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Girl's rape claim was a hoax

A TEENAGER who sparked a week-long manhunt after claiming she was raped as she walked home from school has told police the attack never happened.

But officers said the 15-year-old will not face prosecution over wasting the time of the 80 police officers who took part in the high-profile inquiry and will receive counselling.

The girl originally told detectives she had been raped on waste land off a footpath between Livingstone Road and Accrington Cricket and Tennis Club last Wednesday afternoon.

Ward councillor John Wells today said that although he had initially been angry at the police time wasted and the distress caused to residents, people should be sympathetic to the girl.

An investigation team headed by Detective Superintendent Paul Buschini gathered so much potential evidence that it would have taken more than a fortnight to examine it all.

Officers conducted fingertip searches of the alleged crime scene, spoke to hundreds of potential witnesses, circulated posters of the suspect and made several media appeals. The schoolgirl cannot be identified, because once an allegation of rape is made, the complainant is granted anonymity by law.

After the girl made her complaint, people living nearby told police they had seen a man matching the alleged rapist's description following schoolgirls and
acting suspiciously. Police have confirmed they will continue to investigate the man's activities.

A Lancashire police spokesman said: "Following extensive inquiries into the allegation of rape, detectives have closed the case.

"This follows an admission by the girl that the offence did not take place."

He said action for wasting police time would not be in the "public interest."

Coun Wells said: "It has been very worrying for people who live in the area."

"There are a lot of young mothers who will have been very concerned about their daughters going out.

"In a way, people in the area will be relieved that it is a hoax and there is nothing to worry about.

"I was angry when I first heard it was a hoax, but there are two sides to every story and this girl must have had a reason for doing what she did."

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