

Cllr Evelyn Carpenter comments

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I strongly support the new Policy H16 on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

I am pleased that the Draft Plan has an inclusive definition of Gypsies and Travellers. I have been very concerned about the Government's planning definition which does not recognise all Gypsies and Travellers. The government's definition in my view does not comply with the Equalities Act 2010, and discriminates against groups with protected characteristics under the Act.

I attended a meeting of the London Gypsy and Traveller Forum at the GLA on 13 February 2018 about the draft London Plan where there was vociferous support for targets being set for Gypsies and Travellers' accommodation in the same way that there are housing targets by borough for housing completions as set out in detail in Chapter 4 on "Housing". I believe that not treating Gypsies and Travellers' housing needs in the same way as the housing needs of other Londoners is inadvertently discriminatory.

I hope the final London Plan will set targets for Gypsies and Travellers additional pitches by borough with speedy timescales for completion of new pitches and sites. It is heart-breaking that a lack of policy direction in this area has led to no growth in sites and pitches for many years in spite of an assessment of need by the GLA in 2008. As a result, Gypsies and Travellers have been forced into fixed "bricks and mortar" housing detrimental to their culture, and health and well-being.

I support the reference to Mayoral funding set out 4.16.8. London boroughs will need substantial funding from the Mayor to enable them to address the special housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

Policy H16 refers to boroughs doing a new assessment of need of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers but does not specify timescales and completion targets for meeting the assessed need. Without more robust direction, what guarantee is there that there will be any change at the borough level to make sure that the unmet accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers is appropriately met in a timely way? Past history here does not inspire confidence that the policy here, without more teeth, will lead to positive change.

Policy H 16 section F states that boroughs should actively plan to protect existing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation capacity and this should be taken into account when considering new residential developments to ensure inclusive, balanced and cohesive communities are created. This statement is supported.

However, boroughs will need clearer direction from the London Mayor to ensure this happens. The Mayor should provide more direction here. The policy on new Gypsy and Traveller sites as part of the regeneration of areas of London for housing and other purposes needs to be strengthened. For example, Gypsies and Travellers' pitches and sites require a larger footprint of land compared to other types of housing: these will be in competition for space with housing for other priority groups such as homeless people, for example. In these circumstances, without firm and clear direction from the London Mayor, it will be difficult for boroughs to prioritise the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

Paragraph 4.16.5 refers to insufficient pitch provision leading to a rise in unauthorised encampments. Sometimes, unauthorised encampments happen as Gypsies and Travellers carry out their traditional and nomadic way of life as they cross London. There is a need for a small network of stopping places across London for Gypsies and Travellers to enable to move across the region without causing distress and friction to settled communities.

The draft London Plan is deficient because it does not recognise the need for stopping places for Gypsies and Travellers which is different from the need for additional permanent pitches and sites for Gypsies and Travellers. This has implications for the London Plan's sections on Spatial Development, the Economy, and Heritage and Culture, for example, as well as the chapter on Housing.

The London Mayor needs to give firm direction to London Boroughs to enable a network of stopping places to be identified in consultation with Gypsies and Travellers, and then implemented. My own borough, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, is willing to partner with neighbouring boroughs in the provision of a stopping place for Gypsies and Travellers to prevent unauthorised encampments. Sometimes, unauthorised encampments are used by criminals to dump toxic waste leading to very high costs for the local authority, or businesses, in cleaning up sites. These unauthorised sites used for criminal purposes are also damaging to the reputation of an area which may be earmarked for regeneration.

My borough is willing to partner with neighbouring boroughs to provide a stopping place to support Gypsies and Travellers nomadic way of life, and help combat criminal activity causing pollution and distress to residents and businesses in the area.

However, my borough does not want to be the only stopping place in the London region: this would not be a sustainable position either for the local authority or the Gypsies and Traveller communities.

Therefore, the London Mayor needs to lead a London-wide initiative to identify a network of stopping places across the region. The London Plan ought to include this duty for the London Mayor, and also identify the responsibilities of London boroughs to comply in collaborating together to identify and implement a network of stopping places across the region.

Just as the London Plan refers to Mayoral funding (paragraph 4.16.8) to support the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers so Mayoral funding will be needed to fund the capital and revenue costs of the network of stopping places for Gypsies and Travellers. This will help support both the traditional nomadic way of life of Gypsies and Travellers, their culture and heritage, and boroughs deter criminals using unauthorised encampments to dump toxic waste creating pollution and damaging the environment.

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Champion for Travellers and Gypsies

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham