

**Force Disclosure Unit**

Wiltshire Police HQ

London Road

Devizes

Wiltshire

SN10 2DN

Tel 101 ext 62005

www.wiltshire.police.ukdisclosure@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk

XXXXXX – by email

Date: 3rd February 2025

Your ref: FOI

Our ref: FOI 2025 / 130

Reply contact name is: Nick Penny

Dear XXXXXX,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 2nd February 2025 concerning Thefts from Churches.

I am required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to handle all requests in a manner that is blind as to the identity and motives of the requestor. Any information released as a response to a request is regarded as being published and therefore in the public domain without caveat.

Your request for information has now been considered and I am not obliged to supply the information you have requested.

You wrote:

In 2024 how many reports of theft from churches were made?

The name and location of each church if possible.

In each case what was stolen?

Were the items recovered?

The estimated value of what was stolen?

Were any prosecutions made?

How many churches in total reported thefts?

The same information for the years 2019-2023

Our response:

The information that you are requesting for the majority of your request is not stored in a way which permits easy retrieval.

Whilst our crime recording system(s) are very modern and we record a number of specific characteristics about a crime in specific fields, we do not record everything.

Whilst we have a field called "Building Type" in which we can record the location of a particular crime, this field is not a mandatory one and it is not used very often – generally at the discretion of the individual recording the incident at the time - so much so that any results obtained using



searches based on that field would be incredibly low indeed and completely unreliable in terms of publishing in the public domain (as this response would be).

We do record the address where a crime is reported to have occurred, but this would not always state whether the location was a Church, Chapel, Mosque or other religious place of worship, so once again, any searches undertaken specifically on those criteria would be equally inaccurate.

In addition, we record crimes based on a fixed set of Home Office crime recording codes which for Theft are fairly high-level (Theft of a Vehicle, Theft from a Vehicle, Theft from a person, Other Theft). We do not have a crime classification for recording solely Thefts from Churches.

Technically, we could undertake what we call "wildcard" searches for key words or phrases which may appear in the summary description of an offence or address. However, these are notoriously unreliable in respect of the information they return (results are always understated) for a number of reasons, meaning we do not publish results using this method :-

- a) You are relying on the keyword actually being included in the narrative (often they are not)
- b) You are reliant on words being spelt correctly in the narrative (likewise)
- c) You can undertake searches for instance on "Church" and "Chapel" specifically but this would not return results for Synagogues, Mosques, Temples or other places of worship that might also meet your criteria
- d) An offence address might be St Peters Church, but if it is stated in the crime report as "St Peter's" only, a search for "Church" would not return that result

For all the reasons stated above, the only way we can ascertain the information you require would be to undertake a manual search of every reported occurrence of Theft for the last 6 calendar years and read each occurrence log to try and ascertain whether it meets your criteria or not.

In a typical calendar year, Wiltshire Police normally record well in excess of 2,000 Theft Crimes that are not specifically thefts from either an individual or a vehicle, Shoplifting or Thefts of Bicycles. Each of these would need to be looked at individually to ascertain the information you require and – in many cases – specifics such as what has been stolen and the value may not even be recorded in the offence narrative.

Under the circumstances I am absolutely confident that to locate, retrieve and extract the information you seek would by far exceed the time obligations upon this authority to comply, and in so doing would exceed the fees limits. This is set at £450 calculated at a flat rate of £25 per hour for those work activities comprising of confirming the information is held, locating it, retrieving it and extracting it.

Ordinarily under our section 16 duty to provide advice and assistance, we would advise you how to refine your request to a more manageable level. However, due to the difficulties outlined above, I cannot see how this can be achieved in this particular case.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Wiltshire Police, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which: (a) states that fact, (b) specifies the exemption in question and (c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

The exemption applicable to the information requested is:

Section 12: Exemption where cost of compliance exceeds appropriate limit

- (1) Section 1(1) does not oblige a public authority to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit.

In accordance with section 17 of the Act, this letter represents a Refusal Notice for this particular request.

I am satisfied that all the relevant information has been passed to me and been considered in the light of your request within the time constraints applicable under the legislation.

Wiltshire Police would like to thank you for the interest that you have shown in the Force.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Penny
Disclosure Decision Maker

Wiltshire Police offers a re-examination of your case under its review procedure.



Force Disclosure Unit

Wiltshire Police HQ, London Road, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 2DN
Telephone 101 ext 62005

Freedom of Information Request Appeals Procedure

1. Who Can Ask for a Review

Any person who has requested information from Wiltshire Police, which has been dealt with under the Freedom of Information Act, is entitled to complain and request an internal review, if they are dissatisfied with the response they received.

2. How to Request a Review

Requests for review of a Freedom of Information request must be made in writing to the:

Force Disclosure Unit
Wiltshire Police Headquarters,
London Road, Devizes,
Wiltshire,
SN10 2DN

Email at disclosure@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk.

The reference number, date of the request and details of why the review is being requested must be included. Requests for review should be brought to the attention of the Force Disclosure Unit within 20 working days of the Force's response to the original FoI request.

3. Review Procedure

Receipt of a request for review will be acknowledged in writing to include confirmation of the reasons for the review. The review will be conducted by another Decision Maker, who is independent from the original Decision Maker. The Force Disclosure Unit will set a target date for a response. The response will be made as soon as is practicable with the intention to complete the review within twenty working days. In more complex cases the review may take up to 40 working days.

The Independent Decision Maker will conduct a review of the handling of the request for information and of decisions taken, including decisions taken about where the public interest lies in respect of exempt information where applicable. The review enables a re-evaluation of the case, taking into account the matters raised by the complaint.

4. Conclusion of the Appeal

On completion of the review the Independent Decision Maker will reply to the complainant with the result of the review. If the complainant is still dissatisfied following the review they should contact the Information Commissioner to make an appeal. The Information Commissioner can be contacted via the following details:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Tel: 01625 545 700
Fax: 01625 524 510
Email: mail@ico.gsi.gov.uk