

MAYOR OF LONDON

DJ5101

Appendix 1

Darren Johnson AM
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

Our ref: MGLA150115-6862

Date: 26 FEB 2015

Dear Darren

Thank you for your letter of 15 January about Gypsy and Traveller site provision in London and proposing nine actions for me to consider. Please see my response below to your proposed action points.

Actions:

1. A majority of the Committee believes the GLA should work with the boroughs to commission a London wide update of the GTANA. This would provide the strategic overview necessary to determine the number of new sites London really needs and could support their fairer distribution.

My London Plan (Policy 3.8 of the Revised Minor Alterations to the London Plan, carried forward in the Further Alterations to the London Plan) requires boroughs to ensure that the accommodation requirements of gypsies and travellers are identified and addressed, with sites identified in line with national policy, in coordination with neighbouring boroughs and districts as appropriate. Assessing levels of local need, deciding on the level and location of suitable provision to meet that need and carrying out the necessary consultation with relevant communities and stakeholders is far more effectively done locally. The Plan also reflects national guidance in requiring boroughs to identify, and keep updated a supply of deliverable sites to provide five years' worth of sites against their locally set targets and identify developable sites or broad locations for growth for years 6-10 and where possible, for years 11-15.

2. A majority of the Committee believes that there is a clear need for increased Gypsy and Traveller site provision in London. The GLA has significant land and other assets at its disposal.⁷ Other public bodies in London may also be sitting on surplus land over which the GLA is seeking strategic control.⁸ The GLA should consider releasing some of this land for the purpose of creating a pot of land that could be developed for additional Gypsy and Traveller sites and in particular to support the creation of a pilot toleration site (see below).

I am not currently aware of any suitable opportunities to deliver new pitches on GLA owned land, but the GLA will consider provision for Gypsies and Travellers as part of its land disposal strategy.

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3. In light of the apparent reluctance of the London boroughs to create additional sites, the majority of the Committee requests that the Mayor reconsider the value of reinstating pitch targets in the London Plan.

I believe, for the reasons set out in response to 1 above, that boroughs are best placed to identify their pitch requirements.

4. The GLA should better publicise the availability of Traveller pitch funding as well as providing practical engagement throughout the process, ensuring timeframes are specifically tailored to the longevity of local land searches.

The GLA currently has information on its website that details how organisations, interested in developing new Gypsy and Traveller sites, can bid for grant funding towards site development costs. My staff regularly updates local authorities when new funding streams are announced and where local authorities express an interest in developing such schemes my staff can guide them through the bidding process.

5. In the Committee meeting your officers informed us that a further portion of the Traveller Pitch Funding has been allocated for the creation of Gypsy and Traveller sites in London. Please publish details of this funding allocation, the criteria that will be used to allocate these funds and timelines.

I have previously reported that £1.18m of funding was allocated to refurbish and develop 64 pitches across 4 London boroughs. In January this year, I allocated a further £75,000 of grant funding to renovate and refurbish 15 pitches. This funding means that I have so far allocated a total of £1.193m of funding which will deliver 79 new and refurbished pitches by the end of March 2015. GLA officers are also currently in active discussions with two London Boroughs to identify whether GLA funding can be used to provide further new and refurbished pitches.

6. In light of the success of Leeds Council's toleration sites, the GLA should work with the boroughs on a pilot scheme for London to make land available for short-term Gypsy and Traveller sites modelled on the toleration scheme in Leeds.

The GLA funding programme is primarily aimed at providing permanent new pitches, but any bids from boroughs for toleration sites similar to the Leeds example will also be considered, taking into account the value for money relative to permanent provision

7. The GLA should encourage the boroughs to adopt robust and fair waiting list procedures, taking into account Gypsies and Travellers involuntarily residing in social housing. These might be based on Kent County Council's approach.

I agree that boroughs should manage waiting lists in a fair and robust manner, taking into account factors such as the level of need, site management and the views of local Gypsy and Traveller communities. I would encourage them to share and learn from good practice in London and beyond, including the Kent County Council model your report describes.

8. The GLA should ensure that Boroughs are equipped to regularly engage with their local Gypsy and Traveller communities, providing an accessible frontline point of contact in each borough. Consideration should be given to the possibility of using any underspends from the Traveller pitch fund to finance a support system on which the boroughs could draw.

How to engage with their local communities, including Gypsies and Travellers, is a matter for boroughs to decide, taking into account local needs and resources. I do not anticipate any underspend against this budget, and would note that this is part of an overall affordable housing budget that will be entirely committed to delivering new affordable homes for London.

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9. The GLA together with London Councils should establish a mechanism to support and encourage sub-regional collaborative working in the context of provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites.

My London Plan already encourages collaborative working with surrounding boroughs and districts where appropriate.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Boris Johnson', written over a faint, illegible background.

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London