

Safe Spaces and Green Spaces

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Green spaces need our protection. Many residents will share in concern at recent illegal encampments of travellers, locally.

Last week the police and council worked effectively together to move on those who had illegally occupied Goring Greensward. Over the weekend, more travellers illegally broke into and occupied Langmeads in East Preston.

In both cases, my team and I were immediately in touch with both the police and the local councils. There needs to be a review to rebalance effective action to avoid quiet communities having their public and community lands occupied by up to 100 unauthorised caravans and cars.

In particular, it should not be possible with impunity to take away a historic wall, or other physical barriers, to obtain illegal access to public areas.

The law must be reformed to enable our police to respond effectively and quickly to encampments and so that areas targeted by these groups are protected from future incursions from years to come. I have written to the Home Secretary putting these points to her and asking her to meet local officials.

Safe spaces matter too. The group 'Sex Matters' launched a report earlier this week following a week-long consultation asking the views of women. Transgender people may change their name, may change their appearance or undergo hormone therapy or other medical procedures to match their outward appearance with their internal identity.

The Sex Matters group agree that transgender people share the same human rights as us all. This includes respect for their private life, the right to marry and to found a family, to have their data safeguarded, and not to be subjected to humiliating or degrading treatment.

Women make up over half the population. Over 90 percent of people committing sex crimes are male, with women and children most often the victims. Men must share in tackling this issue. Women, their safety and their lives matter.

Single-sex services should not be attacked as old-fashioned or as not 'inclusive'. Some organisations have become confused, whether they should provide them at all. The voices of ordinary service users, especially women and girls, have not been heard when some single-sex facilities have been lost.

The report gives detailed reasons why there are practical, emotional and safety reasons for single-sex services. Nearly half the women shared experiences of sexual assault, exposure, voyeurism and harassment.

If there is a crisis in inclusion for women and girls, why should single-sex facilities and clear policies be taken away without consultation and without consideration? Changing rooms and facilities matter in shops, sports centres, pubs, cafes, restaurants and gyms. Many think the removal of female-only services can create a hostile environment for girls and women, harming their privacy, dignity and safety.

We now know that in sports where strength matters, the categories should be XX for females, and OPEN for males and those who have been male. Inclusion matters but we must be thoughtful and respectful as to what is fair for all.

Data on gender or gender identity can be sensitive. Data on sex is seldom sensitive. It is recorded at birth, not 'assigned'. Sex should be recorded on medical records to aid correct diagnosis and treatment. Sex is recorded in relation to employment and for the purpose of equality monitoring. Information about sex is used by statisticians to plan services and to study demography. Insurers and pension providers use sex data to estimate risks and returns.

Sex matters in parts of law. Sex discrimination in pay or for work of equal value, whether direct or indirect, is banned. I believe in fairness for transgender people and I believe in safety and security for women: the two need not conflict.