



# **Central Lancashire Local Plan 2023-2041**

## **Statement of Common Ground Between the Central Lancashire Authorities (Chorley Council, Preston City Council and South Ribble Borough Council) and Natural England**

June 2025

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been developed in order to address strategic planning matters between the parties consisting of the Central Lancashire Authorities (CLAs) of Chorley, Preston and South Ribble, and Natural England (NE).
- 1.2 The SoCG has been prepared to comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirements. Paragraph 24 to 27 of the NPPF<sup>1</sup> state that “Local Planning Authorities are under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries”. Moreover, the “strategic policy-making authorities should prepare and maintain one or more statement of common ground, documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in cooperating to address these”. Paragraphs 20 to 23 set out how the duty to cooperate works and how strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries require effective and on-going cooperation. These matters include:
- Housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development.
  - Infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
  - Community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
  - Conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and Natural environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 1.3 According to the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)<sup>2</sup>, a SoCG is a written record of the progress made by strategic policy-making authorities during the process of planning for strategic cross-boundary matters. It documents where effective co-operation is and is not happening throughout the plan-making process and is a way of demonstrating at examination that plans are deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working across local authority boundaries. It forms part of the evidence required to demonstrate compliance with the duty to cooperate.
- 1.4 Both NPPF and PPG make it clear that a SoCG should primarily be produced to document the strategic cross-boundary matters. Therefore, this SoCG is the

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<sup>1</sup> NPPF Version December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Under the Section of Plan-Making

written record account of the progress achieved in the planning process for strategic matters in Central Lancashire and how the CLAs have worked effectively to fulfil their duty to cooperate. The approach taken in writing this statement is in accordance with the requirements of the PPG.

## **2. Background of Central Lancashire**

- 2.1 Central Lancashire covers the geographical areas of Preston City Council, Chorley Borough Council and South Ribble Borough Council, which functions as one integrated local economy and commuting area. It is a single housing market area with high levels of self-containment, or families moving within the area. It is therefore appropriate to work strategically in collaboration to ensure our policy is joined up and complementary.
- 2.2 The joint working on planning-related matters began in 2008, when the three councils came together and produced a Central Lancashire Core Strategy, which was adopted in July 2012. It sets out the strategic planning policies for Central Lancashire. In 2018, a review of the Core Strategy and individual local plans began with a view to deliver a single Central Lancashire Local Plan (CLLP), reflecting both the shared strategic policy objectives and more detailed non-strategic policies.
- 2.3 A Central Lancashire Strategic Planning Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) has been established, made-up of elected members from each authority. This Committee has the responsibility to consider proposals, open them up to debate and move to endorse or challenge them at their discretion. Members from LCC also attend the JAC.
- 2.4 A Central Lancashire Local Plan Team has been created and jointly funded by the three local authorities specifically to undertake the work required to deliver the review of the local plan. The team is accountable to all three local authorities, reporting back to each home team and guiding the process forward.

## **3. Strategic Geography**

- 3.1 Central Lancashire is in the heart of Lancashire within the North West Region and covers the three local authority districts of Chorley, Preston and South Ribble. It comprises an urban core surrounded by attractive scenery ranging from the Pennine foothills/West Pennine Moors in the East, to the Lancashire Plain and the Ribble and Alt Estuary in the West. The area is bounded by Fylde and West Lancashire to the West, Ribble Valley and Blackburn with Darwen to the East, Wyre to the North and Greater Manchester to the South.

3.2 The Central Lancashire area is a diverse mix of urban and rural including towns, villages, and sparsely populated countryside. Some of the main landscape attractions and protected wildlife habitats in the area include the Forest of Bowland National Landscape, the West Pennine Moors SSSI, and the Ribble and Alt Estuaries. There are also significant areas of open space and attractive public parks for sport, leisure, and recreation. Grid-iron pattern streets typify the urban areas of Preston, Chorley, and Leyland, as workers housing was built tightly around the mills and industrial complexes.

3.3 The area covered by the Central Lancashire Local Plan is shown in the map below.



## **4. Central Lancashire Authorities and Natural England**

- 4.1 Natural England is a Duty to Consult (DtC) body, and the government's statutory adviser on the Natural environment. Natural England's statutory remit covers a wide range of natural environment issues and areas, and therefore their advice is focused only on those areas which are relevant to that remit. Consequently, unlike other SOCG signed with other parties, it is not considered necessary to set out agreement on all strategic matters as these are not the focus of NE.
- 4.2 This SoCG is therefore prepared to inform the Inspector appointed for the Central Lancashire Local Plan Examination and other parties about the areas of agreement between the CLAs and NE in relation to environment matters contained in the Central Lancashire Local Plan (2023-2041).
- 4.3 NE has submitted comments through the plans' consultation stages, including Issues and Options (Regulation 18) and Local Plan Preferred Options Part One (Regulation 18). The Part One Consultation Statement summarises comments from Natural England.
- 4.4 Natural England responded to the consultation in a letter dated 24 April 2025 and the councils have carefully reviewed and considered these representations.

## **5. Summary of Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and NE Regulation 19 Response**

- 5.1 The HRA was published for consultation alongside the Reg.19 Local Plan and the assessment was able to rule out adverse effects from all impacts, with the exception of recreation pressure. In relation to recreation pressure, the HRA report concluded that "it has not yet been possible to rule out adverse effects on integrity in relation to recreation pressure for the Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary SPA, Morecambe Bay Ramsar and Morecambe Bay SAC and Ribble and Alt Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site." and that "the CLAs will need to work with neighbouring authorities and Natural England to help establish Zones of Influence for these Habitats Sites to determine whether development within the Local Plan could adversely affect the Habitats Sites".
- 5.2 Natural England's comments in relation to recreation pressure were: "Your Appropriate Assessment concludes that your authority is able to ascertain that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any of the sites in question". Having considered the assessment, and the measures proposed to mitigate for all identified adverse effects that could potentially occur, we generally concur with comments made. However, we strongly recommend that the Appropriate Assessment is amended to align with our comments below regarding

the 2/3 Liverpool City Region (LCR) recreation mitigation strategy. Natural England must be reconsulted on any amended Appropriate Assessment.” and: “Natural England welcome the commitment within Section 5.2 of the HRA to work with neighbouring authorities and Natural England regarding the ongoing recreational disturbance work around Morecambe Bay Habitat Sites. However, we advise this work is still in its early stages, and the progress of this work and your Local Plan timescales may not align. Therefore, you may wish to remove the wording of having the commitment ‘before the Local Plan is adopted’. We advise having the correct policy hook which demonstrates that you will accept the future outputs of the Morecambe Bay work will be sufficient. This approach has been undertaken elsewhere such as the East Hampshire 2014 Local Plan, which was adopted before the wider strategic work for the Solent SPA, SAC and Ramsar (which resulted in Birds Aware Solent) progressed. This policy was accepted by the Examiner in this instance: The East Hampshire Policy stated: ‘To help protect the Solent SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites along the coast, the Council will work with local authorities to monitor the progress of ongoing assessments and recreational management studies being undertaken by the Solent Forum on these sites.

- 5.3 Planning permission will only be granted for development that responds to the emerging evidence from the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project, the published recommendations, and future related research.’ We also support the provision of open space, playing grounds and green infrastructure as highlighted in HS5 – Open Space and Playing Pitch Requirement and EN5 – Green Infrastructure. You may wish to explore options for contributions to open space provisions as further mitigation options. In addition, you may wish to consider the design of open space provisions to reflect larger designated areas for off-lead dogs, circular recreational routes diverting from the coast and notice boards to raise awareness of the sensitivities of the designated sites. Natural England advise a strategic approach for Sefton Coast Habitats Sites may not be necessary in this instance and advise removal. We advise that Liverpool Bay SPA is removed from the Screening and Appropriate Assessment stage. Consequently, we advise that the participation within Liverpool City Region recreation mitigation strategy is not required”.
- 5.4 Engagement took place between the CLAs, NE and the CLAs appointed Consultant LUC to review the matters raised by NE in their response. These matters and the points of agreement are listed below:
- 5.5 Morecambe Bay Habitats Sites: a commitment is made by the CLAs to work with neighbouring authorities (Lancaster, Wyre and Westmoreland & Furness, who are leading on strategic recreation mitigation for Morecambe Bay) in the Local Plan, via a policy hook such as that suggested in Natural England’s Reg.19

letter, will be sufficient to avoid adverse effects on the Morecambe Bay Habitats Sites (Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary SPA, Morecambe Bay Ramsar and Morecambe Bay SAC).

- 5.6 Sefton Coast Habitats Sites: it is agreed participation in the Liverpool City Region strategic recreation mitigation strategy is not required. Natural England are not concerned about in combination effects on the Sefton Coast Habitats Sites from the CLA Local Plan and consider existing safeguards to be sufficient. Existing safeguards include the SSSI 'Impact Risk Zone' trigger to consult Natural England and undertake project level HRA for certain types of development. For the Ribble & Alt Estuaries SPA/Ramsar, this requirement applies to urban residential development of 10 units or more, or any rural residential development, within 5km of the SPA/Ramsar.
- 5.7 General advice: reference in the Reg.19 letter to Natural England's support for new open space / green infrastructure and enhanced provision e.g. for dog walking is intended to be good practice rather than 'mitigation' for impacts on specific Habitats Sites.
- 5.8 HRA implications: with the suggested 'policy hook' in the Local Plan, it will be possible for the HRA to conclude 'no adverse effects on integrity' for all Habitats Sites.
- 5.9 It is agreed that the next steps in relation to the HRA are:
- 5.10 Discussion and agreement of potential suitable policy wording (recreation pressure 'policy hook') with Natural England, prior to Local Plan Examination. This would be available to the appointed Planning Inspectors to consider for recommendation as a main modification to the Local Plan.
- 5.11 The next iteration of the HRA (likely to be HRA of main modifications) will reflect the agreements on recreation pressure, any changes made to policies, and Natural England's recommendation that Liverpool Bay SPA can be screened out of the assessment.

The signatories agree that:

- The CLLP has sought to consider the natural environment in accordance with the NPPF.
- Following discussion with Natural England, it will now be possible to conclude that the Central Lancashire Authorities' (CLAs') Local Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any Habitats Sites.
- The CLAs and NE will continue to work together on environmental issues arising through the examination process.

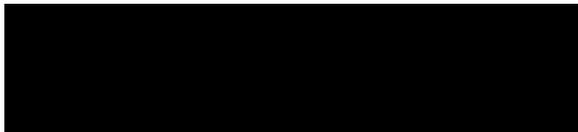
## 6. Signatories

### Natural England

On behalf of Natural England, I can confirm that: There is common ground on the draft planning policies set out in the emerging Central Lancashire Local Plan (2023-2041); and that there are no unresolved strategic issues in relation to matters set out in Section 5 of this statement.	
Signed:	
Date:	02/07/2025
Name:	Rachel Whittaker
Position	Higher Officer

### Central Lancashire Authorities

#### Chorley Council



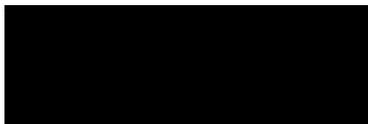
Zoe Whiteside, Head of Spatial Planning

#### Preston City Council



Carolyn Williams, Planning Policy Manager

#### South Ribble Borough Council



Elizabeth Thornber, Head of Planning and Enforcement