



Dear WLC Development Planning

RE – MAIN ISSUES REPORT (MIR) PREFERRED HOUSING SITE LIST, E01 – 0168  
(PRESTON FARM, LINLITHGOW)

**I wish to object to the inclusion of this site in the MIR Housing List and seek its removal from the forthcoming Draft-Plan for the following reasons:**

1. CONTRADICTION IN MIR DOCUMENTS.

The site is outwith Linlithgow, in an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) as part of the Bathgate Hills. In the expertly-researched MIR Landscape Designation Review (LDR) the land is clearly mapped and recommended for enhanced protection within the **CORE Special Landscape Area (SLA)** of the Bathgate Hills. **The inclusion of this land in the Housing List (preferred in part) therefore seems completely at odds with the council's own advice in its LDR.** Specifically, on p79, the LDR states that the candidate Bathgate Hills SLA is at risk from 'development pressure at the edges of Linlithgow... particularly where development begins to move uphill' and recommends that the Council ensures 'settlement expansion does not advance to key skylines'. The site is relevant in both these respects, since it is the final frontier between settlement and the uphill rise to the Bathgate Hills, and it affords uninterrupted scenic views into the key skyline of Cockleroy hill. This scenic importance is obvious from the immediate area of Deanburn Road, Linlithgow to the North, and also from the Western Approaches to Linlithgow along the Falkirk Road where the field is a prominent boundary between town and ancient forest and hillside. The Northward views out of Beecraig's Ridge and Cockleroy are also defined by this land.

2. SUPPORT FOR SLA STATUS

I fully support the recommendations of the scholarly LDR which places this site within land assessed to be 'high-scoring' against most of the given criteria, ranging from scenic views to public enjoyment. In fact, the field in question falls within an area that the LDR believes to be so important to West Lothian's character that it is defined as a 'core' SLA. To locals, this classification is unsurprising since the land preserves the unique setting of both Linlithgow and the Bathgate Hills. In particular the rolling fields provides dramatic context to the listed Preston House, the TPO protected Ancient Woodland around, and the stunning Cockleroy Peak above. In contrast to the detailed LDR, the MIR housing document seems to be simplistic, with little regard for context. However I note that the 'preferred in part' comment on this site means, according to advice I have sought from planners, that the Council does 'not wholly support its use for housing'. This suggests that planners do not consider it as essential to their overall housing strategy and I therefore seek its re-classification as 'not-preferred' due to the land's crucial landscape importance. I also note that several Linlithgow sites *outwith* zones of special landscape character are on the housing list and are fully preferred, helping fulfil the councils housing requirements locally.

3. PUBLIC AMENITY

The spectacular setting is valued by local residents, Donaldson's Deaf School pupils who study and play to the East of the open field, walkers, runners, cyclists, parents with baby-buggies and dog-owners. Simply, this edge of town locale defines our neighbourhood. Importantly access along Deanburn Road to the North of the site is the only place the

general public can enjoy the vista towards the sheer North-face of Cockleroy. Building houses to obscure it would essentially 'privatise' access to this scenery since the other road to the South of the site (for access to Preston House) is, in fact, privately owned.

#### 4. HABITAT & ENVIRONMENT

I note that the council wish to maintain green-zones alongside settlements to preserve wildlife. These fields are vital in that respect: birds of prey hover at harvest time (Twitchers come to the vicinity), woodpeckers visit the trees within the field; bats, badgers, foxes and other mammals are resident and insect life is replete, which attracts hundreds of feeding swifts in Summertime.

#### 5. FLOODING

During the building of Donaldson's School, several houses below the crest of the field were flooded by run-off water and compensated. Additional building would exacerbate this risk. During rainstorms the steep East-West slope of Deanburn Road is already a torrent that occasionally overflows on pavements. Building another road rising uphill off Deanburn Road into a new housing estate would add to this flash-flood risk.

#### 6. SCHOOLING & SCHOOL SAFETY

Linlithgow Primary School is heavily oversubscribed and the catchment is in transition as elderly original residents sell-up, and homes are bought and extended by larger families with school-age children increasing pressure on places. Up to 50 additional family homes would worsen this. Linlithgow Primary is a traffic blackspot with safety and pollution hazards for children. More local traffic from new housing would only increase these risks.

#### 7. NEIGHBOURHOOD

Many residents in Deanburn Road sought advice from local Planners when purchasing homes to clarify that building would not take place and were assured that the AGLV status did imply this. Rejection of former building plans supports this advice. The effect of depriving local residents of their edge of town setting would contradict these assurances and also greatly effect quality of life.

#### 8. PERSONAL STATEMENT

Residents have met with Cllr Martyn Day who notes the contradiction between the LDR designation and the housing proposal in the MIR and supports our reasoning to have it removed. Beyond this apparent 'error' however, reading the reports has reminded me of how important access to views and countryside is. In a fast growing county such as West Lothian I believe it is crucial to preserve increasingly rare historic natural landscapes. This landscape represents the very 'pressure-point' that the LDR imagines, and I encourage the Council to be robust in defence of such places against the desire of landowners to profit. Not just because the development would be a sad loss to the environment, and the residents who celebrate it every day, but because when precedents are set the character of the County will begin to transform, from having distinctive settlements with countryside nearby, to being merely urban sprawl with open-space a car-ride away.

I therefore request the removal of site E01 – 0168 from the MIR Housing List and all future Plans.

Yours Sincerely

