



## THE CARAVAN COMMUNITIES OF THE LINCOLNSHIRE COAST

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**A report to East Lindsey DC**

**July 2011**

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## Summary

This report provides new evidence on the caravan residents of the Lincolnshire coast. Its central element is a survey of households that spend much or all of the year living in caravans or chalets in the area. Interviews with key local stakeholders, including site owners and managers, and a review of existing statistical material, provide further evidence.

Longer-term living on East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites has increased over the last ten to fifteen years, partly in response to the rising standards of static caravans, though planning conditions mean that it is still not possible to live all-year-round on most sites. There is little hard evidence that these rules are systematically flouted.

However, most of this population goes unrecorded. Figures from the Census and the government's mid-year population estimates miss the majority of caravan residents. These omissions matter because population figures drive funding formulas, particularly for grants to the district and county councils. The Council Tax register and the Electoral Register are also likely to miss most caravan residents.

The survey, which involved face-to-face interviews with 374 households across 12 sites, shows the longer-term residents to be a mostly older group. The majority have moved into the area from the coast's traditional catchment areas in the Midlands and Yorkshire. Most have opted for a caravan for very positive reasons, such as a preference for the lifestyle and the local environment. Living in a caravan is a 'second-best' option for only a few.

Some of the longer-term caravan residents are benefit claimants (for example on incapacity benefits or Pension Credits).

Overall, the report estimates that there are perhaps 3,500 households, accounting for around 6,600 people, who live for some or all of the year in caravans or chalets on the East Lindsey coast. Of these, around 40 per cent are in effect full-time East Lindsey residents and should really be counted as such. Many of the other longer-term caravan and chalet residents still maintain a home elsewhere, but on average even they spend between five and six months on-site in East Lindsey.

The report concludes by reviewing the planning options for East Lindsey's coastal caravans, including the case for 'regularising' the status of caravan residents by allowing all-year-round occupation on more sites.

## **1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE REPORT**

### **Aims of the report**

This report provides a unique insight into the caravan communities of the Lincolnshire coast.

There has hitherto been an almost total lack of reliable information on long-term residents of caravan sites, in Lincolnshire or elsewhere in Britain. This report plugs the gap, principally by presenting the results of a major new survey of caravan residents but also through interviews with some of the key players and by an examination of statistical records. Some of the questions the report seeks to answer are:

- How many people live in caravans along the Lincolnshire coast?
- Who are they?
- Where do they come from?
- Why have they chosen to live in a caravan?
- Do they make big claims on local services?
- Are they ever counted?
- And how would they respond to a flooding emergency?

The measurement of the population living in caravans has major implications for resource allocation, including local authority funding. The findings also shed light on key issues for consideration in the development of planning policy for caravan sites.

### **The East Lindsey coast**

It is widely claimed that the Lincolnshire coast has the largest concentration of caravans in Europe. What is unquestionably correct is that along this stretch of the English North Sea coast there is a formidable concentration of caravan sites.

Most of this coastline falls within East Lindsey district, embracing a string of smaller seaside towns including Mablethorpe, Sutton on Sea, Chapel St Leonards, Ingoldmells and, at its southern end, the more substantial resort of Skegness. In total, East Lindsey's coastal strip is home to more than 200 caravan sites and nearly 25,000 static caravans.

'Static caravans' are these days a long way removed from the small caravans (or 'tourers') that are towed from place to place behind family cars. They are very much larger for a start, and they are not really intended to be moved. They are 'mobile homes' only in the sense that they are factory-made and stand on a chassis with wheels and/or fixed supports. In fact, many static caravans most closely resemble bungalows and they are connected to mains utilities in just the same way as bricks-and-mortar housing. Over the last twenty years or so, the improvements in the design and build quality of static caravans have been considerable.

The rising standards of static caravans have made living in a caravan an increasingly practical proposition. In East Lindsey, there is a widely held view that this is now happening. However, there has so far been a complete lack of evidence – other than hearsay – to support or negate this assertion. A further complication in East Lindsey is that the vast majority of caravan sites have planning conditions that restrict the period they are allowed to open.

Two recent reports for the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG)<sup>1</sup> have fuelled suspicions that significant numbers may now be living in caravans along the coast, particularly in Lincolnshire. Both studies assembled a wide range of socio-economic data for England's seaside towns. The East Lindsey coast stood out as an area of high deprivation but also, unusually for an area of deprivation, as an area of continuing population growth. That the area's caravans may be attracting residents from outside the area, especially those on benefits, was one of the possibilities flagged up in the second report.

The need for better information on caravan residents has come to a head because of concerns over flood risk. Just about all East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites sit at or below sea level. Memories of disastrous sea flooding in 1953 are still very much alive, and there is awareness that global warming is raising sea levels. If there were to be major flooding, the emergency services need to know how many caravan residents would need to be evacuated. The flood risk is greatest in the winter months, so what the emergency services need to know is not the peak occupancy in mid-summer but how many longer-term residents there are on these sites.

Reflecting these concerns, the present study has been initiated by East Lindsey District Council using funding from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) under its Pathfinder initiative, intended to begin to address the dangers of coastal flooding.

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<sup>1</sup> C Beatty, S Fothergill and I Wilson (2008) *England's Seaside Towns: a benchmarking study*, CLG, London.

C Beatty, S Fothergill and I Wilson (2011) *England's Smaller Seaside Towns: a benchmarking study*, CLG, London.

## The information gap

There has previously been remarkably little research into Britain's caravan communities.

The two most significant government-sponsored reports are a 1992 survey of mobile home residents<sup>2</sup> and a 2002 report on the economics of the park homes industry<sup>3</sup>. In the present context, the limitation of both these reports is that they cover a rather different segment of the industry to the one found on the Lincolnshire coast. Both cover mobile homes that have permission for all-year-round occupation. The vast majority of the caravan sites in East Lindsey, in contrast, have planning conditions that limit their occupancy to only part of the year. Park homes are also covered by different legislation to caravan sites. This makes it hard to 'read across' from research on park homes to the circumstances of the Lincolnshire coast.

Beyond these two official studies there is little literature in the UK context, in contrast to the much greater volume in the United States where living in trailers and mobile homes is widely recognised as an important phenomenon. A 2009 study of park home residents<sup>4</sup>, based on in-depth interviews, largely confirms the findings of the 1992 survey. A 2010 article<sup>5</sup> finds that caravan communities suffer from high rates of poor health and limiting long-term illness – a conclusion from research in East Yorkshire, just up the coast, that can probably be generalised to Lincolnshire.

The important point, however, is that there have been so few previous studies. The evidence presented here, for the East Lindsey coast, therefore mostly breaks new ground.

## Structure of the report

Section 2 reports on discussions with a range of local players whose activities touch on East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites. This section also considers the procedures through which caravan residents may – or may not – be counted for official purposes.

Section 3, which presents the results of the survey of caravan residents, is the heart of the report.

Section 4 uses the survey results to generate estimates of the overall scale of the caravan population along the East Lindsey coast.

Section 5 considers the policy implications of the findings.

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<sup>2</sup> P Niner with A Hughes (1992) *Mobile Homes Survey: final report of the Department of the Environment*, HMSO, London.

<sup>3</sup> Berkeley Hanover Consulting et al (2002) *Economics of the Park Homes Industry*, ODPM, London.

<sup>4</sup> M Bevan (2009) *Park Home Living in England: prospects and policy implications*, Centre for Housing Policy working paper, University of York.

<sup>5</sup> D Zennor and T Allison (2010) 'Health of caravan park residents: a pilot cross-sectional study in the East Riding of Yorkshire, *Health and Place*, vol 16, pp 309-314.

## 2. THE CONTEXT

### Stakeholder discussions

Between the autumn of 2010 and spring of 2011, the research team spoke to a range of agencies and individuals whose activities touch on caravan residents along the East Lindsey coast. These included:

- Site owners and managers
- British Holiday and Home Parks Association (E Lindsey branch)
- Local planning officer, ELDC
- Planning enforcement, ELDC
- Housing officer, ELDC
- Electoral register team, ELDC
- Council tax team, ELDC
- Lincolnshire Fire and Emergency Services
- Local Census enumeration team
- Jobcentre Plus (Lincs and Rutland team)
- Jobcentre Plus (Skegness)
- Citizens' Advice Bureau, Skegness
- GPs practice, Skegness
- Department for Communities and Local Government (London HQ)

The majority of these discussions, including all those with caravan site owners and managers, were face-to-face. The overview of caravan living, below, reflects these discussions<sup>6</sup>.

### The development of caravan living

A common view among site owners and managers is that the occupants of East Lindsey's coastal caravans fall into three main groups:

- (1) Conventional holidaymakers visiting for relatively short periods, who sometimes also sub-let to friends or relatives
- (2) Those who stay on-site for extended periods – a group that tends to be retired
- (3) Those whose primary residence is the caravan

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<sup>6</sup> The research team would like to thank all those who took part in these discussions, and express particular thanks to the site owners and managers who assisted in the survey reported in Section 3.

On a number of sites there are also significant numbers in a fourth group: seasonal workers, including the staff of the site itself, for whom the caravan is convenient and often comes with the job.

Site owners and managers say that extended stays on-site are nothing new. However, the emergence of caravans as a primary residence is a comparatively recent phenomenon, of the last 10 or 15 years. The growth of this group of residents is seen as having been triggered by the rising quality of caravans, by the low cost of caravan living and by the lifestyle draw of living on the coast. The improvement in the standards of caravans, explained by one site owner, illustrates this well:

- late 1960s: caravan pitches began getting electricity
- 1970s: water was connected to caravans
- mid 1980s: electric heating beginning to be used in caravans
- mid 1990s: first central heating, alongside insulation and double-glazing
- late 2000s: growing sale of units to full residential 'spec'

The environment around the caravans has also changed: access roads are increasingly built for winter use whereas once they would have been just grass.

For a number of years, planning controls shifted in response to these developments. Twenty years ago just about all site licences along the East Lindsey coast only allowed opening during the summer season (eg March to October). Beginning in the 1990s, some site owners and operators began to seek and secure extended opening, for example from 1 March to 5 January. This development was initially welcomed by the Council as a way of extending the holiday season, contributing to the local economy and supporting jobs. These shifts were accompanied by an increase in owner-occupation of the units and a decline in letting 'fleets'.

Over the last two or three years, however, the planning policies have changed once again, mainly because of the attention given to flood risk. The current policy is that new approvals are once more restricted to the March-October season. This applies to both new sites and extensions of existing sites. In reality, however, few applications have been granted within this period.

The extent to which individual site owners have adapted their business to the rise in caravan living appears to vary. A great many have stuck to the old 'March to October' model and, as figures presented later show, the majority of East Lindsey's coastal caravans are still on sites that close for three if not four months of the year. Arguably, the very high density of caravans on some of these sites would anyway make them unattractive to long-term living.

Where sites open longer, the normal practice usually continues to be that new residents have to demonstrate that they have an address elsewhere. So in theory the caravan should still be a 'second home' rather than a primary residence. Some sites also operate rules whereby continuous stays of more than 60 days are not allowed.

Policing the rules is more problematic. As one site manager put it, once a newcomer to a site has demonstrated that they have an address elsewhere there is nothing to stop them selling the other property a few months later. Another site manager noted that 60-day rules were not easy to monitor and really relied on goodwill. Some of the owners of smaller sites claim intimate knowledge of the comings and goings on their site; for others this simply isn't practicable.

There are also differences from site to site in the way that mail is handled. Some site owners and managers frown on the use of their site as a postal address for any purpose at all. Others are more accommodating, allowing mail to be delivered to the site office, though it is rare for individual units to have their own address and postal delivery.

The key rule that does seem to be strictly enforced, however, is the annual site closure in accordance with planning conditions. Whilst the caravan community of East Lindsey abounds with suspicions that this particular rule is often being broken, the research team came across no hard evidence that this is actually the case. On the contrary, the rules around site closure often appear to be very tightly policed. In one case, for example, large numbers of residents are reported to assemble on site in the club house on the evening of 28 February but not be allowed to enter their caravans until after the stroke of midnight.

### **Are they ever counted?**

One of the purposes of the stakeholder interviews was to assess how caravan residents may or may not be recorded for official purposes. This matters because official statistics feed into funding formulas.

#### *Census of Population*

The Census aims to count the number of people resident in each part of the country, right down to the very local level. If individuals live in caravans, they should in theory be included in the population figures.

In the output areas<sup>7</sup> that include the East Lindsey coast's caravan sites, the 2001 Census recorded 551 people as living in 'a caravan or other mobile or temporary structure'. The 2011 Census was conducted while the present research was underway and the results will not be available for some while.

Inclusion in the Census depends on inclusion on an address list: a Census form can only be sent to a household if it has a known address. The problem is that most of the caravans in East Lindsey do not have an individual address. Rather, there is a single address for the

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<sup>7</sup> Output Areas are the smallest geographical unit for which Census data is produced and generally comprise around 150 households.

whole site. The Census enumeration team normally holds addresses for individual caravans only where the household is registered for Council Tax.

Despite efforts to publicise the need to complete a Census form, and despite leaving forms with site owners, the enumeration team are of the view that their coverage of caravan residents has major shortcomings.

VERDICT: The Census of Population is likely to seriously under-record caravan residents.

### *Mid-Year Population Estimates*

Between the decennial Censuses, the mid-year population estimates provide a key input to resource allocation.

The mid-year population estimates are ultimately calibrated by the Census, so if the Census figures are wrong in the first place they will distort the subsequent mid-year estimates. The figures are revised on the basis of births and deaths, international migration data, and local migration data based on registrations with GPs. If in-movers to caravans in East Lindsey register with GPs, their presence should therefore be reflected in the mid-year population estimates.

VERDICT: Year to year changes in population should be reflected in the figures if caravan residents register with local GPs, but the underlying numbers will be wrong because of shortcomings in the Census.

### *Electoral Register*

To be on the electoral register, the caravan has to be the permanent address.

A sample of 16 East Lindsey sites, with more than 5,100 static caravans between them, identifies 113 residents on the 2010 electoral register. Grossing up from this sample to the total of nearly 25,000 static caravans along the coast suggests that the total number of caravan residents on the East Lindsey electoral register is likely to be around 550.

If a caravan resident wants to be on the register they have to ask for an application form or, if they register for Council Tax, a form will normally be sent (though according to council officials this cannot always be relied on). Registration forms are not sent out to caravans other than through these two routes.

VERDICT: The electoral register is likely to miss substantial numbers.

### *Council Tax*

Caravan residents are supposed to pay Council Tax if the caravan is their sole or main residence. Liability for Council Tax begins the day the caravan becomes their sole or main residence – there is no '28 day' qualifying rule or other time-based residential qualification.

In 2010, the council's records show that just 270 caravan households on the East Lindsey coast were registered for Council Tax. Bearing in mind the average occupancy rate (1.9 persons per household<sup>8</sup>) this corresponds quite closely to the estimated 550 caravan residents on the electoral register.

For some residents at least, avoiding Council Tax is an important benefit of caravan living, as the Citizens' Advice Bureau in Skegness pointed out. If residents do not volunteer themselves to be registered for Council Tax, the council has no simple procedures in place for locating them. There are simply too many caravans to mount meaningful checks. Tip offs, DWP benefit claims and applications for bus passes are the way the council finds out about residents on sites, at which point a letter requesting further information about their main residence is sent. If Council Tax is charged, a discount applies for the time the site is required to close in winter.

VERDICT: The Council Tax register is likely to miss substantial numbers of caravan residents.

### *Housing waiting list*

The main housing waiting list in East Lindsey is managed by New Linx Housing Trust on behalf of the council, though some housing associations have their own waiting lists that are managed separately.

In late 2010, the council's records show that 185 households in caravans or chalets on the East Lindsey coast were on the main housing waiting list.

Anyone registering on the housing waiting list has to give their current address but this can be a temporary postal address. The register is required to be 'open', meaning that anyone can join regardless of location or circumstances. A caravan address would not in itself be an obstacle. The waiting list is renewed annually on a rolling basis, which means that if applicants do not respond to a letter sent on the anniversary of joining the list they will be struck off.

VERDICT: There is no reason to suppose that the number of caravan residents on the housing waiting list will be seriously misleading.

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<sup>8</sup> This figure is taken from the survey findings reported in section 3 of the report.

### *GP registrations*

Patients can be registered with a GPs' practice either permanently or temporarily. The permanent registrations are the most important in driving funding formulae.

Not being registered locally is not a bar to using GPs' services, but all non-local patients have to fill out a registration form when they visit the doctor. There is no rule that dictates where an individual should be registered on a permanent basis, so if East Lindsey caravan residents prefer to remain registered elsewhere there is little can be done about this. This is true even for those that require repeat prescriptions because arrangements are now in place for liaison with GPs elsewhere.

VERDICT: There is no reason why caravan residents should not be registered permanently with local GPs, but some may not do so.

### *Benefits*

Jobcentre Plus, which administers the benefits system, isn't really bothered whether claimants live in a caravan or not. What matters to them is that the claimant provides an address.

DWP figures show that in November 2010 the statistical output areas that cover East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites included nearly 1,800 claimants on out-of-work benefits (principally Jobseeker's Allowance, incapacity benefits and Income Support). However, these output areas also cover residents in nearby housing as well as on the sites themselves – around 11,500 in all according to the 2001 Census<sup>9</sup>. A comparison with claimant rates across East Lindsey as a whole indicates that these particular output areas do have above average numbers of claimants, but how much this is attributable to the caravan sites is unclear.

Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who live on caravan sites are most likely to have their claim registered locally because they are required to sign on fortnightly. Incapacity benefit claimants face no such requirement, and it is quite possible that longer-term caravan residents on incapacity benefits may keep their claim registered elsewhere. If the caravan is their sole or principal address, this is of course less likely.

VERDICT: There is likely to be some local under-recording of incapacity benefit claimants, but JSA figures are probably more reliable.

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<sup>9</sup> The research team would like to thank Mike Payne and his colleagues from DWP Sheffield for their considerable efforts to try to disentangle claimants on caravan sites from other local claimants. In the event, it was not possible to deploy this information because of DWP disclosure rules.

### 3. SURVEY OF CARAVAN RESIDENTS

#### Scope of the survey

Between mid-March and early April 2011 the research team carried out a major survey of caravan and chalet residents along the East Lindsey coast.

The timing of the survey was chosen to maximise the focus on long-term residents. As explained earlier, nearly all the caravan sites in East Lindsey operate within planning conditions that require them to be unoccupied for several weeks in winter. Typically, sites are required to be closed from immediately after New Year to the beginning of March or, in other cases, from the end of October or November through to the beginning of March. The start of the survey was timed for a few days after the sites re-opened. The survey was completed just before the beginning of the Easter school holidays, when sites normally begin to fill with short-term visitors and holidaymakers.

The survey was carried out on twelve sites, spread along the whole of the coastal strip, including locations in or near Mablethorpe, Sutton-on-Sea, Ingoldmells and Skegness.

Caravan sites vary in size and in the segment of the market they occupy. The twelve sites were selected to reflect the range of circumstances found along the coast. For example, one of the sites comprised chalets rather than caravans, and most of the residents interviewed on another were employees rather than visitors. The majority of the twelve sites had planning conditions requiring closure in January and February, but one had all-year-round opening and the others were closed from the end of November to the beginning of March. The twelve sites included small family-run ventures and larger corporate enterprises.

The survey necessarily required the consent and co-operation of the site owners/managers. This meant that in practice most of the sites were drawn from amongst those owned or managed by individuals who had attended a half-day conference convened by East Lindsey DC in November 2010 in Skegness, where the background to the research was explained.

There is no way of being certain that the twelve survey sites are fully representative of all the caravan and chalet sites along the East Lindsey coast. However, the number and diversity of the sites gives confidence. The survey statistics, presented here, should nevertheless be regarded primarily as a *guide* to the situation across the district's coastal caravan sites as a whole.

In all cases, the residents of static caravans (or chalets) were the targets of the survey. There was no attempt to include sites that cater only for touring caravans, or to cover the parts of the survey sites used by tourers.

The interviews were carried out by staff from BMG Research on behalf of Sheffield Hallam University. All the interviews were carried out face-to-face on the site itself, usually in the resident's caravan or chalet, using a tightly structured questionnaire. The residents were contacted by door-knocking and up to three call-backs at different times of day were carried out. In one location, site workers who were caravan residents were contacted with the assistance of the management. All the interviews took place during the working week so as to avoid weekends when there might be short-term visitors on site. Interviews typically lasted 20 minutes. Residents could decline to take part but in practice the proportion opting out was low.

The survey targeted long-term residents rather than temporary visitors. All the interviewees were therefore first asked whether they "live here some or all of the year or are just a short-term visitor, weekend resident or on holiday". The survey interview only proceeded with those who said they lived on the site for some or all of the year.

The interviews were normally carried out with a single individual but covered the household as a whole.

In all, 374 interviews were completed. The size of the sample on each of the twelve sites reflected the total number of caravans/chalets on the site and the extent to which they cater for longer-term residents. However, no single site was sufficiently dominant in the survey sample to distort the overall results.

### **Who are they?**

In all, 707 people live in the 374 caravan and chalet households that were surveyed – an average of 1.9 persons per household. By far the largest proportion (67 per cent) are two-person households – the vast majority couples – with one-person households accounting for a further 25 per cent.

The age of residents is shown in Table 1. Older men and women predominate: nearly three-quarters of residents are over 55, and more than 40 per cent over 65. Conversely, there are hardly any children under 16.

This is an age distribution that is very different from the UK population as a whole, though one that has long been known to be associated with the residents of caravan parks, in East Lindsey and elsewhere. On some sites the predominance of older residents is actually enforced by rules that restrict occupancy to the over 50s.

Reflecting the age profile, 61 per cent of residents describe themselves as 'retired'.

Just 1 per cent of residents are non-UK nationals.

**Table 1: Age of residents**

	per cent
Under 16	3
16-24	6
25-34	4
35-44	3
45-54	11
55-64	28
65-74	33
75-84	7
85+	1
No information	4
	100

Source: Survey data

### How much time do they spend on site?

As noted, it is generally not possible for caravan site residents on the East Lindsey coast to live there for the full twelve months of the year. Planning conditions require most sites to close in mid-winter and there is little evidence that this rule is systematically flouted. 'Living in a caravan' is therefore not the same as living in bricks-and-mortar housing. Excepting the few sites where all-year-round occupancy is permitted, it is a question of just *how much of the year* is spent there.

**Table 2: Time normally spent each year living in caravan/chalet**

	per cent
Less than 3 months	15
3 months to less than 6 months	26
6 months to less than 9 months	18
9 months to less than a year	22
All year	19
Other / don't know	1
	100

Source: Survey data

The survey covered residents who in their own view lived there for ‘some or all of the year’. Table 2 shows just how long they usually spend (or intended to spend in the case of new residents) living there. This confirms that only a minority of longer-term residents – just one-in-five – live all year round on-site. On the other hand, some 60 per cent live in their caravan or chalet for at least six months of the year, and some 40 per cent do so for at least nine months of the year. Here is clear evidence that substantial numbers of people do spend much of the year in caravans and chalets along the Lincolnshire coast.

Table 3 shows the number of years they have been on their present site. Relatively modest periods are the norm – two-thirds have been on-site for five years or less – which is consistent with the fairly regular turnover that site owners report. On the other hand, around one-in-six has been resident on-site for more than ten years.

**Table 3: Length of time living on site**

	per cent
Less than a year	15
1 to 2 years	20
3 to 5 years	32
6 to 10 years	16
More than 10 years	17
	100

Source: Survey data

Table 4 looks at where the residents live when they are not on-site in East Lindsey, for example during the two or three months of the year that sites are shut down. The significant observation here is the high proportion – 57 per cent of all the households surveyed – that have another home elsewhere. In the majority of cases (accounting for 45 per cent of all the households surveyed) this is a home they *own* elsewhere. For a smaller number of households the arrangements for the part of the year that they are off-site hint more of muddling through – staying with relatives for example.

Whilst off-site, caravan and chalet residents are most likely to live in Nottinghamshire (26 per cent), South and West Yorkshire (21 per cent), Derbyshire (10 per cent), Leicestershire (6 per cent) and the West Midlands (6 per cent). 8 per cent stay within East Lindsey and a further 5 per cent in the rest of Lincolnshire.

Given that the survey was conducted well outside the main holiday months and included only longer-term residents rather than short-term visitors, the high proportion of residents with another home elsewhere may appear surprising. What this seems to reflect is that modern static caravans are of a sufficiently high standard to function as second homes in which many people spend large parts of the year. But whilst this group is numerous, there is

**Table 4: Where residents normally spend the rest of the year**

	per cent
Live on-site all year	19
Live off-site part of year	
Other home elsewhere	57
With friends or relatives	12
No fixed pattern	7
In temporary accommodation	2
More than one place	2
Other	1
	100

Source: Survey data

also a further group living alongside them for which the caravan or chalet is a primary residence.

This point is underlined by Table 5, which shows the answers to the key question 'Do you consider this to be your main home?' 39 per cent of interviewees said 'yes'. Here is clear evidence that amongst those now living much of the year in caravans and chalets along the Lincolnshire coast, a large group see this as their primary residence.

**Table 5: 'Do you consider this to be your main home?'**

	per cent
Yes	39
No	59
Not sure / don't know	2
	100

Source: Survey data

### **Why a caravan?**

Zooming in on the residents for whom the caravan or chalet is their main home, Table 6 shows where they were living immediately prior to moving onto their present site. This list is again dominated by the Lincolnshire coast's traditional catchment areas in the East Midlands and Yorkshire. A small proportion of residents – 15 per cent – do however come from within East Lindsey itself, at least in terms of where they were last living.

**Table 6: Previous residence of those for whom caravan/chalet is 'main home'**

	per cent
Nottinghamshire	26
S & W Yorkshire	19
East Lindsey	15
Derbyshire	10
Leicestershire	9
Rest of Lincolnshire	3
All other locations	19
	100

Source: Survey data

By far the largest share of those who regard their caravan/chalet as their main home were previously owner-occupiers – 72 per cent in all. 15 per cent last lived in private rented accommodation and 7 per cent in their parental home.

Their reasons for leaving their last home are complex and varied. 45 per cent say they moved because they 'wanted something better', 17 per cent because they couldn't afford to live there any longer, 14 per cent cite health reasons, 11 per cent moved for work, and retirement (8 per cent), wanting to live in the area (7 per cent) and relationship breakdown (6 per cent) triggered smaller numbers of moves. Amongst the survey sample at least, being made homeless or being evicted did not trigger any moves.

Table 7 shows the reasons for opting for a caravan or chalet, this time for all the survey respondents. It is the positive attractions of the local environment and the way of living that shine through most strongly. By comparison, the negative reasons for opting for a caravan or chalet – for example because nothing else was affordable – are cited by far fewer residents.

Table 8 shows the reasons for choosing the Lincolnshire coast. This too reveals a diverse set of responses but again one that is dominated by positive reasons, such as wanting to live in the area. Hardly anyone has ended up on the Lincolnshire coast for negative reasons, such as being unable to find anything elsewhere.

The vast majority of residents (83 per cent) occupy caravans or chalets that they own outright. A further 5 per cent are buying with the aid of a mortgage. Renting from the site owner (3 per cent), renting or borrowing from a friend or relative (9 per cent) and living in employer-owned accommodation (3 per cent) account for smaller numbers.

**Table 7: Reasons for opting for a caravan or chalet**

	per cent of respondents
Liked the local environment	88
Good for holidays	83
Liked the way of living	82
Cheaper than other options	42
Getting older and better suited to needs	41
Just happened to be available	18
Wanted to downsize	18
To free up capital	12
Couldn't afford anything else	12
Came with the job	8
Couldn't get a council house	3
Other reasons	15

NB. Respondents could give more than one reason  
Source: Survey data

**Table 8: Reasons for choosing the Lincolnshire coast**

	per cent of respondents
Wanted to live here	58
Friends/relatives in the area	48
Wanted to retire here	31
Already living in the area	20
To work in area	13
Like it here	9
Close to home	6
Couldn't find anything elsewhere	3
It's flat	2
Other reasons	9

NB. Respondents could give more than one reason  
Source: Survey data

## Do they have jobs?

That caravan and chalet residents are predominantly an older group, often above state pension age, has already been noted. It is unsurprising therefore that only 23 per cent of caravan/chalet residents have a job – and this figure includes a number of site workers for whom the caravan came with the job.

Around three-quarters of the jobs are permanent, rather than seasonal or temporary. Most are relatively low-grade, for example as shop assistants, bar staff or drivers, but the list includes a number of managerial positions, including at local holiday parks and caravan sites. Most of the jobs are within the local area.

## Do they claim benefits?

Table 9 shows the benefits claimed by caravan and chalet residents. This is a long list including benefits for men and women of working age (such as Incapacity Benefit and its successor Employment and Support Allowance), benefits for those of pension age (Pension Credit) and benefits claimed by both groups (Disability Living Allowance). The list also includes benefits that can only be claimed by those in work (Working Tax Credit) and entitlements calculated on a household rather than individual basis (such as Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit). It is also worth bearing in mind that since a proportion of long-term caravan and chalet residents have homes elsewhere, the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit entitlements may relate to this other property.

**Table 9: Benefits claimed**

	<b>% of households including claimant</b>
Pension Credit	18
Disability Living Allowance	12
Incapacity Benefit / ESA	8
Carer's Allowance	3
Council Tax Benefit	3
Income Support	2
Housing Benefit	2
Working Tax Credit	2
Child Tax Credit	2
Jobseeker's Allowance	1
Other benefits	5

Source: Survey data

Given the age of caravan and chalet residents, the high proportion claiming Pension Credit is unsurprising. Nationally, just under a quarter of all men and women over state pension age claim Pension Credit. Bearing in mind the survey households below pension age, the 18 per cent of all caravan and chalet households claiming Pension Credit probably represents a claimant rate among pensioners that is only marginally higher than the national average. Across Britain as a whole, Disability Living Allowance is also claimed widely – by around 1.5m of pension age for example.

The 8 per cent of caravan and chalet households that include an incapacity benefit claimant represents a much higher rate than the national average, bearing in mind that fewer than half these households include men and women of working age. Among the UK working age population as a whole the incapacity benefit claimant rate is 7 per cent; the figures here suggest that in caravans and chalets along the Lincolnshire coast the rate among working age men and women is at least double the national average. Partly this will reflect the high proportion of over 50s, because the likelihood of claiming incapacity benefits rises with age. However, it is also likely to reflect migration to the Lincolnshire coast by incapacity benefit claimants, especially at a stage when they have given up hope of working again.

Survey respondents said that 55 per cent of the benefit claims started *before* coming to live on the present site. This gives support to the view that the Lincolnshire coast attracts claimants from elsewhere.

On the other hand, as Table 10 shows, at least half the benefit claims remain registered elsewhere. Nottinghamshire is again the most common place (24 per cent of cases registered elsewhere), followed by South and West Yorkshire (17 per cent) and Derbyshire (16 per cent). Even so, at least 14 per cent of households – and perhaps nearer 20 per cent bearing in mind the ‘don’t knows’ – do have a benefit claim registered at their caravan or chalet address.

**Table 10: Location of benefit claim**

	% of claimants	% of all households
Registered at this address	36	14
Registered elsewhere	50	20
Don't know	14	5
Non-claimants	n.a.	61
	100	100

Source: Survey data

## What about their health?

Table 11 provides details on the health of caravan and chalet residents over the last 12 months. Survey respondents mostly report this as 'good' or 'fairly good' but there is a smaller group, accounting for one-in-seven residents, for whom health over the last year is described as 'not good'.

**Table 11: Health over last 12 months**

	% of residents
Good	54
Fairly good	32
Not good	14
	100

Source: Survey data

'Ill health' and 'disability' are not the same thing, though there can be overlap. 31 per cent of caravan/chalet households are reported as having at least one person with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity, and 9 per cent of households have two or more people with these problems. In around 90 per cent of cases, the illness, disability or infirmity is reported as limiting the person's activities in some way. In three-quarters of cases the illness, disability or infirmity is reported as affecting mobility.

The relatively high proportion of households reporting health problems or disabilities is perhaps not surprising, given the age profile of residents. The impact is significant however: nearly a quarter of all the households surveyed included at least one person with mobility problems.

Bearing in mind the high incidence of ill health and disability, the interface between residents and the health service is clearly important. Table 12 shows the extent to which residents are registered with a local doctor using their caravan or chalet address. This shows that in total around half are registered on the basis of their site address, and mostly on a permanent basis. Of the remainder, just over three-quarters say they are permanently registered with a doctor at a different address. Once more it is Nottinghamshire (24 per cent of non-local registrations), South and West Yorkshire (24 per cent), Derbyshire (11 per cent) and Leicestershire (11 per cent) that head the list.

The reasons for not bothering to register with a doctor on the Lincolnshire coast are varied – that residents spend more time elsewhere, prefer the doctors elsewhere, or never bothered changing are commonly cited.

**Table 12: Registration with local doctors**

	% of households
Registered at this site on permanent basis	39
Registered on temporary basis	11
Not registered at this site	48
Some are, some aren't	1
	100

Source: Survey data

### Do they use local services?

Table 13 shows the extent to which caravan and chalet residents make use of a number of public services on the Lincolnshire coast. Overall, it is worth noting that it is usually only a minority of caravan and chalet residents that draw on these services. The health services – doctors, hospitals and (to a lesser extent) dentists figure most prominently. Adding up the regular and occasional users, 51 per cent make use of local doctors, 41 per cent of local hospitals, and 23 per cent of local dentists. Local libraries come fourth (17 per cent) but the other local services listed here are barely used at all.

The apparently high proportion of caravan and chalet residents who make use of local hospitals may possibly be inflated by those who are registered with GPs outside the area and find it expedient to use local A&E departments as an alternative.

**Table 13: Use of services on Lincolnshire coast**

	% of households	
	Regularly	Occasionally
Local GPs	15	36
Local hospital	10	31
Local dentist	7	16
Local library	6	11
Local schools	3	1
Local Job Centre	-	2
Local college	1	1
Local social services	1	1
Local nursery	1	1

Source: Survey data

## Are they registered to vote?

Just 22 per cent of survey respondents said they were on the electoral register at their caravan or chalet. A further 5 per cent said they didn't know.

The reasons given for not being on the electoral register at that address are shown in Table 14. Being registered somewhere else is the most frequent reason. The remaining reasons include deliberate decisions to opt out and, for a smaller number, practical obstacles to achieving registration.

**Table 14: Reasons for not registering to vote at this address**

	% of all households
Registered somewhere else	57
Prefer not to	17
Not interested in voting	11
Never been sent a form	8
Didn't know you could register here	5
Not allowed to register here	5

NB. Respondents could give more than one reason

Source: Survey data

On a related matter, just 39 per cent of respondents normally use a postal address on the site where they live – and this will often be the site office rather than the address of an individual residential unit. A further 5 per cent say they use a postal address on site 'some of the time'. Of the remaining 56 per cent who never use an address on site, just over a quarter say that this is because they are not allowed to have an address there.

## How would they respond to a flooding emergency?

An important part of the survey asked how caravan and chalet residents might respond to a potential flooding emergency. Although the likelihood of a flood may be low, this is a serious issue because just about all the caravans and chalets along the Lincolnshire coast, including many a little way inland, lie below sea level. The winter months are the period when the flood risk is greatest and, according to the emergency services, all the residents on-site at the time of the survey (in March and the first few days of April) can be considered to be 'at risk'.

Table 15 shows the response to the question 'If an urgent flood warning were issued for this area, including for this site, would you try to leave the site or stay put?' The disturbing statistic here, from the point of view of the emergency services, is that approaching 30 per cent say they would stay put or don't know.

**Table 15: Response to an urgent flood warning**

	<b>% of respondents</b>
Try to leave the site	72
Stay put	16
Don't know	12
	100

Source: Survey data

Table 16 shows the reasons given for intending to stay put. The predominant reasons are essentially about riding out the risk. Concern for home and possessions is a significant secondary consideration. And some respondents say they have 'nowhere else to go'. The various 'other reasons' noted here are worth reporting because they provide an insight into at least some residents' thinking. They include, in their own words:

- "Area is safe"
- "Help other people on site"
- "Husband is in a wheelchair"
- "I can swim"
- "Never had a flood in three years"
- "Wouldn't flood that badly"
- "Too scared"

**Table 16: Reasons for staying put**

	<b>% of respondents intending to stay put</b>
Willing to take the risk	83
Would try to 'tough it out'	76
Wouldn't want to leave home and belongings	61
Don't take these warnings seriously	22
Nowhere else to go	22
Other reasons	15

NB. Respondents could give more than one reason

Source: Survey data

Table 17 looks at the response to the question 'Would you be able to make your way to somewhere safe?', which was asked of all respondents including those intending to stay put. The somewhat reassuring figure here is that 88 per cent say they could do so using their own car.

**Table 17: Ability to make own way to somewhere safe**

	<b>% of respondents</b>
Yes - by own car	88
Yes - by public transport	3
Yes - with help from friend/neighbour/relative	6
No	3
Don't know	1
	100

Source: Survey data

By way of context here it is worth noting that caravan and chalet residents have a high level of car ownership, perhaps because this is an essential tool for this way of living. 90 per cent of the households surveyed say they have regular use of at least one car or van, and 6 per cent have two or more.

Of the very small numbers (just 15 out of 374 survey respondents) who said either that they couldn't make their own way to safety or that they didn't know, five said the emergency services would need to collect them and three said friends or relatives from outside the area would need to come for them. A number of the remainder were unclear about exactly what help they might require, mentioning for example the need for transport, their disabilities and possible help from neighbours.

Table 18 shows the response to the question 'Do you have somewhere outside the area where you could move for a few days if there was a serious emergency?' As the table shows, only three-quarters said that they had somewhere they could go.

**Table 18: Somewhere safe to go outside the area?**

	<b>% of respondents</b>
Yes	74
No	24
Don't know	2
	100

Source: Survey data

The list of safe havens to which residents would move in the event of an emergency is again headed by Nottinghamshire (26 per cent of those with somewhere to go) and South and West Yorkshire (19 per cent), with Derbyshire and Leicestershire a little further behind (each

on 9 per cent). None of these destinations seems unrealistic, assuming of course that there is no severe disruption to the local road network.

However, for a number of caravan and chalet residents the notion of ‘somewhere safe in the event of flooding’ looks distinctly questionable. 11 per cent of respondents cited other places within East Lindsey as their preferred refuge, including Skegness, Mablethorpe and Sutton-on-Sea, which all sit directly on the coast and could be expected to be exposed to flooding arising from a breach in sea defences. A further 6 per cent cited places elsewhere in Lincolnshire, including Boston which itself might be expected to be exposed to coastal flooding. Of course, multi-storey brick buildings in these towns can be expected to shelter residents better than flimsy caravans, but this is perhaps hardly the point.

Table 19 deals with the Environment Agency’s Floodline Warnings Direct Scheme. Whilst awareness of the scheme among caravan and chalet residents is far from negligible – 42 per cent have heard of it – only a small minority – just 12 per cent have registered to receive warnings.

**Table 19: Awareness of the Environment Agency's Floodline Warnings Direct Service**

	% of respondents
Aware and:	
-Registered to receive warnings	12
-Not registered	28
-Don't know	2
Not aware	58
	100

Source: Survey data

Finally, just 14 per cent of caravan and chalet residents are aware of an evacuation plan for their site (though this does not imply, of course, that such a plan does not exist).

Unsurprisingly, the awareness of site evacuation plans is greatest among residents who are also site workers, since they can be expected to have been briefed on the plan and take responsibility for its implementation.

### **Plans for the future**

79 per cent of survey respondents say they expect to continue living on site for part or all of the year for the foreseeable future. Just 14 per cent say they expect to move out, and the remaining 7 per cent don't know.

The reasons for staying put are nearly all positive: 84 per cent of those expecting to remain for the foreseeable future say this is because they are 'happy living here'. Other positive reasons account for further numbers. By contrast, just 2 per cent of those expecting to stay say this is because they can't afford to move elsewhere. A further 5 per cent expect to stay put because of their job on site.

Of the minority who do not expect to continue on site, only one-in-five say this is because they want to move out of a caravan or chalet. Indeed, a powerful indicator of the high level of satisfaction with caravan living is the fact that this group who say they want to move out of a caravan or chalet account for only 4 per cent of the entire survey sample. Very small numbers – just 3 per cent of the survey sample – say they are on a council or housing association waiting list.

Amongst those who do expect to move in the future or are not sure of staying put, there is also a strong preference to stay local – more than half those with firm ideas on where they would like to live would prefer elsewhere within the local area.

### **The pros and cons of caravan living**

The final part of the questionnaire asked respondents to identify up to three advantages and three disadvantages of living in a caravan or chalet rather than conventional housing. In practice, the responses were a mix of comments about this form of housing and the wider locality. Since, for many people, living in a caravan or chalet is the way they are able to take advantage of the Lincolnshire coast, the blurring of the distinction between *housing* and *place* is perhaps inevitable.

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#### **Table 20: Advantages of living in a caravan or chalet**

**(In descending order of frequency of being mentioned)**

Peaceful and quiet  
Fresh air, healthy and clean  
Cheap and affordable  
Close to sea  
Nice here  
Easy to look after  
Break from home  
Friendly  
Convenient  
Safe and secure  
It's flat  
Freedom and independence  
All on one floor  
The weather

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Source: Survey data

Table 20 lists the advantages identified by residents. The varied answers are grouped into broad categories and listed in descending order of frequency of being mentioned. Only 12 per cent of all respondents opted not to identify any advantages, and a great many mentioned more than one.

Heading up the list, the peaceful and quiet environment of caravan and chalet sites is identified as an advantage by around half of all respondents. The clean, healthy and fresh air aspect of the local environment is also seen as an important advantage. Cheapness and affordability is identified too as an advantage, but by smaller numbers (only around 10 per cent).

Table 21 lists the disadvantages identified by residents, again in descending order of frequency of being mentioned. What should not escape note here, however, is that only 40 per cent of respondents took the opportunity to mention any disadvantages at all – a further indicator of the extent to which there is generally a high level of satisfaction with caravan and chalet life.

The cold weather, and in some cases the associated heating costs, is the most frequently cited disadvantage of caravan/chalet life. This was mentioned by more than a quarter of those who identified disadvantages.

The second most common complaint is that they are not allowed to live on site all year round, requiring them to move elsewhere for several weeks in winter. This is a complaint by around one-in-six of those who cite disadvantages to caravan life, or around 6 per cent of all the survey respondents.

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**Table 21: Disadvantages of living in a caravan or chalet**

**(In descending order of frequency of being mentioned)**

Cold weather  
Can't live here all year  
Long way from other places  
Cost  
Too small  
Poor public transport  
No jobs  
No shops

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Source: Survey data

## The survey findings: an assessment

There are perhaps four strategic conclusions to be drawn from the survey data.

The first is that there is a blurred distinction between 'visitors' and 'residents'. Naively, it might be assumed that the caravan and chalet occupants of the Lincolnshire coast can be divided neatly into two groups: those that live there all year round and those who are temporary visitors or holidaymakers. This isn't the case. In practice, the modern static caravan provides a congenial environment in which some people can spend extended periods even if they have a principal home elsewhere. In effect, the caravan or chalet functions as a second home rather like a cottage in the country. Some people live multi-centred lives and this can be especially true of retirees, who make up a high proportion of site residents. And of course, planning restrictions on most caravan sites along the Lincolnshire coast simply don't allow residents to spend all year there.

The survey sought to filter out short-term visitors by focussing on those who see themselves as living for 'some or all of the year' in their caravan or chalet. Even so, there is considerable diversity in proportion of the year that these longer-term residents spend on site: 85 per cent are there for more than three months a year but only around 20 per cent for the whole year.

The second strategic conclusion is that, notwithstanding the blurred distinction between visitors and residents, there is a sizeable group of caravan and chalet occupants who should unquestionably be regarded – and counted – as East Lindsey residents. They deserve to be included in all measures of the local population on the same basis as occupants of conventional bricks-and-mortar housing. This group is rather wider than just those who live on site all year round.

The occupants who should be counted as East Lindsey residents make up around 40 per cent of all the caravan and chalet residents covered by the survey. A number of key statistics point to this proportion. Amongst the survey respondents:

- 41 per cent live on site for nine months or more each year
- 43 per cent don't return to another home elsewhere for part of the year
- 39 per cent consider their caravan or chalet to be their main home
- 39 per cent are permanently registered with a GP at this address
- 43 per cent are not registered to vote elsewhere
- 39 per cent normally use a postal address at their caravan or chalet site

This proportion – 40 per cent of all non-short term visitors – applies to the weeks in March and early April when the survey was carried out. As a proportion of all occupants on site, including short-term visitors, the figure will be lower, especially during peak holiday periods.

The third conclusion is that living in a caravan or chalet is a positive experience for most residents. Given that even the most modern static caravans struggle to match the space, substance and permanency of conventional housing, it might be expected that long-term

caravan and chalet residents see their home as a 'second best' option. With a small number of exceptions, this is emphatically not the case.

The survey shows clearly that the reasons for opting for a caravan or chalet are mostly 'positive'. Residents mostly choose this form of housing (and this way of life) because they like what it is able to offer – a desirable environment for example – rather than because it is cheaper than conventional housing, though this can be an added advantage. For some it provides the best way to move into the area. In contrast, 'negative' reasons for moving into a caravan or chalet, such as losing a home elsewhere, are much rarer. Moreover, the subsequent experiences of living in a caravan or chalet are also, on balance, strongly positive.

The fourth important conclusion from the survey is specific to the concerns of the emergency services: there still seems some way to go in achieving a satisfactory level of awareness of flood risk and of the appropriate responses.

This need not involve spreading alarm about the likelihood of severe flooding, which in practice is small. However, the survey responses suggest that the nature of the flood risk along the Lincolnshire coast, arising from a breach in sea defences, is not always well understood. This is reflected in the share of residents who would be disinclined to leave the site in the event of a flood warning, and in the surprising numbers that would expect to take refuge elsewhere along the Lincolnshire coast. The perception among at least some residents would seem to be that if flooding were to occur it would be localised and not too severe, akin perhaps to a river bursting its banks. That the risk is inundation by the sea seems not to be fully understood. The rather more reassuring news from the survey is that if the risk could be fully understood, the vast majority of residents should have no difficulty in moving off site.

## 4. THE BIGGER PICTURE

The survey provides a detailed description of the East Lindsey coast's longer-term caravan and chalet residents – who they are, where they come from, why they chose this way of living, and much more. However, it does not by itself tell us just *how many* caravan and chalet residents live there.

### **Thermal imaging**

When the survey was designed, the intention was that the data for the survey sites would be grossed up to provide estimates for the whole of the coastal strip using information gathered from a thermal imaging fly-over. The fly-over, which was commissioned independently of the present research, was intended to identify caravans and chalets that were 'warm' and could therefore be assumed to be occupied. Thermal imaging is an established technique used to monitor heat-loss from conventional buildings, but its application to caravans and chalets is new. The findings were potentially of particular relevance to the Lincolnshire Fire and Emergency Service, who needed to understand the scale of the evacuation problem they would face in the event of flooding.

Two thermal imaging fly-overs were undertaken. The first, at the beginning of February 2011, at a time when most caravan sites on the Lincolnshire coast are closed, appeared to confirm that just about all the caravans were indeed unoccupied.

The second fly-over, at the beginning of April 2011, was timed to coincide with the survey and the 2011 Census ('Census day' was Sunday 27 March). In practice, the results of the second fly-over proved much harder to interpret. Nor did they correspond to what a number of managers understood to be the scale and location of occupancy on their site at this time. The key problem appears to be that spring sunshine warms caravans during the day but the rate at which this heat is then lost in the evening depends a great deal on building materials. For example, some static caravans have plastic roof tiles, which lose heat slowly, whereas others have metal roofs, which dissipate heat more quickly. Except in very cold weather, a thermal image cannot therefore be used to identify whether a caravan is occupied.

### **From survey data to district-wide estimates**

Grossing up the survey results to provide estimates for the East Lindsey coast as a whole therefore has to rely on different procedures and ones for which, in anticipation of the thermal imaging data, the survey methods were not originally designed.

The starting point is the completion of 374 interviews on twelve sites that include, in total, just over 4,000 static caravans or chalets. The completed interviews do not represent the sum total of resident households on the sites: there will have been no contact with some households despite call-backs and, as in all surveys, a small number of refusals. In addition, on several of the larger sites the interviewing was halted once a pre-defined quota had been met.

A further complication is that the survey included a high proportion of sites that are allowed to open for most or all of the year, on the reasonable assumption that long-term caravan and chalet residents are most likely to be found there rather than on sites that are only allowed to open during the summer months. East Lindsey DC's records indicate that the 24,700 static caravans and chalets along the coast fall into five groups in terms of permitted opening:

All year round	700 units (3% of the total)
March to early January	5,200 units (21%)
March to end November	10,200 units (41%)
March to end/mid October	6,100 units (25%)
No information	2,400 units (10%)

What is of particular note here is that all-year-round opening is allowed in very few cases. Indeed, just two sites – one of which comprises chalets – account for the vast majority of the 700 units with permission for all-year-round occupancy.

Of the survey sites, eight were allowed to open from March to early January, and a further site was one of the two main locations with all-year-round opening.

On four of these nine sites the completed interviews represented more than 20 per cent of the stock of static caravans or chalets, and in all these cases there remained scope for additional interviews on site. In two other cases where the site was open from March to early January the interviewing was stopped well short of the 20 per cent mark. Fewer interviews, in relation to the number of static caravans, were completed on the survey sites that were only allowed to open from March to November.

With this information in mind, a number of bold assumptions seem justified:

- That 30 per cent of the units on sites that are open for ten months or more a year are occupied by long-term residents (this equates to 1,800 units)
- That 15 per cent of the units on sites open between March and November are occupied by long-term residents (1,500 units)
- That there are no long-term residents on the March to October sites

- That on the sites for which there is no recorded information on occupancy dates, 10 per cent of the units are occupied by long-term residents (200 units)<sup>10</sup>

'Long-term resident' means the same here as in the survey – households that live on the site for some or all of the year, rather than short-term visitors, weekend residents or holidaymakers. The 30 per cent figure in the first assumption, derived from the survey, is intended to reflect no-contacts, refusals and curtailed interviewing as well as completed interviews.

The resulting figures for the East Lindsey coastal strip as a whole are *estimates*, and subject to an important margin of error, it must be stressed. They suggest that around 3,500 households may be long-term residents in the caravans and chalets along the East Lindsey coast.

At the average occupancy rate identified by the survey (1.9 persons per unit) these caravan and chalet households will account for around 6,600 people.

Also in line with the survey findings, some 40 per cent of these residents – that is, around 1,400 households and perhaps 2,700 people – should really be regarded as full-time, regular East Lindsey residents and counted as such.

Again, it must be stressed that all these figures are *estimates*. It could be argued that they are too high because the survey was biased towards sites where the research team had been told there were significant numbers of longer-term residents. Conversely, the estimates could be too low, council officers have speculated, because some of the site managers who declined to become involved in the survey may have done so to deflect attention from the scale of long-term residency.

Given the shortcomings of the thermal imaging exercise, a different approach would be required to generate more accurate, definitive figures. It is worth underlining, however, that the estimates presented here are based on a substantial survey and on detailed local authority records on all East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites.

The estimates here are particularly worth contrasting with the very much smaller number of residents enumerated for official statistical purposes. As section 2 of the report showed, along the East Lindsey coast the numbers officially recorded as living in caravans or chalets are far lower:

- 550 individuals, by the 2001 Census
- 550 individuals (estimated) on the Electoral Register
- 270 households for Council Tax purposes

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<sup>10</sup> The implicit assumption here is that the majority of these sites have long-standing occupancy conditions that allow March to October or March to November opening, bearing in mind that recent approvals allowing a longer season appear to be better recorded. It is nevertheless possible that a small number of these sites may have acquired the right to all-year-round occupancy.

If, as suggested here, the long-term resident population of the sites is actually around 6,600, of which 2,700 are essentially full-time, it would appear that barely one-in-ten of the long-term residents and one-in-five of the full-time population is routinely being counted.

### **The 'full-time' residents**

The survey tells us quite a lot about the estimated 2,700 'full-time' residents in caravans and chalets.

The respondents who said their caravan or chalet is their 'main home' are in several important respects not very different to other long-term caravan and chalet residents along the East Lindsey coast:

- They are a predominantly older group – around 40 per cent are over 65 and 70 per cent over 55 – even though there is a fair sprinkling of younger site workers among the full-time residents.
- Nearly 90 per cent own their own caravan or chalet, and nearly three-quarters were formerly owner-occupiers elsewhere
- Around a third have been on their present site for at least five years
- Only around a quarter are in employment

Their reasons for choosing to live in a caravan or chalet are also predominantly positive – more than 80 per cent say they like this way of living, and 80 per cent say they wanted to live on the Lincolnshire coast. Only around a quarter were already living in the area prior to moving into their caravan or chalet. Half say they wanted to retire to the Lincolnshire coast.

In other respects the full-time residents are subtly different from the other longer-term residents:

- A rather higher proportion (80 per cent) describe themselves as 'retired'
- They are more likely to report health problems – 35 per cent of these households include someone with a long-term limiting illness or disability
- They are rather more likely to claim benefits (notably Disability Living Allowance)
- And the proportion without a car (15 per cent) is higher

The survey respondents who considered their caravan or chalet to be their main home are more likely to be on the East Lindsey electoral register (48 per cent), more likely to use a postal address on site (74 per cent) and more likely to be registered with a local GP (83 per

cent, mostly on a permanent basis). They are also more likely to use local hospitals, doctors, and dentists.

In terms of their attitude to emergency evacuation procedures, this group of full-time residents is more likely to be registered to receive flood warnings but less likely to try to leave their site in the event of a warning – only just over 60 per cent say they would definitely try to leave. In quite a number of cases this is because, as full-time residents, they don't have somewhere else they could go for a few days, but this is compounded by a widespread reluctance to leave their home and belongings.

86 per cent of these full-time residents say they expect to continue to live on site for the foreseeable future, and 84 per cent say they are happy living there. The main dissatisfaction they voice is that in most cases they are required to move off-site for several weeks during the winter when their site is closed to comply with planning conditions.

### **The other long-term residents**

Beyond the full-time residents, discussed above, our estimates suggest that there are another 2,000 or so households, including perhaps another 4,000 people, who spend a very substantial part of the year in caravans or chalets on the East Lindsey coast.

It is harder to count this group as East Lindsey residents – they often have another home elsewhere – but it is important to remember that this group *excludes* short-term visitors, weekenders and holidaymakers. In effect, they too have a substantial stake in the local area even if it falls some way short of all-year-round.

The survey data shows that 40 per cent of these 'other' long-term residents spend at least six months of the year in their caravan or chalet in East Lindsey, and more than three-quarters live there for at least three months. The average annual stay among this group is between five and six months, though not necessarily all in one stint of course.

One way of looking at this group is to translate their numbers and annual duration on-site into 'full-time equivalents'. A simple calculation here suggests that these 'other' long-term residents are the equivalent of approaching 1,000 households and 1,800 people on a full-time basis.

Adding the 'full-time' and 'other' residents brings the total on the East Lindsey coast, on a full-time equivalent basis, to around 2,400 households and 4,600 people. These figures are estimates, it must be stressed, but they perhaps give the best indication of the extent to which the long-term residents of caravans and chalets add to the coastal strip's population.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Key considerations

In considering the implications of the findings it is useful to begin by making four general observations.

First, the numbers living for part or all of the year in caravans and chalets along the East Lindsey coast are significant. The estimates presented here suggest that perhaps 3,500 households, including around 6,600 people, live in these caravans and chalets for extended periods. Of these, around 40 per cent are essentially full-time residents. These numbers are modest in relation to the overall stock of static caravans along the coast (nearly 25,000). Even so, the long-term caravan population of the East Lindsey coast is equivalent to an additional village or small town.

Second, living in a caravan is highly popular with the vast majority of residents. Indeed, this is a way of living that most residents have deliberately sought. Few have moved into a caravan as a 'second best' option. For a large number of older people in particular, living in a caravan provides a lifestyle that is congenial and safe, in a location they like, and with an often strong sense of community. It is also relatively cheap, allowing them to get by reasonably comfortably on a modest income and, in quite a number of cases, free up capital from the sale of a house.

Third, most caravan and chalet residents are a long way removed from 'problem families'. Whilst the residents include a fair sprinkling of benefit claimants, which is perhaps to be expected given their age and geographical origins, there is no sense in which the caravan sites of the East Lindsey coast have become social 'dumping grounds' for the poor and disadvantaged or those who simply don't fit in elsewhere. Indeed, the fact that most long-term residents own their own caravan or chalet – usually at a cost of a few tens of thousands – guarantees a degree of social exclusivity.

Fourth, there seems to be little if any evidence of outright illegality. Whilst quite large numbers do live in a caravan as their main home they generally seem to do so within the rules, which means that sites close down during the winter, as they are required to do by planning conditions, and the residents temporarily move elsewhere. A truly forensic investigation would no doubt identify instances in which rules are breached, but if illegality does occur it is not sufficiently widespread to have come to the notice of the present research.

The existence of a sizeable but fundamentally legal 'caravan community' along the East Lindsey coast should really no longer be contested. This community does indeed exist, as some local observers have long believed, though it does not conform to negative

stereotypes. For East Lindsey DC, and for Lincolnshire CC, the existence of this community has two important consequences:

- The *strongly positive* consequence is that the local spending by caravan residents will support substantial numbers of jobs in the area, and do so on nearer an all-year-round basis than the spending by summer visitors. Furthermore, in so far as most caravan residents are retirees, they will not be competing with other local residents for work.
- The *strongly negative* consequence is that most of the caravan residents are unrecorded in official population statistics. As a result, the two local authorities (county and district) are missing out on millions in government grant. As a rule of thumb, if the number of households is under-recorded by 1,000, the financial loss to the two authorities is likely to be of the order of £4m a year. At the same time, this unrecorded population adds to demands on local services.

### **The options for planning<sup>11</sup>**

The research team is aware that at least four options are often discussed when the future of East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites is under consideration.

#### *OPTION 1: Status quo*

This is the way forward that involves the least disruption and effort. The very large numbers of caravan sites along the coast would continue to operate under a range of planning conditions, some allowing longer opening than others, often reflecting decisions taken many years ago.

The status quo has attractions, not least because there is no 'crisis' or any requirement for change imposed by central government, but it does have important drawbacks.

First, it leaves the large numbers of households who spend much or all of the year living in caravans with a highly indeterminate residential status. Are they East Lindsey residents or not? The evidence in this report shows that significant numbers *should* really be counted as residents, but for most purposes they fail to be counted. On a day-to-day basis this probably matters little to the individuals concerned, though some will have difficulties in being included on the electoral register and others may find their access to credit impaired by the absence of a conventional address. The consequences for the local council are far more serious:

- The local population will be under-recorded

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<sup>11</sup> The views expressed in this part of the report are those of the Sheffield Hallam research team and do not necessarily reflect the views of East Lindsey DC.

- As a consequence, the district and county councils will be under-funded by population-based formulae
- The district and county councils will also miss out on Council Tax revenue from households that go unrecorded
- The local health service, too, is likely to be under-funded if residents are registered with doctors outside the area

The other major problem with the status quo is that it is inconsistent in the way it handles flood risk. Weather patterns mean that the risk of inundation by the sea is greatest during the winter months, from October to March. That being the case, it could be argued that no caravan occupancy at all should be allowed during the winter months so that no-one is exposed to any risk however small. In practice, the complex mix of planning conditions that make up the status quo in East Lindsey require some sites to close for most of this period while others shut for a much shorter period (generally from 5 January to 1 March). This is inconsistent because it is a policy driven neither by flood risk nor by the preferences of site operators and residents.

In weighing up the merits of the status quo, what also needs to be noted is that the number of longer-term caravan residents is likely to increase. This is partly because the standards of static caravans are improving all the time, providing a more desirable living environment, and partly because an ageing population will increase the numbers in the age cohorts that are most attracted to caravan living.

*OPTION 2: Further restrict the period sites are allowed to open*

This approach would be the logical consequence of giving top priority to concerns over flood risk. To minimise exposure to flood risk, it could be argued that no caravan sites at all on the East Lindsey coast should be allowed to open during the winter months, say from October to March, and that all existing planning conditions should be revised to reflect this.

This option would be fiercely opposed by many site owners and operators. Indeed, it is far from clear that the local authority would find it at all easy to introduce this change where the right to open for part or all of the October to March period already exists. There would also be fierce opposition from substantial numbers of longer-term residents, not least those identified in this report whose caravan is their 'main home'.

But even putting aside the inevitable opposition, there are other good reasons to be wary of more restrictive occupancy conditions:

- Living in a caravan along the Lincolnshire coast is actually a lifestyle that is highly valued by substantial numbers of people. It would be churlish and heavy-handed to deny these people this opportunity

- Ending semi-permanent residency on East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites would take substantial spending power out of the local economy, with knock-on detrimental consequences for local employment
- The loss of spending power and employment would accentuate the seasonality of the local economy. Longer-term caravan residents are one of the groups that sustains spending and jobs outside the summer peak season.

None of this is intended to suggest that the flood risks are anything less than real. However, there are real trade-offs here. The key question is whether the risk to life and property is sufficiently great to cast aside the economic gains and the aspirations of so many households. These are genuine choices, and it would be entirely wrong to allow the concerns about flood risk held by, for example, the Environment Agency and the emergency services, to trump all other positive considerations.

In part, the trade-off turns on the *likelihood* and *severity* of a potential flooding event. A low likelihood of a modest event is perhaps something that should not weigh heavily in caravan planning policy. If effective flood warning and evacuation procedures are in place, the weight attached to flood risk probably diminishes further. The research team understands that the prime risk is not of tsunami-style inundation but of more modest shallow and possibly localised flooding, though at the point of inundation (if there were a breach in the sea wall) the consequences could be severe.

### *OPTION 3: Convert some of the caravan sites to housing*

This conflates at least two rather different options. One is that some of the existing static caravan accommodation could be up-graded to, say, small eco-homes or chalets, primarily targeted at visitors and second-home owners. The other is that some of the existing sites, perhaps most notably the chalet sites with all-year-round occupancy, could be redeveloped for conventional housing. The logic here is that if there is a demand for all-year-round accommodation that is currently being met by static caravans, this might be better met simply by supplying more housing.

This could never be an option for more than a small minority of East Lindsey's coastal caravan sites because if implemented widely it would choke off the supply of low-cost caravan accommodation that underpins so much of the area's holiday business. But as an approach to addressing the needs of those who presently live for much of the year in caravans, house-building does not seem particularly relevant:

- The vast majority of East Lindsey's longer-term caravan residents have in fact quite consciously *opted in* to caravan living, in preference to conventional housing. Their caravans are not a 'second best' choice.
- Living on caravan sites provides a sought-after environment and sense of community that conventional housing often lacks

The effect of redeveloping caravan sites for housing would probably therefore be to displace longer-term caravan residents from one site to another.

That said, there may still be a case for selective redevelopment. If so, the decisions are perhaps better driven by aspirations to diversify the range of holiday accommodation available along the coast (in the case of eco-homes for example) or to increase the stock of affordable accommodation for East Lindsey residents.

*OPTION 4: Allow all-year-round residency on a larger number of sites*

Since significant numbers of households already live for most of the year in caravans and chalets along the East Lindsey coast, there is a case for regularising the situation by allowing all-year-round residency on a larger number of sites. This would not involve endorsing illegality as there is little evidence that present-day rules are being flouted. It would however benefit both caravan residents and the local authority.

By way of background it is worth noting that all-year-round residency in static caravans is not unusual elsewhere in Britain, even though it is currently allowed on hardly any of East Lindsey's coastal sites. The government's 2002 study of 'park homes', for example, suggests that there are around 2,000 sites of this kind in England and Wales with an estimated population of more than 115,000<sup>12</sup>.

The benefits to caravan occupants are that:

- They would no longer have to move off site for a number of weeks of the year, to comply with planning conditions, which can be a significant source of resentment
- It would facilitate registration at the caravan address for a range of purposes, from the electoral register to benefits and banking

The benefits to East Lindsey DC and Lincolnshire CC are that:

- A significant population that is presently largely hidden would in future be more easily counted, resulting in additional funding from population-driven formulas
- Caravan residents' liability for Council Tax would be clearer-cut, and the number paying increased

The benefits to the wider local economy are:

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<sup>12</sup> Berkeley Hanover Consulting et al (2002) *Economics of the Park Homes Industry*, ODPM, London.

- Additional spending in the local economy by caravan residents who no longer have to move away for several weeks a year
- The attraction of additional residents – and additional spending – currently driven away from the East Lindsey coast by the restrictive occupancy conditions that presently apply to just about all sites

However, if all-year-round occupancy were to be allowed on a larger number of sites, two conditions perhaps ought to be met.

The first condition is that the units themselves should be fit for all-year-round habitation. The advances in the standards of heating and insulation, in particular, have been considerable in recent years, to the extent that most new units are fit for all-year-round living, but there will undoubtedly be many older units that do not meet these high standards. It would be wrong to allow residents to live all-year-round in what would effectively be sub-standard housing. This is perhaps a particular concern given the older age profile of caravan residents. Permission for all-year-round living might therefore be tied to the quality of the residential unit.

The other condition that would need to be met is that acceptable flood alert and evacuation procedures would need to be in place. Among residents, this would require a higher level of understanding of the nature of the problem and the appropriate responses than is currently the case.

All-year-round occupancy would probably be supported by a significant number of site owners and operators, though it cannot be assumed that all or many would necessarily wish to go down this route. Keeping a site open for the benefit of just a very few, for example, might not be commercially worthwhile. Where the right to all-year-round occupancy were granted, there would probably be a windfall financial gain for site owners (whose plots would command higher rents) and caravan owners (whose units would be worth more because they could be lived in for the whole year).

The right to all-year-round occupancy might also have some impact on the profile of caravan residents. Whilst these might be expected to remain predominantly over 50, especially where owner's site rules restrict occupancy to this group, the availability of a cheaper option to conventional bricks-and-mortar housing could be expected to attract at least some East Lindsey residents who are currently priced out of owner-occupation or the private rented sector.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that buying a caravan would necessarily provide younger residents with a first step on the 'housing ladder' because even modern static caravans have a shorter life than conventional housing and depreciation can be significant. Indeed, even some older residents can find that after a number of years their caravan has little financial value, which constrains their options if they eventually need to move on or if the site owner seeks to up-grade the quality of units and remove the older stock.

### **The way forward: concluding remarks**

The East Lindsey coast's uniquely large stock of static caravans is an asset rather than a liability. It underpins much of the area's holiday trade. The evidence in this report shows that some of these caravans also provide longer-term homes.

That significant numbers of people, especially retirees, seek out caravan living on the Lincolnshire coast should not in itself be seen as a problem, especially if concerns about flood risk can be addressed. The main concern should in fact be that caravan residents are not properly counted, since this rebounds on local authority funding in particular.

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*The Caravan Communities of the Lincolnshire Coast*

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