



# **Policy LP6 Retail and Town Centres in Central Lincolnshire Evidence Report**

**Proposed Submission  
April 2016**

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# 1. Introduction and Policy Context

## Introduction

- 1.1 A joint Local Plan for the Central Lincolnshire area is being produced which will set the framework for how development will be considered across the districts of the City of Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey to 2036.
- 1.2 This Evidence Report (which is one of a collection) provides background information and justification for policy LP6, which relates to retail and town centres in Central Lincolnshire.

## National policy

- 1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) was introduced in 2014 which offers 'live' government guidance.
- 1.4 Section 2 of the NPPF concerns "ensuring the vitality of town centres", section 3 provides advice for "supporting a prosperous rural economy" and there is a separate section on "Plan-making". The following points are particularly relevant:
  - Paragraph 23 of section 2 states that in drawing up Local Plans, planning authorities should: *"define a network and hierarchy of centres that is resilient to anticipated future economic changes;"* and *"define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, based on a clear definition of primary and secondary frontages in designated centres, and set policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations;"* And requires suitable sites to be allocated in town centres and edge of centre sites.
  - Paragraph 24 - 27 of section 2 concerns the application of the sequential test to town centre uses which should be applied to a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (or default threshold where one is not set locally).
  - Paragraph 28 of section 3 states that Local Plans should support rural tourism and leisure development and *"promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship."*
  - Paragraph 156 - 157 of the section on plan-making states that the Local Plan should include strategic policies to deliver *"the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development"* and *"the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities"* and to indicate *"land use designations on a proposals map"*
- 1.5 The above NPPF policy has been taken into account in preparing the Local Plan as a whole, and policy LP6 in particular.

# 2 Central Lincolnshire Context in Relation to Policy LP6

- 2.1 The Central Lincolnshire City and Town Centres Study (2012) and update (2015) show that overall, Central Lincolnshire has a healthy market share of convenience goods expenditure and a reasonably good market share of comparison goods expenditure. Both provide

information on the hierarchy of retail centres reflected in policy LP6 which, as well as the main City Centre and Town Centres, lists district, local and rural centres.

- 2.2 District and local centres serving the communities and neighbourhoods within the Lincoln Area are identified and covered in more detail in policy LP34 – Lincoln’s District and Local Shopping Centres. The approach taken to the additional district and local centres required to meet the needs of the proposed Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) is supported by evidence in the Central Lincolnshire Sustainable Urban Extensions – Retail Provision Study 2013 and work with the land owners and developers of the SUEs and is covered in greater detail in the SUE policies within the Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford area chapters; LP30, LP39 and LP44.
- 2.3 In a large, predominantly rural area, rural centres are also acknowledged as playing a key role in serving the local population and supporting sustainable communities. The protection of existing community facilities and details on the provision of new facilities is covered in more detail in policy LP15 – Community Facilities. The retail hierarchy specifies that provision within rural settlements should be proportionate to the settlement in which it is located and should follow the settlement hierarchy as set out in policy LP2.
- 2.4 The City and Town Centres Study Update (2015) identified the quantitative need for additional floorspace over the plan period although the assumptions used will need to be subject to regular review and update. This information along with the masterplans for Lincoln City Centre, Gainsborough and Sleaford have been used to identify mixed use areas, city and town centre boundaries and primary and secondary retail frontages. Further details and appropriate uses are given in policy LP33, LP42 and LP46.
- 2.5 The NPPF requires applications for retail, leisure and office development outside of town centres which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan to be subject to an impact assessment. The NPPF states that local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (and gives a default threshold if one is not set). Given the character of the area and the impact that development would have on the different tiers in the hierarchy, the City and Town Centres Study advises against having a blanket threshold for all types of centre. A tiered approach is therefore taken within the policy to reflect the role and function of a centre within its sphere of influence.

### 3 Local Plan Policy: Preliminary Draft

- 3.1 The Preliminary Draft version of the Local Plan (published for consultation in October – November 2014) included a policy on Retail and Town Centres in Central Lincolnshire.
- 3.2 Whilst there were several expressions of support for the policy as part of the Preliminary Draft consultation, a number of comments were received concerning the provision of specific services, the needs of small villages, the need to protect and encourage local independent retailers, the importance of encouraging healthy lifestyles, parking, the need to reference local distinctiveness and heritage, that the district and local centres are not identified, reference to the Lindis Retail Park and the role of neighbourhood plans.

- 3.3 The retail and town centres policy is a high level policy which seeks to identify the retail hierarchy within Central Lincolnshire, identify boundaries and set thresholds for the implementation of the sequential test. Many of the comments received concerned issues covered in more detail elsewhere in the Local Plan, so are not commented upon here. Where named and identified locally, district and local centres and additional retail areas have been named and shown in the area chapters. Lindis Retail Park is an established out of town retail centre.
- 3.4 Comment was also made about the lack of reference to the Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford masterplans and the need to future proof the policy to take account of the increase in internet shopping for example, the need to acknowledge the role and function of Caistor as a small town, the need for consistent terminology, the fact that allowing out of town retail uses such as those at Pennells weaken the City centre. The Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford masterplans were referenced in the supporting text.

## 4 Local Plan Policy: Further Draft

- 4.1 The policy in the Further Draft version of the Local Plan was predominantly the same as the Preliminary Draft, though amended to include Caistor in the list of towns, and references to centres made consistent. The Further Draft Local Plan was published for consultation in October – November 2015.
- 4.2 Various comments were received during the Further Draft consultation either supporting or broadly supporting the policy. Various detailed suggestions were made to improve the clarity of policy wording such as linking the maintenance of thriving retail centres to reducing social isolation, health inequalities and improving community resilience; the need to reference smaller/ independent shops and locally distinctive shopping areas; identifying the need for new centres in mixed use development; and the need to strengthen the restriction of development in the countryside / green areas.
- 4.3 There was concern that the policy was too restrictive for retail / commercial development for larger villages in rural areas and questioning the evidence to support the thresholds set. Some felt that more land should be identified for growth in the future whilst others felt there was little evidence for this given the number of existing vacant units and charity shops.
- 4.4 In response to these issues, locally distinctive shopping areas are referenced and physically protected elsewhere in the Local Plan (for example, directly or indirectly in; LP7: A Sustainable Visitor Economy, LP15: Community Facilities, LP25: The Historic Environment, LP26: Design and Amenity, LP27: Main Town Centre Uses – Frontages and Advertisements and in policies in the Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford Area chapters). However, restricting the use of a building within a use class to small and independent retailers only is not a planning matter, so not appropriate for this Local Plan. Appropriate mixes of uses and new centres are identified as appropriate for regeneration and opportunity areas, SUEs, town centres and Lincoln's mixed use area in policies elsewhere in the plan. By identifying the hierarchy of centres, including those in rural settlements, and linking it to the settlement hierarchy in policy LP2, the policy restricts inappropriate development in the countryside whilst allowing for development of an appropriate scale in rural settlements including the larger villages. Advice on thresholds was provided by the

City and Town Centres Study on the basis of local circumstances and characteristics of the area.

## 5 Local Plan Policy: Proposed Submission

- 5.1 The suggested strengthening of wording acknowledging the link between maintenance of thriving retail centres and the reduction of social isolation, health inequalities and improving community resilience have been added to the supporting text in the Proposed Submission Local Plan. This is supported by the more detailed policy (LP9) on health and wellbeing.
- 5.2 Retail boundaries have been amended where appropriate to allow for predicted retail growth and offer variety and choice whilst encouraging regeneration and protecting the viability and vitality of existing centres in line with the retail hierarchy.
- 5.3 The policy is supported by the City and Town Centres Study (2012) and Update (2015), Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) – Retail Provision Study (2013) and SUE Topic Papers and the Lincoln City Centre, Gainsborough and Sleaford Masterplans. These will need to be regularly updated as the Local Plan is monitored and reviewed in the future. This policy is also supported by other policies in the Local Plan. Implementation of the policy should ensure that appropriate uses are directed towards the identified centres ensuring their continued vitality and viability.

## 6 Alternative Reasonable Options

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been considered for this policy. (Option 1 is the preferred policy approach which has been included in the Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan).
- 6.2 **Option 2:** To have a policy that sets out a different hierarchy and includes out of centre shopping areas. This is rejected, as the basis of the policy reflects the evidence set out in the retail studies.
- 6.3 **Option 3:** To have no policy setting out the retail hierarchy, but to rely on other Local Plan policies and national policy. Other Local Plan policies provide support and guidance for development within named centres and the NPPF sets out a sequential approach to be applied to main town centre uses. This does not however identify specific centres giving the local context for Central Lincolnshire or define their hierarchy as required by NPPF para 23.

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 This Evidence Report demonstrates the rationale for the proposed policy as contained in the Proposed Submission Local Plan April 2016. We hope this helps demonstrate how we have responded to comments received during the Preliminary Draft and Further Draft consultation, as well as how the latest evidence and national guidance has been taken into account.