

Central Lincolnshire Policy S38 Sleaford Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area Evidence Report

Formerly Policy S37

March 2022



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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 S38, which relates to Sleaford Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area. It seeks to maintain the main shopping function of the Primary Shopping Area whilst ensuring an appropriate balance between retail and non-retail uses where possible.

2. Policy Context

National Policy and Guidance

- 2.1. Since the Central Lincolnshire Plan was adopted the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated in July 2018 with subsequent additional changes being published in February 2019 and a further update in July 2021.
- 2.2. Paragraph 7 of the NPPF explains that:

“The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. At a similarly high level, members of the United Nations – including the United Kingdom – have agreed to pursue the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development in the period to 2030. These address social progress, economic well-being and environmental protection.”
- 2.3. Paragraph 8 goes on to state that:

“Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

... b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being;...”
- 2.4. And Paragraph 20 that:

“Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for:

 - a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;...and
 - c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure);...”
- 2.5. Section 7 relates to Ensuring the vitality of Town Centres, where Paragraph 86 states that:

“... Planning policies should:

- a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters;...”

2.6. Section 8 relates to Promoting healthy and safe communities. Paragraph 92 states that:

“Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;... and
- c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

2.7. Paragraph 93 goes on to state that:

“To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
- b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;
- c) guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community’s ability to meet its day-to-day needs;
- d) ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community; and
- e) ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

2.8. Section 9 relates to the promotion of sustainable transport requiring significant development to be focussed on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes (Paragraph 105). With Paragraph 106 stating that:

“Planning policies should:

- a) support an appropriate mix of uses across an area, and within larger scale sites, to minimise the number and length of journeys needed for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities; ...”

Local Policy

2.9. The adopted Local Plan includes Policy LP6 on Retail and Town Centres in Central Lincolnshire which established a retail hierarchy. It identified Lincoln City Centre as tier 1, four named Town Centres in tier 2 (Gainsborough, Sleaford, Market Rasen and Caistor), District and Local Centres in the Lincoln Urban Area, and ‘Rural Centres’ in settlements serving the local population. It also contained Policies LP46: Sleaford Town Centre which sought to maintain the main shopping function of the primary shopping area, LP45:

Sleaford's Regeneration and Opportunity Areas which set out the broad objectives for each identified opportunity area and LP47: Access and Movement within Sleaford which sought to improve movement throughout the town.

3. Context and Evidence

- 3.1. Sleaford has an attractive and historic town centre with a number of retail, leisure, cultural and historic attractions. Sleaford performs as a hub for the rural hinterland of North Kesteven stretching into parts of the adjacent districts but also faces competition from a number of similarly sized towns that are located close by as well as the major centres of Lincoln, Peterborough and Nottingham.
- 3.2. In the Sleaford Town Centre Visioning Report (July 2015) it was identified that Sleaford is not fulfilling its full potential and needs to attract further national and independent retailers to the town along with broadening its leisure uses. Since the Visioning Report was published the national retail picture has changed considerably, however, many of the objectives of the report remain relevant in maintaining and enhancing Sleaford as a service centre and destination.
- 3.3. Building on the Visioning Report and in an effort to bring together findings from a number of linked studies and reports, the Sleaford Strategic Delivery Plan was published in 2018. This identified 40 actions to deliver the vision under five key headings:
 - Supporting the town centre and its regeneration;
 - Encouraging sustainable travel including enhancing walking and cycling experiences and making alternative transport modes more attractive;
 - Encouraging edge of town centre parking to release the town centre of traffic and improving the car parking experience for all users;
 - Investing in the existing strategic infrastructure to create capacity for growth whilst utilising the existing town centre infrastructure more efficiently and effectively to support regeneration; and
 - Improving the town centre environment through enhanced public realm, better signage and reduced congestion.
- 3.4. A key barrier to enhancing the town centre's retail core is the constant circulation of vehicle traffic around the one-way traffic management system. This has many negative impacts upon the town centre including delays to public transport, problems for deliveries to local businesses and contributes to the poor environment for pedestrians and cyclists. There is a need to improve connections to primary routes, develop linkages with surrounding settlements, improve the efficiency and movement of vehicles throughout the town centre and promote a shift from private vehicles to walking, cycling and public transport options.
- 3.5. The retail offer is also constrained in part due to the town centre's heritage and charm. Sleaford has a tight urban grain, with small premises. Whilst this generates an attractive built environment it results in a shortage of modern larger retail premises historically desired by the retail sector, particularly national multiples, and for the sale of comparison goods.

4. Issues and Options Consultation

- 4.1. The Issues and Options Consultation in 2019 included the following proposal for shopping and town centres:

PROPOSAL 16 – Shopping and City and Town Centres

A City Centre Study is being prepared for Lincoln City Centre. It is proposed that the new Local Plan should reflect the evidence of this work and any outcomes to help ensure the plan positively addresses the ongoing role of the city centre and to help ensure it remains healthy. This may include reviewing boundaries and/or reconsidering acceptable uses within the centres.

Policies for the other main town centres may also be adjusted if evidence suggests that this is necessary.

It is proposed that the new Local Plan will maintain the designated District Centres and Local Centres in the 2017 Local Plan unless evidence suggests this is no longer suitable for any areas, and that additional District Centres, Local Centres and Rural Centres will also be designated across the rest of Central Lincolnshire.

- 4.2. This was accompanied by five related questions

Q16a – City and Town Centres

Do you agree that the new Local Plan should try to address the challenging retail environment through positively responding to issues and opportunities identified through work on the city and town centres?

Q16b – Specific Changes Required for the City and Town Centres

Are you aware of any specific planning policy changes that would help to strengthen the city or town centres? If yes please provide details

Q16c – Retaining Current Designated District and Local Centres

Do you agree that the District Centres and Local Centres identified in the 2017 Local Plan should be carried forward unless evidence suggests that this is not suitable? If no, please provide details.

Q16d – Designation of Additional Centres

Do you agree that the plan should designate District Centres, Local Centres and Rural Centres outside of the Lincoln Urban Area?

Q16e – Identifying New Centres

Is there a specific centre which you think should be designated as a District Centre, Local Centre or Rural Centre? If yes, please provide details.

- 4.3. There was good support from responses to the consultation to all questions seeking opinions and a number of suggestions were received in relation to 16b and 16e. The full details of the summary of responses can be found in the consultation report, replicated at Appendix A to this report.

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. Several responses were received in support of the policy and a suggestion that “Market Town” should be added to the opening sentence in the supporting text.

6. Proposed Approach in Draft Local Plan

- 6.1. The Draft Local Plan contains a policy that ties together several previous policies in the adopted Local Plan for Sleaford into a comprehensive Town Centre policy. The policy seeks to maintain the main shopping function of the Primary Shopping Area, sets out the broad objectives for those regeneration and opportunity areas within the town centre and seeks to improve movement throughout the centre of the town.
- 6.2. The Sleaford Town Centre boundary and Primary Shopping Area have been rationalised and reduced slightly from the extent in the previous adopted Local Plan. This reflects the need for a focused area for retail and leisure as a destination in response to the challenges faced by the sector. Reducing the boundary slightly seeks to ensure that uses and investment are concentrated, that vibrancy is not diluted and non-retail uses and dead frontages are kept to a minimum whilst allowing for regeneration and opportunity areas.

7. Reasonable Alternative Options

- 7.1. The following alternative options have been considered for this policy (option 1 being the preferred option).
- 7.2. **Option 2:** to identify a larger Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area boundaries with policy outlining suitable uses in each.
- 7.3. **Option 3:** to identify a smaller Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area boundaries with identified out of town retail centres with policy outlining suitable uses in each.
- 7.4. All three options concentrate town centre uses ensuring a vibrant primary shopping core and periphery. However, the preferred policy, unlike options 2 and 3, would allow for some growth of the centre and investment without overly constraining potential growth options or diluting vibrancy by directing some growth to out of town retail centres or having an area too widely defined resulting in more non-retail uses and dead frontages.

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 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.

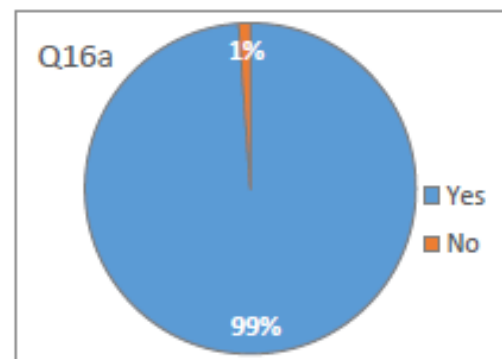
Appendix A

Extract from the Issues and Options Consultation 2019 for Proposal 16

Q16a – City and Town Centres

Do you agree that the new Local Plan should try to address the challenging retail environment through positively responding to issues and opportunities identified through work on the city and town centres?

- There were 87 responses to this question;
- 86 supported the proposal to try to address the challenging retail environment in the Local Plan;
- 1 respondent disagreed with the proposal.



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

- Needs a much broader plan, that considers all factors;
- City and town centres need to be redesigned to recognise that retail must reduce and not require ever increasing consumption. They should also be designed for access by sustainable means rather than private cars;
- More public transport, & key segregated and safe walking and cycling provision to become key. More cars and car parking does not make for a better retail centre;
- The Local Plan is a framework for the next 20+ years. Current retail practices are significantly more dynamic than this, and therefore the LP should refer to a shorter term policy which is regularly updated to reflect changing retail trends;
- The new Local Plan should try to address the challenging retail environment through positively responding to the issues and opportunities identified through work on the City and Town Centre Strategy;
- Our city and town centres seem to be decaying due to internet activities. Anything that can be done to improve them, and accessibility to them is to be encouraged;

- The Local Plan is one of the best places to address the challenging environment faced by town centres. The intention to review the evidence base which underpins the current Town Centre boundaries is fully supported. E.g. a focus on the historic Market Place of Gainsborough would allow more flexibility towards the river end of Lord Street to create anchors which can direct footfall from Marshalls Yard to the historic town centre;
- Suggest that the plan should be more permissive and encouraging of temporary uses where they activate vacant units, particularly, cultural uses such as performance spaces which add to town centre diversity and drive footfall to the benefit of other businesses;
- Suggest reference be made to the Extensive Urban Survey project currently underway which will help to define what makes each town unique and what gives it the character it has. This will provide an evidence base for decision-making in respect of creating more sustainable town centres and vibrant high streets. This study only addresses settlements in tiers 2 and 3 of the hierarchy;
- A City Centre Study is being prepared for Lincoln City Centre which may include reviewing boundaries and/ or reconsidering acceptable uses within the centres. Patricia wish to be engaged in this consultation process. Placing greater emphasis on flexibility will bring the Local Plan closer in line with NPPF;
- Retail is linked with households and employment and if the high street/ centre is full of empty buildings people are not attracted to an area. Whilst shops etc. are important to a town, the number of establishments required is not as great as in the past. It is essential that alternative uses are found for empty properties;
- The special character, as well as the retail/ service/ leisure focus of Lincoln must be maintained. The proposed Project Magna Carta designer outlet and leisure development at the A46/ Pennells Roundabout junction will be a major attraction for the area, supporting sustainable transport choices, potentially linked with proposed Park and Ride facility, as well as part funding and construction of major highways improvements to the A46 junction as a first phase, and potential financial partnering towards the completion of the proposed North Hykeham Relief Road;
- Severn Trent are only able to provide limited comments regarding this section. But we are aware that a number of councils are looking to enhance and re-invigorate town centres and retail areas. One of the key objectives within this is usually to develop a sense of place looking to introduce greener elements such as trees into the urban landscape. This approach can be effective for both biodiversity and ecology, but also where SuDS systems such as tree-pits or bio-retention systems can also provide benefits to flood risk. We would therefore encourage that any policies looking to re-develop town centres consider the benefits of retrofitting SuDS into the landscape;
- Historic England should be consulted in relation to the City Centre Study for Lincoln Town Centre.

Q16b – Specific Changes Required for the City and Town Centres

Are you aware of any specific planning policy changes that would help to strengthen the city or town centres? If yes please provide details

- 3.60. 26 of the 85 people who responded to this question said they knew of policy changes that would help to strengthen the city and town centres. The comments received in response to the question can be summarised as follows:

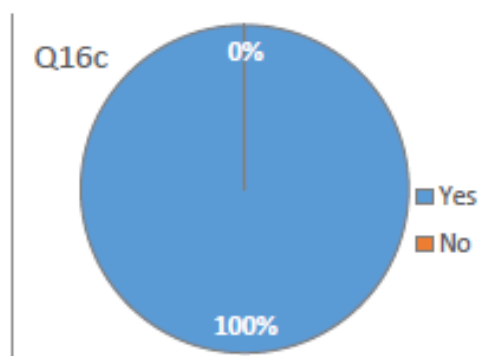
- Business Rate review to allow start up leisure & restaurant opportunities and Transport access in the evenings - Gainsborough shuts down after 4pm;
- Affordable car parking, cheaper for staff, better facilities like toilets;
- Provision of more and cheaper parking capacity within City & Town centres. Public transport services are often insufficient and outlying villages have to use private cars for routine shopping etc;
- Planning must provide sufficient attractive off street parking, eg Sleaford's new cinema complex makes no mention of parking: without which it is not viable and risks being a real nuisance in the town by generating significant congestion. To really make the point, such measures should consider replacing the Holdingham roundabout with a bridge;
- Lincoln is a nightmare for parking since it has a passive anti-car policy. Far more work is needed to make it car friendly. The decision to use roundabouts on the new bypasses is extremely short sighted and will cause major congestion necessitating further major expense and disruption in a few years' time;
- Improve/ increase bus routes into the centre;
- Improved transport networks and increased public transport availability such as later bus and train services;
- Fewer out of town retail centres;
- Centres must be considered for other uses rather than retail and government functions;
- Allow existing shops to be converted to dwellings where the shop has been vacant for say 1 year. This would re-vitalise town centres that are dying as shops close;
- The NPPF has an emphasis on the diversity of uses for town centres to ensure its long term vitality and viability, including opportunities for residential uses. It may be worth considering introducing residential uses within the Primary Shopping Area at ground floor using a 'take away (A5)' style restriction which some London Boroughs adopt. Where it restricts the level of residential permitted to a certain percentage of total frontage and restricts congregation of such uses so that they are spread out across the town centre rather than creating a large amount of dead frontage. This would help further promote existing Heritage led regeneration projects such as living over the shop etc.;
- Allow more commercial/ entertainment activities in centres after 17:30 to enliven & reduce antisocial behaviour, etc.
- Promotion of use of city/ town centre locations for leisure businesses will help reinforce locations as hearts of communities, bringing more people to these areas should also increase footfall for commercial businesses. It would also be a positive change to allow residential development within the town/ city centre as part of mixed-use developments, creating more diverse opportunities for development;
- Cycle and walking provision. Changes to TROs that currently allow for stopping in mandatory cycle lanes cause danger. Allowing cycling in the City centre would bring economic benefit as has been demonstrated in key studies;
- Ring roads at the outskirts of cities should help with internal congestion, however it is a problem during the length of time it takes to get the ring-roads organised;
- Strengthening city and town centres requires coordinated development in transport infrastructure and policy;
- Sleaford Masterplan to be revisited;
- Town centres must change to adapt to the digital revolution. Lincoln might be thought a mediocre shopping centre, but it is, potentially, a world-class visitor attraction. Sleaford and Gainsborough similarly do little to encourage visitors. Diversity of uses must be the future for city centres;

- National Government should level the playing field of taxation on products sold via the High Street versus on-line;
- The Agent of Change principle should be incorporated into design policies (and/ or within town centre or community facility policies). This will help protect existing uses such as theatres and pubs within town centres and elsewhere within the plan area where nearby residential use is proposed and ensure new residential uses within town centres are sensitively located;
- The Government has implemented a number of the reforms set out in the consultation, Planning Reform: Supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes;
- Continue the E Bypass to the A607 but no further; reinstate the goods traffic loop line and construct replacement rail sidings/ distribution centre to handle import/ export container traffic etc.; duplicate the above loop line with the desired E.W link road abandon the newly engineered Tentercroft mess which is too near the city centre and only adds to the confused and ugly townscape round Pelham Bridge (which should be marked for demolition). An even better E.W link road would connect Tritton Road with South Park Avenue and on to Allenby and Outer Circle Road as a possibility thus relieving Broadgate and Lindum Hill. Suggest studying the 1932 edition of the OS Maps for central Lincoln - just change the emphasis from cars to people and don't mix cyclists and pedestrians. In Lincoln the Cathedral stands as a constant reproach to all the lost opportunities;
- Get rid of traffic wardens. They have ruined Gainsborough. Councils expect shoppers to come and then fine them. Every street is a car park, also same in Lincoln.

Q16c – Retaining Current Designated District and Local Centres

Do you agree that the District Centres and Local Centres identified in the 2017 Local Plan should be carried forward unless evidence suggests that this is not suitable? If no, please provide details.

- All 82 of the respondents who answered this question supported the proposal of carrying forward District and Local Centres that were designated in the 2017 Local Plan.



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

- This response is based on our understanding that Keelby is already a Local Centre;
- If the Council is serious in promoting an essentially car free zone, then I planning for connecting bus routes, stops, timetables between district and local centres and into the City Centre has made some headway. However question whether even with free travel the population density of these suburban districts is numerically sufficient to

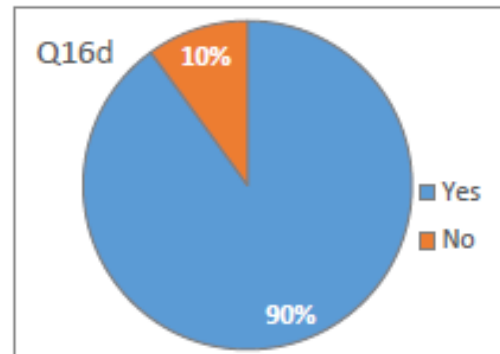
underpin a viable flexible system. Runcom New Town in Cheshire was specifically planned round public transport but Lincoln wasn't;

- But not to expand unless sustainable.

Q16d – Designation of Additional Centres

Do you agree that the plan should designate District Centres, Local Centres and Rural Centres outside of the Lincoln Urban Area?

- There were 80 responses to this question;
- 72 supported the proposal of designating District, Local and Rural Centres outside of the Lincoln Urban Area;
- 8 respondents disagreed with the proposal.



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

- With due caution. Agriculture is the mainstay of Lincolnshire not out of town retail parks;
- All the new towns will need them;
- Providing they are set within clear bounds to retain existing character;
- Possibly - the concept might engender better communications with places like Bardney, Woodhall Spa, Tattershall etc. Maybe resurrect the railway as Edinburgh has done with the very successful Border Railway down to Galashiels and Selkirk some 40 miles;
- In principle this would generally be supported although we would reserve judgment on this matter until further details are provided on how this would work in practice and any development management implications;
- Not sure of the purpose as there is no explanation in the consultation document;
- Local sites could be identified, but no advantage is evident;
- Depends on amount of development in the area;
- Proposed Project Magna Carta designer outlet and leisure development destination at the A46/ Pennells Roundabout junction, supporting sustainable transport choices, potentially linked with proposed Park and Ride facility, as well as part funding and construction of major highways improvements to the A46 junction as a first phase, and potential financial partnering towards the completion of the proposed North Hykeham Relief Road. The proposal promotes tourism in line with the policies of the development plan, whilst supporting existing attractions, providing circa 2500 employment opportunities, and can be delivered within three years.

Q16e – Identifying New Centres

Is there a specific centre which you think should be designated as a District Centre, Local Centre or Rural Centre? If yes, please provide details.

3.63. Of the 71 people who responded to this question, 17 said there were specific centres that should be designated. A list of these centres is provided below:

- As identified in the 2013 Genecon report commissioned by NKDC 'LN6 - a Plan for the future', there is a clear need for additional shops and amenities in the Whisby Road/ Teal Park area;
- Sleaford, Holdingham roundabout could do with becoming a rural centre;
- Sleaford and the River Slea corridor;
- Sleaford;
- Market Rasen, as a rural centre encouraging tourism to the Lincolnshire Wolds;
- Larger Villages such as Skellingthorpe should be given the opportunity to have a Rural Centre;
- This should be based on appropriate criteria to be developed in the Plan. Centres impacting on our village (Coleby) are Bracebridge Heath, Waddington and Navenby;
- Leadenham old railway station yard;
- Cherry Willingham;
- See Cherry Willingham Neighbourhood Plan;
- Scampton when free, Red Arrows will be gone. Too much emissions;
- All major towns below the level of Lincoln;
- Suspect that there are many, but insufficient knowledge to react authoritatively.

Next Steps

3.64. It is clear from the responses that work should be undertaken to understand how the local plan can help support our city and town centres. Evidence will be compiled to develop this understanding and to inform policy direction. It is also proposed that work will be undertaken to identify important local centres and rural centres outside of the Lincoln Urban Area. Suggestions and comments received will feed into these pieces of work.