



# Myths & Facts

Gypsies and Travellers



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## Myths & Facts

This leaflet has been prepared to provide local residents with some information about Gypsies and Travellers.

Gypsies have been a part of our society for hundreds of years.

Romany Gypsies have lived in the UK for over 500 years.

Irish Travellers have lived in the UK for about 150 years.

Today we guess there are between 250,000 and 300,000 traditional Travellers living in Great Britain. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers have a right to live a nomadic lifestyle. A nomadic lifestyle means travelling around and staying in different places to earn a living. The problem is that there aren't enough authorised sites for them. Many of their old camp sites have been shut off so it is hard to camp there now. This means they have to camp wherever they can, some times with the land owners' permission and at other times without permission.

They stop in Flintshire for many different reasons:

- attending a family event such as a wedding;
- visiting family;
- travelling through the area and need to stop;
- for work;
- to visit the well in Holywell.

Like other minority ethnic groups Gypsies and Travellers have their own languages, traditions and customs that guide their way of life. These are passed down through the generations.

Some Gypsies and Travellers have fought and died for this country during both world wars.

### Myth

"Gypsies and Travellers don't have to send their children to school."

### Fact

Gypsy and Traveller children have a legal right to be educated along with all other children. Parents have the same legal obligations to educate their children as others do.

Gypsy and Traveller families are visited by the Traveller Education Service who work in partnership with the families and local schools to place children in a school nearby.

### Myth

"Gypsies and Travellers don't pay taxes."

### Fact

All Gypsies and Travellers living on a local authority or privately owned sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity, and all other charges measured in the same way as other houses.

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Those living on unauthorised encampments, generally speaking, do not pay council tax rates, but they also do not generally receive services. There are occasions when basic services, such as a toilet or a wheelie bin, are provided and the Gypsies and Travellers might make payment for this service direct to the appropriate local authority. All residents within the UK pay tax on their purchases and petrol. All Gypsies and Travellers are charged VAT on everything that they buy.

### Myth

“Gypsies and Travellers live off benefits without giving anything back to society.”

### Fact

A very small number of Gypsies and Travellers receive benefits...

Many Gypsy and Traveller families, who spend the majority of their time travelling from one eviction to the next find it difficult to access the correct level of benefit support (if any) without a fixed address.

### Myth

“Gypsies and Travellers never work!”

### Fact

Traditional forms of work include seasonal

agricultural labour, peddling, basket making, and horse dealing.

Working practices have now evolved in response to the needs of modern society to include landscaping, gardening, laying tarmac, motor trading, scrap metal dealing and tree felling.

It is also common for Gypsies and Travellers to be employed as teachers, academics and public sector workers, as well as in the entertainment industry.



### Myth

“Gypsies and Travellers invade other peoples land and can't be removed.”

### Fact

Gypsies and Travellers have a right to lead a nomadic lifestyle but there aren't enough authorised sites for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales. In addition many traditional stopping places have now been protected to discourage and prevent Travellers from setting up camps. This means that Travellers are forced to camp wherever they can.

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### Myth

“All Gypsies and Travellers live in caravans.”

### Fact

Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic minorities with their own culture, language and beliefs. Yet planning law defines Gypsies simply as people with a nomadic way of life. While this is historically true, 90% of Gypsies across the world now live in houses.

Being nomadic is more common in

Western Europe, but even here only 50% of Gypsies live in caravans. Gypsies also live in houses but they take their culture indoors with them.



### Myth

“Gypsies & Travellers are dirty.”

### Fact

Gypsy culture is built upon strict codes of cleanliness learnt over centuries of life on the road. Concepts such as mokadi and mahrima place strict guidelines, for example, on what objects can be washed in what bowls.

### Myth

“Gypsies & Travellers are allowed to break the law

without being punished.”

### Fact

As with all members of the community the Police will take a firm and fair approach, and while proven wrongdoing is punished they cannot act against unproven allegations or assumptions.

### Myth

“Local authorities cannot be bothered dealing with Gypsy Travellers when they park on council owned land.”

### Fact

Every local authority has a responsibility to manage unauthorised encampments. When one occurs on land owned by Flintshire County Council we will carry out the following set of procedures:

- Visit the site as soon as possible (usually within 48 hours).
- Checks will be made on the tidiness of the site, any impact on local residents/businesses and an assessment of any obstruction of highways or public rights of way.
- As a legal requirement we also take into account whether there are any health or welfare needs.

If circumstances allow unauthorised encampments

may be tolerated for a short time.

If the decision is taken that the unauthorised encampment will not be permitted to stay, we will try to negotiate a mutually acceptable deadline for the unauthorised campers to move by.

If that fails, there are powers that every local authority can use to officially evict the unauthorised encampment.

This decision is subject to the Human Rights and Race Relations Act and all decisions made by the local authority in relation to the unauthorised encampment can be challenged in Court if people feel the decision is disproportionate.

Any attempt to move a unauthorised encampment without following relevant procedures may seem quicker, but it could lead to lengthy court actions and considerable costs.

**If an unauthorised encampment occurs in your area please contact 01352 702122 or 702613.**

