# Travellers exploit bank holidays to establish illegal camps amid council inaction



Travellers are reportedly employing aggressive tactics to establish unauthorised camping sites across the British countryside, raising alarm among local communities and prompting calls for more stringent enforcement of planning regulations. This issue has garnered heightened attention following a series of incidents nationwide, during which groups seemingly exploited public holidays to bypass legal safeguards against land development. Communities find themselves outraged as sections of protected green belt land are rapidly transformed into makeshift caravan parks, often without proper permits and in contravention of existing laws.

Recent reports detail how these operations were meticulously planned, with heavy machinery appearing under the cover of dark during bank holidays. Local councils, frequently unstaffed during these periods, have struggled to respond adequately. In West Sussex, for instance, a tranquil field in Lurgashall was converted into a gravel car park to accommodate caravans during the VE Day bank holiday. Local MP Andrew Griffith expressed his disbelief over the speed of the transformation, pointing out that the council's inaction left residents vulnerable. "It took far too long for local authorities to address this, leaving ratepayers at the mercy of this planning blight," he remarked, adding the urgency for tighter regulations to avert similar occurrences.

In Cheshire, another example arose when travellers repurposed a rural field near Warrington in less than three days, erecting a 10-foot wooden fence and paving the area with concrete after purchasing the land legitimately. Stuart Mann, a local councillor, shared that he felt "impotent" as he witnessed the rapid developments unfold, expressing frustration that timely interventions by the council were lacking. "Why couldn’t someone turn up and say stop? Let’s work something out," he questioned, emphasising a shared sentiment among the community regarding the perceived inequity in the planning process.

The issue of unauthorised encampments is not confined to isolated incidents. A broader pattern of land grabs across the UK has been reported, often coinciding with holiday weekends when councils are less able to react. Further compounding these incidents, various councils have begun to take decisive action in response. The Supreme Court's recent ruling allows local authorities the ability to issue injunctions against unidentified travellers, thus empowering councils to proactively prevent encampments. While viewed as a significant step for local governance, this ruling also places an added responsibility on councils to ensure that such measures are both compelling and proportionate.

Across England, communities have mobilised against these developments. In Southam, near Cheltenham, residents have united to raise funds exceeding £10,000 to contest unauthorised traveller sites, rallying to protect their green belt and maintain community character after years of uncertainty about potential encroachments. Here, a history of unsuccessful attempts by the local council to secure definitive action against such developments has left residents feeling disregarded in a system they believe favours a minority at their expense.

Furthermore, the plight of communities confronting unauthorised encampments paints a picture of frustration and fear among residents who feel trapped in a cycle of violation and a lack of support from local governance. For example, in Kent, the prolonged presence of an illegal campers' site resulted in significant distress for local families enduring noise and pollution, underscoring the complex and often adversarial relationship between traveller communities and established residents.

Calls for proactive governance continue to grow, with local leaders insisting that any enforcement must be more effectively communicated and executed. The unfolding events have prompted demands for legislative changes that ensure fairness across the board in planning reforms. As the government wrestles with these issues, the question remains: how will it strike the balance between ensuring local residents feel protected while also respecting the rights of the traveller community?

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14771731/travellers-obliterating-britains-countryside-illegal-landgrabs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czvv7kxp1j5o)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14771731/travellers-obliterating-britains-countryside-illegal-landgrabs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/29/councils-can-ban-travellers-from-land-supreme-court-rules/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czvv7kxp1j5o), [[4]](https://squarenews.ru/news/post/travellers-set-up-an-illegal-camp-in-a-woodland-next-to-our-homes-weve-endured-years-of-hell-the-council-should-be-ashamed/), [[5]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1840584/Councils-told-they-can-ban-Travellers-from-their-land)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14771731/travellers-obliterating-britains-countryside-illegal-landgrabs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/29/councils-can-ban-travellers-from-land-supreme-court-rules/> - In November 2023, the UK's Supreme Court ruled that local councils can issue injunctions to prevent unidentified travellers from occupying land. This decision allows councils to proactively ban 'newcomer' travellers from sites within their jurisdiction, even if they cannot identify them in advance. The ruling aims to provide local authorities with more effective tools to manage unauthorised encampments and protect public spaces. However, the court emphasised the need for councils to demonstrate a 'compelling need' and to ensure that such injunctions are proportionate and respect the rights of the travellers.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czvv7kxp1j5o> - In June 2024, residents of Southam, near Cheltenham, raised over £10,000 to oppose an unauthorised travellers' site on Kayte Lane. The community expressed concerns about the impact on the green belt and the village's character. Tewkesbury Borough Council had previously refused retrospective planning applications for the site, but an appeal was lodged, and a planning inspector was set to decide the fate of the plans. The villagers' fundraising efforts aimed to support the parish council in objecting to the development and protecting the green belt for future generations.
4. <https://squarenews.ru/news/post/travellers-set-up-an-illegal-camp-in-a-woodland-next-to-our-homes-weve-endured-years-of-hell-the-council-should-be-ashamed/> - In October 2024, residents in the Kent village of Vigo near Gravesend endured years of distress due to an illegal travellers' camp set up in Fowlers Stone Wood. The camp led to noise, pollution, and environmental degradation. Despite legal action by Gravesham Council, the landowner, Gareth Sullivan, was jailed in October 2021 for breaching an injunction. The council eventually seized the site, and plans were made to restore the woodland, highlighting the prolonged challenges faced by local communities in addressing unauthorised encampments.
5. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1840584/Councils-told-they-can-ban-Travellers-from-their-land> - In November 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that councils can issue injunctions to prevent unidentified travellers from occupying land. This decision empowers local authorities to proactively ban 'newcomer' travellers from sites within their jurisdiction, even if they cannot identify them in advance. The ruling aims to provide councils with more effective tools to manage unauthorised encampments and protect public spaces. However, the court emphasised the need for councils to demonstrate a 'compelling need' and to ensure that such injunctions are proportionate and respect the rights of the travellers.
6. <https://www.inkl.com/news/travellers-set-up-illegal-camp-in-newly-built-housing-estate> - In July 2024, a group of travellers set up an illegal camp in a newly-built housing estate in Colchester, Essex. Residents expressed concerns about the impact on their community and property values. The encampment was located on the perimeter of a 13-acre housing estate, with homes valued up to £700,000. The presence of the travellers made residents uneasy about leaving their homes unattended, highlighting the tensions that can arise between new developments and unauthorised encampments.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4n1gg4p7lno> - In April 2024, North Kesteven District Council in Lincolnshire restored land at a former travellers' site on the A17 near Beckingham. After a legal challenge, the travellers and their caravans moved off the land, and work was undertaken to remove hardcore from the site and revert it back to agricultural use. The council stated that a consent order would allow them to restart legal action if residential use began again before the end of 2026, demonstrating the ongoing efforts to manage and resolve unauthorised encampments.