Summary:

East Lindsey has the largest number of static caravans anywhere in Europe. This concentration gives rise to a number of economic, environmental and planning concerns. Given the importance of this holiday accommodation to the local tourism economy and the desire to improve the current tourism offer, it is vital that planning and economic development policies are aligned to manage growth and diversification.

Recommendation:

That Members consider and discuss the contents of this report with a view to advising East Lindsey District Council (ELDC) of a preferred policy approach that:

(i) ELDC includes a provision for s106 to fund emergency planning and safety procedures in any adopted caravan policy;

(ii) a study is completed by the LCC Communities Research & Information team into understanding the number of people living (semi) permanently in caravans in order to make the case for more government funding; and,

(iii) the same approach as advocated in (i) and (ii) above be promoted to other Lincolnshire district councils.

Background

1. The impact of caravans on the coastal strip is difficult to miss. ELDC is proposing a project to study the social, economic and environmental impact of caravans (defined as static and touring caravans, and chalet accommodation) along the coast in more detail. The final report will provide information to enable a focused discussion on a number of issues:
a. What are the benefits and disadvantages of a large number of caravans on the coast?

b. Should a cap on the number of caravans located on the coast be considered and implemented using planning policy and development control powers?

c. If a cap is considered appropriate, where should the restriction be applied?

2. This work will feed into the current evidence gathering of ELDC as it develops its own Local Plan for submission to the Planning Inspectorate. This is a timely opportunity for Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) Members to influence the debate. The following section of this report provides consideration of relevant evidence that is available or needed, and possible arguments to be explored and discussed at the meeting.

Evidence

3. Research has been commissioned by Visit Lincolnshire to provide a profile of potential visitors to the county. The profile categorises visitors into different categories, each with their own leisure interests and spending power. This market segmentation can be used to target different socio-economic groups by ensuring the correct "product mix" is available, i.e. offering a range of traditional and innovative leisure experiences.

4. Two thirds of potential visitors considered a coastal break but only 12% of those wanted a "lively" break typified by traditional seaside resorts (over half of whom prefer holiday park/static caravan accommodation). A third want unspoilt coast (20% preferring holiday park/static caravan accommodation) and 55% want coastal village holidays (25% preferring holiday park/static caravans). Significantly, half of those preferring an unspoilt coastal holiday identified 4* hotel and self-catering as their preference.

5. Thus, it is clear there is still a significant demand for traditional lower cost caravan holiday accommodation. This would be supplemented by bed and breakfast accommodation in the larger resorts such as Skegness. Conversely, there is also a demand for higher quality hotel and self-catering accommodation linked more specifically to appreciation of the natural environment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that holiday park visitors tend to spend money within the confines of the park rather than the wider community. However, this still represents an injection of spending power locally even if there is limited leakage.

6. Environmental and planning evidence has highlighted the perception of flood risk as a deterrent to the private sector when considering further investment. This manifests itself in providing site mitigation and emergency evacuation procedures at extra cost to business. There is also pressure from caravan operators who are submitting planning applications to extend existing parks in order to provide more space for larger caravans in response to customer demand for higher standards.
7. Additional evidence provided by the ELDC review will include:

- Aerial surveys to monitor vacant pitches and implementation of planning permissions;
- Time series of survey data to identify trends and estimate future levels of demand;
- Economic and social impact including analyses of business rate income, Council costs, visitor spend, job creation, seasonal employment and health impacts;
- Visual impact of caravans on the landscape;
- Overview of emergency planning working with LCC; and,
- Establishing a more accurate figure for the permanent caravan population.

Alternative Policy Approaches

8. The available evidence points to a strong traditional holiday industry still in rude economic health. However, there is clearly latent unmet tourist demand for a more diverse and tranquil holiday experience. At a strategic level, it is the ambition of the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) to double the value of tourism in 20 years (Draft Strategic Economic Plan, p. 31, December 2013). In particular, there is a goal to increase the range of tourist attractions with support for 5 developments of a “national scale” associated with an increase in the range of tourist accommodation in the county.

9. A delicate balance is required which protects the existing natural environment whilst promoting opportunities for new investment. The role of spatial planning would be to guide new development to the most sustainable locations working in partnership with private sector investors. Given the fundamental role that caravan accommodation plays in supporting the local economy, there is also a need to manage existing sites and consider the appropriateness of new caravan development.

10. In order to facilitate discussion at this meeting, it may be helpful to suggest a number of different approaches which reflect different views on the role and impact of caravans in East Lindsey:

a. Full Capacity: this policy approach would reflect the view that caravan provision has reached a limit which should not be exceeded because of the impact on the landscape and strain on local services. It would also acknowledge the vulnerability of such structures in the event of a serious flood incident. This would manifest itself in a blanket cap on further caravan development, accompanied by policies to promote the diversification of tourism opportunities exploiting the attractions of the unspoilt coast and natural heritage further inland, e.g.

- Low density, single storey cabin accommodation linked to outdoor activities and enjoyment of the unspoilt coastal strip and country park; and,
- Allocation of prime development sites to attract high quality hotel development (although quality in terms of star rating will ultimately be decided by the view the market takes).
b. Incremental Growth and Improvement: this approach would limit new caravan development and extensions to existing sites to existing holiday resorts and allow development within walking distance of these settlements. Expansion would require improved landscaping and occupancy restrictions outside the holiday season. This would allow some encroachment into the adjoining countryside and is essentially the approach currently proposed in the ELDC draft Core Strategy. Opportunities for diversification would also be encouraged.

c. Tourism Zones: there are examples in NE Lincolnshire and East Devon of a zoned approach which aims to maintain the character of a particular tourism activity such as holiday caravan parks, eco tourism and family entertainment. This is a more rigid approach to controlling development (through boundary definition, prescriptive policy formulation and site allocations) but has the advantage of differentiating particular tourist products and assisting in the promotion of distinct holiday types based on expected facilities and accommodation to those unfamiliar with the area.

**Implications for Lincolnshire County Council (LCC)**

11. LCC already has an important role to play in supporting the coastal tourism economy through the highway, water management and trading standards services it provides. Any projected growth in this sector would have financial implications in terms of highway improvements (e.g. A158 coastal road), flood mitigation schemes and business regulation. This is particularly relevant given ELDC’s current preference of not adopting a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for new development.

**Conclusion**

12. Members are asked to consider and discuss the contents of this report focusing on the questions and different policy approaches included in paragraphs 1 and 10 respectively.

**Policy Proofing Actions Required**

N/A

**Background Papers**

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<td>Visit Lincolnshire</td>
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<td>GLLEP Draft Strategic Economic Plan, December 2013</td>
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