



PRESS RELEASE

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Forensic fight against allotment crime

Recent incidents of vandalism and theft at allotments in Hitchin and Letchworth has seen North Herts District Council (NHDC) and Hertfordshire Police turn to a high-tech tool in their fight against crime - forensic property marking.

The use of uniquely coded synthetic DNA liquid is one of a number of steps that are being taken to combat the allotment crimes, and comes after the arrest of three young people for causing criminal damage at Runnalow allotments, Letchworth.

The special liquid, SelectaDNA, is clear but shows up under UV light. If a marked item is stolen and recovered by police it can be traced back to the owner via the unique DNA code. The kits, being handed out to allotment owners on 13 sites in Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock, also contain high-visibility warning labels and window stickers. If the stickers are displayed prominently, they can also play a part in reducing crime.

Cllr Ian Knighton, NHDC's portfolio holder for leisure, said: "Allotment holders should not have to put up with mindless vandalism and theft of their property. We want to do everything we can in partnership with the police to prevent this happening and this DNA liquid has proved to be an excellent deterrent where it has been used elsewhere."

Letchworth Safer Neighbourhood Sergeant, Steve Oliphant said: "Used in conjunction with warning signs and stickers, we think this initiative will make thieves think twice before breaking in to steal property that can be easily identified as stolen. We think it's a great opportunity for allotment holders to make their property and equipment more secure."

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James Brown, Selectamark's Sales Director, added: "Using SelectaDNA to mark lawnmowers, garden tools and other items of value on allotment sites provides forensic evidence to help police tackle criminal activity. The unique DNA code in the product irrefutably links any criminal to the crime scene and gives police the necessary evidence to pursue a criminal conviction in court. We fully support this scheme and are confident it will be highly effective."

As well as the DNA liquid and signs, NHDC's Anti-Social Behaviour Officer and the police have put together crime prevention advice which has been distributed to the allotments and is also available on NHDC's website at www.north-herts.gov.uk.

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