

## HOPE AND DESPAIR

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Hope ...

[The Traveller Movement](#) (TM) recently released [findings](#) that debunk the popular myth that Gypsies and Travellers get special privileges within the planning system. The TM found that major Gypsy site planning applications are 11.6% less likely to be granted than a major housing application, and minor Gypsy site planning applications are 17.8% less likely to be granted than a minor housing application.

These results come from the Department for Communities and Local Government and cover the period from 2010-2015. This statistical evidence demonstrates that Gypsies and Travellers are not favoured in the planning process. Despite such clear evidence, ingrained attitudes are incredibly hard to change, especially when they have such enthusiastic media support, but the circulation of concrete statistics culled from government data can assist in changing these attitudes. The planning process statistics compiled by the TM can help to dispel the fog of myth and rumour that surround Gypsies and Travellers, at least in this one area.

Further, the Equality and Human Rights Commission [reports](#) that '*as little as one square mile of land across all of England would be enough to provide all Gypsy and Traveller families with sufficient authorised sites*'

And despair ...

In August 2015 the Department for Communities and Local Government released a 'Planning policy for traveller sites' Even the title is disrespectful to Travellers – using a lower case 't' and 'g' to spell 'Travellers or Gypsies' shows a lack of respect for, and a denial of, Gypsies' and Travellers' ethnic status as defined in case law (*Gypsies in Commission for Racial Equality v Dutton* [1989] QB 783 and *Irish Travellers in O'Leary v Allied Domecq* 2000). It is unacceptable for a government department to publish a document purporting to promote 'fair and equal treatment of travellers', yet not spell their name correctly throughout.

The document continues to undermine the ethnic status of Gypsies and Travellers by changing the criteria used to identify a Gypsy or Traveller for planning purposes. These ask: whether the individual previously led a nomadic habit of life; why they stopped; and will they resume this lifestyle in the future. This demotes membership of an ethnic group to a 'lifestyle choice', which can be taken up or revoked at will. Membership of an ethnic minority group is not defined by where you live or the lifestyle you lead and the government is confusing the ethnic status of Gypsies and Travellers by introducing irrelevant criteria.