



# South Kesteven District Council

## Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Survey

DRAFT REPORT

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## Executive summary

### *Context of the Study*

In June 2005 Fordham Research was commissioned to carry out a study of Gypsies and Travellers' housing needs for South Kesteven. The study was designed to assess the housing situation of Gypsies and Travellers in the District, estimate the extent of housing need and also make recommendations for extending assistance. This in the context of the Housing Act 2004 which requires local authorities to include Gypsy and Travellers in their local housing needs assessments.

The study has five priority aims:

1. Consider the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Travellers
2. Obtain a wider understanding of issues facing Gypsies and Travellers
3. Examine the use of official sites and the problems encountered
4. Understand the issues posed by unauthorised sites
5. Examine the strategic implications of the research findings

To achieve these aims the study drew on a number of data sources including:

1. **Review of secondary information**, including government policy and existing research on Gypsies and Travellers, the Caravan Count figures and regional housing strategies
2. **Stakeholder consultation** with local and national organisations involved with Gypsy and Traveller affairs
3. **Authorised and unauthorised site survey** to examine the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers

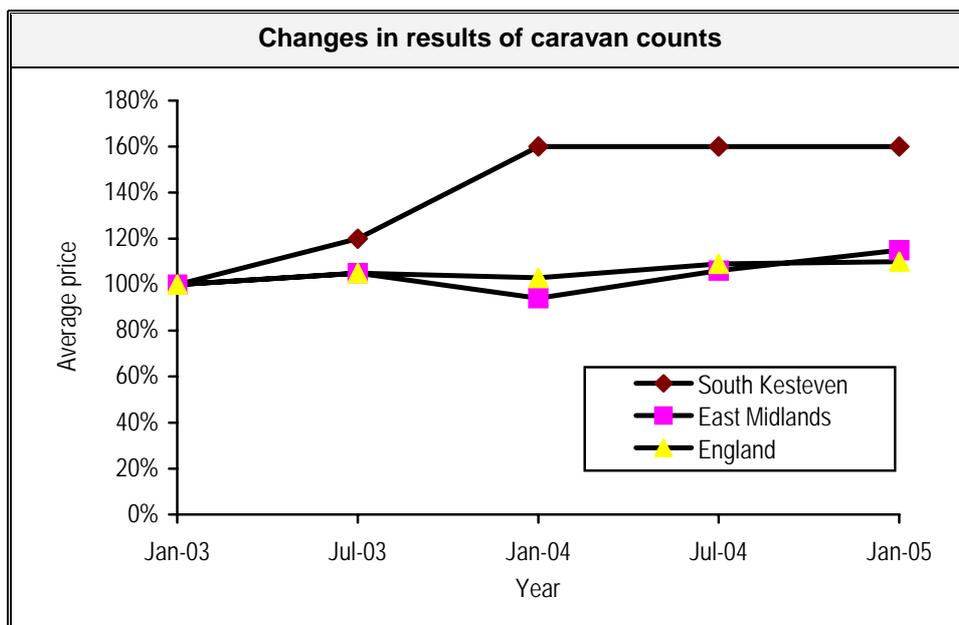
### *Review of secondary information*

It is recognised that there are insufficient numbers of pitches on authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites to accommodate all those who would like a permanent place to stop. As well as the Housing Act 2004, local also need to have regard of their statutory duties, including those in respect of homelessness under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 and to their obligations under the Race Relations (Amendments) Act 2000. However the effectiveness of existing legislation has been limited by the extent of its requirements and

a general failure to implement it. As a result local authorities have often failed to deliver adequate sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

In the East Midlands region, consideration has been given to how the needs of Gypsies and Travellers might be met. However in the light of recent guidance from the ODPM there remains room for improvement. At the district level more needs to be done to develop a joined up strategic approach to the issue. Evidence suggests that at present the approach of South Kesteven District Council is not as well defined or developed as neighbouring areas. As part of this consideration should be given to working jointly with neighbouring authorities as a combined approach to meeting housing need is likely to be more successful given that Gypsy and Traveller issues are rarely confined to a particular area.

The main source of data on population numbers is the ODPM Gypsy Caravan Count. In both the East Midlands and Lincolnshire there is a growing Gypsy and Traveller population, although it is smaller compared to regional and county neighbours. Similarly within South Kesteven, the Gypsy and Traveller population is relatively small when compared to neighbouring areas although it has seen a 60% growth in the past two years. South Kesteven Council figures also point to a rise in unauthorised encampments, perhaps indicating there is need to increase the level of authorised provisions for Gypsies and Travellers.



### ***Stakeholder consultation***

Stakeholders reported that the main issues facing Gypsies and Travellers relates to the shortage of accommodation appropriate facilities on sites. All respondents agreed that more sites are needed although there was no overall consensus about the type of sites that need to be delivered. More assistance also needs to be provided to Gypsies and Travellers wanting to buy their own land.

Other issues that pose problems for Gypsy and Traveller communities include relations with the settled community, their ability to travel and maintain a traditional lifestyle and accessing services such as health and education. While there is a need to improve awareness of these issues among the settled community, Gypsies and Travellers need to be encouraged to engage more in society, particularly with regards to accessing services. To help with this it was argued that there is a case for creating a full time Liaison Officer role in the County.

### ***Site survey***

Thirteen interviews were conducted with Gypsy and Travellers at six sites, covering authorised and unauthorised, permanent and transit sites. Residents were assessed for housing need using indicators of overcrowding, concealed housing, new household formation and housing intentions. Overall South Kesteven's Gypsy and Traveller population do not present much unmet housing need and were generally settled in their accommodation.

There is however evidence that the capacity of authorised sites could be increased to provide alternative accommodation to the few groups currently on unauthorised sites. Up to twenty authorised pitches will be needed to provide permanent accommodation for these families.

There is also a need to increase the authorised transit pitches by five to meet the lifestyle requirements of South Kesteven gypsies who currently use unauthorised sites on route to another area. Although there is a preference for staying on unauthorised sites among their residents due to the convenience and independence, providing authorised transit sites with suitable facilities may outweigh these advantages.

Based on the survey sample the number of Gypsy and Traveller households can be expected to increase by 6% over the next five years. Site capacity should be capable of meeting the predicted additional household requirements.

As well as housing requirements, the survey findings also point to a low take-up of services and facilities among Gypsy and Travellers, although awareness of most Council services was fairly high. Most respondents felt it was difficult to find employment in South Kesteven, however the lack of work was not felt to affect either their own or their children's ability to maintain a travelling lifestyle.

### ***Conclusions***

The overall finding of our research is that while South Kesteven does not have a large Gypsy and Traveller population in relation to other districts in the East Midlands region, its numbers are increasing and its unauthorised sites appear to be increasing more than in neighbouring areas. Many in unauthorised sites would prefer to be in a permanent authorised accommodation and the capacity of these sites should be increased. However there is also a demand for temporary transit accommodation in South Kesteven which is not currently being met. Effectively monitoring the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population and their requirements will help ensure that their needs are met in the future and that tensions with the settled community are minimised.

### ***Recommendations***

- Site capacity

The main issue regarding Gypsy and Traveller in South Kesteven is the significantly sized unauthorised site at the Meres Leisure Centre car park. The interviews with residents at the site suggest that a move to permanent authorised accommodation would be desirable, however we recommend the Council consults all the inhabitants on how their needs can best be accommodated, either by increasing capacity at existing sites or by establishing a new site.

Based on our survey findings, we also recommend the capacity of authorised transit sites to be increased by five pitches. If land is available, this should be separate from existing site provision, given the preference of Gypsy and Travellers for maintaining independence from other groups.

We also recommend site capacity on all Council sites should be reviewed every three to five years, to take into account the relatively young age at which new households forms in Gypsy and Traveller communities

- Access and service provision

Many Gypsies and Travellers in ordinary housing are often isolated and in need of assistance, especially when they first move in with tasks of everyday living. We recommend the Council should consider establishing a named contact person in the housing department, able to assist this group of first time householders/

Poor literacy levels are also barriers to accessing health and education services among all Gypsy and Traveller groups. Provide onsite adult literacy schemes to Gypsy and Travellers should be considered, as should providing information on Council services in different media, including audio-visual and diagrammatic.

Gypsy liaison officers can prove a useful bridge between Gypsy and Travellers and the settled community, local council, police and service providers. Currently no dedicated position exists in Lincolnshire. We recommend South Kesteven Council co-ordinate with other Lincolnshire districts to establish a single countywide figure responsible for liaising with Gypsy and Traveller groups.

- Recording and monitoring processes

Our research has also found that South Kesteven Council could improve its record-keeping and monitoring of the Gypsy and Traveller population in the District. Our final recommendation is for the Council to consider identifying a position in either the Housing or Planning departments to take or coordinate responsibility for monitoring Gypsy and Traveller sites.