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**Subject:** OXTED BUSINESSES APPEAL FOR POLICE SUPPORT



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Dear Ms Townsend, Mr De Meyer, Mr Philp and Ms Coutinho,

We have been reading and listening to all the news pieces regarding the "national epidemic of shoplifting" and anti-social behaviour with interest, as this has also reached unacceptable levels in our own small town of Oxted, and we're sad to say we feel completely unsupported.

On behalf of The Oxted BID (aka Love Oxted), District Councillor Jackie Wren (Tandridge District Council), Oxted Parish Council, Limpsfield Parish Council and most importantly on behalf of the businesses of Oxted town centre, we would like to voice our concern at the increase in anti-social behaviour and shoplifting in our town - both organised and opportunist - and disappointment at the lack of police priority given to these incidents, with minimal response to the continued call outs by shop staff.

For some time now, we have seen a noticeable increase in shoplifting and anti-social behaviour, including dangerous driving at high speeds at all hours of the day and night up and down Station Road East and the A25, scammers targeting Oxted and other local towns, theft and vandalism of the shops with all our pride flags being stolen and fighting and threatening behaviour towards shop staff, including threats of knives and threats of having a firearm.

It is therefore interesting to read the quote from Chief Constable Amanda Blakeman from the National Police Chiefs' Council in a recent article on the BBC, where she said that the Police (it) was "doing everything possible to tackle offenders".

She added that police forces take any incidents of violence "incredibly seriously and will prioritise our response where there is a risk to individuals".

This has sadly NOT been our experience in Oxted where police presence is minimal (we do not have a police station any more, the nearest being in Caterham) and calls to 999 due to threats of violence against staff, even the threat of a firearm, have gone unanswered.

Many of the individuals who are often repeat offenders are well known to the community, the shop staff and also, apparently, to the police, yet nothing seems to be done about them, so they continue to target the shops on a regular basis.

- We have a Shop Alert WhatsApp Group that allows the shops to warn each other and share CCTV and other photos of the offenders, but this does not really seem to deter the individuals.
- We have just set up the DISC system for Oxted, but over the last year while trying to get it coordinated, we have had little response or enthusiasm from Surrey Police. Recently the council set up a meeting with our BID Manager and the police to discuss DISC, but no-one from the police attended. We hope that now this is set up, there will be more engagement from the police.
- Oxted Parish Council in association with Surrey Police, Limpsfield Parish Council, Tandridge District Council and the Oxted BID are currently in the process of setting up a number of CCTV cameras throughout the town, but it remains to be seen how this will deter shoplifters if there is no follow through by the police.

The shop managers/owners and staff of many of the stores in Oxted are at their wits end, having to deal with day after day of assaults on both their stock and their staff. The below comment is from the manager of The Co-op in Oxted, a shop that is relentlessly targeted on a daily basis.

*"Over the last four days we (Co-op) have had three bulk thefts, two staff physically assaulted, one verbal assault, £400 taken from the till in front of staff, made three 999 calls and given vehicle details and CCTV to the police. Our local EVRI driver identified several of the perpetrators and said they are from Hurst Green and known (criminals) to the police (although we know that the majority of the shoplifters are from out of town and not local). We have not had a response from the police to ANY of the above, despite having been visited by a new police officer a few weeks ago, who said he had been recruited specifically to help with our area. We have not seen or heard from him since... The other day, during one of these bulk thefts, the thief was told that a 999 call was being made and he just stood there, laughed and said: 'like that's going to make any difference'... They are laughing our faces on a daily basis, because they know there is zero response, so we are sitting ducks. It is only a matter of time before someone is seriously injured."*

While we understand that the Police are stretched, something has to be done about this situation. We need more police back on the streets and we need this sort of crime to be prioritised, because following Covid-19 and now with the cost-of-living crisis, high street businesses in small towns are on their knees anyway, without having to put up with stock walking out the door every day and threatening behaviour towards their staff.

We are sad to say that confidence in the Police is at an all-time low in Oxted, and we would very much appreciate a chance to sit down with Surrey Police to discuss how the town and businesses can be better supported in their daily battle against shop crime and anti-social behaviour.

With best regards,

Members & Directors of The Oxted BID

Jackie Wren, District Councillor, Tandridge District Council

Members of Limpsfield Parish Council

Members of Oxted Parish Council



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