

Chair, Members of Council,

Firstly, I would like to thank the Council for calling this much needed Extraordinary meeting, for the report by Mr Hermitage - which is extremely helpful and informative - and for accommodating my request to speak first as Chair of Felsted Parish Council.

I was only recently appointed Chair. However, I have been a Felsted councillor for more than 10 years - including through the trauma of COVID - I have never before witnessed the anger, the upset and the mental anguish that the conduct of the Traveller community has caused across the parish.

Let me say at the outset, this is not a matter of race, ethnicity or lifestyle choice. Our parish is not anti Traveller. One of the largest Traveller sites in the District is at the old Felsted Station. That is not the issue.

Last year, an application in the parish at Causeway End for a Gypsy and Traveller site - correctly made prior to any development - was granted approval through the planning process.

At the same time, determined enforcement action was properly taken against a settled resident who had been refused retrospective planning consent for unapproved development works.

The issue is the right of the settled community to hear and be confident that UDC is capable and committed to expeditiously ensuring that Travellers also abide by the laws that govern the lives of the settled community.

Today, you will hear from people who are incensed because they believe that everything that could be done was not done quickly enough and that the council has not treated the egregious conduct of the Travellers with urgency and determination.

They will say, that the evidence is that they are peacefully compliant, while the Travellers are not.

You will hear that residents - many elderly and who have lived peacefully for more than half a century in our beautiful parish, people who have worked all their lives, many in public service, for their retirement - are deeply distressed and afraid to leave their homes for fear of intimidation or abuse from Travellers, who remind residents with implied menace that – *they know where they live* - or even to be able to open their windows because of the noise from the travellers' generators.

I understand the frustration of the Willows Green community, in that many believe this is a situation made worse by what they perceive to be the council's inaction and failure to use the full power of the law when an opportunity to do so was presented in the High Court.

But I also understand the difficult legal obstacles the Council faces (and perhaps continues to face), and the problems of communicating those issues without prejudicing its case.

I will not therefore necessarily associate myself with every comment made by those who speak after me.

But, I want to say that I support our community in seeking a clear understanding of:

- Why this incursion could not be prevented?
- Why the opportunity to be granted enforcement action, that appeared to be offered by the judge at the full injunction hearing on the 18th June, was not taken?
- What happens next and
- What UDC intends to do to stop it happening again.

In conclusion I make two points.

Firstly, I ask that, as part of any contempt or enforcement action it may pursue, the Council makes the strongest case possible for the sequestration of the field at Willows Green.

Unless the field is removed from the current ownership, it will remain despoilt and may never return to countryside.

Secondly, the evidence could not be clearer: across the country Travellers intentionally choose to time their unlawful action when council offices are closed.

I ask that the points made by Mr Hermitage at para 55-59 and in his conclusion at para 60 are urgently pursued.

UDC must - if necessary with other councils to share cost and resource - establish an agile 24/7/365 mechanism that shares and reacts to information and intelligence about potential breaches and provides a robust response to prevent incursions and obtain urgent injunctive relief.

We are expected to protect our homes with locks and alarms: we expect Councils to find an effective alarm system to protect our countryside.

Think out of the box: the travellers do!

Thank you.