

29th May, 2025

**THIS STATEMENT CONTAINS PERSONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE FAMILY AND
SHOULD NOT BE SHARED ON THE PORTAL WITHOUT REDACTION**

Supporting statement for planning application Tom and Montana Roberts
Ponderosa, Church Street, Briton Ferry, Port Talbot, SA112HZ

Dear Sir,

My name is Lynne Garnett and I am a Senior Practitioner in Participation, Representation and Engagement for Travelling Ahead which is an advice and advocacy service for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers funded by Welsh Government. We have also been awarded the pilot project for Welsh Government which involves supporting Gypsy and Traveller families to access help with the planning process for private sites as part of the Anti- Racist Wales action plan initiatives.

We have been working with this family alongside Andrew Vaughn- Harries, the Planning consultant to try and achieve their objective of providing a safe, culturally- appropriate site for them to bring up their four children following Romany Gypsy traditions.

Tom and Montana Roberts both grew up on sites in South Wales and have travelled in this and other areas for all their lives. They tried to live on the Giants Wharf site for several years, but had insurmountable difficulties, including the fact the pitch was so small, and the site so inadequately designed that Mr. Roberts was unable to park a work vehicle on the site. The site is poorly managed with inadequate facilities, and pitches are allocated with no regard for the cohesion of the site. This leads to conflict and personal difficulties so extreme Mr and Mrs Roberts were forced to live apart for some time. This was not sustainable, and so in March 2022 the family purchased the site, and cleared and cleaned this location to make it the lovely, well- kept place it is today.

The irony of this situation is that the council provision that would be inappropriately recommended as an alternative to this pitch is in much greater risk of flooding than this site will ever be. This family have done everything they can to provide a safe home for their family at no cost to the public purse, and should be being helped by the Local Authority planning team to achieve this objective, being the fact that a return to a council- owned pitch is neither appropriate, or possible. There is no availability and significant waiting lists for all sites in this area, where there is a large Gypsy and Traveller community. The Planning team have not contacted the Roberts family or tried to resolve this situation for the good of the family, but indeed have served an enforcement notice, which is not in the spirit of how Welsh Government wishes Local Authorities to be working with its Travelling communities.

However, the Estates Manager David Philips did set up a meeting with the family, myself and Mr Vaughn- Harries following the loss of the appeal, and suggested that an emergency egress could be facilitated through council- owned land; this suggestion is to be commended, and is the sort of common- sense approach needed in this situation.

The children are now aged 10,6,5 and 2, with three of them attending local schools, and the youngest signed- up to begin nursery. Mr Roberts has a successful business in the area, and the family are very well-located near to shops, doctors and facilities. Montana can provide care for her mother who lives locally, and they are close to family support.

Despite the best efforts of Mr Philips, the other departments of the Local Authority have offered the family no help, support or a way forward with this planning application, which is deplorable. There was a Welsh Government follow- up enquiry in February 2025 to the damning Senedd Report of August 2022 which highlighted the lack of progress by Local Authorities in all services relating to Gypsy and Travellers and their accommodation. It was stated that 'contributors agreed that their living situation would be far better if they were able to own and manage their own sites' and I can categorically state that this is the case.

I have been working with the Gypsy and Traveller communities in South Wales for the past three years, and my experience is that most of the Local Authorities are failing these communities in terms of lack of engagement, provision of enough sites, and then the quality of the accommodation provided. This is a dynamic and motivated community, and they are trying at their own expense to provide suitable places for their families to live in the absence of any help from the structures that are supposed to help them. I believe it will be a travesty, and a significant failing of the system if there cannot be a way found to allow these people to remain on their land.

The family recently went travelling for work, and Montana has provided photographs of several notices served on them for wherever they found to stay. There is no transit provision for Travelling communities, and also this way of life is essentially criminalized by the Police, Courts and Sentencing Act, 2022. The family will be forced into an unsustainable roadside existence if this Planning application is not adequately considered, instead of four Traveller children being provided with a good education, and a lovely place to live. I ask this Local Authority to consider this application in this light,

Kind regards

Lynne Garnett

Lynne Garnett
Senior Practitioner Participation, Representation and Engagement,
Travelling Ahead

