

# News about the Housing and Regeneration Bill

## Bill in Committee stage

The Housing and Regeneration Bill is now being examined in detail by a Committee of MPs. Amendments to the Bill can be proposed by Committee members and by the Government. The department for Communities and Local Government is consulting local authorities and Gypsy and Traveller site residents on Clause 272, which introduces security of tenure for residents of local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites. These consultations may lead to Government amendments to Clause 272. The Public Bill Committee examining this Bill is due to finish its work by the end of January, and then the Bill will go to the House of Commons for its Third Reading before going to the House of Lords.

Andy Slaughter MP, a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform, is on the Committee looking at this Bill. He will try to ensure that issues of concern to Gypsies and Travellers are aired.

## Social housing

The Traveller Law Reform Project believes that the Government should include local authority and Registered Social Landlord Gypsy and Traveller sites in the definition of 'social housing' contained in the Bill. At present they are excluded from it. If they were included in it, they would enjoy the protection afforded by the proposed Regulator of Social Housing.

## Security of tenure

The security of tenure offered by Clause 272 to residents on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites has been warmly welcomed. Clause 272 brings local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites under the Mobile Homes Act 1983. At present these sites are excluded from that Act. There is, however, some concern over matters of detail. In January, the Traveller Law Reform Project will produce a commentary on how the Mobile Homes Act 1983 might affect local authority Gypsy and Traveller site residents. The following comments may be revised in that commentary.

- There is some concern about how the rights of pitch assignment in the Mobile Homes Act 1983 might affect local authority needs-based pitch allocation policies. It might be necessary to include in Clause 272 of the Housing and Regeneration Bill some wording enabling a local authority to make sure that the right to assign a pitch did not prevent Gypsies and Travellers in desperate need from having access to pitches.
- We believe it is important to stipulate that the express terms of an agreement between a site resident and the local authority which owns the site should include enforceable standards equivalent to local authority housing, with specific obligations on repairs and maintenance.
- We believe that it should always be possible for disputes between a site resident and the local authority which owns the site to be heard in the county court – it should not be possible for a pitch agreement to substitute arbitration by a person appointed by the site owner. Currently the MHA allows arbitration to take the place of the right to go to court if arbitration is part of the pitch agreement.
- Residents must also have the right to take action in the courts against site owners who do not enforce the conditions of agreements and thus expose residents to the effects of other residents breaking those conditions. Poor site management can make life very difficult for site residents and they should have the right to challenge it.

## Security of Tenure petition

It is still worth registering your support for security of tenure on local authority run Gypsy and

Traveller sites by signing the petition at [http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/tenure\\_petition.htm](http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/tenure_petition.htm). The more signatures the petition gets, the stronger the voice of site residents is against those who oppose security of tenure, and the stronger the Government's position will be in making sure that security of tenure is introduced.

The Traveller Law Reform Project plans to hand in the petition at 10 Downing Street and in Parliament in February.