



Damian Hinds
MP for East Hampshire

News release

Sep 2010
For immediate release

Damian Hinds Leads Westminster Hall Debate On Unauthorised Developments

Damian Hinds led a House of Commons debate in Westminster Hall yesterday on illegal and unauthorised developments and sites in the countryside. More than twenty other MPs attended to support Mr Hinds in his representations to Communities and Local Government Minister Andrew Stunell.

While much of the debate focused on gypsy and traveller sites across East Hampshire and England, Damian Hinds was firm in framing the debate as about a deeply flawed planning system and not blaming an entire community for the behaviour of a few.

In his opening speech Damian Hinds said

“Unauthorised encampments and development in the countryside; when that topic comes up, it is often accompanied by the words “Gypsies” and “Travellers”. When seeking this debate, however, I deliberately omitted reference to any community or tradition. I did so for the simple reason that most Gypsies and Travellers are not engaged in unauthorised development. What we are talking about today would be just as problematic for any community. The vast majority of Gypsies and Travellers are entirely law-abiding. Four fifths of caravan pitchings are in authorised locations, and many more among these communities live in bricks-and-mortar homes.”

Citing the recent incident in Ropley where lack of confidence in the planning system led villagers to buy the land under an unauthorised site themselves, Damian said

“When a small village community feels compelled to find hundreds of thousands of pounds because they simply have no faith in the fairness of the legal and planning systems we know something is very wrong indeed. We need to find a new way of dealing with the problems of unauthorised development and encampments which the whole community can have confidence in. People just want to see fairness, the same rules applied to all.

Since 2004, there has been an increase nationally of 72% in the number of Gypsy or Traveller caravans stationed on unauthorised sites that are Gypsy or Traveller owned. It is perhaps worth mentioning that this increase has occurred despite a large increase – indeed in absolute terms, a much larger increase – in authorised sites, over the same period... It will be said that the local authority had only itself to blame because of inadequate provision of sites within its boundaries, even if sites are available just across the boundary. The implicit

assumption is that one new authorised site means one unauthorised one will go away but this may not in fact be so.”

Damian Hinds also called for reform of the planning regulations to clamp down on the deliberate abuse of retrospective planning applications

“I understand that there is a role for retrospective planning applications, but it must be possible to construct a set of principles that allows for genuine mistakes yet excludes the wilful abuse of the system to create wholly new dwelling places. That would not solve every problem, but it would go some way to restoring public confidence in the system, which has become badly discredited. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will consider the idea.”

Speaking in response to Damian Hinds, DCLG Minister Andrew Stunell (Liberal Democrat) said

“I congratulate... my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) on his measured introduction to what is undoubtedly a difficult issue for many Members.

We want to limit the opportunities for retrospective planning applications. I fully share the frustration and anger that has been expressed in the debate about how those applications can be manipulated in such cases.

I am sure that hon. Members who have recently joined the House will find, as their in-trays get fuller, that they get complaints of a similar kind about retrospective planning applications of all sorts, not simply about Gypsies and Travellers. The Localism Bill will be taking a completely fresh look at planning legislation and will include specific provisions about that.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Westminster Hall debates, although not chaired by the Speaker, are conducted as ‘the House in session’ and recorded in Hansard in the normal way. A Minister from the Department for Communities and Local Government is required to attend and respond to the debate and points raised by MPs. Debates are considered and awarded by the Speaker following a Member applying to his office, they are a chance for important issues to be debated by members even if the Parliamentary timetable does not make it possible in the Chamber.

For more information on Westminster Hall debates please see

<http://intranet.parliament.uk/people-offices/offices-departments/commons-departments/oce/publications-guidance/members-handbook/chamber-and-committees/chamber-business/debates/>

For further information please contact:

Ed Condon
0207 219 7057
condone@parliament.uk