



PARK HOME RESIDENTS ACTION ALLIANCE (PHRAA)



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Disputes cast clouds over idyllic park life

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An estimated 220,000 Britons now live in mobile "park homes," but there is growing concern that the way they are regulated can lead to cases of intimidation and harassment of residents, many of whom are elderly.

If you want to live in a picturesque rural location or by one of the UK's most desirable coastal towns, buying a "park home" often presents an affordable alternative to a traditional bricks and mortar house.

Often popular with retirees, there is a genial, rural feel to these tight-knit communities. There are neat gardens in front of each home and they are often set on hillsides with spectacular views.

They look like luxury bungalows set in a parkland site, but technically they are mobile homes. Usually far bigger than caravans, they are made of wood or metal, and underneath the foundations are wheels so they can be moved.

Hi-tech insulation and materials have made them a 21st century affordable housing solution that the coalition government has praised.

Families do sometimes live in these homes, but in an ageing country where pensions are increasingly frugal, moving to sites like this makes financial sense for older people in particular.

It is a simple formula: sell the main family home, and downsize to a park home for anywhere from £40,000 to £200,000 at the luxury end, enabling homeowners to live off the money they pocket from the sale.

There are now an estimated 1,800 park home sites across the UK, but the way they are regulated under the Mobile Homes Act has led to a nationwide call for reform from residents who say they are being left open to intimidation and harassment by a minority of unscrupulous site owners.

'Bill', a man in his 80s, describes how the owner of the site he lives on entered his home without permission after he decided to put his home on the market.

"He didn't knock on the door, he just walked in and sat down," he says.

"He was trying to turn me over."

Bill told the 5 live Investigates programme how the site owner told him his home was too old and small to sell.

Bill's identity has been changed because people involved with the case are worried about provoking the site owner.

"When he eventually went out of the door, he said: 'You've got to think: you've got to get past me.'"

Legal obligation

Bill needed to move because he suffers from a chest condition and his doctors had arranged for him to live in sheltered accommodation.

However, he needed to sell his park home to finance the switch.

Although residents like Bill legally own their homes outright, they normally have a "mobile home agreement" with the owners of the park home site, and pay a monthly ground rent in return for maintenance and services, like water and electricity.

The law allows site owners to take up to 10% of the sale price of homes sold on their site.

They also have the right to vet prospective owners and block the sale of a home - as long as it is not done in an unreasonable way, such as by claiming the home is too old, as in Bill's case.

Bill says his site's owner was using his legal power and position to try to force the price down and buy it for himself.

The story is typical of complaints from park home owners from across the country.

The owner of the site Bill lives on telephoned him and said he would pay £5,000 for the home, even though local estate agents had valued it at around £50,000.

The estate agent who made the valuation told the BBC that the site owner had told them not to put the home up for sale. In an earlier incident, over another property, the site owner told the same agent he would break the agent's windows if he marketed the home.

The site owner admits paying a visit to Bill but has denied he made any threats to block the sale.

Allegations of abuse like this have been made by residents living on a number of park home sites across the UK, and such stories now date back many years.

Sheila Austin and her fellow residents of Ladycroft Park in Oxfordshire took the then site owner, Mr Maurice Sines, to court in 2005, accusing him of nuisance and harassment.

"He was in your face all the time, threatening that he will move your home and saying that it will be moved at any time," recalls Ms Austin.

"He threatened to turn the park into a doss hole, so we wouldn't want to live there any more," she says.

Compensation

They argued that letters he wrote to them about remodelling the park and moving their homes, as well as his behaviour on the site, amounted to an abuse of his legal powers.

Mr Sines paid the residents a total of £75,000 in compensation and signed a County Court Consent Order in October 2005. He has since sold the site.

Mr Sines told the BBC that he paid the compensation only for the nuisance caused by building works.

But the residents said Mr Sines had repeatedly offered to buy their homes from them and he eventually gave a formal undertaking promising "not to threaten, abuse or harass members of their families or visitors and prospective purchasers."

Sonia McColl, who is leading a national Park Home Owners Justice Campaign to get the law changed, says these cases have been going on for too long.

"You are dealing with people who are in their late 70s, or 80s, or older," she says.

"They don't think clearly and they are taken absolute advantage of."

The Coalition government has promised that park home owners will soon have access to a fuller residential tribunal service, but campaigners maintain that even more change is needed.

Ministers have pledged to consider further "targeted changes" early in 2011.

First published 16th January 2011 by BBC 5 live investigates. Now published for the PHRAA Website by Ron Joyce. General Secretary PHRAA and Editor of Park Homes PHRAA NEWS & THE PHRAA WEBSITE September 2017. Ron says... Nothing much has changed over the years has it? Park Home owners are still being ripped off and nobody in authority gives a damn!!!!