



Irish Traveller Movement in Britain Newsletter Issue 3 2008

Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) Conference – 30/11/2007 London

The ITMB conference was a great success 220 delegates attended and the Traveller community was strongly represented. **Candy Sheridan** a councillor and Traveller said

“This was a much better conference than most because of the simple fact that there was a high number of actual Travellers there! Travellers are becoming tired of the lack of voice that we as a community should be given. So many non-Travellers are deciding where we should live, how the site is designed, why our children must finish school. This conference gave a real voice to the many Travellers that were there and next time let Travellers take all the workshops! as no one needs a lecture on their own history! Travellers know their children need to attend secondary school, we all know that the times have changed and as a community we want to be part of this change!

Lord Avebury, veteran campaigner for Travellers who introduced the duty on councils to provide sites in 1968 as a private members’ bill, which was abolished in 1994, stated:

“At the end of this year, local authorities are supposed to have completed their accommodation needs assessments and the next stage, of identifying land for new Traveller sites begins in earnest. When every local authority sees that others have to find their allocated number of pitches, they should all move forward together, and the next stage begins, with families developing sites where they can afford it, and social landlords providing rented sites”.

Julie Morgan MP Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Traveller Law Reform stated:

“There is evidence that many local authorities are not pursuing their duties under the Housing Act and Circular 1/06 as vigorously or efficiently as they need to and I hope that the Government will address this failure through including enforceable targets for Traveller site development along with targets for affordable and socially rented housing in the Housing and Regeneration Bill”.

Helena Kiely an Irish Traveller and Youth Worker made a tremendous impact in her speech and recounted experiences of bullying at school. Helena stated:

“Travellers need education it’s getting harder to make a living ‘calling’ and doing the old trades, new skills are needed and schools can provide them. A lot of Travellers realise

this and want to send their children to school but what is putting them off is the terrible bullying that takes places in school. We need to stop the bullying in schools!”

See report in the Irish Post newspaper:

<http://www.irishpost.co.uk/news/story/?trs=gbgbsncw&cat=news>

A conference report will be available on the ITM website in February 2008

Communities and Local Government Task Group Launch Report

On the 11th December 2007 the independent Task Group on Site Provision and Enforcement launched their report ‘**The Road Ahead**’. Minister **Ian Wright MP** announced that 97 million pounds would be available for future site construction and refurbishment. The minister felt that more sites presented a ‘win’ situation for everyone, as Travellers would get access to decent homes and services and the wider community would benefit from a reduction in unauthorised encampments and developments and enforcement costs.

ITMB Chair **Father Joe Browne** welcomed the fact the report dealt with wider social inclusion issues as, although important, accommodation was not the only issue that impacted on Traveller life chances. The report can be accessed at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/593429>

Security of Tenure – The Government has introduced clauses into the Housing and Regeneration Bill that increase the rights of Travellers living on local authority sites. **Julie Morgan MP** spoke in the debate on the proposals in the House of Commons on the 27th November 2007 and stated

“I am delighted that, in clause 272, the Government address the issue of security of tenure on sites for Gypsies and Travellers run by local authorities, and I welcome the fact that the clause gives residents of such sites the security of tenure enjoyed by residents of other mobile home sites. The proposals are very fair, and I welcome the Minister’s commitment. These are important matters for Gypsies and Travellers, many of whom have come to the House to meet members of the all-party group on Gypsy-Traveller law reform, which I chair. They have told us about how the insecurity of the present arrangements has affected their lives, families and children. It is therefore very good that the Government are going ahead with the proposals in the Bill. Nearly 40 per cent. of Gypsies and Travellers live on sites provided by local authorities, and they have suffered grievously from the lack of security of tenure. Increasingly, Gypsies and Travellers have wanted to retain a more permanent base while retaining the tradition of living in a caravan and travelling during the summer. Often, that is because they want their children to attend school and, as a result, many more Gypsy children attend primary school than used to be the case. I should say that most Gypsy children on settled sites do so, although that is not so true of secondary schools”

Call for More Sites, Now! - A delegation of Gypsy and Traveller children led by Gypsy and Traveller Affairs and ITM Kent officially launched their e-petition campaign for more Travellers' sites by visiting 10 Downing Street on the 20th November 2007 and handing in a copy of the petition.

Blue Jones a Traveller and member of the UK Youth Parliament says:

“As we know the government are trying to help get us more sites, but all local councils are looking at 2011 before they even start to identify where these sites will be. This is not acceptable as those youth that still live on the road side will then miss out on an education all together; these sites are needed now if we are to get all our youth into mainstream education, or even to get Traveller education service to them. Let's start to stand up for our rights and get things moving”.

Dale Farm – On the 13th December Basildon Council Development Control Committee agreed to continue with the 1.9 million pound eviction of Travellers from Dale Farm. Traveller spokesperson **Richard Sheridan** believes it would make sense to let the Travellers remain where they are until land is identified as part of Basildon council's new accommodation obligations towards Travellers rather than waste millions on an eviction that will make scores of families homeless. On the same day as the eviction decision the East of England Regional Assembly Planning Panel called upon Basildon Council to identify land for 81 Traveller pitches. The Dale Farm case goes to a judicial review in February 2008

A Network of Transit Sites in the North - A Seminar on Short-term Stopping Place Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Events in the North of England took place in Newcastle on November 22nd.

The seminar was organised by the regional Communities & Local Government office and speakers included Joe Hurn from the Northern Network, Scott McNally, Durham County Council and Mark Watson, Cheshire Police. The event was an opportunity for LAs and community members to learn about good practice in providing short term stopping arrangements for key cultural events such as Appleby Fair.

'This is Who We Are' - The report 'This is Who We Are' was launched by the Children Society in London by the Children's commissioner Sir Albert Aynsley Green. The report, written by Heather Ureche and Myfanwy Franks looks at the views and identities of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller young people. The Report can be downloaded from the Children Society website - www.childrensociety.org.uk

Radiowaves is currently launching a Network of Traveller Internet radio stations for young people and is keen to hear from communities who would like to be involved in this exciting new project. The Network will encourage inclusion by sitting within the existing Radiowaves website of over 400 stations, enabling young Travellers, Roma and Gypsy communities to have their own stations, linked with others around the UK, whilst appealing to a wider audience.

Radiowaves gives young people a voice on a safe educational platform with a remit that firmly puts its members at the centre, using creative technology to engage them in learning and skills development. Each Radiowaves reporter has their own page where they can publish audio, text and images. Anybody can listen and download the stories which are presented as podcasts; listeners can also participate by leaving audio comments and taking part in polls. See www.radiowaves.co.uk

The Network has funding from the DCSF and will be participating in the **Traveller, Roma and Gypsy History Month in June 2008**. If you would like to apply to set up an Internet radio station, receive training and recording kit, please email kate.valentine@radiowaves.co.uk by January 18th with the following:

1. Details of current computer/Internet access
2. An idea for a radio programme for History Month
3. An example of a previous community project which involved the use of ICT.

If you need any more information about the Network or application, please ring Kate Valentine 07908403545.

Fair Reporting - Over the years Gypsy and Traveller groups have reported that the persistent refusal of some newspapers to correct inaccuracies and curb abusive and dangerous reporting damages race relations and contributes to an atmosphere of fear and suspicion and puts members of vulnerable groups at risk. The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain has written to the press watchdog the Press Complaints Commission and asked it to revise the code of practice that newspapers are supposed to follow and has called for a new section that reads:

“In exercising its functions, the Press Complaints Commission shall have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination; to promote equality of opportunity and to promote good relations between people of different racial or other groups”.

The Code of Practice Committee consider this request on the 30th January 2008.

Irish Traveller Focus Week – An Munia Tober the Belfast based Traveller support group organised a series of events to raise awareness of Irish Traveller issues, the week was a great success. Learn more about An Munia Tober: <http://www.anmuniatober.org/>

The report '**Providing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Contentious Spaces**' was launched in the House of Commons . The report examines the barriers to new Gypsy and Traveller site provision and methods for conflict resolution. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded the report and it was written by Dr Joanna Richardson of De Montfort University.

One of the key findings was that leadership and political will is vital in the debate on new provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites. Where strength was shown by the leader of the council, or the chief executive, the tone was set for a positive discussion of the issues.

For more information visit:

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/2142.asp>

Leeds Gypsy Roma Traveller Achievement Service has launched a new website:

<http://www.grtleeds.co.uk/>

The ITMB says "The website is a great resource for Gypsies/Roma and Travellers, those who work with Travellers and for people who want to learn about Gypsies/Roma and Travellers. Congratulations to all those who helped make this fantastic website".

Len Smith – We were all very sad to hear of the passing away of Len Smith. Len Smith was a great campaigner for Travellers' rights and his work made the lives of many Gypsies and Travellers better. He will be greatly missed and not forgotten.

You can read an obituary that appeared in the Romsey Advertiser at:

http://www.romseyadvertiser.co.uk/display.var.1910717.0.author_and_champion_of_gypsy_rights_dies.php

Ron Stainer – Sadly Ron Stainer has passed away. Ron helped many Traveller families in the West Country to gain planning permission. He will be greatly missed.

2008 – The ITMB wishes everyone well for the coming year and hopes progress continues to be made for Travellers' rights.

Visit the ITM website <http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/>
Contact us - info@irishtraveller.org.uk Tel 0207 607 2002