen from within. G4/17/1193
- On Monday 18th December at 11.59am two men entered a farm in a white van. The passenger gets out of the van and goes to the rear of the warehouse. The offenders steal various scrap metal items. The van was a small car derived van and had a black spare wheel on the driver's side rear. G4/17/1229 Refers
- Between Sunday 31st December and Monday 1st January an outbuilding in Northfield Road, Ashwell was entered. Unknown what property was taken and the offenders made off direction unknown. G4/18/3 refers

G4D – Barley, Barkway, Reed, Therfield, Kelshall and Nuthampstead

- At 5pm on Saturday 2nd December a garage was broken into in Fordham terrace, Therfield. The offender attempted to steal a bike however the bike got jammed in the garage door mechanism and dog were barking at the address which disturbed the offenders who made off empty handed. G4/17/1170
- Between 3.30pm and 4.05pm on Friday 1st December an offender was let into a property in Windmill Close, Barkway. The offender went into the victim's bedroom and stole an Ipad and left the address. The offender was caught by police and has been charged. G4/17/1173 Refers
- Overnight on Tuesday 12th December the offender have entered farmland in the Barley area the offenders have entered this land in pursuit of hares and have caused damage to the crops. G4/17/1210 and G4/17/1212 refers
- Overnight on Friday 15th December a house in Rooks nest Lane, Therfield had its Christmas lights stolen. G4/17/1218 Refers
- Between Thursday 14th and Saturday 16th December a van was parked at the side of the road in Picknage Road, Barley. The offender has approached the van and has removed a number plate. G4/17/1219 refers

- On Wednesday 13th between 12.15am and 3pm the offenders have stolen Christmas decorations from outside of an address near to peddlers lane, Therfield – G4/17/1223 refers
- Between Friday 15th December and Monday 18th December the Sewage treatment works in Picknage road, Barley was burgled. The offender's entered the property and stole a generator. G4/17/1224 refers
- Overnight on Wednesday 20th December a bottle of gin was stolen from an unlocked car in Smiths End Lane, Barley. G4/17/1233 Refers

G3C - Sandon, Wallington, Rushden, Clothall and Weston

- Between Wednesday 20th December and Tuesday 2nd January, two vehicles were targeted in Halls Green, Weston. The offenders have approached 4x4 vehicles parked in an industrial park. The offenders have removed catalyst converters from beneath the vehicle. G3/17/810 and G3/18/3 refers
- Between Monday 11th and Sunday 17th December a garage was an open sided garage. The offenders have walked in and stole car batteries that the victim was storing. G3/18/8

Your local Neighbourhood Police Teams website

<http://snt.herts.police.uk/Teams.aspx?TeamID=G01>

Useful Links

<http://www.herts.police.uk/>

<http://www.doglost.co.uk/>

<http://www.stolenhorseregister.com/>

Royston Rural Neighbourhood Team Tel – 01438 757935