

# **DALE FARM SOLIDARITY PRESS PACK FOR JOURNALISTS**

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**Who are 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 no place else to go – is a brutal and unnecessary act of ethnic cleansing. Members of Dale Farm Solidarity are from all over the UK, and are working to support the Dale Farm community in avoiding eviction. Dale Farm Solidarity is currently 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](mailto:dale.farm@btinternet.com), [savedalefarm@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:dale.farm@btinternet.com) and [savedalefarm@gmail.com](mailto:savedalefarm@gmail.com)

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

**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. Across the UK many sites have been closed and others evicted and travellers forcibly moved on. This is only part of the marginalisation and prejudice Travellers face, this is not just about homes but also the criminalisation of a community and a way of life. Basildon council wants to spend over £18 million evicting 52 plots of land and 150 families from Dale Farm making hundreds of 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 over 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 continues to be the last socially acceptable type of racism.

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

### **What is happening on 14 March?**

On March 14th, at 7:30 a special meeting of Basildon District Council will decide whether to set aside £18 million and serve 28 days notice of eviction. At 6:45 pm we will hold a press briefing outside the Basildon District Council office, Towngate Theatre, St. Martin's Square, Basildon SS14 1DL. Documents for the meeting, including budget details, are available at <http://www.basildonmeetings.info/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=216&MIId=3859&Ver=4>

These have been quoted in our media advisory.

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

If the council serves the 28 days notice of eviction on the 14 March, then we are likely to set up "Camp Constant" for human rights monitors, starting April 9th. More details on that to follow, but it will be 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 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 provide an authorised site. 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 disabled services. The Council wants vulnerable people in the settled community to suffer in order to make Travelling people suffer.

[http://www.gazette-news.co.uk/news/county\\_news/8461127.10m\\_policing\\_bill\\_to\\_evict\\_travellers\\_from\\_Dale\\_Farm/](http://www.gazette-news.co.uk/news/county_news/8461127.10m_policing_bill_to_evict_travellers_from_Dale_Farm/)

[http://www.halsteadgazette.co.uk/archive/2010/12/16/Basildon+News+%28basildon\\_news%29/8739399.Basildon Council to shed 100 staff and cut services/](http://www.halsteadgazette.co.uk/archive/2010/12/16/Basildon+News+%28basildon_news%29/8739399.Basildon+Council+to+shed+100+staff+and+cut+services/)

[http://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/8792420.Basildon\\_Council\\_cuts\\_target\\_disabled\\_services/](http://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/8792420.Basildon_Council_cuts_target_disabled_services/)

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

The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission, 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 organizations (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)

In May 2008, a British High Court ruled against the eviction of Dale Farm citing unacceptable discrimination against the Travellers. The Labour Group of Basildon City Council also opposes the eviction.

### **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>

"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/](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" 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 Bulldozers: the Women of Dale Farm" The Guardian, 27 July 2010- video interviews

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

## **Previous Press Releases**

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 scrapyard 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’.

February 16, 2011

#### Council of Europe Visit raises spirits at Dale Farm

News that a Council of Europe fact-finding mission will visit Dale Farm next month has lent encouragement to the ninety beleaguered families facing eviction from Britain’s largest Gypsy village. The visit will take place on the eve of Basildon’s extraordinary council meeting on 14 March when members must decide whether to go-ahead with what has been labelled a £13m ethnic-cleansing operation.

Families at Dale Farm now hope that lack of funding for the eviction together with this timely European investigation under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities will sway councillors to vote at least for a delay to the long-planned clearance.

“We’re in the midst of finding alternate places to which we can move peacefully,” commented Richard Sheridan, president of the Gypsy Council. “To this end we’re working closely with our MP John Baron and council leader Tony Ball.”

Dale Farm representatives have their next meeting with John Baron on 1 March at Westminster. They are expected to report on the progress of a planning application to develop a mobile-home park for some those made homeless at Dale Farm on land offered by the Homes and Communities Agency. Because of ecological and other objections already being raised over an initial site at Pound Lane, an alternation location on HCA-owned brownfield in the Gardiners Lane South locality is being considered.

While in London during the second week in March, the FCPNM is to hold talks with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which has also opposed the Dale Farm eviction. The EHRC could be asked to join in a possible legal challenge as it did in 2005 should Basildon serve a 28-day notice on the so-called unauthorized residents.

Meanwhile, supporters are gathering at Dale Farm at the weekend for activities in connection with non-violent resistance to Constant & Co bailiffs, the security company which specializes in forceful removal of Gypsies, being hired by Basildon council at a cost of several million pounds.