



The Traveller Movement

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PRESS RELEASE

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‘New planning rules could force thousands of Gypsies and Travellers back onto the road’ says Gypsy and Traveller campaign charity

- ***The new Government planning policy for Traveller sites means the UK’s Gypsies and Travellers will have to prove they are ‘travelling’ to be able to live on a permanent legal site***
- ***The policy could drive a massive increase the number of unauthorised roadside camps***
- ***New policy is unlawful, discriminatory and will be challenged in the High Court say lawyers***
- ***Green belt effectively barred to Gypsy and Travellers, yet 219,000 houses planned, creating a rural apartheid the UK***
- ***Local authorities with no green belt could see a massive increase in Gypsy and Traveller planning applications***
- ***Government press release claiming ‘fourfold increase’ in unauthorized sites misleads the public***
- ***Government policy ‘blames the victim’ for the historic failure of councils to identify suitable land for Gypsies and Travellers to develop, says Traveller campaign charity***
- ***Gypsy and Traveller social media groups planning mass ‘travel’ in protest***

The Traveller Movement is shocked by the reckless and irresponsible nature of the new Government planning rules for Gypsies and Travellers published over the bank holiday weekend. The new planning policy for Traveller sites includes the re-defining of Gypsies and Travellers, and requires them to prove that they have ‘travelled’ for a number of months in a year to qualify to live on a permanent legal Traveller site. This will cause increased hardship and disruption for both Travelling and settled communities and could force thousands of Gypsy and Traveller families back onto the road, costing councils millions of pounds.



The new policy is also discriminatory because it will effectively ban the development of legal Traveller sites in the green belt and in “green open spaces”, at a time when over 200,000 houses are in the process of being built in those very areas. This will create a rural apartheid and Gypsies and Travellers, who have been part of the UK’s culture and heritage for hundreds of years, will become second class citizens.

At a time when the Government’s own figures show a steady increase in the numbers of permanent authorised private Traveller sites (which make up the majority of the total) and a decrease in unauthorised sites, the Traveller Movement questions the method and motive behind these Government changes which, says the Communities and Local Government Secretary of State Greg Clark, are intended to “reduce community tensions”.

The new policy will do the opposite of what SoS Greg Clarke claims and the positive trends of the last seven years towards civil integration and legal sites will be dramatically reversed.

That reversal will be dramatic because of the 2,671 Gypsy and Traveller caravans currently on unauthorised sites could be forced back onto the road. Under the new policy, they will be unlikely to get planning permission because most private sites are in rural locations. There are also a smaller number of Gypsies and Travellers who currently have a temporary permission (approximately 815 caravans) who could also face being put back on the road when their temporary permissions expire. Then there is the status of the thousands and thousands of Gypsies and Travellers who currently live on legal Traveller sites who will need to prove they are ‘travelling’ to continue living there. The impact on Gypsies and Traveller’s already poor education, health and employment outcomes could be disastrous.

The unworkable proposals will also run into legal challenges if councils try to implement them, say planning lawyers experienced in Gypsy and Traveller site provision. Even according to the CLG’s own equalities assessment, the policy breaches equalities laws by discriminating against the old, the disabled, and women.

The policy is an unworkable example of dog whistle politics, and we will not be surprised if yet another CLG Secretary of State appears in the High Court for unlawfully discriminating against Gypsies and Travellers, and for producing policy that trashes the fundamental principles of equality and fairness in British Law.

As the news filters out, Gypsies and Travellers across the country are furious about what many see as a direct attack on their ethnic identity not seen in Western Europe since 1939 in Nazi Germany. Already mass ‘travels’ to protest against the new policy are being talked about on Gypsy and Traveller social media forums across the country.

Yvonne MacNamara, CEO of the Traveller Movement says:

“The new rule changes will make Traveller site provision almost impossible.”

“As a result of these proposals we strongly believe that what has been a decrease in unauthorised caravans and a slow but steady increase in site provision will be dramatically reversed.”



“This will exacerbate the problem of unauthorised encampments in inappropriate places such as playing fields and car parks, causing more hardship and disruption and could bring tensions between settled and Traveller groups to boiling point.”

“These changes will cause real hardship. The UK’s estimated 120,000 Gypsies and Travellers will not just disappear because a government minister no longer wishes them to exist. They will still be there, they will still need somewhere to live, but their lives will become even more marginalised and their legal status as equal citizens of this country will be brutally undermined.”

“The meddling with the definition of some of our oldest still surviving ethnic minorities is something that belongs in a more terrible recent past.”

Lord Avebury, Patron of the Traveller Movement said:

“For centuries Gypsies and Travellers have travelled the length and breadth of the England playing an invaluable role in this country’s socio-economic and cultural development. The closure of the commons, increasing privatisation of land and dramatic economic changes in the last fifty years have resulted in many Gypsies and Travellers ceasing to travel on a regular basis, but the cultural tradition of travelling has lived on in the form of living in caravans on Traveller sites, often with close family relatives.”

“The Government’s new planning policy redefines these groups out of existence by showing no consideration or understanding in the planning system of their cultural tradition of travelling. This redefinition has very real consequences and will result in a whole generation of Gypsies and Travellers no longer being qualified to apply to live on a Traveller site. It is also likely to increase the number of unauthorised encampments and put pressure on local housing as many Gypsies and Travellers are forced into other accommodation.”

“It is very disappointing to see the Government ignoring the evidence and giving Parliament no opportunity of expressing opinions before these proposals become law. Ministers should have considered the fact that for ten years unauthorised sites have been gradually decreasing and authorised sites have been steadily increasing. Local authorities have made efforts to comply with the existing policy, and although there was room for improvement, these changes will put the modest gains we have achieved into reverse.

Ends

Notes to editors

A full Traveller Movement report on how Gypsies and Travellers are defined in planning law can be found here:

<http://www.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/A-Place-to-call-home-Ethnicity-culture-and-planning-for-Traveller-sites1.pdf>



The Traveller Movement submission to the consultation on these changes can be found here:

<http://www.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/TM-response-to-DCLG-Traveller-sites-consultation-November-2014.pdf>

The latest January 2015 bi-annual caravan count can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/434107/Statistical_Release_Traveller_Caravan_Count_-_Jan_2015.pdf

The Campaign for Rural England's research on the green belt is here:

<http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/green-belts/item/3894-green-belt-under-siege-the-nppf-three-years-on>

A news story on a previous CLG SoS being found to have produced policy that unlawfully discriminated against Gypsies and Travellers can be found here:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eric-pickles-illegally-discriminating-against-gypsies-and-travellers-the-high-court-rules-9993154.html>

The new planning policy for Travellers can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-rules-will-offer-stronger-protection-against-unauthorised-occupation>

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