

West Lothian Local Development Plan 2 Evidence Report	
Schedule	7. Green Belt
Information required by the Act and NPF4 regarding the issue addressed in this section	<p>Town and Country Planning (Scotland) (Act) 1997, as amended Section 15(5):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district. • The principal purposes for which the land is used. <p>National Planning Policy 4 (adopted 13 February 2023)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPF4 – Part 1: A National Spatial Strategy for Scotland 2045, there are six national developments that support the delivery of Liveable Places including the Central Scotland Green Network which overlaps with the purposes of green belt and relates to West Lothian. • NPF4 Policy 8 Green Belts - LDPs should consider using green belts, to support their spatial strategy as a settlement management tool to restrict development around towns and cities. Green belts will not be necessary for most settlements but may be zoned around settlements where there is a significant danger of unsustainable growth from car-based commuting or suburbanisation of the countryside. Green belts should be identified or reviewed as part of the preparation of LDPs. Boundary changes may be made to accommodate planned growth, or to extend, or alter the area covered as green belt. Detailed green belt boundaries should be based on evidence and should be clearly identified in plans. <p>This schedule aims to avoid repeating the content of other topics covered by the LDP2 Evidence Report. The Greenbelt schedule should be read in conjunction with the following other schedules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 - Climate Change • 2 - Biodiversity • 3- The Water Environment and Flooding • 10 - Indicative Local Housing Land Requirement • 4 - Blue and Green Infrastructure • 12 - Brownfield Land • 5 - Natural Places and Soils • 19 - Business and Industry, CWB and Rural Development • 6 - Forestry, Woodland and Trees • 28 - Site Appraisal Methodology, • 8 - Historic Assets and Places • 17 - Local Living
Links to Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NatureScot, Landscape policy and guidance[web-page]

- NatureScot: [Landscape Character Assessment](#) [web-page]
- UK Government, [Effective Use of Land](#)
- West Lothian, [Local Biodiversity Action Plan](#)
- West Lothian Council, [Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes](#)
- West Lothian Council, [West Lothian Council: The Farm Steadings of the Bathgate Hills](#) (2001)
- West Lothian Council, [Landscape Capacity Study for Wind Energy Development](#) (2011)
- West Lothian Council, [Landscape Character Classification](#) (2014)
- West Lothian Council, [Local Landscape Designation Review \(2013\)](#) [includes statement for each of the special landscape areas, SLA]
- West Lothian Council: [Working Together with Nature - West Lothian's Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-35](#) (report and data for nature network anticipated December 2024)
- NatureScot, [Scotland's Landscape Monitoring Programme](#)
- NatureScot, [Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions](#)
- West Lothian Council, [Natural Capital Assessment](#) (2023)

Summary of Evidence

Purpose, scope and structure of this schedule

This schedule focuses on how West Lothian could transition from a set of adopted Countryside Belts in LDP1 to identifying a greenbelt in LDP2. This schedule and its evidence are set out in the following sections:

- 1 Countryside Belts in West Lothian
- 2 Identifying a greenbelt for West Lothian – assessment process

Part 1 – Countryside Belts in West Lothian

- 1.1 LDP1 identifies five countryside belts for the following settlements: Livingston, Bathgate/Whitburn, Winchburgh/Broxburn, East Calder/ Kirknewton, Linlithgow/Philpstoun and Bridgend.

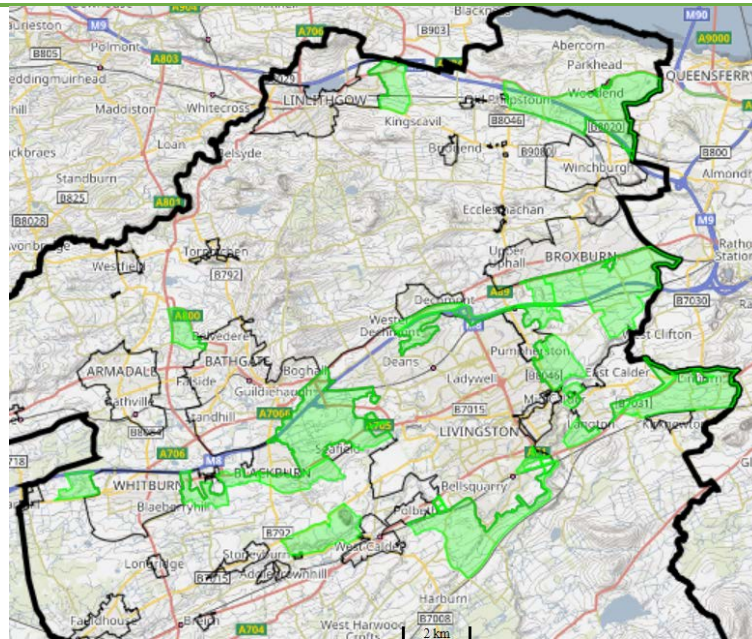


Figure 7.1: Countryside Belts identified in WLLDP1 (2018) (Countryside belts = light green tint; settlement boundaries = thin black line)

- 1.2 Countryside Belts have been in place for several local development plan cycles. Countryside Belts were an important policy mechanism for the shape and extent of the spatial strategy for the West Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP1 2018); in the assessment of site allocations, and determination of development proposals at application stage. Countryside Belts in West Lothian have functioned as nominal green belts.
- 1.3 LDP1 Policy ENV 7 Countryside Belts and Settlement Setting sets out four strategic purposes and criteria for the assessment of development within Countryside Belts. These are to:
 - maintain the separate identity and visual separation of settlements
 - protect the landscape setting of settlements
 - promote public access to green space for informal recreation
 - enhance landscape and wildlife habitat
- 1.4 NPF4 Green Belt policy emphasises compact urban growth to facilitate higher levels of urban density; to constrain sub/urban sprawl, focusing on compactness, or potentially densification. As a place, West Lothian has largely low-density, low-rise housing based on car usage. There is potential within West Lothian to increase urban densities to support levels of residential density which offer the hubs of local living, the benefits of public transport and, fundamentally, respond to the urgent crises of climate change and biodiversity.
- 1.5 The completion of the Bathgate to Airdrie rail link in 2010 - which dramatically improved rail connectivity between stations in West Lothian, Edinburgh, Glasgow - has significantly improved the infrastructure to support less car-based and less suburban settlements. Recent and existing transport hubs, recent town expansion projects and the general success of Livingston as an established new town and a regional centre, also lead to development pressures where spatial containment and policy control through green belt policy are anticipated to be appropriate.

Part 2 – Identifying a greenbelt for West Lothian – assessment process

- 2.1 NPF4 policy 8 sets out that LDPs should consider using green belts, to support their spatial strategy as a settlement management tool to restrict development around towns and cities. The **Scottish Government's Local development planning guidance** (pp. 47-48, May 2023) sets out a methodology for green belt reviews or studies based on five suggested criteria to 'inform any extension or review of precise green belt boundaries, or removal of land from the green belt through the Proposed Plan'.
- 2.2 For West Lothian, this assessment will take place in two parts:
- a) a review of the viability of extant countryside belts, and,
 - b) analysis of potential additional areas which might fit the Green Belt criteria.
- 2.3 This is to be carried out in parallel to the emerging spatial strategy for LDP2. It is considered premature to undertake a Countryside/ Greenbelt review at Evidence Report stage, in advance of the proposed spatial strategy for proposed plan, the Local Housing Land Requirement, the West Lothian Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Nature Network, and the Forestry and Woodland Strategy. The site selection approach will further inform any adjustments to existing spatial protection around settlements to greenbelt protection.
- Step 1 will be to identify any existing settlements, major educational and research uses, major businesses and industrial operations, airports and Ministry of Defence establishments, and any other significant areas of brownfield, vacant and derelict land. These factors would be assessed for Countryside Belts identified in LDP1 and any new areas for consideration as Greenbelt in LDP2.
 - Step 2 will be to review settlement boundaries, i.e. where development has taken place and potential land allocations using planning application data and sites submitted in the call for ideas.
- 2.4 In terms of the protection of settlement boundaries, local landscape designations take the function of containment around several settlements and act as buffers to urban sprawl. For example, the Bathgate Hills Special Landscape Area (SLA) wraps around parts of the settlement boundaries of Linlithgow, Ecclesmachan, Dechmont/ Bangour, Livingston, Bathgate and Torphichen.
- 2.5 Several settlement boundaries are in close proximity to the boundaries of other councils; from north to south these are:
- Linlithgow with Falkirk;
 - Winchburgh with the City of Edinburgh;
 - Broxburn with City of Edinburgh;
 - East Calder with City of Edinburgh;
 - Wilkieston with City of Edinburgh;
 - Blackridge with North Lanarkshire;
 - Greenrigg with North Lanarkshire; and
 - Fauldhouse with North Lanarkshire.
- 2.6 Cross boundary collaboration with the neighbouring authorities forming part of the **Edinburgh Green Belt** will be key, specifically in terms of its relationship to the facing flank of West Lothian, and issues related to regional land use pressures.

- 2.7 The Council has undertaken a landscape character review - **the West Lothian Local Landscape Character Classification 2014** - which is considered robust and is reflected in the national landscape character work undertaken by Nature Scot. Evidence to assess green belt type spatial protection for landscape character is thought to be adequate and has full coverage of the council area (see also Schedule on Natural Place and Soils).
- 2.8 A landscape character assessment is a useful tool in the assessment of green belts and landscape setting of a settlement and would rely on the existing West Lothian Landscape Character Classification (2014) and the NatureScot landscape typology for all of Scotland (2019). In some instances, it might be appropriate to undertake focused landscape studies for areas of concern.
- 2.9 This would also include assessment tools for Green Belt such as:
- Identifying clearly identifiable visual boundary markers based on landscape features such as rivers, tree belts, railways or main roads using the Council's GIS mapping/ aerial photos and digitised historic photos. The West Lothian Local Landscape Designation Review by Land Use Consultants was also briefed to have defensible boundaries with potential for ground-truthing and contains clear guidance on what this entails. Where critical decisions need to be made regarding the routing of a boundary, site assessment could supplement digital and map-based assessment.
 - Directing development to the right locations, urban density can be increased, and unsustainable growth is prevented where a strategic approach is applied. The starting point will be to assess greenbelt as a containment strategy for urban development. The UK government's **Effective Use of Land (2019)** provides guidance on improving effective use of land, including planning for higher density development. It addresses factors of compact urban form, urban density and densification such as plot ratio measures, bed space per hectare and dwellings per hectare, including 'test estimates' for small settlements, neighbourhoods and types of urban areas. To increase urban density and prevent unsustainable growth/ urban sprawl, this is likely to favour land use policies, urban design/ planning guidance and building typologies which offer higher densities and are appropriate to the mostly suburban style and small towns and communities of West Lothian. These might include terraced housing, taller housing and flatted accommodation; supporting higher densities near the town centre/ along parallel secondary lanes to main streets etc. Low-rise/ medium-density housing is one strategy to increase suburban densities.
 - Ensuring that the character, landscape, natural setting and identity of settlements is protected and enhanced, using approaches for settlement identity and resisting coalescence of towns and villages.
 - Supporting West Lothian's Nature Networks by assessing overlay mapping from the West Lothian Local Biodiversity Action Plan over extant Countryside Belts and potential areas of Green Belt as a basis for decision-making. The Forestry and Woodland Strategy also offers an avenue for supporting nature networks and thus green belts.
 - Land in green belt is managed to help tackle climate change including protecting prime agricultural land and land of other values by overlaying mapping from West Lothian Council's **Natural Capital Assessment (2023)**, allowing space for renewables as appropriate, and supporting development and enhancement of the nature network and the Forestry and Woodland Strategy.
- 2.10 Notably the Scottish Government's **Local Development Planning Guidance** indicates that 'boundary changes may be made to accommodate planned growth, or to extend or alter the area covered as green belt.' In the case of the five LDP1 countryside belts, the aim would be to assess them as a starting point for the identification of green belts for the proposed plan.

2.11 As an example, a review of Livingston, a new town planned in the 1960s based around car usage and with extensive structural landscape, would focus on supporting compact urban growth through as assessment of density levels and local living using the urban density measures set out above as well as the Place Standard Tool. The Livingston review will also address coalescence issues with several nearby towns through looking at visual and landscape separation and reviewing/ updating townscape identity from previous work done for LDP1.

2.12 Where designated areas of Countryside Belts do not meet the criteria to be taken forward and designated as Green Belt, the council will consider if it is appropriate and useful to retain a countryside belt designation, or to apply other policy designations.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

This will summarise the steps taken by the planning authority to seek the views of all relevant stakeholders. This will also summarise the views expressed, and explain how they have been taken account of in the Evidence Report. (hyperlinks to records of engagement may be added where appropriate)

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

This will include statements from stakeholders highlighting their agreement or the areas they dispute.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

This will cover what the evidence means for the plan, e.g. the spatial strategy, the Delivery Programme or plan preparation.

Based on the evidence the proposed plan will be required to:

1. Review the use of existing Countryside Belts in accordance with NPF4 policy 8 Green Belts and Local Development Planning guidance.
2. Review the West Lothian LDP1 policies Countryside Belts and Settlement Setting and ENV1 Landscape Character and Special Landscape Areas in respect of the proposed designation of a greenbelt.
3. To encourage, promote and facilitate compact urban growth and use the land around West Lothian's towns and villages, the plan should consider the suburban character and lower densities of settlements in West Lothian and propose approaches for greater urbanisation to reduce urban sprawl and to support local living.
4. Consider settlement identity and setting of local communities, in terms of coalescence, landscape setting and local landscape designations, particularly those such as the Bathgate Hills Special Landscape Area which act as countryside/ greenbelt limits for containment.
5. Consider the development of West Lothian's greenbelt cross-boundary with the Edinburgh and Lothian's Greenbelt. The council seeks to be part of a cross-boundary review of the Edinburgh and Lothian's Greenbelt.

6. Consider green belt for the development of West Lothian's Nature Networks and that land is managed to help tackle climate change.