

## ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON HOLIDAY PARKS AND CAMPSITES

Minutes of the meeting on Monday 15 March 2021 at 16:00, by Zoom

Present: Peter Aldous MP, Chair  
Lord Carter of Coles  
Sir Roger Gale MP  
Ben Lake MP  
Jason McCartney MP

Dan Ellacott, National Association Caravan Owners  
Carole Keeble, Unhappy Caravan Owners/Users Action Group  
John Lally, National Caravan Council  
Nick Lomas, Caravan and Motorhome Club  
Simon McGrath, The Camping and Caravanning Club  
Ros Pritchard OBE, British Holiday & Home Parks Association  
Tom Yeldon

The Chairman opened the meeting, welcoming all and reminding that APPGs are cross-party groups run by and for Members of the Commons and Lords. Whilst stakeholders were welcome, parliamentarians would be asked to respond on any points.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP.

2. Approval of minutes of the previous meeting, held on 1 December 2020

The meeting unanimously **APPROVED** the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 1 December 2020.

Peter Aldous MP invited John Lally to provide an update on the challenges faced by the caravan manufacture supply chain. He responded that there were ongoing obstacles to caravan manufacture due to shortages of materials and components, as well as COVID-19 outbreaks impacting the workforce. John Lally said demand could not be met by current production levels, and there were concerns that park businesses could be let down. Responding to the Chairman's enquiry whether the APPG might offer any assistance, John Lally reported that supply chain issues were affecting other sectors and it was a global problem.

It was **AGREED** that the manufacturing supply chain should be included on future agendas of APPG meetings.

3. Roadmap to reopening

Peter Aldous MP summarised the Roadmap for reopening, noting differences in each of the devolved administrations.

The Roadmap for England had been published on 22 February 2021 and the Chairman stressed the importance of achieving the milestones which were based on the data and not dates. Step 2 of the Roadmap for England included the reopening of self-contained accommodation for a single household/support bubble, however urgent clarification was needed on the definition of 'self-contained', particularly regarding the use of water and waste points, and whether wash blocks could reopen on campsites.

Peter Aldous MP advised that in Wales the reopening of self-contained accommodation, which Welsh Government had confirmed would include the use of water and waste facilities

but not wash blocks, was planned for 27 March 2021, to be confirmed on 25 March 2021. However, due to the restrictions only customers living in Wales would be able to travel.

It was noted that announcements for Scotland and Northern Ireland were due the following day (16 March 2021).

Sir Roger Gale MP welcomed the proposal to seek clarity on whether wash blocks could be used on campsites, particularly as people would be permitted to use indoor WCs when pubs reopened their beer gardens and public facilities were open on Margate sea front. Jason McCartney MP and Lord Cater of Coles echoed Sir Roger Gale MP's call for urgent clarification on whether wash blocks could reopen on campsites.

Ben Lake MP outlined the challenges faced by parks in Wales given that the Welsh Roadmap sought to avoid encouraging customers from England to break the law by travelling and staying overnight. He advised that as most customers of holiday parks in North Wales came from North West England and the Midlands, so these businesses would not see a proper reopening on 27 March 2021.

Peter Aldous MP proposed writing to Westminster Government seeking urgent clarification on the definition of self-contained accommodation. Ros Pritchard raised the issue of to whom to address the letter, given that she had been liaising with civil servants in DCMS, but had been told the definition of self-contained accommodation was now with the Cabinet Office. She also felt that clarity was needed on what would be guidance and what would be law. Sir Roger Gale MP agreed and felt that the issue should be raised with the Prime Minister, as there was no one Minister in charge who could provide a clear answer.

It was **AGREED** by the meeting that the APPG should write to the Prime Minister's Office seeking urgent clarification of the definition of self-contained accommodation.

#### 4. Government support

Peter Aldous MP updated the meeting on the Government support which had been outlined in the Spring Budget which had included the extension of the furlough scheme until September, 5% VAT on tourism extended to 30 September 2021 and then 12.5% until the end of March 2022, restart grants in England, and business rates exemptions which varied between the devolved administrations.

The Chairman felt that this package had been welcomed by the sector and would help support businesses through this difficult time.

#### 5. APPG letter to the Culture Secretary of 6 December 2020

The Chairman reported that the APPG had written to the Culture Secretary, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP, calling for further industry support and a Roadmap in December. As the answers had now been provided in the Spring Budget 2021, he proposed writing to the Culture Secretary to thank him and to raise the issue of the need for a clear definition of self-contained accommodation.

It was **AGREED** by the meeting that the APPG should write to the Culture Secretary, thanking him for the support in the Spring Budget and for the Government's Roadmap, and highlighting the need for clarity on the road map.

## 6. Pop-up campsites and fly camping

Peter Aldous MP felt that the issue of pop-up campsites and fly camping had risen to prominence. Strong demand for camping was anticipated for 2021, given international travel restrictions and the relative safety of the great outdoors. The Chairman advised the APPG of issues in 2020 resulting from over-tourism and included examples of motorhomes camped in lay-bys and car parks, tents camped anywhere outdoors. There had been reports of problems in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the National Parks and the South West of England. Peter Aldous reported that in 2020, across the industry there were some 46% fewer touring and tenting pitches upon reopening due to COVID-19 security requirements and this was likely to continue in 2021.

To tackle the issue of demand far outstripping supply, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, had doubled the time periods of the General Permitted Development Order in England for 2020 and 2021, so landowners could operate a pop-up campsite for tent camping for 56 days (rather than 28 days) in 2021. It was therefore anticipated that there would be many more pop-up campsites in England for the coming season. It was noted pop-up campsites were unregulated and that no site licence was required, however it was hoped that they would help manage the anticipated demand.

The Chairman reported that the Campaign for Real Aires (CAMpRA) was asking local authorities to provide motorhome overnight stops with facilities to help meet the anticipated demand from motorhome owners.

Ben Lake MP shared the concerns relating to his constituency where there had been tensions between the local community and campervans staying overnight in unsuitable locations. He felt there was a need for Welsh Government to communicate and discuss the need to provide adequate facilities for motorhome tourism with local authorities in popular tourist destinations.

Lord Carter of Coles felt that there was a risk of reputational damage to the industry and that there may be drawbacks in encouraging the provision of facilities for motorhome stopovers. Ros Pritchard agreed there were concerns which needed to be considered given the increasing popularity of motorhome ownership and where, for example, in many European countries, motorhome stopover facilities such as 'aires' and 'Stellplätze' had been provided by the local authority and were seen as unfair competition by private businesses.

Ros Pritchard reported that Portugal had introduced a law banning motorhomes from staying overnight outside designated areas such as campsites as 'wild' camping was becoming such an issue in tourist hotspots. She reported that given Scotland had the 'right to roam', wild camping was becoming an issue which the Scottish Government were trying to tackle both for social and environmental reasons.

Nick Lomas confirmed that as a consumer club, the Caravan and Motorhome Club continued to emphasise to their members the need to abide by the relevant codes and that wild camping was not permitted, except in Scotland. The Club wanted to ensure that they could continue to offer properly organised exempt camping. Nick Lomas felt that there was a need to recognise the growing need to provide facilities for motorhomes.

It was **AGREED** by the meeting that the APPG should keep fly camping on the agenda with a view to inviting a speaker on the subject.

## 7. Unhappy Caravan Owners

Peter Aldous MP noted that 2020 had been a difficult year for all involved in the holiday parks and campsites sector, including for caravan owners. He welcomed Carole Keeble to the meeting to address the issues that caravan owners had brought to her attention.

Carole Keeble explained that she represented 17,000 people and cited examples of abuses including holiday caravan owners being asked to leave the park after asking for a refund of pitch fees due to the lockdown, customers afraid to ask for their rights, reports of racketeering, mis-selling which had led to residential misuse on holiday parks and failure by local authorities to enforce site licence and planning requirements. She felt there was a lack of enforcement such that many holiday caravan owners felt exploited, saying that exploitation was endemic throughout the industry.

Carole Keeble described the investment by private equity firms in holiday parks and invited members of the APPG to review her Group's detailed evidence to the Competition and Markets Authority and watch the observations of Consumer Lawyer, Dean Dunham. Her group proposed that any support provided to holiday parks should only be with the proviso that consumer rights were respected.

Lord Carter of Coles highlighted a recent article in 'The New Yorker' about the role of private equity buying residential parks and some of the abuses cited to maximise return on investment. He felt it was something to monitor.

Sir Roger Gale MP advised that there was a wide range of businesses in the sector: the good, the bad and the ugly. He cited exemplary businesses through to rogue park operators against whom local authorities failed to take enforcement action. There were reports of park operators with bully-boy tactics who were not being brought to account, despite local authorities having the enforcement powers. Sir Roger Gale MP advised that the issues had been raised in several Westminster Hall debates, however, the situation had not been satisfactorily addressed.

Ben Lake MP advised there were a handful of rogue park operators in his constituency, who local authorities were trying to tackle; however, the COVID-19 situation had stretched resources. He acknowledged that this was an issue which needed to be addressed.

Carole Keeble said it was not only the large park operators who were acting against consumers' interests, as she had received reports of malpractice from caravan and lodge owners on smaller parks. She felt that given the strength of feeling from the 17,000 caravan owners in her Facebook group that more needed to be done to protect holiday caravan owners.

Peter Aldous MP highlighted the issue of people living on holiday parks where local authorities had turned a blind eye. He felt that Government would already be tackling the issue of residential misuse were it not for the impact of the pandemic and felt that this was an important issue which needed to be addressed.

The Chairman invited views on the role of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Trading Standards, and the Competition and Markets Authority and how these organisations could improve the system dealing with consumer protection. Carole Keeble advised that these organisations seemed unable to deal with the problems presented to them and that holiday parks needed better regulation. She cited the example of a local authority housing a homeless family on a holiday park, while a customer was asked to leave the park due to their residential misuse.

Peter Aldous MP felt that if the APPG were going to progress matters, there was a need to address the most appropriate ministerial department. Ros Pritchard informed the meeting that there were three departments involved – BEIS for consumer protection, DCMS for tourism, and MHCLG for housing. During the Westminster Debate into residential misuse

introduced by Helen Whately MP, an undertaking had been given that the issue would be examined by BEIS and MHCLG, however, there was no further news. Sir Roger Gale MP opined that this was something to bring to the attention of the Cabinet Office.

It was **AGREED** by the meeting that the APPG should write to Rt Hon Michael Gove MP and copy in BEIS, DCMS and MHCLG, so that the issue could be coordinated. A copy of the letter would be shared with Carole Keeble.

8. Any other business

There was no further business.

9. Date of next meeting

It was unanimously **AGREED** that the next meeting of the APPG be arranged for May 2021.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 17:00.