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The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

30 April 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Unauthorised Development and Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision

There is a growing challenge in relation to unauthorised development, planning enforcement, and Gypsy and Traveller site provision in the South East of England. This trend is undermining the planning system, exposing weaknesses in enforcement, and damaging community cohesion, particularly in rural areas.

According to the official caravan count, between January 2020 and July 2025 the total number of caravans in South East England has increased by 32%. Over the same period, the number of unauthorised caravans more than doubled to 629, now with almost three-quarters of these on land owned by Travellers.

This suggests a significant change in approach, with many individuals now purchasing land before moving onto it. Reports of large-scale, rapid development on rural and green belt plots are increasing – there were three such incidents in Surrey alone over the Easter weekend 2026. These developments frequently occur outside the normal planning process, with little regard for local infrastructure or environmental constraints. A site in my constituency was subject to the same tactics in 2021 for which the planning enforcement process has still not concluded.

As a result, this tactic has become an effective way to circumvent the planning system, or at least to delay enforcement action. Many of these unauthorised sites result in protracted, costly disputes between Travellers and local authorities, creating ongoing uncertainty and distress for everyone involved.

We want to emphasise that our concern lies not with Gypsy or Traveller communities, but with a system that is failing everyone. For decades, there has been chronic under-provision of authorised sites despite clear evidence of need. This shortage leaves families with no lawful options for accommodation, exposing them to repeated legal disputes and evictions, while existing communities feel powerless and unheard. A fair and effective response must therefore combine robust enforcement with a serious commitment to delivering adequate, well-located, and well-designed authorised sites.

Reports from local authorities and police forces indicate they lack the powers, resources, and

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capacity to address these developments effectively. Without a coordinated national response, there is a real risk of escalating lawlessness, prolonged disputes, and worsening community relations. Confidence in the planning system and in the rule of law is at stake.

We therefore urge you to establish an urgent cross-government task force to support enforcement efforts and identify what powers already exist, and what additional measures may be needed, to tackle this problem. This task force should include HMRC, the Environment Agency, representatives of police forces and local authorities, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It should also engage with Gypsy and Traveller representative organisations to ensure that any proposals are workable, fair, and legal.

The task force should consider what can be done in the following areas:

- Restrictions on the delivery of construction materials and mobile homes to unlawful development sites.
- Fast-tracking court processes for local authorities to serve and enforce injunctions.
- Targeted powers for police and councils to enter and clear unlawful developments, including where the occupier owns the land or cannot be contacted.
- Improved enforcement co-ordination and data-sharing between HMRC, Immigration Enforcement and planning authorities.
- Identifying how technology and AI can enhance planning and enforcement efficiency in light of declining local authority capacity.

As part of this process, the Government should review planning and enforcement powers to ensure loopholes are closed and agencies have the legal tools and resources they need to act swiftly and proportionately. Alongside this, there must be a renewed national commitment to identify and deliver an adequate supply of authorised permanent and transit sites, so that Gypsy and Traveller families have suitable places to live and local communities are not trapped in a cycle of conflict and uncertainty.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the impact this is having on our constituencies and how we can help the Government to address the problem.

Yours sincerely

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