

DEPUTATION TWO
Residents concerned at levels of local authority provision
for the travelling community

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council which should not be longer than five minutes and please begin by introducing the people in your deputation.

MR A SLINGSBY: The lady is Julie Freer, Peter Greenbush, David Smith and Bill McKinnon at the end. The Deputation is Local Residents concerned at levels of Local Authority provision for the travelling community.

I will not go into the Housing Act of 2004 but that gives a full definition of who has to be allocated for housing in the future, including children. I will start the speech.

For the avoidance of doubt by any members present and members of the public, we are not here as apologist for the appalling anti-social behaviour of certain travellers who have recently occupied sites around the area, or refuse to condemn their alleged criminal damage. We are concerned as much as everybody else with the continuous increase in the amount of money being spent on getting court eviction orders, legal reps to address and advise the travellers on their human rights issues, police involvement and clean-up costs with the preventative measures of boulder placement.

If all these costs were added up over the years and had gone to building enough small sites in several locations around the city, we would not need to be here today seeking common sense and wisdom on an issue that is like the Yorkshire Water bill reminder – if you close your eyes and try to ignore it, the problem certainly won't go away.

It is time to grasp the nettle and try to find real solutions rather than tinkering at the edges. It is an ongoing problem that shows no real sign of being solved in the UK. Advocating about another five sites with ten or 15 pitches on each one is considered the road to madness by some critics so the tax payers of Leeds will continue to push their hands deeper into their pockets to finance the minimum cost of £10,000 a month and the £1.4m already spent since March 2006 as the sensible alternative.

The gypsy population is not likely to go down the last available count of illegal sites was 3,681 amounting to around four or five thousand caravans plus applicants.

Leeds Council is quick to point out that we are a multicultural society, so why do we have the inclusion of some ethnic minorities but the exclusion of others? Some critics say that the travellers leave rubbish, dangerous driving, noise, this, that and the other and everyone else abides by the law and contributes to the communities, so does that mean that Utopia is in sight if travellers change their ways and all start living in houses?

The travellers to be responsible in their actions by self-discipline and reciprocity. This is why the public feel threatened and vulnerable, as they are the people who keep picking up the legal and clean-up costs after travellers have moved on. It is unfair on all

council taxpayers that very little action its taken against them and this really does need to be addressed.

What the UK is experiencing is a direct result of retribution from the 1994 Criminal Justice Act, arguably, one of the most repressive measures in recent history. It made the traditional gypsy an outlaw and made 5,000 gypsy families homeless. There could be similar repercussions if the proposed British Bill of Rights does not compel authorities to share an equal quota of legitimate local sites.

There is a Migration Impact Fund coming in. Leeds is going to get £750,000, so that it a spit in the ocean to the problems we are facing.

There is much dismay caused by legal manoeuvrings which began at Government level in 1944 and have led to stalemate on the question of sites for gypsies and travellers to disadvantage of everyone. Gypsies are our oldest ethnic minority group. They arrived in England about 500 years ago and their way of life is being more or less outlawed by means which would not be tolerated by on for others who have been in this country for less then a tenth of that time. Whether sites are run by Councils, housing association commercial companies or private individuals they must be found to bring an end to the constant merry-go-round of unauthorised camping which is harmful to owners, neighbours of that land, to the gypsies and travellers themselves, and the communities at large. Government guidelines say sites must be near GPs health services, bus routes, shops and schools, does that mean Cottingley Springs is not fit for purpose? Between 1996 and 1997 it became a virtual no-go area and in 1998 the B site was reduced from 36 to 26 plots.

THE LORD MAYOR: Mr Slingsby, I am afraid that the red light is on. If you are nearly at the end of your speech...

MR A SLINGSBY: Just one more, yes. At this point in time we would like Leeds Council to do all in its powers to try to make equal equality for everybody and just as a highlight of humour, the government Inspector of Education for gypsies said: "Gypsies and travellers in Europe were the hidden jewel in the European crown" - probably he lived in a country with a moat round his garden.

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you, Mr Slingsby. Councillor Procter?

COUNCILLOR J PROCTER: Yes, I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for further consideration.

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: I second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: I call for a vote. *(A vote was taken)* This is CARRIED. Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. *(Applause)*