

Temporary High Court injunction banning travellers from setting up illegal sites across the entirety of Harlow

The first complete ban on illegal gypsy and traveller sites has been introduced in an Essex town, after an unprecedented High Court ruling. An interim injunction was awarded to Harlow Council following complaints by residents of being 'beseiged' by gypsies camping on cycle paths, playgrounds and car parks.

The ruling, believed to be the first of its kind to ban illegal camps across an entire town, protected 454 'parcels of land', including "320 vulnerable sites", such as parks and playgrounds, previously occupied sites, highway verges, schools, as well as 134 areas which incorporate cycle tracks, from being used as future unauthorised traveller encampments.

The interim injunction order was served on travellers who are part of the unauthorised encampment at Horscroft Place in Harlow on 4 March 2015. Injunction papers will also be served and displayed on the 454 parcels of land over the coming days. Any breach of the injunction is classed as a serious offence and could lead to a fine or a custodial sentence.

The injunction applies to 35 named individuals, all of whom are now reported to have left the town, as well as protecting the land from encampments by 'persons unknown'.

Harlow Council and Essex County Council said they applied for the ban after 109 different illegal sites were set up in the town since October 2013 and rising numbers of residents and businesses complained about damage to public spaces, fly-tipping, human waste, anti-social behaviour and general disruption.

Councillor Jon Clempner said: "this injunction is about protecting the town's vulnerable open spaces, upholding the law and responding and listening to the concerns of residents and businesses. It is not – and never has been – about persecuting any particular group of people or their way of life".

The two legal sites in Harlow will be unaffected by the ruling and it is reported that there are and will continue to be positive relations between the town's settled travellers living on the two public permanent sites and the rest of the community.

The injunction, which will remain in place until the hearing for a full injunction takes place later this year. The residents of Harlow are reported to be "looking forward to getting back to normality".

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