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# **An Exclusive Countryside? Crime Concern, Social Exclusion and Community Policing in Two English Villages**

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# **An Exclusive Countryside? Crime Concern, Social Exclusion and Community Policing in Two English Villages**

## **Abstract**

Using the example of two English villages, this paper examines whether rural crime concern is evidence of an 'exclusive society' (Young, 2002) in the countryside. Specific attention is given to concerns expressed by residents as part of a consultation exercise to establish community-based policing partnerships in rural areas of the West Mercia Constabulary. Based on these findings the paper goes on to question whether local policing partnerships are capable of shaping idyllic visions of rural space in an exclusionary way. It is argued that while it is important to examine the spatialised rhetoric of rural crime concern, structural processes, rather than localised discourses, make a greater contribution to exclusion in the countryside

## **Introduction**

Crime in rural areas is increasingly being viewed as problematic by policy makers and academics (Anderson, 1997; Aust and Simmons, 2002; Countryside Agency, 2002; Dingwall and Moody, 1999; Gray and O’Conner, 1990; Hogg and Carrington, 1998; Little et al., 2005; Mawby, 2004; Moody, 1999; Yarwood, 2007a). As greater attention given to the policing rural places, it is important to scrutinise emerging policing policies and to establish their impact on rural societies (Yarwood, 2007b).

Some commentators have suggested that recent policing policy is contributing to the growth of punitive, exclusionary practices and social division (Herbert, 1999; Herbert and Brown, 2006; Young, 2002). Jock Young (1999) has argued that an ‘exclusionary society’ is developing as a result of ‘ontological insecurity’ caused by diversification of lifestyles, wider travel, cultures and immigration. This insecurity has led to a series of moral panics that have blurred the boundaries between what is considered criminal and what is considered culturally threatening or undesirable (Yarwood, 2000).

In response to these concerns, the criminal justice system has focused on ‘preventing the worse’ rather than addressing the social inequalities that contribute to crime (Beck, 1992; Johnston, 2000). Consequently, its emphasis has been on the exclusion of certain people from certain places, rather than the use of penal and welfare solutions to prevent the expansion of crime in the first place (Young 1999; Hughes, 2000; Herbert and Brown 2006; Loader, 2006). Within urban areas, ‘safe spaces’ have been created, such as private shopping centres or gated communities, where ‘other’

groups such as beggars, buskers or the young can be excluded on a cultural rather than criminal basis (Low, 2003; Phillips, 2002a; Raco, 2003).

However, it might be argued that the exclusionary society finds its strongest expression in the countryside. There is growing evidence that people who do not fit into idealised constructions of rurality, such as travellers (Vanderbeck, 2003), the young (Yarwood and Gardner, 2000) or indigenous people (Hogg and Carrington, 1998; White, 1997) have been excluded from rural places. In Australia, for example, many country towns are being re-imagined using sanitised, suburban constructions of heritage and rurality to encourage tourism (Tonts and Greive, 2002). Indigenous groups who use open spaces in these towns to meet, drink and negotiate are seen to disrupt (white) rural interests and are more likely to be arrested for transgressing these imagined boundaries (Cunneen, 2001). In the UK elite desires to protect the boundaries of sanitised rural space have led to legislation aimed at excluding particular groups, such as travellers, or activities, such as 'raves', from the countryside (Sibley, 2003).

These exclusionary practices have been driven by two factors. First, rural areas have been colonized by many service class people seeking, amongst other things, a safe distance from the perceived disorder and criminality of urban society (Phillips, 2002b). These new residents can form powerful elites who have the ability to shape the landscape and society of rural areas to match their visions of rurality. As previous research has demonstrated, these ideals suppose rural places to be crime-free and safe places to live (Yarwood and Gardner, 2000). Fear of crime reflects social as much as than criminal threats to lifestyle choices (Cloke, 1993)

Secondly, and linked to this, the general public appears to be gaining an increased say in the way that rural areas are being policed (Crawford, 1997, 2003; Goris and Walters, 1999; Hughes, 2000; Yarwood, 2007b, 2008). In the UK, the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act obliged all parish councils to work in partnership with other agencies to plan local crime prevention strategies (Dean and Doran, 2002; Mawby, 2004). Similarly, the funding of local crime prevention in Western Australia required shire councils to develop their own policing plans and, to a degree, take stronger control of their own policing (Yarwood, 2007a). Local communities, rather than wider social structures, are therefore viewed by neo-liberal policy makers as both the cause and solution of the problems facing rural places (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Lockie et al., 2006; Woods, 2006).

As rural residents are required to become more actively involved in local policing, there are more opportunities for exclusionary discourses to be realised in particular places. As traditional community structures are weakened, efforts to re-engage rural citizens through partnerships may lead to new forms of local power relations that reflect the views of new rural elites (Woods and Goodwin, 2003; Woods 2007). Thus, partnerships are more likely to be dominated by (new) local elites seeking to further their own interests, intentionally or otherwise (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Stehlik, 2001). There is a danger that policing partnerships may emphasise the role of *policing* in its broadest sense by enforcing the ‘dominant ideals of society’ rather than focusing on criminal threat (Bowling and Foster, 2002). It is therefore important to appreciate how fear of crime is constructed within the locality-specific contexts of these social and political changes (Pain, 2000). In short, there is a need for a better understanding of

the ways that discourses of crime concern can influence policing partnerships in specific rural areas.

To start addressing this issue, this paper examines the multiple and contested visions of rural criminality in two English villages. The research presented in the article was part of a consultation exercise by West Mercia police to establish a partnership-based Rural Safety Initiative (RSI) in rural parts of their constabulary. It was thus possible to examine both crime concern and to examine how this affected the formation and working of these local partnerships. The paper is divided into four main sections. The first discusses the RSI in more detail; the second outlines the methodology; the third presents the results of a survey into fear of crime and the final part considers the operation of the RSI in relation to these findings.

## **Background**

Between 2001 and 2006, the Government introduced the Rural Policing Fund (RPF) to improve the accessibility and visibility of the police in the 31 most rural (Aust and Simmons, 2002) forces in England and Wales (Yarwood 2008). A budget of £30 million per year was made available to forces that could demonstrate improvements in rural policing (Department of Environment Transport and the Regions, 2000). Often these funds were used to develop small-scale partnerships with local communities in order to improve the visibility of police officers in the countryside and increase contact between the public and police in a proactive rather than reactive fashion.

West Mercia Constabulary is one of the most rural forces in England (Aust and Simmons, 2002) and polices the three counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire. Although its crime rates are lower than the national average, there has long been public pressure to improve the visibility of policing in its more remote areas (Young, 1993). West Mercia Constabulary used RPF funding to pilot a Rural Safety Initiative (RSI) that aimed to strengthen partnership working between the police, selected rural communities and other statutory agencies. The RSI was piloted in four villages that were chosen by the police for “representing what many people would regard as rural idylls i.e. pretty ‘black and white’ villages with little crime and little, if any, social deprivation” (Owen, 2002 page 1).

This paper draws upon evidence from two of these villages, which have been anonymised as Villages A and B. Both villages were of a similar size and had been subject to social restructuring caused by in-migration and gentrification (Table 1). They showed very similar social characteristics but Village B had experienced a recent and significant growth in social housing that, in turn, impacted on the rural visions held by some of parish’s residents.

Village A is located in Worcestershire and lies within an area of Great Landscape Value and a former Rural Development Area. Its centre was designated a conservation area in 1972 in recognition of its 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Grade II listed buildings. In 2001, the village had a number of services including shops, public houses, a post office, a doctor’s surgery, garage and a primary school. Employment opportunities were limited, although there were a number of industrial units just outside the village boundary. The majority of its residents commuted to work to Worcester, the West



Midlands or other nearby cities and deprivation in the parish was very low (only 4% of the population claimed income support). Only five percent of homes were rented from the local authority or housing associations, compared to the 15% average for households in Worcestershire.

Rates of recorded crime were also very low in Village A, with only 44 offences recorded between 1998 and 2001. During this period, crime rates fell, with only 20 crimes were reported in 1998/1999, 13 in 1999/2000 and 11 crimes reported in 2000/01. The most frequent crimes were recorded as non-residential burglaries and ‘other’ thefts. Detection rates were also high in the parish, with 84% of crimes being cleared-up.

Village A can therefore be characterized as a wealthy, gentrified community with very low crime rates. It might therefore be expected that its residents had very few concerns with crime or social disorder.

**Table 1:** Population Change in the Case Study Villages

	Population 1981	Population 1991	Population 2001
Village A	630	600	660
Village B	1,080	1,080	1,250

Village B is located in Herefordshire. Its centre was designated a Conservation Area in 1979 and due to its historic timber framed buildings. Village B was also well provided with services in 2001 with a primary and secondary school, a range of shops, churches, public houses and a village hall. Many residents commuted to Hereford for work. Only 17% of the population were under 16 in 1991 and 29% were over

pensionable age, meaning that the parish had an older-than-average age profile for its district. It showed an increase in its population during the 1990s, largely due to the construction of new housing estates, including social housing. Indeed, in 2001, social housing accounted for nearly a quarter of all households in the parish, significantly higher than Herefordshire's average of 15%. Crime rates were also low in the parish. Ninety-one offences were recorded between 1998 and 2001 and 78% of these had been cleared-up. The most common offences were non-residential burglaries, theft from motor vehicle and 'other thefts'.

As part of the consultation process for the RSI, the author was involved in a study to determine crime concern in each of these villages and to provide the agencies concerned with data that allowed them to develop local action plans to tackle the crime and safety problems identified by their residents. The following section outlines the methodology for this study.

## **Methodology**

Crime concern in the two villages was primarily studied using a questionnaire survey that was distributed to each household in each village in 2001. Questionnaires were delivered and collected by hand by officers from West Mercia Constabulary and local volunteers. The aim of the survey was not to probe deep levels of human behaviour or values (Hoggart et al, 2002) but, rather, to consult a wide range of residents to provide an extensive picture of their crime concern in their parish. Panelli et al (2002a) observe that the use of questionnaires can encourage a more open response than other face to face methods in crime research. Their more anonymous nature can give

respondents the freedom to be more expressive about certain, perhaps controversial, ideas. Indeed, many respondents used the opportunities afforded by open questions to make some very forthright comments about their parish.

Pain (2000) has been critical of 'quick tick' crime surveys that take no account of locality or wider ideas about experience and positionality. The survey therefore included a series of open and closed questions to allow respondents the opportunity to offer qualitative, subjective comments about their villages. Sections were also included that asked respondents to discuss their own locality and its social and economic conditions. In this way, efforts were made to place residents' crime concerns with the wider contexts of their locality.

The questionnaire survey was also supplemented by observations at public meetings held with residents of each village. These meetings were established to allow residents the opportunity to discuss crime and community safety issues affected their locality and for the police to offer advice on the best ways of dealing with them. They were held as part of an initiative by the police to establish Rural Safety Teams (RSTs) in each village as part of the Rural Safety Initiative (Small, 2001).

The survey achieved a pleasingly high response rate of 67% in Village A and 72% in Village B. The people who responded to the survey were largely representative of villages' resident populations (Table 2), although proportionally more women than men completed the survey and people over 60 were over-represented at the expense of younger people. Nobody under the age of 18 completed the survey, so that the views

of children were not represented (but see Neal and Walters (2007) for an child-centred account of being (un)policed in rural localities).

**Table 2: Response Rates for Questionnaire**

<b>Social Characteristics</b>	<b>Survey Sample Population Village A</b>	<b>Population Profile for Village A (2001 Census)</b>	<b>Survey Population Village B</b>	<b>Population Profile for Village B (2001 Census)</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
<i>Male</i>	44%	47%	39%	48%
<i>Female</i>	55%	53%	58%	52%
<i>Not Stated</i>	1%		3%	
<b>Tenure</b>				
<i>Owner Occupiers</i>	85%	87%	67%	66%
<i>Social Housing</i>	7%	5%	30%	35%
<i>Private Rented</i>	5%	8%	3%	9
<i>Not Stated</i>	3%			
<b>Socio-economic characteristics</b>			77%	77%
<i>Car Ownership</i>	84%	90%	33%	46%
<i>Disability</i>	11%	7.7%	4%	4%
<b>Age</b>				
<i>1-18</i>	0%	17.7%	0%	23%
<i>18-60</i>	56%	61.7%	40%	45%
<i>60+</i>	36%	20.6%	55%	33%
<i>Missing</i>	8%		5%	9%

### **General Perceptions of Rurality**

As the introduction to this paper argued, it is important to understand how constructions of locality and rurality contribute towards constructions of criminality (Yarwood and Gardner, 2000). The questionnaire results revealed that both villages embodied characteristics of the rural ideal (Bunce, 2003). Nearly all of Village A's residents (98%) felt that the village was 'rural' in nature and felt that the village as offering a very high quality of life. It was seen as a particularly friendly place by a

large number of people, who commented on a strong ‘community spirit’ or ‘sense of community’ in the village. Many people liked the ‘peace and quiet’ of the village and valued the high level of service provision, especially the post-office, shop and bus service, in the parish commenting that they were ‘fortunate’ to have such facilities in comparison to other nearby village.

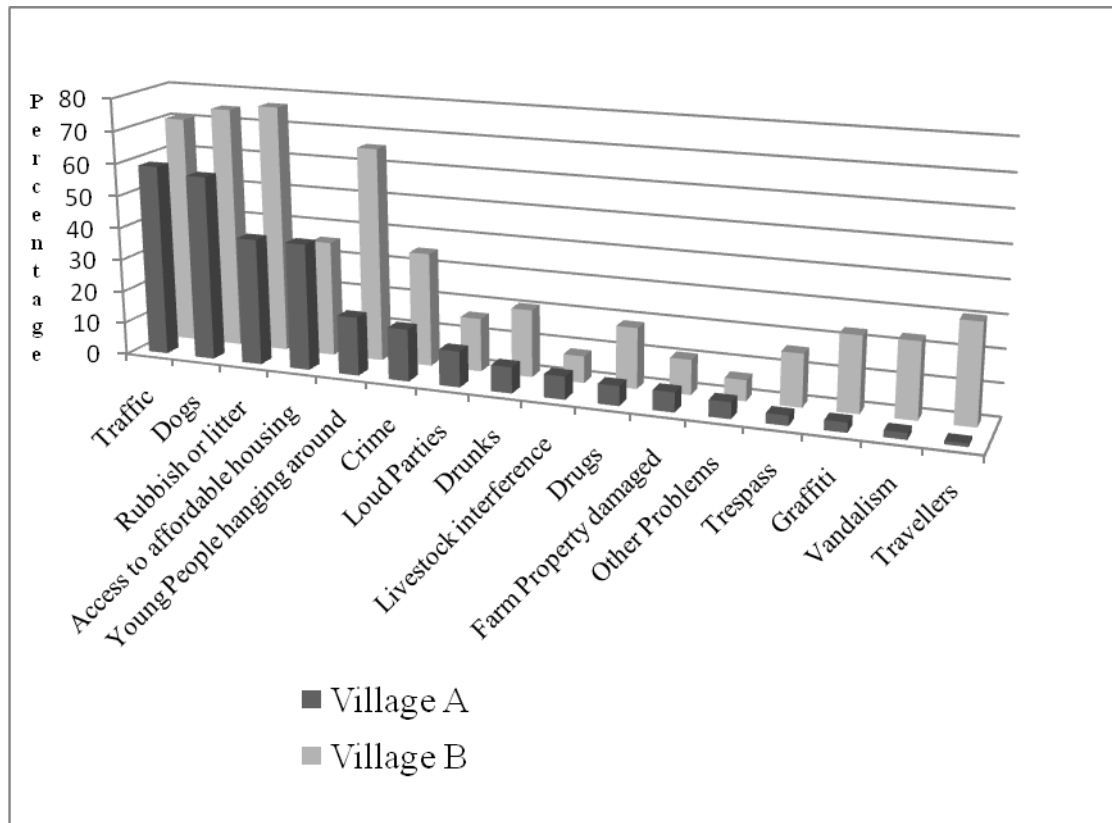
Respondents to the survey in Village A noted very few issues that compromised their high quality of life. The biggest problem appeared to be a lack of public transport and consequently access to higher-order services, such as hospitals or major shopping centres. Access to affordable housing also appeared problematic, although many residents noted that the village had expanded its (private) housing stock. There were very few complaints about anti-social behaviour or social tension in the parish.

Village B’s residents shared many of these positive views. Over 85% of the residents of Village B considered it to be ‘rural’ or ‘very rural’ due to its relatively isolated location and its surrounding countryside. Most people liked the village as a place to live, in particular the ‘peace and quiet’, rural location and the surrounding countryside. Several residents appreciated the number and quality of services in the parish. Many also commented on the friendly people in the area and a perceived community spirit in the parish. However, in contrast to Village A, there was also an undercurrent of concern about anti-social behaviour

Many residents were concerned that the village had grown in recent years. The development of social housing by housing associations attracted the most criticism and a number of respondents suggested (rightly or wrongly) that these had been

allocated to people that had been re-located from urban areas (see also Yarwood, 2002). As the following sections notes, these groups were frequently blamed for criminal activities in Village B.

**Figure 2: Social Concerns in Two Parishes**



### Crime and Other Concerns

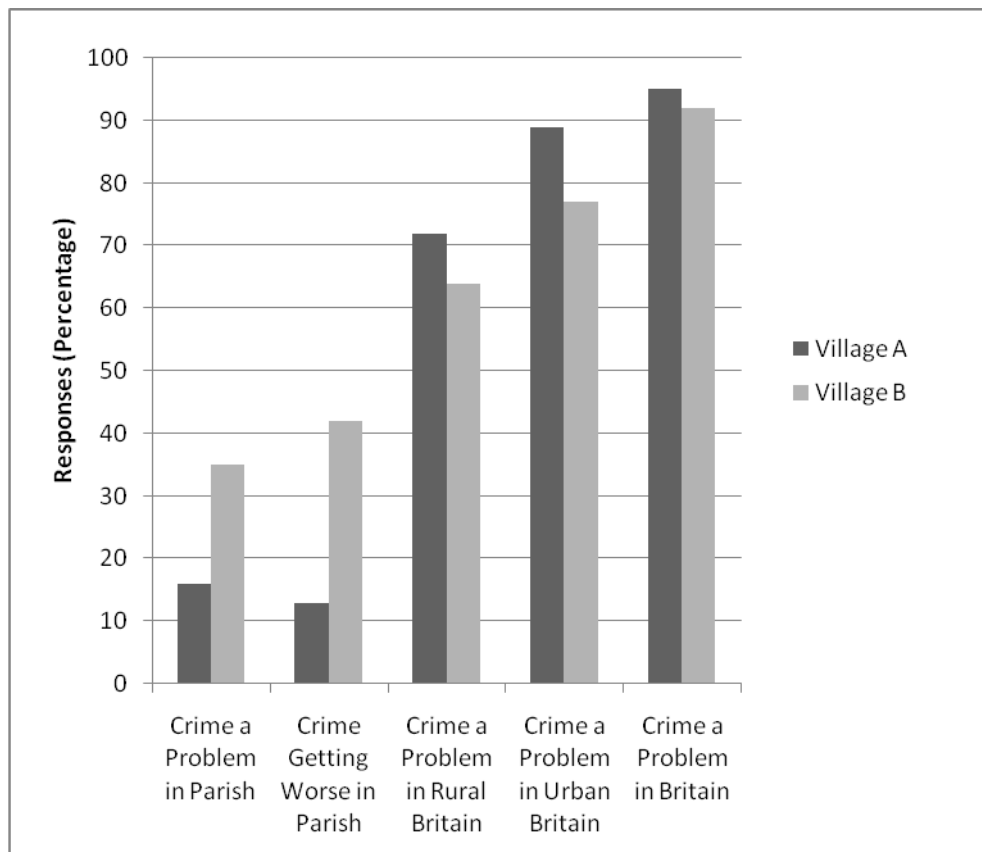
Semantic scales were used to question residents about the extent to which various social issues affected their parish, including crime. In all of these categories, levels of dissatisfaction were higher in Village B than Village A (Figure 2). The speed and volume of traffic were cited as the biggest problems in Village A (59% of respondents) and one of the biggest problems in Village B (71%). The biggest concern in Village B (expressed by 77% of residents)

was that was that litter and rubbish spoilt the appearance of the village. Specific groups, especially travelling people or gypsies, were blamed for this anti-social behaviour by some of Village B's residents. The behaviour of dogs also caused concern in both villages, especially when they defecated in public places or were not closely controlled by their owners.

Crime was not regarded as a major problem by many residents. Thus, people in both parishes felt that crime was a significant problem in other urban and rural areas of Britain, but only a small minority (16% of respondents) were concerned that crime was a problem in Village A and even fewer (12%) felt it was getting worse (Figure 3). These rates were significantly higher in Village B, where over one third of respondents (34%) felt that crime was problematic in their parish and 42% thought that it was getting worse.

In both villages residents' direct experiences of crime were very low (Table 3). There were some reports of trespass, (attempted) burglary and damage to property but almost no reports of physical crime against the person. In Village A, few people modified their behaviour as a result of these concerns, implying that personal fear of crime was generally very low. Only four residents said that they deliberately avoided specific places at specific times to steer clear of crime or perceived danger. These were public houses at closing time and the village hall on 'disco nights'. Furthermore, only 14 people felt 'a bit unsafe' walking alone at night in the village and these fears were caused by a fear of being injured by traffic, rather than physical

**Figure 3: Crime Concern in Two Parishes**



or verbal assault. Linked to these issues, only a small minority of Village A's residents felt that 'young people hanging around' (18%) were a problem, although a few residents commented on noise after closing time, the occasional 'boy racer' and playing football on the village green.



**Table 3: Direct Experience of Crime**

	Experience of crime in Village A		Experience of Crime in Village B	
	Experienced by Respondent (percentage)	Experienced by someone known in the village to the respondent (percentage)	Experienced by Respondent (percentage)	Experienced by someone known in the village to the respondent (percentage)
<b>Burglary</b>	13	56	13	10
<b>Property stolen from vehicle</b>	10	27	12	14
<b>Trespass</b>	6	7	9	32
<b>Attempted burglary</b>	5	24	7	5
<b>Vehicle Damaged</b>	5	5	7	8
<b>Vehicle stolen</b>	5	24	6	4
<b>Livestock interfered with</b>	2	7	6	12
<b>Damage to home</b>	1	2	5	17
<b>Threat of violence</b>	1	2	3	28
<b>Verbal assault by strangers</b>	1	0	2	6
<b>Violence</b>	1	1	1	4
<b>Damage to farm property</b>	1	5	1	2
<b>Mugging</b>	1	2	1	1
<b>Sexual assault</b>	0	0	1	1
<b>Attempted mugging</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Racial harassment</b>	0	0	0	1

By contrast, fear and concern at crime in Village B were significantly higher, despite low recorded crime rates and low experiences of crime (Table 3). There were several reports of ‘threats from strangers’ and ‘verbal assault’. Significantly, though, very few people reported these occurring to them directly but instead knew of, or reported that they knew of, this abuse happening to their acquaintances. It appeared that a low

number of these incidents were making a high impact on the consciousness of the village's residents. Consequently, only 55% of residents felt safe walking alone in their village at night. Women felt more concern than men in this situation or, more tellingly, ensured that they did not have to walk alone at night. Nearly a third (33%) of residents mentioned that they avoided certain places as they perceived them to be dangerous and three areas of public space caused particular concern: the bus shelter, the village green and the village hall. This was because of:

“Teenagers, drinking, swearing, graffiti, generally abusive” (1122, Female, Age 34, Resident 1 year, owner occupier);

“Too many youths drinking and giving a person a lot of verbal” (1328, Female, Age 57, Resident 40 years, owner occupier);

“Youths and gypsies hanging about there” (1218, Male, Age 47, Resident 40 years, owner occupier);

‘Spooky, strange goings on, strange people’ (1313, Male, Age 68, Resident 4 years, owner occupier).

A number of other locations were also avoided because of ‘youths hanging around’ including the telephone kiosk, schools and named (social) housing developments. Other studies have suggested that these areas are important meeting places for young people in rural settings, allowing them to gather and develop their own communities (Panelli, 2002; Panelli et al., 2002b). In this sense, public spaces can be viewed as a

'thirdspace' for young people (Matthews et al., 2000), offering them a setting to create, express and contest their identity. As children they want to be seen and heard by their peers in these places, they often engage in very noticeable activities such as skateboarding, playing football or simply 'hanging around' public places (Matthews et al., 2000). These non-criminal but intrusive activities can run counter to the tranquil, ordered visions of rurality held by some adults (Valentine, 1996; Leyshon 2002). Over two-third of respondents felt that 'young people hanging around' were a problem in Village B, as the following quotes demonstrate:

“young children lean on our hedges and play in the car park at the back of our bungalows in the evenings” (1083, Female, Age 88, Resident 88 years, sheltered housing);

“Young people hanging about. Once I had to stop my car driving in the village as a group of older children were involved in horseplay: one child was pushed on to the roadway” (1124, Female, Age 59, Resident 23 years, owner occupier).

However, Valentine (1996b, page 581-582) notes that children are not viewed homogenously: “parents perceive their own children to be innocent and vulnerable (angels) whilst simultaneously representing other people’s children as out of control in public space and a threat to the moral order of society (devils).” Thus some young people were blamed for causing problems for other youngsters:

“Young people shouting abuse, bored, bullying: nasty environment for young children” (1213, Female, Age 44, Resident 5 years, owner occupier).

In other cases, though, particular groups of young people from specific parts of the village were cited as causing trouble. Faults were particularly found with children who lived in new housing association developments:

“As I have said, I think the housing association have got a lot to answer for. [Village B] hasn't been the same since they started moving in families from too far out. Six years ago everybody knew everybody else which I am sure helps to cut down on crime” (1165, Female, Age 36, Resident 19 years, owner occupier);

“Housing association properties let to people from afar. They cannot live in a small village and therefore the children become troublemakers. Their parents are all drawing social instead of working” (1183, Female, Age 47, Resident 46 years, owner occupier);

“Because we should be looking after what we have, instead of building more houses and bringing urban families into our rural community. You can't put a square peg in a round hole” (1278, Female, Age 38, Resident 36 years, owner occupier);

These quotes highlight an exclusionary rhetoric against ‘undesirable’ (i.e. poor) tenants from urban locations. This even extended to the everyday, non-criminal behaviour of these children:

‘When the [Housing Association] people first got here the children seemed very suspicious of, and hostile to any friendly courtesy, such as saying "Hello" when passing in the street’ (1098, Male, Age 77, Resident 5 years, owner occupier).

It has already been stressed (Table 3) that Village B did not have higher victimisation rates or crime rates than Village A. It therefore appears that this insecurity is linked to changes in society and an ontological insecurity (Young, 1999), in this case the construction of new social housing in the village.

As well as people from housing association homes, travellers were also cited as causing trouble by some residents:

“Gypsies blasting horns in cars and vans. Gypsies hammering and banging, repairing cars and vans. Gypsies parking vehicles in front of bungalow windows as we live in slight dip they block out the light and view” (1147, Male, Age 57, Resident 2 years, housing association);

‘Gypsies are a very big problem! They hang about the streets at all hours; they are rude, aggressive, always on benefits. They pester old people for money and they bring the whole tone of the village down. They should have a special site for them right away from the village. Let them all live there together!’ (1214, Males, Age 47, Resident 40 years, owner occupier).

These statements seem to confirm Young's (1999) view that elite members of an exclusive society attempt to distance themselves from the ontological insecurity brought by other cultures. This said, travelling people and gypsies have always been present in the countryside but have been treated with varying degrees of hostility, suspicion and threat (Sibley, 1981, 2003). These negative comments have co-existed with viewpoints that have seen gypsies as part of the rural scene, valued for fortune telling, trade, casual labour and so on. However, over recent years, the growth of what are loosely termed 'new age travellers' has led to a rather selective and myopic view of nomadic people (Halfacree, 1996, 2006 ). Thus, one resident commented:

'Travellers with horses and bow-top caravans are ok but 'motorised' travellers upset everyone we would like stakes set into the ground along the edges of the common to prevent illegal stopping' (1050, Male, Age 42, Resident less than one year, owner occupier)

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the exclusionary viewpoints were the only ones voiced in the survey. As already noted, the survey produced very few, in any, negative comments about particular groups of people in Village A. Other residents of Village B, while noting the presence of young people in particular spaces, felt that they did not constitute a problem.

'Young people hanging around hasn't changed in 45 years.' (1199, Male, Age 46, Resident 45 years, owner occupier);

‘Sometimes youngsters seem to hang around the bus shelter but do not really pose any problem.’ (1310, Female, Age 48, Resident 11 years, owner occupier).

Others accepted that the presence of young people in these places was a symptom rather than a cause of social change and noted that their use of such spaces reflected a lack of service provision or public space for young people (Matthews, 1995; Pain, 2000).

“Young people hanging about because there is nothing for them to do. The very young and the older people are well catered for, but not the teenagers” (1278, Female, Age 66, Resident 32 years, sheltered housing);

With an increase in housing there are now more teenagers hanging about. I hear there is really little or nothing for them to do - hence they turn to crime. There are just no amenities for young people” (1122, Female, Age 89, Resident 26 years, owner occupier)

Although similar issues were recorded in Village A, very few respondents expanded on the semantic scales and blamed particular groups for these problems. Given the high degree of social homogeneity of the parish, it was perhaps difficult to single out definite social groups, or even individuals, to blame for these activities.

The evidence presented above suggests that rural restructuring and class re-composition have had some bearing on crime concern. Although both of the case study villages enjoyed very low crime rates, the residents of Village B seemed more concerned about crime and anti-social behaviour. This seems to stem largely from the building of social housing in the village and its perceived population with tenants from urban locations.

However, this study suggests that social issues in the village, including uncontrolled dogs, unruly youths and litter, were blamed, rightly or wrongly, on these inhabitants. However, given the low crime figures for the village and relatively few calls to the police by residents, these seemed amount to low-level incidents that may have not been remarked upon in more urban locations. Instead, there seems to be evidence that this behaviour clashes with tranquil visions of rural life. In Village A there were less complaints about this sort of behaviour, largely because the parish retained a high degree of homogeneity, itself a possible symptom of service class action to exclude undesired groups or building from rural idylls (Phillips, 2002b).

However, as Cloke et al (1997) point out, different people in the same locality reveal multiple, complex discourses of rurality. These become even more intricate when linked to ideas of criminality. It is important to note therefore, as (Young, 2002) points out, notions of disorder vary from person to person. Significant numbers of residents did not report problems, criminal or anti-social, or, if they did, were not liable to apportion blame for them on particular sections of society. Many, as Pain (2000) recognises, realised that young people have always transgressed to a degree or



that there are underlying causes that need to be addressed, such as a lack of activities for the young, in the resolution of these conflicts.

### **Policing the Rural**

The results above were used to inform the establishment of the Rural Safety Initiative (RSI) in the two villages. The surveys revealed that in both villages there were fairly high levels of satisfaction with the police: only 9% of respondents in Village A and 15% of residents in Village B felt that the police were doing a 'poor' or 'very poor' job. However, most respondents (62% in Village A and 70% in Village B) felt that the visibility of policing could be improved. The Rural Safety Initiative attempted to respond to these concerns but recognised that there were limitations to what could be achieved:

“because of changes in working conditions and society generally, the 'bobby' who both lived and worked in a village, has largely gone.... but the Constabulary seeks to recreate the best of the village 'bobby' feeling within today's constraints” (West Mercia Constabulary, 2001).

The RSI established 'Rural Safety Teams' (RST) in the two villages to target 'nuisance and quality of life issues' listed in the sections above. The RSTs made use of community consultation techniques (Moseley, 2003), including the survey discussed above as well as 'planning for real' techniques developed by the Constabulary. However, despite these efforts to consult a wide range of people, the RSTs comprised of the 'beat manager' (a police officer tasked with community-based

policing (Yarwood, 2005)) and a number of local people, including at least one parish councillor, who were chosen by the beat manager (Owen, 2002) for their organisational skills, community standing or concern with crime. Thus, in Village A the RST was led by retired senior police officer. Although it is understandable, and perhaps inevitable, that local development teams are comprised of local elites (Moseley, 2003), the self-selecting nature of the RSTs raises concerns about their representativeness and whose visions of rurality were being policed (Yarwood, 2001).

However, the Team in Village A failed to develop an effective action plan, largely because the beat manager was seconded to other duties during the time period of the project. Village B was able to develop and implement an action plan to deal with their concerns. Table 4 lists these actions and notes that, beyond advice and support, most of them required very little direct input from the police and, instead, were led by appropriate agencies (such as the county council in the case of traffic) or local volunteers (such as the litter pick). Although efforts were made to find more activities for young people to undertake by improving the youth facilities, the core of the actions revolved around ‘designing crime out’ of the built environment, as advocated by authors such as Coleman (1985). Although these may lead to short-term changes to young people’s geographies, there is much evidence that these approaches will simply lead to crime displacement and, in a small rural village, it seems unlikely that this anti-social behaviour will be displaced far. There was also a strong element of designing young people out of the environment: the remarkable example of a pensioner hosing down the bus shelter is perhaps a striking example of Sibley’s (2003) assertion that public space is being claimed and policed as private space by

some adults. However, before too much is read into these actions, it is important to consider the overall effectiveness of the RSI.

**Table 4: Problems and Solutions Identified by Village B's Rural Safety Group**

(Source: Owen, 2002)

'Problem'	'Solution'
Young people hanging around	Rural Safety Group contacted the Young Farmers organisation and has improved facilities available to the youth club so that more youngsters attend and spend less time hanging around the village
Teenagers buying drinks from off-licence leading to noise/nuisance problem	RSG approached local store and owner agreed not to sell alcohol on Fridays [youth club nights] to youngsters
Traffic problems in the village	New parking signs erected. Traffic warden requests for a Traffic Warden from Hereford to patrol the village. County Council to evaluate need for more pedestrian crossings.
Rubbish Litter	Litter pick organised for local residents with tools and prizes
Youth congregating in bus shelters	Local resident (elderly lady) hoses-down the shelter every night and local youths no longer congregate there <sup>1</sup>
Vandalism of play area	RGS had 12ft hedge lowered to that obscured the area from the road. With improved natural surveillance the problem disappeared
Speeding traffic	Police officers conducting speed traps with hand-held radar.
Lights outside village hall smashed	Enforced with strong mesh
Greenhouse belonging to elderly resident smashed	Nearby building contractors asked to clear up rubble that was being used as ammunition
Children climbing into re-cycling containers	Containers removed by County Council
Dog mess	Bins installed in village to dispose of dog faeces.

<sup>1</sup> It is unclear whether or not the youths were there at the time of the hosing! It is assumed that they were not.

Four parishes were originally the focus of this initiative. Of these, Village B made the most progress. As already noted, the RSI in Village A it did not achieve any momentum due to police being redeployed (to a murder enquiry). In a further village a RST was formed but only resulted in two or three actions occurred (again aimed at young people and traffic); while in a fourth village co-operation was so limited that the police found it impossible to form a RST or even undertake the initial research for it. The impact of RSI's on wider society therefore appeared minimal.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has attempted to offer an insight into crime concern felt by residents of two English villages. It was argued that it is increasingly necessary to listen to these discourses given increased efforts by the police to work in partnership with the public and other agencies to prevent crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in rural areas. In doing so, it is important to appreciate how rural places are constructed by their residents and how structural changes can affect these perceptions and, consequently, crime concern.

There has been debate about the extent to which exclusionary voices represent a real exclusionary force or merely rhetoric (Sibley, 2003; Young, 2002). Although much has been made of efforts to hollow-out the state and empower local residents through partnerships, it has recently been questioned whether new forms of governance are emerging, or whether these apparently autonomous new alliances represent a form of highly regulated 'government at a distance' (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000).

The RCI suggests the latter. It only ran between 2001 and 2006 when funding was available from central Government to support rural policing. Since then, funding for specifically rural programmes has been withdrawn and the 2004 White Paper on policing (Home Office, 2004) makes no specific mention of rural policing (Yarwood, 2008). According to officers in West Mercia, their RSI programme has now ceased and has been subsumed in the development of local policing teams in line with new Government policy on neighbourhood policing. Thus the opportunities afforded to local elite groups to influence rural policing teams lasted only as long as Government and local policing policies allowed. Thus, the position and power of local elites in governance networks depends heavily on the direction of national policy. This emphasis on community-based approaches represents an ‘advanced liberal’ form of governance or ‘governance from a distance’: local partnerships are created and given a degree of autonomy but are closely regulated by central government (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Lockie et al., 2006; Lockie and Higgins, 2007; Rose, 1996; Rose and Miller, 1992; Woods, 2006). Their life appears to last for as long as they are supported by the government.

Woods and Goodwin (2003) also warn that the impact of partnership working will vary over space depending on the actions of particular agencies. In this case, the police appear to be a key player in determining the spatial delivery and outcome of the RSI. A senior officer chose the four villages for the pilot according to, it seems, fairly arbitrary criteria (Owen, 2002). Police officers were also responsible for approaching residents to run the schemes, raising questions about how representative the teams

were of local people and accountability to them. Thus, the initial development of schemes in certain rural places depended heavily on police decision making.

On saying this, only one partnership (in Village B) seemed to develop into anything remotely capable of affecting its local environment. The programme was met with mixed reactions in the other villages and their responses to it reflected the operation of micro-political powers and articulation of active citizenship in each location (Woods, 2006). The RSI in Village B was successful at providing some public safety reassurance with relatively little input of police resources (Owen, 2002), however its utilization of short-term environmental measures seem unlikely to affect anti-social behaviour in the long-run.

Given both the limited life of the RSI in Village B and its limited impacts on crime, claims (Yarwood, 2001) that such schemes represent a new form of exclusive governance seem exaggerated to say the least. By contrast, the role of housing markets, the efforts of service class to block their development and the lack of political will to provide affordable housing will do more to ensure an exclusive countryside than the operations of a crime partnership. Indeed, one of the most significant findings of this study is the lack of crime concern in Village A. Rather than being a cause for celebration; this draws attention to the social homogeneity of the parish and highlights how the forces of economic restructuring and class composition are contributing to the exclusion of particular groups from certain rural spaces.

As more policy emphasis is put on local policing and local policing teams, geographers should indeed be concerned with examining the local rhetoric of crime

concern. However, we should be wary of falling into the trap of thinking like neo-liberal policy makers and concluding that local communities, rather than wider social structures, are the cause and solution of the problems facing rural places (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Lockie et al., 2006; Woods, 2006). Closer research is needed on the extent to which this rhetoric effects local power relations or whether, as this paper suggests, it merely reflects the impact of much wider, and more significant, powers of societal change and an increasingly exclusive countryside.

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