I am Roy Briscoe a Parish Councillor in Westbourne, West Sussex.

My family moved to Westbourne in 2012, and there was a harmonious relationship between the settled community and the Gypsy/Traveller and Showman communities.

However, since I took up the position of a Parish Councillor I became aware the number of Traveller pitches had increased significantly and to date has more than doubled since I moved to the area in 2012.

As a Parish Councillor, I am available to the whole community to listen to any grievances or issues that the community feel can be redressed by the Parish Council. To this end I have made myself known to many living within the Parish calling at houses and generally introducing myself at any opportunity. As such I believe I have a good feel of the communities’ feelings, frustrations and aspirations.

There have been many occasions where I have been approached by members of the settled community with complaints of the behaviour toward them from the Gypsy/Traveller community.

I will list a number of these complaints, bearing in mind the complainants were unwilling to put their names to them as they were concerned regarding intimidation or retribution;

1. A major complaint that the Gypsy Traveller community treat the planning system with contempt and are seen to get away with it
2. Along that subject one resident on Monks Hill complained about an application for a Gypsy Pitch at the top of Monks Hill, he was subsequently threatened and attempts made to intimidate him witnessed by neighbours, who also complained but did not want the Police involved for fear of retribution.
3. That site which was refused permission was immediately occupied by a Mr Wickens, who then lived there until an appeal was heard which upheld his appeal and allowed the pitch. The community were fuming about this blatant disregard for Planning Laws which they felt were unduly influenced at appeal by the fact he took up residence.
4. Again, a site owned on Cemetery Lane by Mr Sullivan a well-known individual of the Traveller community, ‘The Old Army Camp’ which had been refused permission on several occasions for Gypsy/Traveller pitches and Travelling Showman plots has been covered with road scalping’s and fenced off into several smaller plots with 6’ high close board fencing in an area considered as countryside, prior to submitting a planning application for 4 travelling showman plots.
5. Even after numerous complaints to the Enforcement team of the planning department regarding this conversion of ‘The Old Army Camp’ in the Countryside nothing was done as a planning application then came forth. As a result of this application 4 Travelling Showman Plots were approved. Again, I received several complaints from residents that had they done this they would have been held to task and prosecuted over the blatant breaches and certainly would not have had permission approved, they felt discriminated against, which has upset and alienated a large proportion of the community I represent.
6. Westbourne has a high proportion of Elderly residents whom have raised concern with me over the number of younger Travellers/Gypsy’s in the Parish, quoting they, “feel intimidated and threatened”, by this sudden influx, a few have indicated they wouldn’t go into the Co-op whilst a group from that community were in as they felt worried. This incident was not reported to the Police as the people concerned were genuinely afraid for their safety.
7. One incident reported to me was that of a female jogger running on one of our country lanes, a pony and trap came up behind her and as it went to overtake her the occupant flicked her with the pony whip.
8. Another resident was walking past the established Gypsy/Traveller site on Cemetery Lane when she was approached by 2 youngsters from the site they old her to hand over her mobile phone. She had the presence of mind to say she knew who they were and that they could go and see their parents right now on the site at which point they backed off.
9. Cars belonging to the Traveller Community have been seen racing along Cemetery Lane, often late in the evening, after one such evening the flint post to the cemetery entrance had been knocked over---there were no witnesses to prove who did it but suspicion obviously fell on the Traveller’s by the settled community
10. Emsworth Common Road was closed by a group of Travellers who were racing pony and traps along a length of the Road, causing considerable inconvenience to the other road users and in breach of the Road Traffic Act. This group then descended en-mass at a local hostillery in Funtington driving the locals out that afternoon.
11. I have received several complaints regarding contaminated waste being burned at ‘The Paddocks’ Traveller/Gypsy site which is the largest new site for the Traveller community. As a result, the Environment Agency became involved and eventually a prosecution was taken against one individual. I still receive complaints of toxic fires from this site but on a smaller scale usually on a Friday or Saturday Night when no-one is available to investigate.
12. One family have had a number of Chickens shot on their land, although they are unable to prove it was members of the Travelling community they believe it was, there is no evidence to prove it nor was it reported to the police but incidents like this soon spread in such a small community raising fears and concern still further.
13. I have also been told that one of the Traveller community ran up an excessive bill at a local business, the owner threatened to stop the supply unless some of the bill was paid to which he was threatened with being petrol bombed, this was not reported due to fear of retribution.
14. One of the Traveller/Gypsy community a Mr Green has actually stated in a planning application for a New Pitch to which the Parish Council had initially supported that he cannot live on a site that has now been approved as there are ill feelings between his family and the owner of the adjacent approved plot. The Parish Council withdrew their support to this application as Chichester District lost an appeal for a further 5 pitches in the Parish.
15. The previous appeal mentioned at point 13 is a green field site set in open countryside within view of the South Downs National Park. A member of the settled community applying to build here would not get anything approved as it breaches the National Planning Policy Framework. Again, discrimination shown against the settled community which has had a serious detrimental effect between the two communities. It has fostered ill feelings toward the Traveller community.
16. A Bench owned by the Parish Council on River Street was damaged beyond repair, the 2 youths responsible were challenged by a witness, they were from the Gypsy/Traveller community and threatened the witness, who then did not want to then get involved but it was reported to me in case we could use the information. Without a willing witness, we could not take action to prosecute the offenders or recover damages.
17. I have had several reports of Fly-grazing by ponies associated with the Travelling community, when challenged the owners of the land have been verbally abused but threatened to report the horses to the RSPCA whom I believe have powers to remove abandoned ponies---they have been removed for a few weeks and then returned----the cycle then repeats.

As a Parish Councillor and representative of both the Settled and Traveller communities I feel there is a genuine feeling of hostility being generated and fostered as a result of recent planning decisions and incidents. As a retired Police Officer and having seen such tension indicators rising before I believe there is a strong chance that violence could erupt as a result of the changing balance between the two communities. In order to redress this the community needs time to adapt and accept the considerable increase in Traveller numbers within the Parish.

These tensions and concerns have happened since the new pitches have been approved in the Parish of Westbourne over the last 3 to 4 years.

This statement is true and to the best of my knowledge accurate, I am unable to name many individuals as these incidents were reported in confidence and witnesses are genuinely concerned for their personal and property safety.

Roy Alan Briscoe

Westbourne Parish Councillor.