

# Bellsquarry/Murieston Community Councils

## West Lothian Local Development Plan Main Issues Questionnaire - 2014

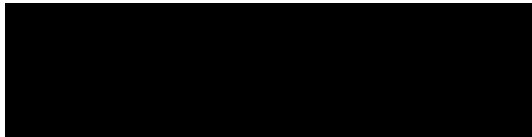
Confirmation of document receipt:

Item 1	Trinity Planning Cover Letter x 2 pages.
Item 2	Trinity Planning Report x 26 pages.
Item 3	Addendum Front page x 1 page.
Item 4	Appendix 1 Summary of Sites x 4 pages.
Item 5	Appendix 2 MIR Transport Appraisal x 3 pages.

Recipient:

Development Planning Team  
Development Planning  
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Signature



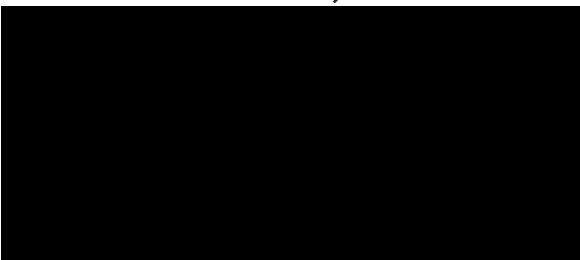
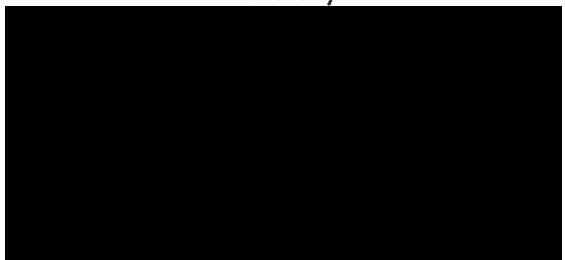
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### Community Council Contact Details

<b>Murieston Community Council</b> Secretary 	<b>Bellsquarry Community Council</b> Secretary 
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# Trinity Planning

*Development Planning Team*

*Development Planning*

*West Lothian Council*

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*High Street*

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*EH49 7EZ*



**14/10/2014**

## **Comments on the West Lothian Council consultation document “Main Issues Report” (published August 2014) – Prepared for the Bellsquarry and Murieston Community Councils.**

Dear Sir/Madam

Attached is a representation submitted on behalf of the Bellsquarry and Murieston Community Councils.

Since there seemed no ability to save the online version, it has been submitted as a paper response. However, the representation follows the format of the questionnaire in any case, and takes the opportunity to comment briefly on the supporting SEA.

The submission has been endorsed by both community councils - as “signed off”.

In addition, both community councils have appended a further paper in support of the Trinity Planning submission, adding useful detailed information on specific sites within the Council’s areas, which should be taken on-board in progressing the next consultative version of the Local Development Plan.

If you have any queries about the submissions, then please do not hesitate to contact either community council, or preferably directly myself.

If you could please confirm receipt whilst my contact details are included on the Questionnaire.

Thank you.

Highest Regards



Trinity Planning

# Trinity Planning

*Development Planning Team*

*Development Planning*

*West Lothian Council*

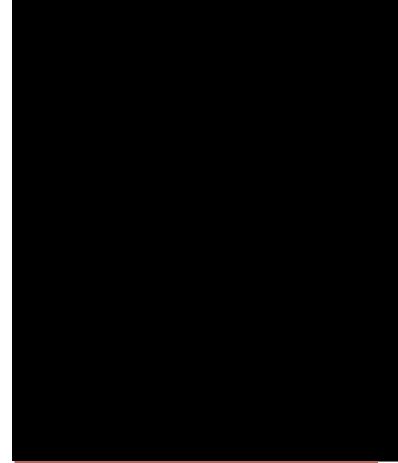
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**Comments on the West Lothian Council consultation document “Main Issues Report” (published August 2014) – Prepared For The Bellsquarry And Murieston Community Councils.**

**Question 1:**

**Yes.**

This Vision is necessarily broad based so it would be difficult to disagree with its sentiments. However, in supporting the overarching vision, this cannot be assumed to infer that the later preferred strategy and other aspects of the MIR are implicitly (or explicitly) acceptable.

Quite the reverse. The preferred strategy raises the real likelihood of sacrificing the environmental aspirations of the Vision statement in driving towards further housing allocations to satisfy the preferred housing growth (i.e. Scenario 3). Meaning that a number of the newly preferred or alternative sites unnecessarily impact on environmental qualities - especially within the Murieston area of south Livingston.

## Question 2:

As part of the Vision it would be quite proper, and re-assuring, to include a "precautionary approach" - though not a "brake" - in taking a balanced view between development and the environment. It would certainly be reasonable to include within even the broad vision a clearer emphasis to positively steer development to brownfield sites and regeneration areas – also improving their environments - as a focus of the overarching development strategy, including continuing to deliver and support the key CDAs (providing the basis of the development profile to 2024 and beyond). This would also provide further development confidence to the various developers involved in the CDA areas as well as a spatial steer to an otherwise amorphous (and detached) Vision.

## Question 3:

### Yes (it is assumed there should be a “Yes”/”No”/”Don’t know” box here)

In paras. 2.2 and 2.3 little rationale is provided to underpin the push to allocate further sites - for housing or employment. It appears there is a relatively healthy supply of land for housing whilst the narrative establishes (on the one hand) there is a substantial employment land supply whilst (on the other) says there is a need to allow for greater diversity. This is confusing and provides limited coherence in then justifying a development strategy that would allow further significant scales of additional allocations.

Further, the paras can be read to indicate that concern for the environment is secondary to satisfying optimistic levels of development growth. This is the case in identifying two (alternative) large housing sites within Murieston (as preferred and preferred alternative sites). Also, it can be interpreted that minimising investment costs (para. 2.4) takes precedence over protecting environmental amenity (para.2.6). Accordingly, a number of greenfield sites identified for housing, adding to a generous existing supply, are unnecessarily promoted within the LDP (with various degrees of support), to the cost of local environmental amenity.

More specifically, whilst the range of issues is broadly acceptable the following critical or adverse comments are made within the context of the Murieston area of south Livingston;

*Main Issue 1:* It seems inappropriate to propose to de-allocate Linhouse within the context of the first two bullets. Whilst formal national support to its special category designation has been removed (as the MIR clarifies), nevertheless Linhouse provides a unique large site offer to the south-east gateway to Livingston, set within a highly attractive rural location, and with direct access onto the A71. The site offers good connectivity to the rapidly expanding Heriot-Watt University (both campus and science park) as well as Edinburgh Park.

*Main Issue 2:* This is supported.

*Main Issue 3:* Bullet one could be read as effectively offering up a “carte blanche” to allocate housing sites without restraint (i.e. such as environmental quality or capacity). The open-ended word “generous” should be replaced by “adequate”, indicating a degree of necessary flexibility.

Also simply allocating higher levels of housing sites cannot secure a five year housing land supply over the course of the whole plan period (from its inception). A local development plan will always need to be rolled forward as appropriate, depending on actual (monitored) performance.

The second “bullet” aim is supported (which is also common to Main Aim 1). The package of CDA proposals correctly provides the backbone to the local development plan in terms of implementing a well-thought out and interlinked package of large development proposals. These sites were chosen based on such factors as transport accessibility and built upon practical models of education provision, but also with their fit within environmental constraints and capacities (first defined in 2004 and since then standing the test of intense scrutiny).

Given the laudable aim to concentrate development within the CDAs, it would be wholly inappropriate to bring forward additional large greenfield sites that would undermine the emerging funding and phasing assumptions being progressed to deliver the CDA packages.

In this, in particular the identification, and apart support, to major housing at either Linhouse (in total 350 houses)\* or Murieston Castle Farm (375 houses) outwith the CDA areas/packages, apart from raising environmental and transport problems, would undermine the Livingston and Almond Valley CDA proposals, particularly delivery of the major Gavieside CDA allocation.

**\* From hereon the term “Linhouse”, in the context of this representation, incorporates the combined sites identified as preferred housing allocations EO1-0051/55, Wellhead Farm, and EO1-0099/ELv54 Linhouse, part de-allocation, that together contrive to provide 350 houses)**

It should be recalled that in identifying the original CDA allocations in the West Lothian Local Plan 2005, that development in the south Livingston/Murieston (as a candidate location then supported by developer submissions) was firmly rejected primarily for transport and landscape quality reasons (without any offsetting planning benefits), whilst development at the Gavieside area was strongly favoured - with its significant transport and employment accessibility benefits (report to Enterprise and Development Committee, West Lothian Council, April 20 2004).

None of the strategic or spatial planning factors relevant then are any less relevant now.

Accordingly, the ramification of bringing forward Linhouse and/or Murieston Castle Farm would be to undermine the repeated aims of encouraging the CDA development proposals, so being contrary to the key employment and housing delivery, as well as sustainability aims outlined elsewhere in this representation.

Para. 2.12 clearly articulates why the two sites referred to above should be rejected, in stating “major new housing and employment development beyond existing commitments will be limited

to those which address specific regeneration aims.....". Allocating either site for housing (at 350-385 houses) would simply conflict with this clearest of policy directions.

*Main Issue 4:* This is supported but, as above, the Council would need to consider the impact of the possibility of alternative additional major housing allocations having an adverse effect in delivering other key infrastructure and facilities.

*Main Issues 5 and 6:* These are supported. However, it is unfathomable how support to the two large greenfield site allocations (Linhouse effectively, and Murieston Castle Farm) can be seen as protecting the natural environment and prioritising use of brownfield sites.

*Main Issue 7:* Similarly a laudable aim, but it is not understood how identifying two potential large rural/semi-rural housing allocations at Linhouse and Murieston Castle Farm could be viewed as anything other than as conflicting with this aim.

*Main Issue 8:* This is supported.

### **Question 4:**

The above comments and criticisms indicate the issues and aims are broadly acceptable, but that the identified preferred or preferred alternative sites shown in Murieston do not satisfy these, and indeed conflict or undermine a number. The aims should not change but the preferred and alternative sites at Linhouse and Murieston Castle Farm should be excluded as non-conforming.

### **Question 5:**

#### **No (or heavily qualified "Yes")**

Firstly the wording of the two alternatives is unreasonably "loaded" towards the preferred strategy. For example the "downside" of the alternative is included but not that of the preferred. If there is no plausible pros- and cons- comparison then it is questioned why the alternative is presented in the first place.

Further, the Council offers up an apparently "stark" choice between two contrasting strategies – implying the outcome must be wholly one or the other. In reality of course there are many shades of grey through sensibly "mixing and matching" based not only on securing a distribution of employment land (by type and location) that better meets job-creating aspirations and providing diversity/choice, but also reflects other key planning realities. To err towards one strategy does not, therefore, rule out aspects of the other.

What can be agreed is support to broadening the extent of jobs activities to be accommodated on allocated employment land, clearly caveated with compatibility of/between employment uses and with proximity to other sensitive uses (i.e. primarily residential) and key constraints (transport, environmental etc.).

In favour of the preferred approach is that the land supply monitoring generally indicates there is no substantive need to bring forward additional allocations, whilst relaxing on employment uses in a number of cases would help diversity and flexibility.

It should also be noted, however, that in describing a “con” associated with the alternative approach, the narrative states an oversupply “could see large employment estates located in non-sustainable, greenfield locations that could have associated local traffic, infrastructure and environmental impacts”.

This sound planning principle is supported. It is therefore surprising that the MIR later identifies a site for housing of some 375 houses at Murieston Castle Farm which raises exactly the same impact issues. Therefore, the laudable principle should also apply to the scales and locations of housing sites given identified in the relevant sections of the MIR.

The preferred approach provides no explanation as to why the single-user site at Linhouse should be abandoned (regardless of the removal of its status via central government) - especially since there is an (over) adequacy of other sites offering a diverse portfolio of choice (by size, type and location/distribution). Given the preferred approach is to provide more flexibility in accommodating mixed employment uses over the abundant supply of sites across the district, then to lose the unique offer at Linhouse would be short-sighted which would reduce the portfolio range of opportunity. See also the response to Question 9.

#### **Question 6:**

**No and no comments.**

#### **Question 7:**

**No.**

#### **Question 8:**

**Yes.**

#### **Question 9:**

**No.**

No case or rationale has been presented in the MIR to support “breaking up” Linhouse, whether to allow a mix of smaller uses or part release for housing. Whilst the national safeguarding of the site has been abandoned this in itself does not mean the unique opportunity the site offers should be abandoned by the Council. The reasons for this are as follows;



- The site is unique in offering the only such development opportunity, so adding to the diversity of the Council's employment land portfolio.
- Given the flexibility promoted by the Council in its preferred approach to encourage mixed employment uses over the substantial range of other employment sites (including as proposed Eliburn, ELv 25), there would no shortage of other marketable sites available to satisfy this policy. Linhouse would not be required to ensure this.
- Linhouse lies within a superb semi-rural setting which is capable of attracting a "one off" inward investment. It is accepted the site has not attracted such an investment to-date (indeed over a number of decades). But as the economy picks up, and in locking-in to the growth aspirations of the SESPlan Strategic Development Plan 2013, then it is would be extremely remiss to lose this major investment opportunity.
- In terms of a large scale inward investment, Linhouse is well located to capitalise on its corridor "connectivity" advantages (in addition to its landscaped quality and setting) in terms of proximity to the West Edinburgh Strategic Development Area (Strategic Development Plan 2013), the continuing expansion of Heriot-Watt University (as a university and increasingly cutting edge science park), along with close proximity to an expanding Edinburgh Airport and further expansion of South Gyle.
- This approach would chime and coincide with one of the three "economic drivers" identified in the Council's recently revised Economic Strategy - as referred in para. 3.4 of the MIR itself.
- The changing nature (and "transferability") of major global and investment activities (including from the growth of the Asian economies) suggests that large attractive single-user sites, in good accessible locations, will increasingly be in demand. This is especially so in the case of Scotland with its strong "brand".

No case has been presented to support an allocation of housing at Linhouse. A large scale housing allocation would openly conflict with key aims of the MIR preferred approaches (see the response to Question 3, Main Issue 3 above) and with the stated emphasis of the development strategy (for the West Lothian SDA) as articulated in the West Edinburgh Strategic Development Area (Strategic Development Plan 2013).

If the Council is seriously looking to de-allocate Linhouse as a high quality single-user allocation, its singular *raison d'être* as an allocation in the first place, then the Council should properly assess its future based on it being a greenfield, semi-rural site on the fringe of Livingston, in terms of its relative (un)acceptability in being identified as a housing allocation. If the case, this representation would support its total de-allocation, with its future potential more appropriately being promoted for recreational and leisure related uses (associated or as an extension to the nearby Country Park).

### **Question 10:**

**Yes.**

This medium sized site would be alternatively suited to mixed employment uses.

### **Question 11:**

**Yes.**

On the principle that allocating any marketable sites within, or with close transport connections to, areas of relatively high unemployment, combined close proximity to significant nearby housing allocations provides a sensible and sustainable planning objective.

### **Question 12:**

**Yes.**

The alternative approach should really not be identified as a sensible option in the first place (meaning no real choice is offered up to respond to).

### **Question 13:**

**No.**

See above.

### **Question 14:**

**No.**

**SEE ALSO ANSWER TO QUESTION 20**

### **Question 15:**

**No.**

**SEE ALSO ANSWER TO QUESTION 20**

The headline justification in promoting the higher level of additional allocations makes no reference whatsoever to environmental, land quality and landscape quality factors within which any "preferred strategy" (a departure from the previous terminology of preferred approach) must take full cognisance as a key planning determinant - as important as infrastructure delivery and build rates (which are mentioned).

This is a fundamental and high order error which perhaps explains why such sites as Murieston Castle Farm and Linhouse are preferred (to varying degrees) within the MIR.

These are attractive greenfield sites (recognising the response to Question 9 above), where major allocations are suggested (at 375 and 350 houses respectively) which would compete with nearby

committed CDA allocations. This can only undermine the declared Council commitment to prioritising delivery of the CDA allocations in West Calder and East Calder (but especially Gavieside). It would therefore undermine the very argument of bringing forward sites to accelerate the “drag” in CDA delivery.

In this case, ironically, the solution becomes the problem. This is illogical.

The narrative then states that a “range of smaller housing sites, in various locations across West Lothian, is needed in order to provide for greater choice and effectiveness of sites....”. Then later “Modest additional allocations in some of these areas will provide a degree of future proofing....”.

But instead the preferred/preferred alternative sites at Linhouse and Murieston Castle Farm;

- are patently not “smaller housing sites”. They are not even medium sized but major allocations by any measure.
- can only compete with nearby CDA allocations.
- would raise parallel or additional infrastructure difficulties and costs - for example adding peak hour commuting traffic on the A71 in addition to the CDA traffic loadings.
- may undermine the delivery of the various interlocking phases of developer funded major new infrastructures essential to timeously delivering the Livingston and Almond Valley CDA package.
- far from “proofing”, the sites would take as much time to deliver as the next phases of the CDA allocations.

The allocations would not achieve the clearly stated aims of the preferred strategy outlined in the MIR, but would undermine them. Far from complementing the CDA proposals (see MIR para. 3.57) these allocations would serve to “upset the balance”. At the same time high quality local environments would be sacrificed without need.

The SESplan SDP (2013) Policy 7 and its narrative provide a slightly better allocation framework in bringing forward additional housing allocations than that of the MIR equivalent.

Therefore, at the district level, additional factors that are essential in justifying a preferred strategy, that is generous in bringing forward allocations in excess of acknowledged requirements (at SDP and LDP levels), must credibly include sites that;

- have minimal impact on valued environments and landscapes;
- are shown to bring about, or relate to, regenerative benefits (including the use of brownfield sites);
- are clearly market and infrastructure compatible with emerging CDA phases;
- conversely, are shown to not undermine progress on CDA commitments;
- are modest in scale - as the preferred strategy actually claims but does not follow. Clearly this would be judgemental but a notional maximum figure might be “up to 50 houses” to encompass small-to-medium;
- Are in sustainable locations that are or can be well served by public transport (bus and rail).

Essentially, without the additional framework provided by (something like) the above then the fundamental housing delivery, regeneration and environmental aims of the Council LDP strategy will not be met.

There is no real rationale as to why the MIR supports the higher allocation alternative Scenario 3, other than stating the self-obvious fact that it would better secure a five year housing land supply.

But even here the MIR only claims it “may improve the prospects” of doing so. On this less-than-convincing basis, and paras. 3.58 and 3.59 highlight the fragility of securing a five year housing land supply in any case, then an argument could be presented to increase the figures even further. This is of course illogical.

Those same paras. highlight the risk and the predominance of the development industry in ensuring delivery. In reality it is doubted that the range of figures in the three scenarios would actually have a significant bearing on consistently meeting an effective five year housing land supply. Other factors dominate.

Despite the uncertainties, if settling on the higher figure is deemed appropriate, in doing so it is clearly incumbent in bringing forward “top up” allocations that these should not threaten the committed development strategy (CDAs), nor raise new infrastructure issues, and are at appropriate scales (small to medium) located in sustainable locations. Conversely, and new allocations must exclude large greenfield sites that have environmental attributes, instead preferring allocations in regeneration areas that utilise low quality sites. The preferred/preferred alternative sites at Linhouse and/or Murieston Castle Farm would directly conflict with these aims.

### **Question 16/17:**

#### **Don't Know.**

### **SEE ALSO ANSWER TO QUESTION 20**

In reality it is unlikely that the range of figures contained over the three alternative strategies will have a significant bearing on achieving an effective five year housing land supply over the period of the plan (as discussed above). At some medium term point the LDP will require to be reviewed and the figures rolled forward in any case.

More important is the selection mechanics in making any new allocations the above (in responses to Question 15) argues that the potential sites at Linhouse and/or Murieston Castle Farm do not satisfy the key criteria that should be applied in bringing forward additional “generous” housing sites.

### Question 18:

No.

**SEE ALSO ANSWER TO QUESTION 20**

### Question 19:

Ultimately the difficulty is a “non-planning” matter, and the MIR succinctly captures this. The Council has already identified a wide range of development sites (by areas and sizes), with developers on-board in a large number of cases, especially the CDA allocations. It would be “chasing tails” to forever identify an inflated number of housing allocations in an attempt to secure the “Holy Grail” of a continuous effective five year housing land supply, when market circumstances are not favourable.

At the same time, the Council itself has been successfully active - in terms of numeric delivery - in bringing forward its own land for housing, and in joint projects with the private sector and housing associations, and exploring other commendable initiatives. However, in doing so this should not be pursued at the cost of satisfying other key planning objectives (as all covered above).

### Question 20

No.

**UNFORTUNATELY, GIVEN THE LINKED NATURE OF THE SUBJECT, THIS RESPONSE ALSO RELATES TO (AND SHOULD EFFECTIVELY BE INSERTED INTO) QUESTIONS 14, 15, 16, 17 AND 18 ABOVE AND A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS FROM HEREON (CROSS-REFERRED)**

The relevant sections of the MIR radiate confusion, due to the terminologies used and inadequate explanations of the construct of the ultimate preferred allocations package (in Chapter 5 and Appendix 2).

Firstly, the narrative and questions (i.e. para. 3.72) switch from preferred and alternative options to referring to the preferred strategy, whilst lying behind both (presumably) is the three different growth rates (with support to Scenario 1).

A simple cross-tabulated schedule is necessary to clarify what this means, basically showing housing numbers, with (something like) subdivided rows "Preferred Strategy"/"Alternative Strategy", and 1<sup>st</sup> column "Preferred Option"/"Alternative Option", then 2<sup>nd</sup> column "1<sup>st</sup> Scenario"/"2<sup>nd</sup> Scenario"/"3<sup>rd</sup> Scenario", then 3<sup>rd</sup> Column the sum of the potential new allocations (i.e. "call for sites" based) and the 4<sup>th</sup> column indicating the residual amount of new sites needed to satisfy requirements.

The complexity may in fact require three simple schedules, but easily "do-able".

Such an approach would provide respondents with "the feel" for impacts in terms of new allocations, so encouraging a more overarching appreciation in then responding. It would also allow the Council (if it has not already done so) to look at the pool of sites candidate sites ("call for sites" etc.), and identify the preferred sites based on rankings, drawing from (including but not necessarily exclusively);

- the Council's Strategic Environmental Assessment (it is currently not clear what role, if any, this has had in determining, as an iteration, the acceptability of sites to-date)
- the location (conflict/compatibility) of the CDAs (including infrastructure)
- preference to regeneration areas
- preferential connectivity corridors etc.
- other availability of infrastructure and services (existing or planned)
- the results of the proposed landscape designation review
- any other deliverability issues

In so far as the Council has already declared its position in favouring the higher housing requirement of Scenario 3, it was incumbent at this stage to have also included diagrams or maps that identified which of the ranked new allocations would be brought forward for each growth scenario.

Clearly this would be "very draft" but would have been essential in better informing respondents who are otherwise expected to understand the implications in commenting on which growth scenario, preferred option etc. they might agree (i.e. relating at a minimum to Questions 15, 16, 17, 18 above and whole raft of area/settlement questions later on).

Given that it is otherwise difficult to conceptualise the planning logic of considering options, strategies, growth levels etc., and so understand the implications "on the ground" to be able to provide an informed response, the result will inevitably be respondents opting to take a parochial stance.

## **Question 21**

**No.**

**SEE ALSO ANSWER TO QUESTION 20**

## **Question 22**

**No.**

**SEE ALSO ANSWER TO QUESTION 20**

## **Question 23**

**Yes.**

The various packages of linked CDA proposals is well thought out, and tested and proven through rigorous examination. Their scales aim to not only deliver the necessary growth in housing provision, but also the prerequisite major infrastructure requirements (especially education and transport networks) which will secure the widest range of benefits, as well as other leisure, recreational, community, employment and environmental gains.

Clearly the slow “take off” has been due to the combination of the complexity of inter-site development (and developer) linkages, consultations, agreements on shared funding of major services (especially education), and the legal frameworks and negotiations that must underpin the processes, but coupled with the intervening slow-down in the economy (as the MIR comments).

However acceleration can be expected as the above blockages recede.

The proposal to bring forward an additional allocation at Winchburgh is argued as exceptional and for good reason (to the relevant CDA area) - and as such is accepted.

## **Question 24**

**No.**

As above (Question 23).

## Question 25

**No.**

As above (Question 23).

## Question 26

**Yes.**

## Question 27

**No.**

## Question 28

**No.**

## Question 29 (two questions)

**Yes.**

Given the level of housing land requirement supported by the MIR, and the fact that most towns face infrastructure and environmental constraints (both to varying degrees), then there appears no reason per se in spatial strategy terms for a declared level of restraint to uniquely still to Linlithgow.

**No. (or heavily qualified “Yes” subject to implementing the below)**

**SEE ALSO ANSWER TO QUESTION 20**



The principle of “sequential approach” is referred to in paras. 3.93 to 3.95 based on (where infrastructure becomes available) in first delivering town centre sites prior to contemplating impinging on sites that raise landscape quality and environmental issues.

However, there is no substantive reason why a “sequential approach” should be applied only in Linlithgow. Given that the same sorts of “planning dilemma” arise in most sub-areas it seems disingenuous (if not inconsistent) to not apply a “sequential approach” elsewhere as well. For example, whilst the details and balance of factors will obviously vary, identifying the two major sites at Linhouse and Murieston Castle Farm (as preferred/alternatively preferred sites) would fundamentally incur similar planning issues as mentioned for Linlithgow (indeed at a bigger scale).

If the Council uniquely applies the “sequential approach” in Linlithgow then this would be inequitable. If it is universally and clearly applied (through the next LDP consultative stage) then it would be supported.

### **Question 30**

**No comments.**

### **Question 31**

**Yes.**

### **Questions 32, 33, 34**

**No comments.**

### **Question 35**

**Yes.**

### **Question 36**

**No.**

### Question 37

No.

### Question 38

Yes.

### Question 39

No.

It seems irresponsible to present an option that is acknowledged, and highlighted, as being unrealistic anyway.

### Question 40

No.

### Question 41

In the current and foreseeable climate of public sector capital budget constraints, the approach of West Lothian Council is fully supported. The true cost and value of PPP (or PFI) remains questionable, so legally securing the bulk of funding from developers (under established guidelines) as a development cost offset against land values, with public funding support where reasonable, seems the only way ahead.

### Question 42

Yes.

It seems irresponsible to present an alternative that is acknowledged, and highlighted, as being unrealistic anyway.

### **Question 43**

Yes.

### **Question 44**

No.

### **Question 45**

Yes.

### **Question 46**

No.

### **Question 47**

Yes.

As an addendum to the preferred approach, in recognising the changing nature of shopping habits, it is suggested that there may be value in also looking at the fringes of (at least) the larger centres, including Almondvale, to review boundaries. This may result in shrinkage (unless a particular centre is linked to CDA and/or other major housing expansions).

This would be relevant to those centres that have (or and might expect) higher levels of vacancies. It would help focus retail provision within a tighter core, whilst also offering potential to identify highly sustainable (by definition) sites for housing.

This may be achieved by actual boundary reviews (via the LDP) or by a generic policy that would allow and encourage changes of use to residential.

## **Question 48**

**Yes.**

Given the availability of the accompanying published Strategic Environmental Assessment as an indicator of landscape, countryside and visual qualities (amongst other factors), even as an early iteration in assessing the schedule of potential sites, it is inexplicable that the large Murieston Castle Farm and Linhouse sites have been given a degree of housing allocation support at this MIR stage.

But considerable comfort can be taken by the statement in the preferred approach that in directing development to brownfield sites within settlements in the first instance “but to bring forward the release of greenfield sites in sustainable locations where there are no alternative locations in order to meet strategic requirements”.

Clearly the Murieston/Bellsquarry areas already contain a continuing supply of land for housing (as listed in the MIR appendices) whilst the strategic need is clearly met by the Livingston and Almond Valley CDA allocations.

## **Question 49**

**No.**

As with the alternatives in Questions 39 and 42, this approach is a “non-starter”.

## **Question 50**

**No.**

## **Question 51**

**Yes.**

The process of consolidating the various current landscape designations, which are certainly confusing, can be supported. With the number of overlapping designations there is inevitably a degree of “ad hocism” in objectively evaluate landscape qualities sites across the district.

The review provides the timeous opportunity to introduce a consistent district wide framework; important for its own sake but also, significantly, in being essential to objectively assess the competing alternative housing allocations (“call for sites” etc.), as one important criterion in evaluation and selection for inclusion in the next stage of the LDP.

However, this support is heavily caveated.

It is critical that the review is unfettered by any need to recognise that sites have been identified in the MIR as potential housing allocations - where these have already been identified as preferred or preferred alternative sites. Its purpose must not be to justify any preferred releases as an “input” but to be used as a tool to assess their suitability (along with other key planning factors - as above). Otherwise the “output” would be biased and discredited.

A point of detailed concern is the prospect that certain ASLCs would drop out of classification altogether. Given the apparent pressures to release sites for development, the need to retain strong and robust sites will become even more paramount - a good example being The Wilderness Wood, Adambrae, which must be retained given its key location and special characteristics.

## **Question 52**

**No.**

## **Question 53**

**No.**

## **Question 54**

**Yes.**

## Questions 55 and 56

No.

## Question 57

Don't Know.

There is no effective narrative to help steer a response. Whilst the concerns involved in pursuing a more relaxed approach would be self-evident, it is unclear whether retaining the current framework (as only briefly bulleted) is successful in its economic objectives or even in raising issues about unacceptable impact in the countryside and rural environments.

It therefore becomes inappropriate to attempt to provide an informed response.

## Question 58

No.

See above (Question 57)

## Question 59

No Comments.

See above (Question 57)

## Questions 60

Yes.

Whilst supported it is not understood why the alternative approach is effectively not part of the preferred approach in any case.

## Questions 61 and 62

**No comments.**

**Question 63**

**See reply to Question 60 above.**

**Question 64**

**No.**

**Question 65**

**No Comment.**

**Question 66**

**No comment.**

**Question 67**

**Yes.**

Whilst supported the same concern as raised to Question 51 arises. The process of reviewing and consolidating designations would additionally provide the timeous opportunity to be able to objectively assess the potential alternative allocations (primarily for housing) as an important site evaluation factor sitting alongside other key planning factors.

However, this support is heavily caveated.

To repeat, it is critical that the review is unfettered by any need to recognise that sites have been identified in the MIR as potential housing allocations - where these have already been identified as preferred or preferred alternative sites. Its purpose must not be to justify any preferred releases

as an “input” but to be used as a tool to assess their suitability (along with other key planning factors - as above). Otherwise the “output” would be biased and discredited.

### **Questions 68, 69 and 70**

**No comments.**

### **Question 71**

**Yes.**

### **Questions 72 and 73**

**No.**

### **Questions 74 to 79 Inclusive**

**No comments.**

### **Question 80**

**Yes.**

### **Question 81**

**No.**

### **Question 82**

**No.**



## Questions 83, 84 and 85

No comments.

## Question 86

Yes.

Table 17 contains “typos” and incorrect numbering.

More importantly more of the various row factors should be used in assessing any new allocations that the LPP may bring forward;

Page 67 – row factors 1, 2, 3, 4

Page 68 – row factors 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Page 69 – 6, 7

Page 69 – para. 3.220 refers to an allotment strategy but does not identify any potential sites to fulfil that strategy. There is no actual reason not to do so at this stage.

## Questions 87 and 88

No.

## Question 89

Yes.

But see below.

## Question 90

Yes.

There appears no narrative regarding this alternative approach (why is it less preferred?), whilst it seems compatible with the preferred approach in any case.

## **Question 91**

No.

## **Question 92**

Yes.

## **Question 93**

No.

## **Questions 94, 95, 96**

No comments.

## **Questions 97 and 98**

No comments.

## **Comments on the MIR package – other documents**

### **MIR Section 5 - Settlement Statements**

This Section starting on page 118 is difficult to comprehend, especially in the use of the nomenclature “preferred use”, “preferred alternative use” and “not preferred”, with a frequently used further sub-category of “in part”.

Whether meant or not, this framework strongly implies a “pecking order” of acceptability by the Council. If so, indeed if not, there is no clear explanation as to how and why different sites fall into their particular category. Certainly the prefixing of terms-to-sites appears not to necessarily conform to the system of assessment - more crudely, “scoring” - contained in the Strategic Environment Assessment with which it is assumed the MIR sites should match in terms of “degrees of acceptability”.

An example is offered in prefixing the Murieston Castle Farm site (EOI-0110) as “alternative in part” and the nearby site Balgreen Farm (EOI-0111) correctly defined as “not preferred”. Yet Appendix 2B of the SEA - page 602 - clearly indicates that Murieston Castle Farm scores less favourably in development terms than Balgreen Farm, but the MIR prefixes a scale of “preferred alternative” status to part of the former - to a significant scale of 375 houses?

This whole approach is, to say the least, confusing in terms of getting to grips with which sites may or may not be coming through as actually favoured for development by the Council. If the use of the terms does not infer any preferences by the Council against various planning criteria - including the findings of the SEA - then their use is at best confusing and, at worst, open to sending the wrong signals out to the public, developers and landowners.

## **The Strategic Environmental Assessment**

The SEA and supporting Appendix document - at over 800 pages - are fairly indigestible.

The point is made above regarding how the SEA has so far been used (as a key site choice iteration) in defining and shaping the identification and categorisation of the substantial list of sites included in the MIR/Settlements Statements.

However, it is assumed that the tabulated site schedule Appendix 2B is, and will be, the key source of steering the assessment and ranking of (un)acceptability of sites in environmental terms. Two fundamental comments are offered up.

1. It is wholly remiss of the listing to revert to consecutive EOI numbering as the format of display of all sites (i.e. by rows). This is the only sites/settlements listing throughout the MIR (and the two SEA documents) that chooses this form of listing. Yet this table, more than most, requires sites to be grouped together by sub-areas and settlements, to allow interested parties to properly consider the relative merits of developing alternative sites (as categorised red/amber/green) within their geographic area of interest. The listing instead makes it especially difficult for community groups and individuals to navigate through the listings to be able to arrive at an informed understanding and so offer a more objective (and hopefully positive) response.

2. It is not clear how the various column categories and sub-categories of Table 2B have been, and will be, used in site selection and defining the above sites nomenclature, and later as a key tool in eventual site allocation or rejection for the PP of the LDP. One obvious and simplistic way would be adding up the reds, amber and greens, with sites with more reds indicating rejection and those with more greens, conversely, moving towards allocation.

The application of the table findings must be explained.

Regardless, but importantly, the column categories in Table 2B must be questioned at this stage. It is assumed the Table 2B categories have been derived from the earlier bases described at length - in the main SEA report (i.e. Tables 4 and 10) and from Table 1A of the SEA appendices.

However, however used the key Table 2B is skewed in favour of cultural heritage influence by including 5 sub-categories. By contrast Landscape and Townscape only contains three sub-categories.

Yet Table 2B must have been derived from the earlier reference sources Tables 4 and 10 from the SEA report (starting pages 15 and 4 respectively) and Table 1A of the same appendices. But Table 10 in the SEA, for example, contains 2 sub-categories for cultural heritage (CH1 and CH2) and four sub-categories of Landscape and Townscape (L1 to L4)

Indeed, most of the other categories have seen a diminution of the number of sub-categories in Table 2B, whereas cultural heritage is the only category that has seen a significant increase in sub-categories.

Simplistically, at face value this manipulation has the effect of falsely inflating the importance of Cultural Heritage compared to Landscape and Townscape (and indeed the other so affected categories) as environmental sensitivities in influencing further decisions on site selection (and rejection).

There seems to have been no reason or explanation as to why this has occurred. Certainly it could be argued that the impact of development on landscapes and townscapes should be considered, if anything, of greater importance and significance in generally affecting a greater sector of the community.

Prepared by - [REDACTED]  
Trinity Planning  
14/10/2014

Endorsed By: [REDACTED].....  
[REDACTED] Murieston Community Council

Date: 16.10.14.....

[REDACTED].....  
[REDACTED] Bellsquarry Community Council

Date: 15/10/14.....

**ADDENDUM TO RESPONSE TO  
WEST LOTHIAN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
MAIN ISSUE QUESTIONNAIRE**

***APPENDIX 1  
SUMMARY OF SITES WITHIN  
BELLSQUARRY/MURIESTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL AREAS***

***APPENDIX 2  
MIR TRANSPORT APPRAISAL AND MODELLING RELATING TO  
BELLSQUARRY/MURIESTON DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS***

## **APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF SITES WITHIN BELLSQUARRY/MURIESTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL AREAS**

We fully endorse the report by Trinity Planning jointly commissioned by us.

The following additional comments, most of which are site specific, are based on local knowledge and appreciation of what our rustic amenity and quality of life mean to the communities which we represent.

On the wind up of Livingston Development Corporation and the passing of 'the baton' to the new West Lothian Council in 1995/96, The Livingston South Local Plan 1996 was endorsed by West Lothian Council.

The land areas south of Murieston Road known as Balgreen and Wellhead Farm were designated as 'Livingston Country Belt' and Murieston Castle farm as designated countryside.

All sites were outwith the new town boundary.

The 'Countryside Belt' extends south to the Carstairs Rail Line giving way to an Area of Great Landscape Value.

The 1996 Local Plan emphasised:-

Para 8.2           the creation of green corridors to define the edge of urban development and protect and consolidate habitats.

Para 8.4           the importance of consolidating the existing landscape structure in the town.

More recently, a Scottish Natural Heritage Study evidences that the positive effect and proximity to greening and clean air improves health and wellbeing. West Lothian Council's Main Issues Report (August 2014) drew on West Lothian Local Plan Policies and in particular ENV 19 ... 'developments which would undermine the landscape and visual qualities of prescribed areas are resisted. In this August 2014 Report, Council Officials recommended not to retain this policy but in short to review landscape designations!

Linhouse has to be retained as a safeguarded industrial site or has the Council at a time of hope for new industries in Biomedical/new technology and the oncoming graphene revolution decided to abandon hope for West Lothian and throw in the towel. The land will not run away. Retention of this site with easy access to road/rail networks is essential for the wellbeing of our county. The highly paid jobs and apprenticeships which would flow are critical to the economy of West Lothian.

In 2004, the Council's Enterprise and Development Committee addressed the proposal to develop Linhouse/Balgreen and Murieston Castle Farm for housing. Council officers' conclusions which were accepted by elected members were that 'the area performs poorly'. Also that the existing employment allocation at Linhouse 'continues to offer a longer term option'.

These decisions were embedded in the subsequent West Lothian Local Plan.

As regards transport implications, there is no capacity for extension of the Park and Ride Facilities at Livingston South Rail Station. Additional housing development at the 'preferred' Murieston and Bellsquarry sites would be an act of utter folly. Spill over into nearby residential streets would seriously impact on residents' amenity. Also, the A71 a main commuting route to Edinburgh would be grid locked at peak times.

### **Site Commentary**

#### **HLV61 –Tarbert Drive**

Error in that it states that planning permission has been granted. Planning permission has been refused on three occasions and in the most recent case an Appeal to the Reporter was not upheld. There remains grave concerns on the high level of toxic waste on the site which is closely bounded by family housing and also that the site to the best of our knowledge has never been tested for anthrax. If legally possible, the site should be de-allocated as suitable for development.

#### **HLV73 – Calder Road**

Error in that it states that planning permission has been granted. A planning brief has been agreed by the Council. However, we strenuously argue for the retention in full of the ancient hedge fronting the site plus the institution of a TPO. Access would still be attained at the east of the hedge.

#### **HLV 94/EOI-0100 –Murieston Valley**

Grateful to note that these parts of the site of the unfilled quarry and secured mineshaft are removed as 'preferred'. The narrow strip remaining is not suitable because it is adjacent to the entrance to Murieston Valley and its T junction with Murieston Road. At peak times entrance/egress to/from driveways of new homes would be rather dangerous. More so, because this narrow strip of land fronts the entrance to the Valley, housing development necessarily tight to the public pavement frontage, would seriously detract from the overall quality of amenity to Murieston Valley.

#### **Lc2 – Murieston Valley**

Rather than mixed use designation, it should be a site for housing. Adequate retail facilities are available nearby at the Bankton Retail Centre.

#### **EOI-0098 – Opposite Teviot Drive**

This borders the beautiful expansion of majestic beech which in part forms 'Robin's Lane', in commemoration of our much loved late MP Robin Cook who was instrumental in the 1995 campaign against Livingston Development Corporation proposals to fell the trees. The Council should designate this site as 'permanently protected' and establish the appropriate designation to achieve this.

#### **UNDESIGNATED – Land Strip South of Moriston Drive to Robin's Lane**

It is believed that this area of 'white land' in the existing Local Development Plan is so designated due to a colouration error in the 1996 Local Development Plan and perpetuated in subsequent LDPs. Under the 1996 Local Plan it should have been designated as an Area of Amenity open space. We wish to have this land designated per COM 2 – Protection of Open Land.



#### **EOI-0051/EOI0055 – Wellhead Farm**

This site has the same type of contamination as Tarbert Drive as evidenced from Edinburgh Council records. The infill of this site would destroy the amenity of Murieston Road with no outlook to the AGLV – The Pentlands. It should remain as part of Livingston Country Belt in line with existing environmental policies.

*Report of Public Local Inquiry into Objection to the Finalised West Lothian Local Plan, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2006. There are no significant changes in the land requirement for South Livingston. Therefore, the report supports the need to retain this land in its existing form.*

#### **ELV54/EOI-0099 – Linhouse**

Retain as earlier argued as industrial site.

*Report of Public Local Inquiry into Objection to the Finalised West Lothian Local Plan, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2006. There are no significant changes in the land requirement for South Livingston. Therefore, the report supports the need to retain this land in its existing form.*

#### **EOI-0110 – Murieston Castle Farm (Preferred Alternative Site)**

Very high quality landscape value.

*No change in status since previous Local Plan, which concluded that this site was not required for development: See Finalised West Lothian Local Plan, Public Local Inquiry 2006, Response to Objection number DEPOB7562/1.*

#### **EOI-0011 – Balgreen Farm**

We endorse fully the 'not preferred' recommendation.

*Report of Public Local Inquiry into Objection to the Finalised West Lothian Local Plan, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2006. There are no significant changes in the land requirement for South Livingston. Therefore, the report supports the need to retain this land in its existing form*

#### **TCU-11 – North of Bluebell Glade**

This small one acre site was not a 'Town Centre' site in the 1996 Livingston Local Plan. It was later designated a 'Town Centre' site and a planning brief agreed by the Council. Bellsquarry Community Council attended the Council Executive on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2011, presenting a petition of 70% of the adult residents in Adambrae opposing the development of the site at which the then Labour opposition moved an unsuccessful amendment 'not to approve the planning brief and review the status of the site'.

The site is fairly heavily wooded and its development per the approved planning brief would result in significant felling of mature deciduous trees.

The site has high wildlife habitat and could provide a natural extension to Adambrae Cemetery or indeed as a 'natural burial ground' or preferably left as a noise and buffer zone from the very busy Almondvale Roundabout.

Policies ENV10 – 13 in the Main Issues Report states 'new woodlands will increase habitats and improved biodiversity'. A laudable policy but wholly at odds with a development designation which would herald the destruction of mature woodland.

In all, it is our view that good political governance responds to respectful and meaningful engagement with its communities which informs the Council of people's aspiration for their neighbourhood. Good strategic planning requires meaningful community participation and environmental sensitivity.

When we reflect on previous significant inputs to the development of Local Plans, it would appear that the majority of community viewpoints are now being ignored or airbrushed from history. Also, that one of the 8 Key Council Priorities ... 'Protecting the build and natural environment' is being ignored.

Your strategic planners, with respect have got Murieston/Bellsquarry badly wrong and we trust that you reflect and take the opportunity to think again.

*Murieston and Bellsquarry Community Councils expect the Local Development Plan planning outcomes to be determined with transparency, impartiality, integrity and legality at all times.*

## APPENDIX 2

### WEST LOTHIAN DEVELOPMENT PLAN – MIR TRANSPORT APPRAISAL AND MODELLING RELATING TO BELLSQUARRY/MURIESTON DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The Transport Appraisal and Modelling deals with strategic travel demand modelling, strategic traffic impact and local accessibility. This note focuses on the local accessibility and capacity aspect of the background paper (Transport Appraisal and Modelling May 2014 Table 1) and in particular the sites identified in and around Bellsquarry/Murieston.

In general, the sites proposed are to the south of existing developed areas. As such, they are further removed from local services and facilities, than existing developments. Whilst there is an enviable network of footpaths & cycle paths in Bellsquarry/Murieston, the distance from some of the proposed settlements to some local facilities, using the network of paths, is beyond the 1600m limit recommended in the report as reasonable. Examples are the doctor's surgery on Hamilton Square, Bowling Club, playing fields, tennis courts and High School. The railway line has limited crossing opportunities which limits accessibility to facilities north of the railway line, from identified development proposals to the south of the railway line. Virtually all local facilities, with the exception of the cricket club, lie to the north of the railway line and hence are relatively inaccessible by active travel modes, from the majority of proposed sites in Bellsquarry/Murieston.

The limited accessibility by active transport modes (walking and cycling) is a major factor which, historically, has limited development in and around Bellsquarry/Murieston and which has enabled the area to develop its existing semi-rural character.

A review of the accessibility table reveals that most sites in and around Livingston, including all of those identified in Bellsquarry/Murieston, seem to score 3 or more. This score can be achieved with poor access to a comprehensive range of facilities. The Town Centre does provide a comprehensive range of facilities within 5 kilometres - Hence the score.

Bus service is scored as 2 out of 5 for all sites. Even though, for some of the sites, the bus route is relatively close, the service frequency is poor. This score of 2 is questionable for Linhouse and Balgreen as the practicalities of providing access to the bus route of less than 400m distance would be difficult to overcome.

Linhouse is deemed to be within 800 metres walking distance of the railway station, so scores 5 out of 5. The remaining sites have lower scores, as they are all more than 800 metres away. All the sites can access the railway station within a 5 kilometre cycle or walk journey.

All of the sites score well for access to walking and cycling routes, which seems reasonable. Impact on school transport seems low and is probably a reasonable assumption.

Impact on station parking is, in part, an inverse corollary of accessibility to the railway station. Those close to the station can walk and hence impose lower impact. Those further away will be more likely to drive and so result in greater impact. However, the score also reflects any need to increase parking capacity at the railway station. The scores are generally fairly high (i.e. low impact) which may come as a surprise to anyone who has tried to find a space in the station car park on a week day morning, as that the scoring does relate to available capacity. Given that the station car park is regularly full, it seems difficult to argue that any of the proposed developments will not generate additional demand and hence will not require additional capacity (as none currently exists). The best score which could reasonably be achieved would be a 1 out of 5, with the possible exception of Linhouse, which is deemed to be within good access range. Given the existing demographic profile of Bellsquarry/Murieston residents and the likely demographic profile of residents of proposed new developments, a relatively high proportion of residents of new developments would be likely to commute by rail. Hence, any new development will increase rail travel. It seems unlikely that no additional parking demand would be generated by these proposed developments. Additional rail demand should have been generated in the modelling (using the SESTRAN regional model) which was used for strategic testing of proposals. However, that additional demand does not appear to have been factored into the accessibility and capacity assessment.

Impact on the local road network is generally scored highly, indicating low impact. This seems reasonable for the local distributor roads, as there is generally ample spare capacity on local distributor roads in Bellsquarry/Murieston. However, the impact on the A71 and especially at Lizzie Brice's and Oakbank roundabouts, could be very significant, if Linhouse were to be developed for housing, with an exit onto Oakbank Roundabout. Queues regularly form at Lizzie Brice's roundabout in the mornings and evenings. Additional traffic on to Oakbank in the morning would be very likely to lead to highly exacerbated congestion effects, owing to the close proximity of these two busy roundabouts.

Additional traffic from proposed new developments (assuming no Linhouse development directly connected to Oakbank roundabout) would join the A71 at the five existing junctions (Wilderness, Newpark and Lizzie Brice's roundabouts and the slips at Bellsquarry/Murieston East and Bellsquarry/Murieston West roads). There would be some additional delays to traffic from Bellsquarry/Murieston joining the A71, owing to additional volume, however, this is likely to be relatively modest. The greater impact will be to traffic passing Bellsquarry/Murieston on the A71 in the morning and evening peak periods, as the available capacity on the A71 through arms at Lizzie Brice's, Wilderness and Newpark Roundabouts will be reduced. So the existing queues, which are present on the A71 in the mornings and evenings, would increase in length, for the same volume of through traffic on the A71.

Table 1 (Transportation Assessment for Call for Sites (EOI) Submissions for Residential Use has a heading "Impact on strategic road network". The notes refer to the impact on the trunk road network. Therefore, it is not clear if the assessment refers to strategic roads, which may include the A71 and A899, but are not trunk roads. The closest trunk road is the M8. All of the sites are scored highly as having no or moderate impact on the strategic road network (Trunk Road network?) It would be good to clarify the ambiguity in the report.

Impact on town centre parking- there are no notes on how this is scored. It would appear that the smaller development proposals score more highly than the larger sites. Presumably because larger sites provide more housing and generate more parking demand.

This seems to be a somewhat bizarre inclusion in the overall scoring. It has the effect of providing bonus points for small sites.

Given that the objective of the tables is to provide comparative scoring between all proposals, with the aim of generating a prioritised list of sites for different areas, the aggregate volume of new housing for Livingston as a whole will generate very similar parking demand in the town centre, irrespective of where that housing is located. For example, if say the target was for 5000 additional houses, this may generate demand for say 100 additional daily car trips to the town centre. This is unlikely to vary significantly if the 5000 houses are built in 5 developments of 1000 houses or 50 developments of 100 houses. So, why score town centre parking impact, unless it is based on distance from the town centre? In effect that is already scored in the access to local services, which, if it scores highly, should surely have low town centre parking impact, following the reason that the town centre facilities are accessible via sustainable modes. There doesn't appear to be a link between accessibility of local services and town centre parking impact.

It is worth noting that the assessments are high level and so it is to be expected that those undertaking the assessment may not have the level of detailed local knowledge of existing conditions that local residents have. Also, the assessment is primarily for comparative purposes to rank development proposals in terms of accessibility and sustainability, to minimise overall transport impact. Having said that, it seems that there is scope to challenge a number of scores for some aspects of the proposed development sites.

Prepared By:   
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October 2014