

Witness Statement

Page 1 of 3

Criminal Procedure Rules, r 16.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9

URN:

--	--	--	--

Statement of: **Thomas Harman**Age if under 18 (if over insert "over 18"): **Over 18**Occupation: **Police Officer - PC 2385**

This statement (consisting of3..... Pages(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it, anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: **Thomas Harman**Date: **30/05/2018**

I am the above named person and I am making this statement in regards to the impact of catapults and missiles on the communities in LANGLEY, FOXBOROUGH and COLNBROOK, SLOUGH. I am writing this statement in support of an application to add prohibitions to the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) in these areas, in line with s61 of Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

I am a Thames Valley Neighbourhood Police Officer, attached to SLOUGH POLICE STATION. I have been a Problem Solving Officer on the East Slough Neighbourhood Team for the last twenty-two months and cover the LANGLEY, FOXBOROUGH, COLNBROOK and POYLE areas. I therefore believe I have a good understanding of the issues affecting the communities in these areas because I have engaged with residents, investigated crimes, interviewed suspects and supported victims.

My team and I also work closely with partners including Slough Borough Council and L&Q housing and regularly meet with members of the community through the Neighbourhood Action Group and Community Forum. This helps us to better understand the communities we serve, other than looking at the number and types of crimes we investigate as a police service.

As a result of this engagement with residents and partners, and collating crime statistics, it is evident that anti-social behaviour (ASB) and criminal damage involving catapults and other items or thrown stones are having a significant detrimental effect on the communities in LANGLEY, FOXBOROUGH and COLNBROOK. The Community Forum identified residents' primary concern to be youths committing ASB and criminal damage with catapults.

This is in light of a significant increase in the number of ASB incidents in FOXBOROUGH and COLNBROOK. There has been a 23% increase in the last twelve months, compared to the preceding year. This is in comparison to a 4.5% decrease across all other neighbourhoods in SLOUGH. Seven of the last eight weeks (19/03-07/05/18) saw a higher number of ASB incidents than the year before. COLNBROOK and FOXBOROUGH account for 11.2% of ASB incidents in SLOUGH in the last year. This is considerable given that these areas account for only 6.9% of SLOUGH's total population (ONS, 2011). An unknown but significant proportion of these incidents involve youths causing criminal damage or using catapults or stones to hit animals or property.

In regards to criminal damage, COLNBROOK and FOXBOROUGH account for 14.6% of criminal damage incidents in SLOUGH in the last year. Between 31st MAY 2017 and 17th MAY 2018, 15.3% (33) of crimes recorded in these areas were for criminal damage. At least 15 of these incidents involved a catapult or similar item or a missile. The majority of these incidents involved damage to vehicles by missiles hitting the windows or bodywork. One victim of criminal damage is severely disabled and has mobility issues and was targeted due to his disability, with the young males shouting abuse at him on several occasions and smashing his car and windows with stones.

Signature: **Thomas Harman**Signature Witnessed by: **N/A**

Witness StatementContinuation of Statement of **Thomas Harman**

There have also been a number of assaults that have been committed by youths in the FOXBOROUGH and COLNBROOK areas involving catapults or missiles. Residents have reported being hit by stones on the arm and head and some of these victims have been of primary school age. One victim was targeted for her perceived ethnicity and religion due to being Asian and wearing headwear. The young males shouted racist abuse and threw stones at the victim, while following her through COLNBROOK.

In the LANGLEY areas, there have been a number of assaults on young children as well as several incidents where catapults have been used to cause injury or death to animals. A swan was killed, orphaning several vulnerable cygnets. A cat was also struck, causing it serious injuries. These incidents have an impact on the environment and wider community as well as pet owners. These incidents have also made some residents fearful for the safety of their pets. A Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) was also struck on the back of the leg with a missile while on patrol. Although less frequent than in COLNBROOK and FOXBOROUGH, the severity of incidents in the LANGLEY area is still severe and is having a noticeable negative impact on the community.

Victims often report feeling anxious and vulnerable after these incidents and are fearful of repetitions. Many also feel afraid of going outside their house in case they are targeted again. Some victims have provided statements but have said they would not be willing to attend court so are offering a limited support to prosecutions. Several victims are actively looking to leave the area as a result of their experiences.

Sadly, there is a significant proportion of victims in the area that do not support police action. The predominant reason for this is a fear of reprisals. When officers attend addresses to speak to victims they often do not provide a statement despite being able to identify the suspects. This is because they have been targeted in their local area, or in their own houses. There is also a general feeling in the community that not enough is being done about the problems so feel that it is not worth the effort.

Engagement with residents in the area identified these reasons to also contribute to an under-reporting of incidents to the police, council and housing associations. The number of ASB and criminal damage incidents is therefore suspected to be much higher than the figures provided above.

The majority of offences are committed by a few young males who are well known to victims and police officers. Unfortunately there is often insufficient evidence to obtain a successful prosecution. This is largely due to a lack of CCTV or witnesses, and victims not supporting police action. Furthermore, unless these individuals are stopped after an offence there are rarely sufficient grounds for a search or to seize catapults and missiles. There is no legal requirement for children to surrender missiles, catapults or similar items to police if requested.

Victims have previously gone to the children's family members, however they have admitted that the children do not listen or respect them so there is little they can do to correct their behaviour. On at least one occasion an officer seized a catapult from a child and gave it to a family member who then returned it to the child. This then led to a continuance of criminal damage in that area however there was no legal reason for the officer to retain the catapult.

Formal measures to tackle this behaviour have also been largely unsuccessful. The lack of evidence has led to a lack of successful convictions which would allow the children to be compelled to engage with services. A lack of convictions also prevents Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) from being implemented. Civil injunctions have been implemented as well however these have not prevented the subjects from continuing to commit offences. Furthermore, civil injunctions are put in place on individuals

Signature: **Thomas Harman**Signature Witnessed by: **N/A**

Witness StatementContinuation of Statement of **Thomas Harman**

and do not prevent others committing offences in the same area. It is therefore not clear what the impact of the injunctions are on the local area.

It is therefore clear that perpetrators have relative freedom to commit ASB and criminal damage because there is little that family members, police or other partners can do to prevent this behaviour. This is a continuing problem which is having a severe detrimental effect on the community, and causing a significant demand on the police and partner agencies. Adding prohibitions to the PSPOs in LANGLEY, COLNBROOK and FOXBOROUGH will therefore provide enforcement options that will increase the risk of offending. This action is necessary due to other solutions proving ineffective and is proportionate to the effect of the behaviour on local residents.

Signature: **Thomas Harman**Signature Witnessed by: **N/A**