

Friends, Families and Travellers

Sept - Dec
2008

New Agency takes on site grants

Iain Wright MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has announced that the new Homes and Communities Agency will take on the responsibility for administering Gypsy and Traveller site grants as from 1 December 2008. In his announcement he said that the Agency would, because of its close relationship with local authorities and other delivery partners, be 'well placed to step up the pace of delivery for the benefit of both Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community'.

We hope he is right. Since the £97 million grant was announced last December there has been precious little evidence of local Councils taking positive action to bring forward sites, although there have been

many fine words about intentions to do so. We believe that the vast majority of local Councils are disinclined to rush ahead with site provision, preferring to wait and see what comes out of the regional site allocations.

Those local authorities that are taking their responsibilities seriously and trying to bring forward sites will need help in ensuring that their good intentions don't collapse once the Nimbys, racists and anti campaigners begin to mobilise to fight proposals for sites in their area. Central Government needs to understand that Gypsy and Traveller communities have to be fully involved in this crucial delivery stage of the process if progress is to be made, and that this work needs to be properly resourced.

We hope that this is a factor that the Homes and Communities Agency will recognise, and will be able to make sufficient funding available to ensure that the delivery of sites proceeds in full partnership with the travelling community. Without this vital injection of funding we foresee many local authorities simply putting site provision into the 'too difficult' box and biding their time in the hope that the issue will go away.

It won't. It is a national disgrace that in 2008 we still have around 20,000 to 25,000 travelling people who have no 'legal' site and we will continue to put pressure on central, regional and local Government to bring an end to this shameful state of affairs.

Young People's art postcards

Earlier in the summer a picture competition was held and the winning pictures by 3 young people have now been

published on fliers to publicise FFT's young people's project. The artists who drew these pictures were Annie May

and Pearly King and Elisha Doherty. Please ring or email FFT if you like us to send you some.



Young People's Summer Fun

This summer has seen a very full and varied holiday activities programme working with about 70 young people across the whole of Sussex, with the support of parents, older young Travellers who have provided peer support, Connexions in West Sussex and the Circle of Life Project based in East Sussex.

Two separate groups of young people applied for, and were awarded youth opportunity funds in West Sussex. This empowered them to apply for their funds, research costs, plan activities and decide where they wanted to go with a majority consensus being reached on several sites. This was the first time these young people had applied for funds and had the opportunity to decide what they wanted to do in their

summer holidays. New experiences were gained and fears overcome particularly by a group who decided to go ice skating for the first time ever.

FFT worked in partnership this summer with the circle of life project which involved several days activities in the woods including making traditional healing potions, cooking on an open fire, tree clay sculptures and an adult from the community showing a group of young men how to make primrose baskets.

Pavee Point Exchange

FFT took part in its first ever youth exchange this summer with 11 young Travellers from Dublin coming to visit us with

Pavee Point and spending a week end getting to know a group of young Travellers from FFT's young people's project. The three days involved the initial meeting in Brighton on Friday afternoon, a trip to Powdermill Woods doing activities including rock climbing, an assault course plus big swing, cooking loads of sausages, bananas with chocolate and the odd marsh mellow or two on a fire, and then attending the Romany Gypsy Arts festival at Hop Farm and being interviewed by Jake Bowers about their experiences. A fairly hectic week end had by everyone and experiences of Traveller cultural ways were shared amongst the group from cooking, to music and language.

Sussex Women's Projects

The Health Project groups have evolved into a bite size education project coordinated by Gemma Challenger (Well-being Community Support Worker) and Rebekah Dilley (Health Community Support worker)

The new bite size courses are aimed to give free taster sessions to anyone in the Gypsy and Traveller

community. So far we have Homeopathy First Aid, Reflexology, Belly dancing, Street dancing, Head massage and Computer and Internet use. We are working on some other exciting leads to complete our 10 bite size courses.

As soon as these are finalised we will be putting together our course brochure stating all the course details, venues

and pick up points. If anyone is interested in any of the courses they should contact FFT for more details. Should anyone be interested in delivering a Health or Well-being course of their own please contact Gemma or Rebekah to discuss this. The courses will start at the end of October and we will keep you posted on their success.

Sussex Traveller Health Project

For more information about the Young People's Projects email:

clare@gypsy-traveller.org

For more information about the women's projects phone:

Beks 07990 516612
Gemma 07990 516627

or email:
rebekah@gypsy-traveller.org
gemma@gypsy-traveller.org

Advice and Policy Update

Advice Work

FFT offers advice, information and casework to all Gypsies and Travellers who seek our help. These cases are a small selection of the wide variety of cases from around the UK in 2007/8.

A. Site Management

This case relates to residents on a Gypsy site in the South East who were unhappy about the management of their site. FFT started regular meetings between site residents and the local authority which resulted in the local authority appointing a dedicated site manager and applying for a government Gypsy Sites Refurbishment Grant to improve the site.

B. Discrimination

One of our Irish Traveller clients in the South West reported an issue of discrimination. The council-run site she is living on was experiencing problems receiving orders from a delivery company. An employee of the company told the Irish Traveller that the company would not deliver to the address as it was a Traveller site. After FFT made some enquiries with the company they denied the allegation made against them but deliveries to the site soon commenced. The issue was reported to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

C. Eviction Threat

A group of New Travellers were parked on private land in the East of England. They had made an agreement with the landowner to stay for a short while so they could complete repairs to their vehicles. Unexpectedly the police arrived at the site with a section 61 notice. FFT worked alongside the local Gypsy Liaison Officer to revoke the section 61 notice. The private landowner had not given the Travellers notice to leave which must be done before a section 61 can be considered by the police. The agreement between the landowner and the Travellers was reinstated and they were able to stay on the land.

D. Tribunal Support

A young Gypsy living in the South East was having problems with her Incapacity Benefit. She had missed a couple of medical appointments due to being constantly evicted and the Benefits Office stopped her benefit. FFT launched an appeal to get the benefit reinstated and the tribunal came out in her favour and recognised that she was undergoing difficult times and the benefit was restored and backdated.

Abbie Kirkby
Advice Worker

Policy Work

SEERA (the South East Regional Assembly) is currently consulting on proposed new Gypsy/Traveller pitch numbers and local authorities in which they will be, in the South East region. The consultation runs until 21 November 2008. Key consultation questions include:

- Is 1,064 new pitches for Gypsies/Travellers in the south east a suitable 10 year target?
- Is 276 new pitches for Travelling Showpeople in the south east a suitable 10 year target?
- Which of four options gives the most suitable spread of pitches across the region?

If you would like to have your say go to www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/consultations Or for a paper copy of the response form ring 01483 555 202 (and leave your details on the ansaphone)

Emma Nuttall
Advice Manager

Abbie & young visitors to the FFT stall at Appleby Fair



For information on our policy work email:

fft@gypsy-traveller.org

For information on training email:

sarah@gypsy-traveller.org

Training

75 voluntary and statutory sector staff came to our Kent training day in May and in June we delivered bespoke training to the British Red Cross in London.



News from the Traveller Law Reform Project

Jurisdiction in disputes on Mobile Homes Act sites

The department for Communities and Local Government is currently consulting on proposed changes to the way disputes are resolved on sites covered by the Mobile Homes Act 1983. Once the Housing and Regeneration Bill becomes law, local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites will come under the provisions of the Mobile Homes Act 1983, so the proposed changes to dispute resolution will affect residents of those sites as well.

The Government's preferred option, subject to the views of consultees, is to transfer jurisdiction for all matters that can currently go the county court to a Residential Property Tribunal – except cases where the site owner is seeking to terminate the agreement, which would still be dealt with by the county court. If, following consultation, the Government decides to proceed with this option, it also proposes that agreements under the Mobile Homes Act should not be allowed to bind site owners and residents to

resolving disputes through arbitration. You can read the Government's proposals at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/parkhomedisputes>

At present, some pitch agreements on Mobile Homes Act sites force residents who are in dispute with the site owner to accept arbitration by someone appointed by the site owner. TLRP believes that this is unfair, and the Government agrees. But TLRP disagrees with the Government on how to address this injustice. TLRP believes that residents should always have the right to take a dispute to the county court, where they may be eligible for legal aid if they cannot afford legal representation themselves. The Government believes that all disputes other than those where the site owner seeks possession of the pitch should be resolved by Residential Property Tribunals, where the parties in dispute have no right to legal aid. TLRP believes that site residents will need legal representation in such disputes, and should have the right to legal aid if they cannot afford to pay – so they must have the right

to go to a court, not a tribunal. You can read TLRP's response to the CLG consultation at

http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/pdfs/MHA_2008.pdf

CLG consultation on other aspects of the Mobile Homes Act

Communities and Local Government is also planning to consult on other aspects of the Mobile Homes Act that would affect local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites once the Housing and Regeneration Bill becomes law.

A lot of concern was expressed by Gypsies and Travellers earlier this year about the Mobile Homes Act's arrangements for pitch assignment and succession. Many Gypsies and Travellers said that these arrangements would not work on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites. The Mobile Homes Act gives the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government the power to exempt such sites from these arrangements, and the CLG consultation will seek people's views on whether or not this should be done. The consultation document should be published in August.

Education and Skills Bill

The Government in its Education and Skills Bill intends to raise the compulsory education leaving age to eighteen, and to see all adolescents engaged in academic education, training or vocational apprenticeships. This programme will be obligatory and noncompliance could lead to prosecution. Although TLRP welcomes the efforts being made through the Bill to improve the quality and flexibility of education and training for 16-18 year olds, there is great concern about the effect of introducing compulsion.

One matter of particular importance to many young Traveller women will be the Bill's interference with their right to choose to be full time mothers. Many Traveller women marry at age 16 or 17 and become mothers in the first year or two of marriage, and they have the legal right to choose to do so. It would, however, appear that, while an 18 year old mother has the right to be a full-time parent, a 16 or 17 year old mother does not, which raises issues of age discrimination. The insistence that any young mother in this situation should leave her young

children in the care of others while attending structured education or training sessions will seem perverse to many Travellers. The Government should acknowledge that work in the home, particularly work as a mother, is every bit as valuable as work outside the home. Raising the next generation of citizens and workers is an honourable and very demanding occupation and should be recognised as such.

You can read TLRP's commentary on the Bill at

http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/pdfs/education_and_skills_bill.pdf.

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments

Since ODPM Circular 1/2006 was issued, following the Housing Act (2004), Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) have been carried out and published for much of England, and all areas will have published GTAAAs by the end of 2008. These accommodation assessments will inform development of policy at regional and local level, leading to pitch allocations to meet the assessed need.

There has been considerable development of Regional Planning Policy, with a number of single issue Partial Reviews of Regional Spatial Strategies under way. All local authorities are embarking on new Local Development Frameworks and are proceeding with Core Strategies (which outline proposed strategies for development) and Allocations Documents (which identify land for development).

A very significant proportion of GTAAAs have been found not to be adequate for their main purpose

– *identifying the necessary numbers of pitches, both residential and transit, for Gypsies and Travellers.*

Very many of them make estimates of need that are much too conservative, often because they are based on unreliable caravan count figures. (Local authorities are required to count all Gypsy and Traveller caravans in their areas in January and July each year. These figures are widely regarded as too low, as some council officers spend no more than two hours on the exercise, suggesting that they have not left their desks. Nonetheless, the caravan count produces a figure which can be accepted as an absolute minimum.)

Despite this fact, some local authorities are challenging either their own GTAAAs or their pitch allocation from their Regional Assembly on the grounds that the allocation is too high. Where local authorities have already suggested possible new sites for Gypsies and Travellers, opposition from local settled residents has sometimes reached hysterical proportions.

To read TLRP's recommendations about GTAAAs and the planning process for site allocation, see http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/pdfs/GTAA_commentary.pdf.

The Government has recently published the Count of Gypsy and Traveller Caravans as at 21st January 2008. The document can be found on the CLG website at

www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagement/care/gypsiesandtravellers/gypsyandtravellersitedataandstat/.

CLG site design guidance

The department for Communities and Local Government has published a *Good Practice Guide on Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites*. The guide can be found at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/designinggypsiesites>.

The guide does not cover the particular needs of New Travellers, and CLG has suggested that it will publish further guidance on this matter.

There is some concern that the guide is too strong in discouraging working on sites, on the grounds that they are essentially residential. There is a need to ensure that sites are safe and that any work does not have a negative impact on site residents, but TLRP is concerned that it may be a mistake to be too prescriptive.

Richard Solly can be reached on:

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info@travellerslaw.org.uk

Website:
www.travellerslaw.org.uk

Planning Update

South West England Regional Spatial Strategy Examination in Public: Panel Report

As reported in the last newsletter the Planning Officer with the help of Tony Thomson, FFT Trustee, attended the three day examination in public into the planned distribution of new pitches in the south west.

The Panel Report has now been published and makes interesting and encouraging reading (it can be found on the Government Office of the Southwest Website : www.GOSW.gov.uk).

FFT, with others, managed to present enough local evidence at the EiP to get some small changes to the numbers allocated to each district (overall an increase of about 100 residential pitches). Perhaps more importantly the evidence and concerns about the assessment process coming from the Gypsies and Travellers' side prompted the Planning Inspectors who carried out the examination to write an additional chapter to the report beyond their immediate brief of looking at the wording of the relevant policy and deciding on pitch numbers to be planned for in each district.

Their comments in the Further Thoughts Chapter will be useful for the next round of Assessments (due in 2011) and in helping to ensure that the process is better.

In particular they highlighted the following:

- The need for revised best practice guidance which should take into account the national experience of GTAA's to date.
- Their considerable concerns about the reliability of underlying data and the robustness of the final figures produced.
- The need for a greater degree of openness about the whole process. In their view this could be achieved by either GTAA's being carried out independently of local authorities or by a joint working party, which includes members of the Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities, or by having some method by which final figures are independently audited.
- Local authorities need to make greater efforts to engage the Gypsies and Traveller communities, a difficult but not impossible task.
- The need for further work on the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers who may wish to transfer

from housing.

More needs to be done to try and establish where those who have a need for accommodation would prefer to live. Such an approach may help achieve a better balance of pitches between districts.

It may be necessary to undertake much larger scale survey work across the whole community to establish a true picture of need.

They identified the need for the guidance to be amended or altered so that it adequately addresses the needs of new Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

One of the successes at the EiP was the recognition by the Planning Inspectorate for the need for stopping places - specifically further consideration should be given to ensuring that a network of temporary stopping places are provided nationally, in addition to residential and transit pitches, so that wider needs can be met both now and in the future.

This does seem to be the first time that this issue has been officially recognised.

The Inspectors also endorsed our view that

in making provision for additional pitches, there is a need to ensure that the need to bring existing provision up to an acceptable standard is not overlooked and to ensure that if pitch numbers are reduced by refurbishment that provision for appropriate replacement pitches is made at the same time.

The issue of affordable pitches was recognised and local authorities will have to give particular consideration to providing an appropriate number of affordable pitches.

The Inspectors highlighted the slowness of delivery and identified measures to speed delivery.

Finally the panel report in one of its 17 recommendations indicated that Annual monitoring Reports should include details of the delivery of additional pitches and also the incidence of unauthorised sites for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

The Panel report must be regarded as a significant move forward though FFT still has misgivings about the level of identified need.

Planning Update cont.

In October a similar exercise will be gone through for the East Region with an Examination in Public at Letchworth whilst both the London and South East regions will undergo the same consultation and examination process in the autumn and spring.

The Midlands and Northern regions lag behind somewhat.

We would encourage anyone with evidence of need in London or the SE to contact the Planning Officer over the coming months so that we can continue to

build up evidence to present at the EiP.

Steve Staines
Planning Officer

Steve can be reached at.

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E mail:

steve@gypsy-traveller.org

Noticeboard

Land for sale

East Leicesteshire.
3 acre smallholding, well established with stables, barns and various buildings, has planning permission for 4 residential units with no restrictions, Has amazing potential to expand. Tingdene 3 bed, and a static currently sited. All utilities, quite secluded village location.

Only serious applicants please £625k. Contact Alistair on 07929449738 or accy2k@yahoo.com

Tapes for sale:

Romani Ways by G E C Webb Volume 1 (13 copies)
Romani Ways by G E C Webb Volume 2 (9 copies)

Would easily sell for £2 or £3 possibly more - in the right environment.

I will accept £20 and post them to you (in the UK) free of charge. I would accept cash (sent by post) or a cheque although would need to wait for it to clear. If interested please e-mail Shirley Caldwell at:

S.Caldwell@tiscali.co.uk

Land for sale

30 acres between York and Harrogate. Water already on the site but no planning permission as of yet.

Contact Mr Lindley
07966308799 or
07980095374.

Sylvia Dunn

I am very sorry to inform you all, that our very dear friend Sylvia Dunn has passed away, after a very long illness, A great strong voice within the Gypsy and Traveller movement, The founder of UK Association Of Gypsy Woman, bought the plight of Dale Farm to the forefront world wide, bringing in Core. fought for the rights of our children and women.

To be honest, along with Len Smith she was our mentor and guidance, one of our strongest advocates within Europe, Stood up against Michael



Howard, within his own constituency in a national election, So much more, Thank you Sylvia, for your guidance and spirit,

Joe Jones
(National Federation of Romany Gypsies & Irish Travellers)

Friends, Families and Travellers

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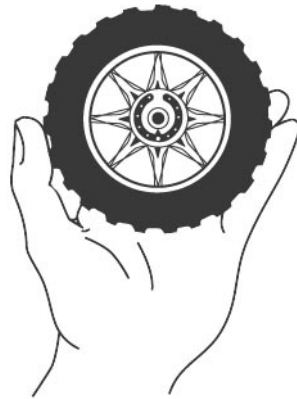
E-MAIL:
info@gypsy-traveller.org

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.Gypsy-Traveller.org

for information, useful contacts and more.



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 voluntary organisation 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 5 – 6 per annum and are open to all members.

If you believe that all members of society should have the right to travel and to stop without constant fear of persecution because of their lifestyle: 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.