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Response to the Draft London Plan

Policy H16 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation

I am a Romany Gypsy who lives on Newham's official Gypsy and Traveller site. I have lived there since I was 11 years old, for 34 years. My family have lived in the borough on the official site since 1971 when it was opened. My grandmother campaigned for Newham to build their site after the 1968 Caravan sites Act was introduced. Our site consists of 15 pitches and houses 5 generations of one extended family. Due to family growth there is a great need for new pitches. We have families doubling on pitches because they've got nowhere to go. Parkway Crescent was relocated in 2007 for the 2012 Olympic Games. Previous to Parkway we lived on Clay's Lane which was compulsory purchased for the Athletes' Village.

In the next 25 years I'd like new sites to be built on par with was done after the 1968 Caravan Sites Act. During the 1970s and 1980s there was an increase in Gypsy and Traveller council run sites in London, but after the duty was removed some sites were closed down and very little has been done.

We welcome the Mayor's new definition of Gypsies and Travellers. Newham was the first council in London to use the government's planning definition and came out with zero need. There is an internal need on our site of around 30 new pitches from young people and overcrowding. Our site is in an area of regeneration and we are so close to the boundary of the LLDC. The council not recognising the need can have an impact in the future of how well the site is protected.

Leaving it to councils to meet Gypsy and Traveller needs has not worked and will not work in the future because it's not a duty, so there is no incentive or sanction for them not delivering. There's a lot of pressure on councils to build more housing and that comes from the targets in the London Plan. The London Plan should also set targets for new pitches to show that this is also a priority when councils are identifying land. The targets should be based on the mid-point figure of need in the 2008 London GTANA as a minimum to be achieved in the next 5 years. The Mayor should then commission a new London wide needs assessment in line with the general housing evidence. Councils and the GLA should include new pitches in general housing development so that housing associations and developers can contribute to site delivery.

I would like to attend the Examination in Public hearings on the London Plan to discuss this policy in more detail and give evidence.