

SUMMARY

Scanning:

Stray, and illegally tethered horses, on common and private land are a long-term problem for County Durham, England. Since 2007 it has generated over 11,000 incidents incorporating road collisions, general horse nuisance and horse welfare issues, antisocial behaviour, and damage. The most problematic area within the County is Bishop Auckland with an average of 12 incidents per week.

The key objectives of partners were to

- Reduce the number of incidents of horse nuisance
- Reduce road traffic collisions and risks to motorists
- Protect the identity of Durham County Council officers and contractors
- Improve the welfare of horses
- Increase public confidence

Analysis:

Analysis showed the cultural history of a significant traveller community was the root cause of this problem. This group wanted to keep and trade horses however the cost of feed was becoming prohibitive generating illegal grazing and lack of control of the livestock. This was concentrated in specific families and particular areas.

Response:

A multi-agency partnership analysed and responded to the problem. The wider horse owning community was engaged with and educated regarding their management of livestock. Similarly legislation regarding the passporting and microchipping of horses was supported. Once this support had been provided a system to target and impound stray horses was initiated. Further preventative measures have been utilised in relation to locations to prevent illegal grazing.

Assessment:

- Initial reductions in 2010 of average incidents in Bishop Auckland from 12 to just over one per week. For County Durham the reduction was from 31 incidents to 7 per week.
- Since middle of 2012 there has been a steady increase in incidents of loose and illegally grazed horses but significantly a reduction in incidents of road traffic collisions (RTCs) as partners target problematic hotspot areas.
- Cost of RTCs reduced from an annual figure of £370,620 to £36,804.
- One principal organised crime group member receiving a five year ban on keeping animals following partnership enforcement activity.

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- Public reassurance has increased and straying horses have been removed as an official community priority since January 2011
- 92 horses impounded since October 2010.
- Over 500 horses passported and micro-chipped.



Horse Passporting Event held at Bishop Fire Station

SCANNING

County Durham, with a recorded history that dates back to 684 has a cultural heritage that is distinct from other areas of the country. Situated in the North East of England it has a population of approximately 0.5m and enjoys a mixture of rural and coastal areas together with concentrations of industrial activity. The coal mining industry, which was once a significant element of its identity, disappeared in the 1980's leaving an area with significant pockets of deprivation. It does however have a large settled community of Gypsy and Travellers for whom horse's are very much part of their culture and way of life. These horses are often illegally tethered and allowed to stray, which means they are often found on private land and the public highway. This creates a variety of problems notably: road collisions; horse welfare issues; and general horse nuisance including damage to public areas. Further whilst local communities suffer the inconvenience or danger caused from horses being illegally grazed in local parks and recreation areas, or wandering indiscriminately around residential areas, Police and other services have to deal with the impact.

Complaints have been received from both the public and locally elected councillors by various departments within Durham County Council. Further in the hot-spot area of Bishop Auckland local residents and motorists have complained at community group meetings including Police and Communities together (PACT) meetings,

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residents groups, and Area Action Partnerships (AAP), making it an official priority for the area.

Since March 2007 there has been over 11,000 reported incidents of horse related problems within County Durham. The most problematic area within the County was Bishop Auckland with over 43% of force incidents.

Highway Disruption

Force-wide statistics regarding stray horses causing highway disruption [ROAD] and stray or illegally placed horses [ASB] are shown per reporting year: -

Incident Type	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	Grand Total
Anti-Social Behaviour	425	218	248	265	362	570	2088
ROAD	983	1402	1415	1578	1789	1817	8984
Grand Total	1408	1620	1663	1843	2151	2387	11072

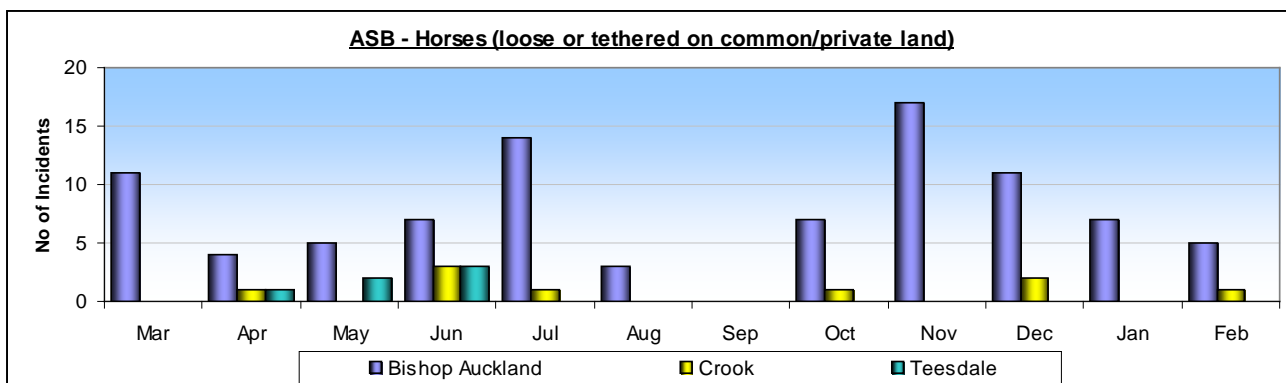
Horse-related road traffic collisions (RTCs) in County Durham for 2010/11 were also examined to investigate the risk of harm from animals straying on the highway, identifying: -

- A total of 16 incidents involved horses and vehicles colliding (13 causing damage and 3 injury).
- 43.8% (7 of 16) occurred in the Bishop Auckland policing sector.
- In a number of incidents the resulting damage meant the vehicle had to be written off.
- In at least two incidents the horse was subsequently humanely destroyed.
- In July 2010 the passenger in a vehicle struck by a loose horse required specialist treatment for facial injuries.

Using the pareto principle a more specific scan of horse related issues was undertaken covering a year between March 2009 and February 2010. This showed 326 incidents of anti-social behaviour classified as "Animal Problems" in this period of which 105 (32%) concerned were either loose horses or those tethered on common or private land. Scanning of the 105 incidents identifies: -

- Bishop Auckland had the biggest problem with 91 incidents in this period (86%).
- Crook & Teesdale were fairly comparable with 9 and 6 incidents respectively.
- Hot months were June-July and again during November-December.

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The key objectives of the project were to:

- Reduced the number of incidents of horse nuisance
- Reduce incidents of road traffic collision and risks to motorists
- Welfare of horses
- Increase public confidence that Police and public services were taking their concerns seriously
- Reduce demand on all key stakeholders
- Increase the budget to a realistic level for enforcement action
- Protect the identity of DCC officers and contractors
- Enforcement action on irresponsible horse owners

ANALYSIS

To deal with this problem Durham County Council (DCC) and Durham Constabulary (DURPOL) formed a multi agency problem solving group to determine the main problems and develop a pragmatic approach to solve any issues identified. This involved key stakeholders from DCC, DURPOL, Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue (DDFR), British Horse Society (BHS) and RSPCA. A scanning document using data from Police was produced to identify seasonal trends and hot spot areas. This partnership initiated a specific horse management focus group in June 2010, which met on a bi-monthly basis.

Location

The area has a propensity to this level of problem due to its cultural history with a significant number of settled gypsies and travellers, retaining the values and customs of previous times. One of these customs is to keep and trade horses.

Further there appear a number of hot spot locations surrounding the Bishop Auckland area of County Durham. Further analysis shows this area is on a main road that is used as a corridor by Gypsies and Travellers attending Appleby Fair. This is the largest horse fair in England for the travelling community in England and is held during the month of June. As such the problem is affected by a seasonal impact as other travellers come through the area.

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The geographical hotspots within the Bishop Auckland police sector include West Auckland & St Helens. The main areas affected are a park area providing ideal grazing. There is also an industrial park with large green spaces which, although target hardened in the past to prevent unauthorised traveller encampments, continues to be accessed for grazing. Neither area is covered by CCTV or otherwise protected by guardians thus providing the opportunity for horse owners to come and go freely without detection.

The second hotspot area is Tindale Crescent and South Church where horses were being illegally grazed on the area to the right of the Fire station with water from the river Gaunless for the horses. In this area fencing has been damaged allowing access to a main A road. The area again has no guardians on an evening as the area includes a Business Park and one of the two permanent Gypsy and Traveller caravan parks within the Bishop Auckland Area.

On the opposite side of the bypass are the residential areas of Henknowle and Woodhouse Close. Both residential areas provide open grazing for horses with access across two main roads. This is affecting day-to-day life within both communities, as horses are often grazing on recreational areas. The horses in question are not used to being handled and can be classed as wild, posing a greater danger to the community. These areas suffer from insecure or absent boundary fencing allowing access. Similarly individuals deliberately open gates or cause damage to fencing allowing horses to stray.

Offender

The main offenders are Gypsies or travellers that have settled within the Bishop Auckland area and who mainly prefer to keep cob horses as a breed. Horse breeding and trading is also part of the culture and can indicate status within the community. Over stocking/breeding of horses and a down turn in the market value have left owners with horses they could not afford to feed. This has been exacerbated by a low market value of the stock coupled with the inflated cost of horse feed due to low crop yields.

Although numerous members of the community will allow their horses to graze illegally there is intelligence to show one extended organised crime family creates a disproportionate amount of the incidents in Bishop Auckland. One of the difficulties the Police and other agencies have is not being able to identify the owners of the horses.

Victim

Victims are predominantly pedestrians, motorists and landowners who are immediately affected by the straying animals. Members of the public wanting to access public spaces were often unable to do so freely due to horse's being on the land. Further the collisions were occurring on busy thoroughfares. The temporary road closures that often followed accidents or the removal of horses that stray onto main roads also create significant inconvenience to a wide number of individuals and adversely affect Fire service response times thus putting lives at risk. In relation to the local landowners who suffered from the illegal grazing there were often reports of threats and intimidation from irresponsible horse owners who refused to move the horses. Further when perimeter fencing was erected this would often be broken. Conversely some land owners were also suspected of opening gates or causing damage to their own fences in order to get the unwanted animals off their land.

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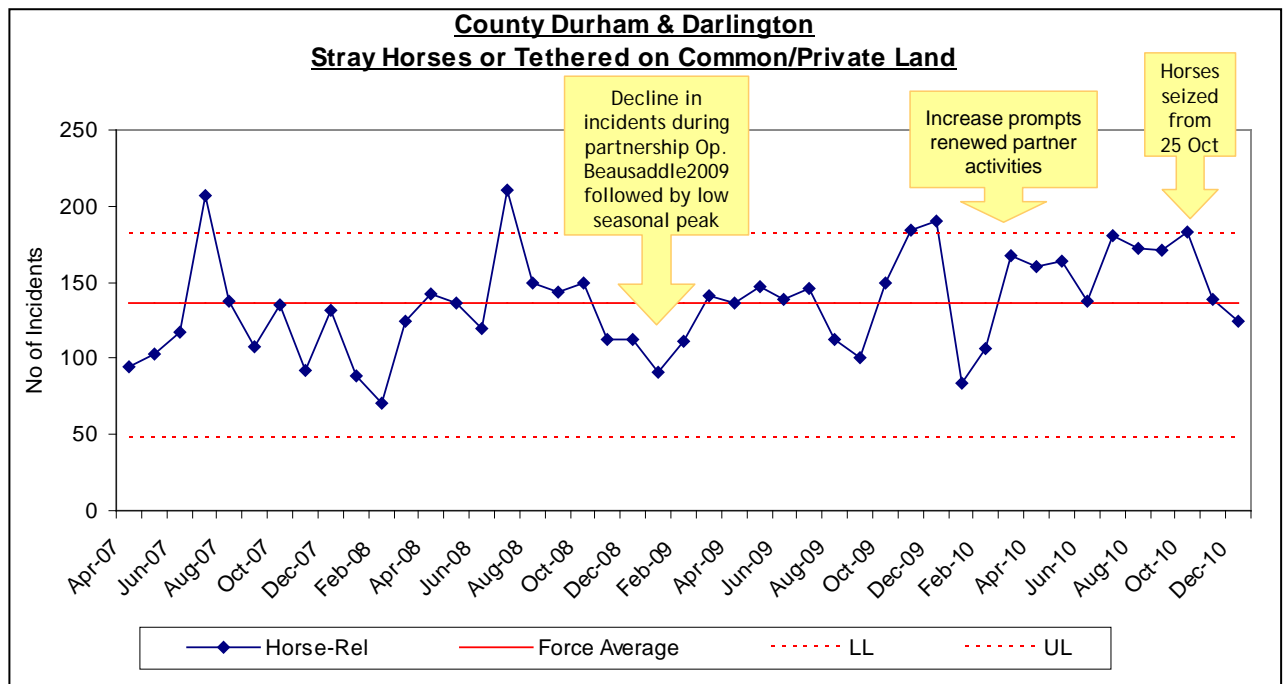
Generally speaking there was an under reporting by landowners of illegal grazing. Further there was a lack of farmers willing to allow Gypsies to rent grazing land due to preconceptions and peer pressure from the farming and wider community

RESPONSE

Previous local responses to deal with the problem were also found to be inadequate for a number of reasons. In 2008/09 partners carried out Operation Beausaddle to tackle illegal grazing. Thirty seven horses were impounded and transported out of the area. This was followed by a decline in horse related incidents but this only continued for a very short period. Intelligence suggested threats of violence and intimidation were used against those involved. Further the equestrian centre where the horses were kept was damaged and most of the horses were illegally recovered.

Further previous local arrangements had done nothing to deter the offenders. When stray horses were reported officers would ring the suspected owner to move them and no sanction was employed. Similarly the legal impounder contracted to work in the area adopted the same method and would contact the offender asking them to move the offending animals. This meant the horses could immediately return to the area they had been impounded from.

The graph below shows the short term nature of the enforcement operations.



Horse Related ASB & Highways Disruption – April 2007 to December 2010

The response involved the following partners:

- Durham Constabulary
- Durham County Council
- RSPCA
- Durham County Fire and Rescue Service
- Durham County Council Trading Standards Department

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- British Horse Society
 - National Farmers Union
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The general activity involved:

- Information letters sent to known horse and land owners.
 - Including a wide partnership to disseminate information. This included the wider horse owning community, together with the National Farmers Union and neighbouring Police Forces.
 - A leaflet was produced for private land owners advising them on how to deal with illegal grazing.
 - A horsemen's evening at the local Fire Station was organised following an increase in concern over horse welfare issues. Over 50 members of the Gypsy and Traveller community attended. The event was used to give advice on worming, passporting and to consult regarding the oversupply of horses and grazing. Attendees received free horse castration vouchers and purchased cost price worming medication with free veterinary advice.
 - The British Horse Society (BHS) have now trained police officers in basic horse handling techniques and use of a scanner purchased through partnership funding.
 - The use of covert surveillance has been used to monitor persistent damage to fencing at a field at Witton Le Wear. The person responsible was identified and action taken.
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More specific targeted interventions have focused on the following:

<p>1. Proactive Horse Impounding Operations: This is a partnership initiative, funded by Durham County Council and staffed by contracted horse bailiffs with the police in attendance at all impoundments to protect the identity and safety of the impounders. The proactive impoundment operations target horses that are grazed illegally on public land. The budget for these was increased by the Council from £15,000 to £90,000. Impoundments commenced in October 2010 and continued on a regular basis in 2011 (16 operations held over a 12 month period in 2011). In 2012, 2 impoundment operations have been held (in March and July). In total, 66 horses have been impounded since October 2010, costing approximately £66,000. Operations have concentrated on the main offenders.</p>	
<p>2. Daytime impoundments: With increased intelligence held by the partnership targeted daytime operations have also been undertaken in identified hotspot areas against problem individuals. Taking account of intelligence gathered from previous failed daytime impoundments partners have been aware of surveillance used by offenders and employed their own counter surveillance to good effect. 26 horses have been successfully impounded by partners in this manner.</p>	
<p><i>How does this work?</i></p>	<p>This response INCREASES THE RISK of having horses removed from public land and REMOVES THE REWARDS of NOT having horses effectively secured. It also REMOVES</p>

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	EXCUSES by setting standards and rules.
<i>In what context does it work?</i>	This response works where horse owners hold value to their horses and do not want to have them impounded. For a member of the gypsy and traveller community to lose horses in this manner is considered a great loss of face therefore the effort to retrieve them has been met with equal or greater force. It was felt that carrying out smaller targeted impoundments may not have the most significant impact initially but would gradually lead to the reduction of illegally grazed and stray horses. This would also become less costly, enabling the funding to last for a sustained period of time. Targeted daytime impoundments have been more costly to partners and require greater police numbers to ensure security of the operation. Impoundments of this nature have only been utilised against hotspot areas identified through intelligence gathering.
<i>What are the outcomes?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The horses are removed from the public space reducing their opportunity to stray into the road. • The horse owners incur a financial loss to recover their horses. • Horse owners are deterred from allowing their horses to become loose or illegally tethered. • Due to the impoundment process, the horses' welfare can be checked and appropriate action taken. • The impoundment process incurs a cost to DCC of approximately £1,000 per horse.
<i>Notes of interest</i>	<p>In order to protect the identity of staff and the contractor in the impounding process, the following measures were adopted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An impoundment procedure was developed County wide. • An independent email address was set up to receive all horse related complaints of illegal grazing.

Passporting and Microchipping: It is a legal requirement for a horse to have a passport and all horses born after 1st July 2009 must be microchipped. Maximum fine for none compliance is £5000. The micro-chip can be scanned and the owner traced which would provide proof of ownership. Passporting and microchipping events have been held at Bishop Auckland Fire Station and more than 500 horses have benefitted from this across County Durham.

<i>How does this work?</i>	This response works by INCREASING THE RISKS by reducing anonymity (meaning that loose horses can be identified), thereby REDUCING REWARDS of illegal grazing and REMOVING EXCUSES.
<i>In what context does it work?</i>	This works in a context where loose horses are not microchipped and therefore the owner of the horse is not possible to trace. This response also works where horse owners see the benefit of having their horses passported

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	and microchipped because of the risk of enforcement action.
<i>What are the outcomes?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500+ horses have been passported and microchipped. • Horses are now more likely to be identifiable if they are found loose or illegally tethered, therefore owners are more likely to ensure their horses graze securely. • A minority have refused to comply with passporting and microchipping requirements as they do not want their horses to be identifiable should they escape and cause an RTC. • Although a legal requirement, feedback from the passporting events has indicated that many persons have previously failed to comply with the law for a number of reasons – unwillingness, financial costs and difficulties with literacy. Enforcement opportunities under the legislation do not act as an effective deterrent. • To encourage pass-orting and micro-chipping, DCC made it a requirement within grazing agreements and the licensing of equestrian centres. • There has also been one enforcement operation on horse pass-orting which resulted in four horse owners in the area having to produce the relevant documents. • To increase public awareness and reassurance there has been media coverage from TV, news articles, website leaflets and verbal to community groups and key local contacts.

The following section considers more recent responses.

Fencing off public land: Fencing off public land has enabled secure paddocks to be created where horses can be grazed. This is a precursor to the Durham County Council Grazing Scheme. Horse owners are being allowed to let their horses graze in the paddocks pending an official agreement being signed.	
<i>How does this work?</i>	This response REMOVES THE EXCUSES by assisting compliance and INCREASES EFFORT to graze illegally.
<i>In what context might it work?</i>	This response creates secure grazing for persons who have previously let their horses graze on open land. It is likely to work when those who let their horses graze on open land are incentivised to graze their horses securely, for example, due to impoundment operations. It is also likely to work where horse owners want to legally graze their horses but previously have not been able to due to land not being available to them.
<i>What are the potential outcomes?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horses are grazing in secure paddocks and therefore are unlikely to gain access to the road. • Improved relations between police and partners and horse owners. • Early indicators suggest that the fencing may be

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	<p>reducing the number of incidents of horse related nuisance and RTCs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the meantime, horses are grazing illegally on public land, however this is currently deemed an acceptable arrangement whilst waiting for the start of Durham County Council's grazing scheme (see below).
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Durham County Council Grazing Scheme: The grazing scheme involves leasing DCC land to animal owners combined with a reference scheme. This is where owners who comply with the land leasing agreements can be offered a reference from the council that they can present to private landowners when looking for private grazing paddocks for their horses.	
<i>How does this work?</i>	This response REMOVES THE EXCUSES by assisting compliance and INCREASES the EFFORT in finding land to illegally graze.
<i>In what context might it work?</i>	This response will work where the horse owner is incentivised to properly look after their horses (for example by utilising a deterrent such as horse impounding) but may not otherwise have the opportunity to find alternative grazing (for example members of the traveller community who through reputation or discrimination have not been able to secure privately owned grazing for their horses).
<i>What are the potential outcomes?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horses are grazing in secure paddocks. • DCC is gaining rent for land. • Improved relations between partners and horse owners.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment has returned to the original period to assess the outcomes following the intervention.

Incident Type	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
ASB	425	218	248	265	362	570
ROAD	983	1402	1415	1168	1789	1817
Grand Total	1408	1620	1663	1433	2151	2387

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Over the reporting period there has been a dip in 2010/11 following commencement of impoundment operations but then a significant rise in incidents in the following two years. Partners have considered this and looking at National trends believe this is affected by the National equine crisis caused by poor economic conditions with feed prices being inflated, cost of horses lowered and unavailability of suitable grazing land. This has been exacerbated by overbreeding and the fact that all animal welfare charities are at capacity and unable to cope with the demand created. There are further factors namely of increased publicity and community confidence coupled with an easier process for reporting straying horses. In addition Meadowfield Industrial Estate was the main County Hotspot accounting for a significant number of incidents. Again due to a lack of immediate analytical work the partners were slow to respond although this hotspot has now been dealt with and horses and fencing removed.

The assessment then went on to examine the outcome specifically in relation to Road Traffic Collisions involving horses. Using Department for Transport figures the below table shows the following savings have been made in relation to RTCs.

Year	Force (incl Bishop Auckland)		Bishop Auckland	
	No of RTCs	Cost	No of RTCs	Cost
2010/2011	4 injury 20 damage	£370,620	2 injury 11 damage	£188,377
2011/2012	2 injury 12 damage	£191,444	0 injury 1 damage	£3,067
2012/2013	0 injury 12 damage	£36,804	0 injury 2 damage	£6,134

Number of horse related RTCs, injury or damage, and the associated costs for fiscal years 2010/2011, 2011/2012, 2012/2013.

The reduction in RTCs has been considered one of the more successful outcomes of the project. This can be accounted for in that RTCs occurred in hotspot locations which on the whole were faster A class roads with greater potential for injury and damage. As a result of targeting these locations RTCs have fallen although nuisance caused by stray horses has not but has been displaced to quieter more rural locations.

Since April 2011 Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue report they have attended no RTCs involving horses.

Continuous scanning has been carried out over time with the following results.

Analysis shows that since figures were collected in the first quarter of 2007 there have been seasonal trends and initially no appreciable lowering of the overall incidents. However as the project progressed incidents lowered with partners being in a position to respond quickly to any identified spikes or hotspots. Once proactive impoundments commenced the partnership were in a position to deal with incidents as they developed. Since October 2010 92 horses have been successfully impounded without incident.

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There appears a seasonal effect with horse related incidents in the spring to early summer. With this in mind impoundment activity has been increased at these times.

Feedback from the micro-chipping/pass-porting events has shown that although a legal requirement many persons fail to comply with the law. This can be for a number of reasons such as unwillingness to comply, financial costs especially if little enforcement activity. More complex reasons have also emerged such as difficulties with literacy.

When the proactive impoundments commenced in October 2010 there was a significant lowering of incidents during the first three months. However in February 2011 there was a significant upward trend and although initially slow to respond the partners did identify two hotspots in the Bishop Auckland sector. Further analysis showed that these were horses owned by one family. Both areas were targeted with impoundments and investigation of horse owners and landowners. This resulted in a significant fall in incidents in April 2011. Following this a large spike in May 2011 was attributed to the incidents at Witton Le Wear, the identification of the offender damaging the boundary fence stopped further incidents occurring.

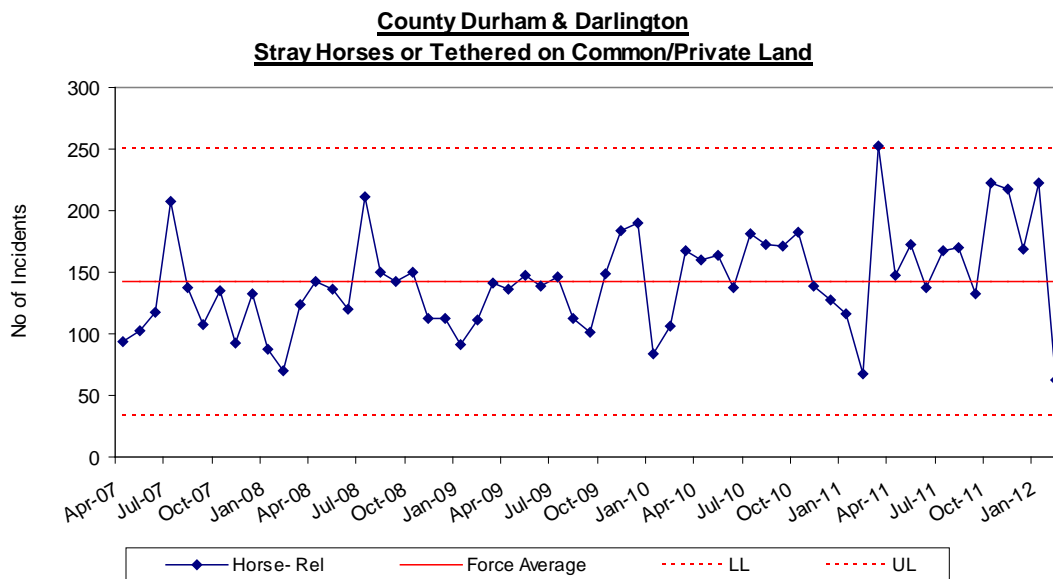
Incidents have tended to dip in November in previous years however this was not the case in 2011 with 217 incidents occurring. In January 2012 incidents were relatively high at 223 but this was swiftly dealt with by an operation within Bishop Auckland whereby four wild horses were successfully impounded. These had roamed freely in residential areas for some months and evaded all attempts at impoundment. This again resulted in a drop in incidents. An investigation was commenced led by Trading Standards as one horse was micro-chipped and identified an owner in Bishop Auckland. This resulted in increased intelligence but no prosecution due to limitations in pass-porting legislation.

Public reassurance has increased and horses have not been a PACT priority for Henknowle and West Auckland community since January 2011

Intelligence identified one target criminal responsible for many incidents of flygrazing and horse welfare issues. An impoundment occurred in February 2012 led by the RSPCA which resulted in this individual receiving a five year ban from keeping animals in December 2012. This was subject to an appeal which was heard in the Crown court on 16th May 2013. Although the appeal was dismissed sentencing was adjourned till 21st June 2013 when the judge indicated a stricter sentence would be imposed with potential financial penalties, custodial sentence and a more stringent ban on keeping animals. This individual is currently being actively sought by police for breaching a condition of bail imposed by the Crown court. All partners are in agreement that this is a major success in dealing with issues of loose and illegally grazed horses and associated welfare issues.

This same individual attempted to utilise members of an organised crime group to follow impounders following a daytime impoundment at Meadowfield on 20th March 2013. Police counter surveillance ensured he was identified and along with two others was arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to steal the impounded horses. He is currently on police bail.

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Horse Related Nuisance & Highway Disruption – 7th November 2011 – 7th February 2012

Partnership involvement has identified a number of issues including intelligence and enforcement gaps. The SARA is to be revisited and a new document written based on knowledge and experience gained by the partnership. Items for consideration in the new SARA are all the above and in addition the following –

Increased community confidence. *This project has reached out to a large cross section of the community. It was at one stage the priority for 2 separate PACT areas. It was a priority for the National Farmers Union as many of their members were adversely affected with their land being targeted for illegal grazing. The British Horse Society were concerned regarding the welfare issues and the perception of horse ownership. RSPCA were concerned with welfare issues. The project has received a great deal of positive media attention namely press, radio and TV. The Area action partnership, Parish and Town Councils have been involved with positive praise for partners involved including comments from the Mayor of Bishop Auckland. As a result of this increased confidence in the ability of partners to deal with the issues it is believed there is a greater willingness for the public to report issues **which may account in part for the increase in incidents since 2012.***

Since April 2011 DDFR report they have attended no RTCs involving horses.

There are other innovations in the pipeline, notably:

Continuation of fencing of council land, horse amnesty and private impoundments. Work is underway to complete fencing around the area of the fire station with kissing gate access points for public use.

In relation to **Horse amnesty**; the over stocking and seriously high incidents of horse welfare issues within the area have forced the exploration of the humane disposal of horses with serious welfare issues. Trading Standards report that expected changes to the Animal by products regulations will allow horses to be slaughtered for non food products without the need for a passport. The Partnership eagerly awaits this

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legislation as it is anticipated this will significantly assist in lowering of incidents and preventing unnecessary suffering of horses.

Use of a **volunteer trained in analytical work** to assist in dealing with intelligence gaps and providing more timely hotspot information to the Partnership. This volunteer may be available within one of the partner groups.

Finally **Private impoundments** is exploring the possibility of land owners to impound horses abandoned on their land without the need to employ outside equine impounders. This would involve removing the animals to an auction or slaughterhouse without the need to stable them.

State number of words: 4274

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