



**Matthew Barber**  
Police & Crime Commissioner  
for Thames Valley

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Cllr Jeff Brooks  
Leader of the Council  
West Berkshire Council  
Market Street  
Newbury, RG14 5LD

28<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Dear Jeff,

I am writing to raise my concerns about the proposals by West Berkshire Council to reduce street lighting across the district. I have serious concerns about these proposals which I understand form part of your budget consultation.

There is a range of evidence which demonstrates what many of our residents will feel to be common sense. Namely that badly lit streets can exacerbate both the risk of crime and the fear of crime.

A systematic review of academic research concluded that improved street lighting reduces crime levels significantly (Welsh & Farrington, 2008). Additionally, there is other research that indicates that where this lighting is reduced that there was also an increase in terms of the perceived fear of crime in the community (Cozens et al, 2003). Painter and Farrington's (1999) research on Dudley Borough's street lighting improvement programme is one of the most influential studies in this area. Their findings revealed that improved lighting led to a 23% reduction in overall crime, with noticeable declines in both property and violent crimes.

It is of course true to say that some other councils have explored similar proposals, but these have not been universally successful. I understand for example that Cambridgeshire County Council reversed their decision and Derbyshire County Council cancelled the introduction of their reduced street lighting due to public concerns. Oxfordshire County Council have recently tried to impose such measures and have now decided to defer this decision due to the weight of public opposition. The College of Policing, RoSPA and the IRAP Road Safety Toolkit all recognise the safety benefits of adequate street lighting.

One of my greatest areas of concern is for the safety of women and vulnerable members of the public, particularly on a night out. It is interesting to note that you are currently proposing these changes only in residential areas and not in town centres around the night time economy. This seems to suggest that you do recognise the benefits of street lighting to keeping people safe and making them feel safe – but only in certain locations. We know that both the fear of crime and the actual risk are not limited to town centres itself. Sadly people can become victims on their route home from a night out. These changes will mean that people will feel less safe walking home from a night out, or getting a bus back to their own town or village only to find that the last part of their journey will be in darkness.

Following the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021 the Home Office launched StreetSafe to allow members of the public to anonymously raise safety concerns about public spaces. The single biggest cause for safety concerns raised by members of the public in Thames Valley is inadequate street lighting.

Thames Valley Police has been leading the way nationally in the work to protect women, particularly in the night time economy, with operations such as Project Vigilant. The unilateral

dimming or switching off of street lighting may jeopardise not just the confidence that has been built up, but also the safety of women in our district.

Of course there are other areas of potential criminality that are of concern. Overall crime has fallen across West Berkshire, but I want that trend to continue.

There has been excellent work by the police both through enforcement and prevention to tackle knife crime in the district. Knife enable crime has continued to fall in West Berkshire over the last year, and we have secured additional Home Office funding to aid the fight against anti-social behaviour in Newbury. Creating an environment where people feel less safe at night risks putting some of those achievements into reverse.

One of the biggest concerns from the public, that has an impact on local authorities as well as the police, is anti-social behaviour. There are many examples where improved lighting has been found to deter or reduce anti-social behaviour. At a time when I have asked the Chief Constable to increase neighbourhood policing resources to help tackle such concerns, it cannot be helpful to reduce street lighting across the district.

With all of these considerations in mind I would urge the Executive to reject the proposal. I remind you that crime prevention is not purely a matter for the police and under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 there is a statutory responsibility on the council to work in partnership to reduce both crime and the fear of crime, and hope you will consider these obligations in coming to your decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Barber', is written in a cursive style.

Matthew Barber  
Police & Crime Commissioner