Chief Supt Catriona Paton

Lothian Scot Borders Command Support

Dalkeith Police Station

Newbattle Road

Dalkeith

EH22 3AX

15th December 2021

Dear Chief Supt,

Newcastleton & District Community Council congratulates you on your recent appointment, the community look forward to working with you and your team over the coming months.

Located in the southern tip of Scotland our community is a long way from police resources. Following a series of incidents which caused alarm amongst us the community have taken steps to install CCTV. Delivering this has taken nearly 3 years, crossing many hurdles to reach the point we are now; Police Scotland officers have supported us in preparing the necessary paperwork as well as providing letters of support for planning and funding applications, without which our tasks would have been even harder. We hope to ‘switch’ on in late February next year.

Part of the rational for going through planning hoops and raising £38k for the install was to provide our community with additional reassurances at times of concern; our remote, rural location, 25 miles south of Hawick, means police resource is not readily forthcoming when we need it. Thankfully that isn’t often, however, after a series of break-ins and thefts the community council decided to consider installing CCTV. Not one person raised an objection locally or regionally.

We take the view that rural crime will continue to increase; diversionary routes from the A7 forcing traffic to come via us raising awareness amongst those inclined to exploit it, coupled with increasing climate change events placing the community at high risk; Newcastleton floods far too regularly , and these events would all continue. Primarily we invested in this system to give peace of mind for ourselves, to support the emergency bunker at St. Boswells in a crisis, and to provide police intel when necessary.

Our community are really looking forward to having that extra set of eyes to keep a watch over us. We have high expectations that this will act as a deterrent, and it will also help increase police resources widening intel sources for you to access when it is needed. Police often ask to check our fuel forecourt footage when there is an incident, this new community wide network of cameras will only give a wider perspective on activities when appropriate.

NDCC will extend an invitation to showcase our system to you nearer the time and hope that you are able come and see it in operation.

However, that isn’t the main purpose of this note; we are already experiencing loss of visible policing and the regular rural reporting has now all but evaporated – by yourselves and by members of the public, who see little point in reporting thefts/behaviours given our remoteness and lack of response.

The Community Council receives a copy of a monthly ‘ward report’ covering the Teviot & Liddesdale catchment, this is dominated by urban statistics and means very little to us. We truly valued the local monthly reports officers provided about rural crime prior to this ceasing and being replaced by the current report. Rural crime gets no mention in any ward report. This increasing lack of recognition is only serving to widen the ‘gap’ between what was a proactive and dynamic relationship where members of the public felt comfortable communicating with local officers whom we saw regularly and trusted.

Recently the CC was provided with a summary of rural activity relevant to us going back to September which was hugely valued by members; it served to remind us just how ‘ignored’ we all feel and that there must be a better way to increase dialogue and communication even if the force cannot spare the manpower to attend regular meetings locally. This is being addressed by our neighbours in Cumbria where local beats are being reintroduced, they have obviously decided that distancing themselves from communities hasn’t worked for them.

We are not pointing fingers just accepting facts. Visible presence is hugely welcome when it comes, Newcastleton has a great relationship with the rural force who do what they can to support us given the constraints placed upon them, but we feel there must be a better way.

We would welcome a discussion about communication channels and how we can exploit these to better effect given the challenges faced by us all. We had hoped to revert to in person meetings, but the recent Omicron strain means we have retreated to screens again. This in itself is really unhelpful as we feel very distant from each other and public sector partners with whom we rely on.

We hope that current circumstances can quickly revert to normal, and we are able to welcome you for a visit and to continue this discussion in person so we can work together more proactively going forward.

Best regards,

Barbara Elborn, Secretary

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