# Woman arrested after losing hide and seek game amid soaring shoplifting charges in Banbury



Heidi Mullen, a 40-year-old woman from Banbury, recently found herself at the centre of an unusual police operation, culminating in her arrest by Thames Valley Police on Thursday, May 29, 2025. She stands accused of a series of shoplifting incidents, charged with ten counts of theft from various retail establishments in the area. Mullen’s apprehension reportedly took place following a whimsical twist—the police noted she “lost a game of hide and seek” with their Neighbourhood Team.

The arrest reflects a broader context of rising retail crime. According to recent statistics shared by Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Barber, there has been a dramatic increase in shoplifting charges within the region. Between April 1 and October 13, 2024, charges rose by 98%, reaching a total of 1,691 compared to 852 the previous year. This surge is attributed in part to enhanced reporting mechanisms, such as the 'Disc' app, which enables quicker and more efficient reporting of retail crimes. The establishment of a dedicated Business Crime Team is also a strategy aimed at tackling persistent offenders and improving case investigations.

Mullen's case is not isolated. Thames Valley Police's 'Operation Purchase' has been initiated in response to the growing incidence of theft. This operation specifically targets habitual shoplifters in Banbury's town centre and retail parks, underscoring the police's commitment to deterring theft while reassuring retail staff and customers alike. During recent operations, multiple arrests were made, including individuals implicated in significant shoplifting offences.

The increase in shoplifting rates is not limited to Banbury alone. Across Oxfordshire, a study indicated that charges had doubled from 514 in the previous year to 1,055 in the most recent reporting period. This alarming trend resonates throughout the region and has prompted local businesses to express their frustrations, with many feeling powerless against the growing wave of thefts.

Furthermore, this change in retail crime patterns has had a noticeable impact on community relations. The police are actively working to reassure both the public and businesses, detailing their ongoing initiatives to enhance officer visibility and increase collaboration among retail workers, who have become vital allies in the fight against crime. As the situation evolves, it is clear that local law enforcement is prioritising not just the apprehension of offenders but also fostering a sense of security within the community.

Heidi Mullen is currently remanded and is expected to appear at Oxford Magistrates Court soon. Her case not only highlights individual acts of crime but also serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges faced by authorities in a landscape increasingly marred by retail theft and its implications on community safety.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25205064.police-arrest-banbury-woman-game-hide-seek/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25205064.police-arrest-banbury-woman-game-hide-seek/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c748g8p99ppo), [[6]](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/rate-of-shoplifting-soars-in-oxfordshire-police-chief-says-twice-as-many-charges-have-been-brought-5061576)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/several-arrested-in-weekend-operation-to-catch-shoplifters-across-banbury-town-centre-and-retail-parks-4523391), [[5]](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/man-arrested-in-banbury-on-suspicion-of-shoplifting-and-assaulting-shop-workers-4954118)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/rate-of-shoplifting-soars-in-oxfordshire-police-chief-says-twice-as-many-charges-have-been-brought-5061576), [[7]](https://www.bucks.radio/news/local-news/businesses-helpless-to-shoplifting-as-retail-crime-surges-38-per-cent-in-bucks/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25205064.police-arrest-banbury-woman-game-hide-seek/?ref=rss)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25205064.police-arrest-banbury-woman-game-hide-seek/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25205064.police-arrest-banbury-woman-game-hide-seek/?ref=rss> - Heidi Mullen, a 40-year-old woman from Banbury, was arrested by Thames Valley Police on Thursday, May 29, 2025, on suspicion of multiple shoplifting incidents in the town. She was charged with ten counts of theft from various retail stores in Banbury. The police reported that Mullen was apprehended after losing a game of hide and seek with the Neighbourhood Team. She has been remanded and is scheduled to appear at Oxford Magistrates Court. ([banburyguardian.co.uk](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/people/court-report-852594?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c748g8p99ppo> - Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Barber announced a 98% increase in shoplifting charges, with 1,691 charges made between April 1 and October 13, 2024, compared to 852 in the same period in 2023. This surge is attributed to improved reporting and the implementation of the 'Disc' app, which facilitates reporting of retail crimes. The strategy also includes the creation of a Business Crime Team to identify prolific offenders and enhance investigations. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c748g8p99ppo?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/several-arrested-in-weekend-operation-to-catch-shoplifters-across-banbury-town-centre-and-retail-parks-4523391> - Thames Valley Police conducted 'Op Purchase', a weekend operation targeting shoplifters in Banbury's town centre and retail parks. The operation led to several arrests, including a 40-year-old woman and a 42-year-old man caught stealing items, a 35-year-old man detained for stealing from Marks & Spencer, and a 43-year-old woman wanted for previous shoplifting charges. The initiative aims to deter and convict offenders while providing reassurance to retail staff. ([banburyguardian.co.uk](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/several-arrested-in-weekend-operation-to-catch-shoplifters-across-banbury-town-centre-and-retail-parks-4523391?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/man-arrested-in-banbury-on-suspicion-of-shoplifting-and-assaulting-shop-workers-4954118> - A 37-year-old man was arrested in Banbury on January 21, 2025, on suspicion of shoplifting and assaulting two shop workers. The Banbury Neighbourhood Team apprehended the individual, who is believed to be responsible for 20 shoplifting incidents and two assaults across the Banbury area. The police described the arrest as the culmination of a prolonged 'game of hide and seek'. ([banburyguardian.co.uk](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/man-arrested-in-banbury-on-suspicion-of-shoplifting-and-assaulting-shop-workers-4954118?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/rate-of-shoplifting-soars-in-oxfordshire-police-chief-says-twice-as-many-charges-have-been-brought-5061576> - Shoplifting rates in Oxfordshire have more than doubled, with 1,055 charges brought between February 2024 and January 2025, compared to 514 in the previous year. Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Barber attributes the increase to improved reporting and collaborative efforts with retailers. Initiatives include enhancing officer visibility, leveraging technology, and sharing information to address retail crime effectively. ([banburyguardian.co.uk](https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/crime/rate-of-shoplifting-soars-in-oxfordshire-police-chief-says-twice-as-many-charges-have-been-brought-5061576?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.bucks.radio/news/local-news/businesses-helpless-to-shoplifting-as-retail-crime-surges-38-per-cent-in-bucks/> - Retail crime in Buckinghamshire has surged by 38% between April 1, 2023, and February 29, 2024, with 14,265 offences reported, up from 10,374 in the previous year. Local businesses express feelings of helplessness, citing incidents like brazen thefts during the day. Councillors acknowledge the issue and are working with Thames Valley Police to address the rise in retail crime. ([bucks.radio](https://www.bucks.radio/news/local-news/businesses-helpless-to-shoplifting-as-retail-crime-surges-38-per-cent-in-bucks/?utm_source=openai))