

Central Lincolnshire Policy S59: Green and Blue Infrastructure Network Evidence Report

Formerly Policy S58

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 S59 (formerly policy S58), which relates to the development, maintenance and enhancement of a network of multifunctional, green and blue (water) spaces, and the connections between them.

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. Section 15 of the NPPF concerns “Conserving and enhancing the natural environment” and there is a separate section on “Plan-making”. The following paragraphs are particularly relevant:
 - Paragraph 20 - *Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for: ... conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.*
 - Paragraph 98 – *Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.*
 - Paragraph 154 - *New development should be planned for in ways that: avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure;*
 - Paragraph 175 - *Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.*
 - Paragraph 186 - *... Opportunities to improve air quality or mitigate impacts should be identified, such as through traffic and travel management, and green infrastructure provision and enhancement.*
 - Glossary - *Green infrastructure: A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic,*

health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.

- 2.3. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was first introduced in 2014 which offers 'live' government guidance. The PPG provides guidance to help in the implementation of policy in the NPPF.
- 2.4. The following paragraphs offer useful guidance in relation to green and blue infrastructure:
- Paragraph 004 - What can green infrastructure include? (Ref ID: 8-004-20190721);
 - Paragraph 005 - Why is green infrastructure important? (Ref ID: 8-005-20190721);
 - Paragraph 006 - What planning goals can green infrastructure help to achieve? (Ref ID: 8-006-20190721)
 - Paragraph 008 - How can green infrastructure be considered in planning decisions? (Ref ID: 8-008-20190721)

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)

- 2.5. The government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YP) sets out government action to tackle a wide range of environmental pressures. The Plan promotes a natural capital approach. It identifies six areas around which action will be focused. These include:
- Using and managing land sustainably;
 - Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes;
 - Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing;
 - Increasing resource efficiency, and reducing pollution and waste;
 - Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans;
 - Protecting and improving the global environment
- 2.6. One of the commitments within the 25 YP, is the creation of more and better quality green infrastructure. The Government commits to drawing up a national framework of green infrastructure standards and to supporting Local Authorities to assess green infrastructure provision against these new standards.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework and Standards¹

- 2.7. Natural England are responsible for developing the national GI Framework referred to in the 25 YP. The GI Framework will work alongside other measures such as mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- 2.8. GI principles and a Beta GI Mapping database (version 1.1) were published in December 2021. GI Standards, a GI Design Guide, GI 'Process Journeys' and the GI Case Studies will be available in the autumn 2022 following user testing.
- 2.9. Natural England has developed a set of 15 GI principles that underpin the GI Framework and which cover the why, what and how to do good green infrastructure.
- 2.10. The England GI Mapping Database is designed to provide publicly accessible, technical evidence on GI across England. The database aims to be a nationally consistent

¹ [Home \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

approach to GI mapping, providing a consistent level of data and analysis across England capable of being supplemented with additional and/or local data as required.

Local Policy

- 2.11. The adopted Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (April 2017) includes a specific policy in relation to Green Infrastructure (GI) (LP20 Green Infrastructure Network) which recognises the importance of protecting and enhancing the Green Infrastructure Network. The policy supports development proposals which are consistent with and help deliver the opportunities, priorities and initiatives identified in the latest Central Lincolnshire Green Infrastructure Study and Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping Study.

3. Context and Evidence

- 3.1. Green and blue infrastructure is a strategic network of multi-functional green and blue spaces, and the connections between them, in both urban and rural areas, which is capable of delivering a range of environmental, economic, health and quality of life benefits for local communities. The network may comprise of spaces in public or private ownership, with or without public access.
- 3.2. Green and blue infrastructure within Central Lincolnshire comprises of many different types, functions, locations, sizes and levels of use, operating at every spatial scale and in all geographic areas within the area. From urban green spaces such as Hartsholme Country Park in Lincoln, to green spaces in the countryside, such as Willingham Woods on the edge of Market Rasen.
- 3.3. In 2011, a partnership of local organisations produced the Central Lincolnshire Green Infrastructure Study (2011 Study), which sets out a Green Infrastructure Strategy and defines a green infrastructure network, for Central Lincolnshire. Using Natural England’s Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards, the study highlighted areas of existing habitats and areas where there were deficiencies in green infrastructure at the strategic level across Central Lincolnshire and identified opportunities to enhance the network. The Study defines specific priority areas where targeting investment in green infrastructure is most likely to deliver multiple benefits. Detailed descriptions of each of the priority areas are contained within the Green Infrastructure Study and are summarised below.

Priority Area	Explanation
Strategic Green Corridors	7 priority landscape-scale areas for strategic green infrastructure enhancement, linkage and creation.
Strategic Green Access Links	16 priority routes within and connecting the Strategic Green Corridors intended to provide for multi-user, predominantly off road access routes for pedestrians and cyclists. Also offer opportunities as wildlife corridors.
Urban Green Grids	3 priority areas with key opportunities for greening the built environment for Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford
Green Infrastructure Zones	30 areas with opportunities for targeted green infrastructure improvements in the wider countryside

- 3.4. In 2019, the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP) produced a baseline GI Map for Central Lincolnshire. This highlights areas of existing priority habitats, designated sites and other areas of green or blue space and updates the baseline GI maps in the 2011 Study.
- 3.5. The Gainsborough Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy (LUC, 2019) describes the current green infrastructure provision across Gainsborough, sets out a vision and core principles that all green infrastructure should follow, and identifies potential projects to deliver improved existing and provide new high quality, multi-functional green spaces and environmental features for the Gainsborough Green Grid.
- 3.6. In June 2021, green infrastructure profiles were published for Lincoln and Sleaford². The primary aim of these documents is:
- To identify green infrastructure assets within and adjacent to each urban green grid and establish a baseline for green infrastructure;
 - To outline green infrastructure issues/threats for each urban green grid;
 - To identify opportunities to enhance, link and extend the green infrastructure network within and adjacent to each urban green grid.
- 3.7. The Central Lincolnshire GI network can be viewed on the Central Lincolnshire Interactive Map and within Green Infrastructure Strategies and Green Infrastructure Profile and Opportunity Plans for Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford, available on the Central Lincolnshire website.

4. Issues and Options Consultation

- 4.1. The Issues and Options consultation identified the existing policy in the adopted Local Plan, LP20: Green Infrastructure Network, as a policy not intended to be substantially changed. A small number of comments were received on the proposal to not change the policy, which can be summarised as follows:
- Enhancement is vital as the quality and extent of the ecological network needs improvement. This would tie into the NPPF and GLNP's 25 year plan.

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. Most people who responded at the Regulation 18 stage were generally supportive of the policy as drafted. The comments received have been summarised as follows:
- Various comments broadly supporting the policy or elements of the policy
 - Various detailed suggestions to improve the clarity of policy wording
 - Various comments suggesting the policy needs rewording
 - Concern that the policy is not in conformity with The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 or the NPPG

² Lincoln Urban Green Grid Green Infrastructure Profile and Opportunity Plan (June 2021) and Gainsborough Urban Green Grid Green Infrastructure Profile and Opportunity Plan (June 2021)

- Suggestion that the evidence behind the policy is lacking/weak, especially in relation to: the age of the GI Strategy (2011)
- Concern raised around policy implementation.

6. Proposed Approach in Draft Local Plan

- 6.1. The proposed policy approach in the Draft Local Plan remains similar to that set out in policy LP20 Green Infrastructure Network of the adopted Local Plan, but supported by updated evidence on the Central Lincolnshire GI baseline, and for the Gainsborough, Lincoln and Sleaford Urban Green Grids.
- 6.2. The policy requires all development proposals to ensure that existing and new green and blue infrastructure is considered early in the design process. Proposals that would cause loss or harm to the green and blue infrastructure network will not be supported unless the need for and benefits of the development demonstrably outweigh any adverse impacts. Where adverse impacts on green infrastructure are unavoidable, development will only be supported if suitable mitigation measures for the network are provided.
- 6.3. Following careful consideration of the comments received, there are some minor changes to the wording of policy S59 and supporting text in the Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan.
- 6.4. Additional wording has been inserted into the supporting text and policy itself to provide clarity that green infrastructure encompasses blue spaces (water features) as well as green spaces.
- 6.5. Paragraph 3 of the policy has been amended and restructured to reflect Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles and to strengthen the link and relationship between this policy and policy S61: Biodiversity Opportunity and Delivering Measurable Net Gains.
- 6.6. Additional information has been inserted into the supporting text to clarify the green infrastructure evidence base which supports the Local Plan, including reference to the recently published Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework.
- 6.7. Green and blue infrastructure can help address many of the Local Plan's objectives, providing cross-cutting benefits. Green infrastructure principles are included in other policies within the Local Plan as follows:
 - Biodiversity: (see Policy S6 Design Principles for Efficient Buildings, Policy S53: Design and Amenity, and Policy S61: Biodiversity Opportunity and Delivering Measurable Net Gains)
 - Health and wellbeing: (see Policy S54: Health and Wellbeing)
 - Multi-functionality: (see Policy S51: Creation of New Open Space, Sports and Leisure Facilities)
 - Connectivity: (see Policy S47: Accessibility and Transport and Policy S48: Walking and Cycling Infrastructure)
 - Landscape, cultural heritage and sense of place: (see Policy S58: Protecting Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford's Setting and Character and Policy S63: Green Wedges)
 - Climate change mitigation and adaptation: (see Policy S6 Design Principles for Efficient Buildings, Policy S20: Resilient and Adaptable Design, Policy S21: Flood Risk and Water Resources, Policy S53: Design and Amenity)

7. Reasonable Alternative Options

- 7.1. The following alternative options have been considered for this policy (option 1 being the preferred option within the Draft Local Plan).
- 7.2. Option 2: Not to have a local policy on green infrastructure and instead rely on other local plan policies designed to protect and enhance open space. This option has been discounted, as it would represent a missed opportunity to have a local policy that fully reflects the NPPF and identified local priorities set out in the GI Study and Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping. This option would not positively provide for green infrastructure within Central Lincolnshire and there is greater uncertainty around the effects this option would have on sustainability objectives.

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.