

DALE FARM SOLIDARITY PRESS PACK FOR JOURNALISTS

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What is Dale Farm Solidarity?

Dale Farm Solidarity is a diverse group made up of people who believe that forcibly evicting the residents of Dale Farm – when they have nowhere else to go – is a violation of human rights and a brutal and unnecessary act of ethnic cleansing. Members of Dale Farm Solidarity are from all over the world, and are working to support the Dale Farm community in avoiding eviction. Dale Farm Solidarity is planning to set up a protest camp as the eviction approaches.

To get comment or arrange an interview with residents of Dale Farm and members of Dale Farm Solidarity, email dale.farm@btinternet.com, savedalefarm@gmail.com, or call 07783322752, 07583761462

We can also try to provide photos or videos of Dale Farm to journalists.

To sign up to our press list, email: dale.farm@btinternet.com and savedalefarm@gmail.com

To sign up for text message alerts, sign up here (don't mind the certificate warning): <https://smsalerts.tachanka.org/dalefarm>

Our website <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com>, facebook group <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=124229427082> and twitter feed <http://twitter.com/letdalefarmlive> are good places to obtain up-to-date information.

What is happening at Dale Farm?

Dale Farm in Essex is the UK's largest Traveller community, consisting of nearly a hundred plots and over a thousand residents of Irish Traveller and English Gypsy heritage. Basildon Council wants to spend up to £18 million evicting some 80 families (about 500 people, many of them children) from the 52 plots of land at Dale Farm that do not have planning permission, making these people homeless. Dale Farm Solidarity is organising alongside the residents of Dale Farm to save these homes and prevent the largest eviction in recent UK history.

Why are Travellers being evicted from Dale Farm?

Half of Dale Farm has planning permission - the other half, home to about 500 people, does not. It is this half of the site that faces demolition by bailiffs Constant & Co, a company which has

advertised itself as “Gypsy specialists”. According to the Commission for Racial Equality, more than 90% of Traveller planning applications are initially rejected, compared to 20% overall. In fact, many Gypsies and Travellers in the UK are trapped in a web of overlapping, systemic failures to respect their customs and preferences, compounded by lingering racism (a 2004 MORI poll revealed that one third of the public admit to being personally prejudiced against Gypsies and Travellers) and the legacy of years of exclusion. Racism against Travellers remains the last socially acceptable type of racism.

Dale Farm itself is officially green-belt land, but was a legal scrapyard when a group of residents bought it, cleaned it up, and turned it into a home for their families.

Across the UK many Traveller sites have been closed, and the residents evicted and forcibly moved on. This is only part of the marginalisation and prejudice Travellers face, and is not just about accommodation but also the criminalisation of a community and a way of life.

Why is the eviction at Dale Farm wrong?

The United Nations says that the forced eviction of people, particularly those who own their homes, is a gross violation of human rights.

Under UK law, central and local government have an obligation to respect and facilitate the Gypsy and Traveller way of life, and to improve the well-being of children, not do the opposite.

The forced eviction of half of the residents of Dale Farm is unnecessary as there are still alternative solutions that could be explored, costly as it may total £18 million which will result in cuts to public services in Basildon, and it will have a massive negative impact on evicted families, including children who will no longer be able to attend their schools.

The residents of Dale Farm own the land, pay council tax and their children attend local schools.

There are alternative solutions to forced eviction: the Homes and Communities Agency have offered land in Basildon that could be provided to Dale Farm residents. Those facing eviction are willing to move if Basildon Council first agree planning permission for these alternative sites.

The UK Government is undertaking a nation-wide consultation on planning for Traveller sites. It is wrong to carry out the forced eviction of the largest Traveller site in the UK before the consultation has been completed and any new policy debated in Parliament.

Before 2000, Basildon Council approved the use of redundant brownfield sites in poor quality greenfield areas for good uses. Since 2000 their policy has changed to one in which they are openly hostile to Gypsies and Travellers.

What did Basildon Council decide on 17 May?

On 17 May, Basildon Council's Development Control and Traffic Management Committee resolved to take direct action to secure compliance with formal 28 day enforcement notices at 51 pitches at Dale Farm. This means that any day the Council might deliver the 28 day notice before eviction.

When will the eviction happen?

The Council can serve the 28 day notice before eviction at any time now, and then proceed to launch the eviction at any point after the 28 day notice expires. This means that there is not a specific day set for the eviction. As in previous Traveller evictions, residents of Dale Farm will wake up to find Bailiffs at their doors, and children will come home from school and see their home being bulldozed.

Camp Constant: How are Travellers and supporters going to resist eviction?

If the council serves the 28 days notice of eviction, then Dale Farm Solidarity will set up "Camp Constant", a place for training human rights monitors, legal observers, and communications volunteers as well as supporters who will take part in non-violent direct action. Friends and supporters of Dale Farm from across the country will come to live at Dale Farm to provide around the clock support to the community and resistance to the eviction.

If recent evictions at other local sites are any indication, the operation is likely to be brutal, without regard to people's possessions, safety or human rights under the law. The Council of Europe has already expressed concern at the UK's approach in this case and about the bailiffs Constant & Co in particular.

Why don't Dale Farm residents leave voluntarily?

Dale Farm Travellers have offered to leave at no cost to the council, but need somewhere to go. Yet Basildon Council has failed to agree to alternative sites, despite a government agency offering a number of local possibilities. Government legislation, planning restrictions and sale of public land have decimated the number of safe and legal stopping places for Gypsies and Travellers. Attempts, such as that made by the Dale Farm residents, to purchase land for themselves face insurmountable obstacles: applications are opposed by local residents, sometimes vociferously, as we've seen at Meriden in Warwickshire and expect to see as the Dale Farm residents continue to try to find a legal place to live.

What does Dale Farm have to do with public sector cuts?

Basildon District Council will cut services in order to pay the cost of the evictions, an estimated £18 million. They've asked the Home Office for £10 million of this. The Home Secretary, Theresa May, might actually make UK taxpayers foot the bill for this unnecessary eviction.

Additionally, the Council plans to axe local services and jobs, even selling off playing fields to developers to raise money. They are actually destroying the green belt in order to supposedly protect it from Travellers. We've been asked to pay for the financial crisis caused by the banks, and now we're being asked to pay in order to deliberately make people homeless. And pay dearly - 100 Basildon Council jobs are likely to be axed to help the local authority cope with budget cuts which will leave it £2.3 million short. They are also cutting £505,000 to services for disabled people. The Council wants vulnerable people in the settled community to suffer in order to make Travelling people suffer.

Press coverage of public sector cuts in Basildon:

10m Policing Bill to Evict Travellers from Dale Farm

Daily Gazette, 20 Oct 2010

<http://tinyurl.com/3hrou7a>

Basildon Council to Shed 100 Staff and Cut Services

Halstead Gazette, 16 Dec 2010

<http://tinyurl.com/3jtx98z>

Basildon Council Cuts Target Disabled Services

Essex Echo, 17 Jan 2011

<http://tinyurl.com/3pfxwjo>

Who else is speaking out against the eviction of Dale Farm?

The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Children's Commissioner, the All Party Parliamentary Group, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing and the Council of Europe have all expressed concern about the threatened eviction of Dale Farm.

Five leading organisations (The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), the Italian human rights organisation Osservazione, and the Slovak NGO Milan Simecka Foundation (MSF)) issued a joint statement in 2007 accusing 16 European governments of "serial abuses" against the housing rights of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers in Europe - Dale Farm is included. (The Advocacy Project)

Selection of previous press coverage

Dale Farm featured in "My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding" Channel 4, February 2011 – ongoing

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/my-big-fat-gypsy-wedding>

"All the Fun of the Fair" The Economist, 19 May 2011

http://www.economist.com/node/18712487?story_id=18712487&fsrc=rss

"Councillors Vote to Evict Travellers from Dale Farm" BBC, 19 May 2011:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-13454101>

"Travellers Move On" ITV, 19 May 2011

<http://www.itv.com/anglia/travellers-move-on56821/>

"A Generation of Children Growing Up...Knowing They're Not Wanted"

Video, The Guardian, 11 May 2011

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/video/2011/may/11/gypsy-travellers-smithy-fenn-willingham>

"Crays Hill Travellers Poised to Launch New Appeal" Essex Echo, 11 March 2011

http://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/8902530.Crays_Hill_travellers_poised_to_launch_new_appeal/

"Bill for evicting just 90 traveller families from UK's biggest illegal site could hit £18m"

"Dale Farm Travellers Eviction The Battle of Basildon" The Guardian, 25 March 2011

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/mar/25/dale-farm-travellers-eviction-basildon>

"Dale Farm Eviction Treatens the Gypsy Way of Life" The Guardian CiF, 16 March 2011

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/16/dale-farm-gypsy-basildon-council>

The Daily Mail, 7 March 2011

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1363812/Travellers-eviction-UKs-biggest-illegal-site-cost-taxpayer-staggering-18m.html>

"We Won't Just Get Up and Leave" The Guardian, 27 July 2010

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/jul/27/dale-farm-essex-travellers-eviction>

"Waiting for the Budozers: the Women of Dale Farm" The Guardian, 27 July 2010

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/video/2010/jul/22/dale-farm-women-travellers-eviction>

Previous Press Releases

[May 22, 2011](#)

Direct action force by Basildon Council will be met by resistance from the residents of Dale Farm and their thousands of supporters

The residents of Dale Farm are living on land that they have bought. Travellers throughout the country were encouraged to buy land to live on after the requirement for local authorities to provide

caravan parks was removed.

But cruelly when they did this voices were raised to ensure that planning permission was not granted. So generations, from babies to grannies, live 'illegally' on their own land with all the uncertainties and dangers that implies.

It is claimed that they are encroaching on green belt land. This might be what appears on maps. But the truth is that prior to the community buying and settling on this land it was a scrap yard! The local council and the objectors know this perfectly well.

Behind the smokescreen of planning rules and green belt land lies a blatant racism.

Basildon Council has not formally replied to the planning applications for alternative mobile-home parks put forward by the Gypsy Council – that could be provided on government agency land at a far lower cost than this act of ethnic-cleansing.

It is clear the Tories want Travellers out of Basildon district whatever the cost in human misery and tax-payers' money. On the strength of dishonest arguments and bigotry, and despite pleas from the UN, Council of Europe and Amnesty International, the Tory leader of Basildon Borough Council trumpets the need to "Uphold the Rule of Law".

He has committed £8 million pounds of council reserves to the bulldozing of the Dale Farm estate. Up to another £10 million could be spent by Essex police in assisting with the eviction. The Council has commissioned private bailiffs Constant & Co to carry out the eviction, a company known for its brutal treatment of Traveller families during move-on operations around the country.

The residents of Dale Farm have asked supporters to establish a base, Camp Constant, to help stop the destruction of their homes.

[April 25, 2011](#)

MPs want Dale Farm eviction called off

With the UK Government urging local councils to mount anti-Gypsy clearance operations over the Easter holiday, speculation has sharpened as to the fate of Dale Farm. The only Traveller-owned village – facing the furious folly of a 20m euro bulldozer-led onslaught – is enjoying greater support than at any time during its ten year-long siege. Meetings are taking place this week aimed at deterring Basildon Borough council from ordering the final assault, while voices from within all three major political parties have called for restraint.

Many are coming to see that exclusion methods will exacerbate a fraught situation, not only for Dale Farm families and the rest of Britain's 350,000 Gypsies, but for the whole concept of the much-vaunted Big Society.

A delegation from an all party parliamentary group which, together with an Irish Embassy representative, visited Dale Farm last week is to recommend that fellow MPs back efforts to find alternative land for those facing eviction. Their stance has the authority of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing Raquel Rolnik, who has appealed to the UK over the massive clearance plan.

"Land is available within Basildon if the council will only agree to use it," said Lord Avebury while lunching with the Travellers. "Eviction can most certainly be avoided." Andrew Slaughter MP, Labour's shadow justice minister, and MP Rodney Bickerstaffe, former head of Unison, were among those at the meeting, together with Conservative Richard Bennett, one-time chair of the Local Government Association. Lib Dem MP Andrew George has recently put down a motion asking Parliament to endorse the proposition that there can be no justification for evicting Travellers such as those at Dale Farm when there is nowhere else for them to go.

Before the week is over, a further team of legal observers will have received training in London for deployment during what could be a month of confrontation and demolition. They will join dozens already signed up by Essex University Human Rights Clinic.

Harlow Against the Cuts, in company with anti-fascist and socialist groups, has scheduled for Thursday one of a number of information nights held around the country to recruit people willing to

camp out with the Travellers. This volunteer home-guard is said to number over one thousand, with more on social networking yet to commit to a nonviolent protest.

Both the Children's Commission and the Basildon Primary Care Trust have expressed concern over the trauma likely to be inflicted on children during the operation. The potential for human rights violations has been spelt out in an internationally-backed legal memorandum and a pre-action letter served on the council warns of judicial review proceedings should a final 28-day eviction notice be served this week. "We look at this as civil defence," said a Dale Farm mother. "Everyone will be here to uphold human rights law and stop breaches of safety, which are sure to happen when people are being dragged out and our homes crushed."

No Pasaran!

March 12, 2011

Prime Minister Speaks on Eve of Huge Eviction-Plan Vote

UK Prime Minister David Cameron says he believes that to ensure what he calls genuine fairness for all communities, half of Dale Farm, the largest Traveller community in Britain, must be crushed out of existence.

Cameron's reasoning was disclosed in the House of Commons last week after John Baron, MP for Basildon, requested a meeting with the Prime Minister to ensure that illegal Travellers' homes in his constituency are cleared and thus, in his view, justice seen to be done.

"My honourable friend has persistently raised this case and this issue in the Commons. I know he speaks for many people about the sense of unfairness that one law applies to everybody else and, on too many occasions, another law applies to Travellers," Cameron said. He said he would now set up a meeting between Baron and Secretary of State for Communities Eric Pickles so that they can look at what more can be done. Presumably a request by Basildon council for government funding of the huge eviction operation will top their agenda.

Head of Basildon Council Tony Ball says the operation will be of an unprecedented scale, risk and complexity. In addition to 400 residents, a large number of protesters and campaigners are expected to oppose the eviction.

He will tell a special meeting of the council on Monday night (14 March) that costs could be as high as £18 million for what may be a six week undertaking. This includes a policing bill of up to £12 million. However, Essex police have only £3 million available and have so far been refused additional financing from the Home Secretary Theresa May.

Dale Farm residents and supporters hope that a Council of Europe investigative group which visited Dale Farm yesterday (10 March) will, like two previous UN bodies, urge that the eviction be postponed so that alternative caravan parks can be provided for those being made homeless.

March 8, 2011

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding to be Bulldozed?

Eviction cost already skyrocketing as groups announce human rights shield

Dale Farm, Europe's largest Traveller community, and one featured in the TV series 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding', faces imminent eviction: Traveller representatives have been told that 28 days notice of eviction will be served on them on 14 March. Dale Farm is a former scrapyards in Basildon, and is owned by the Travellers. It consists of 100 family plots, half of which are set to be demolished.

In response, human rights groups have announced that they will be setting up a full-scale human rights monitoring camp at Dale Farm, before the eviction notice expires on 9 April. Hundreds of activists have pledged to form a human shield around the site to prevent bulldozers from demolishing homes.

Costs for the planned eviction are already skyrocketing. Basildon District Council has set aside 8

million pounds for the eviction itself and estimates that another 10 million pounds will be required. Their application to have the Home Office foot the bill has just been turned down. Taxpayers have already contributed £2.5 million to the Council's legal and other related costs.

Ironically, the eviction costs are being blamed as one of the reasons why Basildon Council is controversially selling off playing fields in the green belt, and allowing developers to build on them to increase their value. The Council also looks set to announce a bank loan to cover the eviction bill at a special council meeting on March 14th. The skyrocketing costs are coming at a time when as many as 100 Basildon Council jobs are likely to be axed to help the borough cope with budget cuts which will leave it £2.3million short. Basildon is also cutting £505,000 to disabled services.

"Dale Farm residents are willing to move, at no cost to Basildon, but need the Council to identify suitable land," said Richard Sheridan, chair of the Gypsy Council. However this seems increasingly unlikely, as Council leader Tony Ball has promised to resign if the Travellers are not evicted before the 5 May council elections. There is an obligation under international law for government to find suitable alternative accommodation for those being forcibly evicted.

"When we can find £18 million to evict families from their own land but can't find the funds to keep nurseries, libraries and youth centres open, something has gone terribly wrong," said Natalie Fox from Dale Farm Solidarity. The group is organising human rights monitors to stay at Dale Farm should their be an eviction. She called the eviction "ethnic cleansing", noting that 90% of traveller planning applications are initially rejected compared to 20% overall.

The eviction comes at a time of increased repression of Romani and Traveller communities in France and Italy. The eviction, which is expected to last up to three weeks will drive many Travellers back onto the road and their children will be forced to leave school.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights stated that 'the practice of forced eviction constitutes a gross violation of human rights'. They went on to say that 'to be persistently threatened or actually victimized by the act of forced eviction from one's home or land is surely one of the most supreme injustices any individual, family, household or community can face'.