



Policy LP17 Landscape, Townscape and Views 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 LP17, which relates to the protection and enhancement of the qualities of our valuable landscape.

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 11 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 111 - Planning policies and decisions should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value. Local planning authorities may continue to consider the case for setting a locally appropriate target for the use of brownfield land.
 - Paragraph 112 - Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.
 - Paragraph 113 - Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected ... landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.
 - Paragraph 115 - Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.
- 1.5 The NPPG also includes advice on how the character of landscapes can be assessed to inform plan-making (Ref ID 8-001-20140306): specifically, it advises that Local plans should include strategic policies for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including landscape (this includes designated landscapes but also the wider countryside). The NPPG also offers guidance on how planning can take account of the quality of agricultural land (Ref ID 8-026-20140306).

2 Central Lincolnshire Context in Relation to Policy LP17

- 2.1 There are several National Character Areas within Central Lincolnshire, as well as the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In addition to these designations which are nationally recognised for their intrinsic special value, the wider Central Lincolnshire landscape is a green, species rich area, and provides residents with easy access to the countryside.
- 2.2 The key issue facing the Central Lincolnshire authorities is the need to protect the rural landscape, as an irreplaceable resource, source of food production and home to various other rural economies, whilst also delivering the sustainable strategic growth which is necessary to meet the housing needs of the area.
- 2.3 The Central Lincolnshire Authorities therefore propose to identify strategic sites for growth across the settlements, in line with the settlement hierarchy, as well as some sustainable urban extensions to the major settlements and set clear policies to ensure that development will not have an adverse impact upon the rural character of the landscape, biodiversity and upon heritage assets. These policies will then be used in determining planning applications.

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 titled ‘Our Landscape’.
- 3.2 During the Preliminary Draft consultation, concern was raised about the cumulative affect major developments will have on the rural landscape.
- 3.3 It was observed that the policy wording in relation to the best and most versatile agricultural land implied that any development proposal that involves the use of the best and most versatile agricultural land would be subject to sequential test and that it is highly likely that many of the allocations that will be made through the Local Plan will involve development of the best and most versatile land. It was therefore suggested that it cannot be right that a formally allocated site should then be reconsidered as a matter of principle through this sequential test, and that the policy should be reworded to only refer to windfall sites and to specifically exclude allocated land.
- 3.4 Another point raised was that the policy should specifically mention the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) because, as a national designation, it warrants specific reference to reflect its status.

4 Local Plan Policy: Further Draft

- 4.1 The policy in the Further Draft version of the Local Plan was amended from the original Preliminary Draft in response to comments received during the consultation on the Preliminary Draft version of the Local Plan and to remove any duplication with other Local Plan policies.
- 4.2 The scope of the policy was also extended to incorporate the protection and creation of views, to maximise the potential to deliver benefits for Central Lincolnshire. The structure of

the policy therefore changed as a result of these changes and the policy was retitled 'Landscape, Townscape and Views' to better reflect the scope of the policy.

- 4.3 In addition, reference to the cumulative impacts of proposals was introduced.
- 4.4 In relation to the matter of the best and most versatile agricultural land (summarised at 3.3 above), this omission was corrected in the Further Draft Local Plan. The criteria relating to the protection of the best and most versatile agricultural land was moved to policy LP55 (see Part G) and made an exception for allocated sites.
- 4.5 The principles that were addressed in criteria a (design criteria), b (brownfield land), c (heritage assets) and e (farm diversification) of the Preliminary Draft Local Plan were also removed from policy LP17 as they were addressed elsewhere in the Local Plan.
- 4.6 In recognition of national status of the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB, the restructured policy included a sub section on The Lincolnshire Wolds, Lincoln's Historic Skyline and Areas of Landscape Value.

Further Draft Consultation

- 4.7 Various comments were received in relation to policy LP17 during the consultation on the Further Draft Local Plan. There were mixed views on the policy. In some instances the policy was generally supported, but detailed comments and suggestions were made by others as to how the policy wording could be improved. The key issues raised included:
- Concerns raised that the policy does not provide sufficiently robust protection for the landscape: many respondents suggested that the existing West Lindsey District Council policies should be updated.
 - Concern that the policy is not fully consistent with the NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development: specifically, that the policy does not explain that some harm can be acceptable where the identified harm is outweighed by the benefits of the development.
 - Comment that the policy should be more explicit in requiring development proposals to enhance setting.
 - Support for how the policy has been expanded from the Preliminary Draft version.
 - It was observed that the legend on the Policies Map shows policy LP17 is applicable to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of Great Landscape Value, and suggested that it should be made clear that this policy also applies to the whole of the Policies map and not just designate landscape areas.

5 Local Plan Policy: Proposed Submission

- 5.1 Only minor amendments have been made to Policy LP17 in the Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan, including correction of minor grammatical errors.
- 5.2 The wording of the latter part of the 'Character and Setting' section which refers to harm and exceptional circumstances has been amended to better reflect the NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development.

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 Propsoed Submission Local Plan.)
- 6.2 **Option 2:** have no local policy on landscape protection and views, and instead rely on national level policy. This policy approach has been discounted given the importance of

protecting and enhancing the Central Lincolnshire landscape in terms of making it an attractive environment for residents, attracting tourists, and protecting significant features such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- 6.3 **Option 3:** have separate policies, one on character and setting, and another on creating and protecting views. This option has been discounted because it is felt that a combined policy is more appropriate and would be more effective given the intrinsic interrelationship between the two elements of landscape protection and enhancement.

7 Conclusion

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