



# PARK HOME RESIDENTS ACTION ALLIANCE (PHRAA)



## MEDIA REPORT No. 12

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### “Mobile home residents ‘out of pocket’ says a watchdog”

#### Mobile home residents 'out of pocket', says a watchdog

15 October 2012 Wales



**Residents of mobile home sites suffer unscrupulous, intimidating or even criminal behaviour from site owners and operators, a watchdog report claims.**

Consumer Focus Wales found many people thousands of pounds out of pocket due to high rents, poor maintenance and site operators blocking home sales.

The Welsh assembly will consider proposals for reform later this month.

But a park operators' group said most were law-abiding and that authorities should enforce existing laws.

About 5,000 people in Wales live in the bungalow-style homes on caravan sites.

There are about 3,500 mobile homes located at 92 residential park sites across Wales with the highest concentration in Powys, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire.

They are a popular choice for older people on a low fixed income and looking to downsize who are attracted by the perception of secure communities of similarly-aged residents, often in a tranquil rural setting.

#### Sale blocking

But the Consumer Focus Wales survey due out later this week found concerns about a range of issues.

The survey, entitled "Park Life" found 62% of respondents experienced problems with the running and management of their site over the past five years while 29% had problems with maintenance, safety or security.

It also found concerns about electricity supply, cost or billing while 33% felt their pitch fees were not fair or reasonable.

Key concerns surround "sale blocking", a practice whereby site owners use their right to veto the sale of a mobile home unit to their own financial advantage.

Almost half of respondents said they did not feel people on their site were able to sell their homes freely and without interference, with some reporting harassment and intimidation.

The watchdog spoke to more than 250 residents and all 22 local authorities in Wales along with the police, voluntary sector organisations and the park homes industry.

A private members' bill, led by South Wales West AM Peter Black and aimed at reforming the civil legislation surrounding mobile home sites, is due to go before the assembly later this month.

New legislation from the UK government is also in the pipeline, following a long-running campaign by park home residents across the UK.

## Incentives

Rhys Evans, senior director of Consumer Focus Wales said: "We would like any new bill to overcome the current barriers preventing effective enforcement.

"Any new enforcement regime needs to be dynamic, robust and have the legal powers to punish unscrupulous site operators, protect residents and provide a greater incentive to raise the standards of the industry."

Police evidence has shown that the sales blocking veto has served to attract rogue site operators into the park homes industry, something Consumer Focus Wales wants scrapped.

One park home resident told BBC Wales: "I think the myth needs exploding that we're a kind of trailer trash, that we live in caravans and we shouldn't really be doing what we're doing, probably living here for 10 months and going to a hotel for two.

"If we were regarded as full-time people living in full-time homes, we should be automatically entitled to all the considerations which people over the road take for granted."

The British Holiday and Home Parks Association said the majority of sites were well-run, and stressed that it was for local authorities and police to enforce existing laws more effectively to protect residents.

In a statement, it said: "The next step, we believe, must be to address the issue of enforcement and, if additional legislation is still considered necessary, to frame this in such a way that the extra protection it affords residents does not unfairly penalise the decent, honest and caring park owners which constitute the vast majority of this industry."

The Welsh Local Government Association said it welcomed the move towards new legislation and admitted current legislation fails to give park home residents the same rights as other home owners.

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**PHRAA Works exclusively for the right of all park home owners to a FAIR DEAL**