



## Culturally Appropriate Homes

### Planning Reform and Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation in England

#### Policy Briefing – Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC

Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC works nationally to advocate for Ethnic Gypsy and Traveller communities through welfare reporting, planning advocacy and research.

This briefing draws on evidence from welfare reporting supporting families navigating planning enforcement, accommodation insecurity and the shortage of authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites.

**“Too often Gypsy and Traveller families encounter a planning system that closes every door except the one that leads to enforcement.”**

— Violet Cannon, CEO, Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC

#### Key Facts

- Gypsy and Irish Traveller people experience some of the poorest health outcomes of any ethnic group in the UK.
- A significant proportion of Gypsy and Traveller families experience housing instability linked to the shortage of authorised sites.
- Research consistently shows that lack of authorised accommodation is the primary driver of unauthorised development, rather than deliberate attempts to bypass the planning system.

These inequalities underline the importance of planning policy in ensuring access to stable and culturally appropriate homes.

#### The Core Issue

The planning system plays a decisive role in determining whether Gypsy and Traveller families can access culturally appropriate homes.

Where authorised sites are unavailable, families are often left with only three options:

- overcrowded extended family sites
- roadside living
- creating accommodation themselves and facing planning enforcement.

Planning policy therefore frequently manages the consequences of site shortages through enforcement, rather than addressing the underlying lack of authorised accommodation.

This creates long-term instability for families and generates avoidable pressures across public services.

### **Why This Matters Beyond Planning**

Evidence from welfare reporting undertaken by Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC demonstrates that accommodation insecurity has consequences across multiple public systems.

Families experiencing planning instability frequently face:

- disrupted schooling and educational instability
- increased stress and deteriorating mental health
- reduced access to healthcare and support services
- financial strain caused by repeated planning applications and appeals.

Conversely, welfare reporting consistently shows that families living on stable authorised sites experience:

- improved school attendance
- stronger family stability
- improved wellbeing
- reduced reliance on crisis public services.

Ensuring access to culturally appropriate accommodation is therefore not solely a planning issue but also a public health, education and equality issue.

Planning policy does not simply regulate land use. For Gypsy and Traveller communities it determines whether families can live in lawful homes or remain trapped in cycles of enforcement and displacement.

Gypsy and Traveller communities have historically functioned as micro-communities based around extended family support networks. Where stable sites exist, welfare reporting consistently shows strong informal care systems supporting disabled children, older relatives and vulnerable family members. These networks can reduce reliance on external services while also addressing loneliness and social isolation among elders — issues recognised in national strategies on social isolation, preventative health and community wellbeing.

### **Case Example from Welfare Reporting**

A welfare assessment prepared by Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC involved a family living on a modest rural site with three children, including a non-verbal autistic child with significant sensory needs.

The family created a small outdoor sensory space within the site to support the child's behavioural regulation, including low-level fencing, a small play area and a garden shed adapted as a quiet sensory space.

Planning enforcement action sought removal of these structures.

Welfare evidence indicated that removal would likely result in significant distress for the child and increased safeguarding risks within the household.

This case highlights an inconsistency within planning policy: a Gypsy and Traveller site with full planning permission for caravans and hardstanding may still face enforcement for structures that would ordinarily be considered routine domestic features within the garden of a conventional dwelling.

Facilities such as a small play area, secure low-level fencing or a garden shed would rarely attract planning enforcement in a traditional residential garden. However, when similar adaptations are made on Gypsy and Traveller sites to support children or family life, they can be treated as breaches of planning control.

This disparity illustrates how planning policy can unintentionally penalise Gypsy and Traveller families for creating the same types of supportive home environments that other families are generally permitted to establish within their own gardens.

This example also raises questions about how planning decisions affecting disabled children are considered in light of public sector equality duties and the need for proportionate decision-making where disability-related adaptations are involved.

## **Structural Issues in the Current Planning System**

### **Lack of Authorised Sites**

Many Gypsy and Traveller families submit retrospective planning applications because no authorised accommodation exists within their local authority area.

Without sufficient site provision, planning enforcement becomes the primary mechanism through which accommodation issues are managed.

### **Flawed Accommodation Assessments**

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments frequently underestimate need by failing to identify:

- hidden homelessness
- overcrowding on existing sites
- families living in housing who wish to return to sites.

In some cases authorities rely on pitches that are uninhabitable or unavailable to demonstrate supply.

### **Housing Inequality on Local Authority Sites**

Residents on many local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites occupy their homes under licence agreements rather than tenancy agreements.

Licence agreements are typically used for temporary accommodation or holiday parks.

Yet Gypsy and Traveller sites function as permanent homes across generations.

This reduces security of tenure and creates inequality compared with other local authority residents.

## **Enforcement and Criminalisation**

Recent legislative changes under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 have significantly increased the risks associated with roadside living.

Families may face:

- seizure of caravans
- substantial fines
- criminal records
- possible imprisonment.

In this context, some families feel compelled to create accommodation themselves simply to avoid criminalisation.

Planning policy must therefore retain the ability for decision-makers to consider welfare impacts, children's education, health needs and the absence of available sites.

## **Key Policy Recommendations**

### **Recognise Gypsy and Traveller sites as culturally appropriate housing**

Planning policy should explicitly recognise Gypsy and Traveller accommodation within housing policy frameworks including affordable housing and self-build provision.

### **Improve accommodation assessments**

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments must involve meaningful engagement with communities and identify hidden need.

### **Ensure proportionate planning decisions**

Planning decisions must retain the ability to consider welfare impacts, children's education, health needs and the absence of available sites.

### **Reintroduce a statutory duty to provide sites**

Reintroducing a duty on local authorities to provide Gypsy and Traveller sites would help address the national shortage of authorised accommodation.

### **Ensure housing equality on local authority sites**

Residents of Gypsy and Traveller sites should have security of tenure equivalent to other local authority tenants.

### **Evidence Base**

Evidence referenced in this briefing draws on welfare assessments prepared by Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC between 2023 and 2026.

These assessments examine the impacts of planning decisions on children's welfare, health, safeguarding and family stability.

### **Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC**

[www.proudgypsytraveller.co.uk](http://www.proudgypsytraveller.co.uk)