

According to Meath County Council, it spent over €1.1m directly on Traveller specific accommodation in 2020. Some of this money went towards the acquisition of housing units, halting site bay renovations, disability adaptations and measures to resolve overcrowding within St. Patrick Park halting site in Navan. This sum of money is a very welcome increase on previous years as records show that under the previous system of budget allocation to traveller accommodation, much of the funding earmarked for local authorities was not being drawn down.

In 2016 funding was allocated to each City or County Council totalling 5.5 million euro, however only 4.2 million of this was actually drawn down. In 2017 local authorities drew down 4.8 million euro of an allocation of 9 million. In 2018 local authorities drew down 8.6 million of the 13 million which had been allocated. Meath was also consistent with the national trend in not accessing available funds in recent years. No clarity as to why this happened has been provided despite a request for further detail.

In 2020 the full national 14.4 million fund was however drawn down, but no breakdown is available on which local authorities drew down funding and which didn't.

All this aside, a visit to St. Patricks Park last week by Aontú Cllr. Emer Tóibín to see the lived experience of travellers in their caravan or bay elicited a mixed response. "There is no doubt that serious improvements to very basic issues of safety is imperative and urgent. The common green areas, the entrance and the road are rife with significant danger for young and old children. A burnt-out mobile home is strewn along the entrance and old pieces of iron or steel lie concealed in long grass on the green. Overgrown green areas and unauthorised parking of additional caravans create a general sense of overcrowding, disarray and neglect. Enormous rocks are positioned all over the halting site and although unsightly and potentially hazardous to children, they are needed to prevent unauthorised visitors."

So the question is to how to improve the living standards of travellers here locally in Navan. Some residents of St. Patrick's Pk, want to live amongst the community and work is underway to facilitate this. However, the acute housing shortage shows no signs of meeting demand anytime soon. Almost 4000 people in Meath are currently facing an unknown vista in terms of their time on the lengthening waiting list. So in the interim while lobbying for increased levels of housing provision, Cllr Tóibín has offered to work on more attainable and immediate solutions to make St. Patrick's Park better, safer and more pleasant for all residents. "Over the next few Saturdays, I'm happy to work with local residents and make this park a more agreeable place to live in and raise families. We can recruit more volunteers, roll up our sleeves and get to work"