# Courts block eviction of Romani Gypsy families at Wigmore site amid council land sale doubts



In a landmark decision, the courts have ruled in favour of Romani Gypsy families living at the Wigmore Coach Park, located just off the M2 in Kent. This judgement marks a significant moment for the Travelling community, which has often faced systemic challenges in securing adequate living arrangements. Earlier this year, Medway Council attempted to evict a group comprising fifteen adults and fourteen children who had originally been relocated to the site by the council itself during the summer of 2023. Initially granted three months' permission to stay under specific conditions—including payment of a weekly licence fee and adherence to various regulations—the eviction notice issued in October has now been deemed a violation of their human rights.

The council had justified its plan to evict the families by stating intentions to sell the land amidst ongoing financial difficulties. However, during the court proceedings, it was revealed that no actual steps had been taken towards selling the land, undermining the council's rationale for the eviction. This raises serious questions regarding local authorities' obligations to address the accommodation needs of the Travelling community, which experts describe as a national crisis, exacerbated by a severe shortage of designated Traveller sites. Medway Council acknowledged it had not established adequate pitch targets, a legal requirement that underscores its failure to provide satisfactory provision for gypsies and travellers.

While the court's decision allows the Travellers to remain at the site, it does not confer upon them a permanent right to stay. The complexities surrounding this case reflect a broader struggle faced by Travellers across the region, many of whom report being on waiting lists for sites, sometimes for up to ten years. Tina Herring, a resident at Wigmore, articulated the frustration felt by many in the community, highlighting the imperative for local authorities and the government to create permanent spaces where families can live with stability. "They just push it on from one county to another," she lamented, emphasising the need for sustainable solutions rather than temporary fixes.

The ongoing plight of Travellers is compounded by historical patterns of discrimination and marginalisation. Local authorities in Kent have faced criticism for not meeting their legal obligations to provide adequate accommodation for Travelling communities. Previous legal actions have illustrated the precariousness of their living situations; for instance, in recent months, groups of Travellers in areas like Gillingham have been forcibly evicted from lands they occupied, even when they had claimed ownership. Such actions reinforce the cycle of instability and disruption within the community.

In contrast, the recent ruling at Wigmore has been celebrated as a beacon of hope. Labour Councillor Satinder Shokar has emerged as a vocal advocate for the Travellers, asserting the need for protections for their rights and lifestyle. He remarked on the importance of this legal victory for families who have historically faced discrimination, stating: "This family has been fighting for decades against injustices, and to finally have something go in their favour has meant so much."

Even as the families celebrate their temporary reprieve, challenges remain. The council expressed disappointment at the ruling and is reportedly considering its next steps. Cllr Louwella Prenter, the portfolio holder for housing and homelessness, stated that the decision is being thoroughly reviewed, emphasising the intended temporary nature of the Wigmore site, which the council does not consider suitable for long-term occupation.

This case is indicative of wider tensions present in many parts of Kent, where local authorities grapple with the presence of Travellers at various transient sites. In recent weeks, other areas, such as Chatham's Hook Meadow, have seen multiple incursions, prompting residents to express concerns regarding security and the economic burden these encampments place on the community.

As the judicial landscape surrounding Traveller rights evolves, it is evident that achieving a balance between community needs, legal obligations, and public sentiment will prove a complex challenge for local authorities like Medway Council. The determination displayed by the Travelling community in the Wigmore case shines a light on the broader fight for dignity, stability, and respect, reminding us of the ongoing struggle that many continue to face daily.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraphs 7, 8, 9
3. Paragraphs 10, 11
4. Paragraphs 12, 13
5. Paragraphs 14, 15, 16
6. Paragraph 17
7. Paragraph 18

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2058925/travellers-win-landmark-court-case> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/travellers-move-onto-hook-meadow-in-chatham-for-the-third-time-in-six-weeks-291093/> - Residents in Chatham's Hook Meadow are frustrated after a group of travellers arrived for the third time in six weeks. Police attempted to block access, but the travellers managed to set up 18 caravans on the field. Concerns include intimidation and the financial burden of council interventions, with local councillor Trevor Clarke expressing disappointment over the recurring issue.
3. <https://www.kentlive.news/news/kent-news/bailiffs-tear-down-travellers-homes-6701903> - In Gillingham, Kent, a group of traveller families was evicted from land they owned on Lower Rainham Road. Despite owning the land, they lacked planning permission to reside there. Medway Council enforced the eviction, leading to the demolition of their homes. The families had lived on the site for over a year, integrating into the local community and facing distressing circumstances during the eviction process.
4. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/calls-for-action-after-travellers-move-onto-barnfield-park-in-chatham-288886/> - Travellers set up camp on Barnfield Park in Chatham, prompting residents to call for action. The group of 21 caravans reportedly gained access by cutting a fence. Medway Council and police are following a civil legal process to remove the encampment. Residents have expressed concerns over the park's security and the council's response to such incidents.
5. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/medway-magistrates-order-eviction-of-travellers-from-wigmore-park-and-ride-in-maidstone-road-273523/> - Medway Magistrates granted an eviction order to remove travellers from the Wigmore Park and Ride facility in Maidstone Road. The group had been relocated multiple times by the council and had set up camp on the site. The council's application for eviction was successful, and the travellers were given 24 hours to vacate the premises.
6. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/high-court-appeal-to-allow-travellers-to-live-on-land-at-sharps-green-in-rainham-dismissed-322600/> - A High Court appeal to allow travellers to reside on land at Sharps Green in Rainham was dismissed. Medway Council had served an enforcement notice in 2017 after caravans were placed on the land without planning permission. The appeal's dismissal upheld the council's decision to refuse planning permission for residential use of the site.
7. <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/litigation-and-enforcement/400-litigation-news/53626-court-of-appeal-quashes-council-direction-requiring-travellers-to-leave-site> - The Court of Appeal quashed a council's direction requiring travellers to leave a site in Ramsgate Harbour. The council had served a notice under section 77/78 of the 1994 Act, but the court found the notice to be unlawful. The ruling emphasized the need for councils to act within the law when seeking to evict travellers from temporary sites.