

Planning Policy Cabinet Advisory Group – 24th March 2026

Item 5: Lancaster District Local Plan Review Evidence Update

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to provide an update on progress on the preparation of the new Local Plan evidence base for the District. It reports on the preparation of current evidence as well as planned future evidence required to support the Local Plan.

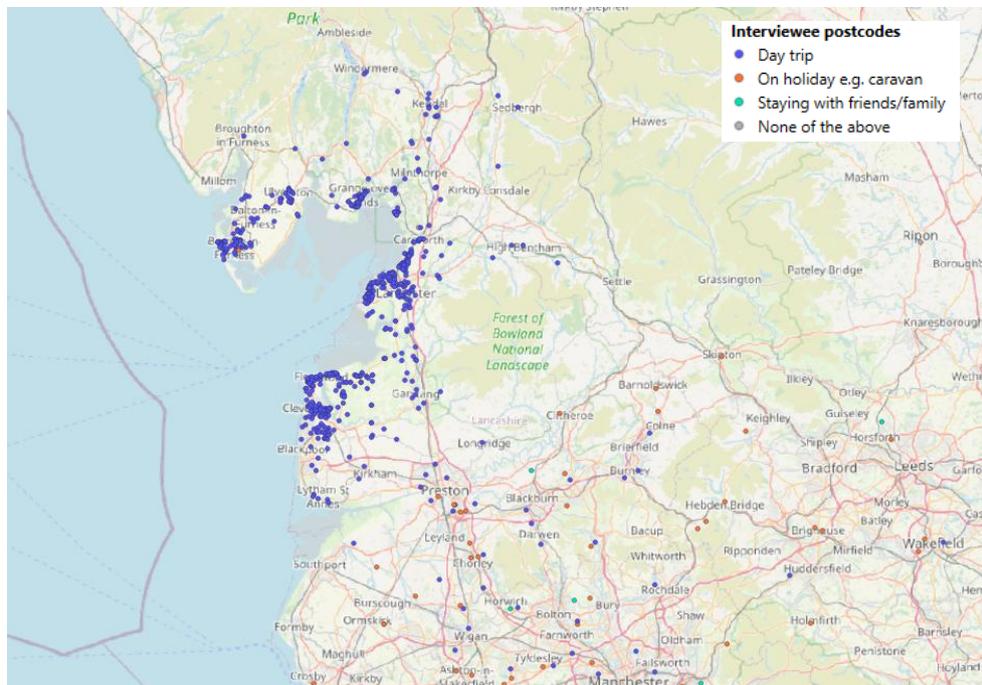
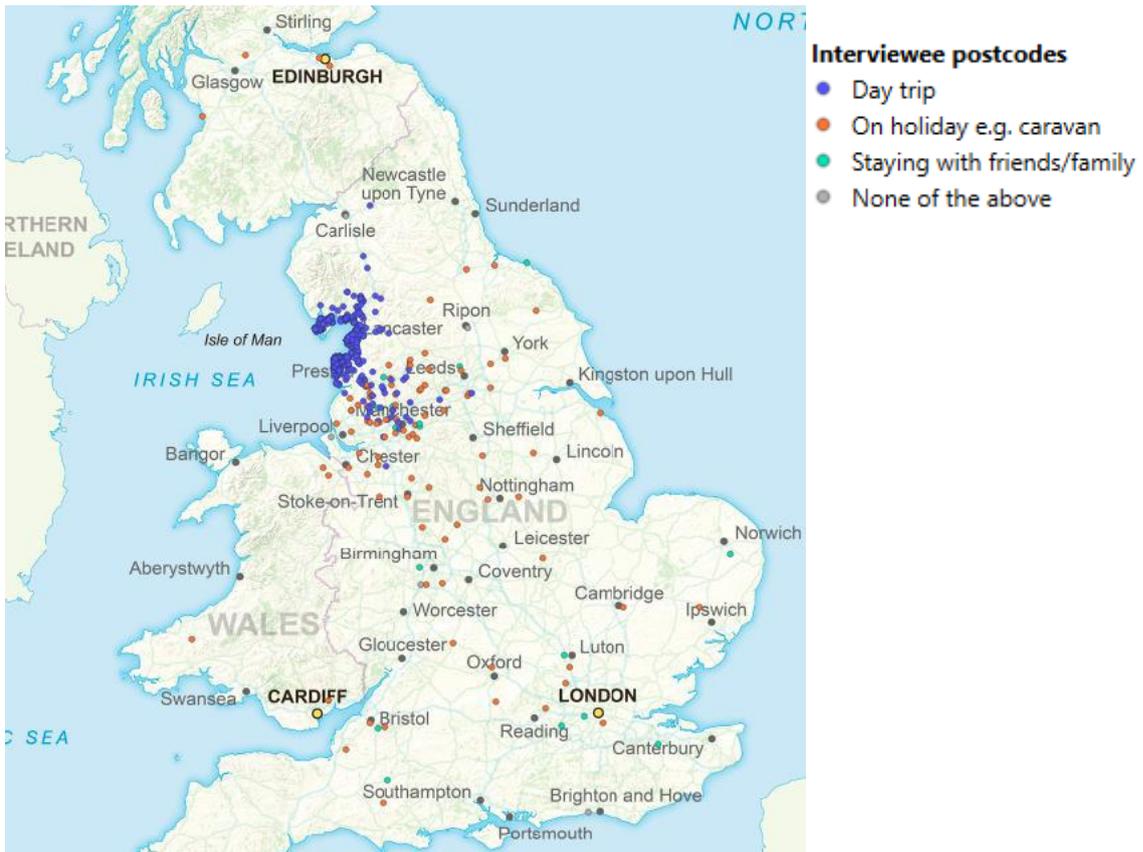
2.0 Evidence Update

- 2.1 Evidence which is ongoing includes the following.

Morecambe Bay Visitor Survey

- 2.2 As reported previously the City Council in partnership with Westmoreland and Furness Council and Wyre Borough Council have commissioned Morecambe Bay Partnership to undertake visitor surveys across several locations around Morecambe Bay.
- 2.3 Morecambe Bay is the largest intertidal area in the UK and is of international importance for the wildlife and habitats it supports, including breeding and overwintering water birds which can be susceptible to disturbance. One of the main sources of disturbance comes through increased recreational use. This is noted to be a key issue for Morecambe Bay with recreational pressure regularly highlighted as one of the main factors threatening this important protected environment.
- 2.4 To better understand this, we require evidence to understand where visitors are coming from and the purpose of their visit. This work will be used to support the preparation of our Local Plans with the work being used to better understand how far people travel and the impact that new residential development may have on the Bay based on its distance from designated sites. The need to understand this is essential to the preparation of our Local Plan and will be a key source of information informing each Local Plan's Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
- 2.5 The surveys are being undertaken face to face by Footprint Ecology. The first set of survey work was undertaken between October 2025 and February 2026 with further surveys planned for April 2026. To date 897 interviews have been completed. These were completed across 18 survey locations.
- 2.6 Initial data reveals that most people surveyed were dog walkers with 54% of those interviewed there to walk their dog, this was followed closely by people out for a walk (32%). 58% of visitors visit at least once a week. 28% visit daily.
- 2.7 The location of those interviewed has also been plotted with this essential to the Local Plan in understanding the extent to which new development could potentially generate more disturbance (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Interviewee postcodes



2.8 Further survey work is being undertaken in April to coincide with the breeding bird period. Once this is completed the results will be analysed and reported with a full report expected to be available in June. The details of this work will be reported to members as soon as it is available.

Local Housing Need Assessment

- 2.9 A final report from external consultants Opinion Research Services (ORS) is expected in the coming weeks. This will be followed by a briefing to Cabinet and All Members on its findings in due course.
- 2.10 The assessment uses the Standard Methodology housing requirement figure as the starting point and considers the type, tenure and size of homes required and requirements for homes to meet specialist needs across the district for the plan period.

Gypsy and Traveller Assessment

- 2.11 Consultants ORS have also been commissioned to provide an assessment of the accommodation needs of the gypsy and traveller community. A survey team has been out in the district carrying out engagement with the gypsy and traveller community. There has also been engagement with various authorities and health providers. Surveys have also been sent out the Parish/Town Councils.
- 2.12 Whilst still being finalised initial feedback from the consultants indicates a need for 65 gypsy and traveller pitches by 2043. This figure could change as the document is finalised. We expect to be in receipt of a final report in the next few weeks with a more detailed report of this work planned for the next PPCAG meeting.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

- 2.13 The SFRA part 1, an assessment of risk across the wider district, has been completed and published. The next stage is an assessment of potential sites for flood risk. External consultants JBA are undertaking this work. They will complete the site assessment identifying different types and severity of flood risks and providing the information in a table format for all potential sites. The site assessment information will inform the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment.
- 2.14 A series of more detailed site-specific assessments (SFRA 2s) will then be carried out by JBA. These detailed assessments will be carried out for sites with more complex flood risk and will focus on whether flood risk can be mitigated and what measures can be accommodated on or off the site to reduce flood risk elsewhere.

Coastal Change Management Areas Assessment (CCMA)

- 2.15 This will assess the impact of coastal change (sea level rise/erosion) and consider potential policies for the area likely to be affected over the next 100 years. Engagement is also ongoing with various infrastructure providers to determine the measures they may have in place for long term flood protection. Following discussion with elected Members, it is anticipated there will be engagement with coastal communities over the coming months.

Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)

- 2.16 One of the biggest evidence base areas under preparation by the team relates to the SHELAA. As reported previously Officers have been busy compiling and identifying a list of potential sites

for development. This includes information submitted by members of the public and other stakeholders via the call for site process.

- 2.17 Officers are now looking to assess these sites to determine their deliverability. This includes assessing their suitability, availability and achievability. A comprehensive database has been prepared to manage this process.
- 2.18 Additional information is also being collected by Officers to support this assessment. This includes the SFRA as set out above as well as heritage and ecological assessments being undertaken in-house by the Council’s Conservation Team and the Council’s Biodiversity Officer.
- 2.19 Officers have also commissioned Landscape Consultants to undertake landscape assessments on potential sites. This is reported below.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

- 2.20 Officers have commissioned JBA to undertake landscape assessments to support the assessment of sites through the SHELAA. These assessments will report on the landscape sensitivity of sites looking at the resilience or robustness of the landscape to withstand change.
- 2.21 The assessment will use the following sensitivity criteria to assess this:

- Physical Character

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
High	The landscape has a dramatic and/or distinctive landform and strongly contributes to the landscape character of the area. There are valuable natural features present such as woodland, hedgerows and watercourses which are in good condition and positively contribute to its character.
High/ Medium	
Medium	The landscape has some distinctive natural features, which partially contribute to the landscape character of the area, whilst other areas of the landscape may have limited natural features. The features are relatively common within the surrounding area and is an example of a typical landscape.
Medium/ Low	
Low	The landscape may contain detractors from the surrounding character due to natural and physical characteristics being lost and eroded over time. Or, the landform and landscape pattern is simplistic and commonplace, with very limited natural features.

- Settlement/Development Pattern

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
High	New development would not relate to the existing character, form and scale of the surrounding built development. The landscape forms an important contribution to the setting of an existing settlement and/or provides an important buffer between two or more existing settlements.
High/ Medium	

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
Medium	New development may detract slightly from the existing character, form and scale of the surrounding built development. The landscape partially contributes toward the setting of an existing settlement and/or partially contributes toward the landscape creating a gap between two or more settlements.
Medium/ Low	
Low	New development would relate well to the existing character, form and scale of the surrounding built development. Or, the landscape may detract from the character and setting of an existing settlement and does not provide a positive contribution toward the separation of two or more settlements.

- Landscape Condition

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
High	The landscape is in good condition with features intact. Features strongly reflect key landscape characteristics within published studies.
High/ Medium	
Medium	The landscape is in moderate condition; there are some intact features as well as evidence of some modified or eroded features.
Medium/ Low	
Low	The landscape is in poor condition and/or has been heavily modified.

- Cultural/Historical Associations

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
High	The landscape has strong and preserved historical and cultural associations. There is a high density of designated and non-designated heritage assets present within the landscape. The landscape contributes to the historical identity and landscape character of the area.
High/ Medium	
Medium	The landscape contains some historical and cultural associations but is also modified or fragmented. Historical and cultural associations contribute to the landscape character but are not a defining key characteristic.
Medium/ Low	
Low	There are no known heritage or cultural associations with the landscape. The landscape has been heavily altered and there are no or very few heritage assets.

- Perceptual Qualities

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
High	The landscape has a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity and has high scenic value. There is limited modern disturbance with dark skies, low noise level, rural and natural characteristics.

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
High/ Medium	
Medium	The landscape has some remote and tranquil qualities, but there is also an influence of urban activity e.g. from settlements or roads. Experiential qualities partially contribute to the landscape character but are not dominant.
Medium/ Low	
Low	The landscape is influenced by urban, industrial or transportation activities, with little to no tranquillity or sense of remoteness.

- Views and Visual Character

Sensitivity	Typical Criteria
High	The landscape is highly visible from surrounding visual receptors and/ or would alter a prominent, distinctive or undeveloped skyline.
High/ Medium	
Medium	The landscape has some sense of enclosure with some views available from surrounding visual receptors and/or some skyline features.
Medium/ Low	
Low	The landscape is enclosed and/or has limited visibility from surrounding visual receptors. The landscape does not form part of a prominent, distinctive or undeveloped skyline.

2.22 An overall sensitivity rating will be derived for each site informed by;

- The individual sensitivity scores of the selection criteria.
- The presence or absence of highly sensitive attributes.
- The degree to which mitigation measures could be utilised to reduce landscape and visual harm arising from the type of development which may be proposed.

2.23 The assessment will also look at the cumulative impact resulting from development in close proximity to each other.

2.24 JBA are looking to develop a more bespoke assessment for sites located within or in close proximity to the Forest of Bowland National Landscape Area and the Arnsdale and Silverdale National Landscape Area. They are currently liaising with the National Landscape Teams to develop this.

Landscape Sensitivity for Renewable Energy & Net Zero Projects

2.25 Gillespies have been commissioned to undertake landscape sensitivity work to identify areas which will be more suitable (in landscape terms) for the siting of renewable energy and net zero scheme. This will specifically focus on the delivery of wind, solar and battery schemes to assess the impact that such development will have on local landscapes.

- 2.26 The intention of the commission will be to identify areas which are more suitable and have more capacity in the landscape to accommodate such schemes. These areas of suitability can then ultimately be identified as areas of suitability within the forthcoming Local Plan Review.

Green Belt Review

- 2.27 Another important evidence base now under preparation relates to the District's Green Belt. Officers have recently commissioned external consultants AECOM to undertake a review of the Green Belt in light of changes to national planning policy, primarily the introduction of the concept of Grey Belt.
- 2.28 AECOM will be using the 2016 Green Belt Review as a starting point and will be reassessing the parcels in relation to the new national planning policy. Through this work they will be looking to determine whether any areas could be considered to be Grey Belt. This work will be used by the City Council to determine whether any alterations to Green Belt boundaries should be made and whether any areas of the current Green Belt should be identified as Grey Belt.

Local Green Space

- 2.29 PPCAG Members will be aware that the Council previously undertook a call for sites inviting interested parties to submit sites that they would like to be designated as a Local Green Space in the new Local Plan.
- 2.30 Local Green Spaces are areas of green spaces which can be shown to be demonstrably special to the local community and under national planning policy are assigned a higher level of protection than most areas of green space across the Country. They can be special for a number of reasons – historical, recreation, sport or as a valuable feature in the landscape.
- 2.31 A call for sites was undertaken over the summer. These sites together with existing Local Green Spaces designated in the adopted Local Plan will now be reassessed using the Council's already agreed methodology to determine whether they should be designated for protection in the new Local Plan.

Functionally Linked Land District Study

- 2.32 Officers are now in receipt of the final Functionally Linked Land Study for the District. This was prepared by external consultants LUC on behalf of the Council. A copy of the report is appended.
- 2.33 The study investigated the suitability of land within Lancaster District to provide functionally linked land to qualifying bird species of the Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites which are located within and in close proximity to the District.
- 2.34 Functionally Linked Land (FLL) is land which lies outside of these designated sites but supports at least some of the needs of the mobile population of birds for which the site is designated, for example by providing seasonal foraging or additional breeding sites. Such an area is therefore 'linked' to the designated site because it provides a (potentially important) role in maintaining or restoring a protected population at favourable conservation status.

- 2.35 The Study combines the results of previous studies and then also looks at the habitat suitability of all areas of the District not covered by any previous study. Previous studies which have investigated FLL within the District includes work undertaken by Natural England as well as our own bid survey work undertaken by the Greater Manchester Ecological Unit (GMEU).
- 2.36 In looking at habitat suitability the habitat preference of qualifying bird species was assessed as was the dispersal distance these species would travel. Using this information the District was broken up into grid squares with scores attached based on the extent to which land could be considered to be suitable for the qualifying bird species. This data was then subject to further analysis which allowed the professional judgement of the ecologists undertaking the Study to be applied. In applying this judgement the ecologists took account of factors such as the size of the land parcel, boundary features, openness and level of disturbance.
- 2.37 The conclusions of this work are presented in a single suitability map, Figure 3 in the appended report.
- 2.38 The Study notes that development should be avoided within areas of high suitability. If proposals within the Local Plan have the potential to affect areas of high suitability, then these areas should be informed by a project specific FLL study.
- 2.39 Officers will be using this information to inform the assessment of sites through the SHELAA.

Lancaster District Highway Assessment of Development Strategy and Allocations

- 2.40 Officers are currently finalising a brief for this work with the intention to appoint external consultants to undertake this assessment in the coming weeks.
- 2.41 The overall aim of this project is to provide the Council with a Highway Assessment of its development strategy and allocations, providing a baseline highways and transport assessment, an assessment of the impacts of the development proposed within the district, and mitigation measures and associated costs focusing on sustainable modes of travel. As recommended by National Policy the assessment will need to be vision led and will need to assess the extent to which forthcoming proposals will help us deliver on our transport vision for the District.
- 2.42 The brief is being prepared in dialogue with Lancashire County Council.

Invertebrate Surveys at Middleton Nature Reserve and adjacent land parcels

- 2.43 Officers have commissioned Richard Wilson Ecology to undertake initial terrestrial invertebrate surveys on land adjacent to Middleton Nature Reserve near Heysham.
- 2.44 The surveys are being undertaken to better understand the importance of this green corridor for invertebrates and importantly how land outside the Middleton Nature Reserve relates to the non-statutory site and potentially how this could form a more substantial and functionally connected corridor, meeting objectives within the recently published Lancaster Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- 2.45 Importantly it may help to define a future formal Local Nature Reserve that would include much of the strategic Heysham green crescent (this area is the largest area of seminatural non-tidal

habitats west of M6 and outside the Arnside and Silverdale National Landscape). It is the only area large enough to set up a Local Nature Reserve that is in public ownership and not directly reliant on the provision of land by private developers. Subject to management, there would be potential to meet open-space needs for current and future residents. As such it could be an important component in a mitigation strategy to reduce recreational disturbance in the Morecambe Bay Special Protection Area as well as providing an important community and visitor resource.

- 2.46 Surveys are expected to take place between late April and late June 2026 with an interim report anticipated in August 2026. Officers will keep members informed of this project and will report back initial findings as they become available.