



We are Londoners too



Letters from Gypsies and Travellers

An Analysis of written responses to the draft London Plan

November 2011

London Gypsy and Traveller Unit



We are Londoners too
Letters from Gypsies and Travellers
An analysis of written responses to the draft London Plan
November 2011

These fifty¹ letters were written by London's Gypsies and Travellers to the examination in public of the draft London Plan, supported and facilitated by LGTU staff, Debby Kennett, Gill Brown, Tracie Giles and Helena Kiely.

Katy George BSc PG Cert undertook the analysis and wrote the report advised by Bernard Bourdillon BA MPhil MRTPI.

The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit has been actively supporting Gypsies' and Travellers' involvement in the development of the London Plan through

- Building capacity for direct involvement through consultation meetings and outreach on both the replacement London plan and the 'Minor' Alteration. This is evidenced by the numbers of submissions from Gypsies and Travellers.
- Administering and maintaining the London Gypsy and Traveller Forum, a GLA supported stakeholder organisation attended by Gypsies and Travellers.

LGTU seeks to support Travellers and Gypsies living in London, to influence decisions affecting their lives; to improve their quality of life and opportunities available to them; and to challenge the discrimination they routinely experience. It contributes to and supports Travellers to contribute to, borough, regional and national policy development, and has done so over the past 30 years.

LGTU has wide experience of accommodation issues. It was actively engaged in fighting roadside evictions, negotiating tolerated sites and campaigning for official sites in North and East London throughout the 'eighties and early 'nineties during which time eight new sites were built.

When the Criminal Justice Act of 1994 repealed the duty to provide sites and increased eviction powers, roadside families were forced into housing and many boroughs began to close sites. LGTU fought these closures. It also started an advice service for housed travellers to respond to the loss of extended family support; the difficulties of coping with bricks and mortar living; and the hardships of temporary accommodation.

Since 2004, LGTU has been actively supporting residents in the development of the four 'Olympic replacement' sites, and has worked for the provision of new sites under the 2004 Housing Act.

Throughout, the Unit has continued its programme with young Gypsies and Travellers on sites and in housing.

¹ Four members of the Community each wrote two letters because comments on the plan were asked for on three separate occasions as the Mayor changed his policy on sites for Gypsies and Travellers, This report takes "the writer" or respondent as the unit of analysis and so is based on a sample of 46 responses, rather than 50. The pairs of letters from the same authors were combined into single 'responses'.

Index

1	Introduction	
	The evidence at a glance	1
	The policy in the Draft Replacement London Plan	3
2	Analysis	
	The letters	3
	Methodology	5
3	Themes	
	Scale of need	6
	Urgency of Need	6
	No options	7
	Unsuitability of bricks and mortar	8
	Discrimination in bricks and mortar	10
	Exclusion and being forgotten	10
	Idea of home	11
	Loss of culture and identity	12
	Participation.....	12
4	Other Studies.....	14
5	Concluding remarks	17
	Bibliography	18
	Appendix A Topic checklist.....	19
	Letters.....	22 - 57

Letters from Gypsies and Travellers

An analysis of written responses to the draft London Plan

1. Introduction

This report presents the letters written by forty six² Gypsies and Travellers who contributed to the Examination in Public (EiP) of the Draft Replacement London Plan during 2010. Their participation was facilitated by the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit. The crux of the particular policy in the plan concerned the targets for new pitches in London over the next few years. The Mayor reduced these targets and then withdrew them altogether as the EiP progressed.

The first part of the report provides a summary and analysis of the letters. This introduction presents the 'evidence at a glance' and outlines the draft plan as it progressively cut back on pitch targets. Section 2 describes how the letters came to be written and discusses the methodology of analysing them. The broad themes that are discovered in the letters are discussed in section 3, while section 4 looks at other studies.

The second part (from page 22) gives the letters in full.

The evidence at a glance:

- All the writers consider the provision of more pitches for Gypsies and Travellers to be a pressing need, and, where an opinion on the lowered pitch targets is expressly stated, all the letters judged this to be inadequate to serve the growing needs of the community.
- Every author expresses a view on the unsuitability of 'bricks and mortar' housing for the Gypsy and Traveller community. The specific problems with houses cited vary in substance and mode of expression, but their unsuitability is either implied or explicitly stated, regardless of the author's own housing situation. Being housed is not seen as a solution to lack of site provision.
- The number of writers forced off sites is an indicator of need; nearly every letter tells this story, either from its writer's own direct experience or that of family members. 43 out of 46 authors (93%) refer to families being forced off sites and into bricks and mortar accommodation.
- The number of representations from the housed community is in itself an indicator of the level of need. 54% of the letters are by individuals or families living in houses or flats³. This supports the assertion (made in Fordham 2008)⁴ that a number didn't state

² Four members of the Community each wrote two letters because comments on the plan were asked for on three separate occasions as the Mayor changed his policy on sites for Gypsies and Travellers, This report takes "the writer" or respondent as the unit of analysis and so is based on a sample of 46 responses, rather than 50. The pairs of letters from the same authors were combined into single 'responses'.

³ Of the total sample, 4% stated they were living in a transient manner in houses, 51% were housed, 43% were living on sites and 7% stated they were moving around/living on the roadside or staying temporarily on sites with friends or family.

⁴ 'London Boroughs Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment Final Report', Fordham Research Group, 2008.

in the GTAA⁵ that they were ‘dissatisfied’ with their current home simply because they knew there was no alternative.

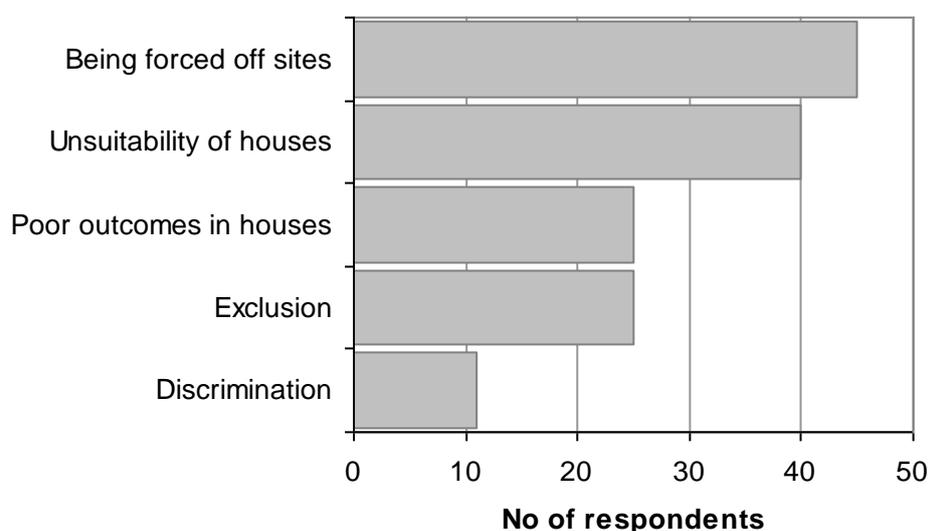
- There is detailed communal knowledge about the scale of the need, including the need arising from the large number of families presently dwelling in houses as a result of having nowhere else to go.⁶ There is a clear sense of collective concern from all parts of the community – irrespective of the writers’ accommodation situation. This illustrates the perceived and experienced vulnerability of the community and culture as a whole. It also demonstrates the mistaken distinction made between families in houses and families on sites (‘...the false premise that they are, somehow, different sorts of people’⁷).

“Moving into houses doesn’t change who we are. We are still Travellers and that’s what we want to be” [45].

- Concern is expressed not just with the lack of adequate accommodation for family and friends, but with the gradual annihilation of a culture and way of life. There is a sense of being coerced and trapped into somehow ‘not being’ Travellers, with a people and their culture being gradually squeezed out of existence by policy decisions: *“Being forced to live in houses and flats is taking the Traveller culture away from us.” [17], “We ask you to take our culture into account and not let the Traveller way of life disappear” [45].*
- The historical lack of authorised sites, the discrimination, deprivation, hardship and inequitable processes are well detailed in the letters and provide a rich and explanative background to the current shortage. The community’s story contextualises their current demand for site provision as achieving previously denied equality, justice and fairness and correcting past wrongs.

Figure 1 below gives an overview of some of the common issues raised in the evidence:

Figure 1 - Prevailing issues



⁵ Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (referred to hereafter as GTAA).

⁶ See ‘Other Studies’ section for further discussion of this predicament.

⁷ LGTU Objection to The London Plan, May 2010, p2.

The policy in the Draft Replacement London Plan

The Housing Act 2004 and CLG Circular 1 of 2006 required that the Mayor of London set a target for pitches within the London Plan based on a Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment (GTAA). The Mayor initially accepted a need for 768⁸ additional pitches in London over 2007-2017 on the basis of the London-wide GTAA of March 2008. However the first edition of the Draft Plan (Sept 2009) included a target for only 538. Most of the letters presented here were written by Gypsies and Travellers in response to this reduced target.

Subsequently the Mayor rejected the needs of *housed* Gypsies and Travellers in a 'minor alteration' of March 2010, and reduced the target to 238. In May 2010 the new Government began dismantling regional planning and weakening planning for Gypsies and Travellers. As a result the Mayor brought in a second 'minor alteration' in September in which the London-wide target was withdrawn.

2. Analysis

The letters

The letters are given in full in the second part of the report (p22 et seq). They were facilitated by Gill Brown, Tracie Giles, Debby Kennett and Helena Kiely of the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit (LGTU hereafter).

LGTU's role was dictated by its objective of partnership working: supporting the community as fully as possible from beginning to end; ownership of the output by the community; and in-built flexibility allowing diverse life experiences and aspirations to be captured and given full credence, in line with the 'Participatory Action Research' model⁹.

Participation was encouraged and facilitated in a number of ways over the consultation period to foster equality of access to the consultation process, ensuring a broad cross-section of the community took part and a range of views were expressed:

1. When the first draft London Plan consultation period began, LGTU produced a leaflet outlining the Plan's proposals and what actions could be taken by interested parties. The leaflets offered support in writing responses. LGTU also produced postcards¹⁰ for the community to sign and send to the Mayor asking for site provision to be considered as a priority. These leaflets and postcards were circulated at meetings, passed on to other organisations working with the Gypsy and Traveller community and made available to individuals and families attending drop-ins at the LGTU offices.
2. LGTU held meetings in Enfield, Hackney and Haringey. At these meetings, individuals who wanted to write letters¹¹ were helped with composition and ideas such as how to

⁸ GLA *Draft Housing Strategy*, Nov 2008, App 1 and GLA *Borough targets for Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision – initial borough consultation*, March 2009. Corrections to the GTAA accepted by the GLA, such as the inclusion of Bexley, boost this number to **811**.

⁹ See Ryder, A. and Greenfields, M., ITMB, 2010, p36.

¹⁰ Postcard responses were not included in this analysis.

¹¹ Due to the low level of literacy and computer literacy in the community, some assistance was necessary to allow fair access to the consultation/participation process.

- start¹² and finish letters. The substance of the letters might be considered as the result of a conversation, largely led by the community member.
3. Outreach sessions, held by LGTU in Camden, Havering, Newham, Haringey, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, also facilitated some letters. Some others were written by Travellers or Gypsies during their visits to LGTU for support or housing related advice.
 4. Certain sites or individuals were specifically asked to contribute to ensure a maximum number of boroughs were represented, or because they were known to have experienced important events such as site closures to give accounts of these and their effects.
 5. A number of letters were written with the support of a council employee. One or two were composed without any support.
 6. In response to the first Minor Alteration, reducing the target to 238 pitches, LGTU distributed another batch of postcards, this time with space for further comments. Around 230 were returned, many with additional information expressing views on the proposed amendments¹³.
 7. Four letters were submitted at this stage. Three of these [44-46] were from individuals who had already submitted letters during the first 'round' and are treated here as extensions of the first submissions to prevent double counting.
 8. A discussion meeting was held at which community members produced a list of topics for those attending the Examination in Public (see appendix A).

Different letters were not written within the same 'nuclear family' and most were a considered and discussed joint submission from a family unit. Each letter can therefore be regarded as expressing the views of a 'household' or 'pitch's worth' of the community.

Most signatories of the letters were women – this reflects their ability to commit a greater level of involvement with LGTU by virtue of being available during the daytime and generally adhering to gender roles in this community, NOT that this matter was viewed as being unimportant to men within the community. Views expressed are often explicitly expressed as the views of a family, "**We** have heard you did a plan for new pitches..." [28], "*I am writing on behalf of my family...*" [25].¹⁴

¹² For example: "I am writing to tell you what I think of section 3.9 of the London Plan".

¹³ Again, not considered in this analysis, but these views were largely in line with the ones considered here.

¹⁴ This concurs with the West London Housing Partnership report, which states: "23 of the participants were female and six were male. As with our experiences of GTANAs, women are more willing to be interviewed, partly as men are often unavailable as they are engaged in income-generating activities" (p34), and other research: *Roads to Success: Routes to Economic and Social Inclusion for Gypsies and Travellers, A Report by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain*, Ryder, A. and Greenfields, M, November 2010, p51.

Methodology

The letters show an undoubted richness and depth. They also constitute a large data-set in relation to the total population of Gypsy and Traveller families in London. LGTU believes that this resource is strong enough to serve both as an input to policy and as the foundation for a robust analysis of the needs of the community. Seen as data, the letters could be said to have been collected through random and purposive sampling with a strong element of self selection.

The analysis given here identifies themes and patterns and considers them in various ways depending on the nature and context of the idea. Some units of analysis are best considered as a proportion of the views expressed from the total of 46 letter writers, while some are more appropriately viewed as a number of mentions of a theme from the body of evidence as a whole. This may 'overlap' individual letters as some closely linked themes may occur within one letter. In these cases the numbers relate to the number of occurrences of a theme or word and may therefore, within the same graphic representation, take account of one letter more than once. Where this occurs, it is stated.

Due to the nature of the material here examined, it is not always possible to capture the breadth of ideas and sentiments expressed using methods which look for specific words or phrases. Many ideas and opinions are alluded to or implied throughout long passages or whole letters but may not feature the particular chosen indicators of those ideas. For this reason, all quantitative interpretations of the information provided should be taken as conservative and descriptive sections should be taken to have equal significance to those it has been possible to quantify. This document should not be taken to be a full explication of all ideas and views contained in the letters. The letters represent a rich body of information which should be subjected to further exploration and analysis.

Some themes easily fall into sub-themes which can then be analysed and displayed in graph form, usefully illustrating the prevalence of particular ways of looking at issues. Other ideas do not fit this method of examination so easily and are elaborated through a descriptive analysis. Wherever possible, quantitative data are given.

Values (numbers of authors) are presented as a percentage of the whole for the most part. This is not considered necessary for small values and therefore is not shown for ideas which appear in one or two letters. These are instead considered more qualitatively.

'Respondents' or 'letters' refer to individual written responses, 'occurrences' or 'mentions' refer to total incidences of ideas/words appearing across the body of evidence.

Bracketed numbers are the code for the source [individual author].

3. Themes

Scale of need

There is a recurrent concern expressed (in response to the original Draft Plan which set the 10 year London target to 538 pitches instead of the 800 or so¹⁵ given by the GTAA) that this figure is too low to meet the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community across London. Many letters refer to the specific targets for their boroughs and give specific numbers of families they know who are waiting to be allocated pitches as evidence that the targets will not be enough.

“Haringey has been given 25 new pitches but this won’t be enough. This will only be enough for the families on the sites who need new pitches, it won’t cover those who are in houses. On our site which is 6 pitches there are 16 children and young people under 25 who will need new pitches in the future.” [15]. Some are more general; *“These new sites are so badly needed because there are so many other Travellers like me.”* [44].

A large number of respondents (28 or 61%) raise objections to the way that the target does not include families in houses. There are frequent references to the ‘fairness’ of this as families have been forced into bricks and mortar accommodation and then told that they won’t be considered for pitches as they have somehow fallen out of the category of need. There is also concern that the policy is divisive and will create conflict and tensions: *“It will cause trouble in families because how will you choose and it’s not a fair process.”* [44].

Urgency of need

All the letters carry implicit or embedded messages regarding the urgency of the need for site provision. The unprecedented Traveller response to the Plan and its amendments is in itself an indicator of how urgent and deeply felt the need is for the community.

In addition to this, 7 letters specifically speak of the urgency of the issue; *“My only hope is that you build these sites **and soon.**”*¹⁶ [04]

This sense of immediate urgency of need is further explicated in the letters describing the local situation in numbers; the families the writer has knowledge of living in unsuitable accommodation and needing a pitch immediately, or those who have children facing an imminent need for pitches as they strive to start their own families. The word ‘desperation’ is often used in this context (this occurs 12 times; 26% of the letters overall).

There is a theme of ‘waiting’ in many of the letters, of a need that has been neglected over many successive generations and of pleas for help ignored repeatedly: *“Am I going to be left here to become an old woman and then its too late for me?”* [39]. *“...I was amazed that your response was to cut the number of plots to less than half of what we need. I really believe that this is not the way forward as down through the years it has always come to the stage when we are going forward that something like this happens. It has always seemed that the problem has been passed on from one government to the next.”* [46].

¹⁵ This exact figure varies as corrections were made to the GTAA

¹⁶ (Emphasis added).

No options

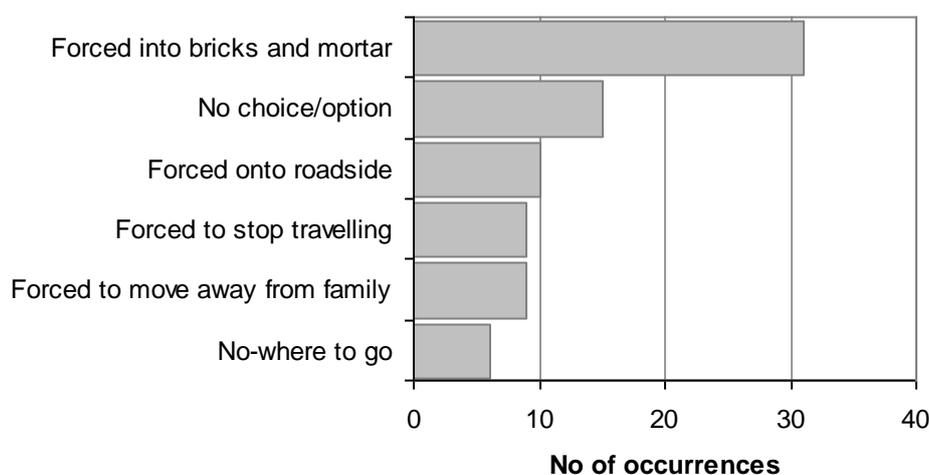
As shown above, 93% of responses used the word ‘force’ in relation to their living situation¹⁷, or spoke of having ‘no choice’ or ‘no option’.

There is a salient sense throughout the letters of an impossible dilemma; intolerable conditions or forced transience making a move to bricks and mortar accommodation the only apparent choice, but a huge sense of loss and dislocation at no longer being able to live as a Traveller:

(From a Traveller with chronic health problems and staying temporarily on a family member’s pitch) “Moving into a house is not an option for me as I would not be able to cope; I depend on the support of other Travellers to help me get through days when I am unwell. Winter is here and this affects me terribly, some days I can’t even get out of bed and without the people around me I would not be able to do anything....The conditions I am living in now are terrible...in the sheds that have no heating...I really need the support of my family. I don’t know what to do.” [04]

Figure 2 below shows a breakdown of how these circumstances were articulated:

Figure 2 - There is no choice



The letters all speak of these as pivotal moments in their families’ histories, when evictions, pitch shortages, overcrowding and dire conditions on sites have cut off all other avenues of support and made this ‘last resort’ the only option available. They all go on to describe the difficulties that have transpired from these events:

“(The) new law came out around 1994 we were getting moved on around every 24 hours by the police. The police impounded our caravans 3 or 4 different times and in the end I was homeless and I had to find somewhere to live because I had 4 young children at the time. I would never have gone into a house only for that...I have now been forced into the bond scheme which is still temporary accommodation.” [44].

¹⁷ Or that of immediate family members.

Another view expressed is that if it becomes clear that no more sites will be provided, more families will begin leaving houses for the road: *“To reject what I am saying would be to go back to the old problem of authorities having to deal with the hassle of moving Gypsies and Travellers from one borough to the next as some will not live in housing.”* [46], *“...just like saying if we all go back out on the road our needs would be addressed more urgently.”* [26].

A total of 13 (28%) letters refer explicitly to forced transience being a particularly difficult outcome arising from the shortage of pitches. This may refer to being forcibly moved from roadside and unauthorised camps, but this is (as with the quote above) often describing past experiences (families still experiencing this kind of existence may have relatively poor access to services such as LGTU and may therefore not be represented in the sample). More commonly these describe the problems ensuing from being accommodated in the private rental sector or squatting: *“...always on the move nowhere to call home.”* [34].

There is, overall, a sense of a community being prevented from putting down roots and establishing stable links in its own way: by living on Traveller sites as families and communities. Attempts at integration through forced assimilation with a ‘settled’ way of life are thwarted by the particular and pervasive exclusion that Travellers and Gypsies experience. The feeling of being dislocated from community and support networks is keenly felt. 20 letters (43%) refer to a loss of community and support:

“It is better on sites because you are surrounded by Travellers and they look after each other.” [45], *“We are not used to...being separated from our people.”* [15].

Unsuitability of bricks and mortar

The unsuitability of bricks and mortar accommodation is expressed throughout, and in a variety of ways. Detachment and isolation from a communal existence and support networks rank highly amongst problems for housed Travellers and Gypsies. Commonly, houses are equated with a feeling of being ‘in prison’ ‘trapped’ or ‘caged’.

Figure 3 below describes some of the problems associated with Traveller and Gypsy families being placed in unsuitable accommodation (houses); in the words of Judge Burton akin to offering a *“rat infested barn”*¹⁸, in the words of one respondent to the London Plan *“...like putting a goldfish in a dog kennel”* [06].

Placing Travellers in conventional housing has a range of negative outcomes, including in relation to health, education, social interaction, community cohesion, and family survival. Although not visible in the evidence given here, studies show that other consequences include a rise in alcohol and substance abuse¹⁹. It is entirely possible that some of the words used here to describe the ‘struggle’ and failure to ‘cope’ point to obscured problems with alcohol and substance misuse which families are reluctant to openly discuss.

The inappropriateness of bricks and mortar accommodation is often associated with the community’s propensity towards large and extended families: *“We get complaints for having the family around which is our way of life.”* [44].

¹⁸ Clarke v Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, [2002] JPL 552

¹⁹ Van Hout, Marie Claire, ‘Travellers and substance use in Ireland – recommendations for drug and alcohol policy’, *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy*, September 2010, <http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.3109/09687630903508554>, Greenfields, Margaret, ‘Gypsies, Travellers and accommodation - A Race Equality Foundation Briefing Paper’, January 2009, <http://hdl.handle.net/10239/139>

The disproportionate (negative) effects of bricks and mortar accommodation on women were reported in several letters: "...you feel on your own which is hard when you are in with children all day." [02], "Its very lonely in a house specially with children..." [45], "...very lonely." [02].²⁰

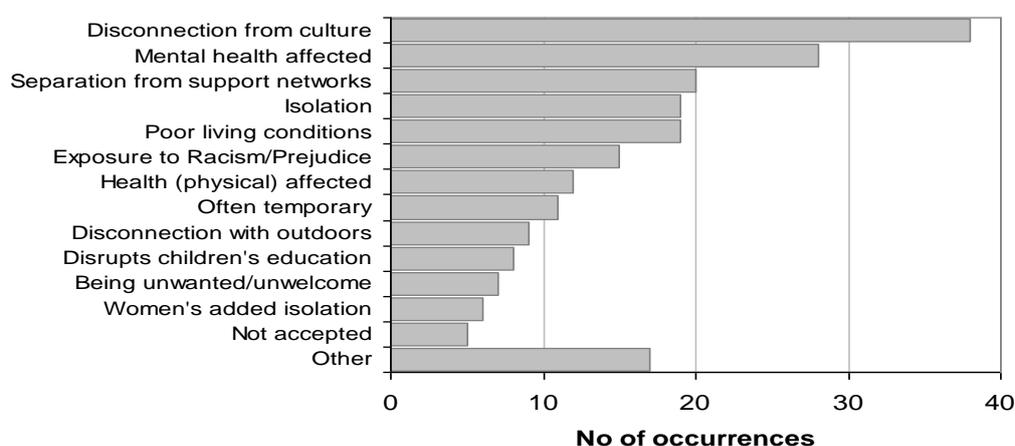
Children can also experience exclusion and hardship in housing. They may face difficulties or display challenging behaviour when surrounded by a culture they are not fully part of and don't understand, and without the family/community network to steer them out of trouble, advise and support them. This is discussed further below. Against expectations, a move to housing can also disrupt children's education over the long term as a consequence of the often temporary nature of housed accommodation in the private sector. (It has been shown elsewhere that members of the Traveller/Gypsy community often experience difficulty securing longer-term tenancies – see 'Other Studies' section).

Long-term or chronic health conditions are described as requiring care which can be provided by the family and community when living on sites, but not when isolated from these support networks: "My husband has type-1 diabetes and needs constant care." [19], "It is better on sites because you are surrounded by Travellers and they look after each other." [45], see also excerpt from [04] in theme 3 above. The link is also made in one letter between premature death and being forced into bricks and mortar accommodation: "...many of my elderly relatives passed away within two years of being forced into flats and houses." [33].

Mental health is a difficult issue to quantify, and is hard to reliably identify from people's descriptive statements about the effects of being forced into housing. This may be harder for the Traveller and Gypsy community than for others as it remains to some extent a taboo subject and is not often discussed directly. Only one letter uses the term 'mental health', but 14 (30%) of the letters refer to depression explicitly. Also included here under 'mental health affected' are references to 'stress' (3), 'anxiety' (1) 'fear' (2), feeling 'insecure' (1), 'struggling' (2), it being 'hard to cope' (3).²¹ These expressions may be interpreted differently by others examining these letters, but the overall tone and context of these comments suggests mental distress.

Figure 3 shows the variety of responses describing the unsuitability of house.

Figure 3 - Unsuitability of bricks and mortar



²⁰ This is corroborated by the West London Housing Partnership report (see 'Other Studies').

²¹ Bracketed numbers refer to number of letters this word appears in.

Discrimination in bricks and mortar

As shown above (Figure 1), 11 letters (24%) referred to the experience of being subject to racism/racial abuse, prejudice, discrimination or being victimised or bullied while living in houses: *“They called us terrible things...”* [21], *“We didn’t realise the world that we were going into. I have put up with terrible racism in the houses like being attacked, abuse outside my door, being called names such as ‘pikeys’ and ‘gypos’. The area that I moved to was very racist. They don’t accept our culture because they don’t understand it.”* [44], *“...I had to go and live in flats on estates. I want to tell you how awful it was. I was the only Gypsy and we were very victimised and bullied.”* [21], *“I am afraid to leave my children outside as they are treated badly by the settled people.”* [38].

In addition to this, 3 (6%) letters talk about their needs as an ethnic minority group more generally; *“I believe that both integration and strong cultural identity for all ethnic minorities is the way forward for London’s multi-cultural communities.”* [46], their belief in equality (2) and their feeling of not being respected as a race (3)²², *“As Travellers we respect all groups but we don’t feel we get the respect we are due.”* [21].

A number of letters describe neighbours making frequent and unreasonable complaints against them for trivial reasons, and this being often connected with their culture of having extended families around them much of the time. *“I try to keep out of their way but they always find something wrong”* [08].

The mentions of having inadequate access to services and support suggest that housed Gypsies and Travellers are subject to the added exclusionary practices (or failures to accommodate) of support agencies, combined with a dislocation from culturally sensitive and informed service provision such as that supplied by LGTU.²³

Exclusion and being forgotten

Of the 46 letters, 25 (54%) refer to being excluded in some sense. Across the letters as a whole, there are a total of 39 mentions of issues of exclusion, although the word exclusion is not the common mode of expression.

There are 16 references to being excluded by councils; (not listened to, neglected and a lack of faith in change) and the absence of political will to address the problems of the community.

There are 6 references to being a hidden or invisible community: *“At the moment Travellers are a hidden community...”* [35], *“Enfield used to be called a Gypsy Borough like Bromley is but they got rid of us or pretend we don’t exist, which isn’t right or fair.”* [33], *“I know the council do not acknowledge the Travellers in our area...”* [13].

There are 3 references to a sense of being disempowered: *“We need someone in Newham and Dagenham fighting for the Travelling community, in the council and in the schools.”* [23].

There are 3 references to being ‘forgotten’.

There are 6 references to being ignored or voices not being heard. Among these are several stories of (repeated) letters to councils asking about sites, waiting lists and correct procedures for applying for pitches being unanswered: *“I have written many letters asking*

²² As above.

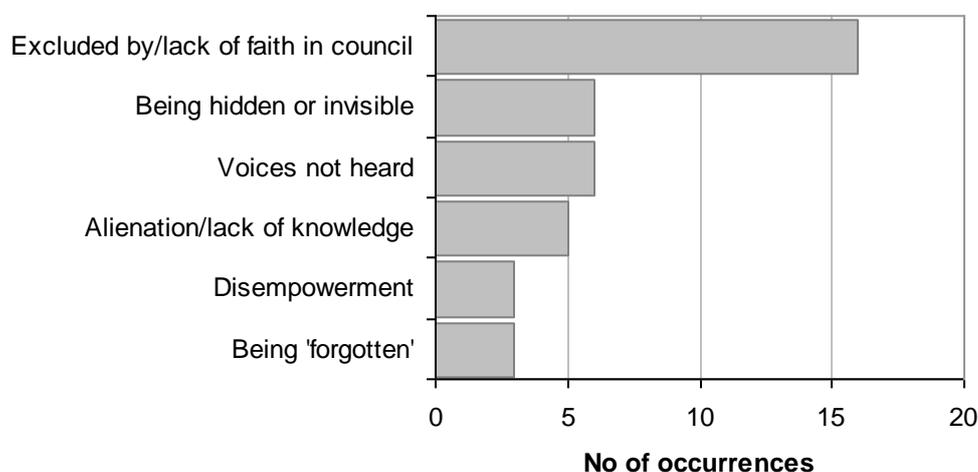
²³ This is supported by West London Housing report; see ‘Other Studies’.

(the council about sites) but have never had a reply.” [10], “(It’s like) knocking at a door that won’t open.” [20].

There are 5 expressions of alienation from and a lack of knowledge about the processes affecting them: *(regarding site waiting list) “I do not know who to talk to about this” [35], “I don’t understand where the idea of 538 pitches came from.” [34].*

These points are displayed below in figure 4

Figure 4 - Exclusion



Idea of 'home'

Many of the letters (15 or 32%) express something about the notion of 'belonging', acceptance and the meaning and sense of having a home. Travellers' preferences for nomadism do not preclude the need to have some permanent place to call home. On the contrary, home is a caravan/trailer which goes with them everywhere, resulting in an arguably stronger permanent sense of home than many in the 'settled' community who are becoming increasingly transient in a highly mobile society: *"For me and my family we desperately want to be considered for a site, to have a stable home."* [44]. Ideas about acceptance and belonging recur. Many in houses express a lack of affinity with their living place in these terms: *"Even though I have lived in a house nearly all my life, I still feel that I belong in a caravan and on a site with my family"*. This demonstrates that an inability to live in houses is not just about what people are used to and familiar with – it goes much deeper, to the heart of identity issues and fundamental human needs. *"I wouldn't class the house as my home"* [16].²⁴

Although movement is integral to the traditional Traveller/Gypsy lifestyle, there is a general feeling across the letters that the kind of nomadism practiced in previous generations is, to some extent accepted as being no longer possible. Significant changes to what constitutes a 'Traveller' way of life have occurred and these have necessitated adaptation and resilience by the community thus far: *(in reference to life on sites today) "[its] not the same as Travelling but it's the next best thing..." [16], "[to] lead a Traveller life but stay in the same place."* [32].

²⁴ For more on this, see 'Other Studies' section.

Loss of culture and identity

Identity is a frequently occurring topic. This is commonly identified as being about ethnic origin, with 37 (80%) respondents making explicit reference to being 'Travellers', 'Irish Travellers' or 'Romany Gypsies'. Ethnicity is carefully defined and obviously important: *"I am an English Romany Gypsy."* [21].

5 (10%) letters refer to having pride in their identity as Travellers.

There are 27 (59%) letters which talk about losing touch with, being disconnected from or feeling alienated from their own culture through not being able to live as Travellers. Some refer to not being able to be open about their identity due to discrimination: *"[a site] where my children can be who they are instead of hiding who they are."* [28], *"[on a site] I would feel that I could be myself."* [20]. Others describe a kind of identity crisis: *"I feel like a fraud living in a flat because I feel I am going against my culture."* [07], *"stuck in limbo, they don't know where they belong. They are reared in one world and have to step out into a different world."* [46]. The detrimental effect on the community as a whole is described: *"...people are mixed up, confused and scattered."* [44].

Many of these sentiments (representing 17 letters) are expressed with special concern for the effects on children: *"...it is breaking my heart. They know nothing about our beautiful culture."* [38], *"they don't know who they are."* [24], *"I want them to be reared the way I was, to know their culture, to be proud of it so they don't feel ashamed of who they are."* [20].

Life on sites, living in caravans/trailers and all that goes with it is described in terms of being inseparable from being a Traveller/Gypsy. It is shown to be the most fundamental and essential expression of 'Travellerhood' repeatedly throughout the letters: *"This is the ways we have lived for generations its in our blood."* [17], *"I would love to live on a site so that I can live my culture the way I always used to, and to have my family around me and call it home."* [44], *"This way of life is where I came from."* [20], *"...they are not settled children, they are Travellers and our culture is about living in Trailers and being surrounded by our community..."* [04], *"Its our way of life and its not a favour we're asking you. Its for the next generation."* [32].

Participation

Another clear thread running through the body of evidence is about participation and involvement in the processes affecting the community. There is a willingness to participate in the Examination In Public²⁵ stated in 10 (21%) of the letters. There are expressions of gratitude or hope expressed in response to the Plan's consideration of the community's needs in 18 (39%) letters (all prior to the 1st Minor Alteration).

There are many mentions of the sense of cohesion with the wider community and involvement in local events. 14 of the letters state the writers' identity as 'Londoners' or refer to the history of their connection with London: *"We are part of London's history...we are Londoners too."* [06], *"We class ourselves as Londoners and residents of Tower Hamlets just like everyone else."* [46], *"London has always been my home."* [43].

²⁵ Or, in a couple of cases, in other ways, including a number of invites to Boris Johnson to visit Travellers' homes to see how they live and better understand their way of life and its need for protection.

A number of the letters express dismay at the notion of segregation associated with living on sites, and give detailed descriptions of social networks and friendships with the local (settled) community; *“You say that sites make Travellers stay separate from other local people. That’s not true, when we are on sites we still mix with the local people. Our children go to local schools, we go to church and mix in with people. At my son’s wedding 3 weeks ago there were people who were not Travellers but who we have got to know.”* [45], being accepted and welcomed by communities and living alongside them harmoniously on sites; *“...the surrounding community became our firm friends who supported us throughout our long hard fight.”* [27] and involvement with local governance structures; *“I myself have been a school governor...I find it offensive that you suggest that we don’t integrate when we feel we are very much a part of our local community.”* [46].

There are 4 (8%) specific references to the desire to contribute to the wider society and what the community, particularly the younger generation, has to offer: *“If there were more sites built for the younger generation of Travellers, I believe that they would be more active members of our communities because they are better educated, they are more integrated, they are more articulate and could do a lot for their own community and the wider community. ...all we want in life is the same opportunities as everyone else and to get on in life integrate and contribute to society.”* [46].

4. Other Studies

The findings of this analysis are consistent with other research conducted into the living situations of Travellers and Gypsies. Among the many useful contributions, the West London Housing Partnership's report 'Working with housed Gypsies and Travellers: A Good Practical Guide' is considered particularly pertinent given the geographical base for the study and the recent date of the work. Also very relevant is the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain's recent report, 'Roads to Success: Economic and Social Inclusion for Gypsies and Travellers'²⁶.

Some key assertions made in this research give strength to our arguments and support the pattern and themes the letters raise.

These are expanded upon below:

1. Poor outcomes for housed Travellers, particularly women:

"There is considerable evidence of poor outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers living in housing, including homelessness, family breakdown and domestic violence. Health status is worse among housed Gypsies and Travellers compared to other Gypsy and Traveller groups, especially anxiety and depression, thought to be prompted by exposure to racism from neighbours and detachment from site-based support networks. *Isolation can be particularly intense for women who often lack employment-based opportunities to meet other people and spend much of their day-to-day lives in isolation rather than among a community on a site.*"²⁷ In the ITMB (Irish Traveller Movement in Britain) study, 17% of the respondents (58% of whom were women), described isolation as a problem associated with housing²⁸.

University of Sheffield 'The Health Status of Gypsies & Travellers in England Report of Department of Health Inequalities in Health Research Initiative' 2004 recognises that "Those who rarely travel have the poorest health."²⁹

2. Increased vulnerability to discrimination and racism in bricks and mortar accommodation:

"... particularly those in privately rented housing, reported living in poorly maintained housingThe move into housing was also perceived to put Gypsies and Travellers into a more vulnerable position when dealing with the settled community. Many felt that living in housing exposed them and their children to increased levels of prejudice because of lack of acceptance from wider society towards Gypsies and Travellers. This prevalent theme was discussed by nearly all of the participants."³⁰ This trend is also discussed in the ITMB report, suggested to be partly accounted for by the enforced residence of Travellers and Gypsies in areas suffering from 'poverty of place'³¹. The ITMB findings

²⁶ Ryder, A. And Greenfields, M., November 2010

²⁷ West London Housing Partnership, *Working with Housed Gypsies and Travellers: A good practical guide*, 2010, p13 (emphasis added).

²⁸ Ryder, A. And Greenfields, M., November 2010, p166

²⁹ Parry, Glenys, Patrice Van Cleemput, Jean Peters, Julia Moore, Stephen Walters, Kate Thomas and Cindy Cooper, (2004), *The Health Status of Gypsies & Travellers in England Report of Department of Health Inequalities in Health Research Initiative*, p1.

³⁰ West London Housing Partnership, 2010, p47

³¹ Ryder, A. And Greenfields, M., November 2010, p161.

indicate 14% of their sample cited discrimination as a problem with living in housing, and the report states that housed Gypsies and Travellers “frequently experience high levels of racism”³².

3. Difficulties in securing long-term stable tenancies:

“Gypsies and Travellers often live in poor quality and overcrowded housing, with increasing numbers at the lower end of the private rented sector.... the high turnover of tenancies in Gypsy and Traveller households”³³. The ITMB report finds similar problems associated with adjusting to settled life, understanding and managing payment of bills and the like, which does, in some situations, lead to instability of tenancies³⁴.

4. Lack of mitigation of difficulties through adjustment to living situation over time:

“...others argued that negative psychological effects of living in housing did not always lessen with time. Such long-term effects included depression, reflected in higher suicide rates amongst housed Gypsies and Travellers, the high turnover of tenancies in Gypsy and Traveller households, and family breakdown.”³⁵

5. Poor access to (culturally appropriate) support in conventional housing:

“...detachment from the informal support networks available on sites which is especially missed when moving into housing, for example, with reading mail or getting advice about contacting service providers.”³⁶ “The relative invisibility of Gypsy and Traveller families once they make a move into housing is noted as one of the major barriers in providing support services.”³⁷

6. Identity and site dwelling:

The West London Housing partnership’s report states: “*Gypsy Identity and Orientations to Space* (2004) offers an insight into the political and social dimensions of living on sites and housing. The paper identifies the idea of ‘the road’ as central to the ideology and identity of Gypsies and Travellers; even for those who no longer travel connection to a travelling way of life is seen as key to asserting one’s identity. The link with travelling and trailers, the paper notes, gives a sense of autonomy to travellers which allows them: “The power to transport themselves around, to define their own living space and reassert control”³⁸. The ITMB report concurs with other research in finding evidence of an experience of the “deliberate destruction of their nomadic culture and forced assimilation”. The report goes on to describe how positive features of life in housing were often preoccupied with it being a “welcome respite from the cycle of eviction”³⁹. This does not in fact refer to an intrinsic advantage of house-dwelling, but a preferability in relation to the extreme difficulty in attempting to live a ‘Traveller’ way of life, and in effect, a coerced choice families are forced to make the best of.

³² *Ibid*, p166, p236

³³ *Ibid*, p13, p37

³⁴ *Ibid*, p171

³⁵ West London Housing Partnership, 2010, p37

³⁶ *Ibid*, p17

³⁷ *Ibid*, p17, p20

³⁸ *Ibid*, p32

³⁹ Ryder, A. And Greenfields, M., November 2010, p171

Margaret Greenfields & David Smith's paper 'Travellers, Housing and the (Re) construction of Communities' provides further evidence of many themes discussed here, and reiterates the crucial role of living on sites in maintaining ethnic identity:

"Many housed Gypsy and Travellers experience the denial of ethnic identity acutely. Several expressed a concern that 'the worst thing is when you move into the house they count you as settled you're part of the population, you're not a Gypsy anymore because they put you into a house' and were concerned that their identity is not always recognised as 'authentic' by others, both Gypsies and Travellers and by the wider society."⁴⁰

7. Invisibility

The ideas of exclusion expounded in the letters was at times connected to exclusion from social and political processes, and at times had a more literal meaning; a feeling that councils or others wanted to put Gypsies and Travellers out of sight and out of mind, avoiding dealing with their problems and providing for their needs. The report by ITMB contains expressions of the same sentiments: "*They put us on the railways lines or they put a big bank all the way round or put it somewhere nobody can see us. I mean, we are people we deserve to be seen.*" This idea of sites being not only in poor locations that no-one else sees as desirable or fit for habitation is expressed in the letters. The sense that Travellers are unseen and therefore denied an existence, together with an identity, is a specific or latent presence in many of the letters. It ties in directly with the feelings expressed by many that policies are skewed to prevent Traveller lifestyles from continuing, and therefore to deny them a space in which to exist and openly live out their cultural identities.

8. Income generation/financial exclusion.

ITMB's study proposes that the higher than average (for the mainstream population) percentage of Gypsies and Travellers living in private rented accommodation (as compared with home ownership) results from the lack of available sites and the greater degree of financial exclusion suffered by the community⁴¹. While the research find uncovers trends towards a greater involvement in waged employment in the 'mainstream' economy for housed Travellers, those previously working in more traditional Traveller economies may find it harder to maintain networks and appear to become excluded from these types of work. The authors argue that there is still some truth in Pat Niner's assertions that sedentarism leads to greater welfare dependency, partly through the erosion of traditional income generation strategies⁴². The report, like the letters, emphasises throughout the independence and desire to exercise self-determination that exists amongst Travellers and Gypsies⁴³.

Perhaps most importantly, the report states unequivocally: "As has been emphasised continually within this report the shortage of site provision is a major driver of economic exclusion".⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Greenfields, M, & David M. Smith, (2010) 'Housed Gypsy Travellers, Social Segregation and the Reconstruction of Communities', *Housing Studies*, 25: 3, p405.

⁴¹ Ryder, A. And Greenfields, M., November 2010, p163

⁴² *Ibid*, p173

⁴³ *Ibid*, p181

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p184

5. Concluding remarks

Other ideas are expanded in the letters and do not fit neatly into one of the categories already explored. Some which are worthy of mention are listed below:

1. The community has a high degree of self-sufficiency and independence. Many Travellers feel their communities can thrive when allowed to live together on sites which are well-managed: *"We can run our lives much better and even we don't need so much help from the council now."* [32]. For many, as reiterated by the ITMB report, this would be ideally on self-owned or Traveller-managed sites.
2. The many remarks about community support mechanisms suggest there may well be decreased pressure on welfare and support services when Travellers are allowed to live on sites and operate through systems of mutual and reciprocal support.
3. The above points and the many statements in the letters expressing a desire to contribute to the wider community demonstrate the alignment of the Gypsy and Traveller community with the current government's 'Big Society' and Localism agendas. Traveller communities exemplify the types of self-organising, pro-active and self-helping communal structures the government wants to promote: *"We have a lot to give to the wider community because family and looking after other people is important to us."* [44]. In the longer term, these views seem to advance the position that site provision will support the sustainable and cost-effective building of stable, cohesive and thriving communities.
4. There seems to be a gulf separating the views London's Gypsies and Travellers have of themselves and that of the Mayor; they see themselves as integral, long-standing and contributing members of London's diverse cultural and ethnic landscape, while the message sent by policy-makers appears to repeatedly side-line them and exclude them from the decision-making processes that affect them. Their willingness to participate in the consultation process has thus far been met with a complete dismissal of their input.
5. Instead of being supported in the creation and maintenance of these self-reliant and co-operative communities, the letters send a clear message of a group being squeezed out of existence, of a culture and identity on the brink of destruction: *"The way its going in 50 years we will be extinct."* [06], *"...[I] have no hope for the younger generation growing up."* [17].

Bibliography:

Greenfields, M, & David M. Smith, 'Housed Gypsy Travellers, Social Segregation and the Reconstruction of Communities', 2010, *Housing Studies*, Volume 25, No. 3

Greenfields, Margaret, 'Gypsies, Travellers and Accommodation - A Race Equality Foundation Briefing Paper', January 2009, <http://hdl.handle.net/10239/139>

Johnson, C., *The Rat-Infested Barn, Gypsies, Travellers and Aversion to Conventional Housing*, Community Law Partnership, 2009

Levinson, Martin P., Gypsy Identity and Orientations to Space, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 33, No. 6, 2004

Parry, G., P. Van Cleemput, J. Peters, J. Moore, S. Walters, K. Thomas and C. Cooper, *The Health Status of Gypsies & Travellers in England*, Report of Department of Health Inequalities in Health Research Initiative, 2004

Ryder, A. and Greenfields, M., *Roads to Success: Routes to Economic and Social Inclusion for Gypsies and Travellers. A Report by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain*, November 2010

Van Hout, Marie Claire, 'Travellers and substance use in Ireland – recommendations for drug and alcohol policy', *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy*, 2010, <http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.3109/09687630903508554>

LGTU Objection to the London Plan consultation draft replacement – October 2009 and The Minor Alteration – March 2010 Policy 3.9 Gypsies and Travellers, The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit, May 2010

Fordham Research, *London Boroughs' Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment Final Report*, 2008

Fordham Research, *Working with Housed Gypsies and Travellers: A Good Practice Guide*, West London Housing Partnership, June 2010

Appendix A: Topic checklist

LGTU organised a consultation meeting on 29th April 2010 for Gypsies and Travellers on the Minor Alteration to the replacement London plan. We invited Travellers who had written to the Mayor in response to the first consultation (between Oct 2009 and Jan 2010) as well as others who may be interested.

Below is a record of the comments made by the Gypsies and Travellers at the consultation. The comments have been presented under the following headings.

1. Boris says that once Travellers move into houses they don't need pitches

- This doesn't make sense because we are all the same people
- There is one rule for Travellers on sites and other for those in houses
- If we had known this would happen we would never have gone into houses
- This new rule will make Travellers stop going into houses and those in houses will move out and will go onto the side of the road (unauthorised camps)
- We will move back onto camps so we are seen to be living in caravans so we can have the same rights. If this causes problems for the councils they can blame Boris
- We don't want to put pressure on the councils – the answer is more sites

2. Boris has not listened to us

- Boris has ignored what we have said about how living in houses affects our health.
- 280 cards and letters were sent. Even if half were sent from housed Travellers this is only the tip of the real numbers
- In every family there are another 50 known who have not written

3. Not enough sites will mean

- More Travellers will move onto camps
- Families will face constant eviction
- Children will miss out on their education
- Young Travellers growing up on sites will be forced into houses
- Conflict in the Gypsy and Traveller community because there aren't enough pitches
- Our choices are taken away from us
- The needs of more and more families will not be met.

4. We are not in houses by choice

- We can't live on the side of the road anymore
- No sites have been built in the past 15 years
- Designation in the past meant Travellers had to keep moving on or go into houses
- We do not choose houses we are forced into houses
- Some Travellers have 'housed' addresses for doctors and schools etc but in fact they are doubling up on pitches in overcrowded conditions. Many councils allow this to happen on sites because they don't want to deal with it.

5. Being in a house affects our health

- Our health doesn't suffer on sites in the same way
- I am only in my flat at night. In the day I am down the site with my family. My children cry when they leave the site.
- I get depressed in the house. There are only 4 walls to look at .
- There is no one friendly to talk to or nearby to help.
- We are very isolated in the house. It is lonely- like a prison
- On a site there is always someone to turn to

6. Travellers in houses - Temporary Accommodation and being moved

- Most housed Travellers are in temporary and private rented houses
- We are being moved a lot which disrupts our lives
- This affects children's education
- Being moved causes lots of stress and worry- having to change doctors and schools.

7. Waiting lists

- If the new pitches are not for housed Travellers what about all the families on waiting lists who are in houses? Will they be taken off the lists?
- Has Boris actually looked at all the council site waiting lists? Many councils don't have a list because they don't want any proof of how many Travellers in the borough need a pitch.

8. We want respect for our culture

- Other cultures/ethnic minorities are recognised and respected
- We want to keep our culture- this doesn't mean we want to be separate from others
- There is a need from all nationalities but we are pushed aside.
- It's like the Mayor wants us to disappear but the number of Travellers is getting larger not smaller. We are not going anywhere!
- Our children are losing their culture by being forced into houses. We want them to know who they are and their past
- We need to keep our culture alive
- Our choice to live our culture has been taken away from us

9. The Prejudice and discrimination we face is the starting point of everything

- We believe that councils don't want to build sites because they are prejudiced against Travellers. What is the difference between the council being told to build houses and pitches?
- Out of the whole of the London plan the only thing the Mayor changed was about new pitches we feel this is racism
- It's not only that we don't want to be in houses it's also that the people in the houses don't want us there.
- We face a lot of racism in houses. Our children are often bullied or worse

10. When we are on sites we are still part of the local community

- Many sites mix well with the local community
- Travellers get on better with locals when we live on sites because we are not isolated
- In a flat on an estate no one mixes with us
- Our children go to local schools, playgroups and after-school clubs
- We are involved in local community meetings and tenants groups
- We know our neighbours and shop keepers
- We want to be part of the local community
- Some Travellers have jobs locally
- The problem for us the prejudice we face. We feel that other people don't accept us
- It is where sites are that's the problem- often they are stuck miles from anywhere, next to railway lines or in industrial areas which are already separate. This makes it much harder to be part of the local community.

Letters from Gypsies and Travellers

01
6th November 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am writing to tell you my view on the London Plan policy 3.9 Gypsies and Travellers. I think it's very good that new sites for Travellers are going to be built because this is very badly needed. We live on a Council site in Camden. It is very overcrowded, we have very little space and all our caravans are very squashed together. We have no space for bigger caravans as the families have got bigger or no space for children to play, park our cars, or for any storage and we have no privacy. If any family want to visit we have no space for them to wait overnight. This site is not even big enough for the families living on it now.

I see the number of new pitches for Camden is 6. This will not even be enough new pitches for our own sons and daughters and grandchildren who desperately need a site to live on because they do not want to move into houses. We have been on the road all our lives, this is our tradition and is the life we only knew and we want to continue this by staying on sites. When Traveller families are forced to move into houses it really affects them in a lot ways. Travelling people are used to visiting one another and always keeping in touch with each other. Houses makes people very isolated and causes people to get depressed especially the women because they are left at home with children.

We urgently need new sites for our community. 538 across London will not be enough because Travelling people have large families and they are growing all the time.

We see that you say that families already on sites should be given the new pitches before families in houses. We don't think this is fair because a lot of families are in houses because they have no choice. They would love to be on sites but haven't been able to get a pitch. We think that everyone whether they are on sites or in houses should be given a fair crack at the whip.

Yours sincerely

02
15th December 2009

Dear MAYOR Boris Johnson

I am a Traveller living in Enfield. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. And that you have said that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

So I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in **Section 3.9 of the Plan**

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built but to say 5 should be built in Enfield is not enough. I know at least 20 separate Travellers families in Enfield myself already who all live in flats or houses.

I do not think those living on council sites should be top priority. This is because they already have one. If they are doubled up, they should go on a waiting list for the local council because they have a policy on who pitches should go to. If they are travelling around with nowhere to go they deserve a pitch and if they live in houses and can't get on they should have the equal chance as anyone else. That's the fair way.

Some of my own children who are living in houses have had no choice but to live in that way. The reason they are in houses is they have nowhere to travel around Enfield and the site

was closed down. My parents lived on the Enfield site in Edmonton for a long time after travelling around. Then around the time it was closed they had to go into a house. It was very sad and hard for them away from the family after all that time.

Some Travellers don't get on well in houses they feel all closed in and it makes depressions and they are very lonely. It's hard to get on with neighbours because they are not the same way as Travellers. And you feel on your own which is hard when you are in with children all day.

I always travelled around so my own children they are used to living a Traveller way of life. I only came to a house 6 years ago. My children are now grown and they have never known any other way. For them it's too hard to live in houses.

Please can you appreciate all this if you can and not make us all live in houses.

Thank you

03

18th December 2009

Dear Mr Johnson,

I am an Irish Traveller and I live on a site in Tower Hamlets. I have lived in London since 1975. All my children have grown up here. I am the mother of 14 children and I have 39 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren. My children want to live on a site – they don't want to move into houses because living in caravans is their culture and their way of living. They can't move onto pitches because there aren't enough and there are no stopping places for them because their caravans get constantly moved. They don't want to move into houses, it's their culture to live on sites. This affects their whole life, their freedom is gone. They lose their identity.

I think more sites are needed for the sake of all the families. They find it hard to cope when are forced to go into houses. 28 pitches in Tower Hamlets is a very good number for our families and will meet our needs for the next 5 years, but after this we will need more pitches for the young ones growing up and getting married.

Yours sincerely

04

15th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller. I live all over London in Private sites or the side of the road.

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built but hope you will consider a few things. I am currently staying with a friend in a private site in Havering. I have been here for a few months and before that I was living on the road side. I hope you can understand what a hard life this is, I have 5 young children and I have Arthritis all through my body. Moving into a house is not an option for me as I would not be able to cope; I depend on the

support of other Travellers to help me get through days when I am unwell. Winter is here and this affects me terribly, some days I can't even get out of bed and without the people around me I would not be able to do anything. They get my children ready for school and make their dinner while I lay in agony. If I lived in a house I would not be able to do this and my children would be taken from me.

The conditions I am living in now is terrible, we have no showers or baths so have to visit the local leisure centre of friends in houses. Toilets are in sheds that have no heating so when I use them I get so cold my body often tenses and without someone waiting for me outside I would sit for ages. They often have to dress me and bring me back to my trailer.

As I said, I am stuck as although it would be better for me if I lived in a house as the cold in trailers are no good, I really need the support of my family. I don't know what to do.

I would not want my children to grow up in houses and become settled children as they are not settled children, they are Travellers and our culture is about living in Trailers and being surrounded by our community.

My only hope is you building these new sites and soon. The council need to be made do this and you are the only person able to do this. If it's only suggested they do it then I think it's very unlikely they will so I ask you support us and put pressure on all councils to get these build as soon as possible.

You have said all new sites should be given to families' already on sites and I really hope you will change this. There are plenty of travelling families that have no option but to live on the roadside or squat and need these new sites desperately.

Thank you for reading my letter,

05

18th December 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am an Irish Traveller living on Abbey Close site in Hackney. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches, so I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built. I have been living in Hackney for the past 20 years. All my family are also living here and we have been living in caravans for all of that time. Before I got married both me and my husband were was living on Waterden Road site in Hackney. When we got married we were not allowed to stay on the site and we had to go into a flat. This was new to us, we were never used to living in houses and we couldn't cope. We moved from flat to flat for about 3 years and then a group of friends and family decided we couldn't stick living in the flats any longer. It wasn't our way of life, we just couldn't cope, so we all got small caravans and went out onto camps. We had no toilets or water but we were happy because this was our way of living and we were so happy to be out of the flats and houses. We lived on camps for about 3 years until I was lucky enough to get permanent pitch on Abbey Close site where I am now.

I see that Hackney has been given a number of 19 new pitches to build in the next 7 years. This will not be enough because there is a waiting list of about 30 families and there are many young couples who have got married over the last few years who have grown up on sites that have nowhere to go. Many of them are living doubled up on pitches but when their family starts increasing they will have to leave. Within the Travelling community are culture is to have big families and most families will have about 8 children. I worry for my own children

because I went through a very hard time myself going from flat to flat and camp to camp. I had no one to help me out. The way is it going now my children will have nowhere to go when they get married. Younger people should have more rights because you can be years on the list for a pitch and if you don't have any children you can't get a home.

I see that you say that the new pitches should be given to those already on sites before Traveller families in houses. This is not fair because the ones living in houses are there against their will because they couldn't stay doubled on a pitch because they have had no family to double up with. The families who are doubled up on pitches are the ones with only one or two children, but the ones with bigger families have had to go into flats or houses, If this was to go ahead it would cause so much conflict in our community. This would go against the families in Hackney who have been on the waiting list for years, who were living on camps but have had to go into flats against their will. In Hackney we have a waiting list and a vacant pitch is given to the family on the top of the list. Many families have been 15 years on the list and it wouldn't be fair after all this waiting for younger families that are double up on pitches and further down the waiting list to get any new pitches before a family who has been waiting all this time and is at the top of the list.

We feel that because of our way of life and our culture we feel that we do not get listen to. We really hope that you listen to what we have to say.

Thank you

06

17th December 2009

Dear Mayor Boris Johnson

London Plan new Pitches Section 3,9

I writing to you about the plans you have come up with for new pitches in London. This is good for us to hear but we only hope it will happen because it really needs to.

I am lucky I am an English Romany Gypsy and I have a pitch. Our council site was hard fought for 30 years ago and Travellers are still having to fight hard for sites even today. Even on our site there are 20 or more youngsters and they will all need pitches over the next years and too there are families in houses who can't get on with being in houses. So 17 in Newham is not nearly enough.

Why are Travellers forced into houses? It's either take it or get out of the area. But it's no good for Travellers. It's like putting a goldfish in a dog kennel. If anyone had a lick of sense they would see that is something that will just cause trouble for Travellers and for the authorities.

I don't understand why our way of life is not respected. Is there any other group of people in the country whose way of life is not respected? Its right to show respect for different cultures and Travellers surely are part of that too.

Can the leopard changes its spots? Of course not and nor can we. We are Gypsy Travellers and we are proud of it. But the way it's going in 50 years we will be extinct.

Travellers are part of London's history. You as the Mayor are proud of its history. My niece wrote a leaflet about the History of London's Travellers. I am sending it with this letter. I hope you will be interested to read it and to see how we are Londoners too.

I was brought up with prejudice all around me. It is good that there are going to be more pitches but please Mr Johnson can you try to make more and make the councils deal with their responsibilities.

You are welcome to come to my pitch anytime to see how we live and hear from us yourself.

07

9th December 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am an Irish Traveller and I live in Haringey. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites. I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan.

I grew up on a site in Hackney and I have always been used to living in caravans with my family. I got married and I couldn't stay with my parents on their pitch because there wasn't enough room to move another trailer onto their pitch. I went to the homeless but we weren't in priority need so we ended up in a squat. We wanted to live in caravans either in a camp or on a site because that's what we were used to but we had nowhere to go.

I am now living in a flat in Tottenham. I am grateful for a roof over my head but I really don't want to live here, I really want to be on a site. I feel like a fraud living in a flat because I feel I am going against my culture. It just not me to be in a flat but I have no choice. I want my children to grow up like Travellers, to have their culture, to know this way of living, to live the Traveller traditions and to know what their culture is all about. I feel that I am losing my identity by not living on a site and I feel my children are missing out a lot. I really want to living in Hackney and to have my family around me. I need the support of my family. 19 new pitches will not be enough in Hackney because there are many young families in my situation who are desperate to be on a site but there are no pitches to move to.

In the London Plan it says that new pitches should be given first to Travellers who are already on sites. I don't think this is fair. Those who are on sites are the lucky ones. I would want to be on a site but I can't be. I don't think that's fair because I have been forced to live in a flat and because of this I will not the same chance to get a pitch.

Please can you make sure that the Council's build these new pitches. I want my children to have the same experience that I had – to live in caravans. This is our way of life. Thank you for reading my letter

Yours sincerely

08

11th January 2010

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in Harrow.

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites. I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan.

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built as I was forced into a house. I lived on a site when I first got married, I became pregnant and the conditions were

not suitable for a new baby so I moved into a flat. It was very dirty in the site and always cold. When I moved into the flat it was a very hard time for me, I didn't understand how to keep up with things. Everything is done differently in a house; it was hard being away from my family. Since my first born was 1 years old I have been trying to get back into a site, I realise now it was a big mistake moving into a house but I just would not be able to cope in the conditions.

I have lived in a house for 13 years and its horrible seeing my 5 children grow up not knowing our culture. I try to teach them but the main part of our culture is us living in a trailer, living outside and not looking at 4 walls all the time. I bring them travelling around in the summer time, we stay in summer camps as I don't like them sitting in the house. I try to bring them to family sites as much as I can so they can play with my relatives kids. The neighbours make it hard for us, the see our caravan in our drive and don't like it. They complain to the council so much for silly things. I try to keep out of their way but they always find something wrong.

In my area there are so many Travelling families and I know that 538 sites will not be enough. Please take the time to see how many Travellers are in my area. We need these sites to be built soon so our children are not growing like settled children. I have heard you plan on offering these new pitches to family's already on sites and I hope you will reconsider this. Families like mine need to be offered these pitches; we need them more than those already with pitches. I am very doubtful the council will build these pitches as they are not very supportive of our community. My family has tried contacted the council over many years to see if there is any plan to get more sites build but there is no one dealing with it. We never hear back from them. Please be aware that very few Travellers in Harrow know about this consultation so you may not get many letters back from Travellers in Harrow, but please don't think that there isn't a need for pitches in this borough. I only found out myself in the last few days and I know that there are many, many more Travellers in Harrow who would want to have their say but don't know that this is happening. I think this is the same all over London.

I hope you will put pressure on the council to build these sites, if you just suggest they do it then it will not be done. They need to be made do it and you're the only one that can do it. We want the Council to consult with us. At the moment we don't even know who in the Council is responsible for the needs of Travellers.

Yours Sincerely

09
13th November 2009

Dear Boris Johnson

I am writing to you about the plan you made for Traveller pitches in London

I have heard you say there should be 538 That is not enough. There are many more families looking for pitches than that number

I was born on a camp outside London but I have live on a council site in Hackney for 15 years. It is my way of life and would not be happy living in a house because I am used to living in sites with Travellers all my life and I would not know what to do in a house. I would not be able to live there and I would get in trouble or depressed.

For the younger generation like me we are worried that we will not be able to get a pitch for our new families. . We ask you please to think again.

Will the councils really build the pitches you have asked them to? I am not sure. Please can you tell me how I can get my council Hackney to build enough pitches. The waiting list is already too long.

Mr Johnson, please come and meet us, see how Travellers live and we will explain it all to you

Thank you for taking my letter

10
11th January 2010

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in London Borough Harrow

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built as I am currently living in a house. There are no sites in Harrow and so many Travellers have been forced to live in houses. I live with my parents. I have always lived in a house as my family had nowhere to go; we were never given the option to live in a site. I have family and friends that live in sites and I visit them a lot.

We face a lot of problems living in a house, we always have done. Our neighbours don't like us; they won't allow their children to play with ours. They make so many complaints to the council for silly things which I am sure they would ignore if we were not Travellers. I don't think it's fair I was made grow up in a house; I don't fully understand my culture. I have 2 younger brothers and I want them to grow and know their culture.

I really don't think 538 new pitches will be enough for London, on my street alone there is 6 Traveller families. They would all prefer to live in sites so I hope you will consider offering these new pitches to Travellers in houses and on the road side. Travellers in houses are growing without knowing their culture while road side Travellers are living in terrible conditions without access to toilets and electricity.

I am very doubtful that my local council will build these new sites, I have tried to speak to my council about services they offer for Travellers such as getting a site build but with no reply. I have written many letters asking but never had a reply.

I think we should have the right to live on sites if we want to, I hope you will put pressure on the councils to build these sites and ensure they make Travellers in their borough aware of the plans.

Thank you

11
8th December 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am a Irish Traveller living on a site in Hackney. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. So I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan.

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built because this is what we badly need. We have been living in caravans all our lives. I have lived in Hackney for the past 21 years. I have 9 children and they have all grown up living in caravans. 3 of my children are now married with their own children and I have a daughter who will be getting married next year. There are no pitches for my children to move onto. They want to stay on sites because this is the only life they have ever know. They want to stay with their own community. But because there are no pitches to move to their only choice is to live in camps on the side of the road. They don't want to do this because it is a very hard life. They will have no water, no toilets and it's very hard for children to go to school because they are constantly moved.

19 new pitches will not be enough for the Travellers in Hackney. The biggest majority of Travellers growing up in Hackney are doubled up with the parents or have been forced to move onto the side of the road where they have no proper facilities. I think that with all the families on the waiting list and all the young couples needing somewhere to live we will need more like 60 new pitches.

Please can you take this seriously because we desperately need new pitches.

Yours sincerely

12
15th December 2009

Dear Mayor Boris Johnson

I am an English Romany Gypsy and I am the licensee of a pitch on the council run site in Newham. I am a young married woman with 4 children

I am writing about the London Plan Section 3.9 on new pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in London

We want need more pitches in London so it is good that there may be some But for Newham the figure is 17 and that is not enough Even on our site now there are over 20 children growing up. And that is just our site and does not count Gypsies or Travellers in houses in Newham who want to get on sites.

I travelled around for most of my life with my family. When I got the pitch here 2 years ago it was a big relief for me and we were so pleased and happy, But I worry now for my children that they will be made to go into houses when they have their own families which is not that far along the line. I can't think how they would be able to live in a house after living the life we do as Travellers. If I had to now into a house the family would suffer a lot whereas now they feel safe, they go to school with other children on the site and have friends there too. And they come back to the site where their family and cousins are and they feel confident. In houses with the way they have to live it causes problems.

Most families have relatives on council sites but there is not enough room for us all due to overcrowding so some are forced to take a house as there is no other choice.

Thank you for reading my letter

13
12th January 2010

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in Edgware

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built as I am currently living in a house as there are no sites in this borough. I have lived in a house almost all my life as there has always been a shortage on sites. I would prefer to live in a site but at the moment the only thing getting me by is other Travellers in my area. There are so many Travellers living in the streets around me. I have 4 children and 10 grandchildren and they visit me a lot. I think it's very important they grow to understand their culture. I travel in the summertime in my trailer, staying in caravan parks. My older children come with and bring their kids; they don't like their children staying in the house over the summer holidays.

I don't think 538 new pitches will be enough, I know of over 100 Travellers living around me that would prefer to live in a site. I hope you will raise the number of pitches number because more are definitely needed. Travellers are living in houses and our culture is slowly dying.

I was told you plan on giving these new pitches to families living on sites and I hope you will change this. Travellers in houses need to be offered the pitches as they are most in need. I know the council do not acknowledge the Travellers in our area so will not build these pitches unless they are pressured. My family had tried to write to the council and ask what they plan to do for Travellers but they have never replied.

I hope you will support us and get this done for us.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

14
8th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am a Traveller living in Haringey. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

So I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built

I live on a Traveller site in Haringey and live there with my 4 children. I have lived on this site for 24 years.

My children are getting older, I have 2 children who are married with children of their own and have nowhere to go. There is not enough room on the site to accommodate them. My children do not know any other way of life and if they are forced into houses they would become isolated and be away from their extended family. They would lose their identity and their culture.

I do not think 538 new pitches in London will be enough because there are a lot more Traveller families living in London who are being forced into houses as there are not enough sites. There is no way that 25 new pitches in Haringey is enough, there is well over 400 Travellers living in Haringey, the 2 sites in Haringey are already overcrowded and there are a lot of Travellers who are living in houses in very poor conditions which has a huge effect on their mental health. They are being moved around from house to house because most of them are living in private rented properties and have no secure tenancies and do not have their extended family around them. I do not want my children being forced to live in a house.

Though I live on a site, I think what the Mayor is saying about priority should be given to Travellers living on sites, should also be given to Travellers living in houses because they also need to have the opportunity to live on a site as the only reason they are in houses is because there is not enough sites and they have had no choice but to live in a house.

Thank you for reading this letter and I am very happy to hear that you have put the needs of Travellers in your plan but there needs to be a lot more pitches than 538.

15

8th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living on a Council site in Haringey. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites. So I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built. I used to live in camps and travel with my family which was fine but this got stopped and we couldn't travel anymore. Now I live in a council site in Haringey where I have lived there for 22 years. I am very worried about my children's future. We are only allowed one caravan in each plot on our site and now my children are grown up they have no where to go. I have a daughter who is now 18, she will be getting married soon and she has nowhere to go. She cannot stay on my pitch because she won't be allowed and she cannot travel. My teenage son is in the same situation. Their only choice is to be forced into houses. This will be impossible for them to cope with because they have lived in caravans all their lives. We are not used to being caged in and separated from our people. I had to live in a house for a while and all the family couldn't cope with it. It made us very depressed and we stayed out of the house all day because we found it so difficult. I feel very sorry for any Travellers who are forced into houses because I know how it feels.

We want to keep our culture and way of life which we are used to for hundreds of years. When we are separated by being put into houses it makes us feel very vulnerable and frightened because we are used to one another's support and guidance. Families who are forced to live in houses are terrified about how this will affect themselves and their children.

I don't think that 538 new pitches will be enough for all the Travellers in London who need a pitch. Haringey has been given 25 new pitches but this won't be enough. This will only be enough for the families on the sites who need new pitches, it won't cover those who are in

houses. On our site which is 6 pitches there are 16 children and young people under 25 at the moment who will need new pitches in the future. We had another site in Woodgreen which the Council closed down 5 years ago and the Council didn't replace any of the 12 pitches.

You say that new pitches should be given to Travellers already living on sites. This will be good for me and my family but I do feel sorry for the ones who have been forced into houses. Hopefully this will be sorted out in the future so that everyone who needs a pitch should get one.

We are grateful for the progress so far because we didn't hear this news about new sites before. This is a very good thing for the Travelling community and it gives me some hope for the future.

Thank you very much

Yours sincerely

16
8th December 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am a Traveller living in Dagenham. I am writing to tell you what I think of the London Plan 3.9 Gypsies and Travellers.

I think we need sites built because we are losing our tradition and our culture. I have been living in a house for 16 years since I was a child, and I would still prefer to be in a site. It is not the same as Travelling but it is the next best thing. I haven't settled in a house, I would still prefer to be living on a site. Even when we were living in the house I still used to go travelling and visit family and friends on sites. After my baby was born I moved onto a site, but I was told that I couldn't stay there because there wasn't a vacant plot. There were people on a waiting list for plots for 4 or 5 years and I had to move back into a house.

I am 24 now and have lived in a house since I was 8 years old but I have never settled in the house, I wouldn't class the house as my home. It is harder for Travellers in houses. We are told that we can't travel any more because it's illegal to stop on the side of the road, but no sites are being built. When we try and get onto a site we are told there are not plots available so you can't stay there. We are not accepted in the houses. They are trying to make us settled but we are still not accepted. We are one of the only cultures that are still not accepted and we suffer from a lot of racism.

I see that you say that the new pitches should be given first to Travellers already living on sites. I don't think one should be put in front of the other. Travellers in houses are worse off in every way because we are more isolated. We have less advice, there are less people understanding the way we live and we have less options in life. If priority for new pitches is given to those who are already on sites then those of us in houses will be worse off more. We are in houses because we have no choice. We want to be on sites but we can't be so it is not fair if we lose out because of this.

It would be better for us and for the Council if we had more sites. This is because when we live in houses they complain that there are too many crowds of people at the house, but it is our way to have family around us. In sites we have all the one belief and family and children and this is not an issue.

538 new pitches across London will not be enough for all the Travellers who want to live on sites. I think that this number has come from those who are living on sites and those families connected to the sites, but there are many Travellers in houses who haven't had their voice heard and needs have been forgotten.

Travellers believe that you are good man and if you have any compassion you will try and do something as the Mayor of London. Please can you make the sure that the councils do build these new pitches, especially Newham.

Yours sincerely

17
2nd December 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am writing to tell you what I think of the London plan. I am an Irish Traveller living in a flat In Hackney. I have three children. Two of my children were born when I was living on unauthorised camps. In Hackney the camps were being closed up and we had nowhere to go. All my family live on the sites in Hackney but none of them had any room for us so I had to move into temporary accommodation and then I got the flat that I now live in. I find it very hard having to live in a flat. The children have no outside space which they were used to as this is part of Travellers culture to be outdoors a lot. I spend most of my time on the sites during the day and only go back to the flat at night because I feel isolated in the flat and find it hard to cope being away from my family and my children want to be on the site with their cousins. I desperately want to live on site because this is our culture and way of life. This is the way we lived for generations it is in our blood. Being forced to live in houses and flats is taking the Traveller culture away from us. I want my children to grow up living the Traveller culture the way that they are supposed to.

I see that the number of new pitches for Hackney is 19. This will not be enough for all the Traveller families in Hackney who want to live on sites like me. The families who were living on unauthorised camps with me are all in the same situation. We have children and we are stuck in flats and houses. We feel trapped and isolated and have no hope for the younger generation growing up because there are just not enough pitches. Even if Hackney did build the 19 new pitches there would not be enough as there are more families than this on the waiting list for pitches and every year the Traveller community is growing and every year there are more young families looking for a pitch to live on. They are finding money and space for in Hackney new houses and flats but they are forgetting about the Travellers needs. If new sites are not built soon then families are going to start moving back onto camps because we cannot live in flats and houses any longer.

It says in the London plan that the councils should be giving the new pitches to families who are already on sites. I am not happy with this one bit because I was living in caravans for much of my life and was forced to live in a flat. I would like to be on a site but I have no choice. Most of the people who are doubling up on pitches are young boys and girls but those who have children like myself have had no choice but to move into a flat or house. I have been on the Hackney waiting list for a pitch for the past 9 years. Everyone should have the same equal rights and equal chance of getting a pitch whether you are in on a site or a house. If this is the way it is going you are going to get a lot more families overcrowding on pitches. The family on the list the longest should have the first priority.

I feel very strongly not just for me but for all the Traveller families who are desperately waiting for new sites. I would be willing to come and speak about this at the examination in public.

Yours sincerely

18
10th November 2009

Dear Boris Johnson

I am writing to you as a member of the Gypsy and Traveller community and to let you know my views on the London plan's point 3.9 which refers to Gypsies & Travellers and how I think it will impact on my family. I am a Romany Gypsy and live on a local Authority site in the London Borough of Newham and a mother of a teenager who will be in the not too distant future looking for some where to live. This is the case throughout our site and would be across London for Gypsies and Travellers, as the extended family would all like their children to have a pitch on their site or on a site nearby as this is our culture.

Newham's target for new pitch's is just 17. Given that there are 23 young people just on our site, and this number is rising as I write this letter to you, who would at some point in the near future be hoping for a pitch to live on. Already extended family members have had to go in to housing as there is a scarcity of pitch's across London on the whole and with past site closures in London. An example is the closure of the Enfield site which meant that some residents who where of extended family moved on to our site as they where forced to leave Enfield with out the borough providing any alterative for those families other than bricks and mortar.

I can't stress how important it is to realise that 538 new pitch's across London is really a small amount of provision. Given that this number was originally 811 and was reduced, I fear that even that 538 number could be dramatically reduced further if some boroughs find their own reasons not to build new pitch's as some are all ready stating.

Waiting for these pitch's to actually start being built is going to seem like forever to those Gypsies and Travellers who are in desperate need and have to face going in to housing and the hidden impact of isolation, discrimination and health problems that most Gypsies and Traveller face when forced with no alternative.

Others who feel very strongly that they can't face bricks and mortar as an option will back to travelling on the roads and go with out amenities such running water, electricity and poor access to education and services.

I also think it is very unfair that priority to these new pitches are given to those Gypsies and Travellers who are all ready on sites with extended family and are on the site waiting lists, whilst others who are living in a house and are desperate to come out are not given the same priority.

I would be happy to express my views at the Evidence in Public as a member of the travelling community.

19
15th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in Haringey. I am 17 years old.

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches but there are just a few things I would you to consider when making your final decision.

I recently got married and am currently living on the side of the road as my husband has never lived in a house and feels he will never cope. He has type1 diabetes and needs constant care. His family live on a site but have no room for us and my family live in a house and have no room for us. I recently found out I was pregnant and am scared about coping without the support from my family.

It's very difficult living on the road side; we have no water, toilets, and showers. We are abused daily but settled people as they don't understand we have nowhere else to go.

I need a site so I can get registered at doctors, Hospitals etc but more importantly so I can be around people to support me.

I understand you have a lot to deal with but I hope you will see this a priority and ensure all council build these pitches, we really need them. It is not fair we are being forced to live in houses.

Thank you

20
7th January 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am a Traveller women living in a council house in Newham. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. So I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan.

I think it is very good idea that you are trying to get more pitches built. I have 3 daughters who will be getting married and they will need sites to stay on. I would like to see a site built in Newham. I have been living in houses for the past 9 or 10 years but I want to be on site because this way of life is where I came from. I have tried living a settled way of life but I feel I can't fit in. I have suffered a lot from depression since being in the house and I want a better life for my children. I want them to be reared the way I was, to know their culture, to be proud of it so they don't feel ashamed of who they are. I did approach the council many years ago and asked them if I could put my name on the waiting list for the Caravan site and they told me that they did not know what I was on about.

I support a lot of the Travelling women in Newham who are in houses but would love to have sites. Our children need to mix with their own community and as for me, I am rearing my children on my own. I have a lot of health problems and it would benefit me and my girls to be on a site where I would get the support and help from my family.

538 new pitches in will not be enough for all the Travellers who need sites in London. There are a lot of Traveller families in houses who haven't had their voices heard and who are hidden and who have been forgotten about. I try to be a voice for the Traveller community but this is difficult when it feels like you are knocking at a door that won't open. As young Travelling women, rearing 3 daughters on my own I would feel a lot less stressed living on site and I would feel that I could be myself. We want the right to live our culture and way of life, we want our culture to be recognised and respected so that we can be part of London's multi-cultural community.

I attend the London Gypsy and Traveller Forum which meets in the city hall as you know. I try my best to go to every meeting. The only support we do have in Newham is the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit. I am asking you to recognise our needs as an ethnic minority and to take all of this into consideration.

Yours sincerely

21
8th January 2009

Dear Mr Johnson

I am an English Romany Gypsy and I am living at present on my sisters pitch in Newham as I have nowhere else to go.

With my family I moved around London a lot when I was a bit younger. We are real Londoners and proud to be so. We think it is good to be London Gypsies and part of the London culture which is becoming so well known.

Mr Johnson I had to go and live in flats on estates. I want to let you know how awful it was. I was the only Gypsy and we were very victimised and bullied. They called us terrible things and it was a very hard time for us. This is not going to stop overnight but perhaps if more sites were built alongside new housing developments then all the neighbours would know each other and we would all get in together.

Everyone should be treated as equal. As Travellers we respect all groups but we don't feel we get the respect we are due. If we are treated with respect we do well and our kids get on well at school and will contribute to society. There are many more Travellers around than perhaps you realise

All Travellers in a borough should be given a fair go at the waiting list not just those who do live on caravan sites now. Please give all a fair crack at the whip

Yours

22
8th December 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I have heard about the London Plan and I am writing to tell you my views. I am an Irish Traveller and I live on a council site in Hackney. In section 3.9 it talks about councils building more sites for Travellers. I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built.

I have been living on a site in Hackney for the past 15 years. I have 11 children and all my family was reared there. They have grown up living in caravans but when they got married

and had their own children they had to leave the site because the Council wouldn't let them stay because we had no room on our pitch. They have been forced to go into houses and this has been very difficult for them because they can't cope in a house. There has been a lot of falling out with the husbands and wives because they are not used to being in houses and flats and this causes a lot of stress because they have always been used to caravans. On sites Travellers always support each other; there is always someone to help with babysitting. In the houses this doesn't happen and the families are left very isolated and they end up coming back to the site. This is the reason why families go back to the old traditions and move into caravans and live on the side of the road. This is a terrible life because Travellers are moved on constantly and have no right facilities. Children get very little schooling. The younger generation of Travellers are in a no-win situation.

19 new pitches will not be enough for Hackney because all the Travellers have large families. I have 11 children who will all need new pitches. I have 6 married already and they all have children. The stress of being in houses is breaking up the marriages.

I see that you say that Travellers living on sites should get the new pitches first. I think that the ones in the houses should get as much fair play as those on sites. Families in houses have been on the list waiting for a pitch for years because there are no pitches for them to move onto. They have no choice but to live in houses

We really hope that you listen to the needs of our community

Thank you

Yours sincerely

23
7th January 2010

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am a teenage girl from the Travelling community and I am writing to explain why I think sites are needed. We feel like prisoners living in houses because we feel we are different and we are not accepted for who we are. On sites we have a lot in common, we have the same culture, we have the same beliefs. I have been living in a house since I was 2 years old but we still go travelling every summer and I love this. We love being in Trailers, all my family are still living in caravans and this is what we are used to, living with our families and living in caravans. Even though I have lived in a house nearly all my life, I still feel that I belong in a caravan and on a site with my family. We have been moved from house to house and have never had a proper place to call home. For my future I would love to see all of us living together on a site, like we have wanted all our lives. I think the younger generation of Travellers are forgetting their culture, and the houses are making us forget our culture and our religion. We are trying to live where we don't belong and we feel we don't fit in and we are not accepted for who we are. On sites we don't feel like we are in fear, we are not afraid to be alone and we belong there.

I see that the London plan says that new pitches should be given first to Travellers already living on sites. I don't agree with this. The only reason why we are in houses is because we don't have a site to move into. We asked for a site and Newham Council laughed at the idea years ago. I don't think it is right that Travellers already in sites should be given first priority because they are already in sites and they still have their culture. We are stuck in houses and this is not fair. If we had the chance to live on a site we would be there.

We need someone in Newham and Dagenham fighting for the Travelling community, in the Council and in the schools. The only one we have on our behalf is Anne –Marie O'Brien who volunteers with the London Gypsy and Traveller unit and tells us what is going on. Please if you read this letter, can you take into consideration that this is a young Traveller girl talking from her heart. We need new sites urgently and please can you make sure the Councils do built these new sites as soon as possible to take us out of our misery. You are the only one who we can turn to now.

Yours sincerely

24
17th November 2009

Dear Boris

RE London Plan Replacement Section 3.9

I am a Traveller living in a house I rent, in London.

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built. But 538 is not enough. Travellers have big families. In Enfield the Council closed the site about 10 years ago and didn't build any new pitches and there are many Traveller families round here who are desperate to live on a site.

I need a site because I was all my life Travelling. All my family were all their life travelling we were brought up on the road. I have been in a house for the past 6 or 7 years. Houses don't agree with us it affects our health. We have always been used to being out in the open, we are not used to being in the houses. It gives us a lot of pressure and stress being in a house because we are just not used to it. We would prefer to get a site and to rear our children up in our own way of life.

I have 6 sons and 7 daughters all living in the Enfield and nearby. They all want to be living on sites. The 5 pitches that Enfield are meant to build would not even be enough for my own family and there are more than 20 more families living nearby.

When young Travellers in London get married they are mostly made to live in a house as there is no pitch for them to go to. This really affects them in a lot of ways. Travellers are used to visiting each other all the time. Houses makes people very isolated and causes people to get depressed especially the women because they are left at home with children without their families around them. And the children suffer too because they don't know how they are. We urgently need new sites for our community. 538 across London will not be enough because Travelling people have large growing families.

We see that you say that families already on sites should be given the new pitches before families in houses. We don't think this is fair. A lot of families are in houses because they have no choice. They would love to be on sites but haven't been able to get a pitch. We think that everyone whether they are on sites or in houses should have the same chance of getting a pitch

I would like to thank you for thinking about our need for new sites. It would make us very happy if we could get onto a site. It would be like a new life to us and our families.

Yours sincerely

25
21st October 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am writing on behalf of my family to tell you my views on the London Plan policy 3.9 Gypsies and Travellers. I see that the plan says there should be 538 new pitches across London. We think it's very good that the Mayor recognises that there is a great need for new pitches but I really believe that this a very small number compared with the numbers of new pitches that are really needed for the young and old who are desperate to get on to sites.

There are many Traveller families in houses against their own wishes because they have no choice as there aren't enough sites. There are families living on the side of the road on unauthorised camps who don't want to live in houses and have nowhere to go because sites are full up, and there are other families on sites but overcrowded. There are young couples who have lived in caravans all their lives but can't get new pitches because there are none available. There are some boroughs for example Enfield where my daughter lives are being told to build very few pitches when we know that there are large numbers of Traveller families living in the borough in houses against their wishes.

You say that Travellers already in sites should be given more priority than the ones in houses or on camps. If given a choice the majority of the Travellers wouldn't be in the houses. They are only there because they have no choice because there aren't enough sites to move onto. I strongly disagree with this because I believe that this is not fair. The needs of all Travellers whether they are in houses or on sites or camps should be recognised all be given an equal chance of getting any new pitches.

Yours sincerely

26
10th January 2010

Dear Mr Johnson

I am writing to you in regards to the London Plan.

I am a member of the Irish travelling community and although I was extremely pleased that each borough had been given pitch targets I am also extremely anxious that it's still not enough and I am aware that those numbers will fall due to various factors eg Hackney are unable to find suitable land to build new sites upon and are weighing up the prospect of the overcrowding of houses and the need to build more houses. Although I can completely sympathise that they are not easy decisions to make, there are more solutions than one.

In the London Plan you expressed your views that the need for travellers living in caravans were to be put first when building new sites: to me that's just like saying if we all go back out on the road that our needs would be addressed more urgently. I am number 25 on Hackney's site waiting list and to my knowledge most of the other 24 are also in council housing. So were the new pitches to be built I don't believe many of us on the list would benefit. Those already in trailers will surely come first.

There are thousands of travelling families in council housing that want to be back in sites and instead of looking for land for apartments blocks or housing why not if appropriate with the surroundings build more sites and free all those badly needed council houses and everybody's happy. Is it not a possibility to be looked at?

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely

Ps At the Evidence in public I hear that you may invite members of the travelling community to speak. I would be willing to come and tell you my story and speak on behalf of other travellers less able to do so.

27

18th December 2009

Dear Mayor Boris Johnson

I have heard you are telling councils to build more Travellers pitches.

I want to tell you about myself. I was born and raised on the council run Travellers site in Haringey. I lived there all my life. But when I got married I had to move into a flat because there was no room for me and my new family in the site. My husbands family lived on council sites in Ireland but when he came here 10 years ago there were no pitched so he had to go into a house.

You have said that 25 should be built in Haringey but even I know more than 25 families with children who will need pitches in the next 15 year and need them now even. So 25 is not enough. I believe more pressure from you should be put on Haringey who do not even have a waiting list and are not following a proper process and they should see that there is a need for more pitches

When I got married and went onto a house I just could not cope with it. And for my son, I do not want him to lose his culture as a Traveller just as you would not want your own children to lose the culture you come from. I have seen you talking about all the cultures in London and ask you to make sure that our culture is not lost as I am sure you will agree.

You have said there should be priority given to those on sites but that's not fair. The ones from houses are there because they were made to go there. It will cause trouble in families because how will you choose and it is not a fair process

I am also sending with this letter a copy of the letter I have sent to Haringey and my councillor so you can see the problem for yourself

Thank you for reading my letter

28

2nd November 2009

Dear Boris Johnson

We are writing to you about the **New Pitches for Travellers in London the London Plan**. We were happy to hear about this

We have heard you did a plan for new pitches and as well in our council Greenwich

We are a Traveller family we live in a council house. I had to live in this house because my family grew too big and so we were thrown off a council site in Hackney for overcrowding 15 years ago and since then we are trying to get our names down for a pitch in the site in Greenwich and in Hackney where we have relatives.

Its been hard to bring up children here for me. I am still not used to living in a house all this time. My health has suffered badly without my family around me and its too hard living alone

without them. Even now I am desperate to get out of here and back to the life I was brought up in and where my children can be who they are instead of hiding who they are.

We have trouble with our local council trying to get our name on the list for pitches. They don't have a list so we can never get a way in. In Hackney they told us we have to live there to get on the list but I did live there and when we were evicted off the only place I could get was on Greenwich.

We don't think its right that you are saying in your London Plan that Travellers in caravans on sites should have first call on a pitch. We are only in a house because we were forced into it .There aren't enough pitches to go round. We ask you to come up with a more fair way to do this. Please can you write to councils telling them to get proper waiting lists so it's fair.

Travellers need more pitches to live and more be safe and more healthy. We hope this letter helps you understand more about us.

Thank you

29
21st October 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I have seen the Mayor's new London Plan and writing to tell you what I think about policy 3.9 Gypsies and Travellers.

I am an Irish Traveller and I am desperate to be living on a caravan site. I am very please that the Mayor is taking notice that there is a great need for new pitches. I have been 5 years in a house in Enfield because I had no choice as there was no caravan site for me to move onto. I have 6 children including one son with special needs. I feel very isolated living in a house and cut off from other Travellers as I do not have the support from my community. It is my culture to be living in caravans and I feel I have no choice but to stay in the house and my children also desperately want to be on a site because they also want to keep their culture and way of life.

I see that the number for new pitches in Enfield in 5. I know that there are large numbers of Traveller families living in Enfield in houses and there is a really desperate need for way more new pitches than this. This is the same for most other London boroughs.

I strongly disagree that Travellers already on sites should be given more priority that families like myself who are in house because we have no choice. Whether you live on a site or a house we all have the same need for any new pitches that are built.

Yours sincerely

30
5th January 2010

Dear Mayor Boris Johnson

LONDON PLAN TRAVELLERS SITES 3.9

We are writing to you about the new Travellers sites for London.

We want to say that we hope you can make sure that the councils build them. Some councils don't realise that there are many Gypsies and Travellers living in their borough in houses and

flats. You will find that most of these people were born on sites of one kind or another but there is not enough space on sites once they get married so they have no option but to go to a house. For a lot of families, living in a house is too hard for them and they can't cope with the life and being so away from their families and it leads to a lot of difficulties for them and for the councils

You say that those people who live on sites should have first choice to be considered for pitches, if they are built. This is not fair because of all the families who were forced to leave pitches due to overcrowding.

We have had a hard time ourselves. We have a young family and we were made to leave a site run by the council due to overcrowding. We have been able to get a temporary tenancy in a house and have decided that we will get a permanent one once it comes up. For us, that is going to be the answer for our family. But for many families it is just a terrible isolation and anxiety and brings problems.

Gypsies and Travellers are used to a life in Trailers and we get on best as large families when its like that. We ask you to make sure there are more sites provided in London.

Thank you for reading this letter

31

8th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in Hackney. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. So I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built. I have lived in Hackney myself for 25 years. I have 11 Children in my family and 40 grandchildren. All my family have grown up in Hackney. I have lived on a site in Hackney for the past 16 years but before that we were living on unauthorised camps moving around. We used to get a week here or there and we did our best to get the children to school so that they would have some education as we didn't get this ourselves. When my children got married there were no pitches for them to move on. They couldn't stay on my pitch because there was not enough room so they had to move back on to unauthorised camps or they have been forced to go into flats. 4 of my children have had to move into flats or houses. What they really wanted was to move onto a site and keep living in the way they grew up, but they had no choice because they couldn't stay on camps because they were constantly moved around.

I don't think 19 new pitches in Hackney will be enough for all of the Traveller families who are waiting for a pitch. There are a lot more than 19 families on the list and more young couples getting married and having their own families. I don't think that 538 will be enough and across all of London, but if they did go ahead with these new pitches it would be a very good start.

I see that you are saying that new pitches should be given to Travellers living on sites before families living in houses. The families have gone into houses because they have no choice. They would like to be on sites but there is no room for them. If this goes ahead then it will cause overcrowding on pitches and this will not help to anyone.

I hope you look into our needs deeply

Yours sincerely

Dear Mayor Boris Johnson

London Plan new Pitches Section 3,9

I am an English Romany Gypsy and I am the licensee of a pitch on the council run site in Newham. I have boys of 19 and 23 living with me. They are not even on the council waiting list because Newham has no waiting list so their future is a big worry to me. I also have a daughter of 29. She has tried living in a house with her own family but she just can't do it. It affects her too much so she travels around with her family. This is very hard for Travellers these days as there are not stopping places, I would love her to get a pitch where she can lead a Traveller life but stay in the same place.

Believe me, if my children had to move full time into houses it would be terrible. When I went to live in a house some years ago it made us all so depressed The 4 walls coming in on you made it like you couldn't breathe. My husband only slept in the house. He got up at crack of dawn and went out and only came back at night because it was making him angry and depressed himself and he needed to get away. We were all much better then when we got a pitch back. We can run our lives better and even we don't need so much help from the council now.

There will need to be more than 538 pitches in London. Even on our site there are a lot of young people and children and that's not counting people in houses. They deserve a fair go at getting pitches because they are made to go into houses or flats they don't ask for it.

Its our way of life and it's not a favour we are asking you. Its for the next generation. We don't want London to have no Travellers living on pitches. Please can you see this too.

Thank you

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am writing to you as member of the Travelling community. I am a Romany Gypsy and although I have for the past 25 years lived on an official site in the London borough of Newham, prior to this I spent most of my life travelling around London of which I stayed for several years in the London borough of Enfield.

I was very surprised to see that Enfield's Pitch target in the London plan is only 5 for the whole borough. I have a large extended family that live in Enfield in houses who are desperate to come out and live on a official site in the borough again. In the late 1960's to the mid 1970's the borough had several large unauthorised camps with up to 20 to 30 families of Romany Gypsies, Welsh Gypsies and Irish Travellers, These temporary stopping places were Pickets Lock, Enfield Riffles and Brimsdown. These are just a few and there were many more.

I stayed on the first official Temporary site in the Borough at Turkey street provided for families waiting for Enfield to build their first official site in September 1974 at Montegue road. I was a resident of this site when it first opened. Unfortunately this site was closed down 9 years ago *without any consultation* due to a regeneration plan and most of my extended family were residents. With the borough offering no alternative other than bricks and mortar many of my elderly relatives passed away within two years of being forced into flats and houses. *Before the council closed the site down, they just let the pitches stay empty and get*

trashed if someone left, even though there were plenty of people wanting a pitch. The last family who stuck it out, got a solicitor and in the end they got a lot of money to leave.

Enfield used to be called a Gypsy Borough like Bromley is but they got rid of us or pretend we don't exist, which isn't right or fair. Enfield should build at least as many pitches as they closed down which is 15.

34

7th January 2010

Dear Boris Johnson,

I move around Haringey, Enfield, and Waltham Forest in temporary accommodation. I have given my mother's address because that is secure and I often stay with her. I am an Irish Traveller and London has been my home for all my life, moving around on the roadside and sometimes going up and down the country looking for work.

I and my family moved onto Wood Green site in Haringey in 1999, and we moved off Wood Green in September 2003. The reason we moved off was that there were a lot of problems with squatters and intimidation, and the site management and police wouldn't deal with these problems. In the end I moved off because we couldn't live in peace, we couldn't bring up our children properly and we were looking at bad things that we didn't want anything to do with. We told the manager and the police what was going on and the council knew the main trouble makers but nothing was done.

At the same time – starting in 2000, Haringey Council started offering money to us to give up our licences because of some development plans in the area. The first time we were offered £20,000 each. We were brought into separate meetings with a lawyer and the site manager which we couldn't tell each other about and I was called Mr X for the record they kept.

I refused the money and said I wanted them to give me land or sort the site out– they said they'd look for it – but nothing came of it and talk about money went on for 3 years. Then in 2003 I left, because the problems were too much, it was like living in a war zone. In 2004 the site was closed down. They said it was because of anti-social behaviour but everybody was given £30,300 + £4,500 for their caravans. 90% of the Wood Green site residents went to Basildon where they bought land with the money. The money in cheques was only released by Haringey to set up a new home. The new homes were land in Basildon which didn't have planning permission but Haringey spoke to the landowners and then released the money and was ok about that. Those people are now being evicted because of no planning permission. My cousin is one of them, so he is homeless and has lost all the money.

This shows to how a Council will do anything to get rid of Travellers. It took only three weeks to get everybody off. Some of the people who got the money were only on there a couple of years and were the ones who caused the trouble so it seems like they were being paid to cause trouble. I had kept in contact with the site manager and had been good tenants but we got nothing. If the Mayor wants Borough's to build sites he has to be very strict and make sure they actually do it. This is very important and the Councils have to start now as we've been homeless for a long time.

We now have to live in houses and we are in and out of private rented property, always on the move nowhere to call home and sometimes we have to split the family. I disagree with the Mayor – where the plan says that Travellers on sites have more needs than Travellers in houses. We have more needs, as Travellers on sites are lucky to be there, and what about the Travellers on the roadside?

I can't stand living in a house its like being in a prison, it tears us apart. Your neighbours don't want you there and we don't want to be there. We have 6 children, 2 are still at school- we try to keep them at the same school even when we have to move house(this is sometimes every 6 months) but we have to drive them all over the place to keep them at the same school, because we can't get a permanent home.

I have 2 daughters and 2 sons who are married and with kids and scattered living in these private rented places. We need a site to keep the family together. Our family alone at this moment need 5 pitches. We would live in any Borough in North and East London as long as it is healthy land. We are happy to live near houses, that stands to reason in London..

If the Mayor's research said that 811 pitches are needed then that is what should be built. I think there are way more than 811 Traveller families in London who are desperate to get a site and I don't understand where the idea of 538 pitches came from.

I am willing to speak at the examination to the public.

35

12th January 2010

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in Waltham Forest

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built as my family would like to live in a site. I know you will have received a lot of letters explaining why Travellers need more pitches and the effects of Travellers being forced into houses. There are some issues I would like to raise which are being affected due to not enough sites being available for Gypsies and Travellers. Education is one of these issues. So many Travellers have no choice but to live on the side of the road or squat. This is effecting the education of so many young Travellers. Moving schools so often has led to Young Travellers becoming the lowest achievers in education. I think if Travellers could settle in sites then their children could go to school and get a real education.

Having nowhere to live creates so many issues for Travellers- our health and life expectancy is much lower than the settled community, poor education achievement and discrimination from the settled community. I believe that a lot of the issues we faced could be solved if we have proper sites to live on.

At the moment Travellers are a hidden community, many councils are not even aware and don't make the effort to get to know how many Travellers are living in their borough.

I am currently living in Waltham Forest. There is one Travellers site in my borough but no management from the council. I have called to see how I could get a pitch on this site but there isn't even a waiting list. I was told the site used to be managed by the council but not currently. I do not know who to talk to about this.

I am very doubtful the council will build any new sites in Waltham Forest unless they are made do so, if they are build then I am wondering if an allocations procedure will be put in place and managed.

I hope you will listen to our views and make sure that the new sites are built

Thank you

36

8th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am a Traveller living in Haringey.

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

So I am writing to tell you what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built.

I live with my mother in a house but I would really like to be on a site. I have to stay in the house to look after my mother because she is elderly. I feel very isolated in the house. My daughter and grandchildren also live in the house with me. I am very worried about the children having to be raised up in a house. They need to be with other Travellers, but there are no pitches for any of us to live on. We really need a site, not just for me but for the young generation of Travellers.

I really hope that you listen to us and help us

Thank you very much

37

11th January 2010

Dear Boris

I am a Traveller living in London Borough of Hackney

I have heard about your London Plan. I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built. I am living in a house with my 5 kids and feel very isolated from my family. I moved into a house 6 years ago after all my life as I was living on the side of the road, we were getting moved on so much and it was affecting the health and education of my children. When I first moved into a house I struggled to cope, I was very depressed as I was not used to being closed in. I had never lived in a house before; I was used to living outside and around all my family. My kids struggled, even though a caravan is a lot smaller they felt closed in. They had no choice but to sit in as going outside was dangerous. On a site or camp we can leave our young children out and run around as everyone is keeping an eye on them, It has taken a long time to let me kids go out alone.

It's not our culture to live in a house and my children are growing like settled children, they hardly know anything about our culture and way of life. I take them to family who live on sites as much as I can but it is not the same. I would like my own pitch.

558 will not be enough for London as there are so many families on the waiting lists, squatting and living in houses as they have no choice.

19 pitches are going to be built in Hackney and I know this will not be enough. There are so many of my relatives on the waiting lists and in houses suffering with depression as they are not happy in houses.

I hope you will apply pressure to Hackney council to make them build these pitches, we need them desperately.

I was told you plan on giving these pitches to families already on sites and I hope you will reconsider. Housed Travellers need to be included in your plan; so many are feeling very isolated and struggling to cope. It's very important our children grow and understand their culture and the only way they will be able to this is by us living in a site with other Travellers.

Thank you for reading my letter,

38

15th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in Havering.

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches, I think this is a very good thing as there are so many Travellers and Gypsies in London in desperate need for a permanent place to stop.

I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

As I said I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built. We need them now more than ever. I am currently living in a house and everyday is a struggle. This is not my culture and not how I was raised to live. I was born and raised in London; I lived on the Tower Hamlets site until my family moved to Bristol for awhile.

I got married when I was 16 and had been travelling around. I became pregnant but even with very little room I had no choice but move into a house so I could get access to the health care. I have epilepsy so need to be able to visit a doctor.

I had no experience living in houses and the thought of moving into a small flat was very depressing for me. I have never mixed with settled people; if I am honest I am a very nervous person. I even fear going to a cash machine by myself. I am so used to having my family near it is so hard to live alone. I have lived in a house for 7 years and everyday I feel more isolated and depressed. I am watching my children grow like settled people and it is breaking my heart. They know nothing about our beautiful culture and this could all be changed if we had a site to pull our trailer onto. I am afraid to leave my children outside as they are treated badly by the settled people. We face so many problems because we live in a house and all these would sort themselves out if we lived in a site with our family. I will never be happy in a house.

I hope you will show your support and follow through in getting these pitches built. The council should feel they need to do this; you are the only person who can do it. Our culture is in your hands, I hope you will take the time to really think it through and help the each council understand this is very important. We need more sites built and we need them very soon.

You mention in the plan, the new pitches built should be given to families already on sites. This is one part I hope you will consider changing. The new pitches should be offered to those on waiting list for sites as they are most desperate. Although the current sites may not be in the best condition, at least those families have somewhere to live and their children are growing and learning what they should.

Thank you for reading my letter and I hope you will help us.

39

18th December 2009

Dear Mayor Boris Johnson

I am writing about your plan to tell councils to build more sites and pitches.

I want to tell you about my story.

Living in houses makes you feel very isolated, smothered and you can't breathe properly.

The children are not having a proper childhood because they live in a house .I feel for them because they are not near their own cousins which they would be if they lived on a site.

They do not have the freedom I had being brought up on camps and sites. I always had my family and friends around me and I always felt good. That's why I feel for my children – they are closed up in a house. When they get out to the sites they are full of joy but when they get back they are bored and feel trapped. They ask me to bring them out every day to the sites.

When they get older they will not know how to communicate with others because they are not used to it because they are brought up in houses. I fear that they will be shy over being reared up in houses and not being reared up on sites and this will not be good for them. They don't understand why they can't be on sites it hurts them to see other children other children living on sites and not them and they say they wish that could be us as well

We are reared as Travellers all our life and for this to happen to people who are used to being out in the open causes a lot of stress and depression and affects young people lives and it is all because of being closed up in 4 walls. A lot of travelling people has fell into terrible depression because of the houses. I do not want to see this happen to my children or any other Traveller, just as you would not want to see such a thing in your own children.

I feel very isolated and sometimes I feel like crying and I do when I get stressed. Is this going to keep going on? Am I going to be left here to become an old woman and that's then too late for me.

I am asking you as a parent yourself to see how I feel in my heart about the future of my children. I need to know where they are going to go and not be left hanging on. Then my heart can be happy because I know my children will be happy and they will be living as Travellers and not just be thrown away from their families. Your family is your life in this world.

I hope you won't forget me and my 5 children. Youngest 3, oldest 16.

Thank you

40

8th January 2009

Dear Mr Johnson

I am writing as an English Romany Gypsy living on the council run Travellers' site in the borough of Newham. I am a young mother with 3 children

We were the ones that were made to move due to the Olympics.

I think it is very good that there are plans for more pitches but will it really ever happen? I don't know if you are aware but Gypsies and Travellers all over London are desperate for pitches. Life is hard for families who don't live on sites due to terrible prejudice and the fact that if you are not brought up in bricks and mortar then you don't get on living in flat or a house. It's like another world and it can make people afraid and children to get bullied. It can cause a lot of trouble for families as often women are left on their own to cope.

I only got my own pitch 2 years ago. My family was all over London Hackney, Whipps Cross Chapel heat, Hammersmith – everywhere. We were unable to stay in one place in rented property as there were many problems – it was not until I was 16 I got onto a site where family were living and that was very important to me then and still is now. For the sake of my children who are surrounded by their family here and are safe its very important to be in your own culture. I am sure that as parent you understand that as well.

Newham council does not even have a proper waiting list for the site here and hasn't had a proper list for years. They have no way of telling how many Travellers want to get on sites as there is no where for people to put their name down so why the figures of 17 pitches has been given to Newham I don't know. On this site alone there are more than that number of children growing up.

I heard there was a survey done to count the number of Travellers needing pitches. Well no one came to see me or my family or my extended family who are in houses and I don't know anyone else who was seen either.

But its very good that something is being done. I would be happy to come and give evidence at the public enquiry as a young mother with a lot of experience under the belt even at my age

Thank you very much for reading this

41

15th December 2009

Dear Boris

I am an Irish Traveller living in Havering.

I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches. As well, I have heard that when the pitches are built they should go first to Travellers living in council sites.

I am writing to say what I think about all this in Section 3.9 of the Plan

I think it is very good that you are trying to get more pitches built as I have been living in a house for the past 7 years. I was forced to move into a house when I married as there were no sites available. However I don't find it very fair you are going to offer these new pitches to families already on sites as people like me will never get a pitch.

I was brought up in the Tower Hamlets site. My family moved to a council site in Bristol, I got married when I was 16 and had nowhere to go. I lived on the site of the road for a couple of years but eventually I had to settle in a house as I became pregnant. This was a very difficult time for me as I had never lived in a house. Every day was a struggle and I became very depressed. Everything is done differently in a house including the way you pay bills. A simple example of this is, we have electricity cards in sites and when they run out we go buy another. In a house you need to set up an account then pay it quarterly or through payment metre. This was confusing for me and I got in to a lot of debt which I am still paying off.

The hardest thing was not being close to my family, I was raised closely to my whole family including extended and when I moved in to a flat I hardly saw them. I no longer had the support I depended on by just having them close by.

I have 2 small children and they nothing about our culture. They are growing up like settled children and I do not want this. We are Irish Travellers, I know it's impossible for us to stop on the side of the road like we used to do so I would like to live in a site so they can get some understanding of our culture. It's important they know their origin.

558 pitches will not be enough for the whole of London but it's a start, these pitches should be offered to those in houses or on the road side as they are in most need.

I live in Havering and I am not confident the local council have much time for the Gypsy and Travelling community which makes me think unless they are MADE they will not build any new pitches. I hope you will support us through this and pressure all local councils into building these pitches.

Thank you

42
7th May 2010

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am writing to you about the London Plan the Minor Alteration on Gypsies and Travellers. I would like to contradict you on your view of saying that sites don't bring Londoners together (paragraph 4) For example here is my story of my experience of our site and what you think you are talking about. You decide.

Our site in Hackney is one of the many sites in London who have been a roaring success. In the beginning our sites started out as a temporary site back in '96. It wasn't very nice to live on it had only one standpipe tap and portaloo toilets but we called it home because it was somewhere to stop and get the kids to school and register with a doctor, it was home to us. At first the surrounding community didn't want to know but it lack of knowledge that stopped them from knowing. Within a year with the help of the London Gypsy and Traveller unit and other various organisations and many meetings, the surrounding community became our firm friends who supported us throughout our long hard fight. We had a big success story on our site and we now have a lovely new site to live on and have all our amenities around us and we're all part of the wider community as well, the church and neighbourhood groups.

When our new site was being built in 2003 we had to move off for a while, while work was being done. When we came back when it was finished all our friends from the surrounding community come out in force to welcome us back. We had the school opposite put 'welcome Home' banners up and all our housed neighbours had banners up too. We had a massive celebration of the opening of the site when Councillor Jessica Crowe opened our site. We had people from all over who helped and supported us: the learning trust, the local TELCO group, the church, the LGTU and everyone we know and who knows us. The chair of the local tenants association spoke at our site opening and he said that in the beginning that things were difficult but now here he was giving a speech and saying how proud he was to have the site as part of their community and how lovely it all was and how lovely it looked.

Our children and our settled children around us are the very best of friends. They have moved from primary school to secondary school together and bonds like that tend not to be broken whether you are a Traveller or not. I believe that Travellers can achieve anything given half the chance. Please give us the chance.

43a

11th January 2010

Dear Boris Johnson,

I move around Lewisham and other south London boroughs in short lease accommodation. I am an Irish Traveller and London has always been my home. My family is in and out of private rented property, and always on the move with nowhere to call home.

I am on the waiting list for a site in Lewisham. The old site has been closed down for nearly a year, and the Council has not built the new site even though they have the planning permission and the government grant. We have no site and no plots in the whole borough. All the Travellers are having to live in houses. The Council now says that they will make a new search for land, but have not said when they will start to look for this land. When we have been to meetings, the Council has no answers to our questions and only say that they'll 'look into it'. They are now calling the waiting list a 'Site Interest List'. I feel that we have been given the 'run around', as they never follow up what is said at meetings and nothing is happening. I cannot understand why they won't build the site which has already been agreed.

I disagree with the Mayor – when he says that Travellers on sites have more needs than Travellers in houses. We have more needs because we cannot live our normal lives. Travellers on sites are lucky to be on them, and what about the Travellers on the roadside?

I can't stand living in a house its like being in a prison, it tears us apart. Houses have no room for our families, children & grandchildren to visit. Your neighbours don't want you there and we don't want to be there. I have 3 children, and try to keep them at the same school even when I have to move house (about every 6 months). Sometimes I'm too far away and the children have to change school, and sometimes they have to wait for places and miss their right to an education. If we had a permanent home on a site, this would not happen to them.

We need a site to keep the family together. As my children grow older and think about starting their own families, they will want to stay near me. This cannot happen in short-term rented housing. We would live in any Borough in South East London as long as it is clean land. We are happy to live near houses, as we know that London is short of land.

If the Mayor wants Boroughs to build sites, then he has to make sure they actually do it. The Councils have to start building now as we've been homeless for a long time.

If the Mayor's research said that 811 pitches are needed then that is what should be built. I think there are more than 811 Traveller families in London who are desperate to get a site and I don't think that 538 pitches will be enough.

I am willing to speak at the examination to the public.

Yours sincerely

43b

25th October 2010

Dear Boris

Re: Replacement London Plan Minor Alteration 3.8i

Thank you for meeting with me and the other Travellers at City Hall last week. I hope that you now have a better idea of why we need a site in Lewisham, and why we need your help to get the Council to build it.

I have written to you before about the need for sites in London and why I think this should be included in the new London Plan. Please can you also make sure that the new Plan at least makes sure that existing sites are kept, as we are losing too many pitches in London. Lewisham have closed their site and have not built a new one, even though they have the planning permission and were given money by the government. They know that there are lots of Travellers living in private rented housing who are on their list and are waiting for a site to be built. When we met with the council officers they promised that they would look for land, but we have heard no more. Neither have they built on the land they already have.

You are our Mayor too, and we Travellers are relying on you. We need you to tell the Boroughs that they must build sites. All that money was spent on the accommodation needs assessment (GTANA) and there is nothing to show for it. Our hopes were raised, and now they will be taken away.

Yours sincerely,

44a

7th January 2010

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am a Traveller living in Barking and Dagenham. I have been placed here in a house by Newham Council. I have heard about your London Plan and that you are asking councils to build more pitches, so I am writing to tell you what I think about Section 3.9 of the Plan.

I have been living London for the past 16 years. I have lived in 5 different houses which were all temporary accommodation under the council and I am still in temporary accommodation. Before this I always lived in caravans. I was born and reared in a caravan and travelled for much of the time. When I moved to London I wanted to live on a site but I had no choice but to go into a house. I was living on an unauthorised camp at that time and then new law came out around 1994 we were getting moved every 24 hours by the police. The police impounded our caravans 3 or 4 different times and in the end I was homeless and I had to find somewhere to live because I had 4 young children at the time. I would have never gone into a house only for that.

Since moving into a house I have suffered very bad with depression. I can't stay in the house on my own. I lost contact with all my family and became isolated away from my family and culture. I feel we have been forced out of a lifestyle that we were used to and have been placed in one where we are not wanted. We didn't realise the world that we were going into. I have put up with terrible racism in the houses like being attacked, abuse outside my door, being called names such as 'pikeys' and 'gypos'. The area that I moved to was very racist. They don't accept our culture because they don't understand it. We get complaints for having family around which is our way of life. We feel are not accepted in houses, we are not comfortable living this way but we are supposed to put up with it.

I would love to live on a site so that I can live my culture the way I was always used to, and to have my family around me and to call it home. These new sites are so badly needed because there are so many other Travellers like me. For us to go forward we need to keep our culture. We want to be proud of our history and our culture and for the young generation growing up to know who they are and to be proud of where they have come from. This has been good for any child. Being forced to live in a way we don't want to, and to suffer the racism that we have suffered is having a very bad effect on our community because people are mixed up, confused and scattered, but we are trying our best to hold on to our culture. We

have a lot to give to the wider community because family and looking after other people is important to us.

I see that the London Plan is saying that new pitches should be given to Travellers already living on sites. I think this is very unfair because we have been forced to go into houses where we don't want to be and now we are being told that we are not priority because we are not staying on a site. I would really love to be on a site but I have had no choice but to be in a house.

538 new pitches across all of London will not be enough. Most Travellers in houses will tell you the same story that I have and want to live on a site. Even my own children who have grown up in a house still desperately want to live on sites.

I feel that I have been treated very unfairly from Newham Council for the past 16 years. I have written to the Mayor of Newham to ask him when the Council will be finding land for these new pitches.

As the Mayor of London you are in the position to change things for Travellers and we would really like to know that you are on our side. I would like for the sites to be built in the near future and this would give me some hope for myself and my family.

Yours sincerely

44b
29th April 2010

Dear Boris Johnson,

I wrote to you in December about the London Plan 3.9. I see that you have now brought out the minor amendment and I am writing to you about this.

I have been 16 years waiting for a council property and I have now been forced onto the bond scheme which is still temporary accommodation. Before this I always lived in caravans. I explained to you in my last letter how I came to be forced to move into a house. I don't agree with what you say about Travellers in houses not needing pitches. In 1994 the government brought in the new law (criminal justice act). Our caravans were taken off us and we were forced into a house. Since then I have fought for a site to be built in my area but I am still waiting. You say there is no evidence that a family like mine needs a pitch to live on. I explained in detail in my last letter how living in a house has affected me and my family. It is not that we don't have a need for a pitch it's that we haven't had any choice to stay living on sites and now you say that our needs don't matter.

For me and my family we desperately want to be considered for a site, to have a stable home. I am pleased to see that you say the sites should be built quickly. Please can you make sure that the councils start building the new sites.

Yours sincerely

45a
19th December 2009

Dear Mr Johnson

I am writing about your plan to build new sites in London and would be pleased if you take my views.

Travellers are forced to live in houses and they don't want to. Myself I have been always living in sites but since I came to London from Ireland 15 years ago I was made to live in a

house because there was no pitch for me. Some of my sisters live on sites and they get on there much better than I do in a house.

Its better on sites because you are surrounded by Travellers and they look after each other. Its very lonely in a house specially with children because they don't see the other Traveller children and it affects them badly because they are Travellers reared and if they are in a house they do not know who they are and where they belong and this can take them badly and cause them to get in trouble more easily because they have not got the support they need from their family around them. I get terrible depression in a house and my health has suffered badly

When I was growing up there was always Travellers around me and helped me if I needed anything We always help each other but my children have not had this since we came to London and it has been hard for me and for them. They don't know who they are

You say that pitches should be given first to those on sites but that is not fair. The ones who have had to live in houses need to get back on sites to start living their proper life again. They are the ones that need the help.

You are the proud Mayor of London and even though I came from Ireland Me and my family are proud to be Londoners too. We ask you to take our culture into account and not let the Traveller way of life disappear. Please can you make the councils build enough pitches for those who need them which is very many and more than the 538 it says in you plan.

Thank you

45b

29th April 2010

Dear Boris,

I wrote to you before about the London plan and I am writing to you again about the minor amendment that you have now brought out. I am living in a house because there are not enough sites and i haven't been able to get a pitch for my family. All my life I lived in caravans with other Travellers around me. I have been in a house for the past 15 years and it has affected me very badly. I was always used to having my family and other Travellers around me. The house is making me ill. I feel very depressed, I feel I am in prison behind walls with no one to talk to. I need to be with my own community because we support each other. Had I known that I was going to be so long in a house I would have moved into a caravan and lived on a camp on the side of the road. I feel we are losing our culture because there are no sites and because we are being forced into houses. My son has just got married and he has nowhere to live. If there were more sites made for the young Travellers they could carry on our Travellers life. We want to stay as Travellers. Moving into houses doesn't change who we are. We are still Travellers and that's what we want to be. We see new houses getting built because people need homes but what's the difference in making sites. We want to have a choice about where we live.

You say that sites make Travellers stay separate from other local people. This is not true, when we are on sites we still mix with the local people. Our children go to local schools, we go to church and mix in with people. At my son's wedding 3 weeks ago there were people who are not Travellers but who we have got to know. Just because we want to keep our culture doesn't mean that we don't mix with other people.

Please can you make sure that more sites are built so that Travellers can get out of the houses and live their lives the way we want to live.

Yours sincerely

46a

December 2009

Dear Boris Johnson,

I am writing about your London Plan and to tell you what I think of the section 3.9 on Gypsies and Travellers. I live on a site in Tower Hamlets and I have been an activist for the last 25 years. I have lived in London for 33 years, 25 of these years I have lived on Eleanor Street site in Tower Hamlets. Before this I travelled with my family all around London and other parts of England. I moved on to the site to get education for my children and they all stayed in school until they were 17.

We are very pleased that you are telling the Councils to build new pitches but we feel that 538 across London will not be enough. It is the Travellers culture to have big families; there can be 7-10 children on each pitch so this is only the tip of the iceberg.

I see that Tower Hamlets has been given 28 new pitches. This will only cover the site alone for the next 5 years and won't be enough for any Travellers who are in houses. I have children who were reared on the site but have had to move into houses due to no vacant pitches and a waiting list of 10 years. They spend most of their time back on the site because they can't stick being in the houses. Travellers feel very insecure living in houses and they get depressed. We worry about them because they might get mental health problems and we worry that the children will lose their cultural roots. The younger generation of Travellers growing up in houses are stuck in limbo, they don't know where they belong. They are reared in one world and have to step out into a different world.

We feel that the younger generation are more aware of the social problems in our society. If there were more sites built for the younger generation of Travellers, I believe that they would be more active members of our communities because they are better educated, they are more integrated, they are more articulate and could do a lot for their own community and the wider community. I believe that both integration and strong cultural identity for all ethnic minorities is the way forward for London's multi-cultural communities.

I see that in the London plan you say that priority should be given to Travellers who are already living on sites. I can't agree to this because although it will go in favour for my children who are on the site with me but will go against my children who are in houses and this will divide my family's opinions and will cause conflict in my family and the wider Traveller community. This is another reason why we need more sites.

I would be willing to come and speak and tell you more about why we need more sites at the examination in public.

Yours sincerely

46b

29th April 2010

Dear Mayor Johnson,

I wrote to you before on the subject of more sites for Gypsies and Travellers and I was amazed that your response was to cut the number of plots to less than half of what we need. I really believe that this is not the way forward as down through the years it has always come to the stage when we are going forward that something like this happens. It has been always seemed that the problem has been passed on from one government to the next when we need more than five hundred plots alone for the children that are brought up on sites at the moment to secure their future not to mind Gypsies living in houses which the majority don't want to be in. To reject what I am saying would be to go back to the old problem of the authorities having to deal with the hassle of moving Gypsies and Travellers

from one borough to the next as some will not live in housing. To take a person or persons from a cultural way of life and put them in limbo is not fair some boroughs have no sites it has not been taken in to consideration that they could build sites in these boroughs and also the boroughs who have a an expectation of 2or 3 plots to be built in my opinion boroughs could spread out the building of sites in there area with each other. I think that the response was not the right approach to the problem more research needs to be done to get the full picture. I wake up every day worrying where my children and grandchildren will end up all we want in life is the same opportunities as every one else to get on in life integrate and contribute to society.

Travelling children are behind in their education as it is and with all the cut backs the effect on the education will be enormous as many need special help because as a community we are way behind in education due to our children being constantly moved around and also due to prejudice and government laws. Not building enough sites will lead to Travellers having to find somewhere to stay. Families will go back to being moved from borough to borough, children will miss out on their education and parents will be prosecuted and criminalised which will result in criminal records which will then affect their chances of employment. The media coverage over the last years shows how big the problem is. It is effecting both the settled and Traveller community which is not fair on both communities. We are a very small minority and we don't want to affect the settled community. All we want is to the same opportunities as anyone else and to have the choice to live our cultural way of life and to contribute to society,

I live on a site but two of my children are married into the settled community and this is the same for some of my neighbours on our site. I don't agree with what you say about sites making Travellers separate. We involve ourselves with things that are happening in our local community. We use our local community centre, our children attend local youth clubs, we are actively involved in our local parish and we have regular residents meetings and meet with the police safer neighbourhoods team and our local councillors. We use all the local services such as schools, doctors, hospitals and community facilities. I myself have been a school governor. We have been involved with local events such as celebrating Gypsy Traveller Roma History month and other events in our parish. We have done this for the last 26 years since the site was opened and we will continue to do so. In fact I find if offensive that you suggest that we don't integrate when we feel we are very much apart of our local community. We class ourselves as Londoners and residents of Tower Hamlets just like everyone else.

As I said in my last letter, i would be pleased to come and speak at the examination in public.

Thank you





London Gypsy and Traveller Unit

6 Westgate Street
London
E8 3RN

www.lgtu.org.uk
info@lgtu.org.uk
Tel 020 8533 2002
Fax 0208 533 7110