

BEN Green Spaces Project Focus Group – Cottingley Springs Gypsy Site 17.11.04

The methodology of BEN green space workshops is based on a standard pattern, for comparability, and carefully tailored in each instance to address relevant cultural factors.

We conducted a green spaces workshop as part of a Residents of Cottingley monthly site meeting. The workshop was advertised well in advance in the residents newsletter, although most of the adults do not read very well, so this message was backed up with face to face reminders. On the morning of the workshop, a leaflet inviting people to the workshop was distributed by BEN staff to all residents, who were offered a free plant for their gardens to encourage participation.

During this canvassing, a number of the residents asked what questions would be addressed, and mentioned points in response to the questions. Come the time of the workshop, seven people attended, all of whom were women. They participated on a drop-in basis, calling by in ones and twos in succession, rather than all gathering simultaneously, so the conversation flowed around the topic rather progressing in a linear way.

It is noteworthy that no men attended the workshop, although they had made a number of pertinent comments during canvassing. For this reason, their comments have been included in the findings.

1/ How many of you were interested in green spaces before you were invited to this focus group?

7/7

2/ What is a green space?

Fields

Hillsides

Mountainsides

Open Country

In the city, what, a patch of grass surrounded by houses?

This site – is this what you mean by green space?

The woodland alongside the site

Parks

Transit sites

The piece of land round the back

My garden

Football pitch

3/ How have you used green spaces?

I love all green spaces, scenery, I'm a countryside person, I love fields, animals and trees.

Camping in the summertime, in Hull, Bath, Brighton, Liverpool, Manchester, Scotland – wherever we can make a living.

We visit other sites in Doncaster, Derby, Wakefield.

The children use the park near the swimming baths, but it's two and a half miles away, there are no buses, it's a long walk, too far for me with my arthritis.

We keep an eye on each other's kids.

Dog walking.

Hare coursing.

I'm a Yorkshire lass, I travel to all the sites round the county.

Photography.

The kids all ride motorbikes.

My kids used to play round the back. There was grass with a park and swings, I've got photos I could show you, but now there's nowhere for them to play. The council sliced off a bit of my plot to improve the next door plot. They tarmacked over the park. I wanted an outdoor pool for the kids. Instead they (New Deal) left a pile of muck outside for me to shovel myself. They put grass seed down. It's half grass. They improved the sheds but they're not finishing it. People are shifting because they're not happy about the state of the site. They'd prefer to stay on site, of course they would, but they move into housing because the site's not clean.

4/ What would you like to do or see in green spaces?

We need a bit of green on each slab, it's no good having it outside people's plot because it will only get tipped on.

I'd like to grow more plants but they don't do very well.

I'd like a bigger piece of land so I could keep horses.

I'd like to see the strip of land next to our site cleaned up. It's become just a tip. It spoils our view and it gives a bad impression to other people. The council have blocked it off, but too late. It's covered in all sorts of rubbish that's been dumped. Some of it Gill (liaison worker) will burn, but lots of it you can't burn. It's toxic.

I'd like to improve the view from my slab.

When someone dies, the men like to gather and talk through the night about the person's life. They stand round a fire to keep warm. It doesn't have to be on the ground like it was at one time. They can do it in an oil drum. We wouldn't want just one spot to do it in, you find a different place each time, otherwise it would remind you every time you see it.

We need a place for the children to play but not right on our doorstep.

I'd like to see more trees.

I'd like to hang up a bird feeder, but I haven't got a washing line.

The compound is a waste of space. No-one uses it. They should put two more families on there.

I'd like to see a play area for the kids on site, but not a park, the equipment is too dangerous, children would fight over it and get pushed off. A basket ball pitch would be safer, they could take turns to throw the ball.

We need a motorbike track. All the kids have got motorbikes but they just ride them on the road round the site. It's not safe. There were plans to put one on the strip of land beside the site. Most people agreed to that idea but it didn't happen, and now there's a load of rubbish over there. Part of the problem is that the people with pitches at the front wouldn't like it. They would object to the noise.

We need more sites. This site is alright, but what about the rest of the Travellers?

People need toilets and showers for health reasons. They need a decent bit of hard standing. It's OK in the summer, but what about in the winter?

The site needs to be kept clean. We pay our council tax but the road sweepers don't do their job properly and the council don't empty our bins. Where does the money go? The gardening work needs finishing. The sheds need heating. There's a play area but we can't use it.

5/ Have you been involved in the use, improvement or creation of green spaces?

No, that's a job for the men.

I have had help to create my garden, but I need help to maintain it.

I've put in some shrubs, but my holly bushes are not growing, I don't know why.

Harjinda had funds but she just took us to Wales somewhere, or was it Chester. They piled all the kids into a minibus and drove us for miles until we

were tired and felt sick. Then the kids played in a big boat they had there and a load of tree houses. They've got play workers there, like we've got here. But we thought it was so we could choose what play equipment we wanted and they said it was just so we could see what other people had got. They did the same survey 20 years ago. Now they're asking my kids. But they never do anything. People don't stick in the job. I feel very strongly about this.

6/ What puts you off using green spaces?

In our culture, women do the indoor jobs. We keep fit and we work very hard doing indoor jobs, cleaning the trailers until they are spotless. If we did dirty jobs outside, people would say we were not real women. They would call us names and say we were like men.

I can't go to the park because of my arthritis. It's made worse by the damp.

I've had help to lay a lawn, and I've planted some conifers, but kids jump over the fence. How can I stop them?

I've no idea what we would need to do to get the motorbike track to happen.

I can't step outside my own front door for dog mess. Other people on site let their dogs run loose and they come into my garden to mess. I haven't got any dogs. All I can do is hose it down. Now I've got a garden, they mess on the lawn. I'm sick of picking it up. I can't cope. It's disgusting. The dog wardens come round and take away the dogs, but people just get them back again. There's nowhere to walk dogs, just up the hill and back. There's no park to go to.

I agree. Dogs are a big problem. I've got two dogs. I keep them for protection if the bailiffs come. I try to keep them chained up but you can't always. Some of the men take their dogs coursing round here, the greyhounds, but farmers don't want you in their fields. They shoot the dogs.

Fly tipping.

I don't know anything about gardening. It's a man's job. It's OK for the kids to help, up to a certain age, but when the girls are fourteen, they'll want to find a man.

7/ What puts you off getting involved in the care and improvement of green spaces?

There's no money. Gill (the Gypsy liaison officer) cleans up.

There's no room for trees in our garden, it's just turf on top of concrete, it's got very poor drainage.

I've got nowhere to stand a pot plant. I can't put up a hanging basket, it's too windy.

Some people put flowers in old tyres, but if we did that here, they'd only get burned.

At the end of the day, it's only a council shed. People don't feel it's their own.

We want to improve the strip of woodland next to our site, but we just don't know where to start.

I need some help to mow my lawn. I can't do it because I'm a woman. I've got no man around.

Health problems – but I might feel more motivated if someone could work with me, give me some encouragement.

I'd like to see the site cleaned up but the problem is too big, there's loads of mess.

There was a hic up from the start with these two sites. It's a long way back now but it still causes problems.

A transit site would do more harm than good. What I'd like to see is small family sites, say for 6—8 caravans, permanent sites, dotted around Leeds.

New Deal left about 20 tonnes of soil in front of my caravan. They come to do the job but they don't finish it off.

I'm afraid the site will be closed down if everyone moves off. People are going into houses because they can't stand the hassle. (Police harassment, council neglect etc.)

Road sweepers come. They sweep the roads but they leave the drains blocked. I'm still paying off the bill for the water meter from when I was away in the summer and they used the water supply from my shed to supply the road sweeper.

The line manager is too remote. Residents meetings should pick up problems like this, but those responsible do not help. We think it's because they don't like us. They are prejudiced.

8/ What puts you off getting involved in the creation of green spaces?

They've got 4 transit sites in Doncaster and five permanent sites. Why are there none in Leeds?

I'd have no idea how to find pieces of land for sites. I'm not educated. I'm not an architect or anything.

It's hard to find land, then it's hard to get planning permission. It's a big issue on the telly now. They keep evicting people, even in the winter, even if you've got babies. They're not trained how to do it safely. Sometimes the police are really racist towards us. You should hear the names they call us. It's racist and sexist. It's very insulting. And people get injured, including children.

We bought a piece of land. It was in a derelict area. We spent lots of money putting up fences and a gate, planting trees. We tried to get planning permission to build our own site but we were turned down. Now that field is just standing empty. It's the same everywhere.

Yes, it happened to some people I know in Coventry, I think that's where it was. They put up chalets, but local people complained and got up a petition. The chalets have all been demolished now. They're just prejudiced against Travellers.

The plots near Wakefield, Gypsies bought them and sold them to other Gypsies who built sheds on them. Then the council evicted them. Now it's a Millennium Garden. It's green belt, that's the reason they gave. But they've since built a load of houses opposite!

When the council were renovating the site here, they put 8-10 families on the compound. It's built on an old swamp. There was a coal mine here before and this was the slag heap. So the tarmac, which is too thin, cracked up and there were maggots coming up through it!

I've heard that the Police are taking over Traveller sites and running them. There are six sites. You can ask Helen where (Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange). I wouldn't live on a site run by police.

9/ What will encourage us to become more involved?

The kids could help. They could be good at gardening, up to a certain age. But they are away during the summer. Old people are on site all year round, but younger people, they come and go.

I would like some advice about how to look after my lawn and encourage my shrubs to grow.

I need help with developing my gardening skills.

If the ground belongs to Gypsies, other Travellers have more respect. If it belongs to the council, they just think they can do their own thing. Young people come on and start playing their radio really loud outside my plot. On our sites, if someone pulls on and you don't get on with them, you just move to the other end. You can't do that here.

They've got CCTV in Doncaster and Wakefield. I can't see the harm in it. Wakefield site is right next to the park. It's got a big fence round it and cameras to stop people causing damage to the site, fly tipping and dangerous

driving. The people there all agree to it. Here, people wouldn't like it. They think its for the police to spy on them, but it's not. You need to build trust and get people's agreement. If the majority agree, the others would have to accept it. It would help us to feel safe when we go away, that stuff won't get stolen from out of our shed. Travellers can't complain to the police, it's not something we do, but the housing workers could monitor it, and they would only check the tapes if an incident was reported.

10/ Is there anything else you would like to add?

It's racism. We used to get tortured by the Police and insulted. They think of us as aliens but we're not, we're people the same as anyone else. There are good and bad in all races. We tried to give them some training but they didn't understand.

My daughter went to a job interview but when she told them her address, they refused her the job.

Our children are bullied in schools. They're afraid to tell their parents. They are brought up to defend themselves. It's the only way we can survive.

I've heard on the radio that the Government are considering a Bill for more caravan sites but the public are very surprised. They don't know anything about us Travellers.

The council and the Police have made Travellers wary and untrusting of them.

I tried living in a house for a while but I got claustrophobic and depressed. I never used to have trouble with my nerves but now I do. I'm under the doctor for it. I had to just go out walking at night, to breath fresh air and feel a sense of freedom.

You talk to me about Stephen Lawrence and Damilola Taylor, well listen because I'm only going to tell you this once. Johnny Delaney was a Gypsy boy. He was thirteen years old when he went to Liverpool. He went across the road from the site with his little brother and sisters to buy sweets. On the way back they were set about by local lads aged sixteen and seventeen. They killed him. Johnny Delaney was murdered, and his killers got three years each in prison. Three years for a life. If a Gypsy had ever done a thing like that they would throw away the key. We went to a memorial service in Derby for Johnny Delaney. It was very moving. Now you tell me, what are the authorities going to do about that?