

## POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL REPORT

Meeting Date	1st May 2025
Report Title	Progress Report on Tackling Rural and Wildlife Crime

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### Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on how North Yorkshire Police (NYP) are tackling rural and wildlife crime in York and North Yorkshire. The report also includes an update on the rural side of the Safer Streets project which the Policing, Fire and Crime Directorate of the Combined Authority (PFCD) managed.

### Overview

North Yorkshire Police is the largest single county police service in England, with just over 818,000 residents scattered across a huge area. In much of the county there are just 76 people per square mile compared with the English average of 430. According to the North Yorkshire Rural Commission, 85% of North Yorkshire is classed as ‘super-sparse’ or very rural. This means most residents live in smaller communities – making access to services, isolation and transport key issues in tackling rural and wildlife crime.

Rural crime is any criminal activity that predominantly impacts on rural communities and business, such as machinery and agricultural theft, livestock theft, livestock worrying and wildlife crime. It’s also criminal activity that can take place anywhere but requires a unique approach due to specific issues associated with rural communities, such as isolation or a lack of access to services.

NYP categorises rural crime into one of four categories:

- **Agricultural** - Agricultural crime covers working farms, farm machinery, farm buildings and smallholdings. Offences include theft of equipment or fuel, damage to property and livestock worrying.
- **Equine** - Equine crime covers working stables and equestrian centres and includes offences like tack theft and livestock worrying.
- **Wildlife** - Wildlife crime includes hare coursing, poaching and interfering with protected species.
- **Heritage** - Heritage crime is defined as 'any offence which harms the value of Britain's heritage assets and their settings to this and future generations'. That can include offences like lead theft from churches, damage to ancient monuments and illegal metal detecting.

Rural crime can also fall under environmental crime, which covers illegal waste dumping, fly tipping, polluting watercourses and land.

Rural and Wildlife crime emerged as a priority area in the public consultation for the Police and Crime Plan 2025-29.<sup>1</sup>

## The Rural Task Force (RTF)

The Chief Constable (CC) and former Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) launched the RTF in 2016 after a survey revealed significantly lower satisfaction rates of policing in rural areas and compared to towns. The purpose was to provide dedicated specialist resources, to strengthen police service in rural areas and make a real difference to people living in those communities.

At the start of 2022 the RTF was re-launched after a review of the resources required to deliver effectively in Rural Communities. The new approach for the team meant an increase in intelligence led operations in partnership with bordering forces, other specialist operations and local policing departments, who target identified high harm offenders and organised crime groups.

Within NYP, the RTF conduct daily searches on any crime that occurs within a rural ward. Within North Yorkshire, there are 137 wards defined as rural. County command contains 58% of rural wards (79), most being within Hambleton and Richmondshire districts. A further 22% of rural wards (20) are within the Coast command (largely Ryedale). The final 20% of rural wards are within the City command (28) primarily within the Selby district.

## NYP and RTF Rural Crime Operations

North Yorkshire is identified by Opal<sup>2</sup>, national policing's intelligence unit for serious and organised acquisitive crime, as the number 1 area across the UK for quad bike thefts and number 3 for GPS thefts due to its vast rurality. During 2024 police operations strategy has targeted specific rural crimes based on local and national crime hotspots. These have included:

- **Op Spotlight** to tackle high value farm equipment and quad bike thefts.

North Yorkshire experiences criminals travelling across the borders into force area and stealing farm quads. Many operations took place in hotspot areas, working closely with neighbouring police forces and used specialist resources deployed to the areas in the effort to detect and deter travelling offenders across borders.

This included officers from the Rural Task Force, Roads Policing Groups, Operational Support Unit, Firearms Support Unit, the Dog Unit and the National Police Air Service.

- **Op Walrus** to tackle a 2023 spike in GPS systems theft.

Working in collaboration with the NFU, auction houses and agricultural dealerships NYP have been involved in the identification and arrest offenders with the recovery of 48 GPS units, worth £300,000. Have arrested, charged and remanded a further 3 offenders in relation to a wider conspiracy to commit theft offences across northern England. They have also worked with national agencies to identify a crime group operating in multiple force areas including York and North Yorkshire.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/police-crime-plan/>

<sup>2</sup> [CITS Opal Review Sept2024.pdf](#)

- **Op Figaro** to tackle poaching which is 2<sup>nd</sup> to theft in rural crimes in North Yorkshire.

This is now a national strategy under Operation Galileo, which tackles illegal hare coursing, and provides a better understanding by NYP of the impacts of poaching offences on rural communities, due to feelings of isolation to all crime types. Strong partnership working is essential in tackling this crime and working with internal partners and communities using WhatsApp groups, target hardening, and the safer streets work has resulted in a reduction of 61% since the start of the Figaro process.

## NYP and RTF Wildlife Crime Actions

Wildlife crime is any activity that goes against legislation protecting the UK's wild animals and plants. It can cause pain and suffering to animals, push species closer to extinction, and can be linked to other serious crimes like firearms offences and organised crime.

The areas of most focus for NYP are bird crime and illegal hunting and work from NYP include:

- **Bird of Prey Persecution** – A new approach working with the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit setting up actions against their tactical delivery plan
- **Hunting with Hounds** - The Hunting Act 2004 prohibits all hunting of wild mammals with dogs, except where it is carried out in accordance with the conditions of an exemption. NYP had organisational learning around fox hunting over the last few years and implemented best practice in accordance with general crime investigations. The RTF also maintain an advisor role to support such investigations with appropriate reviews to ensure standards are met.
- **Livestock Worrying** - Operation Recall works with national animal welfare charities, including, Naturewatch Foundation and the RSPCA, joining forces with the National Rural Crime Unit and police forces to launch the strategic project to tackle the issue across the country. Since Covid lockdown there has been a rise in dog attacks on farm animals. The aim of this operation is to increase education and awareness of dog owners/walkers to prevent dog attacks to farm animals. To use ASB legislation to issue community protection warnings and community protection notices with the overall aim to reduce attacks on livestock.

## PFC Directorate Activity Update

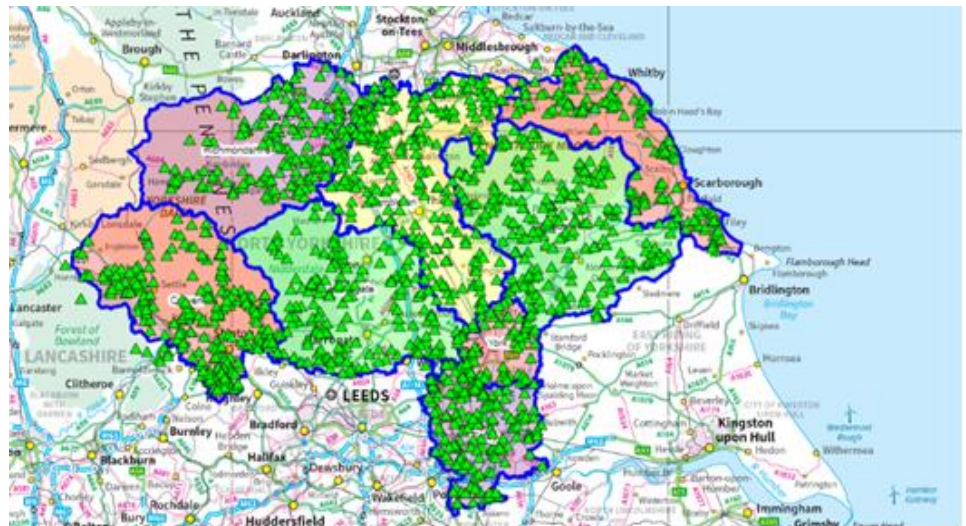
- **Working with the RTF on Safer Streets**

In 2024 the PFCD applied for funding from the Government under the Safer Streets scheme with the bid to tackle rural crime and the funds allocated for crime reduction.

The funding was used to purchase 8,000 Selecta DNA property marking kits to issue to over 1500 farms across York and North Yorkshire. This was the largest undertaking of any previous campaigns, and the largest Selecta roll out in the country. Each farm was offered up to 5 kits and signs to mark high risk agricultural vehicles and equipment specifically Quad bikes, ATV, trailers and tractor GPS devices.

The RTF identified repeat victims and hotspot locations, and these were visited first then a wider spread of farms visited. This map below shows where kits were used. As demonstrated by this picture, the areas which benefitted from this are spread throughout the County.

The kits were showcased at several high-profile events, such as Tractor fest, the Great Yorkshire Show and at local events such as livestock auctions and smaller shows. It was very well received and with each visit or interaction it gave the RTF staff an opportunity to do further target hardening, discuss welfare or other issues that might arise.



As part of the campaign funding also enabled the purchase of Ultraviolet (UV) torches and microscopes to identify the Selecta DNA on products. These were issued to across all traffic teams, operational support teams and in all RTF vehicles. In addition to this, training was given to all staff on the use and identification of the kits.

Selecta asked the NY RTF to produce a presentation. Following this, other forces have approached NYP RTF asking about how they were able to deliver such a large project and is now seen as best practice.

The safer street rollout has been greatly received by the farming community and long-term figures will show the true impact.

However early figures show:

- NYP has seen a 13% reduction in crime during this period with only 3 farms being targeted that had the kits and signs installed, to 72 without them, making it 96% less likely to be targeted if using the Selecta kits.
- A 30% reduction in quad bike thefts since the scheme started.
- A reduction in theft of high-risk items over a 6-month period (July 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> December between 2023 and 2024)

## • Round Table

In February 2025, the DMPFC attended, a policing roundtable chaired by the CC on tackling rural crime [Rural crime challenges – NFU meets with North Yorkshire Police – NFUonline](#). The roundtable saw

industry stakeholders meet with Policing Minister Diana Johnson to discuss strategies in the face of the unique challenges rural crime presents.

The meeting was held at North Yorkshire Police HQ and saw NFU Vice President Rachel Hallos meet with representatives from the National Wildlife Crime Unit, National Rural Crime Taskforce, NFU Mutual, Ceasar, and the National Rural Crime Unit.

**Operation Galileo** was one of the topics of discussion, as it brings together police forces across the country in a bid to tackle hare coursing. Representatives shared the success of partnership working and remarked on how the significant success of this operation has seen a reduction in hare coursing nationally, although there was acknowledgement there is still more that needs to be done.

The link between rural crime and serious organised crime was discussed as well as for secondary legislation for the Equipment Theft (prevention) Act 2023 to be tabled to bring in provisions for other agricultural equipment. Ensuring the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill passes Committee Stage in parliament was also a key ask.

- **Rural Crime Forum**

In March 2025 the DMPFC visited Ripon Cathedral to meet Rural Forum Members, a group of major stakeholders who represent North Yorkshire's rural communities. It is five years since the Ripon Cathedral Rural Forum (RCRF) was established and has been proven to be influential when it comes to priority topics for North Yorkshire such as housing, education, transport, biodiversity and climate change. The DMPFC spoke about how we are working to ensure the Mayor's priorities will work in our rural communities to create safer places for all.

- **NRCN**

On 25th March 2025, the DMPFC attended the National Rural Crime Network (NRCN) hosted its second Annual Conference in London. The Conference brought together government officials, policymakers, academics, law enforcement officials, private sector businesses and other key stakeholders to discuss the progress so far and the way forward in the collaborative fight against rural crime. As part of this commitment, during the conference, the government announced £800,000 in funding to combat rural and wildlife crime. This investment will help strengthen law enforcement efforts, improve intelligence-sharing, and provide much-needed support to rural communities affected by crime. Lord Hanson also confirmed that secondary legislation for the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 will be introduced later this year.