



The Traveller Movement

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Traveller Movement response to DECC call for evidence on energy issues affecting park homes

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Introduction

Gypsies and Travellers are two distinct ethnic minority groups with a long heritage of living in caravans/mobile homes on Traveller sites. They experience some of the poorest health outcomes of any group in society.¹ Accommodation insecurity and the conditions of their living environment (including energy efficiency of their caravans or mobile homes) have a significant influence over these health outcomes. It is essential that DECC take into consideration Traveller sites alongside park homes in this consultation/call for evidence as the issues experienced by both Travellers and Park Home dwellers are very similar.

The ONS recently published a report on the key characteristics of Gypsies and Travellers from the 2011 Census (see footnote).² Whilst this supplies up-to date data on health, employment, accommodation etc it should be noted that the 24 percent of respondents who identified themselves as living in caravans/mobile homes is a significant undercount when compared with other Government data (e.g. DCLG caravan count).

About TM: The Traveller Movement (TM) was established in 1999 and is a leading national policy and voice charity, working to raise the capacity and social inclusion of the Traveller communities in Britain. TM act as a bridge builder bringing the Traveller communities, service providers and policy makers together, stimulating debate and promoting forward-looking strategies to promote increased race equality, civic engagement, inclusion, service provision and community cohesion. For further information about TM visit www.irishtraveller.org.uk

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-inequalities-for-gypsies-and-travellers-progress-report>

² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/what-does-the-2011-census-tell-us-about-the-characteristics-of-gypsy-or-irish-travellers-in-england-and-wales-/rpt-characteristics-of-gypsy-or-irish-travellers.html>

The nature of park homes in the UK

According to the DCLG bi-annual caravan count (January 2014) there are approximately 19,500 Traveller caravans in England. 6,850 of these caravans are located on authorized socially rented sites, 10,020 on authorized privately financed sites, 1,660 on unauthorized developments (land owned by Travellers but without planning permission) and 980 on unauthorized encampments (land not owned).³ These caravans include mobile homes which in most cases are permanent structures on sites. Unauthorised and authorised sites for Gypsies and Travellers (including local authority owned and run) are often situated in environments which promote poor health (busy roads, beside heavy industry etc).

The most detailed study of conditions on local authority sites is Niner's 2003 report for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) focusing on the provision and condition of *Local authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England*. Niner surveyed 107 local authority sites and found that many had very poor facilities and environmental conditions (see Table 2):

- 70% of sites were located in fringe areas of towns and villages⁴
- Half of sites suffer from environmental problems relating to adjoining land or activities to some extent. The most common cause of problems were adjacent motorways or major roads (26% of sites), railways (13%); rubbish tips (12%); industrial or commercial activity (8%) and sewage works (3%).⁵
- Fire points were provided on just 54% of sites. Where there were fire points, 48% were deemed to be inadequate⁶
- General condition of amenity units were rated as good (43% of units); average (41%) and poor (16%). Niner's team judged 10% not to be fit for their purpose (this seems to be related to smallness and poor conditions). Vermin problems are evident in 18% of units⁷
- Over half of pitches (54%) included nothing but areas for vehicular/pedestrian movement. Over a third (38%) had an area of garden, 15% had a clothes drying area, 4% a play area, 2% an animal grazing area, and just 1% a designated work area on the pitch⁸

Energy supply and use in park homes

From our experience as a charity working with Gypsy and Traveller communities across the country energy supply and use to Traveller sites is often an issue. This is especially true for Local Authority sites which in the majority of cases have their energy supplied through the local authority/housing association/management company with individual pitches on sites using either pre-paid meters or set monthly prices for the whole pitch. This has resulted in many residents on Traveller sites not being able to choose their energy providers and in many cases being subject to steep rises in fuel costs without the means to change provider. In relation to sites

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/traveller-caravan-count-january-2014>

⁴ Niner, ODPM, 2003, *The provision and condition of local authority gypsy/traveller sites in England*, p. 75

⁵ Ibid, p. 76

⁶ Ibid, p. 78

⁷ Ibid, p. 81

⁸ Ibid, p. 80

where there is a set monthly charge per-pitch this can result in single occupants (in many cases the elderly and vulnerable) being subject to the same costs as possibly a working family with far higher usage.

Energy Efficiency

It has been TMs experience that many Travellers' caravans/mobile homes are not as energy efficient as they could be based on costs reported to heat them. TM does not have any data on this but we are aware of a number of initiatives in local authority areas to improve energy efficiency in the hope of reducing energy costs. We would welcome more detailed research and guidance on this issues from DECC

Park homes and DECC's policies

Access to Warm Homes Discount Scheme

We have been made aware that many residents on Local Authority Travellers sites who qualify for the WHDS cannot access this scheme because they do not have a domestic electricity account and instead have to pay by meter card through the council. This effectively discriminates against Travellers living on sites who, because of the nature of their accommodation, can't access the scheme. The Traveller Movement have looked into this issue on local authority sites and have found it to be commonplace in many parts of the country including Lancashire, Hertfordshire, Leeds and London. We are not aware of how Gypsies and Travellers living on private sites with more than one pitch are affected by this and would recommend DECC consider these groups when looking at alternative approaches.

Government Electricity Rebate

As highlighted above with the WHDS, Gypsies and Travellers living on Local Authority Travellers sites would not currently be able to access the rebate despite being eligible. We are not aware of how Gypsies and Travellers living on private sites with more than one pitch are affected by this and would recommend DECC consider these groups when looking at alternative approaches.