

# **Mid Devon Gypsy & Traveller Forum**

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

## **Meeting Minutes**

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The forum was attended by three members from the travelling community, Cllr Barnell, Sabrina Thomas (Devon County Council Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer) and 3 council officers from Mid Devon District Council. Introductions were followed by an open discussion which was encouraged by officers. All agenda items were covered though not necessarily in order.

The members of the travelling community highlighted some key issues which were discussed, namely:

- Planning application for pitches in Yeoford
- Concerns regarding the conduct of Parish Councils at public meetings
- Impact of racial hate on mental health
- The impact of the media on the wellbeing of Gypsies and Travellers

Sabrina Thomas reminded the group to report any racial hate using Report Racism/Stop Hate. The link is on the Mid Devon District Council webpages.

Cllr Barnell expressed concern about ignorance towards the community from the public and the media. He confirmed he would look into the possibility of training for parish councils in the future.

### **2. Agree minutes of previous meeting**

No concerns were raised concerning the accuracy of the previous meetings.

### **3. July 2019 Gypsy and Traveller Count**

Jake Choules confirmed that the count had taken place. Members of the community stated that the count is seen as intrusive and questioned the need for this. It was confirmed that this was a central Government requirement but discussions were had as to how Mid Devon can make the count less intrusive. Suggestions included:

- Send an email beforehand stating the dates of the count
- Changing the language used for the count – ask to conduct the count rather than saying “we are here for the count.”
- Send flyers before the count takes place – could include forum information.

### **4. Negotiated Stopping – update**

Sabrina Thomas gave an update on negotiated stopping and explained the idea behind a coordinated approach. She explained that officers from Councils in

Devon are currently exploring the potential for a coordinated approach to negotiated stopping across the county. Sabrina Thomas also explained that a temporary acceptance approach to sites could also be classified as negotiated stopping and that Leeds is a good example of a successful negotiated stopping approach.

## **5. Emerging policies for new pitches in Mid Devon**

Tristan Peat gave an update on the draft local plan for Mid Devon, which is currently being examined by an Inspector, and the emerging planning policies for new pitches in the district for Gypsies and Travellers. The Inspector has suggested that the Council amends its policies to make them more permissive of Gypsy and Traveller sites in the countryside. Tristan Peat explained that this will be considered by the Council later this year, as part of modifications to the draft local plan, and that he will provide a further update at the next forum meeting.

Christie McCombe explained the opportunity for pitches as a result of the Tiverton Urban Extension. Open discussion indicated that pitches in residential areas are not necessarily the best for the community.

## **6. Current planning applications for new pitches**

Jake Choules confirmed that there are two planning applications in Mid Devon that are currently being considered by the Council – one in Yeoford and one in Hemyock. The members of the Gypsy and Traveller community present explained some of the issues surrounding the submission of planning applications.

Concerns were raised surrounding discrimination and a lack of understanding from members of the public, and a need for the appropriate conduct of Parish Councils at public meetings.

## **7. Waiting list and need within in Devon**

The forum was reminded that Mid Devon District Council has a waiting list for pitches.

## **8. Census 2021**

Tristan Peat initiated a discussion surrounding Census 2021 and the Forum heard ideas of how the community may be encouraged to take part. Suggestions were similar to those regarding the bi-annual count.

Sabrina Thomas reminded the forum that the Census could be seen as an opportunity for gypsy and traveller representation.

## **9. How to raise the profile of the Forum**

Members of the community said that they found the Forum useful and would feed back positively to the community. Although word of mouth is usually the most

successful form of communication it was suggested that a Facebook page would also be beneficial.

It was noted that whilst there may not be many people in attendance, the community was aware of the Forum and its profile was increasing amongst members of the community. Those present confirmed they would feed back to the rest of the community.

## **10. Open Forum and Discussion**

The meeting included open forum and discussion throughout, other topics discussed included:

- Waste collection at unauthorised sites
- The popularity of Mid Devon within the community
- East Devon District Council is considering setting up a Forum
- The 'loop hole' planning rule (4 or 10 years)

## **11. Agree topics, chairperson(s), day and timing for the next meeting in the spring 2020**

The members of the community suggested that Fire Safety would be a useful topic for the next Forum. Mid Devon District Council officers confirmed that they would look to bring in a fire safety expert for the next meeting.

It is the goal of the forum for a member of the travelling community to chair the Forum. This has still not been agreed but will be discussed at the next meeting.

This Forum meeting was moved to a Friday afternoon in an attempt to boost attendance. The members of the community present explained that any day of the week would be difficult to get away from work but varying the times and days made sense.

The next Forum meeting will be in April 2020 with a final date and time to be confirmed.

Important details:

Email: [GT@middevon.gov.uk](mailto:GT@middevon.gov.uk)

Website: <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/gypsies-and-travellers/gypsy-and-traveller-forum/>

Key contacts: Tristan Peat, Christie McCombe, Jake Choules