

29th January 2019,

For the attention of Fiona O'Donovan, news reporter at Red FM:

Over the last two decades, the Cork Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) has been supporting the families living on Spring Lane halting site for their right to decent accommodation and living conditions. The Spring Lane halting site was opened as a 10 bay temporary site in 1989, close to Ellis's yard, which has been a traditional camp site for Travellers in Cork for over 60 years.

While the original 10 families on the Spring Lane site have grown to include 3 generations today, no additional unit of Traveller specific accommodation has been built to allow movement out of Spring Lane for those younger people, despite Traveller accommodation budgets being allocated by government yet left under spent by Cork City Council. Today, the Spring Lane site is acutely overcrowded, with very poor sanitation and facilities, and no safe area for the 73 children living on the site.

Many people will think, 'why don't they move out and find somewhere else to live?'. ..

The difficulties for Travellers in accessing private rented accommodation are well documented, as recently in the RTE Investigates program 'Lives on the fringes', shown nationwide on 17th December 2018. Equally, of the 31 families living on site, 14 of these seek to be housed in standard council housing (the majority are 10 years or more on the housing waiting list), yet only one family has been successfully housed by Cork City Council in the past two years.

The TVG has endeavoured to work with Cork City Council, by meeting with local representatives, by participating in Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACCs) and in meetings with successive housing directors, by making multiple written submissions for Traveller Accommodation programmes over the past 20 years, and by supporting meetings between Cork City Council, the voluntary housing organisation Respond, and Traveller residents.

The TVG recognises the serious issue of illegal dumping on Ellis's yard and we sympathise with both non-Traveller and Traveller people living in Ballyvolane/Spring Lane who suffer the effects of this situation. We also recognise that if illegal dumping of that scale was happening anywhere else but adjacent to a halting site, it would undoubtedly have been addressed long ago. Like the pond of sewage water that was left by the local authority to build up and deepen between Ellis's yard and the Spring Lane site, close to the families' caravans, before it was finally drained and cleaned, after years of pressures from the HSE environmental health officer, Traveller and human rights organisations and legal firms.

Unightly halting sites make great material for the electioneering campaigns of politicians who feel no shame tapping into anti-Traveller racism to seek 'brownie points' with voters.

It has been reported to the TVG that Cllr O'Flynn intends to make a motion to Cork City Council to bulldoze Spring Lane, close off the 10 bay halting site and Ellis's yard and rezone the land for the development of sports facilities. Has Cllr O'Flynn also suggested alternative plans for the accommodation of the 31 families currently living on Spring Lane?

Furthermore, is Cllr O'Flynn aware that the zoning of Ellis's yard for the development of Traveller accommodation has already been adopted by councillors, and features in the current Cork City Development Plan 2015-2021?

On behalf of the Cork Traveller Visibility Group, I would like to invite Cllr O'Flynn to meet with us and with resident representatives from Spring Lane halting site to discuss what could constitute the best options for the relocation of the Traveller families of Spring Lane.

Breda O'Donoghue

Chair person of the Cork Traveller Visibility Group