

## **Guardian article – 04/06/10**

### **Threat to Gypsy and Traveller rights**

The coalition government has arrived with a civil liberties agenda (Report, 28<sup>th</sup> May). But not for the UK's most deprived and discriminated-against minority ethnic group – Gypsies and Travellers. Already the government has reversed progressive policies giving incentives for local authorities to develop Gypsy and traveller sites, by cuts announced in the Housing and Communities Agency budget, cancelling all next year's bids for sites. The Conservatives announced plans to scrap planning and housing circulars which have started to give Gypsies and Travellers a "level playing field" in planning disputes with local authorities and planning inspectors. According to Eric Pickles, they want to revive the "Gypsy law" of criminal trespass. This discriminatory law was derided when Michael Howard campaigned on it in 2005.

Detailed research has identified targets for sites for Gypsies and Travellers, and yards for showmen. Many have been agreed with local authorities and progress was starting to be made. After years of inaction on sites a cumulative need has built up. The situation now is worse than ever and will only get worse without new provision. We face a future of more roadside and unauthorised encampments leading to inevitable conflict and enforcement costs to local council tax payers.

Gypsy and Traveller families have just 3,729 caravans on unauthorised sites in the whole of England, with a further 13,708 caravans on council and private sites (Caravan Count, July 2009) and "it is estimated that the entire Gypsy and Traveller population could be legally accommodated if as little as one square mile of land were allocated for sites in England (EHRC, March 2009).

We are calling on the government to think again on its policies and stick to progressive programmes based on civil liberties and fairness.

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/jun/04/equality-liberal-conservative-coalition>