

GYPSY & TRAVELLER MYTH BUSTER

Who are Gypsies and Travellers?

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 defines Gypsies and Travellers as:

- (a) Persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, including –*
- (i) Persons who, on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependant's educational or health needs or old age, have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and*
- (ii) Members of an organized group of travelling show people or circus people (whether or not travelling together as such); and*
- (b) All other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a mobile home.*

'Who are Romani Gypsies?'

This group includes English, Welsh, and Scottish Gypsies and European Roma. Romani Gypsies have the longest known history of the Traveller communities, with their roots being traced back to Northern India over 1,000 years ago. Their language is known as Romany/ Rom.

'Who are Irish Travellers?'

The first Irish Travellers were recorded in the 8th Century as travelling metal workers & menders of household utensils. Their language is called Cant or Gammon, and they are mainly of Catholic faith, and prefer to send their children to Catholic schools.

Gypsies have a shared culture, language and belief system, as do Irish Travellers, and both groups are recognised as ethnic minority groups under race relations legislation. Additionally all public sector organisations have a positive duty under the law to eliminate racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity, which includes Gypsies and Irish Travellers.

'Do all Gypsies and Irish Travellers travel?'

- Planning law defines Gypsies & Irish Travellers as people with a travelling way of life. Whilst this is historically true, 90% of Gypsies & Irish Travellers around the world now live in houses. When Gypsies and Travellers live in houses their culture and heritage stays with them, you do not have to travel to be a Traveller.
- Some groups are highly mobile, moving on when work opportunities have been exhausted and others live permanently in one area or only travel for a few weeks or months of the year.
- Most Gypsy and Traveller families live within close-knit communities, whether in housing or on caravan sites, with strong family and social networks. Gypsies and Travellers now use modern, good quality vehicles and caravans.
- The main reason for travelling is to work, to follow fairs and visit family.

'I thought the whole point of being a Gypsy or Traveller was that you travel? Why do they need permanent sites?'

Although Gypsies and Travellers travel for some of the year, during the winter months most people need a place to stop...

- Travelling patterns are linked to the seasons and the work associated with the seasons. Gypsies and Travellers do not travel on a daily basis, all year round. Families require safe and secure places from which to do their travelling. The 'base' site (if they have one) will usually be where they access GP's, schools and a dentist.
- As Gypsies and Travellers grow older and become less able to travel on a regular basis, some require a safe and secure stopping place where they can maintain the cultural traditions of being a Gypsy or Traveller. Gypsies and Travellers also sometimes stop travelling for periods of time to care for sick or elderly relatives or to continue a child's education within a supportive school environment. Families will then take up the travelling way of life again following these critical events.

'Why do Gypsies & Travellers stop on the side of the road?'

There are not enough authorised places for them to stop; they may be attending a family wedding or funeral in the area, or they are travelling through to one of the many Horse Fairs and need to stop. These are called unauthorised encampments. The Government defines them as "encampments of caravans and/or other vehicles on land without the landowner or occupier's consent"; trespass is a civil rather than criminal offence. Nationally, 21% of all Gypsies & Irish Travellers living in caravans are homeless; this means they have nowhere legally to park their caravan. One solution to this would be to provide permanent and transit sites (Site intended for short stays. Such sites are usually permanent, but there is a limit on the length of time residents can stay).

'Why do the council have to make provision for Gypsy & Traveller sites?'

Under the requirements of the Housing Act 2014 and Welsh Office Circular 30/2007 'planning for Gypsy & Traveller Caravan Sites' all local authorities in Wales are required to identify the Housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers in its area and make provision for any needs identified. The Act includes provisions to place a duty on local authorities to provide sites where a need has been identified. All local authorities are required to complete a Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), which identifies pitch requirements. There are no current official Gypsy and Traveller sites in the county of Denbighshire, and failure to provide could result in an increase in unauthorised encampments and possible planning permissions being granted on appeal for sites in unsuitable locations. Based on the findings of the Denbighshire Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA), Denbighshire County Borough Council are required to provide 6 residential pitches. In addition, the assessment identified a need for the provision of 4-5 transit pitches, along the North of the county along the A55 corridor.

'Who is going to pay?'

There are two options:

- **Public provision** – in the recognition of the importance of the need to provide sites, it is possible to apply to the Welsh Government for grants to cover the costs of development of new sites provided, and refurbishment of existing sites; this is a similar process to how affordable housing for the settled population is funded.
- **Private provision** – the land would be identified in the Local Development Plans that could be purchased by individuals to meet their family needs or self manage but not all Gypsies & Travellers can afford to buy & develop their own land

'Do Gypsies & Travellers pay taxes and rent?'

- All Gypsies and Travellers living on a local authority or privately owned sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity, and all other charges measured in the same way as other houses.
- Those living on unauthorised encampments, generally speaking, do not pay council tax, but they also do not generally receive services. There are occasions when basic services, such as a toilet or a wheelie bin, are provided and the Gypsies and Travellers might make payment for this service direct to the appropriate local authority.
- All residents within the UK pay tax on their purchases, petrol & road tax as do Gypsies & Travellers.

'Having Gypsy sites nearby will increase crime levels?'

There is no evidence anywhere to suggest that this is the case. Crimes are committed by individuals not communities. There is no evidence at all that there is a disproportionate number of offenders within Gypsy and Traveller communities as opposed to any other communities. The police service has learned from past experience that it is wrong to create stereotypes that link particular crimes with ethnic or social groups.

In Cheshire for example, neighbourhood policing and the establishment of Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers has helped build greater trust. Many Travellers return to the same sites year after year and do get to know local officers and local people. There are far fewer unauthorised encampment issues across the county than five or ten years ago. (Cheshire Constabulary 2011).

'What is Denbighshire County Council doing?'

- The Council has taken a proactive approach to tackling the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and are in the process of identifying suitable pieces of land for sites.
- We are also part of a regional group working with other north Wales Local Authorities to understand and engage with the community to ensure that services are appropriate and managed effectively.

Who to contact for further details

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