

KNOWSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report on the recent 'van on the moor' episode with Devon and Cornwall police 101

As agreed by Councillors at our last Knowstone Parish Council meeting, what follows is the long drawn out history of my attempt to ask Devon and Cornwall police to attend on an orange van (not a camper van, a transit styled van) that was illegally parked overnight at various times on Haresdown Moor, above and overlooking the hamlet of Roachill, in Knowstone Parish.

The concerned residents had no idea whether the van was there innocently, or 'overnighting' to evade the then lockdown rules, or as a consequence of other illegal activities, such as theft or drugs.

In any event, what the occupants of the van were doing **at the very least** was illegal as we as a community understand the lockdown rules that applied at that time, and the rules about no overnight camping on the moor.

Last year, I had personally been invited to the special 'Rural Crimes Day' event hosted by Devon and Cornwall Police by our two rural crimes officers (Martin Beck for Devon, and Chris Collins for Cornwall) as I had recently undertaken some training for them along with a number of Firearms Enquiry Officers. One of the big messages from that conference was a request for communities to pass intelligence on to the police and that rural communities were not the 'forgotten' people and that rural crime was a priority.

I believe that the feeling within our community is that the van belonged to travellers and that the police were unwilling and afraid to have any dealings with them. I have no idea of course whether this is true or not and I sincerely hope not but nevertheless the police response has been breathtakingly underwhelming.

1. My original 101 email enquiry at 19.22pm on April 22

As chairman of Knowstone Parish Council, I have just received information of a vehicle acting suspiciously on Haresdown Moor in the current circumstances I cannot drive there myself to check it out. I have no idea whether it is poachers, campers or a legitimate stop. It does not appear to be a vehicle I have ever seen before in the Parish. The information I have received is from a longstanding member of the community, and his comments were;

'Hi Tony, When I came in from the garden at 5-15 I noticed from the kitchen window a transit style van on Haresdown Moor. It is an orange coloured (distinctive!) transit style van, perhaps a Renault, with at least two occupants, and it is parked on the moor, about 200yards from the bridge over the Link Road. I have watched it through binoculars but can't get a clear sight of the occupants except that one wears a grey coloured top, I notice them

walking around the van, and at one stage they moved it slightly. If John has no-one working on the moor, then they should not be there and I am suspicious of them. I have tried to get a photo but it is too far away and very blurred ! It is now nearly 7-00pm and they are still there and I think the police should be advised to take a look'

2. 101 email reply at 01.30am on April 23

Good evening. Many thanks for your report. However without a confirmed registration of the vehicle there is little that can be done to identify the persons or what their intentions were. Please also note that, as you can see, we are not always able to respond to emails as soon as they arrive. In future, if you require a quicker response, may I suggest you call 101 or use our webchat facility available from our website?

Simon 56487

3. My email to 101 11.55am 23rd April

Good morning Simon,

I am grateful for your response, although I am afraid I am not really sure what you are suggesting?

Rest assured if it was an emergency either myself, or the concerned Parishioner, would have called the 999 service immediately.

With the current restrictions in place I did not feel it appropriate to take my car and cruise the moor, potentially off road, to find the vehicle in question to obtain its registration. Just as an aside, my eldest son who is an AFO and OFC has repeatedly told me not to confront strangers in these type of circumstances as it's the role of the police to put themselves (possibly) in harm's way, not mine.

However, more importantly, I thought that the 101 service left it to **your** judgement as to the speed and priority of the response and that slow as email may be, it would be more efficient than calling? I have no idea what a webchat is.

Fortunately the vehicle has now moved if it returns do you want me to find it and get a registration number but if I cant then don't report it?

I am not being difficult but I would like to understand what you are suggesting so that I can share the information with all of the Knowstone Parish Council, and subsequently our very rural community.

4. 101 response by email 13.11pm 23rd May

I appreciate your concerns with this particular situation. We would never ask for you to leave your home where unnecessary during these uncertain times, however in these circumstances, whereby several hours had passed between the report being made to us and the email being address by a colleague, without having a registration for the vehicle, it would be nearly impossible to locate the vehicle (and be sure it was the correct one, no matter how distinctive it may be) and to take the appropriate action. Therefore, as my colleague suggested, if the vehicle is seen again and the occupants believed to be acting suspicious or in any way unlawful, please call 999 at the time of the incident. In doing so, we will be able to facilitate a prompt response based on the information given at the time and catch up with the occupants before they leave the area to question appropriately.

With any ongoing situation that requires a prompt or immediate response, we would encourage the use of 999, 101 or Webchat as appropriate. Webchat is essentially a live secure messaging service via our Devon and Cornwall Police website, whereby you can message a colleague instantly and receive a quicker response than you would email. The below link gives details on how to access it. I hope this helps.

Kayleigh - 57091

5. Resume of my call with 101 evening 23rd April 21.56pm

I reported the exact location of the vehicle, namely 'lectures.giant.boomer.' and that the vehicle was still there at 7am this morning but subsequently moved off, and that there was food debris left behind, but no evidence of a fire.

The police appeared helpful and it was confirmed a police car **would** go out that evening and look but they accept it may well just be parking up until it is good and dark. What is going to be really helpful is to get a registration number or a sense of any writing on the van

6. Resume of my call with 101 9.36 on 24th April

Confirmed the exact registration of the vehicle VA05 NTJ and restated the three word location. Much less helpful response and no commitment to any action.

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7. Resume of my call with 101 19.22 on 6th May

Following a telephone call with a Roachill resident at 19.25pm I called 101 to again tell them the van was back and asked them to action the problem.

To my absolute astonishment, my previous 101 phone calls which had passed on all the relevant information could not be traced and 101 did not have the van registration number or exact 3 word location on file ... I was hugely unimpressed and repeated all the necessary information.

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8. A copy of an email received by a concerned Roachill resident on Monday 11th May 18.56

"Hi Tony

the van is there again, in the same place. It is obvious that the police are not going to assist, because that means that they have to do something out of their 'norm'. Together with the very confusing and un-helpful messages coming from Government today, the police (who treat travellers and gypsies in a different way to the rest of us), and despite your good efforts to obtain reg; numbers etc it is clear that there will be no help to us, on the 'lockdown' front.

However, they are on an SSSI, and there are rules to observe I believe still exist, but can be checked with moors management and Devon wildlife trust, and that is that to avoid any damage to the SSSI, or harm to flora and fauna, there is a limit of footage a vehicle is allowed on to the land (if it is not an agricultural operation), and I think that is 10 or 15 feet., and no camping allowed.

They are breaking the law and for this reason the police should act."

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9. My self-explanatory email to 101 Monday 11th May 20.37

I have been holding on listening to the dalek lady for nearly an hour now so I am having to resort to an email which I know full well is not going to get to anyone in any reasonable time frame ... but I am seriously fed up with this now.

The orange van is back camping on Haresdown moor which I believe is an SSI.

Can you please have someone contact me with whether you have contacted the owners, or are going to, or have no intention of doing so.

I will then let the community of Roachill know what the score is.

Just for the record 1 hour and 8 minutes.

10. Email response from 101 12 May 19.30

I have recorded details of the vehicle and advised local officers so that any passing patrols can take a look.

We do not propose to visit the keeper of the vehicle at their home address as this is not proportionate.

Sean – 57212

11. My email to Cllrs 12 May 23.09

Dear all,

I am pretty speechless by the response that I received this evening from 101. No apology about losing my previous telephone calls, or thanking me for making the effort to report something our community was concerned about

However, more to the point, now we know for sure that nothing will happen to investigate what the van is doing. I can guess why they will not pay a visit to the drivers home address, but there you are.

Asking the Parish Clerk to write to the PCC Alison Hernandez has been suggested to me by the VC and I would be interested in people's views. Lets be fair we would probably only be looking for an acknowledgment of poor emails and poor handling ... and really a full explanation of how they arrived at the 'do nothing' response.

So, do we think Moors Management should now be informed and see if they can do anything, or want to do something? Bollards in some places maybe?

Anyway, I think we lost this one and Jeremy would you be prepared to speak to David, or would you like me to?

Happy days!