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HOME > NEWS / SHOWBIZ > UK NEWS > £2m bill for one traveller family

UK NEWS

£2M BILL FOR ONE TRAVELLER FAMILY



Lee Robson and Peter Scott-Cooksey with a pole showing the width of a caravan in their narrow road

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Thursday January 12, 2012
By **Anil Dawar**
TAXPAYERS face a £2million bill to create a travellers' campsite big enough for just one **family**, the Daily Express can reveal today.

Angry residents in a cul-de-sac where the site would be developed have spent thousands fighting council **plans** to turn their quiet narrow road into a thoroughway for caravans.

The proposals for Church Grove in Ladywell, south London, would create just five pitches – enough for one extended

traveller family – at a cost of £400,000 per pitch. Each one would have a static caravan, a brick building with kitchen, bathroom and living-room, plus space for a touring caravan and a car.

According to Lewisham Council's figures there are at least 500 travellers and gypsies in the borough, but no official sites for them.

Experts predict an extra 50 vehicle movements every day as the travellers manoeuvre their caravans, trucks and 4x4s up and down the narrow street.

Yesterday teacher Clare Brynley-Jones, 37, of the **Save** Church Grove action group, said its 17 households had formed an "amazingly close-knit community".

“It is an enormous amount of money to spend on just five pitches. The only way caravans could be towed in and out is if they mounted the pavement. It is going to be downright dangerous.”

She added: "It is an enormous amount of money to spend on just five pitches. The only way caravans could be towed in and out is if they mounted the pavement. It is going to be downright dangerous."

The residents commissioned two costly independent reports into access to the site. One found that the street was "totally inadequate for the intended purpose", and the other said the caravan site would "materially affect" public safety.

Peter Scott-Cooksey, 54, a driving instructor who has lived in the street for 13 years, said the group was not against travellers living on the site.

"When the council consulted us we suggested they build the access route into the back through the council's own depot, but they said it was not practical," he added. "We have tried to compromise but they won't have it." Fellow resident Lee Robson, 37, called the scheme "crazy", adding: "The council had to break 11 of its own guidelines to get this **plan** through. That's not justice."

Teacher Clare Brynley-Jones

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Lewisham's mayor, Sir Steve Bullock, is due to announce the council's decision next month.

The council, which faces making £88million in **savings**, earmarked the site in 2007 after a school on the plot closed down. So far it has spent £600,000 on its plans. If it goes ahead with the scheme it will cost taxpayers at least another £1.4million, including building anti-pollution river defences and acoustic barriers to protect travellers from the noise of a railway line.

Last night a council spokesman said: "Our council has an obligation to identify the need for a suitable site for gypsies and travellers.

"Church Grove has been identified potentially as the most suitable. We are aware of several concerns, including the width of the road. We will be looking into these in more detail."

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