

## It Could Never Happen Here?

I wonder what you are feeling about the recent urban riots in inner cities which horrified and shocked us all? Do you blame irresponsible feral youngsters, mindless violence, soft policing, lack of parental control or lack of respect for authority? Is it poverty, gang culture, recent cuts, sheer greed, the welfare state or ineffective leadership? Or is it just that bad things always seem to happen in August? Take your pick from any or all of the above; the press certainly have!

### Rural Life Not so NEET

Thank goodness we live in the Wychwoods, this demi-Eden, rather than Tottenham or Hackney. It could never happen here. Or could it? Perhaps complacency is misplaced. Even here the flames of disaffected youth can lick perilously near. We have petty crime; we have drug abuse, too few buses, youth centres always at threat of closure, expensive property which means that some of our young people have to leave the area. Many youngsters nationally are disaffected with the education system and unemployed. The government acronym is NEET - not in education, employment or training. UK figures are shocking; of all Britons aged 16 to 24, 16% are NEET. 63% of white working class 16 year old boys and 50% of black Caribbean boys have a reading age of less than 7. In Oxfordshire there are over 700 NEETs almost half of these will continue as long term unemployed. In 2009 NEETs constituted 7.1% of 16 to 18 year olds, well exceeding the OCC target of 4%. As you might suspect, a

quarter of these are in Banbury and SE Oxfordshire, but even in our own triangle of Carterton, Woodstock and Chippy, there are around 100 young people in this category.

### Engaging with Young People

On the other hand rural communities are uniquely placed to tackle these issues across school, work and home. We have strong communities, loads of local activities, strong family values as our wonderful PTA demonstrate, great schools and very many successful entrepreneurial businesses, as testified by our list of advertisers.

Access to training and employment is a key issue in keeping our youngsters in this area. One example of local action is the NEET Interface for Oxfordshire, just initiated by local residents Emma Earl and Jon Treanor. This is a 'social enterprise' to try to encourage Oxfordshire businesses to take on unskilled youngsters in short term internships. The businesses gain a source of low-cost recruitment without long term obligation. For young people this can be their chance to turn their lives around. Emma and Jon hope to have 30 companies signed up to the scheme by mid-October - all kinds of businesses are offering help from Oxford Football Club to Oxford Instruments to Frilford Golf Club to local hairdressers. If you are interested contact [earl.emma@gmail.com](mailto:earl.emma@gmail.com) or: [jon@neetinterface.co.uk](http://jon@neetinterface.co.uk).

Could it happen here? Not if we take local action now and give a second chance to those who make mistakes in adolescence.

**Liz Watson**