



Friends, Families and Travellers

Feb 2008 -
April 2008

Why we have to provide more sites

Last December Communities Minister Iain Wright announced a further £97 million in Government funding to help local councils meet the housing needs of Gypsy and Traveller families in their area. The funding is said to be part of 'a package of new measures aimed at cutting the number of unauthorised sites in appropriate locations such as car parks or lay-bys'. The grants cover 100 per cent of the cost of council schemes for new sites, additional pitches on existing sites or the bringing of pitches back into use.

In announcing the new funding the Minister said 'it is important that councils ensure that there are enough authorised sites for travelling communities. A good supply of legal sites can break the vicious circle of evictions that is costly in terms of both local tensions and taxpayers' cash'.

We at Friends, Families and Travellers welcome the announcement. We have been impressed by the Minister's apparently genuine interest in trying to

redress the inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers and we hope that he will continue to show the commitment to the cause that he has demonstrated thus far.

We do have one concern though. We believe that some local authorities will see their duty to provide new sites as only being justified by their increased ability to enforce more strongly against 'unauthorised' sites. We believe that those authorities see site provision as a means of solving 'the problem' of unauthorised encampments. We believe that those local authorities will seek to peddle site provision to their local constituents as the most effective means of dealing with 'a problem'.

Well no actually. The reason that local authorities should be providing sites is not because it enables them to enforce more effectively against 'unauthorised' camping. The reason that local authorities should be

providing sites is not because homeless Gypsies and Travellers are a 'problem' that has to be solved. The reason that local authorities should be providing sites is that there is a human need for accommodation that has been neglected for decades and which local Councils should be meeting.

So let us have no talk from Councils about solving a problem. Let us instead recognise the fact that there may be around 20,000 – 25,000 people in this country who have nowhere that they can exist legally and be collectively ashamed that we have allowed this situation to exist for so long.

Stop Press

Just as we were going to press we heard news that the BBC intends to pull the plug on Radio Rokker. This is very disturbing and we are looking into it – watch this space.



Community Support in East Sussex

Just before Christmas we received the great news that Friends, Families and Travellers has been awarded five year funding by the Big Lottery Fund to provide community support to Gypsies and Travellers in East Sussex and in Brighton & Hove.

We are currently recruiting two new community support outreach workers to work alongside Avril Fuller and Sally Burnett as part of Zoe Matthews' Health and Social Care Team. The Team has also recently been augmented by a Children and Young Persons Co-ordinator

(Clare Bingham) and a newly recruited Mental Health Outreach Worker.

It is wonderful to be given the resources to offer this level of support in the Sussex area but we want to see some of the good practices that we are developing locally rolled out to other areas of the country. We know that there is a lot of good work going on out there but currently it is patchy so that Gypsies and Travellers get much better support in some parts of the country than others. We need to start seeing some national strategies being put in place to address the needs

of Gypsies and Travellers – there are enough research reports with useful recommendations but insufficient follow up action to put those recommendations into effect.

The Department of Health could usefully take a lead on this by developing a national strategy for Gypsy and Traveller health that starts to address some of the health inequalities pointed up by the much quoted Sheffield study around four years ago. We will be pressing the Department on this point over the coming months.

Sussex Traveller Health & Social Care Project

*email the project at:
heal.fft@gypsy-traveller.*



Sussex Traveller Health & Social Care Project Update

We were delighted to hear that we have just received funding for a half time mental health and well-being worker to join our expanding team at the project. We are also pleased to welcome Clare Bingham who transferred across from her Caseworker post into our team in January.

We hope to have our two new community support workers in post by the beginning of April and this should greatly enhance the degree of personal support that we will be able to offer to Gypsies and Travellers in the local

area where we are based.

We were also pleased to be awarded a small amount of funding to work with the University of Brighton and Brighton & Hove City PCT, to carry out some research into Gypsy and Traveller use of hospital accident and emergency services. This is something that the PCT is keen to monitor and we too want to see how the service is used as it can help us to lobby for better health care provision for the travelling community. I would be happy to chat with any Gypsies or Travellers who have had

to resort to A&E in the absence of being able to access any other service.

Please get in touch if you would like to talk about any of the work that we do or are interested in joining one of our support groups based in East and West Sussex.

Zoe Matthews
Health Improvement
Manager

Training

Following on from our two successful training days in Sussex in 2007, we will be delivering training in:

Oxford on 2nd April 2008,
Reading on 24th April 2008
Gravesend, Kent on 1st
May 2008.

These Seminars are aimed at Voluntary and Statutory agencies so that they can deliver their services more effectively to Gypsies and Travellers. The Seminars are

headlined by Gypsy and Traveller speakers telling their own stories.

Speakers include FFT staff and other agencies working well with Gypsies and Travellers.

People attending the training can gain an insight into the social exclusion faced by Gypsies & Travellers and get real examples of successful working.

Recent delegates in East Sussex said:

" 1st hand info from a Gypsy speaker - real info", "excellent range of speakers" "I learned concrete facts to pass on at work", "I learned good practice ideas - how to begin to work with this community".

Seminars run from 10am - 1pm with lunch included. Fees are £25 for voluntary, £50 statutory agencies.

This training programme is part of our capacity building work with mainstream agencies and is funded by the Big Lottery

email sarah@gypsy-traveller.org for bookings and information.

Advice and Policy Update

Train the Trainers

Our Gypsy and Traveller young people's group which we ran over the autumn and winter has now finished. We made a film and the young people are delivering training to teachers in schools on Gypsy and Traveller culture and they issues they face in school. They will also deliver training to youth workers. Two of the training sessions have been delivered so far and have been a great success.

Shelter Guidance

Shelter, the national homeless charity, held an interesting conference in February which focussed on the issues that housed

Gypsies and Travellers face. They launched their new guidance on working with housed Gypsies and Travellers at the conference; this can be obtained at www.shelter.org.uk or by ringing 0845 458 4590

Sussex Police Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Group

Sussex Police have started an independent advisory group, which has thirteen Gypsy & Traveller members, as well as FFT and STAG (Sussex Traveller Action Group). The group will monitor the use of Section 61 evictions in Sussex, and advise the police on their policies and policing of the Traveller community in Sussex.

Security of Tenure on Local Authority Sites.

The Housing and Regeneration Bill, which will introduce a clause granting security of tenure to residents on local authority Gypsy sites is currently going through its second reading in parliament. The proposals will put Gypsy site residents on a par with mobile home site residents. The Gypsy and Traveller Unit at CLG (Communities and Local Government) have been holding consultation meetings with local authority site residents to discuss how this will work.

CLG (Communities and Local Government) Gypsy and Traveller Stakeholders Consultation meeting.

The Gypsy and Traveller Unit at CLG holds regular consultation meetings with Gypsies and Travellers. The next meeting will be on 25 March in Birmingham, and will include on the agenda the Animal Welfare Bill, which includes new provisions on the movement of horses, and someone from the DTI (Department for Trade and Industry) to discuss Cold Calling/Doorstep Knocking.

Housing and Regeneration Bill

The Housing and Regeneration Bill was discussed in a Committee of the House of Commons during January and some changes were made. It will probably be discussed by the House of Lords in March.

Homes and Communities Agency

The Bill establishes a Homes and Communities Agency. This Agency is to increase the supply of low-rent housing and affordable housing for sale in England. TLRP hopes that the proposed Homes and Communities Agency will use its powers, where necessary, to ensure that there is adequate provision of caravan sites for Gypsies and Travellers as well as 'bricks and mortar' housing for those who need it.

Regulator of Social Housing

The Bill establishes the post of Regulator of Social Housing to defend the interests of the tenants of 'Registered Providers' of social housing (Housing Associations and similar organisations) by ensuring good management of their properties. Gypsy and Traveller sites owned by Registered Providers will come under the

Regulator's authority.

TLRP believes that local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites, as well as sites owned by a Registered Provider, should come within the remit of the Regulator. Many residents of such sites have long suffered under poor site management and maintenance and have not been protected by the kind of regulation that exists to protect those living in 'bricks and mortar' social housing. Site residents would greatly benefit from standards being monitored by a statutory regulatory body, which would address this inequality.

Security of tenure

The Bill brings local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites under the Mobile Homes Act 1983 (MHA 1983). The MHA 1983 currently applies to all privately run Mobile Home sites where the mobile home pitches are rented out. This includes those private rental sites owned by Gypsies and Travellers or where pitches are rented to Gypsies and Travellers. It does not include small private Gypsy and Traveller sites where a family lives together on its own land and does not rent pitches out to others. It does include Mobile Home sites owned by local authorities but it does not include local authority sites provided for

Gypsies and Travellers.

The Mobile Homes Act 1983 gives site residents security of tenure. This means that they can carry on living on their pitch for their whole life unless they break their tenancy agreement AND the site owner can prove that they broke it AND that a court accepts that they broke it and thinks that it is reasonable for them to be evicted. (If a site only has planning permission for a few years, the pitch agreement must state this fact and this means that the security of tenure only lasts as long as the site's planning permission lasts.)

At the moment, residents on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites are licence holders, not tenants. They can be evicted from their pitch with only 28 days notice and the site owner does not have to prove that they broke any rules in order to get a court order to evict them. So the security of tenure offered by the MHA 1983 would give greater security to local authority site residents than they have at present, and this is to be welcomed.

Many residents on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites are concerned that new, more restrictive terms and conditions may be introduced in new tenancy agreements, particularly

The Traveller Law Reform Project works on behalf of Friends, Families and Travellers, the Gypsy Council, the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain and the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit

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with regard to the amount of time that tenants could spend away from their pitch travelling without breaking their tenancy agreement. It is important to remember that bad or overburdensome clauses are *already* a problem in many local authority licence agreements. It will be important for site residents to seek advice when negotiating new agreements and bear in mind that they may be able to rely on the Unfair Contract Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999.

There should be full consultation between the department for Communities and Local Government and site residents nationally on the contents of new tenancy agreements and a model tenancy

agreement should be produced. Meanwhile, security of tenure should be introduced as an addition to existing licence agreements.

Right of occupiers to assign pitch agreements

The MHA 1983 gives site residents the right to give or to sell their mobile home to anyone they like, and thus transfer their pitch agreement, as long as the site owner agrees. The site owner must not refuse permission without good reason.

There are differences of opinion over whether this right to assign pitch agreements should apply on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Some take the view that residents of local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites should have equivalent rights to tenants of local

authority houses and flats, who do not have the right to assign their accommodation. There is a concern that if site residents are able to assign their pitch agreement to a person of their choice, Gypsies and Travellers with no legal pitch anywhere and without family connections or friends on an existing local authority site may never get a pitch. Some believe that the right to transfer a pitch agreement by selling the caravan on that pitch would be especially destructive, as residents may be tempted to sell to the highest bidder, and people desperate to get off the roadside would bid against each other. For these reasons, it is argued that clear written local authority allocations policies, based on need and length of time on a waiting list, should operate whenever a pitch is to be vacated.

Others take the view that

tenants on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites should have the same rights as others who live in mobile homes, including the right to assign their pitch through giving or selling their caravan to the person to whom they wish to assign the pitch agreement. They point out that the local authority, as site owner, would be able to refuse consent to the pitch allocation if they had a good reason. They suggest that concerns could best be addressed by the government issuing guidance to local authorities on matters that they should take into account when considering whether or not to give consent to a proposed assignment. Such guidance could explain the circumstances in which consent will be given.

For a full briefing on the Bill, see the TLRP website or phone TLRP



'Pikey' is a racist word – official

After beating our collective heads up against a brick wall in trying to get the BBC to stop allowing its presenters to use this offensive and racist term of abuse it was encouraging to hear that in December last year Lewes

Magistrates Court found a defendant guilty of racially aggravated threatening behaviour as a result of calling a nightclub manageress a 'pikey'.

Good for the Lewes Magistrates and shame on the BBC for

its complacent and smug replies to the complaints that we and others repeatedly make about the use of offensive language against Gypsies and Travellers. We need to keep the pressure up on the BBC and others to stamp this out. It can be done - recently we

managed to get The Sun newspaper (not the most Gypsy and Traveller friendly of papers) to print an apology for having called somebody a 'pikey' and, if they can be made to see the error of their ways, then surely we can get the Beeb to see the light also.

Noticeboard



Telephone Helpline for Travellers

0845 120 2980

This advice line is
open between
10.00am — 1.00pm
and 2.00pm —
5.00pm, Monday to
Friday.

Travellers can speak
directly to
experienced advisers
on questions of
eviction, planning
matters, issues
involving official
caravan sites and
other matters.

It is run by the
Travellers Advice
Team at the
Community Law
Partnership. The
service is funded by
the Legal Services
Commission.

Romany and Traveller History Month – June 2008

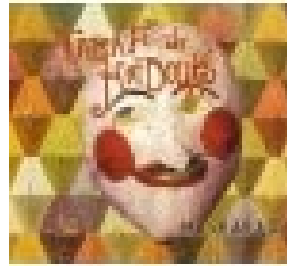
This year, for the first time ever, there will be a Romany and Traveller History Month in June.

This idea was initiated by Lord Avebury who contacted Lord Adonis, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools and Learners to suggest such a commemoration. The aim is to explain the history and culture of the travelling communities, which is not usually included in the school curriculum, to challenge the myths and to break down barriers.

It will be a great opportunity to celebrate the richness and diversity that these communities bring to our everyday lives and we at Friends, Families and Travellers aim to arrange events locally in the Brighton area where we are based to support the initiative.

We would like Romany and Traveller History Month in June to become a regular feature of the calendar just as Black History Month in October has become. A great opportunity to promote better understanding between the travelling and the settled communities.

Taraf de Haidouks – Maskarada (Audio CD)

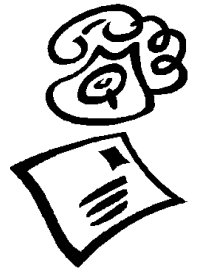


For any lover of Gypsy music, or anybody wanting to experience a flavour of it, this new album by Taraf de Haidouks, a well-known troupe of Romanian Roma musicians, is a must. The name of the band, in its Romanian form, roughly translates as 'Band of Outlaws', and on this album they recapture some Gypsy melodies 'stolen' from them by classical composers such as Bartok, de Falla, Khachaturian and Albeniz.

Bela Bartok, the 20th Century Hungarian composer, spent much of his life collecting traditional folk songs and incorporating many of these into his concert works. Taraf de Haidouks turn the tables on Bartok and others by reclaiming several of these classical pieces and interspersing them with fascinating original pieces of their own. Each track demonstrates the vitality, exuberance and sudden

frenetic changes of tempo characteristic of Gypsy music, coupled with great virtuosity and musicianship throughout the band. Some pieces seem to work slightly better than others – 'In a Persian Market' is possibly best left to Ketelbey's original version (if heard at all) - but overall this is a minor criticism of a fine album that is to be highly commended. The final piece 'Suita Maskarada', a Taraf de Haidouks original, is a gem.

We are not sure as to the availability of the disc in mainstream music stores but you can order it from Amazon or direct from the producers by Googling 'Taraf de Haidouks'. It would also be a great band to hear live should you get the chance!



Planning

Planning in South West England

FFT is due to give evidence at an Examination in Public of the partial Regional Spatial Strategy for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation in Exeter in early March about the need for new sites and distribution of them. After hearing evidence from local authorities, organisations and individuals the Planning Inspectors will make recommendations about the numbers of pitches, both residential and transit, for which each local authority should make provision.

This is an important stage in the process of making much needed sites available which will be followed in most other regions of England. The uneven quality of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs) means that there will be much argument not only about the numerical level of provision but also the type of accommodation that is needed. FFT will be arguing strongly for an increase in the proposed provision (the numbers so far proposed can be found on the South west regional Assembly website, [\[ra.gov.uk\]\(http://ra.gov.uk\)\) but also that every Council should make some provision so that there are no 'no go' areas for Gypsies and Travellers. There is some support for this notion of provision in every area from a recent vote by the East Region Assembly to ask each Council to provide at least 10 pitches. Unfortunately this appeared to have less to do with meeting the need and more to do with 'spreading the burden' more evenly across the region.](http://www.southwest-</p>
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It seems likely that the patchy nature of the evidence in the GTAAs in the South West means that the inspectors will only come up with interim figures, which leaves mileage for ensuring that the next round of GTAAs (mostly due in 2011) are done properly. This means that the guidance on doing them, which was only issued in final form by the Department of Communities and Local Government last autumn, will have to be revised in time for the next round of GTAAs to ensure that assessments bear more relation to reality. Of particular importance, and neglected in many GTAAs, is the need to establish a reasonably reliable baseline census of all Gypsies and Travellers

in England - those on authorised sites, those on 'unauthorised' development, those with nowhere of their own to stay and those in houses. Without this as a precursor to assessments they will inevitably continue to be flawed.

This whole process is going to take a long time before sites are established on the ground - this part of it is making plans about making plans! There will be an ongoing need for scrutiny of the developing plan process locally to ensure that needs are met in the right way, in the right places and in the right numbers. There will also be an ongoing need to ensure that the right proportion of socially rented pitches, 'affordable' pitches and private market driven pitches are catered for, and that appropriate funding mechanisms are put in place, just as for conventional bricks and mortar housing.

Steve Staines
Planning Officer

Contact Steve Staines if you wish to have a full copy of the planning research.

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Friends, Families and Travellers

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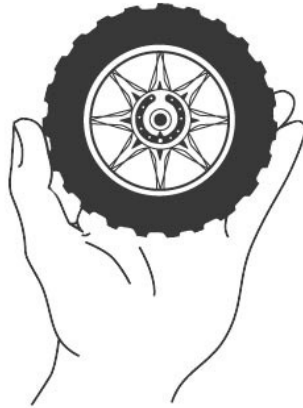
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E-MAIL:
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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.Gypsy-Traveller.org



Friends, Families & Travellers was

established in response to the passage through Parliament of the 1994 Criminal Justice & Public Order Act. It has since grown into a nationally recognised charity which serves the whole spectrum of the Traveller community, both traditional and new, settled or on the road.

The majority of work promoted by FFT is carried out by an Advice and Information Unit based in Brighton and covers evictions,

harassment, planning, employment, benefits, education, health, civil rights, discrimination and legal representation. The Unit is also active in research, monitoring, mediation and policy development at local and national levels.

In 1999, FFT was one of five organisations short listed for the Human Rights Award, part of the UN International Day of Human Rights.

FFT became a company limited by guarantee (non-profit voluntary organisation) no. 3597515 and a registered charity in 2006, no. 111 2326.

FFT is run by a management committee made up of Trustees elected by the membership.

Management committee meetings are held every six weeks and are open to all members.

If you want to help bring and end to racism and discrimination which Gypsies and Travellers experience on a daily basis: JOIN FRIENDS, FAMILIES AND TRAVELLERS NOW!

I would like to join Friends, Families and Travellers. I understand that this will enable me to vote at the Annual General Meeting, attend Management Committee Meetings and receive copies of the newsletter.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POSTCODE: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

Waged-£10.00 Unwaged-£5.00 Organisation-£25.00 / or Donation

I do not wish to join FFT, but please accept a donation towards the work you carry out

Please state if you wish to remain anonymous.

I do not wish to join FFT, but would like to receive newsletters (subscription costs as above)

Please make cheques payable to FFT and return to: FFT, Community Base, 113 Queens Rd., Brighton BN1 3XG.

All membership information held by FFT is confidential and will not be made available to others without your consent.