

## Submission to Clare County Council

### Draft County Development Plan

2023-2029

From

Clare Traveller CDP Steering group

25<sup>th</sup> March 2022

#### Background

The Clare Traveller Community Development Project (CDP) has been chosen as one of seven pilots nationally for a Community Development Programme funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development. This is an exciting and much needed opportunity for Clare where no standalone Traveller organisation exists. This is collaborative start-up project guided and directed by a steering group comprised of representatives from Clare Local Development Company, Clare Public Participation Network, Clare Women's Network and HSE Traveller Health Unit Midwest.

The aim of the project is to establish an independent Traveller Community Development Project in Clare. Our objective is to develop a programme responding to the needs of the Traveller community - engaging closely with the community and ensuring a strong Traveller voice and active participation from the community.



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*This project is funded by Department of Rural and Community Development.*

## **Traveller Accommodation Crisis**

There is a crisis in accommodation nationally for Travellers. Despite statutory requirements Travellers continue to live in poor conditions throughout Ireland. On roadsides, in temporary halting sites and in overcrowded and substandard conditions in both standard and Traveller specific accommodation, with associated health and safety risks and knock on impacts onto mental health and education outcomes.

Notable, in this context, is the recent report by the Ombudsman for Children's Office '*No End in Site*' which highlighted the deplorable conditions in which Traveller children are living in. A further European Social Rights Institute report published in September 2021, '*Monitoring Adequate Housing in Ireland*', found that 39% of Travellers are living in overcrowded conditions and 5% lack access to basic facilities such as sewage and piped water. Travellers are also significantly overrepresented within official homeless figures nationally, accounting for as high as 50% of the homeless population in some local authority areas according to recent Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Equality Reviews.

## **Travellers in Clare experience a multitude of challenges and barriers to accessing basic Human Rights.**

- Travellers in Clare are disproportionately impacted by homelessness, particularly *hidden* homelessness, whilst Travellers as a group are over – represented in the homeless population nationally the figure is 11% in Clare during 2021 50% of those who presented as homeless were Travellers which indicates clearly that there is a specific problem in Clare.
- Families on the roadside are living in poor conditions, without access to basic amenities such as running water and sanitation.
- Poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancy than that of the general population. Over 11% of Travellers die by suicide.
- 80% of the Traveller community suffer the trauma of unemployment, in a study Behaviours and Attitudes survey only 17% of people said they would employ a Traveller.
- The Irish Prison service estimates that Traveller men make up 15% of the prison population, and that Traveller women constitute an estimated 22% of the prison population

## Traveller Accommodation Programme and the Urgent Need for Engagement with Travellers

5.2.8 *Traveller Accommodation* cites the obligation under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 on Clare County Council to prepare and adopt a Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP) subject to periodic review. Clare Traveller CDP steering group notes the following: The Draft County Development Plan for Clare proposes to rely on the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 in regard to the zoning of land for Traveller homes- this TAP was not passed by the LTACC as should have been the case although it was passed by Clare County Council. There was no input to the TAP from the Traveller community in Clare. (See circular 35/2018) It is therefore of the utmost importance that a participatory Traveller Housing Needs Assessment is carried out in the county and that at review the current TAP is amended to reflect the actual community needs and that this is then reflected in the County Development Plan which will run until 2029. Development Plan Objective CDP5.

There is an urgent need to re-evaluate the approach that is taken to assessment of Traveller accommodation needs, and there is now an opportunity to adopt a more reliable and effective method in assessing Traveller accommodation needs in Clare. This approach should involve:

- Facilitation of a Traveller-to-Traveller engagement and discussion (experience has shown that this kind of engagement is more likely to result in real needs and real preferences to emerge). Results from this process are more reliable as a guide to future planning than the current one-dimensional form-filling that is currently used.
- Providing real options and possible outcomes in discussions with Travellers – encouraging open discussion rather than restricting choice in a form-filling exercise, (answers given on a form are unlikely to reflect real needs and are more often than not given by families currently in crisis – ticking the box that represents the only real option will not result in a sustainable accommodation outcome in the longer term).
- A clear focus on accommodation needs associated with Traveller culture. Government are now sponsoring a nation-wide study aimed at informing future policy on ‘Traveller appropriate accommodation’ (following on from a recommendation by the Expert Review Group on Traveller Accommodation). An accommodation needs process in Clare should take these developments into account.
- Engagement with Travellers around projection of future accommodation needs and future-proofing of accommodation recommendations. This is of critical importance if mistakes of the past are to be avoided – where very

successful developments can become overcrowded ghettos after a number of years. A needs assessment must explore not just the immediate possibilities to families living in crisis. It must also create the space for people to consider the implications of future family formation – children and grandchildren – if real sustainability is to be achieved.

Clare Traveller CDP steering group, is convinced that this real engagement with Travellers is a very necessary starting point in ensuring a successful outcome to a Traveller Accommodation Plan in Clare.

We are prepared to discuss this in more detail if you think it would be of use.

For further information contact:

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