

# **Policy LP21 Biodiversity and Geodiversity 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 LP21, which sets out the approach to assessing the impacts of development proposals on biodiversity and geodiversity. Please note the policy numbering for this policy has changed in the Proposed Submission Local Plan from LP23 (in the Further Draft) to LP21.

## 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 points are particularly relevant:
  - Paragraph 113- Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or 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 114- Local planning authorities should set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure.
  - Paragraph 117- Planning policies should plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries; identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations; aim to prevent harm to geological conservation interests; and where Nature Improvement Areas are identified in Local Plans, consider specifying the types of development that may be appropriate in these Areas.
  - Paragraph 156- The Local Plan should include strategic policies to deliver the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment.
  - Paragraph 157- Local Plans should contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural environment, and supporting Nature Improvement Areas where they have been identified.

- 1.5 The above NPPF policy has been taken into account in preparing the Local Plan as a whole, and policy LP21 in particular.
- 1.6 The NPPG 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.

## 2 Central Lincolnshire Context in Relation to Policy LP21

- 2.1 Central Lincolnshire has many areas which are noted for their natural beauty, biodiversity and geodiversity value. These areas support a variety of species and habitats, and form an important part of the ecological network within the wider environment.
- 2.2 Central Lincolnshire is home to Bardney Limewoods National Nature Reserve, a group of small-leaved lime woods and the Humberhead Levels, one of 12 nationally selected Nature Improvement Areas in England which lies partly within Central Lincolnshire. Additionally, there are numerous Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and Local Wildlife Sites.
- 2.3 The key issues facing the Central Lincolnshire authorities in relation to this policy area include allocating land for development with the least environmental value, protecting and enhancing sites of biodiversity and geodiversity importance, supporting the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, species and ecological networks and designating local biodiversity and geodiversity sites.
- 2.4 The Central Lincolnshire Authorities respond to these issues in a variety of ways, working with Natural England, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and as partners in the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership. A shared approach has been taken to developing a local evidence base to support the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. The Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping Study (October 2013) is an example of this shared approach, providing spatial biodiversity opportunity evidence to support the policy approach in the Local Plan and the work of the Local Nature Partnership.

## 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 Biodiversity and Geodiversity (Policy LP19).
- 3.2 Natural England raised a number of concerns regarding the wording of the policy. Their main concerns were the need for stronger protection for European Sites and SSSIs, lack of specific guidance on geodiversity, stronger protection for ancient woodland and veteran trees and reference to ecosystem services.
- 3.3 The Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust raised similar issues through the consultation on the Preliminary Draft version of the Local Plan. The main issues were the need to reference Nature Improvement Areas, removal of wording that weakens the policy, such as ‘as appropriate’ and ‘where possible’, protecting sites that meet the criteria for selection as a Local Wildlife Site or Local Geological Site and wording to strengthen the mitigation section of the policy.

## 4 Local Plan Policy: Further Draft

- 4.1 The policy in the Further Draft version of the Local Plan (published for consultation in October-November 2015) was amended in response to comments received during the consultation on the Preliminary Draft version of the Local Plan, in particular to address the concerns stated above.
- 4.2 Most people who responded were generally supportive of the policy as drafted in the Further Draft version of the Local Plan. The representations received during the Further Draft consultation raised the following main issues:
- Concern was raised by the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP) that Local Sites of Biodiversity and Geodiversity value had been omitted from the Policies Maps. The GLNP felt they should be included as they are a material consideration in a planning application.
  - Several respondents, including the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, suggested 'where possible' should be removed from the third bullet point, as they felt it further weakened the policy where it was only 'seeking to' deliver a net gain.
  - A further issue raised was that opportunities for enhancement were not always possible or viable and the policy wording should reflect this rather than be an absolute requirement.

## 5 Local Plan Policy: Proposed Submission

- 5.1 The policy in the Proposed Submission Local Plan has been amended in response to comments received during the consultation on the Further Draft version of the Local Plan. :
- 5.2 In response to the GLNP concern, it has been decided not to include Local Sites on the Policies Maps as the GLNP provided an update on their status on an annual basis and therefore the maps would soon become out of date. Instead, the Local Sites will be shown and kept up to date on an electronic, interactive map on the Central Lincolnshire website using the data provided by the GLNP. The supporting text to policy LP21 has been amended to direct people to where Local Sites can be viewed.
- 5.3 The policy has been amended to remove 'where possible' from the third bullet.
- 5.4 The policy wording has also been amended to clarify that enhancement opportunities should be taken proportionate to the scale of the proposed development.
- 5.5 There were a number of minor policy wording suggestions, some of which have been taken forward into the revised policy in the Proposed Submission Local Plan.
- 5.6 Aside from the NPPF and NPPG, the policy is supported by evidence on sites held at the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership and contained within the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan and Geodiversity Action Plan, Central Lincolnshire Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping Study and Central Lincolnshire Green Infrastructure Study.

## 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.)
- 6.2 **Option 2:** To have no local policy and rely on national policy in the NPPF to protect biodiversity and geodiversity. This option has been rejected as the NPPF clearly sets out

that Local Plans should include strategic policies to deliver the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment.

## 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 Further Draft consultation, as well as how the latest evidence and national guidance has been taken into account.