



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

Ranil Jayawardena MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

9 May 2018

Dear Ranil

We are writing as co-chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma.

Our attention has been drawn to the unauthorised encampments petition on your website, which purports to contrast Gypsies and Travellers with hard-working honest residents. We have the pleasure of knowing many Gypsies and Travellers personally, and we are really dismayed at the tone of your remarks, which we know will cause considerable hurt and offence to these communities. I'm sure you will appreciate that such language with reference to any other ethnic minorities in the UK would be simply unacceptable and possibly illegal, and we ask you to withdraw your petition, which will exacerbate division and discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers.

The APPG does acknowledge the problem of unauthorised encampments, and we held a very useful cross-party roundtable on the subject earlier this year, working with police leads, police and crime commissioners, local authorities and others to identify practical solutions. We would be very happy to meet you to discuss these ideas in detail, and hear your views on how they might work in your constituency.

One difficulty is that some local authorities have not identified land for authorised sites. As you will know, there is a requirement under PPTS (Planning Policy for Traveller Sites) to identify a five year supply of land for Gypsy and Travellers. In 2016 the charity Friends, Families and Travellers wrote to the 66 local authorities in the South East to find out if they were complying with this requirement, and found out that only 10 local authorities had identified a five year supply of land for sites.

The research found that a total of 1,745 new pitches on Traveller sites were needed in the South East by 2033. The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) for Basingstoke and Deane identified a need for 7 pitches, none of which the local authority had identified land for. The GTAA for East Hants identified a need for 12 pitches, none of which the local authority had identified land for. In Eastleigh a need for 15 pitches was identified,



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again none of which land had been identified for, and in Fareham 8 and no land provided for.

Remedying the severe shortage of authorised sites is therefore a priority for ending unauthorised encampments. Temporary sites can also be useful, and are being used in some areas. There are also successful examples of 'negotiated stopping' arrangements, whereby local authorities agree a set of expectations and standards of behaviour with Gypsies and Travellers, which the settled community can look to the local authority to uphold.

We very much hope these practical, constructive steps, which enjoy support among the police, local government, and Gypsy and Traveller groups, and which offer much more cost-effective solutions for local communities, will find favour with government. What won't work is to penalise Gypsies and Travellers for unauthorised encampments when there are no authorised sites they can use. Given that Gypsies and Travellers experience the lowest life expectancy, the highest infant mortality rates, the worst health and the worst educational outcomes of any ethnic minorities in the UK, there are major inequalities which need to be tackled. Ensuring that Gypsies and Travellers can safely and legally pursue their traditional lifestyle, with safe and secure places to stay, is an important element of improving outcomes for this marginalised group, and will also serve to reduce the cost to the public purse.

We hope this letter is helpful and that you will reconsider your petition in the light of these comments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kate Green'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Whitaker'.

Kate Green MP and Baroness Janet Whitaker
Co Chairs All Party Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma