# Judge blocks eviction of Romani Gypsies in Kent over human rights concerns



The situation for a group of Romani Gypsy families occupying the Wigmore Coach Park in Kent has reached a significant legal turning point. Medway Council's attempts to evict the group, consisting of fifteen adults and fourteen children, were deemed to infringe upon their human rights by a judge, marking a pivotal moment in the ongoing struggle for secure Traveller accommodation in the region. Earlier this year, the group was relocated to the site by the council, initially granted temporary residence for three months with the stipulation that they pay a monthly fee and adhere to certain regulations.

Despite complying with these conditions, the travellers received an eviction notice in October, as the council indicated plans to sell the land to resolve ongoing financial issues. However, during the court hearing, it was revealed that the council had not taken any concrete steps toward selling the site, and had also failed to establish pitch targets to adequately support the Gypsy and Traveller communities, which are facing a severe shortage of suitable accommodation nationally.

Tina Herring, a resident of the Wigmore site, expressed her frustration with the council's management of Traveller accommodation, stating, "I think that it's down to the council and the government to supply permanent places for each and every one who needs them and to not just keep moving us around." Her sentiments reflect the broader concern among Travellers about the cyclical nature of their accommodation struggles, which often sees them temporarily relocated with little prospect of secure, permanent housing. The precariousness of their situation is further illustrated by reports of families often being on waiting lists for multiple sites, enduring years of uncertainty about their living conditions.

Legal proceedings regarding the group's status have unfolded amidst growing tensions between local authorities and the Traveller community. As the court acknowledged the ruling as a significant milestone, it also noted that the circumstances surrounding the case might change in future, suggesting that the legal battle over this site is far from over. The travellers have since lodged a planning application to transition the park-and-ride facility into an officially designated Traveller site—an initiative that was attempted previously but rejected without sufficient local infrastructure to support it.

Councillor Satinder Shokar, a vocal advocate for the rights of the Travellers, highlighted the historical injustices faced by this community, stating, "This family has been fighting for decades against injustices, and to finally have something go in their favour has meant so much." His comments underscore the systemic discrimination that Travellers often encounter and the urgent need for local councils to engage meaningfully with the community to develop sustainable housing solutions.

Despite the ruling, Medway Council expressed disappointment. The authority noted that the initial permission for the use of the site was meant to be a temporary measure, asserting that the car park should not be converted into a long-term site for permanent occupation. This tension between council intentions and community needs remains unresolved, further complicating the landscape of Traveller accommodation.

The broader implications of this case resonate far beyond Kent. Previous court rulings have positioned the plight of Gypsies and Travellers at the forefront of discussions on human rights and municipal responsibilities. In 2019, a Court of Appeal ruling highlighted the risks associated with borough-wide injunctions against Travellers, a practice deemed problematic due to its potential to violate the European Convention on Human Rights. This precedent places additional pressure on local councils to provide essential facilities and suitable accommodation, thereby shaping a more inclusive approach to policy-making in relation to the Gypsy and Traveller community.

As the Wigmore group's situation continues to evolve, it serves as a stark reminder of the complexities surrounding Traveller accommodation in the UK. The need for equitable, informed, and compassionate housing solutions is increasingly urgent, demanding a collaborative effort between local authorities and the Traveller communities they serve. Ultimately, the path forward will require not just legal victories, but genuine understanding and investment in spaces that honour the cultural and practical needs of those who walk a nomadic lifestyle.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraph 5
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraph 7
7. Paragraph 7

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-remain-at-park-and-ride-site-despite-order-to-lea-300704/> - In January 2024, a group of travellers continued to occupy the Wigmore Coach Park and Ride Car Park in Kent, six months after being served legal notices to vacate. The site, initially intended as a temporary accommodation, had been occupied by around 11 caravans since July 2023. Despite the eviction notices, the travellers remained, highlighting the challenges local authorities face in managing unauthorised encampments. Medway Council was required to pursue possession of the site through the courts, as the temporary licence granted to the group had expired. The council had provided facilities, including toilets, for the group during their stay.
3. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/traveller-encampment-remains-at-car-park-despite-notice-give-296888/> - By November 2023, a traveller encampment continued to occupy the Wigmore Coach Park and Ride Car Park in Kent, more than a month after being served with a notice to leave. The group had been residing on the site since July 2023, with the council granting a temporary licence for three months. Despite the eviction notice, the travellers remained, prompting Medway Council to pursue legal action to regain possession of the site. The council had provided facilities, including toilets, for the group during their stay. The situation underscored the complexities local authorities face in managing unauthorised encampments.
4. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/medway-magistrates-order-eviction-of-travellers-from-wigmore-park-and-ride-in-maidstone-road-273523/> - In September 2022, Medway Magistrates granted an eviction order to remove travellers from the Wigmore Park and Ride facility in Maidstone Road, Kent. The group had pitched up on the site near Bredhurst in September 2022 and had been moved from other areas in Medway on 18 other occasions by the authority. The council had previously served a Section 77 notice to leave the site by 2pm on the day of the court hearing. The eviction order granted meant the group had 24 hours to leave the site. The council had previously used bailiffs on occasions to get this particular group moved.
5. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/plans-submitted-to-turn-wigmore-coach-park-just-off-the-m2-near-bredhurst-into-traveller-site-307539/> - In June 2024, a planning application was submitted to convert the Wigmore Coach Park and Ride car park, located just off the M2 near Bredhurst, into an official traveller site. The site had been occupied by a group of travellers since July 2023, initially as a temporary measure. The application aimed to establish a permanent site for the community, addressing the national shortage of approved stopping sites and facilities for travellers. Local residents expressed objections, citing concerns about aesthetics and potential impacts on the area. Councillor Satinder Shokar, an advocate for the travellers, highlighted the benefits of providing a permanent site for the community.
6. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/traveller-encampment-to-occupy-wigmore-coach-car-park-for-three-months-289895/> - In July 2023, a group of travellers began occupying the Wigmore Coach Park and Ride Car Park in Maidstone Road, near Bredhurst, Kent, for a temporary period of three months. The council provided facilities, including toilets, for the group during their stay. The site had previously been used by commuters to London on the Kings Ferry coach services but had been vacant since the service ceased operations due to the pandemic. The council emphasized its legal obligation to work with the group and provide necessary support during their stay.
7. <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/end-injunctions/> - In December 2019, the Court of Appeal ruled that borough-wide injunctions against Gypsies and Travellers are inherently problematic and may breach both the European Convention on Human Rights and the Equality Act. The court emphasized that Gypsies and Travellers have an enshrined freedom to move from place to place. The judgment provided guidance to local authorities considering such injunctions, advising them to demonstrate the availability of suitable alternative sites and to engage properly with the Gypsy and Traveller community. The case highlighted the need for councils to consider the specific needs and lifestyle of the community when implementing enforcement measures.