

Central Lincolnshire Policy S43 Sustainable Rural Tourism Evidence Report

Formerly Policy S42

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 S43, which relates to tourism developments in the rural areas of Central Lincolnshire.

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.”

- 2.3. Paragraph 84 states that “Planning policies and decisions should enable...c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside...”

- 2.4. Paragraph 93 relates to social, recreational and cultural facilities, which encompass tourism facilities, and states:

“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.”*

- 2.5. A significant proportion of tourism activity, especially in urban areas, relates to the historic environment. Chapter 16 addresses “Conserving and enhancing the historic environment”. Paragraph 190 is particularly relevant, stating:

“Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and*
- d) opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.”*

Local Policy

- 2.6. The adopted Local Plan contains a single policy in relation to tourism, Policy LP7: A Sustainable Visitor Economy, which seeks to support existing and new development and activities, and also direct related development to the most appropriate locations.
- 2.7. This policy does not differentiate between the urban and rural visitor attractions and economy.

3. Context and Evidence

- 3.1. Within Lincoln, the Cathedral and Cultural Quarters, along with the High Street and Brayford Waterfront provide a variety of visitor attractions within a relatively compact area. These attractions range from the Castle and Cathedral, to art galleries and lesser known attractions such as the Cheese Society and Arboretum.
- 3.2. The continued growth of both the University of Lincoln and Bishop Grosseteste University further add to the increase in visitors to the city.
- 3.3. The visitor economy is one of the most important sectors of Central Lincolnshire’s economy. Lincoln is one of England’s key heritage cities, and the principal visitor destination in Central Lincolnshire. The city attracts over 3million visitors a year, generating over £190 million and supporting 2,000 jobs. The Visit Lincoln Partnership considers that, by comparison with similar historic towns and cities, there is potential for Lincoln’s visitor economy to grow.
- 3.4. Tourism naturally extends beyond the urban areas of Lincoln, Gainsborough, Sleaford and the market towns. Rural Central Lincolnshire also makes a significant contribution to the visitor economy. Many visitors are attracted to the waterways, walking and cycling routes, the many aviation and other attractions across the area which are varied and numerous.
- 3.5. The Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a popular visitor destination for walkers. The AONB extends into Central Lincolnshire between Market Rasen and Caistor and is surrounded by a locally designated Area of Great Landscape Value.
- 3.6. In addition to the varied range of visitor attractions within Central Lincolnshire, there is also a wide range of serviced and un-serviced tourist accommodation across the area.

The provision of a sufficient level and range of holiday accommodation is essential for supporting the contribution made by the tourism sector to the local economy.

- 3.7. Lincoln is not a seasonal destination, with a traditional August peak for visitors, like many, areas the city is busy all year round, with visitor accommodation, especially hotels, enjoying year round occupancy. Visitors to Lincoln, and the wider Central Lincolnshire area, arrive for both business, education and leisure purposes. The continuing growth in population, investment by businesses, fast growing universities and investment in and rejuvenation of tourist destinations will continue to attract increasing numbers of visitors to the area. Within Lincoln room occupancy rates are very high (80%) with hotels frequently full and turning business away.
- 3.8. Rural Central Lincolnshire has a range of tourist accommodation in the form of Bed & Breakfasts, self-catering cottages, lodges, and caravan, camping and glamping sites for all year round and seasonal uses, in a range of permanent and temporary buildings of different sizes. This variation compliments the provision of visitor accommodation in Lincoln, which in addition to hotels, includes bed & breakfast and self-catering accommodation.
- 3.9. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit tourism hard in Lincoln and, whilst the full effects remain unknown, it is hoped that with more people holidaying in the UK there will be short-term increases in visitors which will help the sector to bounce back.

4. Issues and Options Consultation

- 4.1. The Issues and Options consultation identified the existing policy, LP7: A Sustainable Visitor Economy amongst the policies not intended to be changed. A number of comments were received on this proposal to not change the policy. These were:
 - This policy is urban-centric and is silent on development in the countryside, especially non-dwellings and caravan parks where development would not be allowed under LP2.
 - The wording of this policy could be expanded upon regarding how it contributes to the local economy, visitors and the local community.
 - Should be amended to limit the number of holiday homes or caravans to 10 where the need can be demonstrated.
 - Should be a third criterion for 'new' tourism ventures to be considered positively – there is current ambiguity in relation to this.
- 4.2. However, the consultation also asked question 17 - "Do you agree that the new Local Plan should provide greater distinction and clarity for how tourism development will be considered in the open countryside?" There were 97 responses to this question, 91 supported the proposal, and 6 disagreed. A number of additional comments were made, these are set out below:
 - This would be welcome;
 - More importance should be given to developing and promoting the visitor economy;
 - Especially non-residential accommodation - caravans and static homes. LP55 part e
 - needs to include 'merit' where farm buildings are being re-purposed for non-residential development similar to LP2;

- Without it, developments always get approved as there is little policy to guide;
- A tourist based economy is important to the developmental growth of the area. It is important that all areas contribute to tourist development;
- Natural England agrees that the Plan should provide greater clarity for tourism development particularly in relation to impact on landscapes and biodiversity;
- Local Plan policies must recognise the value of Greater Lincolnshire's natural environment to the visitor economy. The GLNP's report Scoping Nature Tourism in Greater Lincolnshire estimated the economic value of nature based tourism and leisure activity for Greater Lincolnshire to be £325m. As such this should be reflected in policy LP7;
- LWT understands that economic vibrancy is critical for healthy local communities, and that nature can underpin growth in the visitor economy. The need to manage that growth while not degrading the very elements that make it possible is key. Environmentally sustainable tourism developments to ensure an all year round offer should be reflected in the Local Plan, this needs to recognise what the open countryside and nature can offer, as illustrated in the report, 'Developing Nature Tourism in Greater Lincolnshire: a report to the GLNP' (2016). Society becoming more connected with nature, will value nature more, and help recover nature, while nature recovers society BUT this economical strand needs to not detract from nature and the natural capital of Central Lincolnshire;
- This is a critical factor in developing but protecting our environments for the future;
- Why risk spoiling the countryside;
- The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the heritage of the wolds gateway settlements are essential to the visitor economy in the area;
- The Viking Way is an important heritage trail;
- Encouragement of visitor centres (such as the new Sherwood forest visitor centre & natural reserve) should be a focus at a location in the Wolds;
- Policies that are clear and unambiguous are helpful;
- Provided it is not overly prescriptive and flexible enough so as to inhibit creativity;
- NKDC seems to have done little to stimulate the tourism economy during the past 10 years? But this work can only be done with the active support of Local Communities. It can't be imposed from Sleaford;
- Vitally important. tourism is good for our economy - but it should not impinge largely on our day to day life;
- Better public transport will be needed to minimise private car usage;
- Tourism will be local unless rural railways are put back, or visitors will be confined to urban areas as in the past;
- The apparent, almost unfettered, ability of people to set up caravan parks or mobile homes needs much greater control. The definition of holiday accommodation also needs to be more clearly defined to include periods of occupancy to avoid setting up 'mobile' permanent homes;
- Plan should ensure that recent changes in government legislation to allow year round occupancy at caravan/ lodge parks should not be encouraged by the new revised plan;
- Static Caravans are not the answer if they become an unsightly blot on the landscape;
- No permanent establishments in the open countryside, permits or temporary events favourably considered, music festivals at Bardney in the 1970's remembered, restore as many wind mills and watermills as possible (the dams and mills are usually in working order. N Hykeham had 2 tower mills);
- Greater clarity for tourism in the countryside should exclude large static caravan sites where there is little control about full time occupation and little or no

contribution made to the local council tax level. Holiday homes should be attractive and few in number, fitting with the agricultural character of our local countryside;

- The Fossdyke and River Witham provide a leisure resource which attracts visitors, including boaters, to the area. The provision of visitor mooring facilities within the Open Countryside can help to promote the use of the canal for such use to allow for overnight stays. Many boaters choose to visit the network as it provides a relaxing environment, which would not be conducive towards the provision of all overnight facilities within the Urban Area. In addition, the capacity of the network to accommodate all leisure operations within urban areas is limited. For example, sporting activities including fishing, canoeing etc. cannot all be accommodated within the small section of our network that lies within the key settlements of the Central Lincolnshire Area;
- Promotion of the visitor economy should be supported/ promoted. Interpretation of the current 'overriding' test is unclear, specifically in relation to visitor accommodation. Element of flexibility, should be retained as tourism and visitor economy considered could be very varied in nature;
- Concern that being too prescriptive would stifle tourism when it is a significant contributor to rural economies. Good implementation of the CLLP through the DC/ DM teams in the LPAs should be able to cope with the situation without the need for restrictive policies;
- There are instances where a more flexible approach can allow for the conservation of rural sites of historic value. This can allow for the creation of additional accommodation for visitors to the county. If the accommodation is situated in characterful historic sites this can be an additional attraction. LCC has been supportive of the redevelopment of buildings from the WWII Blyton Camp into holiday accommodation;
- Policy LP7 should be amended to provide greater distinction and clarity for how new tourism development will be considered in the countryside. This should set out a positive framework to allow appropriate investment in the countryside and should not, simply apply in the negative circumstances when a use is considered "unsuitable" in the built area. Tourism and Visitor facilities may be drawn by specific attributes outside of a settlement, and could include accommodation for visitors who have come to experience rural pursuits (bird watching, fishing, sailing, etc) or may be associated with an agricultural activity, including, for instance, a visitor centre for renewable energy developments or open farms to allow people to learn about food and farming in more detail;
- Market Rasen Racecourse is a major tourist attraction in the region, and is a significant contributor to the local and regional economy. In addition to the principal business of the Racecourse as a racing venue, it also hosts and operates a wide range of complementary functions and activities, which are integral to JCR's businesses all year round outside the racing calendar and all profits are reinvested into racing. Complementary functions include but not limited to:
 - hosting outdoor events and recreation, including but not limited to UK cycling events, equine events and polo club;
 - Hosting weddings, dinners and conferencing; and
 - Outdoor leisure and tourism, including a caravan site and a golf course.
- Racing and complementary non-racing functions at Market Racecourse are longstanding and established and contribute significantly to the tourism economy and recreational social infrastructure in the region. It is a major leisure, recreation and sporting venue and tourist attraction, which is particularly important in rural areas such as Market Rasen. It would provide greater clarity and guidance to decision makers if Market Rasen Racecourse is allocated as an existing facility

and appropriate visitor facilities in the countryside or alternatively a list of existing and established tourism related destinations and facilities such as Market Rasen Racecourse is included as an appendix or in the supporting text to Policy LP7.

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 policy, with several making similar comments. The comments received have been summarised as follows:
 - Various comments broadly supporting the policy
 - General concern expressed that the policy and supporting text could result in increased activity that will degrade wildlife habitat.
 - Various comments suggesting amendments to supporting text references to the Lincolnshire Wolds and natural environment.
- 5.3. No significant changes have been made to the policy in response to the comments made. It is considered that the policy wording as set out for consultation provides a stronger policy position than that provided in the suggested amendment to the policy text. The policy as currently worded clearly states at criterion 'g' "...away from such built up areas **and** the proposal will not..." ensuring that proposals will not provide conflict with other policies in the Plan. Additional wording has been included within the opening sentence to provide additional clarity, as follows "Development proposals within or immediately adjacent to villages..."
- 5.4. Additional wording has also been included within the supporting text to the policy, to provide clarity and greater detail. Within paragraph 7.2.2 the reference to walkers has been amended to walking, cycling and outdoor pursuits.
- 5.5. Paragraph 7.2.5 has been expanded with additional text to read "... particularly welcomed if it can be demonstrated that they do not increase the risk of unacceptable disturbance, directly or indirectly, of sensitive wildlife sites. Wildlife..."

6. Proposed Approach in Draft Local Plan

- 6.1. Rather than the single policy contained within the adopted Local Plan, the Draft Local Plan includes two policies one focussing on the urban areas and one on the rural areas in relation to tourism and the visitor economy. The two new policies relate to "Sustainable Urban Tourism", "Sustainable Rural Tourism". This report is concerned with the policy on Sustainable Rural Tourism.

7. Reasonable Alternative Options

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

Option 2: A general Central Lincolnshire wide policy promoting sustainable tourism, leisure and cultural facilities and directing development to existing settlements. This option was discounted, as it was considered that one single policy would not be as effective in addressing and supporting the different aspects of sustainable tourism as having separate, specific policies.

Option 3: No policy, rely on other Local Plan policies and national policy. This option was discounted, as it will not provide the same level of protection for existing destinations and facilities, nor will it ensure the most appropriate development for Central Lincolnshire in the same way a local policy will.

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.