

## Letter from Kathleen McCarthy to The Queen

28<sup>th</sup> June 2005

Your Royal Highness,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the 300 Gypsies living at Oak Lane in Crays Hill, near Basildon in Essex.

I don't know if you are aware of us but we are facing a large and violent eviction in the near future. As you know from your own experience, the media can be very nasty and cruel and we have felt the pain of this over the last several months.

Our local residents and the leader of the opposition, Michael Howard, have made the media say awful, racist and hateful things about us that simply aren't true. I'm sure you know how this feels. Because you are our ruler, I think you could help stop this terrible eviction. We have a lot of children who are going to school for the first time here. We have seen our children learn so much since we bought the land here in Crays Hill. We are the fifth generation of Irish Travellers who were born and reared in England. Our mothers and fathers and their forefathers have suffered at the hands of the British government. We are all British subjects and we are pleading with you for any help you may be able to give us. As a grandmother and a mother, you must know the pain of trying to help your children through life.

Please help stop this eviction that is going to flatten our homes and destroy our children's lives. If this was happening in a foreign country there would be an outcry. We have nowhere to go and no one to turn to. I have tried to contact the government on several occasions but they have said that we are breaking the law by living on what they say is green belt land. We bought this site in good faith four years ago when it was nothing but a scrap yard. We put a huge amount of effort in to clean it up before we could live on it. It was never a green field. In fact it had a licence to operate as a scrap yard from 1968 until 2000.

If we are brutally thrown off this land, we will be forced to live by the side of the road as there are no sites in this country for us to live on anymore. When we pull onto the side of the road, we are usually told to move on by police and local councils within 24 hours. On the side of the road, there is no water, no education, no electricity and no amenities. It is no life for a child – or anyone for that matter in this day and age.

I am 42 years old and have been treated like this all my life. I want a better future for my children. I had to ask someone else to write this letter for me as I cannot read and write. I would like very much to meet you in person because only then will you understand the situation we are in and the things we have to put up with. We love our culture and our way of life, but we just want to be settled, not to break the law, and be left in peace.

You are our last hope and our Queen. I know you are extremely busy but if you could reply to my letter it would be a great honour to hear from you.