AGM of the Surrey Gypsy Traveller Communities Forum

held on Thursday 13th May 2021 on Zoom

Minutes

Present: Jack Ayres, Lalage Grundy, John Hockley, Jean Howey, Chris Raymer, Amanda Deadman, Louise Norie, Liz Patroe, Debbie Jones, Monica Vidal, Kate Jenner, Jo Packman, Sarah Cawley, Dee Cooper, Andrew Hill, Mark Haythorne, Thomas Falkner, Elena Boafe, Nikki Parkhill, Lisa Gavin, Miriam Wakerly, Ivy Manning, Helen Smith, Camilla Edmison, Kevin Ryan, Cheryl Wood, Grace Clayton, Nickola B. in place of Susan Weston, Sam Meyer, Daniella Corr, Genty Lee, Lisa Gavin.

1. John Hockley welcomed us to the meeting.

2. Apologies were received from Jeremy Harte. Kevin Ryan couldn’t get into the zoom meeting but was keen to play an active part.

3. The minutes of the last full AGM were accepted, together with the interim reports of the managing committee.

4. The Chair’s Report was presented by Lalage Grundy. She said how grateful she was to everyone who could be here today, how thankful for the support that Hilda Brazil had given the Forum over the years – though Hilda had retired now, she was always ready to help – and how mindful of everything that Ann Wilson had done for us. Ann was such a pillar of strength that it was hard to think two years had gone since she passed away.

The Forum had been monitoring plans for new sites, and for additional pitches on existing sites – but we should make sure that these turned into reality, not just plans.

The Romany Weekend had been a success in 2019; of course the pandemic had made it impossible to hold one in 2020, or plan one in 2021, but relations remained good with the Rural Life Centre at Tilford.

Our programme of cultural awareness training had moved online, and was doing well.

We responded to the consultation about criminalising trespass. We were deeply concerned about the new bill which proposed to make trespass a criminal offence, and continue to follow the outcome of this.

We had held a Zoom meeting with the Deputy Lieutenant to explain the importance of Gypsy and Traveller issues. This had been arranged by Mônica Vidal, and we were grateful for the support of SMEF.

Mônica had also invited us to apply for funds to make a drama on mental health in the GRT community.

5. The Treasurer’s Report was presented by John Hockley. We had £9241 in hand; most of our funding had come from cultural awareness training and small donations. Online donations could be made via the website, and would be very welcome. Yvette Howe was prepared to continue as our accountant: proposed by John, seconded by Lalage Grundy, and agreed.

6. The following people had put their names forward for re-election as officers:

Joint chair (GRT community) – Jack Ayres

Joint chair (non-Gypsy) – Lalage Grundy

Vice-chair – subsequently confirmed as Jean Howey

Treasurer – John Hockley

Secretary – Jeremy Harte

Secretary for online meetings – Jean Howey

All proposed by Chris Raymer, seconded by Jo Packman, and agreed.

The following people had put their names forward for election as committee:

Chris Raymer (with Andrew Hill as substitute), proposed by Lalage and seconded by John

Dee Cooper, proposed by Lalage and seconded by John

Tayla-Jane Cooper, proposed by Lalage and seconded by Jean

Genty Lee, proposed by John and seconded by Jack

All agreed.

7. Any Other Business

Mental Illness Drama

Jo Packman wanted to know more about the drama mentioned in the Chair’s Report. Lalage explained that this would be a play bringing life to the problems that people in the community experienced about mental illness. It would work, if only we could get we need GRT actors. Jo said she was interested and would like to help. Lisa Gavin wanted to know how far we had got. Lalage said she would speak to Megan. Dee Cooper offered some advice on filming – her film *Romany Me*  had gone as far as America. Lalage hoped we might use Salvation Place. Miriam Wakerly offered to help with screenplay writing. In a private message, Ivy Manning said she may have actors for the drama if we got in touch with her.

**Action Lalage**

Planning and sites

Jack said our first need was for more sites. Houses got planning easy, sites didn’t! We needed to change this. At Penny Pot we didn’t get planning but houses in the same area did, and so did a showmen’s site. What were we doing wrong? Miriam said she had been reading the 2017 report on the cost of plots etc. Was there still anti-Gypsy prejudice from councils? Had the cultural awareness training helped to get more plots laid out? Lalage said there was still work to do, that’s was why we were still doing meetings like this. Some small private sites had been approved, not council ones. Maybe the answer was to press for transit sites in Surrey, like the one in East Sussex. Jack said yes, we had a lot of sites in Surrey, but it was not enough because people still had growing families. Most plots were doubled up. We needed new sites more than anything, we’d reached a point where it was OK to move but illegal to stop!

The Policing Bill

Mônica said that this new law on criminalising trespass would not be good for community relations. John said there were many non-Gypsy homeless people on the road in vans too, and he wondered if this new law was directed just at Gypsies or whether it was meant for non-Gypsies too?

Hate Crime

Ivy Manning introduced herself, she was from Friends Family Travellers; Ivy is a Romany Gypsy and a hate crime officer, she asked how do we deal with online hate crime. Lalage said that Jean had dealt with some online. Ivy gave us details on how to report hate crime against the GRT community and said that if we needed more information, please contact her, ivy@gypsy-traveller.org.uk

Architecture

Thomas Fulkner spoke about what he does as an architect. He was interested in planning and equality for travellers and was keen to help, please contact him, Thomasfulkner@aaschool.ac.uk.

Education

Dee Cooper raised the issue that our children needed more support from schools! Her son Levi has been in Uni for four years now studying Science and has a master’s, but he was never supported and she had been told not to bother to let her son try. Children needed to know what the options were, and they needed more info on jobs, colleges etc at a earlier age.

GRT Strategy Group

Nikki Parkhill said her group supported Education as well as Health and Accommodation. They had an Early Years Programme, she agreed with what Dee said and was willing to help, please contact her, nikki.parkhill@surreycc.gov.uk.

Culture Links

Kate Jenner said her group at Surrey History Centre were keen to support the forum at Romany Day and other culture events at different venues. They were working on a programme of ‘culture links’ with career advisors in secondary schools to show what jobs were available.

Gypsy Skills

Dee said our kids needed support! Jack said we were proud of our children! We had policemen, among them, doctors and a lot more, his son was a qualified electrician and that was all because of Gypsy Skills – we needed funding to get that programme back! Jean said that she worked at Gypsy skills and would certainly second it coming back, it would help children like her son a lot

NHS on Sites

Lisa Gavin spoke about her role as a NHS nurse and her work on the sites and what help she could give, and also about the Covid vaccines. She was working with hospitals to explain about the ways people did things in Gypsy and Traveller culture. She wanted to help as much as possible, she’d been in post for two years already and had funding for another year.

8. Date of the Next Meeting

The next committee meeting would be on Monday 24th May at 6.30pm, venue/ means of access to be circulated.