Travellers finally walk away from illegal camp

THEY'RE OFF

TRAVELLERS and protesters staged a mass walkout from Dale Farm, all but ending a two-day stand off against bailiffs and police. More than 100 people left through the main gate, which had been demolished earlier in the day. Many of them are believed to be moving to the neighbouring legal site. Resident Kathleen McCarthy said: "It is a terrible moment, very sad, but the time has come." Over the two days, 39 people were arrested. None of these were travellers.

FULL STORY: PAGES 5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,14,15,16

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Travellers leave Dale Farm with ‘heads held high’

By JON AUSTIN and STEPHEN HACKWELL

The dramatic walkout followed more tension on the site, that saw the iconic scaffold barrier demolished and five people arrested, taking the total to 39 for the two days.

Shouts of “Save Dale Farm” rang out as the crowd, some hand in hand and others clutching family portraits, surrounded by a media scrum, made their way along Oak Lane.

Traveller Kathleen McCarthy said: “Our message is that, as supporters and residents, we leave with our heads held high. “It’s a terrible moment, very sad, but the time has come. Our message to the council is shame on the council – you have left us homeless.”

John Gore, who moved his mother’s caravan to his brother’s legal plot, said: “We’ve got to go now. “This is not a place to stay any more.”

However, others hinted the battle was not over. One man, who would not be named, said: “We’ll be here tomorrow. We’re not going anywhere. “This isn’t over.”

One of the protesters, who would be named only as Rich, said: “We’ve done what we came to do. We’ve made a stand and we’ve shown the world that Dale Farm is a real community.”

Stuart Hardwick Carruthers, a campaigner for the travellers, said there were about 30 people left on three plots on the illegal site that were protected because of a council technical error.

Council leader Tony Ball said: “This is very encouraging to see the travellers and their supporters leaving Dale Farm in a peaceful and dignified manner, something that I have always urged and called for.”
BATTLE OF DALE FARM

I’ll stay put, says Danny Sheridan, 66

A TRAVELLER who lives on one of the three protected plots on Dale Farm has vowed to stay put, even if the site becomes a "ghost town".

Under a recent High Court ruling, Basildon Council cannot remove any caravans from three plots, although it is allowed to dig up the hard-standing.

Danny Sheridan, 66, owns one of the plots in the illegal half of the site and says he will never leave.

He said: “I am staying here. I’ve been here two years and I’m not going anywhere. I’ll put down some matting or something. It will be all right.

“It may be a ghost town, but that doesn’t bother me.”

The plots enjoy protection because council officers failed to mention the removal of caravans when they issued the initial eviction notices nearly a decade ago.

There were no caravans on the plots at the time, but they have now been occupied by relatives of Danny and his partner Rita Sheridan, 58.

Yesterday, each of the three plots had at least four caravans crammed into its boundaries.

Danny said: “I don’t know what will happen to the other caravans. They can stay there for the moment. Council bosses have said they may consider issuing new eviction notices to close the loophole once the initial site clearance is completed.

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BATTLE OF DALE FARM

5ft wall of mud will bar access back on to site

A FIVE-FOOT wall of mud around Dale Farm will stop travellers moving caravans back on to the site once it has been cleared.

It will be similar to the walls built at the Hovefields site in Wickford, which was cleared between 2005 and 2010.

Tony Ball, leader of Basildon Council, said: “The land will be turned over and baunds will be put in so there is effectively a wall round the site to stop cars and other vehicles getting on to the land.

“The land will be accessible by foot because it is the travellers’ land and they will be able to walk on it.

“But we will make sure no vehicles will be able to get back on to the land.

“There will also be security at the site, how long for I cannot say, because that is an operational decision.”

The council will also apply for a High Court injunction which would mean travellers were in contempt of court if they returned.

This would mean they could be jailed or have assets seized. Many people argue the eviction could have been avoided if the council served an injunction against the site several years ago.

By MELISSA HILLS

Mr Ball also said Basildon Council would be looking to recuperate some of the taxpayers’ money and try to recover some of the cost of the eviction.

He said: “We have made it clear we will claim back as much as we can from the travellers. We have had costs awarded to us for the failed judicial reviews which we will recover. If the money cannot be claimed back from the travellers then we do have the right to seize the land for remedial purposes.

“We do not know how much the costs are for the site clearance, it will all become very clear in the very near future.”

Residents brand departure ‘a joke’

RESIDENTS welcomed the travellers’ departure from Dale Farm, but branded it a joke that many had moved just yards to the legal site.

Residents in Crays Hill are convinced some of the Dale Farm residents own or have access to empty legal pitches next door, but wanted to get planning permission on the illegal site to increase the land value.

David McPherson-Davis, a Ramsden Crays parish councillor, said: “The fact they have moved on to the legal site suggests they were not giving us the full story. If the legal plots are owned by friends or relatives, then why did they not allow them on to their pitches a lot sooner?”

Len Gridley, 82, from Oak Road, Crays Hill, said: “This is a joke. They have cut the electricity, but they have got power on the legal plots. It’s not over until the last one pulls off.”

Kathleen McCarthy, a spokesman for the site, denied anyone had other homes and said they could only use the legal pitches, owned by relatives, for a temporary period until the owners return.

She said: “People say we have other places, but I can tell you Dale Farm is our home and we have nowhere else to go. Do you think we would be putting ourselves through this otherwise?”

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TENSIONS ran high as bailiffs cut protesters free from the barricades.

Supporters camping out on the gateway at the top of the scaffolding barricade had been forcibly removed on Wednesday afternoon, but six remained chained and tied to lower parts of the structure and surrounding fences.

At 7.15am yesterday, riot police formed lines in front of the barricades and bailiffs used machinery to cut through the ties protesters had attached themselves to.

A pair of supporters were wrapped in threats to keep the chill out.

At about 9.30am, bailiffs put up fencing around the barricades and about 20 campaigners wearing boiler suits and face masks climbed on to the roof of a mobile home to watch.

They shouted "Shame on you" and "Don't hurt them" as the bailiffs carrying out the operation.

Supporters who had volunteered to be legal advisers for the Dale Farm Solidarity campaign group wrote notes on what the bailiffs were doing to keep a running account of the operation.

When protesters were removed they were led away by police.
THE scaffold tower that came to symbolise the Dale Farm travellers' resistance was finally torn down yesterday.

After the last protesters who were chained and concreted on to vehicles and the base of the structure were removed in the morning, heavy machinery got to work.

This was in stark contrast to last month's failed first eviction, when a small group of bailiffs and Basildon Council leader Tony Ball approached the gate and merely asked through a faulty loudspeaker if there was anything he could do to get them to take down the barricade. They were met by an army of travellers and protesters hurling threats and abuse.

But at 8.30am yesterday, a large digger tore through the scaffolding, wooden planks and concrete.

It made light work of the makeshift defences, bitting into the inevitable fact they must now eventually have to leave.

There was a hull as bailiffs were finally allowed to secure other areas of the site before the rest of the tower was pulled down at about 10am.

Removing the barricade was another major step for Basildon Council after its successful start to the clearance with police. The scaffolding first went up weeks before the initial eviction vote in June 2005.

It was soon barricaded with scores of gas bottles which were later removed at the request of the fire service.

It was more heavily fortified this year with wood, concrete and vehicles as the eviction loomed.

Protestors tried in vain to get English Heritage to list it as a symbol of the battle of Dale Farm last month, but the request was refused.
BATTLE OF DALE FARM

- Trying to stay put – a protester with her hand encased in a barrel of concrete
- Daily life goes on – a traveller and a child pass by the officers on guard
- Guarding the barricade – two officers
BATTLE OF DALE FARM

Balliffs at work – two protesters are surrounded by security while they are removed from their positions

Coming down – the Dale Farm scaffolding tower

Watching – a police officer in protective gear

Picture: CHRIS RADBURN

Picture: MIKE MINERS BA01000_96
Puxon: I shall not be condemning violence

By GINA MARDEN

TRAVELLER campaigner Gritian Puxon refused to condemn violent protesters and revealed travellers had used activists to come along to support them.

When questioned over whether he supported violent outbursts, Mr Puxon said: "We asked the protesters to come here. The violence is their response to the violence of police, who broke through the barriers. I have no condemnation of them whatsoever."

In the long term, Mr Puxon said he is hopeful a public inquiry taking place next month will allow travellers to stay elsewhere in the Basildon borough.

Held on November 22 by the planning inspectorate, the hearing will determine whether land made available by the Government in Church Road, Lathdon, is suitable for a traveller site.

Meanwhile, resident Kathleen McCarthy vowed to return to Dale Farm in a year to see if it has been returned to green belt.

She said: "This won't be returned to green belt, so all this will be for no reason."

She also believes what she has witnessed in the past two days has been completely unacceptable.

She said: "I've seen a resident with blood dripping down their face, and another who has been put in hospital by police beating.

"The way in which the police are acting has shocked and outraged everyone here. Dale Farm will weigh heavily on Britain for generations. Our entire community is being ripped apart by Basildon Council and the politicians in Government."

All Saunders, a Dale Farm supporter, added: "The way Basildon Council conducted the eviction confirmed what has become clear throughout the legal process - Basildon saw travellers as second-class citizens who it wants to chase out of the area."

A day of tension and accusations

DAY two of the eviction was another drawn-out process, with no lack of tension in the air.

Bailiffs soon got to work on the barricade, but for much of the rest of the day it appeared to be another stand-off.

Then there was a dramatic turn at 1.30pm when travellers and protesters agreed to leave the camp together.

They wanted to go before Basildon Council served 48-hour eviction notices on a small number of pitches.

However, tensions flared after Lorraine Browne, solicitor to the council, was accompanied on a walk around the site with riot police.

This led to an impromptu protest march around the site by travellers and protesters.

Some shouted abuse at the police and condemned the council for trying to influence the situation when a peaceful solution had been offered.

Traveller Mary Sheridan said: "Why would they do that when we said we would go? It seems it is them that wants the fight."

A council spokesman said it had been agreed with campaigners or Candy Sheridan that Mrs Browne would do the checks, but not serve the notices, before the hostile reaction followed.

He added: "We could not send her around on her own."}

Bailiffs removed the first mobile home shortly after 2pm yesterday evening and expect to start work on the remainder today.

The 48-hour notices will now be served today, but the council could not confirm exactly how many pitches were affected.
BASILDON'S police chief spoke of his pride at the way his officers handled the eviction, and dismissed claims they were too heavily-handed.

Divisional Commander, Chief Supt Glen Caton, applauded the conduct of his team who have handled an "incredibly demanding" situation.

He stressed, despite claims of "police brutality" by travellers and activists, not a single official complaint has been made about any officer involved in the operation so far.

Chief Supt Caton said: "The officers involved have acted with the utmost professionalism and in proportion to the trouble they have faced, I'm proud of them and I've had a lot of public support saying the same thing."

"They've had rocks thrown at them, timber hurled at them, urine poured over them and, of course, no end of verbal abuse."

"Thankfully no officer has been seriously hurt."

"I have seen no evidence of any heavy-handedness and, as far as I'm aware, there hasn't been a single complaint made about a police officer."

He added people sitting at home watching the coverage of the eviction on TV had to bear in mind they were only being exposed to "a snapshot" of what is really going on.

He said: "This has been an incredibly difficult and demanding situation, and people have to remember most of the officers involved are just bobbies on the beat."

"We don't have the luxury of riot police sitting around, as we don't have operations like this very often."

"So, they are just everyday officers, male and female, who have been given some extra training."

"Many would have never faced a situation like this before."

"The British police force is the best in the world. These past couple of days prove that."

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POLICE arrested 39 people during the two-day operation at Dale Farm.

Among them is a woman who has been charged for failing to remove a mask under the Criminal Justice Act. All the others, arrested for obstructing a bailiff, have been bailed.

Twenty-three were released on bail, one was released without charge, and a further 14 were last night still in custody.

Supt Trevor Roe, Essex Police’s spokesman at the eviction, said all those arrested – barring one person from Basildon – were from outside the area.

He said: “As far as I’m aware, the residents have not offered any serious violence at all. That is reflected in the 39 arrested who are all protesters from outside the county, apart from one.”

So far, 11 police officers have received minor injuries such as cuts and bruises during clashes with protesters.

Supt Roe said the priority for police remains to keep the peace on the site and to support bailiffs as they clear the site and entrance.

He said the Crays Hill community policing team were continuing to visit the camp and had been approached by several traveller families who wanted to leave. Supt Roe added: “We are trying to facilitate that as quickly as we can.”

The senior cop said officers were still facing resistance from the activists.

Several protesters spent the majority of the day sitting on the roof of a chalet, hurling abuse and threats at police.

Supt Roe added: “We can’t just remove protesters unless they commit offences.”

Nine police forces, including Essex, London’s Met Police, Thames Valley, Surrey and Wales, are taking part in the eviction.
**BATTLE OF DALE FARM**

Riot cops made site a war zone – priest

**‘Heartbreaking for community’**

A CATHOLIC priest has condemned the handling of the eviction so far – and claimed it had already caused permanent damage between police and the travelling community.

Father Dan Mason, parish priest of Our Lady of Good Council Church, Wickford, visited the site as the operation began.

He said: “It was very traumatic. One woman was injured. They told me she was pushed against a wall and kicked. She sustained a back injury. She was taken to hospital, but they couldn’t take her because there were no beds. It’s all completely surreal.”

Father Mason said he knew the people at the site well and the families were always hospitable.

He added: “We sit in a camp, having a cup of tea. Seeing riot police everywhere, helicopters, protesters, it looked like a war zone.”

Father Mason said the involvement of riot police had badly damaged relations with police.

By JON AUSTIN jon.austin@echo.co.uk

He said: “It is heartbreaking for the community. Police who have built up a good relationship with them are now just associated with the riot police.”

He said the travellers had nowhere to go and would not take council accommodation as it would split up their community and many feared it would lead to claims they had jumped the housing queue.

He added: “There could be room for them to squeeze on the neighbouring legal site, but those people could lose their licences if they do that.

“This could be the start of the council trying to get rid of them all.

“In the unauthorised site there are also three legal pitches, but they fear the bailiffs won’t respect those.

“They have already done some damage.

“There is always the fear the eviction will be ever enforced.

“This is their land, but the council will say the cost of the eviction means they can confiscate it, so they won’t get compensation.”

**TV camera is smashed**

A FILM maker says his camera, worth £20,000, was smashed by a security guard during the Dale Farm eviction operations.

Richard Parry, a director for Hardcash Films, is making a documentary about the eviction for BBC TV’s Panorama.

He was also behind the BBC’s Big Eviction Dale Farm special earlier this year and the BBC3 series Gypsy Wars, which included an episode devoted to Dale Farm.

Mr Parry has alleged his camera was damaged for no apparent reason in the press compound.

A Basildon Council spokesman said police recorded footage in the area had been viewed, but showed no evidence of the damage being caused.

However, he added: “We take all complaints seriously and this has been logged as all others would be and Mr Parry has been urged to contact the chief executive, Raja Mahendran, to pursue it further.”

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