

Transport Action Network

Response to:

Home Office Consultation:

Strengthening police powers to tackle unauthorised encampments

Response to Consultation

We are particularly concerned that the proposals aimed at dealing with a relatively small number of unauthorised traveller encampments could have some unintended consequences including undermining peaceful protest and democratic participation.

While we accept that some traveller encampments can have a negative and costly impact on landowners, as acknowledged in the consultation paper this involves a relatively small proportion of travellers and frequently comes about due to a shortage of authorised sites in an area. Therefore, it is premature to clamp down on people's civil liberties in this way while there is still an inadequate provision of sites. Expanding the number of authorised sites would be a far less confrontational and a far better way of managing the situation, avoiding the need for legislative change or expensive police and court action.

Additionally, these proposed new powers could be used against peaceful protesters, often acting on a matter of conscience, to stop them protesting, normally against large and highly damaging new developments. These people often set up camps to protect wildlife sites, mature trees and other important habitats and this legislation could turn them into criminals for taking a stand against the wanton destruction of nature. Given the perilous state of the natural environment, demonstrated by the continued decline in biodiversity as recorded in the [State of Nature 2019 report](#), defenders of nature are needed more than ever.

Therefore, we would strongly object to the criminalisation of trespass. If anything, the right to roam needs to be expanded to cover all land, bar private dwellings, their gardens and a handful of other exceptions, as it is in Scotland. If the Government does press ahead with these measures, we would strongly urge that it considers including wording that specifically excludes its use against protesters acting on a matter of conscience.

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Chris Todd

Director

Transport Action Network

Transport Action Network provides free support to people and groups pressing for more sustainable transport in their area and opposing cuts to bus services, damaging road schemes and large unsustainable developments

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