

This booklet was produced in conjunction with members of the Gypsy and Traveller community, without whose help this booklet would not have been possible.

Thank you to all who contributed.

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Summary

Gypsies and Travellers contribute to society through involvement in many spheres of activity, and live by the same rules as everyone else. However there are many “myths” about them in the media. This booklet has been prepared in partnership with a group of Gypsies and Travellers to provide a more accurate picture of their lives and to promote better relationships with settled people.

The term “Gypsies and Travellers” includes different groups, some of whom have been in Britain and Bristol for centuries. Gypsies and Travellers have their own strong traditions and customs but these are widely misunderstood.

Gypsies and Travellers are minority ethnic groups and legally protected under the Race Relations Act, so

discrimination against them is unlawful. Public bodies have a duty to promote their racial equality, but many inequalities still exist. They experience high levels of discrimination and prejudice.

For example 25% of those living in caravans are homeless because they have nowhere legal to park and face frequent evictions. Gypsies and Travellers have been encouraged to set up their own sites but only 10% have their initial planning applications accepted. They also experience severe inequalities in education, health and other services.

This booklet looks at the real lives behind the myths.



Who are the Gypsies and Travellers of Britain?

Gypsies are Romany ethnic groups whose ancestors migrated from India from the tenth century and then mixed with European and other groups (Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995, Acton and Gallant 1997). Irish Travellers are a nomadic group with a distinctive way of life who have been part of Irish society for centuries (Irish Traveller Movement 2004).

“Roma” is used to describe European Romany speaking groups who have come to England from Eastern and Central Europe, and is sometimes used to refer more generally to Gypsies and Travellers. New Travellers are people of settled background who adopted a travelling lifestyle in the more recent past, although some are now in their third or fourth generation of travelling (Earle *et al* 1994). Circus and fairground families are another group who travel for their work.

Definitions which draw on the history, traditions and culture of groups are

known as “ethnic definitions” and are important in race equality law. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are legally protected from discrimination as minority ethnic groups under the Race Relations Acts.

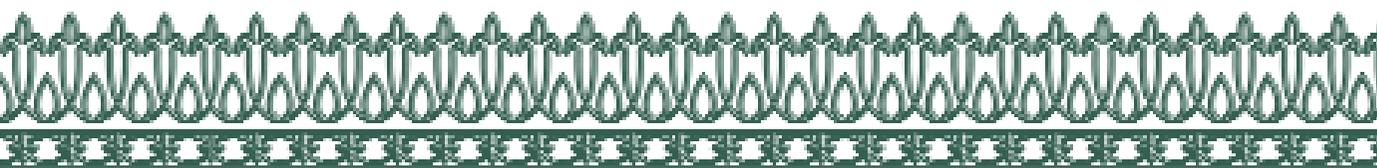
There is also a non-ethnic definition of a “Gypsy” in planning law, which is applicable to all Travelling people. Because it refers to people of nomadic habit of life this definition caused problems for Gypsies and Travellers who had stopped travelling for health reasons. So the government recently introduced a new definition for planning guidance purposes: “Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family’s or dependents educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such”....

Myth

A former Home Secretary, said on BBC Radio Midlands on 22 July 1999:

“There are relatively few real Romany Gypsies left, who seem to mind their own business and do not cause trouble to other people, and then there are a lot more people who masquerade as Travellers or Gypsies, who trade on the sentiment of people, but who seem to think because they label themselves as Travellers that therefore they’ve got a license to commit crimes and act in an unlawful way that other people don’t have.”

(*The Times* 19.8.99)



Who are the Gypsies and Travellers of Britain?

It is also important that individual Gypsy and Traveller families are able to decide themselves whether they self-define as “Gypsy”, “Traveller” or some other definition.

Although the groups have different histories and traditions, there are some common customs, and all face discrimination and prejudice.

How long have there been Gypsies and Travellers in Britain and in Bristol?

“Gypsies and Travellers have lived in Bristol for generations” “My family has always lived round here” “I was born, grew up and went to school in Bristol” (Gypsies and Travellers speaking)

Gypsy and Traveller groups have been in Britain for at least 500 years and probably much longer. The first written record of Romany Gypsies is at the Scottish court of King James in 1505 (Fraser 1995, Liegeois 1994).

Irish Travellers have been migrating to Britain alongside other Irish people since the early nineteenth century (Johnson and Willers 2004).

For centuries, thousands of cultures were nomadic. Being settled is a relatively new concept that developed with nation states. Many communities travelled for their livelihood in all the countries of the UK (McVeigh 1997).

Gypsies and Travellers have lived in and around Bristol for hundreds of years, on former commons and open areas such as at Emerson’s Green, Bradley Stoke, Patchway and Lawrence Weston, as can be seen in street names such as “Gypsy Lane” and “Gipsy Patch Lane”. Currently there are many Gypsies and Travellers who were born in Bristol and spent their childhoods here, for example on sites in Speedwell, Redfield, Newtown and Brislington, and attended local schools. Small groups of New Travellers have frequented Bristol in the last three decades.

Why do Gypsies and Travellers have a different way of life from that of the settled population?

What is Gypsy and Traveller culture?

“We have our own culture and we want to be recognised as an ethnic group”
 “Being a Gypsy is in your blood, it’s part of your heritage”
 “People want Gypsies and Travellers to disappear, they want to wipe out our lifestyle” (Gypsies and Travellers speaking)

Like other minority ethnic groups, Gypsies and Travellers have their own languages, traditions and customs that guide their way of life. These are passed down through the generations, but are also adapted to new conditions. Cultural values are very strong, though like other groups, each family and individual may have their own special ways of putting them into practice.

The family is extremely important to Gypsies and Travellers and a source of great pride. Extended families support and look after one another. “Travellers are lucky to have one another, we don’t split up as a lot of people do these days. We need each other for support and comfort and we always know, if we need

someone, that they’re there” (Gaffey, B. 1992: 36) “We would never put our parents in a home” (Traveller).

Children are central to the lives of Gypsy and Traveller families. The public perception of Gypsies and Travellers can be the opposite of the real situation. For example there are myths and rhymes about Gypsies stealing children (Hancock 2002), but in fact there are many examples in Europe of Gypsies having their own children taken away to try and stop them being Gypsies (Cemlyn and Briskman 2002). In a poem about her people, Irish Traveller Kit Gaffey wrote:

Yet so often they’re talked of
 As ruffians and rogues,
 Thieves and stealers,
 Child beaters and hogs.
 Yet they’re so close to each other
 It’s hard to believe
 That their love exists to all their creed.
 They watch other children as if watching
 their own
 With love and attention, kindness from
 the soul. (Gaffey, K. 1992: 80)

Older members of the community are also respected and cared for within the family.

Myths

“...Travellers...live on the fringe of society, shun convention and often disregard the rights of others”

“It’s just that the Travellers’ culture and behaviour is almost incompatible with the way most of us live”

(Bristol Evening Post editorial 29.9.98)

“Travellers are their own worst enemies. It seems as though the vast majority of them have turned the art of being squalid and scruffy into a science”

(Bristol Evening Post editorial 16.7.97)

Why do Gypsies and Travellers have a different way of life from that of the settled population?

The Romany language is spoken by Romany Gypsies in different forms throughout the world. Irish Travellers have their own language called Cant or Gammon. It is important for families and children to keep their language alive and for it to be valued and supported, as other languages like Urdu or Welsh have been.

Gypsies and Travellers have special hygiene rules, which are in some ways stricter than those of settled people but are not well understood by people outside their community (Okely 1983). Gypsy Anna Lee explains: “We never wash in a sink. If we have a sink in the trailer it’s always got a dish inside, ’cos we have separate bowls for everything... for washing up...for washing our hands and face...and for wiping around. We never get ’em mixed up. When we are doing our laundry we won’t wash our tea towels in with all the rest of our clothes, ’cos we think that’s very unclean.” (Lee 2000: 81).

They take great pride in cleaning their caravans daily, even when getting moved

on, and have gleaming displays of china and glass. “It’s very important to keep your trailer clean but when you’re travelling it can be very awkward... Sometimes you haven’t got enough water...And it’s getting the water, because they won’t let you have it. So you learn to use maybe one dish of water to clean your trailer – you’ll wipe all around first, and then do your floor with it. I clean my trailer every day” (James 2000: 36). Again the public perception can be the opposite. They are often assumed to be dirty and called names like “stinking Gypo”, which is very hurtful and constitutes harassment.

Homeless Gypsies and Travellers who have to stop on unauthorised sites may have uncollected rubbish because public refuse collection does not cover these sites. If rubbish is not collected from settled residents, the press may be very supportive of their difficulties. Very often the presence of Gypsies and Travellers on an unauthorised site is used as an excuse for fly-tipping by other people in the area, but the Travellers will get the blame.

Another important aspect of Gypsy and Traveller culture is the ability to earn a living in many different ways. As self-employed small businesses they fill gaps in the British economy by providing a wide variety of goods and services and adapting to new economic needs (Okely 1983).

The tradition of nomadism or travelling is significant, and allows Gypsies and Travellers to travel to take up work opportunities, and to meet with family on special occasions such as christenings, weddings, illness and funerals. These “rites of passage” are very important events which all family members join. Communities also meet up at Gypsy horse fairs such as at Stow on the Wold and Appleby. Although opportunities for travelling are now more restricted, nomadism is as much about the possibility of travelling as about travelling itself: “more a state of mind than an actual situation” (Liegeois, 1987: 53). Irish Traveller Michael McDonagh (1994: 95) sums it up: “Nomadism entails a way of looking at the world, a different way of perceiving

Why do Gypsies and Travellers have a different way of life from that of the settled population?

things, a different attitude to accommodation, to work and to life in general.”

Religion is of great importance to many Gypsies and Travellers, in terms of their daily lives and through rituals and gatherings. Irish Travellers are often devout Roman Catholics and their children attend Catholic schools. Many go on pilgrimages to Lourdes or in Ireland. Large numbers of Romany Gypsies are now Born-again Christians. They find love and solidarity in the Church and in meeting up with others from across Europe at large Christian conventions.

Do Gypsies and Travellers in housing stop being Gypsies/Travellers?

Gypsies and Travellers who have moved into housing do not lose their culture or their ethnic status. For many the tradition of nomadism remains key to their cultural identity, and many still hope that they or their children or grandchildren will be able to travel in the future (Parry *et al* 2004a). Other cultural characteristics, such as strong links with

extended family, are maintained wherever Gypsies or Travellers live.

How well does the general public understand the cultural traditions and experiences of Gypsies and Travellers?

Despite this strong culture, Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are amongst the most misunderstood groups (Ni Shuinear 1997). Theories have even been put forward that their culture does not really exist, for example in Ireland in the 1970s (Collins 1994; DTEDG 1994). Prejudice and hatred are openly expressed. “Roma remain to date the most persecuted people of Europe” (ERRC 2001 quoted in Hancock 2002: 53). Half a million were killed in the Nazi Holocaust, “but their plight is often forgotten and they remain ‘demonised’. If we don’t learn from the past, we run the risk of repeating its mistakes in the future.” (Dr James Smith of the National Holocaust Centre) (BBC News 26.5.05. www.news.bbc.co.uk).

A MORI poll in 2003 found that 35% of the population admit to prejudice

against Gypsies and Travellers, while 38% believe such prejudice exists (Stonewall 2003). 32% cited newspapers, and 42% cited television as among the most important influences. “Extreme levels of public hostility...(are) fuelled in part by irresponsible media reporting of the kind that would be met with outrage if it was targeted at any other ethnic group” (CRE 2003). The MORI poll concluded that: “Overall, the findings of the poll indicate that personal contact and familiarity with difference are keys that unlock the shackles of prejudice”.

We discuss later in this booklet some of the ways in which Gypsies and Travellers are developing contacts with the general public and working to promote understanding of their culture and reduce prejudice.

What are Gypsies and Travellers’ experiences of discrimination, disadvantage and harassment?

There is much evidence of severe and continuing discrimination in education, health, employment and contact with

Why do Gypsies and Travellers have a different way of life from that of the settled population?

the criminal justice system (CRE 2003). This undermines Gypsies and Travellers ability to live ordinary lives and to access services equally (CRE 2004). "Great Britain is still like the American deep south for black people was in the 1950s. Discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers appears to be the last "respectable" form of racism." (Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality) (BBC News 17.10.04. www.news.bbc.co.uk)

In education Gypsy and Traveller children experience many disadvantages, not least their difficulties in accessing a stable education when they are moved on. They have been seen as the "group most at risk in the education system" (DfES 2003). Good work has been done by some schools and Traveller Education Services to provide an equal and inclusive education. However children can still find that their culture is ignored, their needs are not met, there is bullying from other children, and a hostile reception in the neighbourhood (Bhopal 2004, O'Hanlon and Holmes 2004, Save the Children 2001). One school in

Essex closed recently when Travellers were enrolled because other local parents mounted a campaign against them and withdrew their children.

A major study by the Department of Health found many health problems for Gypsies and Travellers. They have "significantly poorer health status and significantly more self-reported symptoms of ill-health" than other people in the population of a similar age, gender and economic status (Parry *et al*, 2004b: 5). Poor living conditions are known to have a negative effect on health. This is made worse because they have less access to health services. Prejudice, communication difficulties with health staff, and being moved on even when family members are ill mean that "the health needs of Gypsies and Travellers are not being met through current plans and provision" (Parry *et al*, 2004a: 8).

Gypsies and Travellers can experience unequal treatment from the police. They cite stories of being arrested without due cause, unfairly barred from public venues,

or repeatedly stopped and questioned. Some forces are working to improve their equality strategies and practices (CRE 2004), but in many areas there is a long way to go.

There are still "No Travellers" signs in some pubs and shops, where Gypsies and Travellers face suspicion and extra scrutiny by security guards. They can meet outright public hostility and racism. A racist incident is "any incident which is perceived to be racially motivated by the victim or any other person". Gypsies and Travellers are often the target of such incidents, which can include verbal abuse, inappropriate jokes, damage to property, physical assault and even murder, like the murder of 13-year-old Johnny Delaney in Liverpool in 2003. The police, local authorities and other agencies have a responsibility to resolve racist incidents and protect victims. Public education is important in encouraging people to report harassment so it can be tackled.

Where do Gypsies and Travellers live?

“We just want somewhere to live in peace” “We get moved on wherever we go” “We fought for our country and we have a right to live in it” (Gypsies and Travellers speaking).

For many Gypsies and Travellers a key area of cultural difference from the settled population is where they live. However public policy has significantly failed to meet their accommodation needs. Twice-yearly government counts show consistently that a quarter of Gypsies and Travellers in caravans are on unauthorised sites, because they have nowhere else to stop. This means that they are legally homeless under the Housing Act 1996.

Between 1970 and 1994 under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 local authorities

Count of caravans in England July 2005

Unauthorised sites	4,067
Authorised public sites	6,458
Authorised private sites	5,186
Total	15,711

Source: ODPM 2006

had a duty to provide sites for people “of nomadic habit of life, regardless of their race or origin”, “residing in or resorting to” their areas. Many did not provide sufficient sites, or put them in unsuitable locations far from local facilities, by motorways, rubbish tips or industrial activities. In 1994 the government repealed this duty and withdrew grant aid for sites. With fewer sites Gypsies and Travellers were forced onto increasingly problematic stopping places or into conventional housing unsuited to their cultural needs. Government research has calculated that up to 4,500 additional pitches are needed (Niner 2002).

Those without sites face many problems beyond their control; dangerous and polluting conditions; lack of basic services such as water, sanitation and rubbish collection; no safe play space for children (CIEH 1995); never knowing when they will be moved on; and facing harassment and vigilante attacks. Eviction can be frightening and traumatic, and families are likely to be repeatedly evicted. This means they cannot go to school, get

Myths

“...Travellers...invade other people’s land and can’t be removed”
(*Bristol Evening Post* 21.3.05)

“Another village at war as more Gypsies muscle in”
(*Western Daily Press* 21.1.05)

“Basically, the Gypsies have driven a horse and caravan through the planning laws”
(*Daily Express* 3.8.04)

“We don’t want Travellers here”
(*Bristol Evening Post* 1.12.99).

“Invasion of the Travellers...Brazenly flouting planning laws and exploiting the Human Rights Act, Gypsies across Britain are buying fields and setting up their homes”
(*Daily Mail* 6.5.04)

“...Travellers...tend to cause trouble and wherever they go they're not wanted.”
www.hertsessexnews.co.uk

“March of the Gipsy camps...”
(*Daily Mail* front page 15.11.04)

Where do Gypsies and Travellers live?

health care or other essential services (Kenrick and Clark 1999, Hyman 1989). Local authorities and police are spending money on evicting Gypsies and Travellers rather than providing sites to solve the problem for everybody (Morris and Clements 2002).

“They knock you up at three in the morning and you have to wake the little ones and tell them it’s time to move on again. And on the road, there are verbal attacks all the while...They prevent you having fresh water and electricity.” (Scottish-Irish Traveller) (*The Independent* 21.3.05)

In 1994 the government argued that Gypsies and Travellers should set up their own sites. However planning guidance actually made it much harder to obtain planning permission. Although local authorities were expected to make provision for sites in development plans, positive action was rare, and there were very restrictive criteria for site proposals (ACERT 1998, Morris and Clements 1999). Only 10% of initial planning applications by Gypsies and Travellers succeed compared to 80% of applications from the

settled population. For those who, despite these odds, have achieved a family site, the process has been very protracted with numerous different hearings (Johnson and Willers 2004). This greatly increases the stress for families who may need a stable place to live because of serious health problems or to access education.

Why do Gypsies and Travellers sometimes set up sites without permission?

The lack of public sites and the great barriers they encounter in trying to set up their own have left many Gypsies and Travellers without the basic right to accommodation. If they camp on other people’s land, private owners, local authorities and the police have a range of different powers to move them on (ODPM 2006b).

In order just to have somewhere to live, some Gypsies and Travellers therefore purchase their own land and apply for retrospective planning permission. This process is used regularly by members of the settled community, who may indeed attract sympathy if they have to demolish a building constructed without

permission. The planning application still has to go through the due process. It accords with the policy of successive governments who have expected Gypsies and Travellers to provide their own accommodation.

The conflicts that can be generated are in nobody’s long-term interest. Sometimes public meetings are held and hostile and discriminatory statements are made about Gypsies and Travellers. What is needed is to establish more public sites, to make the planning process more equitable, and to welcome Gypsies and Travellers as part of the community.

Why do Gypsies and Travellers live in urban neighbourhoods or near other people?

Gypsies and Travellers need to live near built-up areas for the same reasons as other people, to access economic opportunities, health care, schools and shops. Increasing development and urban expansion means that many traditional

Where do Gypsies and Travellers live?

stopping places are no longer available. Gypsies and Travellers are often seen as “invading” neighbourhoods, but their travel patterns reflect long historical traditions. Instead it is the Travellers who have been pushed out. Around Bristol there are countless areas of land that have been developed, ditched, mounded or bouldered, preventing camping in previous traditional locations (Bancroft 2000, Sibley 1981). “No room here for the nomads” (*Bristol Evening Post* 10.7.98) has sadly been true for many Travellers.

Would conventional housing solve the problem of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers?

There are no accurate figures about Gypsies and Travellers living in housing. Another way they are excluded is not being counted as a separate ethnic group in official statistics such as the national census (Morris 1999). However it is estimated that maybe half now live in houses.

In the past authorities have often assumed that problems of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers

could be solved by housing. They may accept a housing offer in desperation at having nowhere else safe and stable to raise children or for health reasons, but it may prove a difficult and stressful experience. They can feel isolated from their extended family, trapped and enclosed. “I have lived a few years in a house. Can’t bear to be closed in. It’s OK for a while but then you can’t stand it no more. I feel the same about a house as a house-dweller would feel about living in a caravan permanently” (Cardiff Gypsy in Thomas and Campbell 1992: ix). “Travellers are ordinary people, that want the same rights, the same things as non-Travellers, but we live in trailers, we don’t like closed spaces, we love the openness, its sense of freedom” (Gypsy 2006).

Gypsies and Travellers in housing may be exposed to increased hostility and racism. “It creates enormous pressures on all members of the family....I think it allows for far more racism” (Education staff in Cemlyn 2000: 336). “Once you tell your neighbours that you are a Gypsy, they are no longer friendly, they think that Gypsies cannot be trusted” (Gypsy 2006).

The courts have confirmed that homeless Gypsies and Travellers should not be forced to accept conventional housing. In a high court case in 2003 drawing on European case law, the judge stated “In order to meet the requirements and accord respect, something more than taking account of an applicant’s Gypsy culture is required....Respect includes the positive obligation to act so as to facilitate the Gypsy way of life” (Willers and Johnson 2004: 188).

For other Gypsies and Travellers housing can be a satisfactory solution either for a period or more permanently. It is



Where do Gypsies and Travellers live?

important that each individual and family can decide what meets their needs, and that their culture continues to be recognised, but this is very far from the case at present.

How are the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers to be decided and met in future?

The government is currently seeking to address some of the accommodation difficulties of Gypsies and Travellers. A series of measures since 2004 is aimed at bringing Gypsy and Traveller site accommodation within mainstream housing policies, albeit as a specialised form of provision. The Housing Act 2004 section 225 obliges local housing authorities to include the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers residing in or resorting to their district when assessing local housing needs, and include these needs in their housing strategy.

The Planning and Compensation Act 2004 requires Development Plan Documents to set out how the land required for sites is to be made available. Revised planning guidance on these matters aims to create inclusive communities, increase the number of Gypsy and Traveller sites while reducing unauthorised encampments, protect and facilitate the traditional travelling way of life and respect the interests of the settled community (ODPM 2006c). Local authorities are required to involve Gypsies and Travellers in developing their policies and programmes.

Do Gypsies and Travellers have greater rights than other people?

What basic rights do Gypsies and Travellers have?

“We are human beings like everyone else”
 “We just want to be treated fairly”
 “We have lived on our own place for two years. We often greet local people but they turn their heads away and ignore us” (Gypsies and Travellers speaking)

“Any person, whether a traditional gypsy, a statutory, that is nomadic gypsy, or one who is neither, is entitled to the Article 8 right to respect for his private and family life and home...” (Auld, LJ Wrexham County Borough Council v (1) National Assembly of Wales (2) Michael Berry (3) Florence Berry, 2003)

Gypsies and Travellers have the same rights as other members of the community under national and international law, and are entitled to protection as minority ethnic groups. They have needs for basic accommodation, security and belonging. Rather than Gypsies and Travellers having more rights implemented than

other people, they have instead experienced a lack of very basic safety, life opportunities and services that others take for granted. Even assistance such as help with heating their homes, widely available for house-dwellers, can meet with outraged headlines when requested for Gypsies and Travellers.

Why is the Human Rights Act used in planning cases?

Gypsies and Travellers have used the Human Rights Act because the planning system has not treated them fairly and their rights to a home and family life have been denied. The use of the Human Rights Act has therefore encouraged the planning system to take their needs into account. Government guidance states that “the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights should be considered as an integral part of local authorities’ decision-making” (ODPM 2006c: 16).

Myths

“What Gypsies are getting away with in some parts of the country is totally wrong and must be stopped (Robert Kilroy-Silk)” (*Guardian* 25.3.05)

“I do understand they have to have rights but there just seems to be two different laws for different people” (*Western Daily Press* 21.1.05)

Gypsies heat treat.

“Gypsy bosses are demanding cash from the (Scottish) Executive – so Gypsies can install CENTRAL HEATING in their caravans” (original emphasis) (*Sun* newspaper 21.9.04)

The Sun Petition.

“Dear Mr Prescott

1. We demand an end to retrospective planning consent given by councils to Gipsy camps
2. We demand that planning laws apply equally to everyone and not be waived to benefit a minority of Travellers”.

Are Gypsies and Travellers living outside the laws and r

Myths

“...Gypsies ..are granted immunity and even given privileges. The rule of law is flouted daily by people who don't pay taxes, give nothing to society and yet expect to be treated as untouchables” (*Sun newspaper* 10.3.05)

“In effect they are sticking two fingers up to the rest of society...People..feel resentful...because the majority of us have to conform to society's rules.” (*Bristol Evening Post* Editorial Issue No21,966)

“Gypsies are told: You don't have to obey the law” (*Daily Express* 3.8.04)

“(On BBC Radio West Midlands) the Home Secretary said that it was time to end sentimentality about Travellers as they were often involved in burglary, thieving, breaking into cars and urinating in the street” (*The Times* 19.8.99)

“...You can't control Travellers, they are a law unto themselves” (*Bristol Evening Post* 1.12.99)

Living as part of the wider community

“We work and pay our taxes”. “We have strong morals and look after each other” (Gypsies and Travellers speaking).

Gypsies and Travellers are bound by the same rules as everyone else. They pay taxes and license fees. They meet mutual obligations in day-to-day business dealings with the general population (Clark 2002). They also engage in a range of occupations as teachers, probation officers, police officers, nursery managers, community workers, shopworkers. And this will increase as more Gypsies and Travellers are able to access education.

There are often fears that establishing a site in an area will lead to increased crime. However research has found that Gypsies and Travellers and settled neighbours built up effective relationships once a site is established (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 1996) and “many have good relationships with neighbouring communities” (ODPM 2006d). In some areas local residents have actively supported the efforts to

achieve an established site and welcomed them to the area (e.g. Niner et al 2005). Even where there are considerable difficulties, the way forward is through talking and working together.

“...Reverend Hore...said the experience of his Cambridgeshire village was both a warning and a sign of hope. Tensions rose in 2003 after a nearby caravan site expanded...Reverend Hore said there had been new dialogue between villagers and the Travellers which was improving the situation....This is what can break down barriers....If you are journeying together, at least you can create a dialogue” (BBC news 17.11.05. www.news.bbc.co.uk)

Like all other groups, Gypsy Traveller groups include a few people who engage in anti-social or criminal behaviour. The vast majority of Gypsies and Travellers are law-abiding and want criminal behaviour dealt with by the law in the usual way. The high media profile can result in all Gypsies and Travellers being labelled as blameworthy and criminal.

ules of Society?

It can be assumed that all criminal activity in a neighbourhood is due to Gypsies and Travellers, without any evidence.

Moreover media reports may misleadingly headline police arrests but fail to report subsequently if charges are not brought against those arrested. This happened in Fishponds, Bristol, in the early 1990s with a front page report of 24 Travellers being arrested from an unauthorised site that was opposed by local residents. There was minimal reporting when none of these Travellers was later charged. Because some settled people engage in criminal activity, it is not assumed that this is a characteristic of all settled people.

Do Gypsies and Travellers care about the development of Civil Society?

Contributions to society

“When Gypsies and Travellers do good things these are never mentioned”, “We have raised a significant amount of money for children’s and hospital charities, but this is not mentioned because we are Travellers” (Gypsies and Travellers speaking).

Because Gypsies and Travellers have been the object of so much suspicion and hatred, it has sometimes been hard for them to engage in ordinary community, social and political activities. However they show determination in overcoming these barriers and there are many ways in which they make a very significant contribution to a harmonious community, and to enriching the nation’s cultural and political life.

In politics Gypsies and Travellers serve at local and national level as councillors and on committees and have stood for

Myths

“Travellers have rejected a conventional lifestyle, they don’t want to be part of established communities and certainly want nothing to do with councils”
(*Bristol Evening Post* 28.05.02)

“The vast majority of people don’t care if life is made unpleasant for these people. They have contributed nothing to society. They just take.”
(*Bristol Evening Post* editorial. 1.2.94)

Do Gypsies and Travellers care about the development of civil society?

election to Parliament. There are Gypsy MPs and councillors throughout Europe. The following obituary of a leading Gypsy politician appeared in *The Times* 14.11.05.

“Charles Smith Gypsy activist, poet, and film-maker, he once ran a successful antiques business. Charles Smith, who has died of cancer aged 49, was one of the leading English Romani community activists of his generation, chair of the Gypsy Council and, since April 2004, a commissioner of the Commission for Racial Equality. An activist in his own ethnic community, he was also a tough, pragmatic local politician. Living on a residential caravan site in Essex, which included both Gypsies and non-Gypsies, he fought Castle Point borough's claims that they had no Gypsies, and then was himself elected a Labour councillor for eight years. He served as mayor in 2002-03.”

Gypsies and Travellers are engaged with MPs and ministers in all-party parliamentary groups, meetings and conferences to try and resolve the

difficulties over accommodation, to promote an improved code of practice for the media, and good practice in services for Gypsies and Travellers. The Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition brings together in this endeavour many Gypsy and Traveller groups such as the Gypsy Council, the Irish Traveller Movement, the National Romani Rights Association and Friends, Families and Travellers. The Coalition won the Liberty Human Rights Award in 2004.

Coalition spokesman Mr Len Smith said “now more than ever” Travellers needed to speak out on these issues...”We can show the rest of society the great contribution that Gypsies and Travellers are capable of making, want to make, and are already doing,” (BBC News 6.5.05. www.news.bbc.co.uk)

There have been many Gypsies over the years who have been famous for their remarkable contribution to society, although their Gypsy background is not always known. These include the actors Sir Charles Chaplin, Sir Michael Caine and Bob Hoskins, Nobel Prize winner

Mother Theresa, footballer Eric Cantona, and singer David Essex. Elvis Presley also had Romanichel origins (Romanestan 2006).

Those who are less famous have also made outstanding contributions and sacrifices. Many Gypsies served in the British Army in both World Wars. Two were awarded the Victoria Cross for their bravery. In today's world Gypsies and Travellers are active members of churches. They are involved in charity work in the community and raising money for good causes. They undertake voluntary work with services like education, police and health to provide public education through exhibitions, videos, meetings, training events and publications.

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“Event honours Gypsy volunteers A Gypsy from Liverpool who is helping to create an information pack about his culture following the death of his son in a racist attack was today being honoured at the House of Lords. Patrick Delaney was joining more than a dozen Gypsies at the event [“Playing a Part in Communities”] in London which aimed to recognise the voluntary work carried out by Gypsies and Travellers around the UK. Mr Delaney...joined a team who are trying to diffuse inter-racial tensions by producing an information guide about the Gypsy culture...

At the event Mr Delaney was being joined by a number of fellow Gypsies including Richard O’Neill, from Manchester, who performs important work for health, including founding the National Men’s Health Week and Bridie Jones, from Canterbury, who works with local schools and police to improve relations with the Gypsy community and prevent bullying...also...Siobhan Spencer, from Matlock, Derbyshire, who helped

create “Pride not Prejudice”, an annual forum helping to break down barriers between Travellers and the police.” (Community Newswire 18.10.05)

Gypsies and Travellers are involved in all walks of life. They are particularly concerned to promote improved knowledge and understanding. They are involved with research in universities into health and accommodation needs, and work in schools developing cultural resources for all children. In Bristol Gypsies have served as school governors and on council working groups. Local Gypsy and Traveller children are helping to create an exhibition of Gypsy and Traveller culture to be shown at the Bristol Museum in 2007 (?).

Gypsies and Travellers have long cultural, artistic and humanitarian traditions. They have been vilified as “outsiders” but they need to be included and welcomed so that their contributions can enrich and develop society alongside all the other groups that make up our communities, without having to hide their identity for fear of harassment. An

important starting point will be the abolition of homelessness among Gypsies and Travellers by providing or enabling sites to be provided. But we all have a part to play in overcoming the “myths” and prejudices which damage their lives.

Contact list

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Avon Travellers Health Project
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Travellers Advice Team
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**Equalities and Community
Cohesion Team**
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Further information

**The Gypsy and Traveller
Law reform Coalition,**
email
www.travellerslaw.org.uk

The Gypsy Council
email
www.thegypsycouncil.org

The Irish Traveller Movement
email
www.itmtrav.com

Friends, Families and Travellers
email
www.gypsy-traveller.org

Commission for Racial Equality
email
www.cre.org.uk

TravellersinLeeds
email
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Travellers Tairing
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www.lmu.livjm.ac.uk/traveller

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