

Frustration as Speed Watch scheme stalls

by Amanda Wills

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TWO villages that spent thousands of pounds on a scheme to target speeding motorists that they cannot use say they feel let down by police.

Their Speed Watch equipment has been gathering dust since the police officer responsible for the project retired in February.

Since then every attempt by Thanington and Chartham parish councils to find out who – if anyone – has taken over police responsibility for Speed Watch has hit a brick wall.

This week, the police admitted there appeared to have been a breakdown in communication and officers would be looking urgently into how it could help the two villages.

The Speed Watch system was launched by Kent Police two years ago. Parish councils were encouraged to buy into the scheme and monitor speeding in their own villages.

Volunteers man mobile speed measuring devices that flash up the speed of motorists driving too fast.

The volunteers log registration numbers of those vehicles and pass the information to the police.

If a vehicle has been caught speeding twice within 12 months the owner is sent an advisory letter from the police. If the same vehicle is caught three times a further warning letter is sent and officers may take follow-up action.

Thanington Parish Council was one of the first in the area to invest in Speed Watch. It spent £3,000 on the equipment, found two teams of

volunteers and started using it on speeding blackspots in the parish.

Then the police officer responsible for the scheme at Canterbury police station retired and the initiative ground to a halt.

"Now we have no one to pass the information to. We have been trying to contact the police but haven't been getting anywhere," said the frustrated clerk, Roger Cheesworth.

"We are really disappointed. We have the equipment and the volunteers and they cannot even supply a police constable to take the details. They have let us down."

Chartham council hasn't even been able to use its Speed Watch equipment as its 10 volunteers are still waiting for police training.

Council chairman Anne

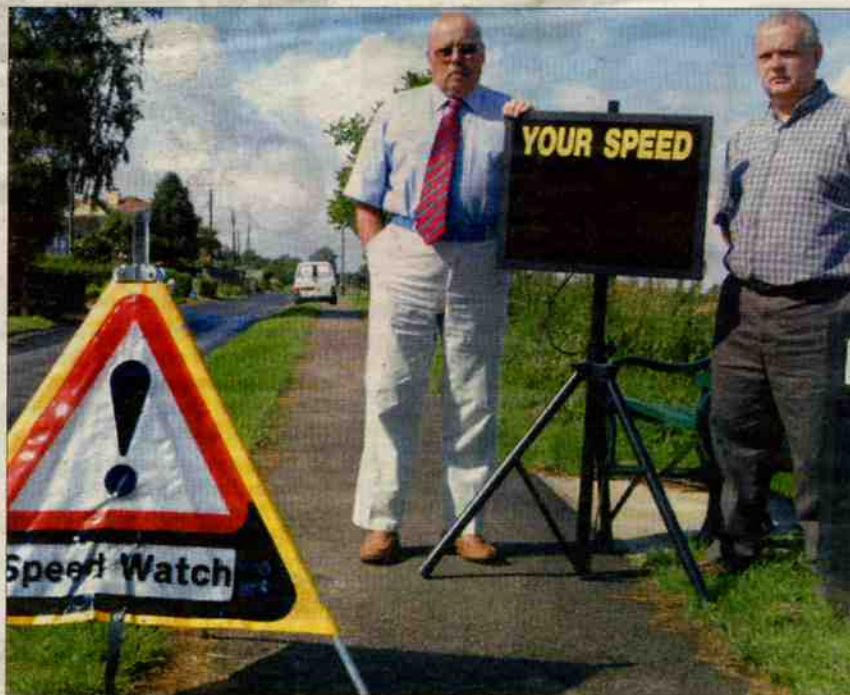
Dawes said: "We feel let down because we have invested in the equipment and can't do anything with it. It is frustrating."

In a statement, Ch Insp Lee Russell said: "We are concerned that there appears to have been a breakdown in communication about Speed Watch and we will be looking urgently at what we can do to assist the parishes that have signed up to this scheme."

County councillor Martin Vye said he would be writing to the area commander for east Kent, Ch Supt Peter West, to find out what had gone wrong.

He gave Thanington council £2,500 from his member's fund towards the cost of Speed Watch two years ago.

"I hope very much that this disturbing situation can be put right quickly," he said.



■ Roger Cheesworth and Andy Milton with the redundant Speed Watch equipment in New House Lane, Thanington

Picture: Chris Davey pd 1244565