**Surrey Gypsy Traveller Communities Forum**

**Minutes of a committee meeting**

**held by Zoom, 22nd March 2022**

**1. Welcome from John Hockley (host)**

Present: John Hockley, Lalage Grundy, Dee Cooper, TJ Cooper, Jeremy Harte, Jean Howey, Chris Raymer, Andy Hill, Nikki Parkhill.

Guest: Tristan Barnet.

Apologies: Jack Ayres.

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the last committee meeting (2nd February) were agreed.

**3. Matters arising**

These were covered by the updates sent out with the agenda.

**4. Hate Crime – Social Media and Journalism**

Lalage asked us to think about we could achieve, and what should be made a priority. If there was stuff being put out that we couldn’t challenge, then we were wasting our time trying. The hateful speech associated with publications like *Surrey Live* was getting Jean down; it would get anyone down.

Jean summarised the situation. It had been the usual stuff since lockdown; there were Travellers in a field at Betchworth and she tried to stick up for us. If there was bad language or racism in online discussions she reported it, trying not to argue. These were responses to stories from the public, not the original posts. She’d asked moderators to take Facebook comments down but there had been no response on Facebook. So she emailed the man at *Surrey Live*, and he said OK, and still nothing happened. No one was taking contributions down or moderating them. Some posts had been taken down, but not all: she hadn’t looked at this last month. It had been her dealing with all this, not the Forum officially.

Tristan introduced himself as the Hate Crime sergeant for Surrey Police, new in post. As he saw it, there were two separate issues here, the *Surrey Live* website and the Facebook posts. Comments on Facebook were hard to moderate. With *Surrey Live*, we could be more restrictive as they’re the owners, and they’re based in the UK, where Facebook is based outside. Derogatory terms should be reported to the police online through the Surrey Police website.

Chris said that social media was a massive issue and it would be better for us to pick the fights we can do something about – like the *Surrey Live* website. The police had found on their own site that when they put out Gypsy stories they had to disable the comments boxes. Two or three years ago when there was a particularly problematic group at Elmbridge, one of the sergeants tried to argue a moral case but it all ended up in the *Daily Mail*. We should keep a record of what’s happening, and the police should have a way of brigading it, organising a central response, so that one problem didn’t end up not divvied out to 15 individual officers.

Nikki suggested that we use partnership with the Council. *Surrey Live* was atrocious for all sorts of reasons – mostly the things they allowed to happen on the Facebook page – but the Comms team at Surrey had a relationship they could build on. Chris felt that the Comms team at Surrey Police could do the same. With offenders like newspapers, the more something was represented by organisations, the more they had to listen. Kerry [Ceri?] Bowles the Corporate Comms Head was good.

Lalage reminded us that we’d had journalists approaching for a comment, usually to go with a damning story; and they’d been prepared to write something positive; but then to go with it they wanted input from a member of the community, photos of whoever it was, and all their details; and of course nobody would put their head above the parapet. She’d talked to these journalists and explained why people weren’t happy with the press and why they weren’t willing to take the risks of identification, but it still left a gap where otherwise have would have had a positive story. We need people to take this up at a higher level – the County or the Police. Should we focus on the worst offenders, or give them up as a lost cause and focus on others? There was a derogatory article in the national papers online every three days about an encampment. It sells, or they thought it sells.

Nikki asked if we could find allies to put out positive stories? Like the gardening competition. Tristan pointed out that the Derby was coming up, and there was a sixty-page magazine that went out, so we could get something in that. We could run some history and then bring the story up to date with the obligation to provide sites.

Dee was cautious about this; wasn’t the guy from What’s On In Epsom on the team?

A couple of years back on that page a photographer was putting up pics of the Derby site, they had children in and everything. She’d told him that this was a problem and he said people could do anything they liked. Yes, said Lalage, but we were at a point now where we couldn’t resent the past: we’d have to work with who we’d got. On the other hand, we weren’t in a hurry: we shouldn’t rush in just because there’s an opportunity to do something.

Jean felt there would be problems with responses to the stories. She was scrolling *Surrey Live* where the story about Gypsies being invited to play football came up and immediately someone was rude about this. It might not seem like nothing but when you got it every day it was a hurtful thing. Lalage remembered the football story – apparently it may be about a vendetta between the football club and the rowing club next door.

Dee thought that if we could get some content out with the heritage, that would change things. Everything had changed. As a child, growing up, she was used to going to the Derby, stopping for a bit, seeing people, but it was all different now, she didn’t go any longer. For the magazine releases, we needed to go back to first principles, why we were there on the Downs in the first place. We could do it for History Month. Lalage asked if she could write something for us – or anyone else? People could stay in touch and keep us posted, no need to wait for the next meeting to say something.

Nikki added that her Comms team has just got back, and they’d welcome some content. We could have an ongoing group. Lalage, Chris, Andy, Dee and Nikki were the people most interested, perhaps Jean, perhaps John as well.

**5. AGM – Advertising, Speaker**

This was coming up in May so we needed to do a Save the Date. It would be on Zoom. Did we want a speaker? Jeremy suggested that it would help advertise the meeting if we had something apart from the usual. Well, the Police Bill was topical. Who would be right for that? Jean remembered Chris was very reassuring when he talked about it last time, at least as far as Surrey was concerned.

Chris explained that Bert Dean was the lead for encampments. They’d heard that Mark Villiers would be taking the Bill to court as soon as it passed into law, for the infringement of human rights. The Bill was a political decision in every form and had very little to do with the police. It hadn’t been brought home to the people in Parliament that if you remove a caravan it makes the people who were living in it homeless and therefore they have to be rehoused. Right now social services couldn’t even keep up with the children that needed to be rehoused as part of ordinary business. The law had all been written down but people had no idea what it was going to mean in practice. He hadn’t come across anyone who thought this is good in any shape or form.

So for the AGM, Bert would be the best speaker on the technical part of the Bill. And then maybe a panel to answer questions – people from the County as well as the police.

Lalage asked if we could we get it out on social media? That’s what we needed to bring in members of the community. Jake might help; Dee said she had been talking to him, but he was busy at the moment. Jeremy would send something out, with details that Jean and Dee and Jack could circulate.

**6 AOB**

Gardening Competition

Dee: said that the gardening competition had been shared on Facebook, and it was on the *Travellers’ Times* site. She would write a Save the Date flyer for people, asking anyone who was interested to get back, so we knew how many we’d got coming in. John had contacted 25 companies for sponsorship.

Romany Weekend

Lalage proposed that we set the Romany Weekend aside for the moment, as she and Jeremy could deal with it.

Government Fund for Improving Sites

Lalage introduced this. £10 million was not a lot but councillors ought to apply for it. Nikki recommended that we send it to Ian Horgan – he was the team manager for Surrey Gypsy sites, one step up from the individual site managers. John said that the problem was not the money but the land. Applications were to come from boroughs and districts, so the opportunity ought to be brought to the attention of their CEOs.

Surrey Heath District Plan

Jeremy would reply to this as Secretary with something on the lines of – we regret the reclassification of Gypsy identity to follow government outlines and request that they rehouse people regardless of this, carrying on as they did before; also noting the problem of the shortage of sites; and drawing their attention to the money now available. Otherwise it all looked OK.

Media Training, Movement for Change

John asked if there was charge for this or was it for free? Members of the community should have priority. Dee said she would go.

Bereavement Counselling

Jean said she had looked into this, and they wanted to know an awful lot of your own business, so she wasn’t having any of it and didn’t recommend it to other people.

Educational Attainment

Nikki said that a fund for specifically educational attainment was now available and we should think of applying

Gypsy History

Jeremy said that his book was being published.

**7 Date of Next Meeting**

TBA