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## DEFIANT TRAVELERS OPEN COMMUNITY CENTER AS BRITAIN'S HIGH COURT PREPARES TO RULE ON THEIR EVICTION



Dale Farm, UK: The embattled Irish Travellers at Dale Farm in southeast England have opened a small community center, a week before the British High Court is due to rule on whether they can be legally evicted.

The center was inaugurated on Saturday in the presence of several distinguished visitors, including Lord Avebury, a member of Britain's House of Lords, and Clive Marden, head of Racial Equality, an independent body which monitors Britain's race relations.

The center will also serve as a chapel and has been named after St. Christopher, the patron saint of Travelling. Father John Glynn, a priest at the local Catholic Church, gave his blessing at Saturday's ceremony.

The center is the first community initiative undertaken by the Dale Farm Travellers, who have been refused planning permission to build on their land by the local Basildon Council and threatened with eviction.

In his remarks, Lord Avebury denounced the council's efforts to evict 86 Traveller families and warned that any involuntary eviction would damage Britain's reputation for tolerance. Referring to coverage from the Advocacy Project (AP) he said: "The advice from as far afield as Washington is 'Don't do it.'"

The Travellers and their supporters hope that the center can provide leisure and training for teenagers, who rarely go to school, and women at Dale Farm who seek to become literate. AP has recruited a Peace Fellow, James Dasinger, to provide IT training.

But opponents of the Travellers fear that the center will create an aura of permanence, and demonstrate Dale Farm's community spirit. As a result it has come under sustained attack from the Basildon Council.

Malcolm Buckley, the head of the Council, recently cut ties with the Essex Racial Equality Council (EREC), a regional branch of Racial Equality which provided almost 10,000 pounds sterling (\$20,000) for the center. The EREC had served as an advisor to the Basildon Council on the social aspects of Dale Farm, and warned that an eviction would create serious medical problems for the Travellers.

John Baron, an influential Conservative MP for the area and another fierce critic of the Travellers, has also attacked the EREC and urged the UK National Lottery (which funds many British charities) to withdraw funding from the EREC.

Meanwhile, the Advocacy Project has also drawn sharp criticism from Essex residents for its coverage of Dale Farm, including blogs and a recent article by AP in the Washington Post. Commenting on AP's video coverage of Dale Farm which has attracted over 900 viewers on You Tube, one visitor advised AP to focus on abuses in the US "before pointing the finger at England."

- For the welcoming speech by Lord Avebury and other background material, visit the [Dale Farm partner page](#).
- Read the blogs of [James Dasinger](#).
- View the AP [footage of Dale Farm](#).

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