This submission is to express my concerns for the community at large and my family in particular not at the expense or exclusion of Gypsy/Travellers (G/T). It is an attempt to explain those concerns which is why I became involved with the Ringland Matters Group (RMG), how the group progressed its cause.

I learnt that it was planned to site two (G/T) sites within the community of Ringland from local press reports. One would be adjacent to my home -via an underpass- at the Ringland Allotments (RA) the other on Hartridge Farm Road (HFR) adjacent to the New Llanwern High and The Welsh School. I did not want either not because of –not in my backyard- but because of my concern over the number of antisocial behaviour incidents, in the underpass to the RA and Llanwern Village in particularly and across the estate the as a whole.

I joined the RMG to express these concerns. Those at the meeting understood and shared my concerns and agreed it would not be good for estate or the G/T if the antisocial elements within the settled community targeted the camps out of boredom or sheer devilment. I agreed to be Vice Chair so that I would be more able to support the Chair in the need to object on logical just grounds avoiding at all costs any discriminatory considerations. From its inception the group have stayed within the rule of law and obeyed an appropriate social, just and non-racial attitude -we played fair- we did not blockade our estate as other areas had, we resisted attempts to do so and have communicated with the travelling families and were told by Rhona -a senior member- that it would be better if we were called the People Matter Group. She is an astute lady.

Our first decision was to organise a public meeting that was attended by local councillors, police, the local press and travellers (5/2/13). Opening the meeting the Chair insisted that all were expected to conform to civilised debate so that everyone could express their views for the benefit of all, any not prepared to do so would be asked to leave. The meeting was as we had insisted well behaved with many varied contributions. The G/T supported our objections, declaring that they “did not want the RA site because of the pylons and the SDR” nor the HFR site “because it was too near the school, they stressed they “did not want trouble but if it came they would handle it”. It seem that like me they were also concerned over the possibility of the less socially inclined element from the school/estate would out of boredom or plain mischief be willing to misbehave.

From suggestions at the meeting we agreed to organise an objection petition based on the principle of sound logical argument. This was an easy task for me as I thrive on meeting and talking to people; plus, the weather was good! Every signature I collected -the group recognised I had as an individual collected by far the most-, was based on the premise of the folly of putting these sites so close to an estate with enough inherent problems as it is –though I may have occasionally said insanity- (this is a recognised deprived area). Not one signatory disagreed with the logic of my argument though two said they -the G/T- had to go somewhere and refused to sign. Many wanted to sign on behalf of their partners who were at work but I did not want to compromise the purpose of my efforts returning whenever possible.
Two signatories were travellers one signed with his mobile phone number as his address after first taking issue with me over what were we doing for travellers, until I explained that I would be happy to support them by collecting petition signatories in support of their choice of site and that we had already pressed our councillors to provide appropriate facilities for the family at Goldcliff who had been there for 40+ years and were not intending not to move.

At the second public meeting not arranged by RMG, Mark Hand (MH) gave a presentation of the LDP G/T element stating there would be 23 standings neglecting to add that by 2026 an increase to 43 was planned. In answer to a question about G/T paying council taxes etc., a colleague of MH assured the assembly that on permanent sites they did “there would be no cost to ratepayers she declared. This was challenged when it was suggested if the G/T did not put £5M into the city’s coffer there would be a burden on us. This meeting was less friendly than the RMG one. When one member of the G/T said all she wanted was somewhere to do her washing, bathe her kids and shower; it was met with a chorus of “it’s called a house”. She later said she felt intimidated by some of the more vociferous attendees of the meeting.

On the 4/6/13, I attended with other RMG members the council meeting when an amendment to remove the G/T sites from Ringland was defeated with one councillor stating it was best to “put them all together where they can be kept an eye on” I though this to be quite derogatory and totally against how we had pursued our objections, we had been advised that to use inflammatory, derogatory or racial arguments would damage our cause.

On the 19/12/13, I again attended the council chamber with group members when another amendment to re-evaluate some of the other sites was lost with a lower majority and one councillor abstaining, stating “we did not want them at Bettws so I can’t support them being at Ringland” again derogatory.

I am amazed at the way the new administration has handled this element of the LDP many of them have acted more like community councillors than City councillors. There were/are other sites equally suitable that would fulfil the needs of the G/T without the possible problems that may arise so close to a large housing estate. City councillors would have banked the £5M from a housing development together with the community charge income for years to come. Yes they would need to opt for one of the other city owned sites or compulsory purchase one but I wonder would other sites have the same value, would the purchase of land suitable for housing but bought for a G/T site be as costly as one for housing development. Is such a site as large as HFR really needed? Even if only some of the £5M could have been saved after all of any cost that may have to be met was settled, that surely is what city councillors would/should do.

I did not join the chorus of it’s called a house but I confess if travellers wish to become settled surely the most obvious option would be a house where they could become fully integrated into our community as have the Poles, Russians, Check Republicans, Africans yes and some G/T –some of whom willingly signed my petitions for the reasons of common sense and the same concerns that I have.
This may not qualify as a proper submission but it is how I came to this point and what the ordinary local law abiding citizens I talk with feel. Some of the reasons for our concerns are recorded below.

The pedestrian underpass at Dawson – adjacent to the RA- was gated some years ago because of antisocial behaviour, which included youths.

- Drinking
- Smoking
- Drugs
- Foul and abusive language
- Copulating
- Urinating in salt/grit bins
- Spreading the contents of bins around with no cause or bad weather conditions
- Gathering wild unripe plums from close by and throwing them at homes, people, pets, vehicles and each other
- Threatening gate key holders*  

Youths are again gathering there. I am not sure if it’s a seasonal or an age thing but it occurs over and over whatever the weather particularly at night.

The gates both ends were locked each night and opened every morning until the two elderly key holders were threatened and are now left open after the involvement of our local MP. One of the quite heavy gates have since been damaged and repaired but remains open and is again used by youths that people are reluctant to approach. It is not used by many people especially if there are youths there and at other times due to flooding - less frequent now drains are serviced- dog fouling – it is dog walkers who use it most and disruption to the lights including damaged wiring, though there is no evidence to show it was by youths.

To put a G/T site creating another challenge for these unruly gangs here in my mind folly.

HFR, the many reasons for not using this location for a site will be already be before you with perhaps the exception of one. Some seven or eight years ago some young people used this site to ride their bikes until an illegal G/T camp was set up that stopped them doing so. It resulted in conflict, which was reported to the school and the police and although I have been unable to obtain recorded proof of this I believe this to be the reason the G/T at the first public meeting declared they did not want trouble but if it came they would handle it. The same youths who gather at the underpass gather at other areas on the estate. When wardens move them from one they go to another and most go to or have recently left the high school.

To install a site at this £29M prestigious complex is in my mind insane.
The majority passed this plan as is necessary in a democracy but is it truly
democratic for the full cabinet -bar one who would not be elected again if he did
not stand by his electors- to toe the party line because time demands that a
decision is necessary right or wrong. Many of them are not affected by this
element of the LDP, do they all really think the previous administration spent so
much time drawing up the original plan examining in so much more detail the
many sites, taking time to weigh all the necessary considerations. Toeing the
party line detracts from true democracy.

But

History tells us that at times the majority is not correct, did not Columbus prove
all to be mistaken. As you steer your way through the mass of information, the
intricacies, arguments and facts, may you have that Columbus moment

Terry J French
On behalf of the people of Ringland, Always, Broadmead and Moorland