

Cllr Eleanor Jackson's address to Cabinet 12 September 2012

How did it ever get to this – total shambles! More precisely, *omni-shambles*. That is, everything going wrong at once. The development of the Core Strategy is held up in part because of lack of a proper policy on traveller sites, residents are rightly outraged because of planning blight which will last until 2014 at least, and the whole site selection process is being changed half way through. A judicial review is threatened and judging by p268 of the Cabinet papers, the Council has incurred £30,000 in extra expenditure because of the GTTAA needs updating, as a result of the heartless way the previous administration sat on the Oct. 2007 report.

£100,000 may be needed in all.

Meanwhile an estimated 3 Roma families, 37 travelling families and one showground family, all with B&NES connections and many with a legitimate claim on social housing like about 15 families already housed, have no permitted homes, and nowhere to move to if the Council decides to evict them from an unauthorised encampment. *

I am not in the blame game. I could not possibly adjudicate between Tory indifference, Lib.Dem chaotic muddle with the best of intentions and officers unable to connect with other departments effectively. Yorkshire gumption is the answer –plain common sense demands:

1. Remove all obviously unviable sites from the list. Continuing with them will not persuade the inspector that 'no stone has been left unturned.'
2. Second a planner to the team to prevent further mistakes.
3. Regularise Lower Bristol Road, restrict numbers, charge council tax.
4. Listen to the travellers themselves: they do not want to be parked in large encampments far from shops and schools.
5. Having made appropriate provision for transit pitches, simply bring all other encampments under planning law and ask the same questions about a site what would be asked of any other development.

If proper controls had been applied, the encampment at the Clandown FC ground in 2008 would not have swelled to 150 vehicles with the local Radstock homeless and ex Glastonbury hippies moving in and anti-social behaviour alienating the Clandowners, which makes it hard to propose the site now as an alternative to Bath Old Road school canteen.

You may remember Andy Saxton who spoke to you before. Nobody should lose a house sale and with it a future job because of this Council's mis-directed shambolic policy. So put the resources in, and sort this mess out. Now, not in 2014.

*Figures from the 2007 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment. Summary attached.

Submission – Cllr Eleanor Jackson

Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment. Published October 2007.

A product of the 2004 Housing Act whereby the need in each LPA is established. Because of this legislation, B&NES is obliged to identify sites, not just publish criteria. If it fails to do so, and there is a clear need, the Secretary of State can require it to be done.

Therefore the West of England study was conducted to establish the demography of the current situation and future needs in terms of health and education needs etc.

The research was conducted January –June 2007, and the report compiled in October.

Under the Act, ‘Gypsies and travellers’ means:

- a) Persons with a cultural tradition of nomadic life or living in a caravan
- b) Everyone else of nomadic lifestyle, regardless of their ethnicity.
- c) Those who, for personal reasons, have ceased to travel for a while.
- d) Members of a group of travelling show people.

744 individuals were surveyed, half under 18, in 188 interviews using travelling people themselves to conduct the interviews.

67 interviews done in 2006 in S. Gloucs. Served as a kind of pilot, with the questions being refined as a result of the responses.

The data was then co-related with existing data already held by local authorities, such as school attendance.

Also investigated the need for ‘emergency stopping places’ (where a 28 days’ licence is possible) and temporary transit needs.

35 show people were interviewed, their community being quite distinct and with different needs.

p6 outlines the legislation.

1960 Act: Caravan Sites and Development. It outlawed all sites which did not have GDC permission.

1994 criminalised encampments and dismantled the 1968 Act which had required local authorities to make provision, but only a third of authorities complied. Local authorities were now obliged to take legal action to remove encampments, often at crippling costs to the tax payer (Something we have seen recently!)

2002 St Andrew’s Park, Bristol was set up. Thereafter Bristol City Council saw the cost of evictions drop from £200,000 per annum to under £5,000. Other authorities experienced similar savings.

2006 An amendment to the legislation now enables ‘retired’ gypsies to join encampments

Since 1979 LA has been required to do six monthly counts of caravans to establish the size of the travelling community. This is not done for hippies or show people.

p10 outlines other academic research with which their own findings can be triangulated.

p13 describes the extensive networking within the community and the expertise gained from previous studies to encourage co-operation by the communities

p14 It proved extremely hard to glean any information about their financial circumstances.

The basic flaw in this requirement to count caravans is that it gives no indication of how many households there are. Teenagers are often put in their own caravans while still dependent on their parents –one family may have four or more caravans. It is also difficult for them to locate all the illegal pitches. The community objects to the whole process of being head-counted anyway.

An advisory forum was set up and actual travellers did the interviews which made a huge difference, as they mainly interviewed their own people. They worked in the same proportion as the three main communities – Roma, travellers of Irish origin and ‘new travellers’. They went in blind without pre-arranged times because of the nature of the travelling community. A police raid in the middle of the information gathering did not help at all. The other problem was reaching the housed/settled travellers.

Recommendation: that the WoE Gypsy/Traveller/Showman Forum continued to meet on a regular basis in an advisory capacity.

Finding: B&NES has no Roma families but a disproportionate number of 'new travellers'. In B&NES the average is three caravans per household but many are less. This may be because there are few Roma. However, average no of children is 2.1 except for show people, who have 1.4 (nationally housed families are av. 1.8)

There are far fewer older people compared with the settled community perhaps because life expectancy is low, or because older people get themselves housed.

14,000 caravans altogether in England, for approx. 40,000 individuals.

There will be a separate census category for them in 2011.

WoE have approx. 1,933 individuals in about 500 households with about a third in housing (This is the same as the 2012 report by Shelter on housed travellers.)

This means 188 sited households with 15 in B&NES, (13 with kids) 123 in S.Gloucs.

6 show people households in B&NES including those housed. **22 altogether**

21 households in B&NES were interviewed.

This is a relatively stable community living on unauthorised plots.

In 2007 there were 20 pitches in addition to the one pitch with temporary planning permission.

Spoke to most new travellers and show people.

They had very few responses from the over 60s.

Most NT children were aged 1-5. The majority of the 11-16 year olds are Irish travellers. The Archdiocese of Dublin (RC) has established that 70% of Irish travellers die before they are 60, and 80% by 65.

Show people need storage for their rides. They used to have 'winter quarters' but now they travel to Christmas fairs and only spend Jan-April repairing rides etc. They have much larger caravans and about 4 vehicles per household.

They have significantly fewer children but look after their old people. Daughters on marriage move to their husband's site. There is little 'marrying out'. B&NES have 2 show families of long standing. There is considerable overcrowding in the existing yards, which has led to fatalities in fires. There is an acute shortage of authorised pitches for show people. 49% nationally have no existing self-owned sites or private lets, which is what they want. 45% could afford to buy their sites.

p51 Total B&NES requirement is 2011-16 is 22 pitches including the legitimisation of the existing households (18) ie permanent pitches with one household per pitch. One family with to transfer out of a house to a pitch. (rare choice)

An expansion of 3% is desirable to accommodate young married couples.

37% of respondents want short stay/transit pitches. Some travellers are not travelling because of the lack of places to move on to.

2005-6 B&NES had 30 instances of unauthorised encampments including NTs

2006-7 B&NES has an estimated need for 20 transit pitches for a proportion of the 60 travelling families in the WoE

One show person's yard is needed by 2011

There were 31 unauthorised caravans in B&NES in Jan. 2004, 26 in July 2005

The number of families who want to get housed, and the number who want to leave is almost identical.

Further work is needed to establish preferences.

Jan 2007 Had 35 unauthorised encamped families. Most of these would be entitled to be re-housed – at what cost?

Many of the housed families are very unhappy because of their neighbours' prejudices and harassment. Also they find dealing with bureaucracy very difficult.

Recommendation: more teaching support, and education of settled population

48% have enough savings to buy a house.

In the SW access to medical care is better than elsewhere but some GPs refuse travellers from unauthorised encampments. Depression was the most frequently reported illness. Also high prevalence of asthma, bronchitis and other lung diseases.

Probably the result of genetic pre-disposition and dampness + high incidence of smoking.

Significantly higher rate of disability among the housed travellers. The team established by Bristol Council to make contact with travellers is highly commended. They often lack house adaptations to which they are entitled. Also suffer from illnesses caused by poor water supplies and sanitation. 46% of those housed are unhappy with situation. **The Travellers Health Project is vital, but only 60% were aware of it.**

Bristol has a good 'myth-busting leaflet' which should be used more widely.

Only 22.5% of traveller s children in 2005 achieved 5 C+ GCSEs, 14.9% of Roma. Compared with 54.6% generally. 12,000 children nationally are out of school at any one time. Bullying, racism, (including from the teachers) and a feeling that there was no point in attending if the families going to be moved on were reasons given. Also they may stop near a school which is already full and they cannot organise an appeal.

B&NES needs to do more outreach work about the Travellers Education Service. New Travellers tend to educate their own children at home. Travellers were keen to go on FE courses, and many had. They wanted vocational courses. 40% of NT had contact with housing services, but since many had no children, they could not get help. Roma would also seek help, but Irish travellers mainly did not.

70% reported racism and harassment, but most never went to the police.

p138 Among the recommendations was that travellers should not be offered poor quality land or contaminated sites no-one wanted.

p139 **B&NES needs 19 pitches, 20 transit pitches, and 1 show people's yard.**