

Press Releases - Traveller Accommodation Act flawed - 11/04/00

Councillor Eoin Costello criticises the Department of the Environment

At Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council we are currently debating the travellers accommodation programme as required by the Travellers Accommodation Act 1998. The Act requires that the Councillors bring in a programme for the accommodation of travellers in the county. If the Councillors fail to do so the Act provides that the manager will do so. This Act and the associated guidelines, while they are a step in the right direction, have a number of flaws.

According to the Department of the Environment November 1998 Guidelines for Residential Caravan Parks for Travellers " the need to improve management and maintenance generally of local authority accommodation has been stressed in recent years in order to protect the capital investment in the provision and refurbishment of accommodation and to ensure that tenants receive a high quality service.

Our county is significantly in debt (£9m). As a result of this we have not been able to maintain the current traveller sites in our county. Has the Minister helped us in this? No. A pilot programme called the Initiative on Management and Maintenance of Traveller Accommodation was introduced last year by the Department of the Environment, which gives some funding. This is too little, too late. By a lack of proper central funding the Minister has allowed travellers sites to become uninhabitable for the traveller residents and a source of major concern for the local community.

In the 1998 guidelines the Minister directed that "Authorities should make reasonable efforts to inform local residents or the representatives about proposals to provide a caravan site within their area". However there was no procedure identified for this with the result that different authorities have followed different procedures for public consultation. Some Counties have followed a route that could be described as undemocratic.

Most reasonable Irish people would feel that an accommodation with the travellers has to be reached for the good of both

communities. At the moment the minister is making this extremely difficult. To help achieve a long

term settlement that will work I would ask your readers to join me in writing to the Minister for the Environment to demand proper financing of the Traveller Accommodation Act.