



Alex Norris MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Building Safety, Fire and Local Growth)
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

By email to:

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Dear Mr Norris,

As you may know, last weekend a [devastating fire tore through Ver Meadows Caravan Park near Redbourn in Hertfordshire](#). Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service attended for several hours on Saturday and is investigating the cause of the fire, which affected around 90% of the site – we understand that 12 out of the 15 caravan pitches there have been partially or completely destroyed. Thankfully, all residents were evacuated safely, and we are grateful for Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's work in extinguishing the fire and preventing the loss of life in this case, and to the local communities for their support to those affected.

However, this traumatising incident will have wider effects on Gypsy and Traveller communities across the country. Many will be reminded of the appalling tragedy in 2015 at Carrickmines in County Dublin, in which a fire killed eleven people, including five children and an unborn child. Whilst the cause of the fire at Ver Meadows is yet to be determined, it has led to further questions being raised about fire safety on Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Fires on Gypsy and Traveller sites are particularly dangerous due to the close proximity of caravans, the widespread use of gas cylinders, and the absence of clear and consistent fire safety regulations. These conditions significantly increase the risk of injury, extensive property damage, and loss of life

Gypsy and Traveller sites are often located in places [where others would not be expected to live](#), such as near sewage, industrial, and refuse sites and facilities, and motorways. Such locations bring a number of risks, which must not be ignored, particularly as Gypsy and Traveller communities already experience disproportionate inequalities across a number of social indicators. Gypsies and Travellers have a right to live in culturally appropriate accommodation and should have equal access to protections that help ensure homes are safe.

Also, in most cases, victims of a fire such as this would initiate a claim on their home and contents insurance. However, Gypsies and Travellers living on sites are unable to obtain home insurance. A [2022 Financial Times documentary](#) into financial exclusion in Gypsy and Traveller communities showed interviewees explaining how they could not get home contents insurance for mobile homes, despite contacting dozens of insurance companies. This issue has been raised with the Financial Ombudsman but with no resolution or recognition of the discrimination in access to home insurance.



We urge the government to listen to Gypsy and Traveller communities, and to ensure an inclusive approach to fire safety and prevention standards. Health and safety standards such as the Decent Homes Standard should apply to homes of all types, not just bricks and mortar accommodation. We recommend that the government take urgent steps to address these inequalities, including by:

- Providing emergency support for affected families on the Ver Meadows Site, including in securing accommodation and financial assistance;
- Reviewing any existing guidance on fire safety relevant to Gypsy and Traveller sites to ensure robust fire safety policies are in place, which are reflective of the additional risks faced;
- Consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities to develop and implement safety protocols that are practical, respectful and effective;
- Extending the protections afforded to renters in the updated Decent Homes Standard to Gypsy and Traveller sites;
- Conducting a review of discrimination in access to home and contents insurance for Gypsy and Traveller site residents.

We look forward to your response, and to learn what actions the government intends to take to ensure the safety of Gypsy and Traveller site residents, and to prevent further such tragedies.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Mann, CEO, Friends, Families and Travellers

Josie O'Driscoll, CEO, GATE Herts

Cc Lord Khan of Burnley, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Lords Minister for Faith, Communities and Resettlement), PSWajidKhan@communities.gov.uk