



COUNTRYSIDE FACTSHEET

Background Context:

The Local Development Plan 2018 guides the majority of new development to existing towns and villages to support sustainable travel patterns. National Planning Framework 4 has now become part of the Development Plan against which planning decisions are taken.

LDP1 supports the diversification of the rural economy allowing the countryside to be used for agriculture, forestry, countryside recreation and other development that has a need for a countryside location including business and leisure and tourism development.



Figure 1: Leisure development near Dunbar

It supports new houses in the countryside only if these are affordable houses or if these are houses that are converted from the many redundant rural buildings such as old farm steadings that not only contain embodied energy but add to the architectural character of the countryside.



Figure 2: Farm steading converted to housing near Dunbar

Many new houses in the countryside continue to be delivered through the sensitive conversion of appropriate rural buildings to most commonly residential and occasionally non-residential uses such as workshops or farm shops. No affordable houses have yet come forward in the countryside since the new policy became effective in 2018.

Local Designations: In addition to the national and regional designations that are shown in the natural heritage factsheet the countryside also has the following local designations that are made by East Lothian Council and are each the subject of a specific planning policy:

- **Special Landscape Areas** – these replaced the old Areas of Great Landscape Value and cover large areas of East Lothian which have been identified as having special landscape qualities that should be protected from harmful development. New development proposed in these

areas should comply with guidelines for each area and may not be permitted if it harms the landscape character of such an area.

- **Green Belt** applies to a specific part of the East Lothian countryside close to Edinburgh. The reason for its justification was to protect the landscape setting of Edinburgh from inappropriate development. It covers countryside around Musselburgh, Oldcraighall and Wallyford and up to the edges of Tranent and Prestonpans surrounding towns and villages extending to Prestonpans and Tranent.
- **Countryside around Towns** areas are similar to Green Belt and apply only to the most important parts of the landscape setting of towns and villages or to land that prevents two settlements joining together.
- **Gardens and Designed Landscapes** that are locally important to protect have been identified by the Council to complement those that are protected in the national interest. Many of East Lothian's historic gardens around old buildings are protected in this way to ensure that new development does not harm the elements that justify their designation.

Plan policies in respect of these designations have ensured that the objectives of the designations have been met and have not been overturned at appeal.

National Policy Context

National Planning Framework 4 provides policy for all of Scotland's countryside from the remote



Figure 3: Carfrae farm shop

highlands to pressured areas such as those close to main populations in the central belt. It requires the Local Development Plan to identify the characteristics of its rural area including its existing patterns of development, pressures, environmental assets, community priorities and economic needs. Its spatial strategy should set out an appropriate approach to development in rural areas which reflects the identified characteristics for example by directing new housing towards existing towns and villages.

The National Planning Framework applies to all countryside areas within Scotland. Its themes encourage more people to live closer together, be more connected with the goods and services we need and for us to move around by more active transport to address climate change. Generally in the countryside it aims to revitalise rural areas encouraging sustainable development. Specifically, it requires the new Local Development Plan to identify the characteristics of its rural areas and set out an appropriate approach to development in rural areas which reflects the identified characteristics.

Although the NPF applies as a whole the new national policies specifically for countryside development in NPF4 include policy 10 Coastal Development, policy 17 Rural Homes, and policy 29 Rural Development.

Policy 10 applies to the coast and requires the LDP to consider how to adapt coastlines to the impacts of climate change. A precautionary approach is required to flood risk from rising sea levels. Development is permitted on the developed coast if it does not require further coastal protection measures but is more restricted in the undeveloped coast. Policy 17 supports proposals for new homes in the countryside in specific circumstances including that previously inhabited areas that are suitable for resettlement should be identified in the LDP. Policy 29 supports rural development that contributes to viability, sustainability and diversity of rural communities and the local rural economy.

Issues for consideration in next LDP

The next East Lothian LDP needs to consider whether maintaining the current approach to the countryside and coast when considering any new developments is still the right thing for the East Lothian countryside.

East Lothian's countryside is classed as accessible with only very small fringe areas outwith 30 minutes' drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000 or more. The Council does not therefore consider that countryside requires regeneration, renewal or action to address population decline and planning policies have been developed to address pressures in the countryside.

The rural housing policy in NPF4 does have a more relaxed approach to housing in the countryside. It is important that this more permissive policy does not lead to housing in the wrong location or deflect away from the reuse of existing properties such as farm steadings, which have been so often been successfully converted within the context of the 2018 LDP policy. LDP2 will need to consider how to react to this new national policy.

East Lothian's countryside and coast is attractive and is a major reason for the attraction of visitors. Protecting the countryside through the four local designations above is an important part of planning policy designed to retain the appearance and attractiveness of the countryside.

There is an intention to keep the designations in the current plan but a review will be undertaken of the detailed boundaries of the CATS to check whether there are any changes required and also to check whether there are any new ones required.