

GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS – MYTHS AND FACTS

We don't need more Gypsy or Traveller sites in the area.

There are many reasons why we need to provide additional Gypsy and Traveller sites. First of all, the Council has a legal responsibility to plan for the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities in the borough, as they do for the settled community. If they failed in this duty, a Planning Inspectorate would need to approve sites on appeal and the local community would lose all control over the process. A deficiency of authorised sites has been used by the Courts and the Planning Inspectorate throughout the country to justify retention of some unauthorised developments, with considerable costs to landowners and opposition by the settled community.

Secondly, allocating sites will improve access to health and education for Gypsy and Traveller families currently living on unauthorised sites, addressing some of the symptoms of deprivation currently faced by these communities (for more information see 'Gypsies and Travellers are better treated than the settled community'). Thirdly, the allocation of sites may save the taxpayer money. The former district councils that now make up Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council had incurred considerable expenditure in pursuing enforcement action against unauthorised encampments. The cost of enforcement action can far exceed that of providing authorised sites. This has been demonstrated by Bristol City Council, for example, who saw their enforcement costs drop from £200,000 a year to £5,000 a year after they built a site.

Allocating sites will mean more Gypsies and Travellers come to the area. It will lead to more unauthorised encampments.

These sites are intended to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers who are already part of the local community and residing in the district. They are necessary to accommodate natural population growth in these groups, in the same way that additional housing is needed to accommodate growth in the settled community. There is no evidence that provision of a site in a certain district leads to greater demand for accommodation in this area from Gypsies and Travellers. What's more, allocating authorised sites sufficient for the local Gypsy and Traveller communities will help the Council to take more effective enforcement action against unauthorised sites. Local authorities nationwide are going through a similar process of assessing need and allocating sites.

Gypsies and Travellers get land for free.

Gypsies and Travellers either buy or rent authorised sites. It is true that there are some cost implications to setting up an authorised site. These costs can be minimised by reconfiguring existing sites rather than setting up new ones. Where new sites are needed, a number of funding options are available, including funding by Gypsies and Travellers themselves and the use of Government grants. Once set up, new sites may be rented from the Council or from a Housing Association.

Gypsies and Travellers don't pay their way.

Gypsies and Travellers who live on council or privately-owned sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity and other associated charges. These vary from site to site, but are often higher than comparable charges for conventional housing. Like everyone else Gypsies and Travellers pay road tax, VAT on goods and services, and income tax when working or self employed. Those living on unauthorised encampments do not pay council tax, but equally they do not receive standard services. The encampments need to be in place for one year before tax becomes payable. For council tax to be charged, an occupation must be established by the valuation office agency to be nontransient, and registered and banded accordingly. Most encampments are far more temporary in nature. Source: Commission for Racial Equality (March 2007), Safe Communities Initiative: Defeating Organised Racial Hatred – An information pack. Available at:

http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/downloads/Defeating_organised_racial_hatred-2.pdf

Gypsies and Travellers are better treated than the settled community.

Gypsy and Travelling communities have been shown to have significant issues with access to health, education and social services, often as a result of having to move location frequently due to evictions. Research has found that life expectancy for men and women is 10 years lower than the national average, and Gypsy and Irish Traveller mothers are twenty times more likely than mothers in the rest of the population to have experienced the death of a child. Traveller children have the lowest educational attainment of any ethnic minority group. In 2003 less than one quarter of Irish Traveller and Gypsy children obtained five GCSEs at A – C grades compared to a national average of just over half. Research also indicates that Gypsy and Traveller children are often bullied and harassed at school by other pupils. Allocating sites will help to address these symptoms of deprivation by allowing Gypsy and Traveller communities adequate access to services and opportunities for integration.

Source: Commission for Racial Equality (March 2007), Safe Communities Initiative: Defeating Organised Racial Hatred – An information pack. Available at:

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Gypsies and Travellers are getting special treatment – they get planning permission where others wouldn't.

Most Gypsy and Traveller site applications fail to get planning permission first time around, and many are also unsuccessful on appeal. There is no comprehensive data on this, but the information available suggests that Gypsy site applications have a lower chance of approval than others. Source: Commission for Racial Equality (March 2007), Safe Communities Initiative: Defeating Organised Racial Hatred – An information pack. Available at: http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/downloads/Defeating_organised_racial_hatred-2.pdf

Gypsies and Travellers don't take part in society

Gypsies and Travellers are engaged in many paid and voluntary activities supporting local communities and national life. Today, despite barriers to health and education services, increasing numbers of children are enrolled in school. Gypsies and Travellers want to engage with the wider community and promote mutual understanding.

If Gypsies and Travellers want to live in the area they can live in houses like the rest of us.

The courts have confirmed that, for many Gypsies and Irish Travellers, living in a caravan is not a 'lifestyle choice' but a result of their social and cultural heritage and an essential part of their ethnic identity. This is true whether they are nomadic or settle for long periods in one place. Most Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England are believed to live in houses. While some choose to live in conventional housing, others may feel they have no alternative, because of bad health or educational needs. Little research has been done, but there are reports that many, particularly those who have recently moved from sites, find it difficult to settle in housing, and to keep up the tenancies. Some who live on sites travel more than others. A minority travel regularly for work and cultural reasons, but might stay in one place between periods of travelling. Others rarely travel, but live in a caravan with family and friends." Source: Commission for Racial Equality (March 2007), Safe Communities Initiative: Defeating Organised Racial Hatred – An information pack. Available at: http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/downloads/Defeating_organised_racial_hatred-2.pdf

Gypsies and Travellers are responsible for antisocial behaviour like littering, fly-tipping and crime.

Littering and fly-tipping are mainly a problem on unauthorised sites, where there are often no rubbish collection facilities. This process will identify potential locations for authorised sites. Authorised sites are more likely to have planned rubbish collections, and may engender a greater sense of ownership and pride amongst the communities who reside on them. Well managed and well run Gypsy and Traveller sites do not generally cause trouble to the local settled community. Whilst criminal justice agencies do not collect information about Gypsies and Irish Travellers as separate ethnic groups, there is no evidence that offending is any higher among these groups than among others. Research in Northamptonshire has indicated that an encampment does not result in a spike in crime levels. One possible explanation for the often-cited link between Gypsy and Traveller communities and crime is that in the event of criminal behaviour by someone on an unauthorised encampment, the police have powers to evict the entire encampment. Unfortunately this can lead to the mistaken belief that everyone on the encampment has committed a crime, even if only a small number of people on the site were responsible. Source: Commission for Racial Equality (March 2007), Safe Communities Initiative: Defeating Organised Racial Hatred – An information pack. Available at: http://83.137.212.42/sitearchive/cre/downloads/Defeating_organised_racial_hatred-2.pdf