# Kirkby Lonsdale faces unprecedented tensions ahead of Appleby Horse Fair



As the annual Appleby Horse Fair approaches, villages in Cumbria brace themselves for the surge of visitors, particularly from the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. This year's gathering is expected to be particularly chaotic, with reports of disruptions already surfacing. Locals in Kirkby Lonsdale, a historic town near Appleby, are already dealing with an influx of roughly 10,000 travellers before the fair officially starts on 5th June.

In the run-up to the event, tensions have escalated. A special police task force is grappling with a wave of offences that include burglary, criminal damage, and incidents of knife crime. Alarmingly, the situation escalated to the point where police felt it necessary to handcuff a group of ten-year-old boys following allegations of knife threats. This decision has sparked outrage among local residents, some of whom viewed the police's actions as heavy-handed. A police spokesperson stated that the handcuffing was a precaution taken for everyone’s safety while searches were conducted, though no weapon was ultimately found.

Kirkby Lonsdale Cricket Club has borne the brunt of early disturbances, suffering severe vandalism that left its pavilion in ruins. “The damage is heartbreaking for all involved,” a club spokesman shared, illustrating the emotional toll such incidents have inflicted on a community that usually comes together to celebrate the sport. Meanwhile, reports of intimidation from traveller children have surfaced, adding to the locals' anxiety. One resident noted, “They seem to have descended on us this year... there have been problems caused by gypsy children in the town centre.”

A significant change in the landscape of the fair seems to have contributed to this year’s early chaos. Kirkby Stephen, a nearby town that has historically hosted a pre-fair gathering, has successfully pushed back against the influx by restricting services and shutting down potential camping spots. This may have inadvertently redirected the flow of travellers to Kirkby Lonsdale, intensifying tensions in a place unaccustomed to such numbers. Residents describe the current scene as unprecedented, with a local remarking, “We all want a peaceful fair, but this isn’t it.”

While chaos surrounds the immediate locality, the Appleby Horse Fair itself has evolved into Europe’s largest traditional gypsy gathering over its 250-year history. In contrast to the current concerns looming over the event, the fair has a rich tradition that offers a socio-cultural exchange among diverse communities. Locals witness horse washing in the River Eden and the vibrant marketplace where goods from fashion to horse-related wares are sold, demonstrating the fair's unique cultural significance.

However, the fair increasingly faces scrutiny, particularly regarding public safety and animal welfare. In recent years, police have upped their efforts to manage the event responsibly, implementing enhanced stop-and-search powers in response to violent incidents. Last year marked the highest number of arrests since 2015, highlighting the ongoing struggle to balance community concerns with the cultural importance of this annual event. According to Bill Welch, a representative from the Gypsy and Traveller community, the Appleby Horse Fair is a sacred event, comparable in significance to Christmas for many attendees.

In preparation for the gathering, both local authorities and traveller communities have begun collaborative initiatives to improve sanitary conditions at the fair, addressing persistent concerns over public health amidst the chaos. A campaign aimed at raising funds for additional sanitation facilities has garnered notable support, showcasing a willingness among stakeholders to ensure the event can be enjoyed in a respectful and safe environment.

Amidst the mixed emotions surrounding this year’s fair, neighbouring towns like Kirkby Stephen are taking proactive measures to deter unwelcome gatherings, with local farmers reporting physical barriers and signs to prevent caravans from occupying their land. However, some community members worry that limiting public access could escalate tensions further, rather than fostering an atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect.

As the fair approaches, it becomes evident that despite its longstanding traditions, the event continues to stir complex issues related to community dynamics, safety, and the cultural significance it holds. The ongoing situation in Kirkby Lonsdale serves as a poignant reminder of the delicate balance between hospitality and the right of residents to feel safe in their homes as they prepare for Europe's most notable gypsy gathering.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767513/cricket-pavilion-knife-threats-Locals-lock-Europe-gypsy-gathering.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/border/2024-06-10/appleby-horse-fair-clean-up-begins-as-over-100-arrests-made-at-event)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767513/cricket-pavilion-knife-threats-Locals-lock-Europe-gypsy-gathering.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/border/2024-06-10/appleby-horse-fair-clean-up-begins-as-over-100-arrests-made-at-event), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-58213988)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767513/cricket-pavilion-knife-threats-Locals-lock-Europe-gypsy-gathering.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c511l443dy0o), [[6]](https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/24245400.incident-levels-highest-since-2015-appleby-horse-fair/)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/border/2024-06-10/appleby-horse-fair-clean-up-begins-as-over-100-arrests-made-at-event), [[4]](https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/23543814.travellers-raise-funds-improve-sanitary-conditions-horse-fair/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767513/cricket-pavilion-knife-threats-Locals-lock-Europe-gypsy-gathering.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/23543814.travellers-raise-funds-improve-sanitary-conditions-horse-fair/), [[7]](https://www.itv.com/news/border/2023-06-12/appleby-horse-fair-arrests-more-than-double-in-2023)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-58213988), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c511l443dy0o)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767513/cricket-pavilion-knife-threats-Locals-lock-Europe-gypsy-gathering.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itv.com/news/border/2024-06-10/appleby-horse-fair-clean-up-begins-as-over-100-arrests-made-at-event> - The 248th Appleby Horse Fair concluded with over 100 arrests, marking the highest number since 2015. Despite the arrests, police reported that the event proceeded smoothly. Bill Welch, a spokesperson for the Gypsy and Traveller community, emphasised the fair's cultural significance, describing it as sacred and more important than Christmas. Local businesses experienced varied impacts, with some reporting increased patronage and others choosing not to open. The event also highlighted concerns over animal welfare, with the RSPCA noting incidents of horse exhaustion and a fatality due to overexertion.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-58213988> - Ahead of the annual Appleby Horse Fair, Cumbria Constabulary implemented a Section 60 order, granting enhanced stop and search powers, in response to intelligence about individuals intending to cause serious violence. The order, effective until Sunday, also saw the deployment of armed officers to swiftly address potential incidents. Superintendent Matt Kennerley stated that any individuals seeking to act violently were not welcome, emphasising the fair's aim to be an enjoyable and safe environment for all attendees.
4. <https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/23543814.travellers-raise-funds-improve-sanitary-conditions-horse-fair/> - In response to concerns over sanitation during the Appleby Horse Fair, the Gypsy and Traveller communities collaborated with a charity to raise £24,000 over four years. This initiative aims to provide additional toilets and cleaning services in public areas, alleviating the financial burden on local councils. Traveller Representative Bill Lloyd highlighted the importance of maintaining sanitary conditions, especially with the closure of several pubs, which traditionally offered facilities to the public.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c511l443dy0o> - Gypsy and Traveller leaders have cautioned visitors to the Appleby Horse Fair about potential scams, particularly concerning the purchase of stolen caravans. Cumbria Police reported the seizure of several vehicles and the arrest of three men on suspicion of handling stolen goods. Community leaders Billy Welch and Bill Lloyd advised fairgoers to exercise caution when buying caravans, emphasising the ease with which scams can occur and the importance of due diligence.
6. <https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/24245400.incident-levels-highest-since-2015-appleby-horse-fair/> - The 2023 Appleby Horse Fair witnessed the highest number of arrests and animal welfare incidents since 2015. The event saw 42 arrests, a significant increase from 18 in 2022, and 89 more incidents than the previous year. The rise in incidents is attributed to proactive measures implemented by authorities in the lead-up to the fair. The Multi-Agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group (MASCG) is considering making the fair a ticketed event to help cover policing and street cleansing costs.
7. <https://www.itv.com/news/border/2023-06-12/appleby-horse-fair-arrests-more-than-double-in-2023> - The 2023 Appleby Horse Fair saw a significant increase in arrests, more than doubling compared to the previous year. The fair attracted a large number of visitors, with sunny weather contributing to the high turnout. Despite the increase in arrests, authorities reported that the event was managed effectively, with proactive measures in place to ensure public safety. The fair's popularity continues to grow, highlighting its cultural significance and the challenges associated with managing such a large-scale event.