

Matthew Barber  
Police and Crime Commissioner  
Thames Valley

via email:  
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**Councillor Bethia Thomas**  
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22 December 2025

Dear Matthew Barber,

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding the activity seen across the district, by groups like 'Raise the Colours Oxfordshire' who have been involved in a wave of continuing flag raising across the Vale of White Horse.

As already discussed, we both see the Saint George's Cross and Union Flag as symbols of national pride. However, used in the wrong way I believe these flags can also be seen to be a divisive issue particularly when they are attached to public property by an unauthorised group. The idea that we are all part of one community that identifies with a single flag does not sit well with the diverse communities in which we live.

I have received many messages from constituents across the Vale that are upset and troubled by the flags and see them as a means of intimidation, reducing cohesion and fostering division of our diverse communities.

Flags started to appear on street lighting in mid to late July 2025, and the action has been coordinated in many areas by the group known as Operation Raise the Colours.

According to the Hope not Hate [website](#), the organisation Operation Raise the Colours has provided a significant number of flags that have been raised on street lighting, and it is this activity, in recent weeks that I am most concerned about, as it has been associated with alleged threats, intimidation and reports of physical violence.

I have taken the decision to write to you because this problem does not seem to be abating. For example, I believe plans for this activity are continuing and have been organised for my own community here in Faringdon this week.

As you know I am concerned that a small minority of unauthorised individuals participating in this activity can have the effect of silencing freedom of speech and potentially create a community who are in fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Vale of White Horse District Council passed the [Sanctuary and Fair Treatment motion](#) on the 10 December 2025 to;

1. Recognise the risks to our communities if the disinformation, suspicion, and intolerance it generates go unchallenged, and commit to addressing them wherever they occur.
2. Work with partners to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone in our communities and that racism is confronted wherever it occurs, in schools, workplaces, and on our streets.
3. Request that Cabinet support the co-production of a Community Cohesion Action Plan with key stakeholders and in consultation with councillors, including actions to support community-led dialogue and ensure appropriate resourcing is considered during budget setting.

You launched the Police and Crime Plan 2024-2029 within which you state that protecting communities is part of the key priorities: “[Anti-social](#) behaviour does not always have a direct victim, but it can make whole communities feel unsafe.”

The Plan goes on to say that building confidence is key to policing, that the police “...must continue to improve communication between the police and the public they serve; always striving to build relationships within communities as well as between communities and the police.”

At your annual presentation in November 2025, you provided the following advice on the issue of flags:

- 1) “Any incident reported to us will be considered individually, with each report likely to have its own circumstances, motivation, impact and level of damage caused.”
- 2) “As with all matters, policing continues to take an impartial approach, and we will balance the right to freedom of expression with the need to tackle crime and enforce the law.”
- 3) “Regardless of the symbols involved or sentiment being expressed, painting on the highway, including roundabout markings, constitutes an offence of criminal



damage and will be investigated appropriately as well as being flagged to the relevant highway authority.”

Your approach does not, however, address the current concerns of communities where flags have been installed without their consent. Although there is no illegal action with the attachment of flags onto street lighting, there is community tension that is at odds with your Police and Crime Plan 2024-2029 in building relationships and confidence with communities.

Given those concerns raised by our residents as already described, I would like to ask what the police can do to help remove the flags here. Please can you also advise on the action you will take to help reduce the current tensions in communities across the Vale of White Horse district.

I look forward to your response as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bethia Thomas".

**Councillor Bethia Thomas**  
**Leader of the Council**