

Crime and the perception of crime in East Herts

"What is the reality in East Herts? How can the council and ward councillors address this issue with residents?"

**This study will help set the scene for the forthcoming review of
Community Safety.**

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Outline

This report details crime and disorder in East Herts based upon recorded crime and anti social behaviour. Whilst it is clear that not all crime is reported, and therefore goes unrecorded, there is no reason to suspect that crime is less likely to be reported now than previously has been the case. In fact the growth of Neighbourhood Policing and the role of Police Community Support Officers has shown a propensity for the public to increase crime reporting as police become more locally involved with their communities. Against that background crime and Anti Social Behaviour continue to reduce.

This report presents statistical data at district and then at police section levels. It then shows the context against the backdrop of other Most Similar family Groups (MSGs), firstly in "All Crime" and then in the small number of areas where crime is not reducing. It is important to note that these tables just compare us with our peers. This 'family' group is collectively one of the safest peer groups in the country.

This report addresses public perceptions, specifically about community safety and anti social behaviour, as well as alcohol and drugs, before turning to perceptions of our partnership.

A summary follows the outline of our Community Safety Partnership activity and action plan.

East Herts District - Recorded and Detected Crime statistics

Comparison between two identical time frames (01/04/2009 - 07/03/2010 and 01/04/2010 - 07/03/2011)

	2010/11	2009/10	+ / -	% + / -	
Motor vehicle Crime	752	739	+13	+1.8%)
Robbery	30	23	+7	+30.4%)
Serious acquisitive crime	1141	1132	+9	+0.8%) 68 crimes
Burglary other	487	448	+39	+8.7%)
Domestic violence	297	326	-29	-8.9%	
Violent crime	1278	1313	-35	-2.7%	
Serious violent crime	30	35	-5	-14.3%	
Serious sexual offence	44	46	-2	-4.3%	
Less serious assaults	368	394	-26	-6.6%	
Burglary Dwelling	359	370	-11	-3%	
Distraction Burglary	9	11	-2	-18.2%	
Racial/ religious agg. crime	39	54	-15	-27%	
Theft from shop	516	548	-32	-5.8%	
Theft person	92	94	-2	-2.1%	
Anti Social Behaviour incidents	5852	6603	-751	-11.4%	
All crime	6418	6640	-222	-3.3%	222 fewer crimes
All crime detection rate	36.02%	35.24%		+0.78%	

Table 1

This table shows the numbers of offences last year compared to this year across the entire district. The green sections show the crime types which have been reduced this year. (Full financial year's data not available until April)

A snap shot of main crime types broken down into areas

	10/11	09/10	+ / -	%	
Year to Date Violent Crime:	Bishop's Stortford	424	422	2	0.5 %
	Buntingford	71	68	3	4.4 %
	Hertford rural	68	67	1	1.5 %
	Hertford Town	646	667	-21	-3.1 %
	Sawbridgeworth	69	89	-20	-22.5 %
	East Herts CSP	1278	1313	-35	-2.7 %
Year to Date Serious Violent Crime:	Bishop's Stortford	13	7	6	85.7 %
	Buntingford	1		1	
	Hertford rural	1	4	-3	-75.0 %
	Hertford Town	12	21	-9	-42.9 %
	Sawbridgeworth	3	3	0	0.0 %
	East Herts CSP	30	35	-5	-14.3 %
Year to Date Serious Acquisitive Crimes:	Bishop's Stortford	414	417	-3	-0.7 %
	Buntingford	71	68	3	4.4 %
	Hertford rural	61	66	-5	-7.6 %
	Hertford Town	633	652	-19	-2.9 %
	Sawbridgeworth	69	87	-18	-20.7 %
	East Herts CSP	1248	1290	-42	-3.3 %
Year to Date Theft from Shops:	Bishop's Stortford	235	210	25	11.9 %
	Buntingford	3	3	0	0.0 %
	Hertford rural	4	1	3	300.0 %
	Hertford Town	270	323	-53	-16.4 %
	Sawbridgeworth	4	11	-7	-63.6 %
	East Herts CSP	516	548	-32	-5.8 %
Year to Date Burglary Dwelling:	Bishop's Stortford	104	97	7	7.2 %
	Buntingford	31	31	0	0.0 %
	Hertford rural	45	58	-13	-22.4 %
	Hertford Town	132	119	13	10.9 %
	Sawbridgeworth	47	65	-18	-27.7 %
	East Herts CSP	359	370	-11	-3.0 %
Year to Date Motor Vehicle Offences:	Bishop's Stortford	172	165	7	4.2 %
	Buntingford	66	55	11	20.0 %
	Hertford rural	79	98	-19	-19.4 %
	Hertford Town	332	304	28	9.2 %
	Sawbridgeworth	103	117	-14	-12.0 %
	East Herts CSP	752	739	13	1.8 %
Year to Date Criminal Damage:	Bishop's Stortford	297	391	-94	-24.0 %
	Buntingford	104	118	-14	-11.9 %
	Hertford rural	65	108	-43	-39.8 %
	Hertford Town	555	560	-5	-0.9 %
	Sawbridgeworth	85	109	-24	-22.0 %
	East Herts CSP	1106	1286	-180	-14.0 %
Year to Date ASB:	Bishop's Stortford	1784	1911	-127	-6.6 %
	Buntingford	397	540	-143	-26.5 %
	Hertford rural	469	466	3	0.6 %
	Hertford Town	2707	3035	-328	-10.8 %
	Sawbridgeworth	495	651	-156	-24.0 %
	East Herts CDRP	5852	6603	-751	-11.37 %

Table 2 - This table shows the main crime types broken down into area. It compares this year with last year and shows the difference by volume and percentage.

All Crime - How do we compare with other similar areas?

(Home Office ranked “Most Similar Groups” - MSGs)

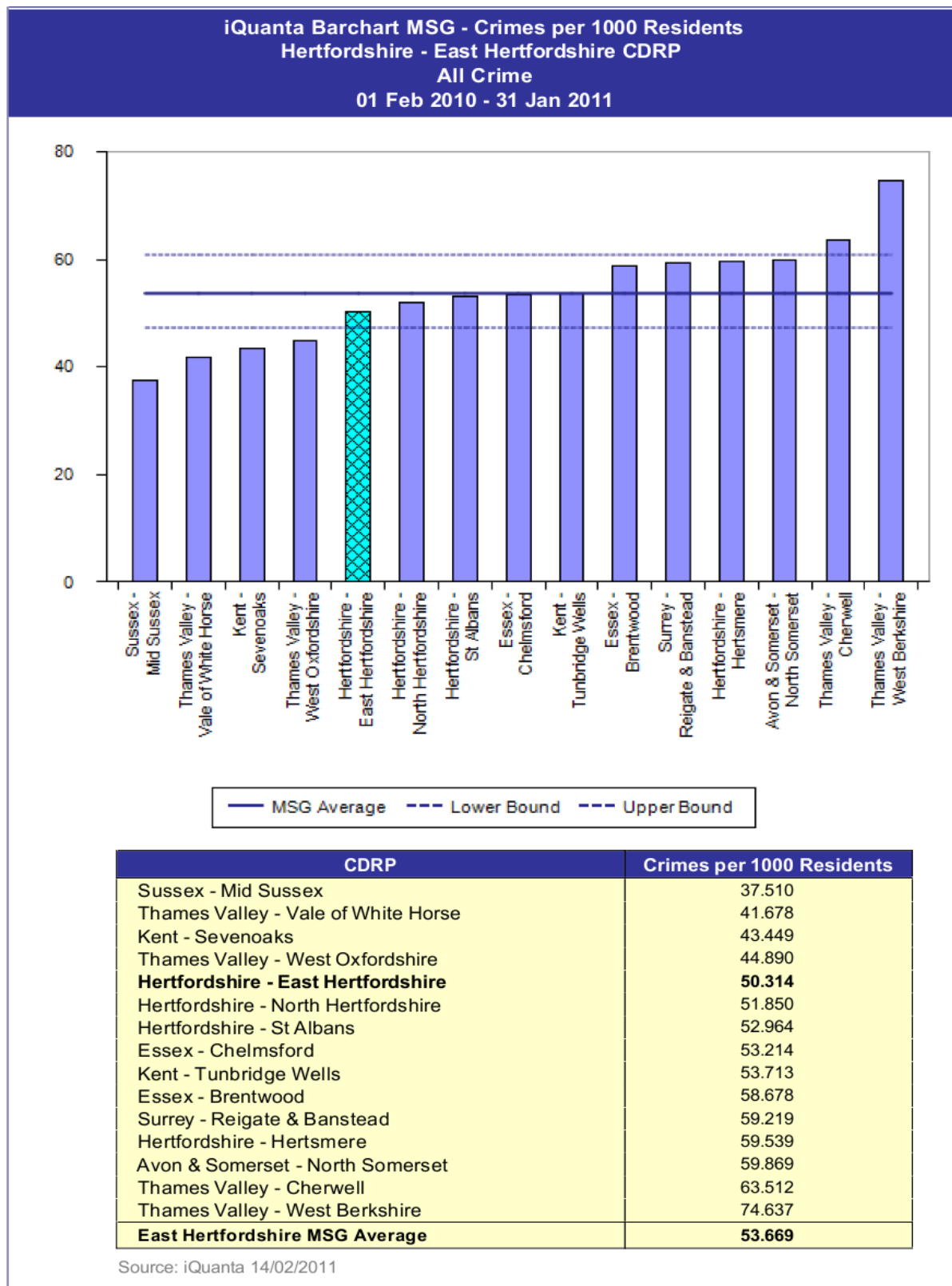


Table 3 - This table shows that we are better than average, and 5th safest in our already safe group

Examining the four crime types which have not reduced this year

1. Vehicle crime

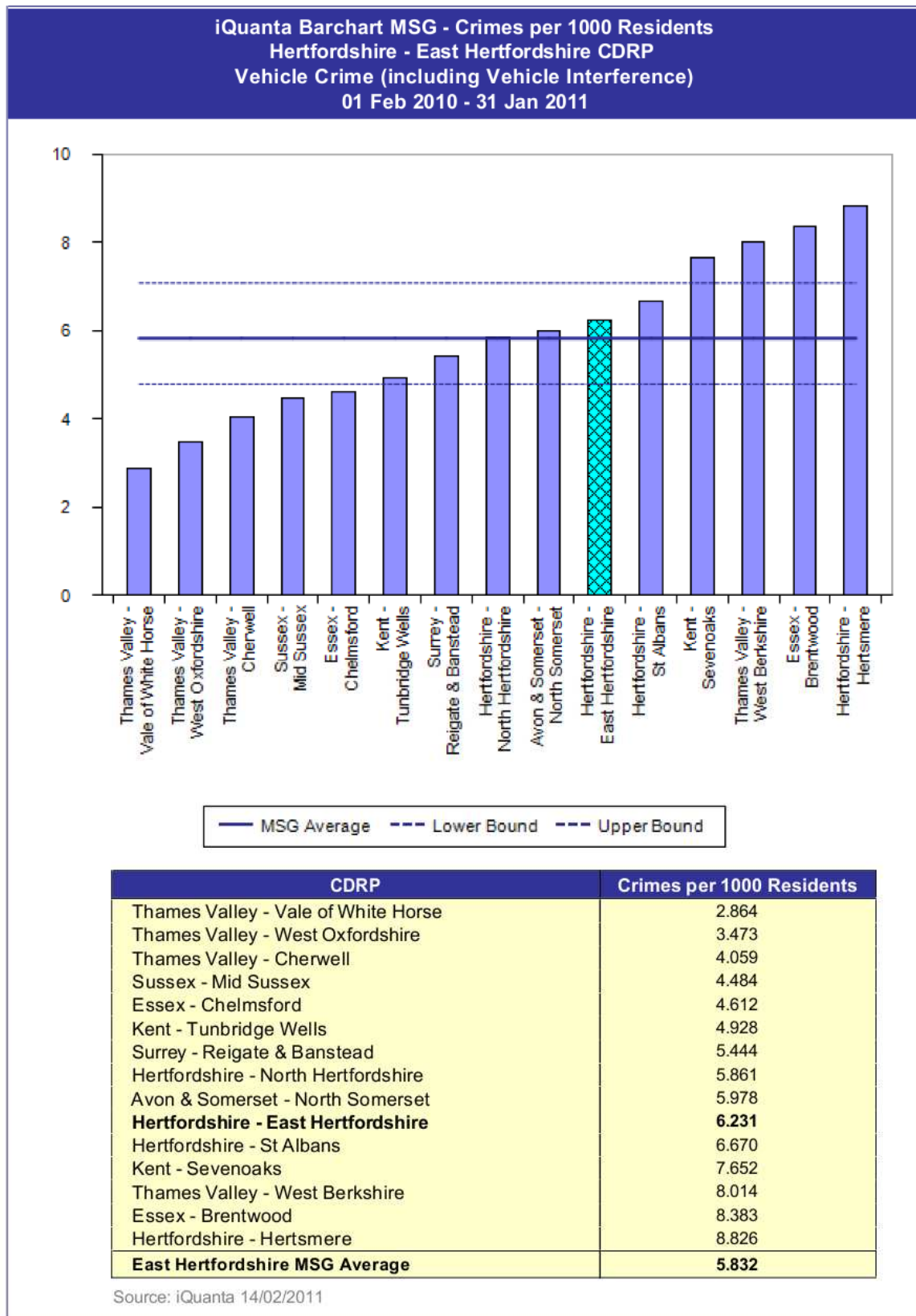


Table 4 - This table shows our vehicle crime to be just above average in this very safe group

Examining the four crime types which have not reduced this year

2. Robbery

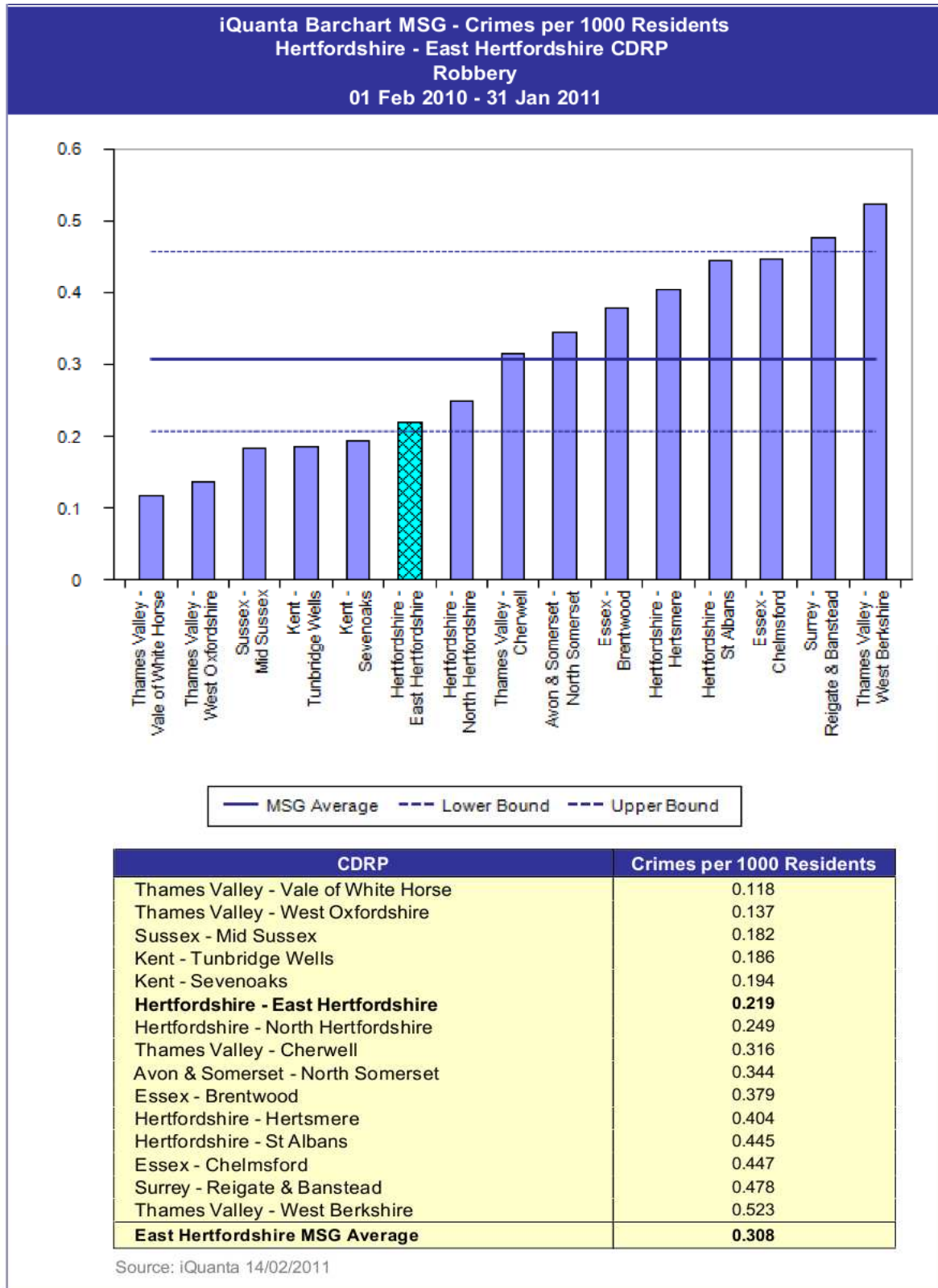


Table 5 - This table shows robbery to be well below our group average

Examining the four crime types which have not reduced this year

3. Serious acquisitive crime

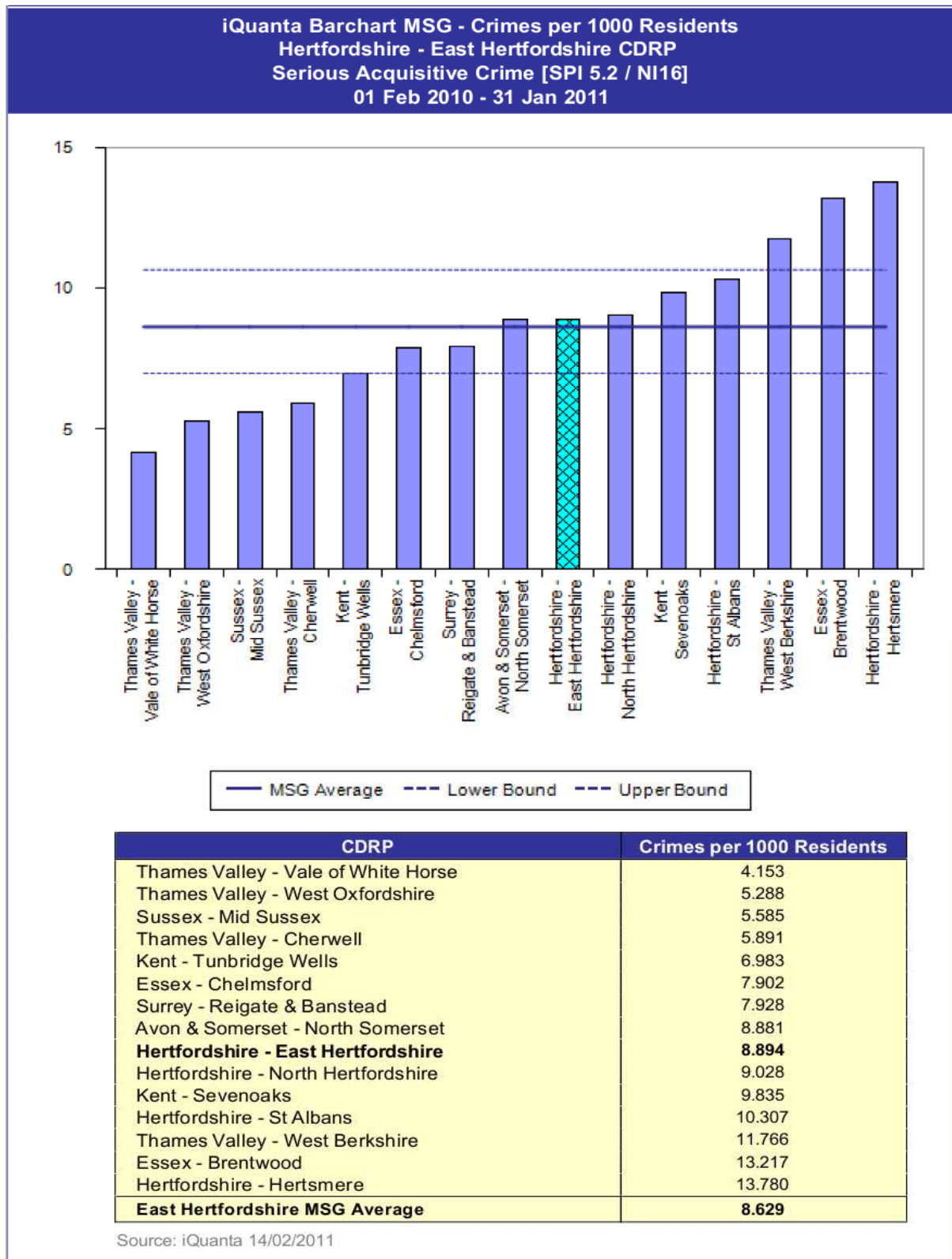


Table 6 – This table shows that acquisitive crime is the same as the group average

Examining the four crime types which have not reduced this year

4. Burglary Other (Sheds and theft of lead etc)

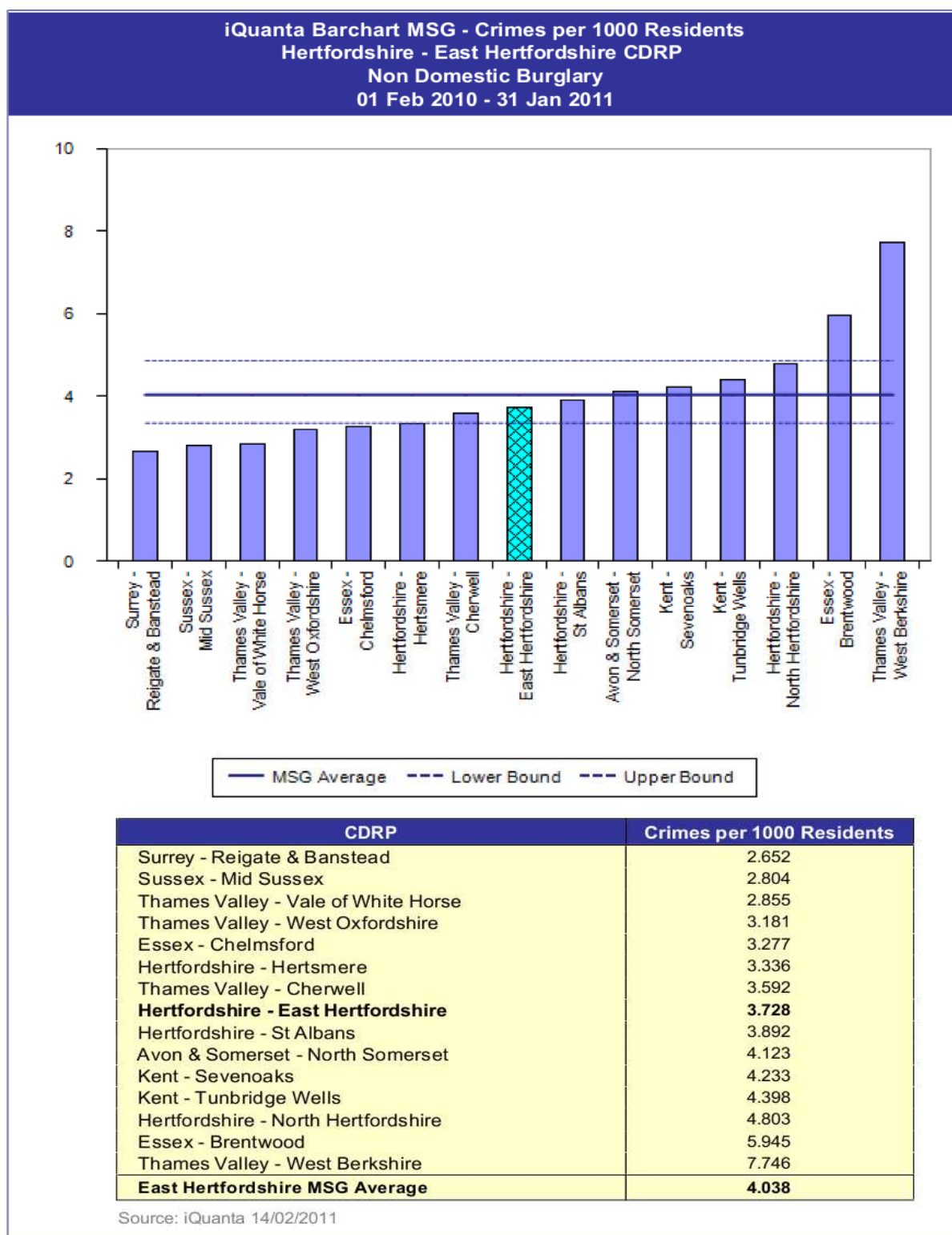


Table 7 – This table shows that burglary is below average in our group

Having looked at the actual crime statistics, which are amongst the lowest in the country, we now examine public perception.

Public perception (Extract from 2010-11 Strategic Assessment)

2.6 Reassurance and Confidence

Place Survey

The Place Survey field work took place in September 2008 and the results were released in June 2009. The survey comprised questions relating to the National Indicators that highlight a partnership approach is required in order to improve the quality of life for local residents.

Sixty four percent of residents felt that the level of crime was the most important element in making somewhere a good place to live. East Herts currently has the lowest overall crime rate in the county, and 90% of East Herts residents suggested they are very or fairly satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

Feeling safe perceptions

Risk assessment status: Low risk

East Herts features in 1st position in Hertfordshire with the majority of residents (64.5%) responding that they feel very or fairly safe after dark. When asked how safe residents felt during the day, 93% felt very or fairly safe, which ranked 3rd position in Hertfordshire.

Community safety/ASB perceptions

Risk assessment status: Low risk

Percentage			
Perception	East Herts	Most similar Hertfordshire Neighbour	East Herts Rank
ASB as a problem	13.9	Three Rivers (12.5)	3 rd out of 10
Noisy neighbours/loud parties as a problem	8.3	North Herts (8.8)	2 nd out of 10
Teenagers hanging around streets as a problem	36.1	Three Rivers (36.2)	3 rd out of 10
Rubbish/litter as a problem	29.6	St Albans (30.0)	2 nd out of 10
Vandalism/graffiti/deliberate damage as a problem	23.3	Welwyn and Hatfield (26.2)	2 nd out of 10
Abandoned/burnt out cars as a problem	4.2	St Albans (4.4)	2 nd out of 10

Table 8 – This table shows the percentage of people who consider these issues as a problem in East Herts

When compared to the other 9 districts in Hertfordshire, residents in East Herts have positive feelings towards community safety issues where the majority surveyed felt that community safety and ASB issues were not a problem to them.

Reviewing the results for East Herts only suggests that the biggest anti-social behaviour problems in East Herts are teenagers hanging around the streets (37%), followed by rubbish or litter lying around (30%).

Alcohol and drug use perceptions

Risk assessment status: Medium-high risk

Percentage			
Perception	East Herts	Most similar Hertfordshire Neighbour	East Herts Rank
People using/dealing drugs as a problem	19.4	North Herts (20.9)	4 th out of 10
People being drunk/ rowdy in public as a problem	27.6	Watford (28.0)	8 th out of 10

Table 9 – This table shows the percentage of people who responded who consider that drugs and drunkenness are a problem in East Herts

Twenty three percent of East Herts residents felt that people using or dealing in drugs is a big problem, which 6% feel that it is a very big problem. East Herts features 4th countywide for this perception and is therefore considered medium risk. Similarly, the actual levels of drug related offences covering the period August 2008 – July 2009 were 4.1 per 1000 head of population, making East Herts 4th across the county for actual drug related offences. This suggests the perceptions of East Herts residents reflect the reality.

‘People being drunk or rowdy’ was scored by 9% of East Herts residents as a very big problem and by a further 20% as a fairly big problem. Comparing East Herts score with the 9 other districts suggests a high risk as it features in 8th position.

Partnership consideration

Despite the fact that the top ASB type was rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour (section 2.4), street drinking equates to just 1% of ASB, 59 incidents last year. Furthermore, residents in East Herts felt that the biggest anti-social behaviour problems were teenagers hanging around the streets (37%), followed by rubbish or litter lying around (30%), not people being drunk or rowdy. This local picture contradicts the countywide view where ‘people being drunk or rowdy’ was considered high risk.

The public perception of how we deal with issues

East Herts featured in 2nd position for residents feeling that police and other local public services successfully deal with issues in their area. This perception reflects the reality where the actual levels of crime for East Herts during August 2008 – July 2009 were 29.9 per 1000 head of the population, which is the lowest crime rate figure countywide.

How do the public feel about the Police and the council keeping them informed

(NB Information relates to Hertfordshire County)

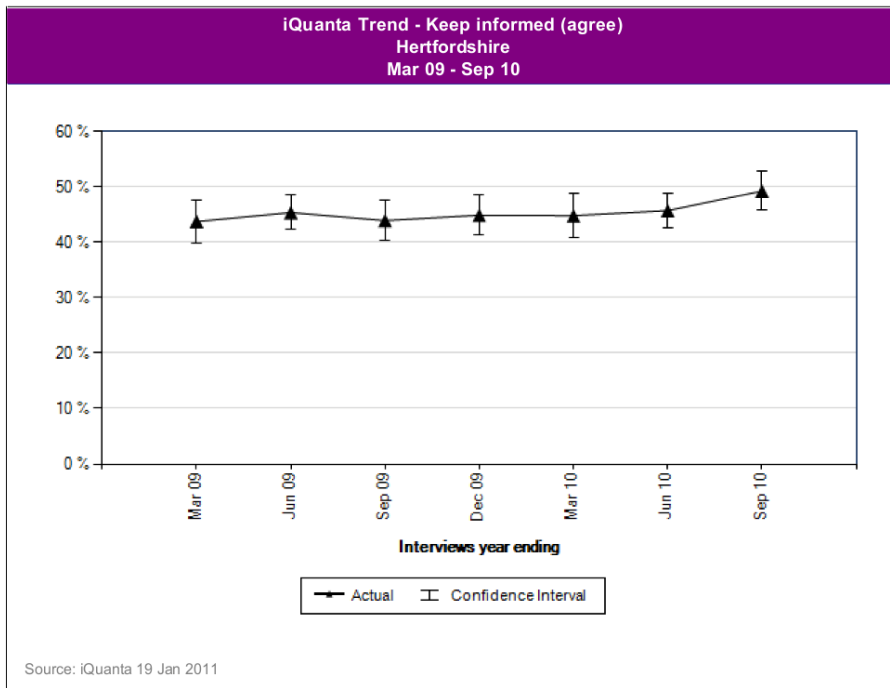


Table 10 – This table shows the % of people, who expressed a view, who agree that Police and local authorities keep the public informed about dealing with anti social behaviour

Our Partnership Activity

Community Safety Survey

From September – December 2009 1500 survey forms were made available to the public via Community Safety Partnership reception areas and websites, Town and Parish Councils, sent to community groups and distributed at public events (Appendix A).

Respondents were asked to list their top three community safety concerns.

There were 228 respondents. Of those who stated, 59% were female, 41% male, 172 under the age of 18, 56 over 18 and 33 over 65.

The community safety concerns were widespread with not one concern standing out as being dominant. The top three concerns of all 228 respondents were burglaries (13%, n86), theft/mugging (12%, n83) and anti-social behaviour (10%, n71).

All age groups felt that burglaries were a concern to them. However, only the under 18's felt that drug abuse / misuse featured in the top three. Only those aged 19 and above had anti-social behaviour (ASB) in their top three. Having not asked what type ASB concerns people, firm conclusions cannot be made. However, ASB featured in the Place Survey, where the biggest ASB problem in the district was reported to be teenagers hanging around the streets and litter lying around (see section 2.6).

It must be noted that the majority of those who listed their age fell in the under 18 age group. Therefore comparisons cannot be made directly between the age groups as the under 18's feature in the majority. Despite this, it may be worth noting that there were some large differences in opinion between the age groups. Thirty three in total were concerned about domestic violence. 91% (n30) of those were under the age of 18. Furthermore, 27 people were concerned about hate crime. 89% (n24) of those were under the age of 18 and no one over the age of 65 was concerned about hate crime.

Community Safety Public Meetings

During January – February 2010 the Community Safety Partnership presented at five public meetings across the district. The presentation was structured "you said, we did" providing a summary of last years consultation and the work the partnership carried out in response to it, followed by "what next" enabling a summary of the most recent crime trends and community safety issues to be shared.

During the question and answer session to the panel comments varied slightly for each town. For example, Ware and Bishop's Stortford focus was on pot holes, litter, graffiti, and driving with mobile phones. Hertford's discussion centred on activities for young people and the role the community can play with regards to community safety. Sawbridgeworth's focus was on poor street lighting and Buntingford commented on anti-social neighbours.

Those in attendance at the public meetings were given the opportunity to list three community safety concerns and after the presentation, asked to state if they still had these concerns and if the partnership had been effectively addressing them (Appendix B). A total 73 concerns were listed. Forty seven of those remained concerns after the presentation, and only 4 had their concerns dispelled. After hearing about the work of the partnership, 9 felt the partnership was effectively addressing their concerns, whereas 24 felt the partnership was not. As with the results obtained through the community safety survey, concerns were wide ranging. The top concern was speeding (n11), followed by litter (n9) and anti-social behaviour (n8).

The Community Safety Action Plan

The plan is attached at appendix A

There are however a number of example achievements below

- Increased support for Neighbourhood Watch - Neighbourhood watch signs, meeting rooms and general support
- Support for the Police in addressing concerns of rural communities: Further rollout of RIGS -the Rural Intelligence Gathering pager scheme. Purchase of night time vision equipment to address hare coursing problems. Specialist tack marking equipment purchased
- Support for taxi marshals
- Support for Street Pastors
- Support for PCSOs
- Community Safety Newsletter
- New community safety website
- Community Safety Accreditation scheme
- Numerous crime prevention initiatives – purple bells, panic alarms
- Support for LIFE scheme
- A double page spread in Link this month

Summary

The East Herts Community Safety Partnership has again achieved excellent results for those who live, work or travel in East Herts. The communications group of the Community Safety Partnership continues to broadcast the good news. Its latest product being a double page spread about Community Safety in the Link magazine, other newsletters have been produced. Our crime statistics show that overall crime continues to not only be low and but continues to reduce in East Herts. This has clearly contributed to East Herts being officially the sixth best place to live in the entire country. (Halifax quality of life survey 2010)

Whilst there are a small number of crime types which stubbornly refuse to decline, these amount to a small number of offences. Despite these small rises, the total number of recorded crimes over the reporting period fell by 222 or 3.3%, against a backdrop of year on year crime reductions in East Herts. The Community Safety Partnership and the Police in particular are to be congratulated for their work in achieving this.

- This message needs to be communicated to the public more effectively

In respect of public well being, the reduction of Anti Social Behaviour incidents is also excellent news. There were 751 fewer incidents reported this year compared to the same period last year, a reduction of 11.4%. This must be coupled with the fact that we are in second position for residents feeling that police and other local public services successfully deal with issues in their area.

- This message needs to be communicated to the public more effectively

Challenges still exist about dealing with public perceptions of behaviour fuelled by alcohol or drugs. In many respects both of these matters lie within the gift of the partnership.

The local authority is the regulatory body for licensing and it should be within their power to influence the extent of alcohol fuelled issues through enforcement of robust policy.

Public concerns over drugs can paradoxically be raised by successful policing activity. Clearly substance misuse needs to be addressed through a combination of treatment and policing, but drug offences are generally identified by police pro-activity, and would have escaped headline media attention if not detected.

- Careful consideration needs to be given to how the promotion of detection of drugs offences impacts upon public perception about drugs being a serious matter of public concern.

There will be a significant number of pressures which will influence next year's crime and anti social behaviour figures. Apart from the obvious reduction in public sector resources, there is a danger of agencies adopting a parochial approach at a time when the need for partnership working and sharing resources for mutual benefit could not be greater. The funding of CCTV is a case in point. There is clear evidence that CCTV is both an effective deterrent and vital tool in evidence collation. It continues to have strong public support and they are reassured by its presence. There should be an open discussion between the CSP and town councils over the future of CCTV in East Herts to ensure an equitable solution.

- The discussion of CCTV funding should be part of the review of Community Safety
- Likewise the future funding of council supported PCSOs needs clarifying

The structure of the partnership is under review to reduce the number of meetings that multi agency staff attend. The Partnership is further exploring the possibilities of co-location; we already have a Police 'ASB' officer working part time from our Wallfields offices.

The partnership is a healthy one, but it faces a number of challenges. Clearly a downward spiral of crime cannot continue in perpetuity, and against a backdrop of likely increasing social decline and scarcer resources, the need for shared resources and the importance of role of the elected member has never been more necessary to promote effective Community Safety.

Brian Simmonds

HLCS

March 2011