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Travelling Ahead: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Advice
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21st December 2022

Dear Sir,

**P/022/0622- Maes Y Bettws –Mr & Mrs Jim and Julie Janes – Additional
Background Support**

My name is Lynne Garnett and I am an Engagement Officer employed by Travelling Ahead, which is a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Advice and Advocacy service funded by Welsh Government. I would like to provide a supporting statement for James and Julie Janes, responding to outstanding matters for which you required clarification.

Firstly, in response to your question as to how are the applicants linked to Pontrhydfen/ Neath Port Talbot, there is no requirement for Gypsies/ Travellers to have connection to an area; this is not a planning consideration as it is self-evident that whilst Travellers will, generally -speaking, attach themselves to an area in which they can make a living or have family links, a local connection is not a pre-requisite, for obvious reasons. The local connection requirement is not, therefore, one which should be relied upon in determining a Traveller family's planning application, albeit in this case the family are Welsh Romany Gypsies with strong ties to South Wales generally.

Secondly, members of the public do not generally perform 'sequential tests' when buying a Traveller's site, nor do they check 'settlement limits'. Due to the generally disproportionately hostile response to seemingly all planning applications by Travellers, Traveller's tend to gravitate towards sites away from settlement areas as, in my experience, they feel they are more likely to get less hostility from the settled community. This is not consistent with planning requirements for sites, but as planning law is quite complex in this regard, people can be forgiven for not understanding or being aware of the planning consideration of sustainability.

This is also the case for a 'site selection process'; this is similarly planning jargon and with respect, language used and understood only by planning officers. Considerations for people in general are more economic, affordability being the main factor in this.

As regards the disabled facilities required by the client, as they hope to develop the site according to their needs they know best what their needs are, and will build accordingly. They wish to develop this site at no cost to the public purse, and so this is potentially not of relevance overall.

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Similarly, the applicant's housing history is well explained in the appendices provided with the case. The fact that this family currently reside in inappropriate bricks and mortar accommodation is of no relevance, as their heritage is Romany Gypsy and due to the acute shortage of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, this is an unwanted consequence for many families. The irony is that many Traveller families resort to social housing due to lack of appropriate sites, therefore adding to the overall housing shortage when they do not wish to be in this type of accommodation.

I would like to make the following points for this planning application in relation to the current situation within Wales: the current need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in Wales still markedly outstrips provision. A recent Welsh Government report published on 10/08/22 ¹ called for 'immediate action' and highlighted the 'wide-ranging failures by Welsh Government and local authorities in providing adequate sites for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities'. One of its key recommendations was for the Welsh Government to set out:- 'how and when it will use its powers to ensure that councils are delivering on their duties in finding appropriate sites for Travellers'.

It is apparent that the process for identifying, developing and delivering local authority sites has been slow and that in fact Welsh Government figures show that despite the new duty under the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 the majority of new pitch need in Wales is not being delivered in the way that was envisaged but rather being met by Gypsy and Traveller families themselves applying to develop private sites and meeting their own need with no expense to local authorities. These small, family based sites are, as you will be aware, often the preferred choice not just for families but for wider reasons including supporting diverse and cohesive communities and lessening the impacts of larger developments.

In the light of the Welsh Government recommendations of this year, allowing this planning application could provide the opportunity for the Local Authority to prove it is giving serious consideration as to how it can meet and implement its duties to Wales's Gypsy and Traveller families under the Housing Act (Wales) 2014. This would seem even more pertinent in light of the referred to report.

In conclusion, I would ask the Local Authority to approve this planning application, as they are not in a position to offer alternative, culturally-appropriate accommodation that would meet the needs of this family if they refused it. Travelling Ahead implores you to therefore, to take a common-sense approach and approve this planning application in light of the overwhelming evidence in its favour.

Yours Sincerely,

Lynne Garnet

