

# Whittlesey Neighbourhood Watch

## 17<sup>th</sup> June Minutes

### Introduction and Attendance

The meeting opened with the chair welcoming everyone and noting that introductions were unnecessary due to everyone's familiarity with one another. Apologies for absentees were briefly acknowledged, with only two apologies noted, to be included in the official minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed, and no pressing issues were raised from them, although it was noted that meeting energy could be improved. The chair expressed satisfaction at the group's continued activity despite lower attendance, attributing it to the season and other commitments rather than a decline in interest.

### Updates and Recent Activities

A significant update shared was the establishment of a new Neighbourhood Watch scheme, reviving an initiative that had previously lapsed. The chair and Robin have been actively attending various events—three in the past couple of months for the chair—such as the Nova Club at the Conservative Club, which was well attended and generated interest. Attendance at the Golden Age event was also highlighted, where, despite good awareness of Neighbourhood Watch among attendees, actual membership remained low. Concerns were raised about the duplication of services by multiple organisations at such events, particularly those funded by public money.

### Current Membership and Participation

Membership figures were discussed, revealing around 460 members in the Whittlesea area, with approximately 32 coordinators, half of whom are considered active. The discussion acknowledged the common challenge of engaging people post-COVID, as many individuals have become more insular. The increased prevalence of local WhatsApp groups was noted, suggesting that while formal meeting attendance is down, neighbourhood watch activity continues in other forms. The importance and relevance of Neighbourhood Watch were reaffirmed, with the chair and others committed to promoting its value.

### Finances and Banking

The financial update revealed that the long-standing bank account had been closed by the bank due to inactivity, with a balance of £138.24 to be reclaimed and transferred to a future account. There was discussion about establishing a new account with Metro Bank, which is now commonly used by community groups. Sponsorship for signage and materials remains a challenge, as does the need for new signs, which are crucial for visibility and awareness.

### Website and Digital Engagement

Robin presented the current state of the website, which serves as a hub for information, including links to resources on cybercrime and live weather updates. The website is described as user-friendly, continually updated, and has even attracted international attention. Robin emphasised the importance of digital engagement in reaching a wider audience.

## Expanding Schemes and Community Outreach

A major focus was the plan to establish 'empty' Neighbourhood Watch schemes in new estates where none currently exist, making it easier for residents to join. This approach has proven successful elsewhere. The group discussed the need for localised and personalised leaflets, with suggestions to distribute them through estate agents and possibly involve local youth groups or cadets for delivery. The potential for greater engagement in new housing developments was seen as a key opportunity.

## Artificial Intelligence and Neighbourhood Watch

Robin gave a demonstration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, specifically Copilot, showing how they can generate stories, images, and tailored content—useful for communication and promotion. The dual nature of AI was discussed: its potential for enhancing productivity and creativity, but also the risks of misuse, such as creating convincing scams or disinformation. The importance of verifying AI-generated content was stressed, and the ongoing evolution of AI, including the coming quantum computing revolution, was briefly outlined.

## Police and Community Safety Update

The police update covered ongoing issues such as illegal parking, anti-social behaviour, and some minor drug activity, although Whittlesea is described as relatively settled compared to nearby areas experiencing more serious problems. Recent police activity includes parking enforcement, arrests related to drug offences, and regular engagement with the community, including youth work and adult drop-in centres, which are seen as effective in preventing more serious problems.

## Coordinators' Reports and Local Issues

Several local issues were raised by coordinators and members:

- The removal of semaphore signals at the station as part of a network upgrade, with explanations about the new signalling system and planned footbridge improvements.
- Problems with a hedge damaged by fire and challenges with council responsibility and repairs.
- A personal dispute involving suspected illegal burning of asbestos and general nuisance from neighbours, with advice given to keep records and contact the council's environmental team.
- Faded neighbourhood watch signs and the process for acquiring replacements, including the need to check with the council and ensure safety when erecting signs.
- Concerns about vagrancy and shoplifting in the area, noting individuals with complex needs and the involvement of local authorities.
- Vacant properties attracting attention, with efforts being made to contact those responsible for maintenance.

## General Reflections and Future Plans

The meeting concluded with thanks to attendees, reiteration of the group's ongoing commitment, and a reminder of the next meeting date to be confirmed. Throughout, there was an emphasis on practical solutions, community engagement, and adapting to new challenges—whether technological, social, or organisational.