

Central Lincolnshire Policy S66 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows Evidence Report

Formerly Policy S65

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 S66, which relates to the protection of trees, woodland and hedgerows.

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 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):

*...c) **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”*

- 2.4. Chapter 15 of the NPPF concerns “conserving and enhancing the natural environment”. The following points are particularly relevant:

- 2.5. Paragraph 174 is seeking to conserve and enhance the natural environment, setting out:

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

...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;...

...d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;...

2.6. Paragraph 179 further states, in relation to habitats and biodiversity:

“To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity⁵⁶; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation⁵⁷; and

b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.”

2.7. 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.

2.8. The PPG states that local planning authorities should work collaboratively with other partners, including Local Nature Partnerships, to develop and deliver a strategic approach to protecting and improving the natural environment based on local priorities and evidence (Paragraph 010 Reference ID: 8-010-20190721).

2.9. The PPG also recognises the importance of green infrastructure, it states:

“Green infrastructure is a natural capital asset that provides multiple benefits, at a range of scales. For communities, these benefits can include enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes, food and energy production, urban cooling, and the management of flood risk. These benefits are also known as ecosystem services.” (Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 8-005-20190721)

2.10. The section of the PPG relating to Natural Environment provides additional detail on the varied reasons why trees, hedgerows and woodland are so important and why and how local plans should seek to protect such assets.

Local Policy

2.11. The adopted Local Plan does not contain a specific policy relating to trees, woodland and hedgerows. Rather, the subject is included and addressed in a number of other policies.

2.12. Trees, woodland and hedgerows are addressed along with other landscape, townscape and views matters within Policy LP17: Landscape, Townscape and Views.

2.13. The protection of ancient woodland and veteran trees as irreplaceable habitats is addressed within Policy LP21: Biodiversity and Geodiversity.

2.14. In addition, Policy LP25: The Historic Environment seeks to protect trees in conservation areas, and Policy LP26: Design and Amenity seeks to “... f. Incorporate and retain as far as possible existing natural and historic features such as hedgerows, trees...;”

3. Context and Evidence

- 3.1. Central Lincolnshire contains a number of urban areas and has a large rural area with different characteristics, opportunities and constraints. Trees, woodlands and hedgerows, contribute enormously to the character of many parts of the Central Lincolnshire area – they are very important visual elements in the landscape, since they are attractive in themselves, soften and give a context to development, provide focal points and screen unsightly areas from view.
- 3.2. However, the amenity value of trees is not confined only to their contribution to Central Lincolnshire’s visual character. They can also help to reduce noise and prove beneficial in terms of atmospheric pollution, modifying microclimates and flood mitigation through storm water attenuation. Furthermore, they provide habitats for wildlife, help to stabilise soil against erosion, and play a role in reducing climate change by locking up carbon dioxide. As a result, they are highly valued by the majority of people, and the relative scarcity of tree cover in the southern half of the Central Lincolnshire area, in particular within North Kesteven, gives them an added importance.

4. Issues and Options Consultation

- 4.1. The adopted Local Plan does not contain a specific policy in relation to ‘Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows’ therefore there were no specific consultation questions on this subject. Despite this, a number of comments were received relating to trees, woodland, which have been summarised as follows:
 - Within the objectives, the role of trees and woods as important and multifunctional form of greenspace should be mentioned;
 - Other comments: The plan should consider the need for additional woodland planting to absorb carbon and enable adaption to the impacts of climate change. Tree planting can play an important role in Carbon offsetting;
 - It is important to ensure that existing trees and woodland are protected and in particular ancient and veteran trees.

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 in relation to this policy. These comments have been summarised as follows:
 - Various comments broadly supporting the policy.
 - Various detailed suggestions, to improve clarity of policy wording.
 - Various comments suggesting the policy needs substantial or significant rewording, especially in relation to the inclusion of references to tree canopy cover, British Standards in relation to trees and construction and Hedgerows Regulations 1997.
 - Various comments suggesting the policy needs substantial or significant rewording, especially in relation to mitigation measures

- Concern that the policy is not in conformity with the NPPF.
- Various comments stress the importance of mature trees and the need for their retention

- 5.3. In response to the comments made during the consultation, the wording of the policy and supporting text has been amended in a number of places to provide greater clarity and conformity with the NPPF as well as ensuring the policy is appropriately robust. This includes both the policy and the supporting text being amended to be more robust and state that any losses of ancient woodland or veteran trees would only be permitted in wholly exceptional circumstances.
- 5.4. The suggestion to include a target for the percentage of canopy cover within the policy has not been taken forward. It is considered that the policy as drafted provides adequate protection, and that a percentage target would be particularly difficult to implement.

6. Proposed Approach in Draft Local Plan

- 6.1. The Draft Local Plan contains a specific policy relating to trees, woodland and hedgerows. The policy seeks to protect and maintain the existing tree and woodland cover within Central Lincolnshire, mitigate for any losses (especially of high value trees and/or woodland, as defined), encourage and where appropriate require the planting of new trees. The policy also sets out protection for hedgerows.

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: No policy on trees, woodland and hedgerows, rely on the NPPF. This option was discounted as, while it would protect the most valuable trees and woodland, it would not offer protection for locally significant and important trees and woodland, or hedgerows.

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.