

Communities and neighbourhoods

Andrew Stunell: Rights for travellers who play by the rules and protection for councils

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As part of a new fair deal for travellers and the settled community, Communities Minister Andrew Stunell today outlined plans for improved tenancy rights for travellers on authorised council sites.

Following consultation, legal changes are set to be made that will mean that those travellers who play by the rules will get more protection against eviction, putting them on an equal footing to those living on other residential caravan sites or in council houses.

At the same time councils will be able to take swift action against any travellers who flout the rules of their tenancy agreements and they will be able to obtain possession orders with less risk of legal challenge.

Councils will also be able to safeguard pitches for travellers who cannot afford to pay for a private pitch and who might be otherwise forced to camp on unauthorised sites, by not allowing tenancies to be automatically passed on when a caravan is sold or given to family members.

The changes come as part of the new Government's plan to improve community relations between travellers and the settled community, which has already seen councils freed from the top-down Regional Strategies and the associated building targets; which now means that councils can decide for themselves how many traveller pitches are necessary in their area according to local need and historic demand. And at the same time, Mr Stunell is looking at ways to strengthen the powers available to councils to more effectively tackle unauthorised developments and unscrupulous private developers.

Ministers have also confirmed that new authorised traveller pitches will be treated on an equal footing as new bricks and mortar homes, with councils getting financial benefits for building authorised sites where they are needed.

Communities Minister Andrew Stunell said:

"This is about redressing the balance, putting travellers and the settled population on a level playing field and bringing fairness back to communities.

"The message is clear whether you live in a caravan or a bricks and mortar house, if you are a law-abiding citizen you have a right to have safe place to live.

"But rest assured, we will not stand by and let people flout the planning rules that everyone else abides by, which is why we will strengthen the powers that councils have to take action against those who abuse the planning system."

Notes to editors

1. Following consultation, the Government intends to commence Section 318 of the Housing and

Regeneration Act 2008, designed to extend tenancy rights for travellers in authorised local authority traveller sites by including them in the Mobile Homes Act 1983.

2. The responses to the consultation can be found at:
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/implementinghomesresponses.
3. Further announcements will be made in due course on plans to increase planning enforcement powers; measures will be included in the Localism Bill this autumn.

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