

# Housing Gypsies



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We wish to thank those who gave of their time and offered opinions on the Consultation Paper (on *Reform of the Caravan Sites Act 1968*) issued by the Welsh Office in August 1992. We interviewed thirty Gypsies currently resident at the Rover Way and Shirenewton Sites in Cardiff. We agreed that they would remain anonymous. We also interviewed twenty people in Cardiff whose professional occupations bring them into contact with Gypsies. People spoke to us in their personal capacities and the opinions they expressed did not necessarily reflect the policies of their employers or organisations.

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*November 1992*

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# HOUSING GYPSIES

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report on Gypsies in Cardiff is restricted to matters concerned with housing. In particular, it relates to the Consultation Paper on *Gypsy Site Policy, and Illegal Camping: Reform of the Caravan Sites Act 1968*, issued simultaneously by the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment in August 1992. The period for consultation ended on 13 November 1992 and this Report was prepared in response to the invitation to comment on the proposals found in the Consultation Paper. A response was submitted to the Welsh Office.

The Consultation Paper indicates in paragraph 12 that “The Government considers that for the 1990s a fresh policy is needed which recognises the considerably greater number of travellers and the lessons which have been learned over the last 25 years.” It is stated that the Caravan Sites Act 1968 has proved to be a failure and the proposal in paragraph 24 is to repeal the duties on local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies and replace it with a discretion to be exercised by those authorities. Paragraph 25 indicates an intention to adopt a new policy towards the payment of the 100% grant for capital costs of sites and that it will cease to be payable generally.

In paragraphs 24, 26, 27 and 28 it is stated that there will be a policy to “encourage gypsies who have settled in an area to move from caravan sites into both private and public sector housing”. This is to be achieved through advice to Gypsies and to local communities and also through limited financial support to Gypsies moving off pitches on publicly-owned caravan sites towards the purchase of permanent housing. Finally, paragraph 29 states that the “privileged” planning position currently enjoyed by Gypsies will be changed so that the “planning system should apply to gypsies on the same terms as anyone else”.

This Report was prepared for a particular purpose and also prepared according to a particular format and structure. The term ‘consultation’ is a powerful word within the democratic vocabulary. It means to take advice or seek information from someone. We expect political governors to seek and heed the opinions of the governed for without such action and response democracy gives off a hollow sound. Consultation must be real and not symbolic. Effective consultation is particularly difficult and challenging when communities such as Gypsies are involved. Their historic and daily interaction with officialdom is invariably troubled. Officials are rarely carriers of good news. It is not surprising that they do not seek out such contact but we should also accept that their reluctance to participate is not based on indifference but previous experience.

In our society there are both strong and weak voices. Social, professional and political standing provide platforms from which strong voices can be heard. Many members of society do not enjoy these benefits and consequently have

muted voices despite having clear and valid opinions. Consultation should mean that all voices are canvassed and positive steps taken to ensure that the weaker voices are amplified into audibility for the benefit of the policy makers. We are of the opinion that there is a weakness in the general consultation process which resulted, in this instance, in policy makers failing to consult the Gypsies as *individuals* despite the fact that they are the very people who are targeted by the Consultation Paper. When we interviewed Gypsies on the two Cardiff sites they expressed a disturbingly high degree of ignorance or misunderstanding over the proposals. No direct communication had come to the Gypsies from the Welsh Office in the form of a copy of the document, a summary, or oral communications or attempts to canvass opinions. We are aware that the Cardiff Gypsy Sites Group was contacted, but consider this level of consultation to be inadequate.

The tolerance of house dwellers towards caravan dwellers is limited, as is the ability of the majority to recognise and accept that Gypsies are different. Britain is a cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic society. The willingness to accept difference as a component part of a well-rounded society competes with our anxiety to make others more like us. The resistance of Gypsies to conform to alien norms is consistent and frustrating. Yet their rejection is also a test of our willingness to accept the validity and value of difference and see it as the expression of personal and collective choice. We believe that a subtext of the Consultation Paper is that Gypsies should, through legal social engineering, be encouraged and directed to be more like house dwellers by becoming house dwellers.

As a result of inadequate consultation with individual Gypsies we decided to structure this Report as a vehicle for their voices. We use whenever possible the direct speech of the Gypsies themselves. We canvassed their opinions and believe that their distant voices should carry the greatest weight. They are not objects but people whose lives will yet again be disrupted by the proposed legislation. In addition, we interviewed officials, councilors and voluntary workers in Cardiff who, in their working lives, come into contact with Gypsies. Such are the daily demands on these people that many said they were unable to find time to respond formally to the Consultation Paper. The interviews allowed them to make their opinions known about the wisdom and viability of the proposals. Again, we rely heavily on direct speech from these busy people

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levels of public sector finance. Even if change was generally considered desirable its feasibility hinges upon appropriate support which, in the present financial climate, is not forthcoming. Given the failure of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 it is clear that the Government is seeking change.

**WE THEREFORE SUGGEST THAT, WHILST THE CARAVAN SITES ACT REQUIRES REVIEW, AND “APPROPRIATE HOUSING” FOR GYPSIES REMAINS TO BE ACHIEVED, THE WAY FORWARD IS NOT VIA THE PROPOSALS FOUND IN THE CONSULTATION PAPER.**

We consider that one powerful force behind this Consultation Paper is ideology. In housing matters the political commitment to the market economy was illustrated by the Housing Act 1980 with the right to buy for council tenants followed by the Housing Act 1988. The process of removing local authorities from public housing management responsibility to be replaced by the market and the Housing Corporation is well advanced. Gypsies are the unfortunate victims of this ideology as they are “encouraged” to move into the public and private housing sector. In addition, we believe that there has been an unfortunate and harmful conflation of issues associated with New Age Travellers and Gypsies. The moral panic, defined as a law and order issue, arising out of the reported activities of New Age Travellers has resulted in widespread political demands for legislative change. The confusion and conflation of these two different communities has produced a series of proposals which are unacceptable to Gypsies and to those who, in their working lives, have contact or responsibility for providing them with social and professional services.

**OUR RESPONDENTS ARE CLEAR IN THEIR REJECTION OR SCEPTICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSALS. THEY REPRESENT A WIDE RANGE OF INTERESTS IN CARDIFF, NONE MORE SO THAN THE GYPSIES THEMSELVES, AND IT IS TO BE HOPED THAT THEIR VOICES WILL BE BOTH ACKNOWLEDGED AND ACTED UPON.**

## **2. LEGISLATION**

A change in statute law does not simply happen as if by act of God. It is a consequence of a Parliamentary process which in turn normally reflects the political position of the government of the day, and possibly party policy as stated in its manifesto. The Conservative Party, in its election manifesto of 1992, committed itself to reviewing the position of Gypsies and New Age Travellers in British society. Specifically, it undertook to review the Caravan Sites Act 1968 with the aim of reducing the nuisance of illegal encampments. Subsequently the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment issued a Consultation Paper on 18 August 1992 concerning proposed changes to the law affecting these groups, and invited responses by 13 November 1992.

The Consultation Paper was issued by the Housing and Planning Minister, Sir George Young. Introducing the proposals the Minister said:

*The 1968 Caravan Sites Act is too loosely defined. It has become an open-ended commitment to provide sites, which inevitably leads to a drain on taxpayer's money and undermines gypsies' responsibility to provide for themselves.*

*The present arrangements are unsatisfactory for local authorities, local communities, landowners, and gypsies and travellers alike. The public resents the unlawful occupation of land and the intolerable nuisance that can be caused to local communities.*

*The Government believes that today's proposals for reform will offer swifter action to deal with illegal campers who persists in flouting the law, will encourage travellers to provide their own sites, and will provide space on existing sites as some families move into permanent housing.*

*The consultation also proposes to remove local authorities' duty to provide further caravan sites for gypsies, substituting instead a discretionary power; placing gypsies on an equal footing with anyone else who needs planning permission to use or develop land; curtailing the availability of grants for local authorities to provide gypsy caravan sites; and encouraging gypsies and other travellers who have settled on local authority sites to move into permanent housing.*

### **3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

This is not the place to rehearse the manner in which Gypsies have been mistreated and misunderstood in Western society over the centuries. However, in the recent past they have been conflated and confused with New Age Travellers in popular imagery and by the tabloid press. For many people, travellers, Gypsies, hippies and New Age Travellers are one and the same. A general political concern and a commitment to put the record straight for the New Age Travellers was expressed recently by the Cabinet member, Peter Lilley, Secretary of State for Social Security, at the Conservative Party Conference, Brighton, when in October he declared that New Age Travellers were social scroungers and would be dealt with accordingly.

Concern has built up and focussed upon New Age Travellers, also known as "hippies", because of the social impact and challenge of their alternative lifestyles and summer festivals. The majority have been described as those bonded by an eclectic mysticism and the desire "to escape materialism, comfort and social status for a simple life in the hills and field of rural Britain" (the *Guardian*, 23 May 1986). They themselves describe the worthlessness of their place in society, homelessness, the prospect of continued unemployment or low-waged employment. These social and economic factors do not encourage them to remain within that part of society they have experienced. An alternative and more popular description was offered by Mrs Thatcher, as Prime Minister, who said to the House of Commons that the government would be "only too delighted" to make things as difficult as

possible for hippy convoys and that "if fresh legislation on criminal trespass is needed to deter hippies it will be introduced" (Hansard, 5 June 1986).

There is also evidence from our interviews that Gypsies have very limited tolerance for New Age Travellers and are concerned about the way in which they are reaping the whirlwind created by popular concern over New Age Travellers' lifestyles. Comments by Gypsies included:

*"New Age Travellers are not real Gypsies because whenever we camp somewhere, Gypsies always pick up every scrap of rubbish because if they leave the land as they found it they will always be able to return to the same piece of land at another time. Real Gypsies do not take drugs or drink excessively like New Age Travellers".*

*"One thing the government should understand is that New Age Travellers are not Gypsies. They should be called hippies not travellers. Have you ever seen us smoking drugs, having acid house parties? You don't see Gypsies doing this. By the time my children grow up there will be nothing in this country for travellers if they bring in this new law. The travellers' life will be destroyed".*

*"Gypsies are being blamed by the government for the hippies. Hippies are not travellers – they don't work, they don't do anything. They just roam around and we are getting the blame".*

*"They are educated people from posh houses. Many of them are on drugs. Don't see how they can class Gypsies with them. If those hippies were Gypsies their kids would have been taken from them. They have started it all. Look at the damage they have done. Never heard of Gypsies doing the same damage or taking drugs".*

*"I think this is a terrible law to come out for Gypsies because the ones that have caused them to do this is the hippies who are house dwellers not Gypsies".*

Other interviewees expressed opinions indicating that there is both popular confusion of the different peoples and also opportunistic political manipulation of public concern about New Age Travellers which provides an opportunity to revise the legal rights of Gypsies.

*"The Gypsies are copping it because of the experience of the New Age Travellers which is quite a different thing. They are a nice scapegoat, a very useful scapegoat to vent anger on and they can't hit back".* Rev. Bob Morgan, Ely, Cardiff.

*"These proposals are an immediate reaction particularly against New Age Travellers and has caught up in it the traditional Gypsy population".* Nigel Stannard, Cardiff Short Life Housing Association.

*"My initial reaction is that it is a reaction to New Age Travellers and it is ill thought out. I can understand people's concern My initial reaction is that it is a reaction to New Age Travellers and it is ill thought out. I can understand people's concern about the nuisance caused but the government is using it as an excuse to tighten up the already restrictive regulations with regard to Gypsies. I find it difficult to understand why, when site provision is not keeping pace with demand, that these proposals will make it even more difficult for them to find sites. Under the proposed legislation, local authorities will no longer have a duty to provide sites. (Rita Austin, Director, Commission for Racial Equality, Cardiff).*

Summer solstice peace festivals and similar New Age Traveller gatherings have been defined as major issues of law and order where the loyal forces of a stable and organized society are ranged against corrupt social deviants. For example, in the notorious "battle of the beanfield" of June 1985 on the Hampshire-Wiltshire border, over 500 arrests were made along with extensive damage to mobile homes. Arbitrary and unnecessary police violence was captured on film by TV crews. The police action was so shocking that even the landowner, the Earl of Cardigan, later condemned the police, and in 1992 several of those who were wrongfully arrested were vindicated in the civil courts.

The press played their part in defining the actors by such headlines as "Crackdown call in hippy terror ... Hippies set to invade ... Hippies spark wildlife fears ... Stonehenge haven for Satanists ... Hippy children throw excrement at police ... Convoy dogs examined for killer diseases". Mrs Thatcher expanded the debate by stating that "The problem is how to deal with people who accept all the advantages and benefits of a free society but refuse to rise to their responsibilities." (5 June 1986).

In the alternative, Peter Vincent-Jones, an academic lawyer, has argued:

*The options are clear: to in effect ban the festival through tougher criminal measures and greater police intervention, accepting the implications for civil liberties, or to provide the resources and alternative sites that will enable the event to take place without public disorder and interference with private property. (Journal of Law and Society, 1986).*

The summer of 1992 has presented a similar catalogue of events and popular concern. Mid and North Wales are focal points for meetings of New Age Travellers. The experience of farmer Stan Pugh, who lost sheep and sustained property damage was widely reported. He said "I've never seen such people in my life and didn't know they existed in Britain." (Western Mail, 25 July 1992).

Nevertheless, it is wrong to state that this public confusion of Gypsies and New Age Travellers is total. Many people have recognized, as have our interviewees, that they are discussing very different people. For example,

councillor Ioan Richard, Lliw Valley borough council, stated that he is keen to “differentiate between hippy convoys and the genuine nomad families” (Western Mail, 25 June 1992). A similar position was adopted by the Country Landowners Association when they commented that “We have no particular axe to grind at all with the traditional Romany gipsy” (Western Mail, 20 August 1992). In Lampeter, Gypsies who had lived on the local common for 30 years were threatened with eviction because of the arrival of New Age Travellers. County councillor Hag Harris said “people are not happy about them being turfed out. They are people who lived there for years before the common became the problem it is now” (Western Mail, 5 March 1989).

**WE BELIEVE THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN THIS OPPORTUNITY WHEN NEW AGE TRAVELLERS, WHO ARE ALL TOO EASILY MISIDENTIFIED BY HOUSE DWELLERS, ARE RECEIVING A BAD PRESS TO ADVANCE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS DIRECTED TOWARDS GYPSIES IN THE EXPECTATION THAT SUPPORT FOR GYPSY CIVIL RIGHTS WILL BE BADLY AFFECTED BY THE REPUTATION OF THE NEW AGE TRAVELLERS.**

#### **4. CARAVAN SITES ACT 1968**

According to the long title of the Act, the Caravan Sites Act 1968 was intended:

*[T]o restrict the eviction from caravan sites of occupiers of caravans and make other provision for the benefit of such occupiers; to secure the establishment of such sites by local authorities for the use of gypsies and other persons of nomadic habit, and control in certain areas the unauthorized occupation of land by such persons.*

Section 24 of the Act empowered local authorities to provide caravan sites for Gypsies. Section 6 made it a duty for the council of counties, (in this case South Glamorgan County Council), to use those powers to provide “adequate accommodation” for Gypsies “residing in or resorting to their area.”

#### **5. HOUSING IN WALES**

The issue of housing Gypsies must be located within the context of the available housing and those who are currently homeless in Wales. If the housing stock were adequate or the homeless list were shrinking then adding Gypsies might not be an insuperable problem for local authorities even though the Gypsy community has special needs and requires a high level of support and services to achieve a successful move into houses.

For 1991, Welsh Office statistics indicate that 24,025 people were accepted as homeless in Wales. This represents an increase of 22% over the previous year and a 63% increase in the last decade. On average 30 children became homeless every day in 1991. It must be noted that these figures do not

include single people, childless couples or those not counted for other reasons. The voluntary organization Shelter Cymru estimated that in the UK last year there were 156,000 young people under 25 who were homeless. The organization estimates that between 7,500 and 10,000 young people in Wales are experiencing homelessness in one form or another each year and that the total number in Wales is in excess of 60,000.

According to Shelter Cymru, since 1980 the number of council properties had been reduced by 87,398, overwhelmingly sold to sitting tenants under the right to buy scheme. The number of council houses built since 1980 is 17,108 and housing association properties number 11,417 since 1980. As the more desirable properties are sold it leaves both a shortfall in affordable public sector rented housing stock and a diminution of the quality of housing stock. In Wales 7.2% of all housing stock is deemed unfit as compared with 4.8% in England. Again, in Wales 36.8% of housing stock built before 1919 is unfit compared with the figure of 25% for equivalent stock in England. 4.3% [42,200] properties in Wales lack basic amenities compared with 2.5% in England.

In 1990/91 there were 75,402 applicants registered on local authority waiting lists and 16,215 on housing association waiting lists. Again, this figure fails to recognize those people ineligible for local authority housing including debtors, recent residents, and often the single homeless. In Cardiff the housing waiting list has reached an all-time high of 8,595. These statistics partly reflect the recession and, in particular, this phenomenon is displayed in the growing number of mortgage repossessions in Wales.

In the first six months of 1992 over 75 households a week had suspended possession orders made against them in court. This represents over 300 orders a month, the majority against people with children. In South Glamorgan nearly two households a day are being evicted for mortgage arrears. The Lord Chancellor's Department has issued figures showing that 54 households a month in South Glamorgan are losing their homes. There exists a housing crisis in Wales through lack of suitable and affordable accommodation.

**IT IS WITHIN THIS APPALLING SOCIAL HOUSING CONTEXT THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS FOR REHOUSING GYPSY FAMILIES MUST BE LOCATED AND EVALUATED.**

The opinions expressed by local politicians reflected their concern about general housing conditions and the further problems that would occur as a result of 'encouraging' Gypsies to become house dwellers. Indeed, if positive discrimination in housing allocation were to be employed in favour of Gypsy families this could well produce adverse reactions from those already on the waiting lists and result in further difficulties for Gypsies who are resettled.

*As far as I am concerned the travellers are born into a way of life that they want to preserve and have every right to preserve and I do not think that they should be forced into housing. The other issue is that there aren't any houses for them to be forced into because in Cardiff*

*there is a large waiting list. There are lots of families in B & B and where are the houses going to be found for the travellers? (Councillor Julie Morgan).*

*To suggest housing gypsies will add to the problems as we can't even house those people who want to be housed in council houses. It is just building on a problem when you are forcing people to move into houses who do not want to do so. What gypsies want is more sites and not to be put in houses. (Councillor Linda Thorne).*

The proposed criminal sanctions that could result in the impounding of their homes are unacceptable. These sanctions are unlikely to be attractive to police forces because acting as enforcement bailiffs in such matters is not what police officers think of as 'proper policing duties' (*Police Review* 28 August 1992). In addition, such consequences produce multiple legal problems over the definition of 'homelessness' and local authority responsibilities under housing, welfare and child-related legislation.

*The main implications are not so much with the travellers who are actually in our sites at the moment but the considerable number of them who are trying to find somewhere to put their caravans. There is a large number of children involved. We are not addressing that problem at all so that the idea of prosecuting them and taking away their caravans is absolutely abhorrent. It is cruel. It is going to have a terrible effect on those children and their schooling. (Reverend, Councillor Bob Morgan).*

*Looking at it from a police practical point of view I cannot see us being in a position to start impounding and taking possession of caravans. Although we have a pound next to the station it is full up. We are just not in a position to keep those sorts of vehicles and the point is when it is the family home the local authority would not be particularly happy if we took away their homes and gave the local authority the problem of having instantly to rehouse a family say of six ... I know that there are quite a few Gypsy travellers in local authority housing now but unfortunately once the local community realize that they are Gypsies, they are subject to a few problems – the same sort of problems as a black family would face if they suddenly moved into the area. This tends to be harassment not specifically racial, just harassment. (Inspector Geen, South Wales Constabulary).*

General concerns about homelessness were expressed by interviewees who deal with these issues on a daily basis.

*We have seen a creeping growth in homelessness in Gypsy families going through the conventional homelessness route and you would assume that the introduction of this legislation would increase that, by what extent it is difficult to predict. Any increase is going to pose us problems because we have already got 420 families in temporary*

*accommodation (not gypsy households) so it could well rise. (Peter Tyndall, Deputy Director, Housing, Cardiff City Council).*

Particular concern was expressed about finding suitable houses for the average Gypsy family, which is usually large in number.

*It will put another burden on the district councils and those authorities which are responsible for housing and especially under the homeless persons legislation. It will put a heavy burden on those local authorities who are already hard pressed to provide accommodation. There are particular problems for Gypsy families especially if the family is large because Housing Associations, who are now the providers of social housing, are not building enough large family houses with four, five or six bedrooms. (Nigel Stannard, Cardiff Short Life Housing).*

*We have problems locating the right house for the large family such as a gypsy family as most houses are three-bedroom. As it is more difficult to find suitable property, they will then have to spend longer in temporary accommodation. (Jeff Rochester, Senior Housing Officer, Cardiff City Council).*

*They would need huge houses to put us in because of the size of our families. If you have 5 children you must have a 4 bedroom house. What if you have 10 or 13 children? They'd have to knock two or three houses together. (Gypsy).*

*Where do we house them anyway? We have too small a housing stock now and I would rather work with Gypsies to give them better sites. The community is enhanced. When they come off the road they suffer more than the average family, especially if it is their first time off the road and they are cooped up in one room. The mothers and the kids just go downhill. They are born and bred on the road. It is immoral to force them into housing. (Stephanie Hall, Social Services, Homelessness, South Glamorgan County Council).*

## **6. FROM CARAVAN INTO HOUSE DWELLERS**

The Consultation Paper indicates in section 24(c) that steps will be taken to encourage Gypsies who have settled in an area to move from caravan sites into private and public sector housing.

### **6a Gypsy opinion on house dwelling**

The national press canvassed the opinions of Gypsy leaders in August 1992 when the Consultation Paper was published. These spokespersons condemned the proposals with descriptions as emotive as a “form of ethnic cleansing”.

Peter Mercer, President of the Gypsy Council for Education, Culture, Welfare and Civil Rights said:

*The government is trying to force people into houses who have lived this way for years. The vast majority of the Gypsy community still lives in caravans. They don't want to live in houses. You can't hook a house up to the car and pull it away ... What the government envisages is cultural genocide. They are trying to destroy a way of life and a race of people because some of them are occasionally a bit of a nuisance. (The Independent, 21 August 1992).*

Equally defiant is Tommy Lee, General Secretary of the Romany Guild. He declared that "this is a racist document, like apartheid. They'll never get me into a house." (The Independent, 21 August 1992).

We enquired of the Gypsies on the two Cardiff sites whether they were attracted by the idea of moving into houses. We wished to establish whether their views were in accord with those reported elsewhere. Their position is clear. They wish to remain as caravan dwellers partly because of the cultural, emotional and psychological damage that would accompany house dwelling. The feeling of coercion is strong, which in turn produces traditional Gypsy resistance to official policy for change which they fear is, once again, not in their best interests. For some readers it might appear paradoxical that Gypsies are afraid that their family units and children would be corrupted by close association with house dwellers. Cardiff Gypsies have said:

*It would be wrong to put Gypsies into houses. They would be taking away all our culture. And we wouldn't be able to keep pets: chickens and horses ... I'd feel lost in a house because of all the open space, it would make me feel ill. I think all Gypsies feel like I do.*

*I don't think I could ever live in a house – I'd feel closed in – claustrophobia ... We've always had animals all our lives: dogs, chickens, ferrets, ponies – where would we put them?*

*They are trying to force us into houses but we don't want to be forced into them. They have tried everything with the Gypsies. They won't leave us alone. Proper Gypsy people would not wish to be in houses. Hippies come out of houses. It's not our fault they can't control hippies. It's like saying 'if we can't control the Chinese we will get the Indians.*

*I've spent all my life living in a caravan – this is all I've been used to. House people would not like to be put into a caravan to live so why should we go and live in houses? You feel closed in a house when you're not used to walls round you.*

*We don't want to live in a house. What about people who suffer from claustrophobia? They can't take the pressure of living in a house. They'll end up going to the doctor getting depression tablets.*

*We travellers want to protect our children. We don't want to see them smoking dope and on a site we can keep our eyes on everyone's children and we'll all know what's going on. You can't do this in a house behind doors. All travellers, even if not related, will tell each other what their children are up to.*

*I wouldn't feel my children were safe in a house. We don't hurt or abuse our children, not like the house dwellers. When our kids are playing they are always in the sight of some relative or friend.*

*There are lots of young people in houses who sell drugs and other things which our children will be mixing with and we don't believe in that. We have no drug problems on this site at all. Another thing is we don't worry about our kids on this site. They don't get raped or molested on a Gypsy site. Never heard of this amongst Gypsies – only among house dwellers.*

*I am a proper Gypsy. I can go back three generations and I've photos to prove it. I would die before going into a house. It's wrong. They might just as well do what Hitler did in the war and kill us now ... All I want to do is pay our own way. We want to look after ourselves. All I want is a slab and a toilet and I'd be happy.*

We also contacted Gypsies who are currently living in houses in Cardiff. Some had settled as house dwellers, for personal reasons, but most made clear the preferred mode and place and living.

*I did not like the site. My daughter is a bad schizophrenic and that is why I came to live in a house.*

*I don't want to live in a house but I can't stay on this site. My pitch is infested with rats. I can't let my children out. The electricity goes off in the winter and there is no hot water for bathing or washing. I shall move into the house but I want to come back to the site when it's built. We're travellers and we don't want to live in houses.*

*It's okay but I really want to move back to the caravan site. I am waiting for a pitch on Shirenewton to come up but we've got to wait until someone moves or dies ... We talk to our neighbours and have had no trouble but we don't visit each other's houses like you do on the site ... Though I'm married my husband doesn't live here. He is on the road because he's nowhere to put his caravan. As soon as I get a pitch I'll give up the house and move back with him ... there are a few happy in a house but the majority are only in a house until they can get a pitch on the site.*

*I don't like living here. My two eldest, 17 and 14, are threatening to leave because they want to move to Shirenewton. My kids don't want to live in a house at all. I don't mind being in a house as long as I know*

*I can go back on site as soon as I can get a pitch. I can't sleep at nights because I'm worried that my two eldest will leave in the night.*

## **6b Political opinion on house dwelling**

Local councillors were interviewed and asked to express the views of those house dwelling constituents who had been in contact. (We considered it appropriate to test local opinion via councillors rather than directly approaching neighbours of Gypsies). They indicated that complaints had been received from residents about resettlement difficulties concerning Gypsy families in their area.

*You get all sorts of problems when a Gypsy family moves into housing. Recently in this area a family moved in and I received complaints from neighbours who wanted the Gypsy family moved out. They were collecting vehicles and spending their time doing them up outside the house. They worked all hours of the day and night with their radios on which disturbed the neighbours. These are the sort of problems you will get – they are just not compatible with their neighbours and this fact must be accepted. (Councillor Linda Thorne).*

*Gypsy families have been rehabilitated in [X] and have caused more problems – problems in school, with neighbours, they terrorize, they steal from ordinary, decent, everyday citizens and they should be moved from living near them. They have made their neighbours' lives hell and purgatory. I am not in favour of Gypsy sites being placed near industry or housing. (Councillor Vita Jones).*

## **6c Professional opinion on house dwelling**

We also interviewed people working in the voluntary, education and public sector whose occupations bring them into contact with Gypsies and housing issues. Again, the message was clear: Gypsies have major problems in resettling, although we should remember those problems may also be a construction, which is open to interpretation, of neighbours. For some the problem is created simply by the status of being a Gypsy not by what Gypsies do.

*Apart from the practicalities of actually housing Gypsies. I think there would be so many problems concerning complaints from neighbours. In one case of a family moving to Trowbridge, 40 complaints were recorded from neighbours – mostly from those who had bought their houses. There is a real possibility of Gypsy ghettos in areas of housing. Gypsies almost never settle in houses. When housed, some became ill and had to leave the house within weeks. Another woman became depressed, lost three stone in weight. She felt the walls closing in on her when living in a house. Another family in Tremorfa refused to use the upstairs of the house. They removed all doors downstairs, put shelves around the walls for plates, had a tin bath in order to make it*

*like a caravan. (Laura Woodruffe, former Senior Housing Officer, and former Manager of Cardiff Gypsy Sites, Cardiff City Council.*

*There have been numerous traveller families waiting for local authority housing for years but after they have been living in the house for a short while they found they were unable to settle to the different lifestyle. There have been cases where the family had moved into a house but in fact had chosen to live in the caravan parked in the garden. It is usually needs of a medical nature or the recognition that house dwelling offers a better environment in which to bring up children that prompts travellers to request housing in the first place. (Ann Ogle, Area Housing Manager).*

*I actively encourage Gypsies to stay in their caravans. My view is that Gypsies only come off the road if they have a problem e.g. sick children, excessive violence, educational reasons. They rarely come off the road as a planned decision. I only know one family who have settled well. These government proposals just give them more problems, problems they cannot solve in the Gypsy way. They suffer a lot of harassment and discrimination in houses. My theory is that on a properly run caravan site there are less problems with Gypsies than there are with other people on council estates. I fear that with these proposals there will be no more money to provide the necessary sites. (Stephanie Hall, South Glamorgan Social Services).*

*My experience of placing homeless Gypsies in council housing is that it has not been successful. There are many problems – damage to property, friction between neighbours, so inevitably they do not stay long. Putting Gypsies into housing just adds pressure to existing over-stretched services and it is not just about numbers but conflicting lifestyles. (Mike Friel, Housing Help Centre).*

*The survey I did for the Gypsy Sites Group showed that very few people wanted to move to a council house. They clearly wanted to stay on the two sites. The parents and kids wanted to stay on the sites. We got information about intentions of kids who were in their teens. All bar one or two of them wanted to have a plot of their own on the site and buy their own caravan. If they are not provided with sites by the local authority to meet their demand it is going to be very difficult for them to find alternative accommodation. (John Brookes, City and Regional Planning, University of Wales Cardiff).*

## **7. PRIVATE LAND PURCHASES**

The Consultation Paper suggests that Gypsies become more self-reliant and provide sites for themselves as part of the transitional process towards permanent housing. However, seeking land for a private site will be made more difficult by the decision to ensure that the planning system applies to Gypsies on the same terms as anyone else.

The interviewees were questioned about private purchases of land for settlement purposes. Many Gypsies do not have the financial resources to make such purchases even if suitable land is available. However, there are some who have an interest in this possibility but we discovered that it is a problematic and costly business fraught by planning issues. There is also a marked reluctance by landowners to sell land to Gypsies.

Indeed, one solicitor informed us that he knew of a Gypsy who had used an agent to buy land and then bought the site from the agent to get around the problem of discrimination. This transaction also incurred double conveyancing costs.

*We tried to find land in all parts of Cardiff and when we were unsuccessful. We also tried in many other parts of the country without luck. Once the owner found out we were Gypsies the deal was off.*

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*I know people who have bought ground and the minute they bring their caravans on, the bailiffs and Council people come to take them off. Even if you can afford a piece of ground you can't do what you like with it. I know some farmers very well. I could buy land from them and pay so much each week but not through a bank or anything like that, but you couldn't live on it because you won't get permission.*

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*We bought a plot but didn't know about planning restrictions. We didn't know we needed permission to put our caravan there. Within two weeks of moving on the land we had a letter from the Council saying we had to get off it as we didn't have permission.*

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*At the moment it's easier for a Gypsy to get planning permission for a caravan site in the green belt than it is for a person to build a house. These new laws will put us in the same position as house dwellers when it comes to planning permission. It will make it harder for us. What should happen is that councils should tell Gypsies where they will give us planning permission. We don't want good land: bogs, mountains, anything.*

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*We'd like to have our own sites but we don't know when we buy the land whether we'll get permission. If we knew we'd get permission before we bought it, it wouldn't be agricultural land and the farmer would then treble what he wanted for it.*

Even if land is identified the financing of the purchase is difficult. The financial institutions such as banks and building societies are geared to transactions that service house dwellers rather than Gypsies. The institutions have no history or structure that accommodates the special needs of Gypsies, even assuming the potential purchasers are willing to approach them for credit.

*It's difficult to get land and then get planning permission. And what about where the money is coming from? We can't take out a mortgage. We haven't got desk jobs sitting in central heating all day. We are out in the snow putting scrap on the wagon and taking everyone else's rubbish to clean up the area.*

A bank manager was asked to identify the ideal characteristics of a prospective borrower. No mention was made that the borrower might be a Gypsy. The answer effectively ruled out Gypsies:

*Secure employment; proof of a regular salary evidenced by a bank account with prospects for future increases; disposable income surplus; previous history of satisfactory loan repayments; home owner or prospective; no financial pressures in evidence; evidence of unencumbered assets; no detrimental financial information; a good communicator.*

The same question was put to people in the Bristol and West Building Society and the Bradford and Bingley Building Society. We were told that they would lend money to anyone with the ability to pay provided:

*The person could prove that he had a regular income supported by documentation, e.g. a P60 or accounts. The Society would not lend money on land which had no property on it unless the person already owned a property and was buying the land with the house as security ... proven income as shown by a P60 or certified accounts; proof of a history of ownership of property or for the first time buyer evidence of a regular payment of rent; a credit score.*

The buying of land and legal siting of caravans was confirmed as problematic:

*I have never been approached or heard of any Gypsies trying to buy any land in this area. I know many farmers and they never want to sell any of their land and they know, if they do, there are many people interested in buying fields for their horses and they would not consider selling land to a Gypsy. (Donald Francis, Estate Agent).*

*I think there would be reluctance on the part of the landowners to sell them land in the first place. They feel easier selling to the local authority because if there are any problems they can go to the local authority and create a stink afterwards. (R. Bellringer, Estates and Valuation Department, Cardiff City Council).*

*On a practical point, the proposals that Gypsies seek their own permissions for sites is fraught with difficulties by their very lifestyle as planning permission is land-based rather than person-based. It is far more complex for a Gypsy to get permission as he is usually, though not always illiterate; money is unlikely to be in abundant supply; he will need to employ professionals to assist him and really Gypsies need someone to act collectively on their part, which the County Council does at the moment. These difficulties will be compounded by the special exemption applicable to Gypsies being removed by these proposals. (Robin Crossley, Planning Department, South Glamorgan County Council).*

## **8. CONCLUSION**

This report aims to represent the views of two principal interested parties on the matter of housing.

The first group is made up of Gypsies currently resident in Cardiff at the Rover Way and Shirenewton sites. At the time of our interviews the Gypsies were largely unaware of the contents of the Consultation Paper but became better informed as a result of the interviews. However, it is clear that the Gypsies are committed to retaining their freedom of choice and movement. This is not to suggest that they are satisfied with their lot. The changes they would welcome in matters of housing are in the direction of site improvement and an increase in the number of sites. However, opportunities to allow them to purchase and occupy private sites were also seen as attractive options. No Gypsy expressed interest in moving into permanent housing or becoming a house dweller. Indeed, hostility was expressed to such a fundamental transition in their way of life.

The second group is comprised of those who have contact with Gypsies in their working, professional or political capacities. Although these people gave *personal* opinions the statements inevitably draw upon their experiences with Gypsies. Concern was expressed about the viability of the government's proposals. Without significant amounts of cash aid both of a capital and revenue nature these plans are unsustainable. Reservations were advanced because of the knock-on effect of the proposed housing strategy given the desperate shortages currently existing within the public and private rented housing sectors. Gypsies in houses present a complex set of special needs which will add extra strain to the existing support structures. Ultimately, and perhaps most importantly, in a democracy the wishes of the people should be paramount. There was concern that, given that the wishes of the Gypsies are clear, they should not be ignored. Gypsies are anxious to remain caravan dwellers with the option of mobility.

development of private sites, encouragement and powers to Tâi Cymru to develop sites within the Housing Association structure; co-operative enterprises for site development; and reviewing planning procedures and monitoring discrimination against Gypsies in matters of sale of land.

These proposed alternative initiatives would be cheaper, simpler to implement, be supported by the interested parties, and therefore be more effective. Such action would be seen as constructive. A policy to improve the conditions of Gypsies in ways they require and appreciate would in turn be supported by Gypsies and those involved in sustaining their culture and way of life. The government is committed to change but it is imperative that it be change for the better and for the common good. It is clear from our survey that the current proposals within the Consultation Paper on housing issues are unacceptable to the affected key parties.

## GYPSY VOICES

*As stated in the body of this report, Gypsies are the proposed subjects of change but have a disproportionately small input into the process. Consequently, in an attempt to help redress the balance a selection of statements made to us is reproduced below. As agreed with the Gypsies currently resident in Cardiff their names are not disclosed. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the authors or Cardiff Law School.*

### Gypsies on sites

“New age travellers are making it bad all over the country for us. I would not want to go into a house because this is our home. We have been here eleven years and we came from Rover Way. They only play at it. I have been born into it and so have my children. It is our life. Some of the Gypsies that go into houses don't stay long. Them press should put it right about who is who. Them people who write about them should get their facts right before they write anything. The travellers – they come out of houses, they are not Gypsies. On the site here there are about fifteen to thirty travelling people who move away every year. This new law to impound trailers is not fair on the real travellers who go away in the summer and take what they own with them and come back in the winter. The hippies are not travelling people.

Buying our own site? Who has the money to do this? We haven't. There should be family sites though and transit sites. This site is rough but it is happy and peaceful. When they do it up it's going to be a different sort of site. Most of the Gypsies who go into houses come out. Sometimes people who have been brought up in a caravan decide when they get married to get a house but then when they do they realize they can't settle.

One thing the Government should understand is that new age travellers are not Gypsies. They should be called hippies and not travellers. Have you ever seen us smoking drugs, having acid house parties? You don't see Gypsies doing this. By the time my children grow up there will be nothing in this country for travellers if they bring in this new law. The travellers life will be destroyed.

We are here and based here. It is the families out on the road with little children who are the ones that'll suffer. When my children and my sister's children grow up they may decide they don't want to stay in Cardiff and they might want to go somewhere else to live. They won't be able to move around. There are boys who have gone and got married but there is no place for them to stop. There's a young family here [illegally parked outside the site] since Saturday and he's been moved four times. The police have made him move four times in three days.”

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“I have been on this site for eight years. I was born in a caravan and would not like to end my days in a house. We used to travel for a short while years ago. Then Gypsies were allowed to stay on the side of the road or somewhere for twenty-four hours. But some of the farmers would complain. Out here for instance there is the boundary between Gwent and Glamorgan and as long as you moved from one boundary to the next you could have the same length of time to stay again. On Leckwith Common, we stayed for years on and off. They didn't keep moving you in the old days, but Gypsies have more now than they did in those days. Travellers know where to get you. A rolling stone gathers no moss. There are no rolling stones now but you gather a helluva lot of moss now.

There are a lot of Gypsies marrying house-dwellers but usually they will live as Gypsies, especially if the Gypsy man marries a house-dwelling girl, she'll accept his lifestyle, and sometimes the other way. In times to come the Gypsy life will die out completely. If the Government have their way it will die out within a year or two. The Gypsy life has changed – we have changed. No one expects to live off anyone. Usually in years ago, Gypsies were for one another. They weren't separated like they are today. We were all one no matter what happened. It is 'what I want but not what they want' today.

We never had the money to buy a plot of land. Some would like to buy their pitches but it would make it bad for those that don't buy their own pitches. If you are young with your life ahead maybe, but no good for me because it would only be left behind for someone else.

It would be wrong to put Gypsies into houses. They would be taking away all our culture. And we would not be able to keep pets – chickens and horses. When my parents died, a house-dwelling friend took me in her house for the night but I could not sleep upstairs so I slept downstairs on a settee by a door. I like to be by a door, I can't settle unless I'm near a door. I'd be lost in a house because of all the open space, it would make me feel ill. I think all Gypsies feel like I do.”

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“I have never been in a house. My grandfather and his father were all born in carts. We have been in Britain for a very long time, but we are Cardiff Gypsies. When they made the site we had no choice and we have been here for seventeen years. We only leave the site for short distances. I think we ought to have the same rights as council house-dwellers. We should be able to do what they can do if we could afford it and buy the plot we have been on for nearly twenty years. The National Gypsy Council would have to help with the cash, failing that our families would help. I have ten children.

I would not think of going elsewhere and buying land. It was a big fight to put us on a site. Local councils have broken the law since 1968. They have not been able to break the law and get away with it for twenty-four years. It is not

a hidden fact, it is a known fact. They never complied with an Act of Parliament that is the law of England.

Is this country following Germany? Last week, the German people were throwing stones at Gypsies that were there for work. Fifty thousand Gypsies and six million Jews were killed just for being Gypsies and being Jews. The only reason there was fifty-thousand Gypsies was because there were not so many as Jews.

They are trying to force us into houses but we don't want to be forced into it. They have tried everything with Gypsies. They won't leave us be as we are. None of the family have gone into houses and we are a big family. If any decisions are made, we are the last to know. If we had wanted to go into houses we would have done it years and years ago. Proper Gypsy people would not wish to be in a house. Hippies come out of houses. It is not our fault they can't control hippies. It's like saying 'If we can't control the Chinese we will get at the Indians'.

They never thought about us when we were living in tents and carts with muck up to our knees with some sleeping under the cart and some on top of the cart. They never thought about us then.

In Yugoslavia on the telly, they put Gypsies into houses but they didn't put them into streets of houses, they put them into houses like in an out of the way place with chickens and pigs. But I could not live in a house. Why don't they build houses for women that's in homes and hostels. It would save them a lot of money if they saved houses for them. It is costing a lot of money in bed and breakfast each week. What happens when they put Gypsies into houses or tries to and you have all these other people in bed and breakfast? Why don't they put them in the houses and leave us in peace?

The government said the Gypsies should buy their own land. We are council tenants too. If they said I could buy my plot after seventeen years I could get in touch with the National Gypsy Council and see if they would give me help with the money and if not my family would each give a bit.

When a Gypsy dies, they burn his caravan. In the beginning all Gypsies came from India. Sikhs burn the dead and put the ashes in the river. Dr Price was the man who burnt his own child in Wales. Today they burn the caravan. I should think it would cause a revolution to put Gypsies in houses. We are not in the same position as council house-dwellers but if there was any change to be done if they want to alter things, they could sell the individual his pitch. I feel very strongly about this.

[X] Council has privatized their site and the Gypsies there have a life like dogs. In [X] the Gypsies rebelled against it. One of the backward Gypsies was doing dirty work such as burning out rubber cables. He was given petrol to do this and being dull, he tried to chuck it on the fire but it burnt all his arms till they were hanging off and his front. He went to hospital but he died four or five months ago.

The site here could be run cheaper. Look at the wooden fences – they could have put up steel fencing instead. We have not had a breakage in two or three years. The site was wrongly designed and wrongly built.

We don't want houses. All we want is to be treated like other council tenants and be able to buy our own pitches. We would feel safe then. If you owned your own pitches you'd be less burden on the council. Then any breakages would be down to the occupier. The council would have the right to say what you can or you can't do on it afterwards."

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"We are getting the blame for the antics of the 'New Age Travellers' who are dirty, drink and drug taking dropouts and we feel angry about this. They will never get me in a house and my daughters say the same. We all live in sight of each other and when I look out of the window I like to be able to see my family, which I could not do in a house. I could not live near people who are not part of my family. We are discriminated against – if there is a dispute between a Gypsy and a non-Gypsy, the non-Gypsy would be believed. We don't have as many rights as others – we are Welsh just like other people. We pay out poll tax, electricity and rent for our pitch and we have to buy our own caravans – those in council houses have their houses thrown in as well. We know a family who'd gone in a house but only lasted three or four months but had to leave because they felt 'smothered'. Irish Travellers are more likely to want a house as they have lots of children.

We couldn't afford to buy our own land but if the government gave us some land which was big enough for all of us and had services, we'd be very happy."

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"We have lived in a caravan all our lives. All our six children live in vans, some on this site. As soon as my grandchild comes out of hospital he'll only know about living in a caravan so you can't expect him to feel comfortable in a house. Children aren't safe in houses. We'd be afraid of letting them out of the house because of the dangers. You don't hear of a Gypsy hurting or abusing his children. This is what would worry us in a house. If the children are out playing here, they are always in the sight of one of my relatives.

We live the freedom to travel – we go to the Royal Welsh Show and we book a field in advance and the locals like having us there. Quite a few families go off travelling for up to thirteen weeks each year. These 'New Age Travellers' are not real Gypsies, because when Gypsies go and stay somewhere they always pick up every scrap of rubbish because if we leave a piece of land as we find it, we can always go back at another time. Real Gypsies do not take drugs or drink too much like these New Age Travellers."

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“We have lived here on the site for fifteen years. I’m not a Gypsy but my husband is. We have been waiting for a house but we don’t have many points and we’ll only get a flat or maisonette and we’d like a garden. I’d like a house but my husband doesn’t. Every place we’ve been offered has not been suitable for my husband. I want to live near my parents in Rumney but I’ve not been offered a house there. If I had a house, I’d find it easier to get work as my parents could help with my daughter. We don’t go travelling – it’s usually the young marrieds that travel.”

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“We’ve lived on this piece of land for the last eighteen months after living on a caravan site. We’ve been trying to find some land to buy or rent for the last eleven years. We want to be more secure and to do what we want with our own bit of land. I lived near to my parents on the caravan site and looked after them until they died. We tried to find land in all parts of Cardiff and also in many other parts of the country but with no success. As soon as a seller found out we were Gypsies, the deal was off.

We couldn’t live in a council house – it’s like being in a prison. We want to go off for a while and know that when we come back we’ll have a place to return to. Houses are too much hassle but I don’t think generally Gypsies have problems with their neighbours.

We found out about this bit of land from my brother who bought it and is letting us live here and we’ll pay him back. He just paid cash and we didn’t know we needed permission to put a trailer there. When we’d been here two weeks, we had a letter from the council saying we had to get off the land as we had no permission. The land is green belt land. We had sold our two caravans at Shirenewton and our car and truck to move onto the land. I had eight children living with me then and I was ill. The Gypsy Sites Group people helped us, and two councillors, and we made an appeal and we were allowed to stay here. This took about eight or nine months though.

This is much better than being on the site. We feel independent and there are no restrictions. Most Gypsies would like to do this but they don’t have the money and can’t get a mortgage. Even if they had the money, it’s impossible to get anyone to sell land to a Gypsy. A non-Gypsy ought to pretend to be a Gypsy to see what a hopeless task it is.”

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“I think it is a terrible law to come out for Gypsies because the ones that have caused them to do this are the hippies who are house-dwellers, not Gypsies. I wouldn’t like to go in a house – we’ve never had a house in our lives. Every year I leave the site for three or four months to go travelling. I take my two youngest children (aged eight) to show them how Gypsy life is – not only on a caravan site. We go all over the country – the east side, London, Swindon, West Wales. We don’t stop on sites, we just pull on lay-bys and waste ground.

They give us a week, sometimes three weeks, and then the council and the occupier get in touch with us to move. We stay there until they tell you to go. They'll arrest you and if you've got no money to pay the fine they'll take your van.

There's more travelling in my dog than in those New Age Travellers. They won't make one law for one and one for the other – they class everyone the same. The caravan is the only home we have. If that goes we could all end up homeless. But it won't stop us from travelling though.

Have our own sites: that's okay if you have the money. I know people who have bought ground and the minute they bring their caravans on the bailiffs and council people come to take them off. Even if you can afford a piece of ground, you can't do what you like with it. I know some farmers very well. I could buy land from them and pay so much each week but not through a bank or anything like that, but you couldn't live on it because you wouldn't get permission.

I've got five married children and only have one daughter on a site. The rest of them are travelling up and down the country and the only time when they go off the road is when they come to visit me. They all want pitches on a site and are on a waiting list and have been for eight or nine years, ever since they got married. They'd like to come here, but they've got to stay where they are until here's a vacancy here. They only have a few weeks in a place before they get moved on.

I don't think I could ever live in a house. I'd feel closed in – claustrophobia. You'd have to give up everything you've been used to all your life – dogs, chickens, ferrets, ponies, because you'd have nowhere to put them. We've always had animals all our lives.

A politician in Wales said he was waiting for the travellers to come onto land in his constituency but there were no Welsh Gypsies or Irish Travellers amongst them, only new age travellers.

Everything we stand for, they are just cutting us off from the knees. We wouldn't be able to move for a while in the summertime like we do now. I've no relatives in houses – my Mum is eighty-nine and been in a van since she was born. What about young people who want their own vans when they get to eighteen?

Most Gypsies feel as I do, we all feel the same.

We'd like to have our own sites, but we don't know when we buy the land whether we'll get permission. If we knew we'd get permission before we bought it, it wouldn't be agricultural land and the farmer would then treble what he wanted for it.”

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“I’m a proper Gypsy. I can go back three generations and I’ve got photos to prove it. I would die first before going in a house. It’s wrong. It’s hippies is the problem and we’re getting the blame. They might just as well do what Hitler did in the War and kill us now. It’s supposed to be a free country and we should have a free choice – if we don’t we might as well curl up and die. There should be permanent places for everyone and if there were enough sites we could move from area to area. If they do bring in this law, all we’ll do is to get tourers and go on ordinary sites where you can stop legally. Proper Gypsies will not go in houses. They’ll fight. We are not asking for houses – they should be given to the homeless. All we want is somewhere to stay when we are on the move. We have been brought up as nomads – we know no different. Whoever is bringing in this law should be made to swap houses with Gypsies and see how he’d like to live in a caravan in the winter.

I was in Manchester years ago and you could stop on any ground belonging to the council. Most Gypsies are very clean but some are not. What they should do is to fine those Gypsies who leave rubbish. Councils should leave a skip for rubbish and if they make a mess they should be fined. You also get fly-tippers - lorries that come from factories, tip their rubbish, and go – and we get the blame.

The only ones to go in houses is the Irish and hippies – very rarely the Gypsies. Why don’t they make sites for us and make chalets for us if they want us to live settled. We have a different culture. Irish Gypsies are Irish and they must come from houses, but we have travelled all our lives. If they build no more sites, they might as well lock us up now.

We are at the very bottom of the list – lower than blacks, Asians, Chinese. We are scum – we have no rights. All we want to do is pay our own way. We want to look after ourselves – all I want is a slab and a toilet and I’d be happy. We just wouldn’t get on with house-dwellers. We have goats, ducks, chickens, horses, dogs – we’d have a house like a farmyard. We just wouldn’t fit in.

These new laws will just make people take to the road again. Imagine being a house-dweller with three kids and the police came and said they were knocking your house down. How would you feel? That’s what it’s like – I’d kill them first!

MPs have a lifestyle they are used to. Are we interfering with them? No!

We like to go travelling, but we don’t go abroad like house-dwellers – we can’t afford it. If we want a holiday we go travelling, maybe to the seaside for the kids. Proper Gypsies don’t go for houses – the bloodline is not there. I know no one in a house at all. There should be more sites and those people on sites should be made to keep it clean and if they don’t they should be thrown off.”

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“People who live in caravans are not treated the same way as house-dwellers. House-dwellers can get grants. If the government would let us buy our own land, we would do the work to install sewers, water, electricity, et cetera ourselves. It is so difficult to get planning permission and I think they should make it easier for us, especially where there is a limited number of sites. There is a lot of land that would be suitable for us – any land that is not good for crops – even bog land would do because all we would do is to fill it in with hardcore. We don’t want good agricultural land – just any rough land out in the country that no one else has a use for. We could divide it into small family plots. I have two brothers and five sisters and between us we could buy land if it is in the right area. I have not personally tried to buy any land but my cousin did hear about some land and he was going to buy it but then he heard about what the government plans to do so he didn’t bother. He is afraid he would be refused permission.

I have never lived in a house and have no wish to. We like to see our neighbours. House-dwellers do not want to be seen by others. We do need more sites because when my children are old enough, they will want to have their own caravans and plots. What will they do if these laws come in? It should be easier, not harder, for us to get permission to make our own sites. We could do it on any rubbish land so long as it is outside of cities.

If they build no more sites or not let us build our own, we will end up like the hippies – back on the road. I grew up on the road. I went to twenty-two different schools. If you are on the road, you can only stay in a school for a few months before you get moved on again.

It was only when I moved here twelve years ago that I was able to register with a dentist and the same goes for doctors. If you need, say, dental treatment on the road, you have to get emergency treatment, which usually means removing your teeth.

Hippies move around the country in large groups. Gypsies always move in small groups. There is a lot of violence on the roads now so we tend to move in groups of sixty or seventy so we feel safer. These new age travellers have done so much damage to the land and I can say that no farmer has ever had so much damage done by Gypsies. If Gypsies want to go to, say, Swansea to meet for a reason, before they go they would arrange to hire a field. We would not just go there like the hippies. We are getting punished for what others have done – punishing a race of people for what others outside that race have done. Most of these hippies have rich parents, have qualifications, and they can move in and out of the lifestyle when it’s convenient to them. I have noticed when I see these encampments of hippies on the telly that there are many small children and teenagers but you don’t see many in between. This is because when it’s not convenient for them to travel, they go back into their houses to get their children educated.

We don’t need the government to pay for the land for us. We can get together in small family groups and we’ll pay for it and do it ourselves as long as we get planning permission. What use is a bit of land if we can’t live on it. They

are trying to make us go where they want us to be. I've been here twelve years or so but I can still go if I want. They want to pin us down.

If these laws go through, it will just put us back on the road again. We'll have no education for our kids, no doctors or dentists, no emergency services.

Councils that have complied with the 1968 Act are being punished and those that have not built sites and have been breaking the law for twenty-four years will be rewarded. All I want is to be able to buy some land so we can make our own family site and it wouldn't cost the government anything.

I have read what the government wants to do and I think the proposals are absolutely stupid altogether. The idea that threatening to impound Gypsy caravans is going to make travellers move into houses is crazy. It won't. This will drive all amenities away from Gypsies. At the moment, it is easier for a Gypsy to get planning permission for a caravan site in the green belt than it is for a person to build a house. These new laws will put us in the same position as house-dwellers when it comes to planning permission. It will make it harder for us.

What should happen is that councils should tell Gypsies where they will give planning permission. We don't want good land – bogs, mountains, anything. Where you get planning permission for houses, you won't get planning permission for caravan sites because of the other residents who will object. It must be somewhere out of the way. All I want is for the councils to say what type of land and where they will give us permission. How far it must be from the main road and how far from the nearest house.

It is definitely because of the hippies that they want these new laws. They have ruined it for us. Can't see how they can bring in a law against them to cover us.

I can quite understand how a farmer must feel when all these new age travellers move on to his land. We are not allowed to pull on to a farmer's land – we have to pull in on the side of the road and this is the problem. Since they've made sites, there are a lot less travellers on the road and a lot less nuisance from us than there used to be. There are eight of us in my family and in the last ten years not one of us has pulled onto an illegal site.

There is a lot of land allotted for building houses. I could build a house but not a Gypsy caravan site. So it must be land well away from houses – bad land. You can't build on a bog but you can put a caravan on it.

The proposal to confiscate our vans would cause chaos. What if fifty families decided to do this and refused to move. Would they put the men into prison and what if the wives refused to move too, just what will they do then? They should be providing land – even giving us grants towards it.

The paper has under-estimated the Gypsy population. There are a lot of Travellers living on farms that local authorities do not know about. Private

sites are not counted as Gypsy sites. No one knows about some private sites until someone complains.

We don't want to have to go back on the road. We want to settle just so long as our children can be educated.

If they build houses for Gypsies, they would want to be close together. But then who would want to be next to fifty Gypsy families? They want to get rid of us and our culture. We would end up in ghettos like in Germany. We want freedom to choose.

Trying to group us with the hippies is crazy. The way hippies live is not a proper way of life – they are just dropouts. They can't class us the same as them. All this will do is to put Gypsies back on the road and we will lose education, health care."

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"I have spent all my life living in a caravan – this is all I have been used to. House people would not like to be put in a caravan to live so why should we go and live in houses?

We haven't travelled for a long time because I've got two children in special school. All my relations are caravan dwellers. You feel closed in a house when you're not used to walls around you and you feel claustrophobic.

Can't wait for the new pitches to be built as it'll be much better with new toilets and bathrooms and concrete slabs around you. We'll be very happy with that.

We haven't got the money to buy our own sites or do anything like that."

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"Gypsies are being blamed by the government for the hippies. Hippies are not travellers – they don't work, they don't do anything – they just roam around and we are getting the blame. If a Gypsy does something wrong, all the Gypsies get blamed. That doesn't happen with house-dwellers – if one does something wrong, they don't blame all house-dwellers. They are taking this new law out because of the hippies – they are the cause of it. All us travellers are suffering for it. We have been Gypsies for centuries. They are putting us on a black list. They should make more sites. If they don't make more sites, people will be back on the road and there will be lots of hassle. The Government will spend much more money on moving us from town to town.

We don't want to live in a house. What about people who suffer from claustrophobia? They can't take the pressure of living in a house. They'll end up going to the doctor and getting depression tablets. What about the children's education? Before there were no sites, children didn't get educated. Since sites were built, children have gone to school and been educated.

If they don't build more sites and if they do bring this thing out about fining people, they'll have all the trailers moving onto all the existing sites. We will be overcrowded and it will be a health hazard because there won't be any toilets for them. What if they said to house-dwellers 'we are not going to build no more houses. We are going to give you a caravan and put you onto a site to spend the summer and the winter on it.' Would any of those like to be put on a site and be forced to live there and not give them any more houses? How would they like that? We are human beings, we are not dogs, we can't be told how to live, what not to do. We have been brought up on a site."

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"I have lived a few years in a house. Can't bear to be closed in. It's okay 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.

You get class divisions here the same as in house-dwellers. They talk about some travellers being rich. We only ask them to provide us with somewhere to put our caravans. We don't ask them to provide our caravans. But they are willing to spend millions of pounds on houses that we don't want. Why don't they spend the money on sites? It doesn't cost as much to build a site.

If it is your own permanent site, you take care of it. If it is a transit site, people are not careful with it because they're moving on. Money should be spent on proper sites for people who stay on them. It's permanent sites that are needed.

If we wanted to have our own private site, it's difficult to get land and then get planning permission. And what about where the money's coming from? We can't take out a mortgage, we haven't got a desk job sitting in the central heating all day, we are out in the snow putting scrap on the wagon and taking everyone else's rubbish to clean up the area. People on social, where are they going to buy? Old people who can't work? How can they expect us to buy our own land if we are on social security?

We used to travel years ago, but children suffer because of no education. It's not nice on the roadside when at say, six in the morning, the police come and ask you to move. It's happened to me with snow on the ground and they wouldn't even give me a chance to make a fire and feed the kids. It's 1992, not 1929!

When young people want their own caravans, if there aren't any pitches they'll have to go on the road or be forced into houses that they don't want.

We have been on this site for twenty years. Most of the kids here don't know what it's like on the side of the road, and the hassle. They've been on a permanent site. The kids know people in houses - relations - and they just don't want to go into houses.

Lots of young people in houses, they sell drugs and other things which our children will be mixing with and we don't believe in that. We have no drug problems on the site at all. Another thing is we don't need to worry about our kids on the site – they don't get raped or molested on a Gypsy site. Never hear of this amongst Gypsies – only amongst house-dwellers. We know no harm is coming to them as we are watching them. We are not behind closed doors – we can see what's going on. We help each other. We can see what's happening out there.”

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“Live in houses? We would go round the bend looking at walls all the time. I was born in a caravan and reared up in a trailer. We don't know any different. We are different from the hippies – they know nothing about travelling. I have daughters in a house and they are grumbling all the time. It is the worst thing they have done. When I go to see them I have got to keep going outside all the time – I can't sit down in it. They are living in houses because there are no pitches for them but they don't like it at all.

When all the houses are built down here, the site is going to be moved. We'll get the blame for anything that happens.

We're getting blamed for the hippies. They are educated people from posh houses. Many of them are on drugs et cetera. Don't see how they can class Gypsies with them. If those hippies were Gypsies, their kids would have been taken from them. They have started all this. Look at the damage they have done. Never heard of Gypsies doing the same damage or taking drugs.

We are alright as we are. I don't want a house. We are only used to living in these. We can't be blocked in. If I go to my daughter's, after an hour I feel I am suffocating and it's the same when I go to hospital to see a nephew, I can't wait to get out into the open again.”

### **Gypsies in houses**

*[A Gypsy who has been living in a house for two weeks]:*

“I am desperate to get back on a site. We travelled originally but then we had a house in St Mellons – [X] helped me to get a house where I stayed for two years. I'm separated from my husband but he found out where I was and threatened to take the children so I had to move quickly. I got a private house with two bedrooms and I told the landlord I had a couple of kids which was okay but when he found out I had nine with me he went mad. Had to get out but in the end I was given a few months to get out. I had to find somewhere through homelessness and I have been here for two weeks and all my family are here except the three eldest boys. I don't like living here. My two eldest at home aged seventeen and fourteen are threatening to leave because they want to move to Shirenewton. The three eldest are living with cousins on the site. My kids don't want to be living in a house at all.

Most of my family are on Shirenewton. I don't mind being in a house as long as I know I can go back on site as soon as I can get a pitch. If not, I may have to go back on the road to keep my kids. I can't sleep at night because I'm worried that my two eldest will leave in the night. If I can't get back on site, I will lose the children and that's the last thing I want.

The kids don't like being closed in. They can't mix with others. It's like being in prison to the kids. It's like an educated child going to live in a trailer, he wouldn't like it.

When we were on the road, we had to move around mostly in Cardiff from one piece of land to the next. We might be on one piece of land for months but then we'd have to move. Sometimes we would go on to my sister's pitch on site for a while. There should be a transit site for travellers who travel, but all I want is my own pitch.

There are so many homeless people so if they got me a place on site, it would release this house for a homeless family.

They are mixing Gypsies with these hippies. You don't find Gypsies taking drugs. We don't hang around campfires like these hippies do."

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"If they ever did try to stop travellers living how they want, there would be the biggest riot in the world. If all us travellers got together, they couldn't do it. My family here have fifty-six children between us and if they all wanted to have houses there would not be enough. And there's the grandchildren – they'll be wanting their own pitches when they grow up in ten or fifteen years time. What if we all wanted houses? They'd have nowhere to put us. It would break the government to pay for this. There are so many homeless now without travellers too.

It's the fault of the hippies. When we pull in we ask the farmer's permission and we pay rent. We use our own toilets and we don't leave mess when we leave. We bag all our rubbish and take it to the dump. The ground is left as clean as when we came.

If this new law comes out, some caravans are worth twenty thousand pounds. What travellers would do is to buy a tatty old caravan for twenty pounds and let them impound this. Though we can't read and write, we aren't stupid and we will find a way around things.

They would need huge houses to put us in because of the size of our families. If you have five children you must have a four-bedroom house. What if you have ten or thirteen children? They'd have to knock two or three houses together. They'd have to pay for the gas, electric and there would be grants for furniture, crockery, bed linen. Government would have to pay millions if travellers wanted to be awkward. How would we make our living? We would probably end up on social security.

It's the hippies is the problem. They go on to farms and take their diesel, steal chickens et cetera. They are house-dwellers – drop outs on drugs.

What we want is more site pitches and to make it easier for us to get planning permission if we buy our own land. How many house-dwellers would like to be made to live in a caravan for the rest of their lives? They'll never stop travellers living in vans.

Another brother lives in Bristol, and a group of them have bought land and divided it up. They are in the process of applying for planning permission now. This is what they really want for those that can afford it – make it easier to get planning permission.”

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“We travellers want to protect our children. We don't want to see them smoking dope and on a site we can keep our eyes on everyone's children and we'll all know what's going on. You can't do this in a house behind doors. All travellers even if not related will tell each other what their children are up to.

When I go out I've got to take all the children with me. My seventeen-year-old won't stay in the house on her own. She is scared of what she hears and sees on the telly – murders, rape et cetera. She is frightened to stay in the house alone. When our boys fight, we know about it and we can break it up and sort it out but in a house how does anyone know what goes on if you can't see it? You could be murdered and no-one would know.

I can't let the kids out onto the streets to play because there is no-one watching them. They come home from school and stay in all the time. They want to be out in the fresh air – that's why they want to be on Shirenewton site and if I don't get a pitch, the kids will leave home.”

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“Let them have their own choice. Who wants to go in a house let them go and those that don't they can stay in their vans. I've been ten years in various houses in this area and have lived on Rover Way and Shirenewton. Trouble is, if people want a house they have to wait a long time. There should be enough houses for everyone who wants them. Lots of black people come over here and get houses. How is it that Somalis get houses and travellers don't? Why do they do it for blacks and not Gypsy people? The Somalis come over and jump the queue and they've got jobs. The DSS buys them furniture too. I've been waiting over a year for a three-bedroom house. If the Council would buy me a van, I'd go back but I'd have to have a bathroom and warmth. Councils should play fair with travellers. Some will go in houses if they don't keep them waiting. If they muck them around, they don't go.

When I lived in a caravan, I had no electric, no hot water and was paying rent for nothing, always in the muck. That's why I wanted a house. Things are

better now on the sites but they'll pay a lot for it and it'll be too expensive – they'll be put of pocket.

The neighbours are okay but we don't mix with them. I think if travellers wants houses they should have them and if they don't it's up to them."

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"I was brought up on Rover Way Caravan Site and when I was sixteen my mother [a single parent] died and although I had a brother of eighteen, I was in charge of the whole family – five of us. Neither my brother nor me were old enough to stay on the pitch, so we had to move. We went to my Gran's in Crewe in a house for a few months and then went onto my Auntie's pitch for a while, but we couldn't stay there because there were too many vans on the one pitch. Then we had a private house but the landlord didn't pay his mortgage so we were evicted. We went through homelessness and we were put in Roundwood for a while but someone tried to break in so we wanted to move. [X] from the Sites Group got us this house here and we've been here for three years. It's okay but I really want to move back to the Caravan Site. I am waiting for a pitch on Shirenewton to come up but we've got to wait until someone moves or dies. We didn't travel a lot before when we lived on the site, but we knew that we could if we wanted to and if people can't do it, they'll want to do it even more. I don't think they'll ever get Gypsies into houses."

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"Before we moved in here, the neighbours had got up a petition to keep us out. They thought we would be a typical Gypsy family with lots of kids. When you get say two Gypsy families in houses close by, all the Gypsy kids will get together and the neighbours had heard about a family in [X] where they caused havoc. But once we had moved in and they saw we were quiet they have been okay and when there was another petition about getting rid of Gypsies, a couple of neighbours came to say that they had refused to sign it. We talk to our neighbours and have had no trouble but we don't visit each other's houses like you do on the site. Travellers would rather mix with travelling people. We see drug taking amongst the country people [house dwellers] when they walk past our house smoking dope so we keep together, because we don't want to get mixed up in that.

When country people look at Rover Way site it looks rough. It used to be kept very clean when it was new because there were notices that it must be kept clean and if you had a warning which you didn't heed, you'd be threatened to get off. But now scrap is everywhere and there are dogs roaming around. They used to have dog boxes and you had to keep them tied up.

In Bristol, people can buy plots and they will keep them nice. That's what they should do here is have a site for those who can't buy their plots and another site for people who want to buy them. My relatives in Bristol have bought land to make their own site near Severn Beach. It's not near any houses or shops but they are having trouble getting permission to use it as a caravan site.

Travellers want security – they want to be able to go off in the summer and know that when they come back for the winter they've somewhere to live. In Severn Beach, we can't understand why there is a problem with permission.

When you live in a caravan it is nice to sit down and see people walking around and they come in for a cuppa and a chat. You don't get that in houses. On a site we help each other. If I needed to lend a car for something, someone would do it. Not in a house though. Kids are looked after. If there are arguments between people, others can see what's going on and can stop any trouble.

Though I'm married my husband doesn't live here – he's on the road because he's nowhere to put his van. As soon as I get a pitch, I'll give up this house and move back with him. My sister is getting married soon and going back on site. I really need two plots – one on Rover Way for my sister and two brothers and one on Shirenewton for me and my husband, but there's just not enough pitches. They need another site in Cardiff – never mind stopping money to build them. It would be cheaper for the Council to give me a pitch and then I can give up this house for someone who's homeless. I have saved the Council money – if I hadn't looked after my brothers and sisters when my Mum died, we'd have all been in care – five of us. If I can't get a pitch as soon as my sisters are settled on a site, I'll go travelling with my husband.

There are a few happy in a house, but the majority are only in a house until they can get a pitch on the site.

The Government should give a grant to people who want to buy their pitches. They give grants to house-dwellers to do their houses up. Why not travellers? All we want is the land – we have our own caravans.”

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“I have lived here for just two years and I came from Rover Way Caravan Site where I had lived for fourteen years. I have lived before in a house in Manchester for twelve years.

I had a bad slab in Rover Way, the conditions were very bad. It was too near the sea and it used to tremble. I broke my ankle there and I stayed three weeks in hospital. I did not like the site. My daughter is a bad schizophrenic and that is why I came to live in a house.

I settled in okay. My point of view may be different to others though. The neighbours are nice and helpful. I don't miss travelling as I never did travel a lot anyway. I have been in Cardiff for twenty-three or twenty-four years. I had to wait about fourteen months for this house. The first and only house offered to me was in Llanrumney but I didn't like it so I exchanged it for this one which belongs to a housing association. I had to take the first offer because otherwise I would have to wait for too long. I am better off here as I can't get around and I can't drive and my daughter is bad.”