

West Lancashire Local Plan Review Issues & Options Consultation

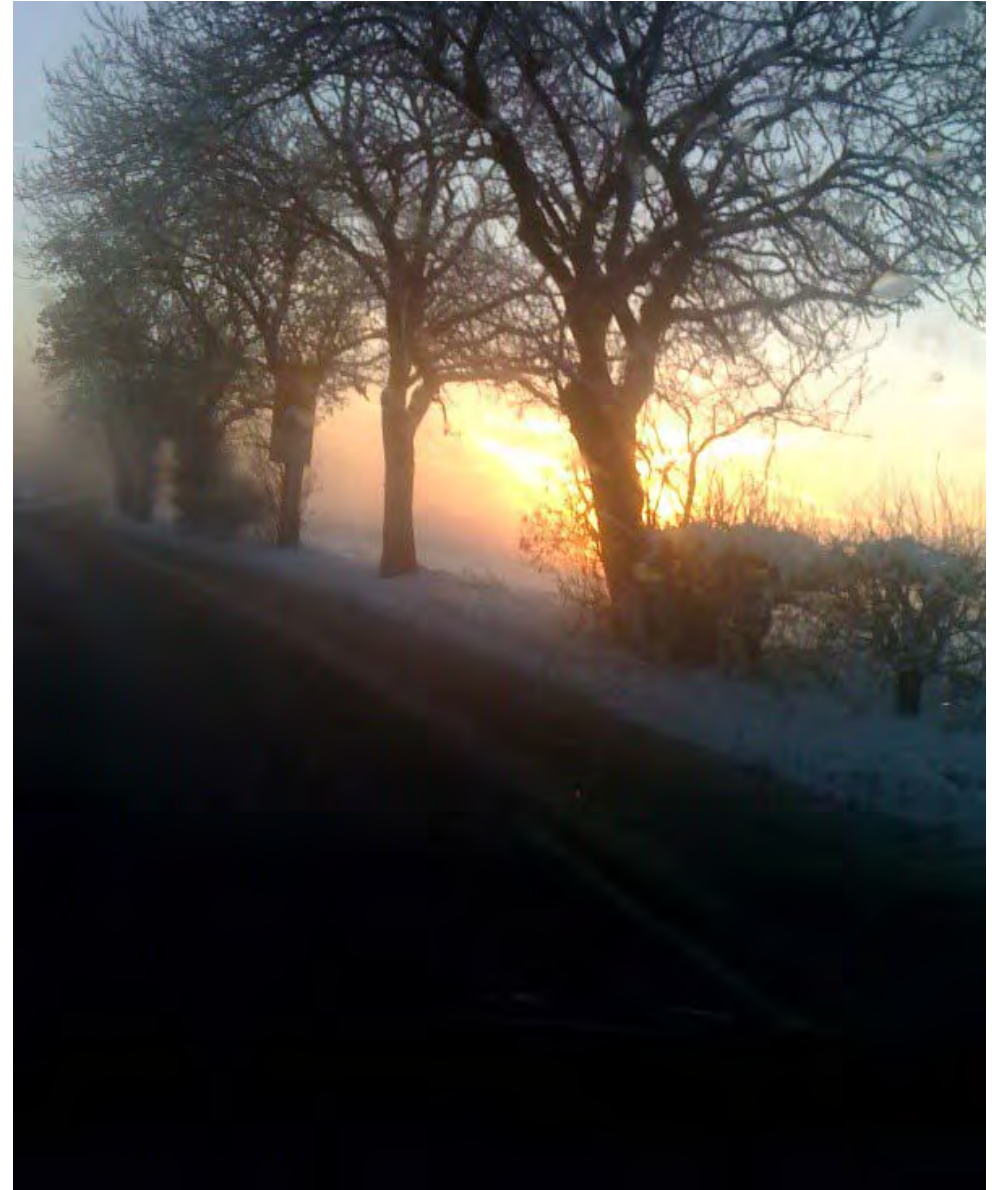


Environmental
Policy Options Paper
February 2017



Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Managing the Natural Environment	2
3.	Addressing Climate Change	4
4.	Designing the Built Environment	6
5.	What Happens Next?	10

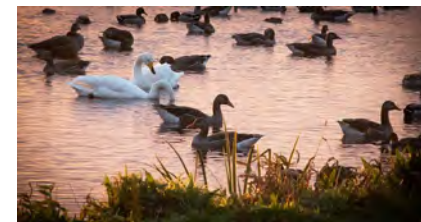


1. Introduction

- 1.1 Current trends in population growth and the inevitable increase in demand for natural resources will require careful management as a new Local Plan is prepared, particularly if we are to support West Lancashire's needs in a sustainable way, and in particular in a manner which does not have a detrimental impact upon the environment. Added to this is the challenge of managing the impacts of climate change, caused by rising temperatures, and resulting in increased coastal flood risk and erosion, increased occurrences of extreme weather events such as heat waves and heavy rain, and long-term changes in seasonal weather patterns.
- 1.2 One key aspect of resilience to climate change of particular relevance in West Lancashire is dealing with the risk of flooding. This has the potential to impact on the area's economy in terms of the agricultural and horticultural industries of West Lancashire but also impact on built-up areas.
- 1.3 Planning has an important role to play in minimising vulnerability to such impacts, for instance controlling where new development is located. Particular issues exist within the Northern Parishes and some localised areas elsewhere which are located within Flood Zone 3, where the probability of river and sea flooding is greatest, or there are exceptional instances of surface water flooding. This issue is covered in the Strategic Development Options Paper as the location of new development goes to the heart of the Plan-making process and so the relevance of areas at risk of flooding to where new development should be located is considered with the Strategic Development Options.
- 1.4 Design of the built environment is also relevant to climate change (and visa versa) and so must not just be concerned about how a place looks but also considers how a place, or a building, functions. For example, carefully thought through layouts can encourage walking and cycling rather than car use for short journeys in particular, securing reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Renewable energy generation, flood mitigation and energy saving measures can be built into new developments in a way which will not compromise design.
- 1.5 Taking all the above into account, there will be a number of issues related to the natural environment, built environment and climate change that the Local Plan will need to address.

2. Managing the Natural Environment

- 2.1 The combination of new development, intensive farming practices on agricultural land and climate change is predicted to result in an overall loss of habitat for a number of species as well as issues such as habitat squeeze and fragmentation. However, there are challenges related to obtaining up to date information on biodiversity to accurately measure this impact. Surveys of some sites (particularly at the more local level) are carried out infrequently and therefore the evidence necessary to make an accurate assessment of the impact of development upon nature sites may be lacking. It is also difficult to predict and measure the effects of climate change on biodiversity, but it is necessary to gain an understanding of the short, medium and long term impacts and how resilience can be built up to it within the natural environment.
- 2.2 The preparation of the Lancashire Ecological Network by Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust is an important part of the work needed to inform policy-making on this issue and the Council will continue to work with the County Council and Wildlife Trust to gain a better understanding of the issue in order to ensure that the policies included in the Local Plan offer the best opportunities for biodiversity enhancement available through new development.
- 2.3 There are a number and variety of internationally and nationally designated nature sites located within West Lancashire, including Martin Mere and the Ribble Estuary. These are largely protected and managed through European and national legislation and so the Council's approach with regards to these sites is essentially to protect them in line with their conservation objectives and enhance linkages to other habitats.
- 2.4 However there is growing recognition that biodiversity is not restricted to these areas. Biological Heritage Sites are Lancashire's locally important wildlife sites, hosting a wide and rich variety of species. These are monitored and managed at a County-level and are identified within the Local Plan. Amendments to the list of sites are made by the Biological Heritage Sites Review Panel which comprises ecologists from the County Council, Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside and Natural England.
- 2.5 Even smaller scale 'natural infrastructure' such as street trees and domestic gardens act as wildlife corridors, play a significant role in connecting and supporting habitats, allowing species to move. Recognition of this concept has led to the development of 'Ecological Networks' in recent years. These were established as a response to Government concern, expressed in the NPPF, about the challenge of halting biodiversity loss, resulting from the effects of increased development and climate change. At a Lancashire-wide level, Ecological Network maps have been created for two of the three major habitat groups (woodland and scrub as well as grassland) and maps for the third group (wetland and heathland) are still being finalised. Each map identifies and classifies the Core Areas, Corridors and Stepping Stones identified for that habitat group, so providing a more complete picture of where habitats are and where they should be protected and enhanced if possible.



Environmental Policy Issue 1: Local Nature Conservation Sites

- 2.6 West Lancashire has a lower tier of district-level nature sites – termed ‘Local Nature Conservation Sites’ – which have been designations for the last two Local Plans. However, there has been some concern that this site selection no longer accurately reflects areas that are important to biodiversity. There is a sense that the production of the Ecological Network of sites somewhat supersedes this designation and that the Ecological Network approach is a more effective way of preserving biodiversity for the long term. There are also the implications and responsibilities set out in DEFRA guidance on how such local site systems should be selected, managed and reviewed. This additional burden would need to be picked up by the Local Authority in partnership with landowners.
- 2.7 However, should the current district tier of Local Nature Sites be removed, the sites would need to go through an assessment procedure to consider whether they should be upgraded to a Biological Heritage Site or if not, to ensure any aspects of ecological value is reflected in the Ecological Network.
- 2.8 The Council will need to consider the precise policy wording that will be required to ensure the preservation and enhancement of Ecological Networks, Biological Heritage Sites and internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites in West Lancashire but the Council has two options of how to address the current designation of Local Nature Conservation Sites:
- 1) **Continue with the Local Nature Conservation Sites designation in the next Local Plan.** *This would require assessment of whether the sites currently designated are still worthy and whether there are any other candidate sites. The Council will also need to consider*

how the sites can be managed to meet their obligations. This is particularly difficult given that most sites are not in public ownership and the Council has no powers to require a landowner to maintain their land in a particular way.

- 2) **Remove the Local Nature Conservation Sites designation from the Local Plan.** *The sites instead would be incorporated into the Ecological Network. A Local Plan policy would need to be included which affords appropriate protection to this Ecological Network.*

Summary

Environmental Policy Issue 1 looks at the importance of how we protect our natural environment and the ecology that lives within it. If you have views on that issue, please answer the question below in our **Issues & Options Survey**.

Should West Lancashire retain the Local Nature Conservation Site designation in the future? Which policy option for the management of local nature sites do you think is the most appropriate for West Lancashire? Why?

3. Addressing Climate Change

- 3.1 As outlined previously, planning is central in shaping places to secure reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and provide resilience to the impacts of climate change, and it is also important in supporting the deliverability of renewable energy.
- 3.2 The provision of renewable energy is important in seeking to reduce reliance on carbon-based energy and reduce the effects of climate change. As such, it is important that the Council consider how the Local Plan should facilitate the provision of Renewable Energy in West Lancashire. Renewable Energy can be a divisive issue, generally due to the perception of harm to the local environment that certain types of renewable energy can generate (e.g. wind energy and solar farms). However, this does not remove the Council's responsibility to consider all options and assess them objectively.



Environmental Policy Issue 2: Renewable Energy

- 3.3 National planning policy broadly supports the provision of renewable energy but ministerial statements over recent years have placed clear provisos on that support, in particular relating to onshore wind energy. It is good practice for the Local Planning Authority to assess the types of renewable energy that are appropriate in different parts of a district and then designate areas which are suitable for specific types of renewable energy generation.
- 3.4 A recent study (the Lancashire Sustainable Energy Study) concluded that West Lancashire has the potential to create 1630Mw of renewable energy mostly from wind, followed by micro-generation, with much smaller amounts from available resources in the form of waste and biomass.
- 3.5 As such, the Council will need to review the studies conducted for the preparation of the last Local Plan on potential for renewable energy generation in West Lancashire and identify any areas that the Council might designate for specific renewable technologies. There would appear to be two general policy options available to the Council in relation to the provision of Renewable Energy:
- 1) **Designate specific areas where the generation of wind energy, solar farms and any other renewable energy technology may be appropriate.** This will need to rely on the assessment of various criteria for each technology to identify defined areas which are, in principle, appropriate for that technology in terms of it being a viable location to generate energy and would not be unduly harmful to the surrounding environment or uses.

- 2) ***Do not designate any specific areas for renewable energy technologies, and therefore consider any applications for the development of such technologies on a case-by-case basis.*** This is effectively the current approach in the Local Plan. This provides more flexibility and enables the industry to propose sites they see as suitable for consideration under the planning process, however it has its disadvantages given that it does not provide clear planning guidance to an applicant as to where the Council might find development of renewable technologies appropriate and so may result in applications for such development in inappropriate locations.

Summary

Environmental Policy Issue 2 considers how the Local Plan might plan for developments that use Renewable Energy technologies. If that's something you think is an important issue, please answer the questions below in our **Issue & options Survey**.

Should West Lancashire Borough Council designate sites for the provision of Renewable Energy? Which policy option for provision of Renewable Energy do you think is the most appropriate for West Lancashire? Why?



4. Designing the Built Environment

- 4.1 Good design encompasses both buildings and spaces and creates places which are unique, attractive and lively where people want to live, work and visit. West Lancashire has its own distinct character and development should reflect and draw upon this local distinctiveness. Design is not just concerned about how a place looks but also considers how it functions.
- 4.2 Good design is inherently sustainable. Carefully thought through layouts will encourage walking and cycling rather than car use for short journeys in particular and well-designed buildings using quality materials will have a longer life. However, designing the built environment must be considered at many different levels – neighbourhood, site layout, scale, mass and form of the building or buildings down to individual design elements.
- 4.3 All development, regardless of scale requires a proper understanding of the site, its surroundings and the distinctive nature of the place. Development proposals should understand local context and the constraints and opportunities of the site.
- 4.4 The Council's Design SPD establishes a set of design principles and sets out the Council's expectations in relation to design. The Local Plan Review will need to explore options for amending our design policies, where appropriate.

Environmental Policy Issue 3: Sustainable Design and Construction

- 4.5 The way that buildings are designed and constructed can help to reduce the effects of climate change by reducing the demand for energy (for heating or lighting a building) and so ultimately reduce the production of greenhouse gases in the creation of that energy from carbon-based fuel. It can also help promote biodiversity by including specific features. Approaches to rating the sustainability of a building or construction have been downplayed or removed altogether by changes to national policy and advice in recent years, and so it has become quite difficult for planning to require that a certain standard of sustainable construction is met in new developments. However where it is justified and does not make development unviable, the Local Plan can include policies which place a requirement for a particular sustainable feature or measure on certain new developments to help improve the environmental performance of buildings.



4.6 A good example of this would be the provision of electric vehicle recharging points in new developments. The Local Plan could include a policy which requires all new houses to have a suitable external power connection that an electric vehicle can be recharged from. Other examples might include incorporating renewable energy technologies into/onto new buildings or developments or promoting features on buildings or developments that support the movement of, or habitats for, local wildlife (bird boxes, bat bricks, hedgehog-friendly fencing). As such, there are three general policy options available to the Council to address this issue:

- 1) **Require specific sustainable design and construction features or measures to be incorporated into new developments.** *This option would require clear evidence of the need or justification for any particular feature and the viability of including it in new development in an affordable way but would provide certainty on what is expected.*
- 2) **Do not require any specific features or measures through policy.** *This option would rely upon the market demand for such features to change current construction and design practices in the development industry and so provides little certainty that any such features would ultimately be incorporated into new development but provides flexibility to developers.*
- 3) **Require new development to contribute financially to a Community Energy Fund.** *This option would enable those developments where it is practically difficult to include specific features in the development to instead make a financial contribution in lieu of these features to a Community Energy Fund*

which the Council would manage. This might particularly be relevant when carbon compliance cannot be achieved on site in line with the final Part L building regulation increase. The Council could then utilise this fund to make other, existing properties more sustainable or to deliver renewable energy developments, thereby ensuring the same overall net improvement in sustainable construction.

Summary

Environmental Policy Issue 3 weighs up the pros and cons of how the Local Plan might encourage or require sustainable design and construction in new developments in West Lancashire. What do you think about this? Answer the questions below in our **Issues & Options Survey**.

Which policy option for Sustainable Design and Construction do you think is the most appropriate for West Lancashire? Why? Would a combination of options help to assist sustainable development? What kind of measures could we require of new development?



Environmental Policy Issue 4: Sustainable and Healthy Places

- 4.7 It is recognised that creating places that are beneficial for human health only comes about through collaborative and joined-up working, since improving health is a complex, multi-faceted challenge. However, the design of new development layouts can encourage increased activity levels and reduced car-usage in order to combat long-term excess weight and obesity related health problems, improve local air quality and to generally help residents and users to exercise more. This prioritises providing an attractive and easy to use walking and cycling environment which connects places with each other, provision of open spaces within easy reach for recreation and play as well as good quality neighbourhood spaces where community and social infrastructure and local facilities are also provided and protected. All of this also has mental health benefits.



- 4.8 Whilst the Borough does appear to have an abundance of open green space as a result of its rural setting, one of the main issues relates to deficiencies in certain types of open space and sports facilities (either quantitatively or qualitatively), and poor access to these spaces for local communities. In addition, problems relating to an oversupply of poor quality green spaces in some areas can lead to difficulties maintaining the green spaces which makes them less attractive and results in under-utilisation.
- 4.9 As such, there are several (not mutually exclusive) options that the Council might consider including in the Local Plan:
- 1) **Requirements for developments over a certain size to incorporate features that encourage an active lifestyle for local residents and visitors.** Such features effectively encourage residents and users to enjoy what is provided within the development in a way

which leads to more exercise. This can be traditional provision of open space and play / exercise equipment and pleasant routes to walk / run around but can also include more creative use of space and layout design to garner interest in activities that facilitate physical exercise. This can often link to the next option, in terms of encouraging residents / users to move beyond the development site into the wider local area and enjoy physical activity and exercise.

- 2) **Requirements for developments over a certain size to provide direct connections from the development to the wider cycling and walking infrastructure.** *This option seeks to enable easy, sustainable access to local services and facilities and so encourage residents / users of the development to move to / from the development site by walking and cycling rather than the car when using local facilities such as corner shops.*
- 3) **Requirements for residential developments over a certain size to incorporate public open space and amenity green space. Public open space and green features are crucial to creating a pleasant environment to live in.** *Not only do they facilitate healthy activity and exercise, but they provide a calming and peaceful environment that benefits mental health and wellbeing. As such, this option would seek to maximise the health benefits of incorporating public open space within new developments.*

Summary

Environmental Policy Issue 4 reflects on the role that the Local Plan might have in promoting healthier lifestyles for the people who live, work and spend leisure time in West Lancashire. Do you think it is important for planning to consider this? If so, answer the questions below in our **Issues & Options Survey**.

Which policy option for creating Sustainable and Healthy Places do you think is the most appropriate for West Lancashire? Would it be appropriate to include more than one of the options in order to create healthy and accessible environments for all? Which ones, and why?

Are there any other environmental policy issues that should also be considered? If so, what are they?

4. What Happens Next?

Responding to the Issues & Options Consultation

4.1 Having read this Paper, the Council would like you to respond by commenting on what you've read through the Local Plan Review: Issues & Options consultation. The easiest way to do this is online at **www.westlancs.gov.uk/localplan**, where you will find instructions on how to respond.

4.2 The best way to respond is by completing a short survey online available at the above web link. The survey is related to the questions you'll have seen scattered throughout this Paper and the other Issues & Options consultation papers. You can also email or write in with your comments to:

Email: localplan@westlancs.gov.uk

Postal Address: Local Plan Consultation

Planning

West Lancashire Borough Council

52 Derby Street

Ormskirk

L39 2DF

4.3 All the Issues & Options consultation papers, as well as survey forms and details of how to engage with the consultation, are also available at:

- **all Libraries in West Lancashire,**
- **at the Council Offices, 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk, L39 2DF; and**
- **at the Customer Service Point, Unit 142, first floor of the Concourse, Skelmersdale, WN8 6LN.**

4.4 You can also phone the Council if you have any queries about the Local Plan Review Issues & Options Consultation to speak to a Council Officer on **01695 585194**.



Next Steps

- 5.5 With regard to the wider process for preparing a new Local Plan, following this Issues & Options Consultation, the Council will consider the feedback received from the public consultation and use it in preparing what is effectively a draft Local Plan, known as the Preferred Options Paper. The Preferred Options Paper narrows down on, and selects, the Council's preferred policy option for each topic (i.e. how policy will address each key issue) as well as the preferred strategic option for how much new housing and employment development should take place and where. At that point, site allocations are proposed to meet the development needs identified.
- 5.6 The Preferred Options Paper will be publicly consulted upon and the feedback from that consultation will be considered and the Council will make the necessary refinements and amendments to the proposed policies and site allocations to prepare what is essentially a "final draft" Local Plan, known as the Publication version, which represents the Local Plan that the Council want to take forward and adopt.
- 5.7 Once again, the Publication version will be made available for public scrutiny and formal representations (comments) on the document will be invited. However, this time, the comments will not be considered by the Council, but submitted with the Local Plan to a Planning Inspector to consider as part of the Examination of the Local Plan. This Examination will involve public hearings where those invited to speak by the Planning Inspector can put forward their views to help the Inspector to arrive at a decision on whether the Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with all relevant legislation and whether it is a "sound" document.
- 5.8 More detail will be provided by the Council on how to engage with the Preferred Options Paper, the Publication version and the Examination in Public as we reach each stage, but the above gives a brief overview of the process.
- 5.9 Alongside the preparation of the Preferred Options Paper, the Council will continue to prepare and commission new studies to provide the evidence needed to guide the Council's decision-making on which policy options, strategic option and site allocations are most appropriate for inclusion in the new Local Plan.

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