**APPG on Metal, Stone and Heritage Crime**

Inaugural Meeting Minutes

17 April 2018

**Attendees:**

Graham Jones MP (GJ)

Lord Birt (LB)

Dame Caroline Spelman MP (CS)

Nic Dakin MP (ND)

Kate Green’s Office

Cheryl Gillan’s Office

Joseph Priestly, Zurich (JO)

XX, Zurich

Antonia Grey, BMRA (AG)

Graham Jones opening remarks:

Prior to the Election we had an APPG on Metal Theft, which was verysuccessful. However, w struggled during election cycle to continue to see support and interest.

Following the Election and the approach by BMRA and given that stone theft has been an increasing problem, we decided to include stone and heritage to get more interest from parliament. The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 dealt with the smaller criminal element and thefts have fallen but still areas that need to be tackled, such as organised crime because the knock-on effects are tremendous. But Government has withdrawn all support to tackle metal theft. As a result, there is still a gap in government ability to tackle the issues.

Situation overview:

Antonia Grey, BMRA delivered a presentation on Metal, Stone and Heritage crime landscape:

to those assembled. (Attached).

Election of officers:

* Graham Jones (Chair)
* Caroline Spelman (Secretary)
* Nic Daikin (Treasurer)
* Antonia Grey (Secretariat)

Comments:

CS: We are definitely seeing metal theft but also grave stones and church masonry. We are being told that insurance is now not insuring some listed buildings. Moreover, many church officers and planning officers do not know that they can replace lead with a similar material so are not approving. I would ask that we find a way to promote this. It should be noted that Environment Agency (EA) officers not equipped to deal with serious crime and the illegal, often difficult operators. We do need to look at Enforcement more widely.

AG: I should point out that EA officers cannot go into non-permitted sites as they cannot use permit monies to fund action to tackle illegal activities. They have to apply for Grant in Aid Funding. It would, however, probably be more logical if they could use a portion of the permit monies.

CS: Yes, we need to look at this and perhaps at waste shipments to see where things are going.

GJ: I agree that we should proactively work with religious group at protecting and substituting materials. The first thing is to raise awareness.

JB: Northamptonshire has had spate of church roof thefts. These are small communities without the funds to replace the lead. I was told metal theft is down but no one is actually collecting proper data. It seems clear that this is organised crime. I think we need to talk to the Serious Crime unit to understand why we don’t have better understanding. Can we call law enforcement to account for why they are not handling this issue? It also seems there is no concerted effort between different agencies involved, including churches, to allow the use of substitutes. We do need to bring all the different agencies together.

CS: In actual fact, the Church Care England website lists all substitutes. Perhaps we make this know more widely. I am sure someone from Church House and Historic England (HE) would be happy to be involved too.

ND: I would suggest involving the Local Government Association as well.

AG: We need perhaps to look at disposal routes and how many of them are unregulated. You can find cash for scrap offers all over sites like Facebook and Gumtree and these sites are ideal ways to dispose of stolen material. The same is true for reclaim and salvage yards.

JP: May we bring up the issue of squatter’s rights in industrial buildings? We are seeing a spate of squatters going into industrial buildings, stealing the metal, fly-tipping waste and abandoning the site. Owners are then left with the clean-up bill. Can we close the loop-hole that sees industrial buildings unprotected?

CS: I think we also need to look at agricultural site that are also being targeted by metal thieves, who are taking machinery, gates, roofs, etc. (Manholes too).

Actions:

GJ: We will invite HE, EA and National Crime Agency (or Organised Crime division) to come and have a discussion round stone theft in churches. Will see if we can get more figures. Bring together key issues. We can then move onto metal.

CS: If you ask me for data, I can put a question.

Thanks

Meeting closed