

Tourism Factsheet

Background and Context

This factsheet will look at Tourism in East Lothian including the current LDP 2018 policies and general approach to tourist related development, NPF4 policy direction, specific issues for the local area, and some potential options for going forward into the Evidence Report and LDP2.

LDP 2018 policies and Guidance

There are four tourism related policies with LDP 2018: TOUR1, TOUR2, TOUR3 and TOUR4. Policies TOUR1 – TOUR3 relate to specific sites or locations in East Lothian (Archerfield, Belhaven Chalets and Dunbar Castle Vaults respectively). TOUR4 (Hotels and Guest Houses) is a protective policy applicable to development proposals involving change of use of buildings away from hotel or guest house use.

A review of policy usage within planning application determination showed limited use of TOUR1 – TOUR4 policies. There are two potential reasons for this:

- There have not been many tourism related development proposals put forward since the LDP 2018 was adopted, or
- Policies are not suitably worded for determining relevant proposals, or other policies providing the necessary context and reasoning for decisions

Indications are that policies TOUR1 – TOUR3 could be removed and that policy TOUR4 should be retained but reworded and updated to cover a wider tourist development decision-making basis.

As part of LDP 2018, a Countryside and Coast SPG was produced and gives additional guidance on development within coastal locations. This relates to tourism as much of East Lothian's tourist draw is due to the coastal location of settlements and quality of beaches. This SPG is likely to be transferred to form part of the next LDP but should be largely retained.

Avison Young Tourism Study (2021)

In 2021, the Planning Service commissioned Avison Young consultant to carry out a study of East Lothian's tourism sector. This study looked at the trends for visitors, amount and suitability of tourism accommodation, and post-covid tourism recovery. The limitation of the study was that it was carried out during a period of lockdown, meaning visitor numbers and patterns of use of accommodation are not reflective of the typical situation pre-pandemic. Some conclusions and recommendations from the study were:

- Potential for a large hotel or resort facility in East Lothian
- There tends to be quite a lot of day visitors meaning spending is somewhat less than overnight stays
- Tourist who use accommodation and stay overnight have limited choice for type of accommodation

The findings from this study will be used to develop and take forward our approach to tourism development in LDP2.

NPF4

The NPF4 was adopted in February 2023 and introduced three broad themes for future LDPs to address climate change, nature crisis, and health inequalities. Each of these has links to tourism and this is explained below.

Climate Change

It is widely recognised that climate change will now cause changes that we are unable to prevent even with reductions in greenhouse gases. A changing climate has potential effects on tourism with weather being more unpredictable and severe weather events. For coastal areas in particular, climate change could mean sea level rise affecting our beaches, protected landscapes, and certain species of birds, animals, trees and plants. Although not a new concept, the issue of sustainable tourism is a key theme that runs through the NPF4. It is closely linked with climate change and net zero, and aims to address the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. Decisions we make in planning (and as a Council) must now demonstrate how tourism related development meets the important climate change and net zero targets and priorities to limit the future effects.

Nature Crisis

Linking with climate change and carbon emissions, the nature crisis is a significant challenge for every sector. The loss of various species of plants and animals could significantly change the tourism sector in East Lothian. The area is highly dependent upon the high quality landscapes for attracting tourists to beaches, golf courses. It also has an abundant bird population which attracts visitors specifically to the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick. The damage to or loss of these habitats would significantly affect the tourism sector.

We must therefore ensure that decisions involving new tourism related development will not only preserve but enhance the natural environment to address the nature crisis.

Health

Tourism relates to the health of the population of both the visitors and of the existing communities to which tourism are attracted. Health is both physical and mental, and tourism can help people improve both. Tourists often visit East Lothian simply to engage in sports or recreation (golf, walking, cycling, surfing etc.) which naturally improve physical health. There is a balance to be made however, as tourism can, if too impactful on existing communities (parking, litter, noise etc.) could create tension. It can also put a strain on existing Council resources such as the Rangers, Waste Management, and Biodiversity (Action Plan).

Policy 30: Tourism

The NPF4 provides a specific policy on tourism which is within Policy 30. Overall, the policy is supportive of sustainable tourism development, and in particular post-pandemic economic recovery. However, there is also a recognition that tourism activity can negatively impact upon the health and wellbeing of existing communities in which it occurs. Future LDPs must therefore do two key things:

- Identify suitable locations which reflect opportunities for tourism development by taking full account of the needs of communities, visitors, the industry and the environment
- Identify areas of pressure where existing tourism provision is having adverse impacts on the environment or the quality of life and health and wellbeing of local communities, and where further development is not appropriate.

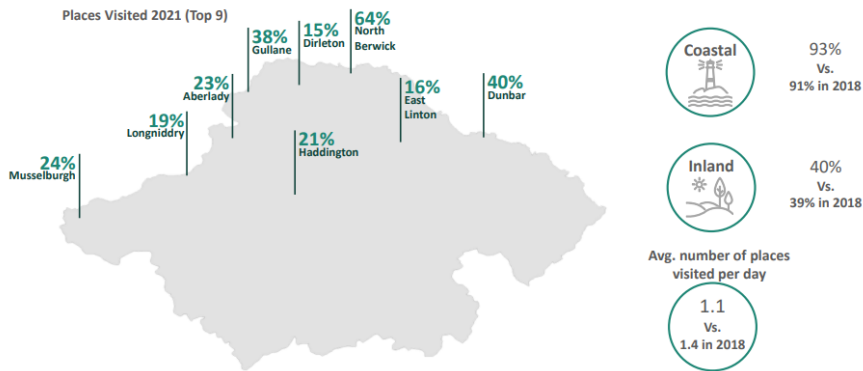
These requirements are inter-related with many other aspects of work within the next Local Development Plan, and a balanced approach will be necessary to achieve them.

Monitoring of trends and current issues

Since the LDP 2018 was adopted, there have been quite significant changes to the economic and environmental context of East Lothian.

As we are now emerging from the most significant effects of the pandemic, there may not be as reliable statistics available for the tourism sector due to lockdown restrictions on facilities and travel and changes in visitor numbers and trips. This is reflected in the East Lothian Visitor Survey, 2021 which was undertaken by Economic Development which also looks at some of the past trends across the district, some of the key stats emerging from it have been highlighted below which will help to shape consultation questions and decisions for the next Local Development Plan:

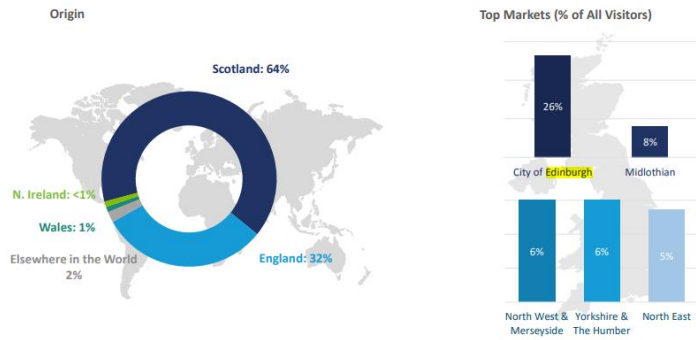
Visitor numbers to coastal areas remain roughly the same. It is the area visited by most people coming to East Lothian.



<p>Rural Relaxers 26%</p> <p>Those who come to East Lothian primarily to relax and enjoy the environment.</p> <p>They prioritise beaches and enjoy nature and wildlife, alongside visiting East Lothian's towns and villages.</p>	<p>Sightseers 18%</p> <p>Sightseers come to East Lothian to visit the museums and visitor attractions on offer, to see East Lothian's towns and villages, and to relax in the area.</p>	<p>Active Explorers 16%</p> <p>Those who are visiting East Lothian to experience all that it has to offer.</p> <p>They enjoy almost everything which the area has to offer- beaches, towns and villages, shopping and adventure.</p>	<p>Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) 12%</p> <p>Those who travel with the main purpose of visiting friends and relatives.</p> <p>They also enjoy relaxing and visiting the beach, but do these things alongside the those they are visiting.</p>	<p>Event Goers 8%</p> <p>Travellers who come to East Lothian particularly for an event held in the area.</p> <p>They're also keen on relaxing and enjoying the event with friends and family.</p>
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Activities Undertaken

Places Visited	2003	2011	2015	2018	2021
Visiting the beach	48%	64%	62%	62%	77%
Sightseeing/touring	45%	68%	51%	55%	57%
Going to cafes	-	60%	32%	40%	43%
Countryside / country parks	7%	34%	35%	35%	38%
Going to restaurants	17%	52%	28%	29%	34%
Visiting gardens / parks	9%	14%	12%	18%	29%
Other shopping	22%	32%	20%	18%	24%
Farm/local food & drink	8%	16%	20%	22%	22%
Museums / galleries / exhibits	8%	43%	28%	30%	21%
Visiting friends/relatives	-	-	21%	19%	18%
Going to pubs	-	24%	15%	16%	18%
Historical buildings	27%	31%	23%	24%	17%
Craft centres / shops	8%	20%	13%	14%	11%
A specific event	-	1%	21%	19%	7%
Other	-	1%	3%	7%	6%



The top visitor market is from Edinburgh where most travel by car to get to East Lothian. This figure is likely to be influenced by pandemic restrictions and social distancing in terms of reduced public transport usage. Visitor numbers are highest in North Berwick.

Places Visited

Places Visited	2021
North Berwick	64%
Dunbar	40%
Gullane	38%
Musselburgh	24%
Aberlady	23%
Haddington	21%
Longniddry	19%
East Linton	16%
Direlton	15%



Short Term Lets

Short Term Lets are known to provide a relatively large proportion of tourist accommodation in Scotland and indeed within East Lothian. The flexibility of short term lets is one of their main reasons for attracting guests in terms of booking, facilities, cost and location. In general, the benefits of short term lets to areas can include increased tourism overnight stays, spending more in local shops, cafes, restaurants and tourist attractions, job creation etc.

There have however in some areas across Scotland been problems associated with too many short term lets including noise and disturbance to more permanent residents, lower perceived safety due to regular changing of guests, less community cohesion, less longer term rental accommodation particularly in town centres, etc. Their management and

regulation has also been problematic particularly where operators are not fulfilling their obligations.

As a result the Scottish Government introduced new legislation in 2022 named the Town and Country Planning (Short term let control areas) (Scotland) regulations. This legislation gives Local Authorities in Scotland additional powers to help them manage the number of short term lets and also ensures that they are operating in an acceptable manner. All short term lets must now be licensed, and there is a deadline for those currently operating to obtain this. New short term lets will automatically be required to apply for a license in order to commence operation.

Planning authorities are now able to designate a control area for short term lets, where they would require planning permission in addition to a license. There are specific criteria for determining applications for short term lets, and these are set out within the Scottish Government's Planning Circular 1:2022 – Establishing a short term let control area.

In order to gather information on short term lets in the area and to understand more about public opinion, the Planning Service carried out a public consultation between February and April 2022. The response rate was good and the findings will be taken into consideration when decisions are made on whether to introduce any control areas. A recommendation will be made to the Council in early 2024, following the licensing deadline.

The Council's Housing Strategy Team commissioned a study by Arneil Johnson on the effects of short term lets on the private rental sector in East Lothian, as the number of short term lets can have an effect on housing provision. The results indicated limited effects on the private rented sector however in certain locations this may be more significant. Further joint work will be carried out between Planning, Housing and Licensing teams.

Relevant Plans and Strategies within East Lothian Council

Tourism has many different aspects and we will be working with other East Lothian Council Services in order to best align our next LDP with other plans and strategies.

Climate Change

Underpinning everything is the need to manage the irreversible effects of climate change and to limit further deterioration for future generations. The Council's Climate Change Strategy 2020-25 was approved following the declaration of a climate emergency in East Lothian. It contains seven outcomes for the 5-year period including Active Travel and Sustainable Transport, Net Zero Energy Efficient Homes and Buildings, and a Low Carbon and Sustainable Economy.

Tourism will be affected by climate change and to achieve the aims of the Climate Change Strategy, there needs to be significant change in policy and practice. The next LDP will be climate change focussed and helping to achieve sustainable tourism will be a key priority.

Economic Development

Of greatest relevance to the preparation of the Evidence Report and proposed LDP2 are the Economic Development Strategy (EDS) and the Tourism Strategy. These are both prepared by the Economic Development team.

The replacement Economic Development Strategy will be very important for the next LDP as there is a close link between tourism and the economy. The current EDS contained targets and priorities for tourism, and the next LDP needs to contain an approach to help to achieve the aims set out in the next EDS, whilst at the same time allowing alignment between the NPF4 and LDP2. A new strategy will begin preparation this year with its content helping to develop the economic elements of the LDP.

The next Tourism Strategy will be prepared to demonstrate how the key tourism aims and targets set out in the EDS will be met. Annual monitoring of economic effects of tourism is carried out and there will be an analysis of how trends are shifting and the overall contribution of tourism to the local economy. Again, this will not be available for Evidence Report submission stage.

Transport

Another key issue for tourism is transport, and in particular achieving sustainable tourism. Relevant to East Lothian is the Scottish Government's Regional Transport Plan as well as the Local Transport Plan prepared by East Lothian Council.

The Regional Transport Plan provides the context for improving the way transport functions within the wider Lothian area. Whilst tourism is often considered to be mainly people who travel from further afield to the area, there is a considerable amount of traffic movement within the region, often for day trips to East Lothian. Ensuring that the public transport network is sufficient in order to reduce private car use is a key priority.

The Local Transport Strategy provides a more localised approach to transport in East Lothian, and deals with key areas where improvement is needed to travel patterns such as shifting towards more sustainable modes (walking, cycling including electric bikes), public transport access, congestion, multi-modal routes etc.

Linked to the LTS is the issue of town centre parking including length of stays for on-street spaces, dedicated off-street car parks, charging for parking etc. All of these will interact with tourism and there needs to be a joined up approach between Planning, Economic Development and Transport in order to ensure that cross-service decisions take into account the different remits and priorities of each.

Next Steps

The public engagement will look to gather information from the public and other key stakeholders on how the next LDP can meet the strategic policy objectives and the needs of the population. Key questions on tourism will be as follows:

- What can we do to make day trip visits to East Lothian more sustainable?
- What can we do to encourage more overnight stays in East Lothian?
- Should we be trying to encourage a wider range of year round activities and events in East Lothian?
- Do you feel tourism is having a positive, negative or neutral effect on nature? How can we better protect the natural environment from any harm resulting from tourism?

Existing Tourism Destinations	Development Opportunities in East Lothian – recently consented
Archerfield Fox Lake Brunton Theatre Musselburgh Race Course Museum of Flight Scottish Seabird Centre North Berwick Thurston Manor Preston Grange Museum – expansion ongoing to museum Seton sands holiday park Belhaven Chalets Whitekirk Hill Myerton Motor Museum Heritage Assets – Dirleton, Tantallon, Hailes Castle East Links Family Park	Papple Steading Agricultural Heritage Centre, auditorium and café, business retreat - Whitekirk Holiday accommodation - Castlepark Golf club holiday accommodation – Potential relocation of East Links Family Park