



**Colin's Blog**  
**Springing forward**  
**Friday 9<sup>th</sup> March**

New Life  
New Beginnings  
New Horizons  
New Challenges

Spring is just around the corner, bringing with it new life, new beginnings, new horizons and of course, new challenges!

With the UK still suffering from the effects of austerity, there are still tuff times ahead, coping with even more financial constraints, cutbacks and the knock-on effects that coincide with economic downturn, not only in the UK, but across Europe and beyond.

We will all be expected to continue to try to **'DO MORE, WITH LESS,'** and will need to be even more dependent on the good will and support of everyone around us.

Looking back in time, and at the famous words of Winston Churchill *'Never was so much owed by so many to so few,'* but not wishing to take away the very importance and relevance that his speech had relating to the brave and gallant efforts of the RAF, a similar quote could be used today, to describe the dedicated efforts of the men and women of our emergency services who serve the public 24/7 often under difficult circumstances and with reduced resources at their disposal.

All of this, serves to highlight the growing importance of community cohesion, the work of the voluntary sector and in particular, the value of the thousands of people who volunteer their time and services to Neighbourhood Watch.

**SPRING WATCH** is intended as a platform to promote the work of Neighbourhood Watch, and other Watch schemes and to encourage community involvement as well as the return of old fashioned values, whereby, people look out for each other, and, regardless of race, creed, age or gender, everyone working together towards mutual respect and understanding.

Gone are the days when we can just pass the buck onto someone else, which is why I use the slogan: **'HELPING COMMUNITIES TO HELP THEMSELVES.'**

With the support of my friends and colleagues from Epping Forest District Neighbourhood Watch, and alongside my friend from Essex County Fire & Rescue, I will be formally launching **'SPRING WATCH 2018'** from the charity stall adjacent to Barclays Bank and Costa Coffee, on Epping Market from 9am until around midday on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018.



**Life isn't about finding yourself. LIFE IS ABOUT CREATING YOURSELF !**

## **SENSE & SENSIBILITY REMINDER - POTS AND PLANTS WARNING!!**

I have updated this message, which I have sent out in the past:-

Spring and Easter are approaching, and hopefully, Summer is not too far away, the only down side being the usual crime trends that accompany it.

In past years, there has been a sizeable increase in the theft of large pot plants and hanging baskets from private houses throughout Essex.

Where the thieves have been seen, it is reported that they simply pull up outside the house, usually in a van, two men walk into the garden then lift the pot into the vehicle and drive off. It's all over in a few seconds. Past trends indicate that the thieves target large pot plants (some of the ones stolen were valued at over £200 each), as well as garden ornaments and mature hanging baskets. Almost without exception the thefts have occurred from FRONT gardens.

There are very few ways by which you can secure a large terracotta pot to the floor and if you chain hanging baskets to their brackets, past offences have shown that the thieves may simply pull the brackets from the wall causing more damage.

The best advice we can give is not to display such items where passing thieves will be able to see them from the highway. If you have valuable pots and hanging baskets display them in the BACK garden; at least over the summer period.

The thieves know that there is big money to be made in stolen pot plants, hanging baskets, garden furniture, lawnmowers and other gardening equipment at this time of the year. We appreciate these items are difficult to secure but at the very least, don't make it easy for them.

**And, whilst talking about the vulnerability of our front gardens, here are some more thoughts from me: -**

Personally speaking, whilst I travelled around the district in the past, as the weather improves, and the daylight increases, I often noticed **bicycles, children's scooters and ride-on toys** left insecure and strewn around front gardens or lying against fences, walls and hedges, often on the public side of garden boundaries (footpaths etc).,

As both a parent and grandparent, I know how expensive some of these items are to buy, which is why I recommend that we all remember to take appropriate steps to ensure that these items don't become easy pickings for thieves!"

My final thought is that it is far easier to take precautions against theft than to comfort and pacify a distraught child who has lost his or her favourite possession!

And, before I sign off, something for dog owners to consider, is that 49% of dogs that are taken, (that's stolen), from their owners, are taken from their front gardens!



Website: [www.essex.police.uk/my\\_neighbourhood.aspx](http://www.essex.police.uk/my_neighbourhood.aspx)

POLICE NON-EMERGENCY NO: 101 IN AN EMERGENCY ALWAYS DIAL 999  
**ESSEX WATCH – HELPING COMMUNITIES TO HELP THEMSELVES**



## ***WATCH OUT – THERE'S A THIEF ABOUT***

### **LATEST FROM ACTION FRAUD: -**

# **Cold spell sparks a warning for last minute skiers as victims lose over £200k in 2017 to ski chalet fraud**

2nd March 2018

**As people look at booking last minute skiing holidays for the year, Action Fraud and the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) are warning of the threat posed by fraudsters.**

In 2017, victims of ski chalet fraud lost a **total of £231,875** to fraudsters. This is an average of **£2016 per person** and an eight percent increase on the year before.

Reports show that fraudsters are selling bogus ski chalet holidays to unsuspecting victims who are paying large deposits for a property. Once they make the payment they never hear from the property agent again.

In some instances, victims will turn up in the mountains to find their chosen chalet does not exist or is being used by other holidaymakers.

The vast majority of people who go on winter sports holidays have a trouble-free experience, but for some, problems can occur. Holidaymakers booking their flights, transfers and chalets online through separate suppliers are particularly vulnerable to offers that on the surface appears great value for money, but, are a scam.

**Head of Action Fraud, Pauline Smith, said:** “We have seen a rise in the number of ski chalet fraud reports made over the past two years and the impact of falling victim to this type of fraud can be far greater than the financial loss, people can end up missing out on a well-deserved break and left with feelings of distrust which may stop them from booking online in the future. We hope that by raising awareness, people will feel better able to protect themselves

“We recommend that you are thorough when researching a last-minute holiday and that you book directly with an airline or hotel, or through a reputable agent. When deciding to deal directly with a property owner or letting agent, be sure to ask them questions about the booking, room, location and area.

“We urge anyone who believes they have been a victim of fraud to report the incident to Action Fraud.”

**Chief Executive of ABTA, Mark Tanzer, said:** “Unfortunately travel is a very attractive area for fraudsters, who are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the way they target the public and ski chalet bookings. As these are often of high value with scarce availability, it is a very lucrative area for them. Look for membership of legitimate travel companies such as ABTA and follow police advice, as well as the general information and tips from Get Safe Online. Travel fraud does not only result in financial losses, the emotional costs can also be severe, with much anticipated holidays or trips to visit loved ones being cancelled at very short notice. Victims often only find out once they’ve arrived in resort that they’ve been ripped off.”

### **Minimise the risks of falling victim to ski holiday fraud:**

- **Do your research:** Don’t just rely on one review - do a thorough online search to check the holiday company’s credentials. If a company is defrauding people there is a good chance that consumers will post details of their experiences, and warnings about the company.
- **Stay safe online:** Check the web address is legitimate and has not been altered by slight changes to a domain name – such as going from .co.uk to .org
- **Pay safe:** Be cautious if you're asked to pay directly into a private individual’s bank account. Paying by direct bank transfer is like paying by cash – the money is very difficult to trace and is not refundable. Wherever possible, pay by credit card or a debit card.
- **Check paperwork:** You should study receipts, invoices as well as terms and conditions. Be very wary of any companies that don’t provide any at all.
- **Look for the logo:** Check whether the company is a member of a recognised trade body such as ABTA. If you have any doubts, you can verify membership of ABTA: <https://abta.com/find-a-member>
- **Take out travel insurance:** Always make sure that you have adequate insurance in place. This can be brought directly from an insurance broker or the travel company.
- **Use your instincts:** If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

- **Royal Mail has announced that it has successfully intercepted 3 million fraudulent letters from reaching UK homes since stepping up its drive against criminals in November 2016.**
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- Several initiatives have been set up to protect consumers from fraudulent mail which can include invitations to participate in fake lotteries with prizes and letters from people posing as “clairvoyants”.
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- Some of the fraud prevention initiatives created by Royal Mail include; stopping scam mail from reaching letterboxes by impounding at distribution centres and training frontline workers to identify scam mail. Royal Mail also provide a special helpline, email address and Freepost address for customers.
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- Stephen Agar, Managing Director of Letters at Royal Mail said: “We are committed to doing everything we can to stop this fraudulent material from reaching UK households”
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- “We continue to deploy a range of different initiatives to keep one step ahead of the scammers.”
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- A joint initiative with the National Trading Standards Scams Team was originally introduced in 2014 where thousands of frontline workers at Royal Mail were trained in how to identify scam mail and spot potential victims.
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- The National Trading Standards Scams team estimate postal scams could be netting criminals worldwide up to £10 billion a year
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- Read more on the Royal Mail website.
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- Please note: Action Fraud is not responsible for the content on external websites
- **If you think you have been a victim of fraud you should report it to Action Fraud by calling 0300 123 20 40 or by using the online reporting tool: - [https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/report\\_fraud](https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud)**

**Remember:** Keep Alert, Keep Secure, Keep Safe, and have a good weekend!

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You can also read my log at: <http://www.eppingforestnhw.org.uk/>

