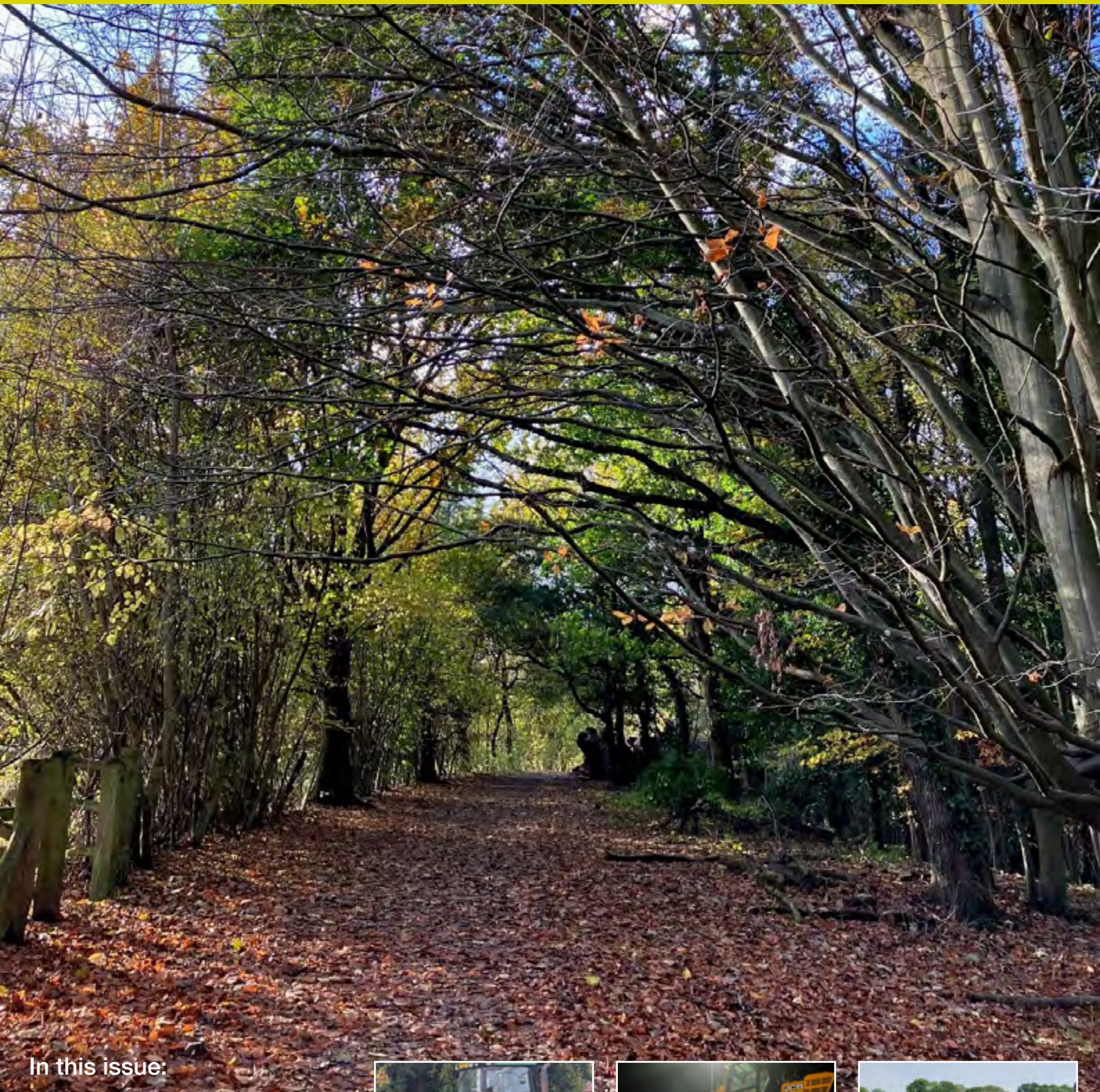


Rural Matters

Rural policing in Kent – a magazine for residents and businesses

Autumn 2026



In this issue:



**Kent
Police**



Autumn crime alert



Stolen plant action



Community events

Plus the latest news on rural and environmental policing in Kent

Welcome to Rural Matters

Welcome to Rural Matters. See inside for the latest on the Kent Police Rural Task Force. There are now more officers countywide dedicated to tackling and preventing crime in the countryside. We've the latest news on how these officers, partners and colleagues are working to protect and support Kent's rural communities. Email your Rural Task Force team – rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

Rural Inspector

Inspector Tom Mepstead

Rural Sergeants

Sergeant Ross Haybourne

Sergeant Wayne Heasman

North Division

- PC Marc Pennicott
- PC Paul Williams
- PC Beth Ninnim
- PC Matt Amos

West Division

- PC Anna Verrall
- PC Tom Smith
- PC Jim Elkin
- PC Laura Bournazian
- PCSO Millie Smith
- PCSO Chris Ward-Davies

East Division

- PC Luke Jorden
- PC Mike Sutton
- PC Amy White
- PCSO Debbie Fields
- PCSO Ian Norton



Email your Rural Task Force team rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

More rural contact information, see back page.

Report non-urgent crime online

-  Go to www.kent.police.uk/report
-  Report a crime, incident or non-injury collision in minutes
-  Receive your confirmation email and reference number immediately

Anyone with information about suspected crime can contact the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously by calling **0800 555 111** or using the anonymous online form.

Crimestoppers.
0800 555 111
100% anonymous. Always.



X account

Your Rural Task Force PCs have a X account [@KentPoliceRural](https://twitter.com/KentPoliceRural)

The team regularly Tweets updates on what they've been doing and any live incidents.

Follow for the latest news and information.



Latest news

New Rural Task Force sergeant joins the team

Sergeant Wayne Heasman has joined the Kent Police Rural Task Force team.

He has worked in a number of policing roles for 13 years – on Neighbourhood and Local Policing Teams across Medway and latterly Swale for the past seven years.

He has dealt with a number of poaching incidents and led response teams in rural Kent, including the district response to catapult attacks as part of ongoing Kent Police action targeting the issue.

He said: 'This has given me a broad insight into the challenges faced by our stakeholders in the rural community and how we can continue to support and develop our teams in the work we do. I am really excited to be joining the RTF team with its excellent reputation and to build stronger relationships with the rural community. Originally I am from rural Sussex so am keen to continue to support local interests and challenge the criminality occurring in Kent which affects them.'



Agricultural GPS thefts – two charged after Rural Task Force action

An investigation by the Rural Task Force led to two arrests involving alleged theft of high-value farming navigation GPS systems.

Two men suspected of conspiring to steal from nine victims across the county are currently remanded in custody ahead of their appearance at Canterbury Crown Court in October.

Farms in Canterbury, Folkestone, Romney Marsh, Maidstone, Sheppey and Thanet were reported to have been targeted during July and August 2026.

The alleged thefts from tractors and other agricultural machinery were estimated at a total cost of over £170,000. Enquiries into other possible linked offences outside Kent are continuing.

Two Romanian men were arrested on 16 August after a suspect vehicle was stopped on the Essex side of the Dartford Tunnel after pursuit by Kent Police officers. Two other men were arrested and released on bail.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne said: 'As well as being very expensive to replace, GPS systems play a big part in modern day farming and when they are stolen it can have a significant impact – especially during the harvest season.'

'We know certain crime types increase in the autumn when evenings start to get darker and more farm equipment is in use. We already have good relationships with many of our local farmers and rural communities and will continue to do everything to reunite victims with stolen belongings and bring those responsible for rural crime to justice.'



Protect machinery and vehicles with free marking service

The Kent Police Rural Task Force offers free property marking.

Officers have equipment to mark surfaces on hand tools, saddles and generators or vehicles like tractors and horse boxes.

The service is free at events or farms and workplaces. Marking helps officers identify and return stolen goods.

Email rural.task.force@kent.police.uk



Farm building burglary suspect arrested

A crowbar, sledgehammer, gloves and bolt cutters were found after a vehicle was stopped by Rural Task Force officers on patrol following a suspected burglary.

The officers arrested a man on 26 August after being alerted that an attempt had been made to break into a farm building in Faversham, with a wire fence allegedly cut.

Rural Task Force officers on patrol locally identified a suspect vehicle, which was stopped later that day. After a search of the vehicle a 29-year-old man from London was arrested on suspicion of burglary and driving offences.



Kent Police at Tractorfest

Kent Police teams engaged with visitors at the popular annual Tractorfest event in Biddenden.

The Rural Task Force, Kent Special Constabulary and Kent Volunteer Police Cadets were at the rural event on Saturday and Sunday 15-16 August. The two days are centred around tractors but with a focus on supporting local and agricultural charities, groups and organisations. This year's hot weather attracted good crowds and the Kent Police contingent were available to provide information about their work and crime prevention to hundreds of visitors.



Rural Crime Champion Award in memory of PC Harry Callaghan

When the death of Rural Task Force officer PC Harry Callaghan was announced earlier this year tributes poured in from colleagues and the rural community.

PC Callaghan's reputation as a respected, effective and warm hearted 'copper' will now be recognised with an award in his name. The idea was put forward following the many positive comments received from colleagues and the farming community about the impact the officer had over his many years working in rural policing.

The 'PC Harry Callaghan Rural Crime Champion Award' will be presented at an annual departmental Kent Police awards event. Nominations for the recipient will be welcomed from Kent Police colleagues and the rural community network.

Head of Kent Police Strategic Prevention Command Superintendent Rob Marsh



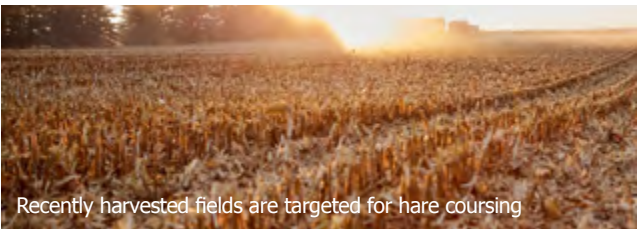
said: 'This award will recognise someone who has delivered an exceptional level of service to the rural communities in Kent, very much in keeping with what PC Callaghan brought to rural policing, ensuring his legacy continues to inspire others.'

Suspected hare courser stopped by officers on rural patrol

A suspected poacher was arrested and equipment seized by Rural Task Force officers on proactive patrol.

When suspicious activity was reported in Faversham on 8 September, Rural Task Force officers in the area identified a suspect vehicle. When the driver didn't stop on request, the vehicle was brought to a halt on the A2 after a short pursuit. A catapult and torch were found and an 18-year-old man arrested.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne said: 'This incident highlights the effectiveness of the Rural Task Force's proactive



Recently harvested fields are targeted for hare coursing

Men in court for 'brutally' hunting wildlife with dogs

Two men who persecuted wildlife with dogs and made 'heartbreaking' videos of their trophies have been sentenced in court.

Videos of their actions, which the RSPCA said caused 'extreme levels of suffering for both wild animals and the dogs used in the crimes,' were not played in court due to their upsetting content.

The men were sentenced on 25 September for offences under the Animal Welfare Act, Deer Act and Protection of Badgers Act after the judge heard descriptions of animals brutally killed and filmed.

David Stanbury of Denstead Lane, Chartham Hatch and his son Jack Stanbury from Vale View Road, Aylesham were given suspended jail sentences at Canterbury Crown Court

following an RSPCA investigation.

RSPCA officers worked with the Rural Task Force to execute warrants in October 2025, locating one of the dogs seen in the videos, a lurcher called Bear, who was seized. The men, who admitted multiple offences, were banned from owning or keeping animals for life.

RSPCA Investigator Michelle Hare, from the charity's Special Operations Unit, said they launched an investigation after David Stanbury was arrested by Gloucestershire Police at a wild boar hunt in the Forest of Dean on New Year's Eve in 2024.

She said: 'His phone was seized and unlocked a mass of content showing he was prevalent in the persecution and hunting of wildlife with his dogs, as well as implicating his

son, Jack, in the crimes. We found a large number of shocking videos showing wildlife being brutally killed, heartbreaking trophy images and messages relating to hunting deer, foxes and badgers with his dogs, uncovering extreme levels of suffering.'

Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne said: 'We work closely with the RSPCA to support action to target those who think they can kill animals and get away with breaking the law for their own entertainment. This result shows that they will be brought to justice and we will continue to work closely with our partners to stop these cruel and illegal activities.'

David Stanbury was given a three-year prison term,



suspended for three years, ordered to do 100 hours of unpaid work, 15 Rehabilitation Activity Requirement days, adhere to a nine-month curfew order (between 9pm and 5am) and pay costs of £5,000.

Jack Stanbury received an 18-month jail sentence, suspended for two years, ordered to pay £1,000 costs, complete 100 hours of unpaid work and adhere to a 9pm-5am curfew for six months.

Rural crime focus at busy time of year – special briefing highlights action

Crimes which traditionally increase at this time of year – such as hare coursing and poaching, equipment and agricultural machinery theft – were discussed at Bank Farm, Ashford at a special briefing.

The event follows a similar one earlier in the summer around anti-social behaviour, as thousands of visitors were drawn to the county's coasts during the hot weather.

The autumn months bring particular issues within rural Kent. They include damage and threats associated with trespass and hare coursing, poaching and catapult use to kill game and wildlife, the targeting of farm machinery, theft of fuel from oil tanks and burglaries in isolated locations as nights draw in.

Held on 10 September the briefing highlighted operations and enforcement by the Rural Task Force with inputs from Head of Strategic Prevention Command Superintendent Rob Marsh, RTF Inspector Tom Mepstead



NFU regional board chair Alan Clifton-Holt explains the impact of rural crime



RTF Sgt Ross Haybourne being interviewed

and Sergeant Ross Haybourne alongside National Farmers' Union regional board chair Alan Clifton-Holt.

Media representatives were invited to carry out interviews. Kent Police Head of Press Office Adam Westgarth said: 'The event went incredibly well, with valuable insights

from the very farmers who are being targeted who could explain the impact these crimes have on their livelihoods while raising awareness of the relentless efforts of the Rural Task Force in protecting them and bringing those who target them to justice.'



Rural team seize over £1.4m worth of vehicles, cash and equipment

Since the beginning of the year Rural Task Force action has resulted in numerous arrests and £1,416,250 worth of items seized.

They include locating a suspect for the theft of £100,000 worth of tools from across the county in August; investigating a series of thefts in West and North Kent earlier this year, where two tractors, a mini-digger, various trailers and other items were stolen from rural properties and a suspect arrested and recalled to prison and the arrest of two men due in court shortly for a series of agricultural GPS thefts.

In July and August alone the team seized £218,500 worth of items and recovered stolen vehicle parts, three horse boxes, one caravan, five bronze statues, one dumper truck, four vehicles, and four GPS systems.

Catapult incidents – arrests made

Arrests have been made after reported catapult incidents in Kent.

Their use to target and damage property and vehicles, attack animals and sometimes people is a growing concern nationally.

There have been a number of incidents across the county and the Rural Task Force has been involved in local action and national discussions to tackle the problem.

Of particular concern is young people using catapults destructively and sharing videos on social media.

In recent months there have been arrests in Kent. A suspect aged 16 was arrested following an investigation into an assault on a pensioner in Cranbrook.

Police had been called to an incident on 16 June involving five young people where a catapult was allegedly fired towards a man in his 70s, who needed hospital treatment.

The following month in a separate incident a 17-year-old boy was arrested after

an incident in the Ashford area where a moving vehicle, which had three children inside, was allegedly targeted with a catapult.

Officers swiftly arrested a suspect and a catapult and bag of ball bearings was seized. Both incidents happened in the afternoon in daylight hours.

There have also been reports of incidents where animals – such as ducklings and swans – and buildings, in one case a church, have been targeted with slingshots.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Wayne Heasman said: 'We have been investigating a rise in catapult offences and will continue to investigate these distressing incidents thoroughly. We are committed to bringing offenders to justice. It is important young people understand the consequences of their actions and the seriousness of offences where damage, harm and injury are caused.'

Campaigners have called for tougher legislation on



These items were among those seized

possession of a weapon and sales to children.

In the UK catapults are not illegal to own or carry in public, but if they are used to harm people, injure or kill animals, damage property or for anti-social behaviour their use could be illegal under existing laws.

There is a national police response, Operation Lakeshot. The Rural Task Force also seize catapults and ammunition in relation to poaching and related wildlife offences.

Hay bales arson investigation

Two teenagers have been arrested in connection with a suspected arson at a Dover farm.

Police were called on the evening of 18 August to St Margaret's-at-Cliffe, where Kent Fire and Rescue were working to contain a large fire. No-one was hurt but numerous livestock were moved to safety and the damage caused estimated at over £100,000. Two teenage boys were later arrested in connection with the incident, with investigations continuing.



Community horse patrols – reassurance in green spaces

Equine Community Police Volunteers patrol green spaces in the countryside and parks.

The Kent Police volunteers on horses regularly work with the Rural Task Force – reaching hard to access areas, acting as eyes and ears and being a reassuring visible presence.

Recently they were out in Mote Park, Maidstone supported by local neighbourhood teams. PC Lee Tallon said: 'The experience was well received by members of the public and their children alike, who were delighted to be able to see the horses being prepared prior to setting off around the park. This is a new initiative, which will hopefully be continued in the coming months.'

Engagement events reach communities countywide

The Rural Task Force team regularly attends community events, rural shows and seasonal activities across the county.

They include the Kent County Show, Living Land, ploughing matches and open days – with opportunities to contribute, explain recent RTF action and give crime prevention advice about security and property marking.

In recent months they have been at the Western Heights open day; Swale family fun day; Kearsney Abbey farm and forest day; heritage meeting with Sussex RTF; British Riding Clubs summer



Rural PCSOs Ian Norton and Debbie Fields with the RNLI

show jumping qualifiers – where 17 horse boxes and 24 saddles were property marked; Heritage steering group at Dover Castle;

Ashford cattle market; Maidstone Crown Court community day and Dover District Council around catapult offences.

Action targets stolen plant and agricultural equipment

A total of 378 vehicles were stopped and checked at the Port of Dover in ongoing work to target stolen machinery, plant and high value cars being taken abroad. The Rural Task Force work with the Port of Dover Police and partners from the National Construction and Agricultural Theft Team as part of national action.

In September across two days they stopped and checked HGVs, box vans, trailers, caravans, and plant and agricultural equipment.

Suspected stolen vehicles seized included two caravans worth £10,000, a horse box, a Lexus worth £40,000 and a £9,000 Hyundai – found in a Mercedes van suspected of being used in crime – and a Nissan Navara worth £20,000. A second operation in September involved proactively patrolling Ashford, Maidstone, Canterbury and surrounding areas where a reported stolen horsebox and the flatbed pulling it were seized, a number of vehicles stopped and crime prevention advice given.



Be alert to cold-caller fraudsters posing as police

Criminals posing as police officers have been cold-calling people to ask for money.

Members of the public reported receiving calls claiming to be from the police on 1 October.

The number shown falsely appeared to be a Kent Police number. Other victims were told a named officer was calling from a Kent station. They were given a reference number and false email.

The fraudsters claimed passport or personal details were being used in crime and as part of an investigation, requests for money made.

Two victims lost money after being conned into giving details of their crypto accounts including seed phrases similar to passwords and used to access crypto wallets.

Crime Prevention Advice:

- Kent Police officers will never ask people to transfer money for an investigation.
- Don't give personal information in response to an incoming call, particularly if asked to do something which will affect you financially, including personal bank information.
- If you have a crypto currency wallet or account, never confirm details. Always keep your seed phrase secret.
- End such a call immediately. Wait five minutes for the line to clear or use a different number to contact police.

Kent Police Rural Task Force – protecting rural communities

The Kent Police Rural Task Force works to tackle rural crime and engage with local communities. The specialist team also includes Police Community Support officers in each part of the county and is supported by a Rural Special Constables' unit.

They are dedicated to protecting rural communities and ensure offenders face justice, working with partners, neighbouring forces and local residents to prevent crime and act on their concerns.

This includes proactive and high visibility operations and building on strong links with other agencies, Kent Police and cross border police colleagues and farming, equine and rural business communities.



FarmWatch alert system

The FarmWatch app gives members a dedicated tool to pass on information to the Rural Task Force team quickly. Anyone interested in joining their local FarmWatch group email the RTF at rural.task.force@kent.police.uk. FarmWatch WhatsApp is a tool to share information directly with the team and not to be used to report crime. Any crimes should be reported in the usual way; 999 if a crime is in progress or via the Kent Police website.

Need to report a crime?

Do it online



Report non-emergency crime 24/7 using online services
kent.police.uk/report



A quicker way for you to report crime and incidents



Receive email confirmation and reference number immediately



Access **Live Chat** by the blue circle in the bottom right corner of any Kent Police webpage



My Community Voice

Protecting the neighbourhoods of Kent and Medway

MCV is a two-way engagement tool brought to you by Kent Police

Use the QR code to find out more.

Or visit the website

www.MyCommunityVoiceKent.co.uk



Find out what's happening in your area



Receive alerts from your local officers

Tell us what matters most to you



Sign up



Sign up today and make your voice count

Countryside Code

Remember

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Leave all gates as you found them
- Keep pets under close control
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone

