

Unauthorised caravan sites can wreak havoc on local communities, including our own, often leaving behind environmental damage that can cost landlords and local authorities huge sums of money to repair. In short, these sorts of encampments are a nuisance and illegal and it is important that quick action is taken by the authorities to deal with the situation.

However, perhaps contrary to popular belief, recent figures show that 84 per cent of traveller caravans across England were on authorised sites. The vast majority of the traveling community are law-abiding people and many get a bad reputation from the impact unauthorised sites have on local communities, including the associated anti-social behavior that can all too often follow.

Where illegal encampments are set up, it understandably causes a great deal of distress to settled communities and we have had instances of this in Aylesford and Ditton in recent years. Both the police and local authorities have a range of powers available to tackle unauthorised encampments and thankfully the authorities have been quick to act, so I do know how important it is that those responsible for enforcement have the right powers in place to deal with the issue effectively.

But clearly more can be done which is why the Government has recently confirmed that it is looking at this issue and the Housing Minister has announced a consultation on the powers local councils and police have to remove unauthorised traveller encampments. The consultation will look at the current system to remove illegal encampments, court processes and helping prevent illegal travel and what the reasons are in the first place.

I do welcome this consultation. Britain is home to a wide variety of cultures and it is important that we balance the needs of different communities, which is why we must look to strengthen the system currently in place to protect the interests of settled communities and balance the right to a person's nomadic way of life.