

Central Lincolnshire Policy S5: Development in the Countryside Evidence Report

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan is being updated since the first Local Plan for Central Lincolnshire, an area covering the districts of City of Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey, was adopted in April 2017.
- 1.2. This Evidence Report (which is one of a collection) provides background information and justification for Policy S5, which relates to Development in the Countryside. This is a criteria-based policy approach which will be used to determine whether applications for residential and non-residential proposals and uses are acceptable within the countryside.

2. Policy Context

National Policy and Guidance

- 2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) notes a number of relevant paragraphs that relate to development within the countryside.
- 2.2. Paragraph 80, within Chapter 5 Delivering a sufficient supply of homes, sets out expectations for development of residential properties within the countryside.

“Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;*
- b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;*
- c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;*
- d) the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building;*
- or*
- e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:*
 - is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and*
 - would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.”*

- 2.3. Paragraph 84 explains the importance of sustainable growth of rural businesses including rural tourism.

“Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.”*

- 2.4. Paragraph 85 notes,

“Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.”

2.5. Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment sets out in paragraph 174 that:

“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;”*

2.6. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was introduced in 2014 and it sets out live guidance on how to implement the policies of the NPPF. The guidance includes details on how isolated homes for rural workers will be assessed in countryside which is relevant to this policy.

How can the need for isolated homes in the countryside for essential rural workers be assessed?

Considerations that it may be relevant to take into account when applying paragraph 79a of the NPPF [Now para. 80, 2021] could include:

- evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at, or in close proximity to, their place of work to ensure the effective operation of an agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance, where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attention 24-hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products);*
- the degree to which there is confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future;*
- whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process;*
- whether the need could be met through improvements to existing accommodation on the site, providing such improvements are appropriate taking into account their scale, appearance and the local context; and*

- *in the case of new enterprises, whether it is appropriate to consider granting permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period.*

Employment on an assembly or food packing line, or the need to accommodate seasonal workers, will generally not be sufficient to justify building isolated rural dwellings.¹

Local Policy

- 2.7. The adopted Local Plan has provision for development within the countryside set out in Policy LP55 Development within the Countryside. This policy sets out a criteria-based approach for both residential and non-residential development within the countryside.
- 2.8. The policy recognises that the best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected for a number of reasons; the important role of agriculture in the local economy, help to reduce ‘food miles’ and a desire for people to source local food. The Central Lincolnshire Authorities recognise that the most versatile agricultural land is an irreplaceable resource and should be protected.
- 2.9. The current local plan policy is set out in 7 parts:
- Part A: Re-use and conversion of non-residential buildings for residential use in the countryside
 - Part B: Replacement of a dwelling in the countryside
 - Part C: Mobile homes within the countryside
 - Part D: New dwellings in the countryside
 - Part E: Non-residential development in the countryside
 - Part F: Agricultural diversification
 - Part G: Protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land
- 2.10. Each part of the policy sets out criteria in which proposals within the countryside will need to satisfy.

3. Context and Evidence

- 3.1. Central Lincolnshire is predominantly a rural area with the vast majority of its land in agricultural use. This agricultural economy is vital not only for the local economy but also for the nation’s food security.
- 3.2. The Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) identifies Lincolnshire as the UK Food Valley and has a programme aimed at promoting and enhancing this sector. Agri-food is also one of the GLLEP’s priority sectors and this is also the case within Central Lincolnshire.
- 3.3. There are a number of challenges facing agriculture, including increasing influence of technology, a move towards large glass houses for growing crops, the complexities relating to now disappeared EU funding, and many more. As such, it could be said that the industry is in a state of flux. The GLLEP is clear that trends towards automation will continue, and it is evolving its views about how best to take this forward.

¹ PPG Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 67-010-20190722

- 3.4. The Local Plan may have some influence in what happened with agriculture, both in terms of homes being delivered for agricultural workers, but also for policy to manage development that is not covered by agricultural permitted development rights. The local plan policy will need to provide a framework for such decisions in light of the potentially competing priorities of protecting the countryside and fostering the agricultural industry at a time where the need for change in the industry may become great in the coming years.

4. Issues and Options Consultation

- 4.1. The Issues and Options Consultation sought respondents' views about growth distribution under proposal 7 which focuses on where new housing will be located.

Q7c – Breaking down the “Elsewhere” category
Do you agree that the “Elsewhere” category should be broken down further to address deliverability? If so, what break down do you think should be used to reflect sustainability and/or market considerations?

- 4.2. There were a number of comments received in response to the question and the key issues can be summarised as follows:
- It should be broken up by districts.
 - The definition of “elsewhere” is meaningless if it is not carried forward in the policies and it should be broken down further taking into account availability of facilities and connectivity.
 - There is scope for further differentiation in the “elsewhere” category in order to direct more development to settlements higher up the hierarchy, offering more sustainable locations for development.
 - Further evidence and understanding should be developed to support the assumed growth in the elsewhere category and also other housing and economic sub-markets as a result of activity outside of Central Lincolnshire.
 - Leave the elsewhere category as it is – the growth should be focused in the towns.
 - Only larger conurbations with jobs, schools and dedicated public transport and cycling and walking facilities should receive growth.
 - If the large villages list was shortened, by increasing the dwelling numbers or by applying an available amenities requirement, then large villages could be a more focused category, for example Cherry Willingham is already a focus for growth and the potential is enhanced with the LEB.
 - Should be decided based on the provision of infrastructure and services – large villages can stand alone and smaller villages should be looked at as clusters.
 - Attention is needed to the needs of current residents of these areas, the addition of more people can cause chaos.
 - It should be further broken down and should be based on amenities, employment opportunities and good public transport links.
 - The areas chosen were selected from a sustainability perspective and market considerations are not a planning consideration.
 - It is important that it is clear what is proposed in all levels of the hierarchy so residents can consider planning implications in their area.
 - Would reduce the LSA to be tighter to the Lincoln urban area with small and medium villages relocated to the elsewhere category and ensure they are not over-developed or left without access to infrastructure.
 - Further clarity about the precise locations of development would assist with infrastructure delivery.

- In light of the proposal to reduce the threshold of allocations to 10 dwellings, it is almost inevitable that there will be more locations in the elsewhere category.
- The focus should be on the settlement hierarchy.
- Individual neighbourhood plans have a lot of answers to the questions.
- Each area has its own level of deliverability and a percentage is not always a good indication of growth, with more attention paid to individuality.
- There is much land in the elsewhere category which is suitable for development and settlement should be considered further away from the Lincoln Strategy Area.
- This should not be broken down if this means that communities that have produced a neighbourhood plan needs to take on additional growth.
- If the “elsewhere” category is broken down, then Policy LP11 Affordable Housing, should also be changed to reflect this change.
- A more flexible approach is needed in the “elsewhere” category to enable market forces to dictate the level of housing achieved. Sustainability can remain the key policy determinant, but deliverability should be given and increased emphasis.
- Other categories such as brownfield and greenfield should be considered.
- Growth in small communities should only be delivered with local community support.
- The focus should be on development benefitting communities in the elsewhere category.
- Parish boundaries should be reinstated for an area’s development limits.
- Market Rasen should continue to be a focus for development.
- Kirkby La Thorpe, with its proximity to Sleaford and the highways network is ideally placed for additional growth.

4.3. Another section within, the Issues and Options Consultation sought respondents’ views about employment proposals in the countryside under proposal 15 which focuses on employment within the countryside.

Q15d – Detail for Employment Sites in the Countryside

Do you agree that the new Local Plan should include definition of what development is or is not acceptable on employment sites in the open countryside? If not, please explain why.

4.4. There were a number of comments received in response to the question and the key issues can be summarised as follows:

- consideration should be given to permitting rural or workspace office schemes of
- small scale (<1 acre) in rural areas where strong environmental credentials
- demonstrated;
- Should be clear understanding of what is acceptable, or not for employment sites in
- the countryside, but agricultural sites should not be removed from employment site definition;
- We must seek to protect the character of some parts of our beautiful county;
- Support for clear definition;
- Every proposal should be taken on merit and judged by the local community through
- the neighbourhood plan process or equivalent;
- All areas should be considered;

- Principle of definition supported, but it should not be too restrictive, there should be a clear demarcation between pure agriculture and industrial/commercial to prevent drift into the countryside, development should be proportionate to location;
- Consideration should be given to whether mixed uses will make a site viable;
- Caution expressed against a restrictive policy defining what is not acceptable on employment sites in the open countryside, particularly if this restricts waste management facilities.
- Already covered in Neighbourhood Plans;
- Greater clarity for sites in the countryside may be beneficial to heritage assets;
- Certain uses can have a detrimental impact upon the area in which they are located, consideration needs to be taken in locating developments.
- Greater consideration of food and farming sector needs to be given to ensure necessary development and support.

4.5. The following next steps were identified on page 70 of the Issues and Consultation Report: “There was strong support for the proposals in relation to employment sites and a number of detailed comments which will require further consideration. It is suggested that the general approach proposed is pursued, with the details for the policy approach(es) being developed, but this may need to be amended to reflect emerging evidence.”

4.6. The following next steps were identified on page 42 of the Issues and Consultation Report, “The responses to the questionnaire provided a lot of competing view points and raised many points worthy of further reflection. It is proposed that the breakdown of distribution will reflect the urban focus of the overall strategy which is considered to be a sustainable approach for Central Lincolnshire, but that it be kept under review taking into account both the likelihood of market delivery, availability of infrastructure and any specific needs being identified through evidence.”

5. Regulation 18 Consultation

5.1. A Consultation Draft of the Local Plan was published for consultation between 30 June and 24 August 2021. During this eight week consultation comments were received on the plan, the policies within the plan, and supporting information and evidence.

5.2. A number of comments were received on this draft policy at the Regulation 18 consultation both in support of and objecting to the overall approach. Furthermore, a number of detailed comments were received and can be summarised as follows:

- Suggestion that the policy should allow development of abandoned buildings in the countryside.
- Suggestion that Part G should go further to address the need for glass houses as an increasingly important part of agriculture and horticulture.
- Suggestion that the policy should include greater control for industrial development in the countryside even if it is associated with agriculture, potentially with a sequential test being applied favouring existing industrial sites and close to the road network.
- Objections to various parts of the policy including Parts A and G.
- Suggestion that the policy should allow for infill in open countryside.
- Suggestion that the policy should also allow for development where it is not suitable in an urban area.

- 5.3. The comments received at the Regulation 18 consultation were carefully considered, however, the policy is important to protect the countryside and also allow agriculture to flourish. Future iterations of the Local Plan may require this policy to be updated to account for further changes and enhancements to the industry, but at this time it is considered that this policy is sound and will help ensure only sustainable development occurs in the countryside. As such, no major changes were made to this policy following the Regulation 18 Consultation.

6. Proposed Approach in Draft Local Plan

- 6.1. The proposed approach is an update to the original Local Plan policy LP55 (Development in the Countryside). The policy retains the criteria-based approach to the 7 key areas:
- Part A: Re-use and conversion of non-residential buildings for residential use in the countryside
 - Part B: Replacement of a dwelling in the countryside
 - Part C: Mobile homes within the countryside
 - Part D: New dwellings in the countryside
 - Part E: Non-residential development in the countryside
 - Part F: Agricultural diversification
 - Part G: Protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land
- 6.2. The policy builds on the existing local plan policy, which has generally proven successful since the plan was adopted. The policy generally seeks to ensure that development is generally limited in the countryside except for a number of specific examples.
- 6.3. This approach will help avoid development being allowed unless it is intrinsically linked to a rural enterprise or where the site specific context is such that development would not be harmful. This approach will ensure that the countryside is protected but will allow reasonable flexibility for farmers and those operating other rural enterprises to allow their businesses to flourish.

7. Reasonable Alternative Options

- 7.1. The following alternative options have been considered for this policy (option 1 being the preferred option).

Option 1: A policy that provides clarity for what development will and will not be allowed in the countryside limiting it to very specific types of development.

Option 2: No policy and instead relying on general local plan policy and national policy.

- 7.2. Option 1 provides clarity on what development would or would not be supported within the countryside. National policy alone would not be sufficient to rely on given the specific Central Lincolnshire rural context. The inclusion of a policy on this subject helps to improve certainty for residents, applicants and decision takers on relevant planning applications.

- 7.3. Option 2 would not provide enough certainty or cater for the varied types of scenarios within Central Lincolnshire given the rural nature of the area. Reliance on other local based policy and national policy would offer enough protection when considering development proposals within the countryside.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. This Evidence Report demonstrates the rationale for the proposed policy as contained in the Proposed Submission Draft Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. This report has been updated following the Regulation 18 consultation. This helps bring together relevant evidence that has informed this policy and how we have responded to comments received during the plan making process, as well as how the latest evidence and national guidance has been taken into account.

Further reading links:

Farming is Changing Published June 2021.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1003924/farming-changing.pdf