

Prime Minister David Cameron
Secretary of State Eric Pickles
Under Secretary of State Andrew Stunell
John Baron MP

All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers: Proposal for resolution to unauthorised development at Dale Farm

Thursday 15 September 2011

Dear Cllr Ball,

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (APPG) are writing to encourage your Council to suspend the planned eviction of residents living on unauthorised pitches at Dale Farm, due to take place on Monday 19 September pending the brokerage of a solution which we believe is achievable. If it is successful, as we believe it would be, it would save public money, allow the illegally occupied portion of the site to be restored and be more humane to those traveller families who are now on the cusp of eviction.

As an All Party Parliamentary Group we would not normally become involved in local matters. However, the Dale Farm situation is a matter of national significance as demonstrated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission's statement yesterday in which they said, "Dale Farm is the product of a national problem". As your Council acknowledged, there is a national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites. We also believe that your Council has correctly stated that the planned eviction does not represent a long term solution for the traveller families affected.

The APPG is also aware of the Government's financial involvement through the DCLG and the Home Office. . An international body (the UN Committee for the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination) has also expressed concerns in relation to the UK's obligations under international human rights law.

We respect the desire of the Local Authority to do its utmost to uphold the integrity of planning law and its own development control policies. We believe it is also significant that your Council's position is now acknowledged and agreed by those representatives from the Dale Farm community with whom we have spoken.

Even at this stage, the APPG believes a solution can be brokered which could resolve this long running and complex issue. Such a solution would have to:

- i) restore to the green belt that part of Dale Farm which has been illegally developed;
- ii) identify a temporary site or sites for the residents of Dale Farm to move on to;
- iii) allow time for the residents to secure alternative and culturally appropriate accommodation.

Such a solution would help to protect scarce public funds (we understand that up to £18 million has been budgeted for the eviction), would be more beneficial for the settled population (who may otherwise have their lives considerably disrupted if homeless

travellers are given little alternative than to set up unauthorised encampments and sites in the area)and be significantly more humane for the Dale Farm residents, (especially those who are most vulnerable and who are currently living in extreme anxiety which is contributing to worsening health and other problems).

The APPG is aware that the Council were previously involved in negotiations facilitated by the EHRC which we were told unfortunately failed due to a breach in confidentiality. We propose that following the temporary suspension of the planned eviction a group to facilitate negotiations between Basildon and the Dale Farm residents is immediately formed. This should have clear terms of reference and ensure strict confidentiality.

As well as your Council (including its planning section), we suggest members of such a group might include:

- John Barron MP
- Representation from Essex County Council and Local Authorities in Essex
- Minister or senior representative from DCLG
- Member of the APPG for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers
- EHRC
- HCA
- Jan Jarab (EU Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights)

The APPG appreciates the fact that you have been working tirelessly on this issue for many years and that you are keen to find an effective and lasting solution. As you have previously acknowledged, enforcement does not represent a long term solution for the Traveller families or for the settled communities in Basildon.

The APPG are ready and willing to support you to achieve a peaceful and long term solution for all parties.

Yours sincerely

Andrew George MP
Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

ADD OTHER APPG NAMES