

Friends, Families and Travellers Briefing: Lack of increase in Affordable Pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in England, December 2017

Key Findings:

- There is a chronic national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England. 16% of caravans in the July 2017 national caravan count were on unauthorised land, largely as a result of this.
- There has been only been a 2% increase in socially rented pitches between 2010 and 2017; an insufficient number to address even natural growth through household formation, let alone a historic lack of pitches for Gypsy and Traveller families.
- Official figures produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) on 'new' socially rented pitches are misleading and do not represent an actual net increase in pitches.
- Despite an increase in private pitch provision between 2010 and 2017 there are still insufficient numbers of new pitches to meet Gypsy and Traveller families' needs. Many Gypsy and Traveller families cannot buy land or gain planning permission for private sites.

There is a recognised national shortage of sites for Gypsies and Travellers¹. The Better Housing Briefing Paper 26¹ found that Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the highest rate of housing deprivation of any minority ethnic group in the UK and are 7.5 times more likely to experience housing deprivation than other groups. This means that many families do not have a place to stop or call home. This has serious health and social implications for Gypsy and Traveller families, many of whom cannot access basic water and sanitation and experience difficulties in accessing services such as education and healthcare. Due to the lack of available pitches families are forced to camp in public spaces, where they are often the victim of hate crime, and the existence of roadside camps can lead to damaging relationships with the settled community. Despite this, little progress has been made in the way of site provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities. This report will outline statistics on the provision of socially rented pitches and demonstrate how official figures on pitch increases can be misleading.

An overview of the number of Gypsy and Traveller caravans

As demonstrated in Table 1, the number of caravans counted in England is increasing, however little has been done to meet the increasing needs of Gypsy and Traveller families.

¹ <http://www.better-housing.org.uk/briefings/ethnic-disadvantage-housing-market-evidence-2011-census>

Table 1 – Increase in caravans by type in the Traveller Count², 2010³ – 2017⁴

| | July 2010 | July 2017 | % Change | % of total no. of caravans |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------|----------------------------|
| Total no. of caravans | 18146 | 22792 | + 25% | |
| No. of caravans on private sites | 7648 | 12370 | + 62% | 54% |
| No. of caravans on socially rented sites | 6862 | 6701 | - 2% | 29% |
| No. of caravans on unauthorised encampments / developments | 3636 | 3721 | + 2% | 16% |
| No. of local authority / registered social landlord pitches | 4931 | 5044 | + 2% | |

Funding mechanisms for new affordable pitches for Gypsies and Travellers (2011-2017)

Between 2011 and 2017, the government has set up three funding schemes which give local authorities the opportunity to create new affordable pitches for families in their area; the Traveller Pitch Fund (2011-2015), the Affordable Homes Programme (2015-2018) and the Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme (2016-2021). The only ring-fenced scheme amongst these was the Traveller Pitch Fund which has now been come to an end but produced the highest number of new pitches. However, despite the clearly evidenced need for pitches and the availability of funding, there has been very low uptake across the board and figures released are often misleading. Alok Sharma, Minister of State at DCLG reported in parliament in October 2017 that there has been an increase of 551 pitches between 2012 and 2017⁵. However, further analysis of these figures reveals that they do not represent an actual net increase and fail to take into account the number of pitches lost as a result of development. We will outline the actual numbers of new pitches created under each scheme in the section below.

Traveller Pitch Fund (2011 – 2015)

In November 2014, the Homes and Communities Agency⁶ published figures showing that funding was allocated for the creation of 625 new pitches under the Traveller Pitch fund⁷. When HCA were contacted in December 2015 asking for further information, figures were released suggesting that a lower figure of 533 new Traveller pitches received funding under the Traveller Pitch Fund 2011 –2015⁸. However, when FFT wrote to all the local authorities listed in the published figures, we found that the actual net increase in pitches was actually no more than 335, considerably less than the published statistics. It represented an

² On a set date in January and July every year local authorities conduct a Traveller ‘caravan count’. The Department for Communities and Local Government collate these figures. The Traveller Caravan Count does not represent a thorough assessment of accommodation need; it is merely a snapshot count of caravans on those bi-annual days.

³ DCLG Traveller Caravan Count, July 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gypsy-and-traveller-caravan-count-july-2010>

⁴ DCLG Traveller Caravan Count, July 2017,

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/659661/Traveller_caravan_count_July_2017.pdf

⁵ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2017-09-06.9129.h&s=Traveller#g9129.r0>

⁶ HCA administer the grants.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traveller-pitch-funding-allocations#history>

⁸ FOI request regarding net increase in socially rented pitches under the Traveller Pitch Fund, 18 December 2015.

increase of only 67 pitches per annum nationally, which is insufficient even to accommodate natural growth through household formation.

Affordable Homes Programme (2015 – 2018)

We recently carried out a similar analysis of the number of pitches created under the Affordable Homes Programme and found that the actual number of new pitches under this scheme was four, not 36 as published⁹. Table 2 illustrates the reason for the discrepancy in these figures.

Table 2: Completed pitches under the Affordable Homes Programme (2015–2018)³

| Local Authority | No. of new pitches | | Details |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| | Published figures | Actual increase | |
| Central Beds | 2 | 2 | Additional pitches on existing site. |
| Darlington | 22 | 2 | Replacing 20 pitches on existing site and adding 2 additional pitches. |
| Harlow | 12 | 0 | Replacing 12 pitches on existing site which are derelict or unused. |
| Total | 36 | 4 | |

Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme (2016-2021)

At the time of this report being published there has yet to be any formal bids from local authorities to the Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme for funding for Gypsy and Traveller pitches.

Wider Policy Background

Local authorities need to identify a five year supply of specific deliverable sites in line with the assessed need for pitches. However, many assessments of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers are widely criticised because they can undercount the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers in an area and changes in the planning definition¹⁰ means that less people fit within this definition, yet still require somewhere to live. Research carried out by FFT in June 2016 found that only ten local authorities out of 66 in the South East of England had met their requirement in identifying a five year supply of specific deliverable sites¹¹. This illustrates that the wider planning mechanisms for the provision of sites are also currently failing Gypsy and Traveller communities.

⁹ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2017-09-06.9129.h&s=Traveller#g9129.r0>

¹⁰ The 2015 Policy Planning for Traveller Sites redefined who Gypsies and Travellers are for the purposes of planning. This means that if a Gypsy or Traveller stops travelling permanently, even for education, health or old age, they no longer meet the planning definition.

¹¹ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Five-Year-Supply-Research-Findings-Statement-FINAL.pdf>

Conclusion

It is clear that the government's mechanisms for creating new affordable pitches for Gypsy and Traveller families are not working, despite well-evidenced need and demand. Despite the continuing increase in the number of Gypsy and Traveller caravans in the UK Government's biannual caravan count there has been no significant increase in socially rented pitches. The rate of increase currently does not even meet the demand arising from natural growth due to new household formation, let alone address the national shortfall. The government is proposing a review into enforcement powers for unauthorised encampments, however what is really needed is a review into how to make substantive inroads towards meeting the national shortfall of Gypsy and Traveller pitches - positive legislative and policy changes are urgently needed.

Recommendations

- The government should adopt a definition of a Traveller in planning terms that incorporates all Gypsies and Travellers who need a pitch to live on (for example as proposed in the Draft London Plan¹²).
- The government must re-introduce targets, and a statutory duty to meet the assessed accommodation need of Gypsies and Travellers, as formerly existed under the Caravans Sites Act 1968¹³¹⁴
- The government must ring-fence Gypsy and Traveller pitch funding for local authorities to produce socially-rented pitches. This will require improved communication between DCLG, HCA and local authorities.
- The government must begin to accurately record and monitor figures on actual net increase of Gypsy and Traveller pitches.

¹² P190-192 https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/new_london_plan_december_2017_web_version.pdf

¹³ CSA 1968 s6. The CSA was repealed under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

¹⁴ The Welsh Government reintroduced the duty to identify land to meet the assessed need in 2016 (section 103 Part 3, Housing (Wales) Act 2014). This is an encouraging step but does not represent a duty to provide sites.