



Irish Traveller Movement in Britain Newsletter

Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) Conference – 30/11/2007 London.

Speakers will include Lord Avebury, Julie Morgan MP, Claire Cooper (Communities and Local Government) and Arthur Ivatts OBE Adviser to the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Workshops on Traveller Law Reform - Housed Travellers – Education - Criminal Justice (prisons and policing) - Community Groups - Tenant Involvement – roadside encampments.
For more information visit: http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/about_us/noticeboard

Travellers Call for a Better Deal in Schools

On the 20th September members of the ITM advisory group met Arthur Ivatts and Sheila Longstaffe *Department for Children, Schools and Families* to discuss what could be done to improve access to educational opportunities for Travellers. Helena Kiely a Traveller youth worker with the *London Gypsy and Traveller Unit* recounted how she had suffered from extreme bullying at school and noted the negative impact it could have on confidence. Helena said that she had dropped out of school but took up a college place and was able to study without being bullied, this enabled her to become a youth worker. Breda Doran informed the meeting how she had become a classroom assistant and felt that it would help if more Travellers were given the opportunity to take on roles like this or become teachers or school governors. Julie Joyce told the group that her boys had had a tough time at school, they were picked on and did not enjoy secondary school so she had decided to home educate them. On her site in Manchester there is now a home education centre and it has been involved in a number of projects such as film making and learning about Traveller traditions and culture as well as education in more basic subjects. Their work is assessed by their local authority. Literacy classes are also organized in the learning centre for older people.

The meeting decided that the Irish Traveller Movement should write to the Children's Commissioner and request a meeting. The ITM will also be initiating a major consultation and piece of research on education and hope this will influence the Government's policy agenda on Traveller education.

Dale Farm Planning Inquiry

On the 3rd October there was a hearing of the planning inspectorate concerning several plots at Dale Farm, including the plot occupied by Melissa and Mary McCarthy who were tragically orphaned by a fire on the site in 2005. The *ITM* and *Friends Families and Travellers* submitted a joint statement of support for the families. Father Joe Browne Chair of the *ITM* attended the inquiry and stated

“We believe that these plots should be given the permission to stay for the three year period they request. It should be noted that there is a national shortage of sites. It is therefore highly likely that if these families had to leave their plots at Dale Farm that these families would not be able to secure alternative Traveller sites which will enable them to live in accordance with their Irish Traveller culture. New accommodation policies for Travellers will probably not deliver new sites for a number of years”.

The Government has stated that where there is clear and immediate need for sites as evidenced through significant numbers of unauthorised sites or developments then local authorities should bring forward Development Planning Documents containing site allocations. Basildon District Council like many other councils has so far failed to do this.

‘On the Edge’ 5TH October - a conference organised by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the CEHR - Richard Sheridan spokesman for Dale Farm Site despaired at how 18 million pounds is wasted on enforcement each year. More sites would be good for Travellers allowing them to have decent access to services and cut down enforcement costs.

Decent Homes for All - The ITM with its partners in the *Traveller Law Reform Project* hopes to see Travellers included in the affordable housing agenda which is part of the forthcoming **Housing and Regeneration Bill**, this could see Travellers given special support with other groups in the wider community to get decent accommodation they can afford. A special briefing paper has been prepared to help MPs and Lords speak about the needs of Travellers when this Bill is debated. <http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/documents.htm>

Site Design and Management - The draft CLG guidance on the management and design of Traveller sites contains useful advice which if implemented could improve the quality of life for Travellers living on sites. In September the ITM submitted proposals for how the guidance can be improved and developed, this followed extensive discussion with Irish Travellers. The ITM response can be accessed at <http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/policy/policy-submissions>

Need for a Statutory Duty - The ITM has held a number of meetings in London with council representatives about new accommodation policies for Travellers. Some appear to have little understanding of the obligations they are under to identify land for sites, a number have also stated that a statutory duty would assist them in overcoming local opposition within and outside their councils to increased Traveller site provision. The ITM will be raising this point in a meeting with the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Traveller History - The Irish Traveller Movement is developing learning materials so that children from the wider community can learn about Irish Travellers in school. The material will appear on the ITM website. Let us know if you have any useful pictures or stories.

Yellow Rose Awards – Congratulations to Pete Mercer MBE and Francis Barrett Irish Traveller boxer who amongst others were awarded on the 24/9/2007 for their achievements. The event was organised by *ITM Kent* and *Gypsy and Traveller Affairs* and presided over by Joe and Bridie Jones.

Romani Studies Network 8th December at 11 am - 12.15 in the University of Greenwich Old Royal Naval College, Queen Mary Building Room 268 talk on "The Current Situation in British Romani/Gypsy/Traveller Politics" by Prof.T.A.Acton, University of Greenwich and Mr Andrew Ryder, Irish Traveller Movement.

Highly Offensive Material on 'My Space' – Irish Traveller Eddie McDonagh recently spotted an entry on the website 'My Space' which called on viewers to 'kill Pikeys'. Hillingdon's Traveller Forum have described it as highly offensive. It was one of Eddie's children who first drew his attention to it. Both Bell Farm Christian Centre and the Irish Traveller Movement have reported it to the Police and it is currently under investigation. Eddie's MP John Randall (Conservative) has stated that it is totally repugnant and should have no place on the website 'My Space'.

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Visit the ITM website <http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/>