

Strategic Policy 23 (SP23) – Landscape

1. The District's landscapes will be protected, enhanced, used and managed to provide an attractive and healthy working and living environment. Development will be guided by the District's Landscape Character Assessment and landscapes defined as highly sensitive will be afforded the greatest protection.

2. Development will be supported where it allows for greater public access to the countryside and naturalistic coast, supports visitors to the District and helps provide additional employment opportunities, provided this does not compromise landscape quality or the biodiversity objectives of the plan.

3. The Council will ensure that the distinctive character of the District's landscapes whether they are of cultural, natural or historic significance, will not be compromised. In particular, the highest level of protection will be given to the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is designated at a national level because of its landscape quality.

4. The Council will support development that conserves and enhances designated and historic landscapes (Winceby Battlefield, Lincolnshire Wolds, Coastal Country Park, Conservation Areas, Historic Parks and Gardens, setting of listed buildings within the landscape) as focal points for widening and improving the visitor experience.

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

12.10. Biodiversity is a term commonly used to describe the variety of life on Earth. This encompasses the whole of the natural world and all living things with which we share the planet. It includes plants, animals, and even invisible micro-organisms and bacteria that, together, interact in complex ways with the inanimate environment to create living ecosystems. Geodiversity is the term used to refer to physiographical and geomorphological features, such as rocks, minerals, fossils, soils and landforms.

12.11. Biodiversity is a key indicator of the health of our environment and contributes greatly to our quality of life. Enhancing biodiversity is one of the key principles of sustainable development. It also has considerable economic and social benefits. Biodiversity is dynamic; however, some species and habitats can be highly susceptible to the harmful effects of change. Changes in climate, agriculture, settlement patterns and other human activities have led to a decline in biodiversity in the District over the last 50 years. The District Council, along with other public bodies, has a duty under The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out its functions. This is referred to as the "Biodiversity Duty". The aim of the biodiversity duty is to raise the profile of biodiversity, so that the conservation of biodiversity becomes properly embedded in all relevant policies

and decisions made by public authorities. Conserving biodiversity includes restoring and enhancing species populations and habitats, as well as protecting them. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan Biodiversity 2020 highlights the need to reverse this decline and bring about a step change in habitat creation and recreation and to increase the connectivity of sites.

12.12. The Lincolnshire BAP forms part of a national initiative to provide action plans for the nation's most threatened and declining species and habitats. The BAP includes actions and activities relating to development and the planning process. The Council will apply the policies of the Plan to meet the objectives of the Lincolnshire BAP. Species and habitats listed on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 Section 41 as species and habitats of principal importance should also be safeguarded.

12.13. There are a number of sites recognised at a local level for their nature conservation or geological value. These sites have been identified for features including their rarity, diversity, fragility or because they are typical of the local biodiversity or geodiversity of the District. The Council will seek to protect these sites when assessing development proposals. The important sites that meet the selection criteria published by the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership are called Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) or Local Geological Sites (LGSs). There remain sites from the previous regime of designation, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS), which have not yet been tested against the new criteria published by the GLNP. Until such time as these sites have been resurveyed and an assessment made of their current ability to meet the criteria, these sites remain designated and this policy still applies to them. The Council will keep the evidence base up to date throughout the lifetime of the Plan including a list of sites and any changes to the evidence base in the Annual Authority Monitoring Report.

12.14. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) give legal protection to a suite of the best sites for wildlife and geology in England. They are notified and approved by Natural England. These sites are protected for both their own nature conservation value or geological, and as part of a national network of such sites, the Council values these sites and acknowledges their legally protected status.

12.15. The District includes sites of international importance for biodiversity, including parts of the Wash and Humber Estuaries. These include designations of Ramsar Sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). There are a number of policies within the Core Strategy that may bring forward development proposals, the location and nature of which may affect the intrinsic value of these sites. Development proposals likely to have an adverse impact on these sites should be subject to a Habitat Regulations Assessment, including an ecological assessment of the impact of the proposed development, in combination with any other plans and projects. Details of mitigation and enhancement measures should also be provided, along with details of site management to explain how this will be achieved. The Local Plan itself is subject to Habitats Regulation Assessment (under The Habitats Regulations) throughout its preparation to ensure that its policies and proposals do not have an adverse

impact on internationally important sites. The Council will monitor the impact of local plan policies and proposals and visitors at the above relevant sites by assessing visitor access each year to see how and if they increase and will take appropriate action to mitigate any effects.

12.16. When assessing any proposal for development which may impact on a protected habitat or species, or priority habitats and species identified in the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan or Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, the Council will require the developer to provide up to date information to enable a proper assessment of the site to be made. Considering how the proposal seeks the preservation, restoration and re-creation of these habitats and the protection and recovery of species populations. This may take the form of information from the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre or other appropriate source and may require the carrying out of a habitat or ecological survey for the site. In assessing such proposals, the Council will firstly seek to incorporate the habitat or species within the development and seek its enhancement through the proposals. Where this is not possible, harm or disturbance to the habitat or species will be kept to a minimum and appropriate mitigation sought. Only where this is not possible will the Council consider compensation. At the time of writing the Plan, East Lindsey is not within a Nature Improvement Area (NIA) but work on this is ongoing. Where development is within a Nature Improvement Area (NIA) it should contribute to the aims and aspirations of the NIA.

12.17. There are a variety of ways that development can impact upon a site, and not all of these will be direct. Sites protected for their biodiversity importance may be highly susceptible to changes in water levels and pollution of water courses and ground water from nearby development and from air pollution caused by increased traffic movements and operational needs of development. Soil is a finite resource, and fulfils many roles that are beneficial to society. As a component of the natural environment, it is important that soils are protected and used sustainably. Soils of high environmental value (e.g. wetland and carbon stores such as peatland) should also be considered as part of ecological connectivity. More detailed guidance on this matter can be found in the Defra Code of practice for the sustainable use of soils on construction sites.

12.18. Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees are an irreplaceable resource that cannot be replicated through normal biodiversity offsetting processes, due to the time it has taken for them to reach their current status. The national inventory of ancient woodland is held and updated by Natural England. The Woodland Trust has a record of identified veteran trees and can provide further advice if it is considered that a tree not yet identified would fulfil the criteria. In determining planning applications, the Council will look to the Standing Advice for Ancient Trees and Woodlands published by the Forestry Commission and Natural England. Development involving, or with the potential to affect, an area of ancient woodland or a veteran tree will need to provide the highest level of evidence to demonstrate that there is significant community benefit to the development proceeding and that the minimum damage occurs as a result of the development

12.19. Sites identified for their biodiversity interest, at whatever level, do not exist in isolation and the linking of a network of sites increases their range and extent, this also makes a valuable contribution to the integrity of both individual sites and overall levels of biodiversity across the District. This connectivity should not stop at a site boundary or even District boundaries and opportunities may exist to create or strengthen links that support biodiversity on a landscape-scale. Linear features, such as hedgerows, verges and watercourses can play a valuable role in helping to develop networks of sites and in allowing species to migrate. It assists in the adaptation of landscapes and ecosystems to climate change. The Council has undertaken a Green Infrastructure Audit, identifying existing networks of habitats across the District. From this work, it is possible to identify how any opportunities for further habitat creation fit into this network and gives sites the best opportunity to establish themselves and the expansion and linking of these sites will be supported. This can also be used to inform the development planning process and other opportunities for habitat creation. The Council will seek to enhance the biodiversity of the District through the determination of planning applications. The Council will seek to retain natural features, including trees and hedgerows on site, wherever possible. It will also seek the creation of new areas for wildlife, including the planting of native tree species, to help strengthen existing biodiversity networks. The Council is a partner in a number of initiatives, such as the, Lincolnshire Limewoods, the Coastal Country Park, Heritage/Wild Coast Partnership and the Lincolnshire Chalk Streams Project. Initiatives such as these help to improve understanding of the natural environment and provide further opportunity for the enhancement of biodiversity.

Strategic Policy 24 (SP24) - Biodiversity and Geodiversity

1. Development proposals should seek to protect and enhance the biodiversity and geodiversity value of land and buildings, and minimise fragmentation and maximise opportunities for connection between natural habitats.

2. The Council will protect sites designated internationally, nationally or locally for their biodiversity and geodiversity importance, species populations and habitats identified in the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Development, which could adversely affect such a site, will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances:

- In the case of internationally designated sites, where there is no alternative solution and there are overriding reasons of public interest for the development;***
- In the case of nationally designated sites, there is no alternative solution and the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the biodiversity value of the site; or***
- In the case of locally designated sites, and sites that meet the criteria for selection as a Local Site, the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the need to protect the site in the long term.***

3. In exceptional circumstances, where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable and development is permitted which would damage the nature conservation or geological value of a site, the Council will ensure that such damage is kept to a minimum and will ensure appropriate mitigation, compensation or enhancement of the site through the use of planning conditions or planning obligations. Compensation measures towards loss of habitat will be used only as a last resort where there is no alternative. Where any mitigation and compensation measures are required, they should be in place before development activities start that may disturb protected or important habitats and species. Proposals to provide or enhance a site will be supported.

4. Where new habitat is created it should, where possible, be linked to other similar habitats to provide a network of such sites for wildlife.

5. Planning permission will only be granted for development which directly or indirectly leads to loss or harm to ancient woodland or aged or veteran trees, in exceptional circumstances, where the developer can demonstrate that the wider benefits of that loss clearly outweigh the protection of the trees

Green Infrastructure

12.20. Green Infrastructure (GI) is the umbrella term used to describe all the different elements that form the network of natural and semi-natural spaces within and around our towns and villages, and in the open countryside. The use of the word green in this context can be confusing as it is often misunderstood to mean parks, woodlands and other areas that are literally green, but the term can be used to cover a wider range of spaces and includes rivers and other water features, and importantly in East Lindsey's situation, includes the coastline. GI covers a variety of types of spaces, including (but by no means exclusively) woodland, parks and gardens, green lanes, public rights of way, churchyards, sports facilities, water courses and beaches and dunes.

12.21. Ideally, GI should come from a range of different types, forming an overall network. GI is an important component part of place making and quality of life. It has many benefits to the environment and to both individuals and the community as a whole. It can:

- Foster environmental appreciation;
- Help provide space for biodiversity and networks to help the migration of species;
- Help improve health and childhood development by providing opportunities for physical activity and diverse and flexible environments for play;
- Improve general well-being and quality of life;
- Provide the setting for both formal and informal recreation;
- Safeguard our landscapes and enhance the setting of heritage assets;