

Y PWYLLGOR CYFLE CYFARTAL

Dyddiad: 16 Ionawr 2003
Amser: 9.30am
Lleoliad: Ystafelloedd Pwyllgora 3 ac 4
Teitl: Yr Adolygiad o Sipsiwn Crwydrol: Adroddiadau ar yr Ymweliadau â Safleoedd

Diben

Adrodd ar sylwadau trigolion a gasglwyd yn ystod ymweliadau â safleoedd Sipsiwn Crwydrol ledled Cymru.

Y Cefndir

Ceir cyfeiriad at ymweliadau â safleoedd yng nghylch gorchwyl yr adolygiad o Sipsiwn Crwydrol, sy'n nodi:

"Efallai y carai'r Pwyllgor ymweld â mannau arwyddocaol i drafod materion perthnasol gydag aelodau o'r gymuned Sipsiwn Crwydrol a phreswylwyr lleol."

Nod yr ymweliadau oedd rhoi cyfle i aelodau o'r pwyllgor gwrdd â thelueoedd o Sipsiwn a Theithwyr ar eu telerau eu hunain ac i gael trafodaethau â hwy wyneb yn wyneb am eu pryderon a'u barn am y gwasanaethau a ddarperir. Y disgwyl oedd y byddai'r ymweliadau yn para tua 2 awr, ond roedd peth hyblygrwydd gyda hyn, gan ddibynnu ar ba mor barod yr oedd y teuluoedd i siarad. Hysbyswyd y trigolion o'r ymweliad ymlaen llaw, trwy'r swyddog cyswllt sipsiwn a/neu reolwr y safle.

Yr Ymweliadau

Ymwelwyd â phedwar safle yn y Gogledd, y Canolbarth, y Gorllewin a'r De. Ceir crynodeb o'r ymweliadau yn yr atodiadau:

Gorffennaf 2002	Sioe Frenhinol Cymru, Llanfair-ym-Muallt	(Atodiad A)
Rhagfyr 2002	Ruthin Road, Wrecsam	(Atodiad B)
Rhagfyr 2002	Pen-y-Bryn, Llanelli	(Atodiad C)
Rhagfyr 2002	Shepherd's Hill, Pont-y-pl	(Atodiad D)

Annex A

Members present

Lorraine Barrett, David Melding, Janet Ryder and Peter Rogers visited the site.

The site

The field entrance had been blocked off this year with three metre high boulders, apparently placed by the Countryside Council for Wales.

A restricted access had been opened as a result of negotiations between the Police, Powys County Council and families arriving in the town.

Over 100 families and caravans were on the original field site (it was not clear whether this number had been constrained as a result of self regulation).

Powys County Council provided skips for rubbish, and both the Police and Council officers had established daily communication with the families on site.

Further background information about the site, which was circulated to Members before the visit, is also given below.

The visit

Members were met by a group of men actively involved in trying to secure authorised stopping for the Royal Welsh Show event. Representatives of one major family group were unable to be present and sent their apologies. In addition to speaking to this group, members also spoke with a cross-section of people in caravans on the site.

The major points of the discussion are summarised below.

The site and travelling to the Royal Welsh Show

The Royal Welsh Show is a major event in the year with many families using it as an opportunity to travel and to meet family and friends.

Some families had tried to book into the campsite for the Show but were refused a place – this was not unusual.

The field has been used for many years, even before the establishment of the show, and there was great concern that they were no longer able to use it for a stopover.

Families wanted a site that they could use to be identified. They were prepared to pay to use the field and accepted the need to screen the river if it were to be used regularly in future. Some kind of pre-booking system was suggested to manage the number of people using the site. It was also suggested that

water, rubbish skips and toilets would need to be provided.

It was suggested that these matters had been dealt with more effectively when a Gypsy Liaison Officer had been employed in the area.

General accommodation issues

Many of the families no longer travelled extensively and had settled either on permanent sites or into permanent housing. For many the Royal Welsh Show was their main remaining opportunity to travel.

Temporary and transit sites were identified as a difficult issue with some people feeling that they could cause problems for those living on permanent sites and others being concerned that they were often not managed effectively and ceased to be temporary sites because families were not required to move on.

There was support for enabling families to buy plots of land with planning permission in place to enable them to live in caravans on their own sites.

Some people expressed the view that there was already adequate provision of permanent sites in Wales.

Families referred to increasing restrictions on travelling caused by campaigns by housed residents and the impact of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.

Education issues

Many acknowledged their inability to read or write but felt that the next generation was much better educated.

There was recognition of the need for reading and writing skills and computer literacy.

There was a much greater level of support for primary school education, and a greater level of concern about secondary school. Some families felt that once children reached secondary school age it was appropriate to cease formal education and teach the children about their own culture and way of life.

Families also spoke about the problems in arranging school transfers, as well as discussing school discipline, ensuring that children attended school, and the problem of bullying.

Key issues arising from the visit

Following the closure of the field as an official site by the Council, a group of families had made every effort to secure an alternative site, including applying for planning permission themselves at a different location.

The large rock barrier in the entrance provided a negative message to the large numbers of the general public passing the site.

Families were willing to work closely with the local authority to assist in the management of a temporary Site. (Given the number of families, children, caravans and vehicles the present site was well ordered, and kept clean and tidy.)

A consensus view amongst local residents, shopkeepers, the Police, the Local Authority, the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, the landowner, and the families themselves that the Ysgiog Farm field was the best current solution to the need for a temporary stopping place.

Background information

For Gypsy & Traveller families, attending the Royal Welsh Show is an important social event, in the tradition of cultural gatherings at regional shows and fairs. This is the only event of its kind in Wales for Welsh Gypsies & Travellers, and is more important than the historical gatherings at Appleby, Stow-on-the-Wold, Brough, and Ballinasloe fairs, and Epsom races. Travelling in caravans to the Show, and meeting other Gypsy and Traveller families, is one of the last remaining opportunities for families to express themselves as an ethnic group with a history of nomadism.

Powys County Council provided a temporary Site at Ysgiog Farm in co-operation with the farmer until 1999. Planning permission was refused in 1999, primarily due to the designation of the River Wye as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Families have pulled on to this location since then, except for last year, when Foot and Mouth restrictions applied.

In 1999 and 2000, there were approximately 150 families in caravans at the Ysgiog Farm Site.

Powys County Council and the families themselves have sought various alternative locations, without success.

Despite the lack of an official site, conflict was avoided in 2000 through negotiation and co-operation between the families, Powys County Council, and the Police. There was also minimal disturbance to local residents, adjoining property and land, and the site itself.

Annex B

VISIT TO RUTHIN ROAD SITE NEAR WREXHAM - 13 DECEMBER 2002

Brief background

The site was originally built in 1986 with 10 pitches for permanent occupation. The site was extended to provide a further 9 pitches in recent years to accommodate Gypsy-Travellers displaced by the closure of the unofficial Croesnewydd site.

On 5 December the site had 28 adults and 32 children resident, with 11 out 19 pitches occupied.

The site has had problems over the last couple of years, although it is quieter at present.

Description of the site

The site is an elongated oval with a narrow entrance at one end and a slip road off the dual carriageway into Wrexham at the other. Along the long sides there is a 12ft metal fence on one side of the site and a very busy road along the other. Trees screen the whole site.

The pitches at the bottom end of the site (nearest the slip road) are closed at present. The Council advised that there was no demand at present, but they would be made available to anyone that wanted them.

There is single-track access in and out of the site via a single exit/entrance. The access road is at the edge of the site and runs alongside the 12ft fence. A number of short roads branch off to give access to four pitches each. There is very limited space to manoeuvre vehicles.

There is no green space on the site.

The site warden's office is located next to the entrance.

A CCTV camera is pointed at the site entrance.

A children's play area had been provided at the bottom end of the site, but had been damaged and is now closed.

The visit

Janet Ryder AM visited the site. About two hours were spent on site, speaking to residents in their caravans who represented three families. The comments made by residents have been grouped by theme in following paragraphs.

The site at Ruthin Road

Access

Immediate surroundings

Several residents commented on the dangers posed by the nearby roads. Both of which are extremely busy and do not have pavements.

Problems on the site

The residents acknowledged that there had been difficulties on the site over the last couple of years.

They universally objected to the video camera, and several of them pointed out that it had not stopped further damage to the boundary fence.

Residents were unanimous that the enlargement of the site had been a mistake and had caused problems for site management.

It was stated by the residents, and confirmed by officials from Wrexham Council, that many of these difficulties had been caused by visitors from other sites rather than residents.

Site management

The issue of site management generated a range of comments. There was general agreement that management needed to be clear, fair and strong. However, there did seem to be a lack of clarity about what site management should provide and what responsibilities the residents needed to take on. There were also concerns that site management should not be too hidebound by rules and regulations.

One resident volunteered that they would be happy to take on the management of the site and felt that they would be able to manage it more effectively than at present.

Discrimination

Residents mentioned discrimination in a range of contexts.

Some younger residents had been unable to find work because employers would not give them a job once they knew where they lived.

Other residents mentioned that they were not welcome in some of the shops in nearby villages.

Education

Importance of education

We spoke to parents of children in school and to a number of young people who were either in school or had recently completed their education. The parents were strongly supportive of school and the need for their children to be educated. Great pride was taken in the children's achievements at school.

The young people we spoke to generally also felt that education was important. However there was real frustration at the difficulty they faced in finding employment having completed school. The young people referred to instances where they had been wrongly blamed for problems and then been dismissed; and other occasions where they had been asked where they lived in an interview that seemed to be going well and had then been told that they were not suitable.

Extra-curricular activities

One person commented on extra-curricular activities. They felt that they were important and ensured that their children were able to take part. They also commented that not all parents agreed with this.

Adult education and training

One of the adults commented that they were illiterate and although they had tried to learn to read and write that had found it impossible.

Securing places in schools

There were mixed views on this issue, with some people stating that they had not experienced any problems while others had. Securing places was easier for the families who were relatively settled on the site. The work of the Wrexham Traveller Education Service (Wrexham TES) in finding school and training places was praised, and several people mentioned that they would be speaking to Vikki Seddon, from Wrexham TES to get her advice.

Range of education provision

Very little direct comment was made about the range of education provision available. However, we did meet young people who seemed to be of an age where you might expect them to be just starting formal secondary education but were pursuing more vocationally based courses. This suggested that a range of options were available.

Discipline

One parent mentioned that they were working with the school to ensure that their child attended and behaved in class. This was done through a record card that had to be signed by each teacher and then by the parent when the child returned home.

Health

Access to services

Most residents seemed to have been able to register with GPs, although they did mention some difficulties with receptionists in surgeries.

Wrexham's new health bus had visited the site that morning, although we did not receive any direct feedback about it.

Travelling

Most of the residents we spoke to appeared to be quite settled on the site and did not travel. One resident commented that children needed a good education, as the Gypsy lifestyle would not be around in a couple of years.

At least one resident was expecting a large number of relatives to travel to visit them on the site over the Christmas period.

Housing

Views on housing varied. We spoke to one resident who had previously lived in a house and was anxious to move back into one as soon as possible. Another resident explained that they could never live in a house because they would be too worried about fire.

VISIT TO PEN-Y-BRYN SITE, LLANELLI – 16 DECEMBER 2002

Background

Pen-y-bryn is owned and managed by the local authority and was opened in 1997. The site residents formerly had pitches at Morfa caravan site, which was over 30 years old. Rather than refurbish Morfa, the residents were relocated to Pen-y-bryn, and the former Morfa site is now within the 'Millennium Coastal Park'.

Description of the site

The site was situated down a narrow road leading off the route towards the city centre. It was a considerable distance from any shops/services and not served by a bus route. The site manager's office was situated close to the entrance.

There were 30 pitches on the site and residents include children, teenagers and elderly. 13 nuclear families live on the site, belonging to three extended families, and most residents have been living on the site for some time. Some residents have had previous experience of living in houses but preferred to live on the site.

Each pitch had utilities (water/electricity) and room for vehicles. Rows of pitches were separated by tarmac roadways. Metered water and electricity was provided to individual pitches, and gas cylinders were also being used.

The visit

Helen Mary Jones AM visited the site. About two hours was spent on the site. Six men were approached but most time was spent inside caravans speaking to women with children of pre-school age. Normally a site manager/warden was available on site during the day. Due to staffing issues the site was currently being managed by the council's housing manager.

Issues raised by residents

Health

Provision of health services was generally good. Those we spoke to had been registered with a GP for some time, although this was a doctor situated some distance away in the town centre. Health visitors also visited the site.

Education

There was universal praise for the local primary schools and the education services provided for younger children. Most children attended the local Bynea school which was installing a Learning Centre to provide opportunities for older children to progress beyond primary education to learn vocational skills. A playgroup was also available for pre-school children from both the Gypsy and Traveller and settled

communities.

Accommodation:

Utilities

There was concern about the very high cost of water and electricity for heating and washing and drying clothes. Bills of up to £30 a week for electricity and £10-15 weekly for water seemed the norm. Residents lack freedom of choice in the provision of utilities. The utility companies supply water and electricity to the council at a central point, rather than to individual pitches. The council then meters usage on each pitch and re-charges residents according to set rates. The housing manager informed us that computerised individual metering was being introduced on the site.

Location/access

The site is in quite an isolated location, some distance from the nearest bus stop. School transport is provided, but reaching other services in the town centre is very difficult for those without access to a vehicle. Most local taxi services served the site but there was at least one that had refused.

Postal services

The post office would only deliver post to the site manager's office rather than individual pitches because of dogs guarding the pitches. When the site office was closed residents would have to travel to the central sorting office to collect their mail. One resident had missed two important medical appointments as a result.

Annex D

VISIT TO SHEPHERD'S HILL, LOWER RACE, PONTYPOOL - FRIDAY 13.12.02

Brief background

The Shepherd's Hill site was owned by Torfaen County Borough Council and first opened as a gypsy-traveller site around 1976-77. The council managed the site until it was taken over by the Gypsy Council in 1990. The Gypsy Council reported that when the site was taken over there were problems with rubbish and vermin and that the local authority had incurred high costs to repair damage to the site.

The 24 families living on the site were a mixture of Irish Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and English Gypsies. Some of the families, including the site manager, originally came to the site from the Manchester area, but the families all seemed to have been settled in the area for a number of years. Some of the residents were locally born and bred and had attended the local primary school.

The site

The site was set in a green field area on the outskirts of Pontypool, surrounded by low hillsides. The 26 pitches had space for two caravans per pitch. The whole site area was covered in tarmac and in very good order. There was a separate parking area for work vehicles, and an area near the entrance with

amenities (water/electricity) set aside for visitors to pull up. The site manager, Mr Docherty, occupied a chalet 'caravan' at the entrance of the site and also had extended family living on the site.

The visit

Lorraine Barrett AM visited the site. The visit lasted over an hour, with a tour of the site with the site manager, conversations with a small number of male and female residents and a longer conversation with the site manager and his wife in their chalet.

Health

No problems were reported with registering with local doctors and accessing health services.

Education

It was reported that all the children were transported to attend local schools. Most of the children on site during the visit were of pre-school age. There were some children playing who looked old enough to be in school, but we were told that they are generally picked up and taken to school regularly.

Accommodation

The pitches were well-spaced and the families well established on the site. A water meter was installed on the site. The site manager monitored the meter and charged residents accordingly. The individual wash-houses on each pitch were also connected with electricity.

There were no spare pitches on the site and the site manager felt that there would be a lot of demand for a large transit site in that area. If managed correctly he felt such a site could be prevented from becoming permanent.