

Put the horse before the cart: Government planning and housing policies need radical change if we are to address unauthorised encampments

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On Wednesday 6th February, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government James Brokenshire made a [statement to parliament](#) regarding the publication of the government response to the consultation on powers for dealing with unauthorised development and encampments. Baroness Janet Whitaker and Kate Green MP, the Co-Chairs of the APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma wrote to the Secretary of State on the 29th January 2019 highlighting their [concerns about the consultation](#), many of which have not been adequately addressed in the government's response.

The letter from Baroness Janet Whitaker and Kate Green MP to the Secretary of State highlighted that the consultation document had too strong an emphasis on strengthening powers, and not enough emphasis on exploring the key contributing factors to the number of unauthorised encampments. The letter highlighted that the heavier emphasis on strengthening powers instead of on the causes of unauthorised encampments was putting the cart before the horse. The letter evidenced how government inaction in addressing the lack of places for Gypsies and Travellers to live was a key factor in high levels of unauthorised encampments. In particular:

- The mere 2% increase in socially rented pitches between 2010 and 2017;
- The failure of most local authorities in their duty to identify land to meet their assessed need for more pitches; and
- The fact that the planning definition for Gypsies and Travellers is not fit for purpose.

It is essential that the imbalance in the proposals outlined by the government is addressed, or these will create a perfect storm for Gypsy and Traveller families who cannot get a pitch or place to stop.

In addition to the issues raised in the initial letter, the APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma want to highlight concerns about specific proposals outlined by the Secretary of State which could be incompatible with the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. Specifically, amongst commitments the Secretary of State set out was included the development of *“guidance making clear that the Secretary of State will be prepared to review cases where concerns are raised that there is too high a concentration of authorised traveller (sic) sites in one location.”* It is unacceptable to suggest that the gathering of Gypsies and Travellers living on authorised sites in one area is undesirable. This is illustrative of the demonising and populist viewpoints which underpin many of the proposals set out in the report.

Responding to the Secretary of State's statement, **Baroness Janet Whitaker, Co-Chair of the APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma** said,

“Tonight, 3000 families will fall asleep at the side of the road or in a park or field with no water, regular evictions and interrupted access to healthcare and education because of the government's failure to identify land they can legally stop. We are eager to meet with the Secretary of State to ensure that balance is restored in the government's approach to unauthorised encampments.”

About the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

The APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma provides a forum for parliamentarians concerned about issues facing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities and seeks to address these issues and challenge inequalities. [Find out more.](#)

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Relevant Resources

MHCLG and Home Office announcement, 'Government announces plans to tackle illegal traveller sites'. [View here.](#)

Government response to the consultation on powers for dealing with unauthorised development and encampments. [View here.](#)

APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma views on the Home Secretary's written statement on 'Improving the effectiveness of enforcement against unauthorised encampments'. [View here.](#)

Response of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the Consultation: "Powers for dealing with unauthorised development and encampments". [View here.](#)

Travellers Times, "Government says "crack down" on unauthorised Traveller camps imminent". [View here.](#)

Friends Families and Travellers, "Get tough on site provision, not on people with no place to go". [View here.](#)