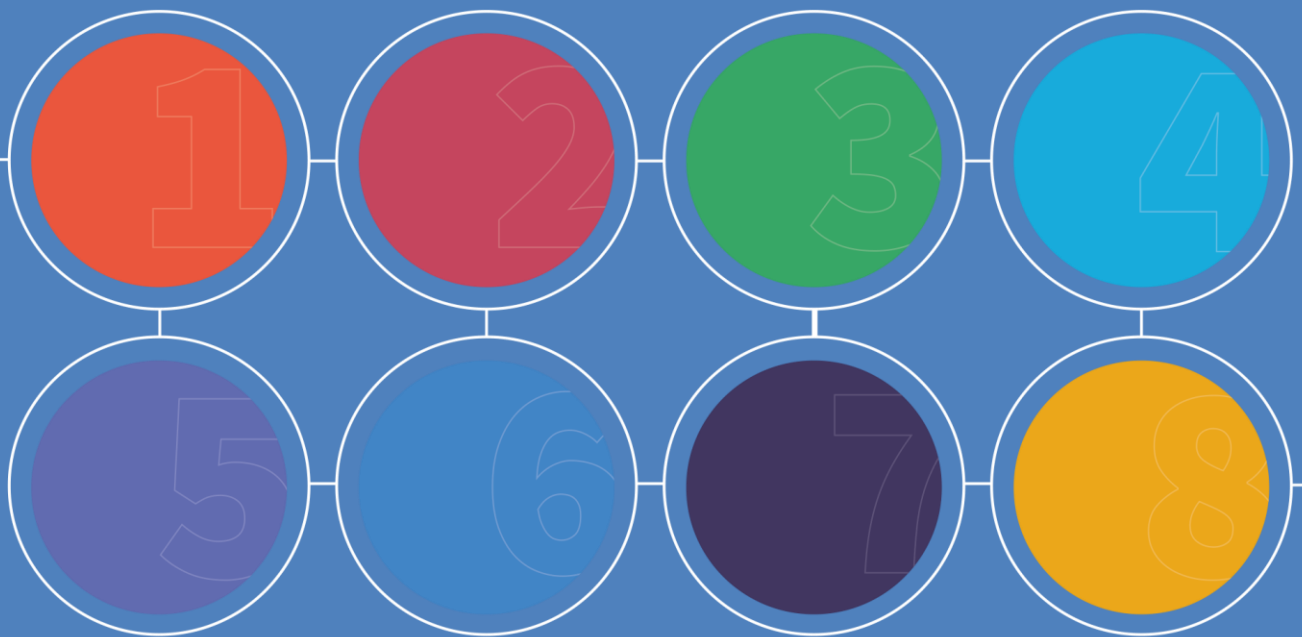


West Lothian Council Employment Land Audit



2023/24

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Foreword

Ensuring an effective supply of employment land is one of the most important economic development functions that local authorities carry out. If serviced employment land is not available, firms would be unable to expand their operations and it would be very difficult to attract new businesses to West Lothian resulting in a lack of job creation.

Reflecting the importance of this SESplan, the former Strategic Development Plan for South East Scotland, which fell with the introduction of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) introduced a policy requiring local authorities to ensure that an effective supply of employment land is provided.

Although the local authority has a key role, the most important issue is not who owns employment land, but how it is made available for early development. Where the private sector is not in a position to service employment land to allow onward sale of plots, the Council may need to intervene, acquiring and servicing land to ensure local economies are not constrained.

The Employment Land Audit (ELA) is an essential part of this process, as it allows us to identify which communities have an adequate supply of employment land that is readily available and capable of attracting and supporting investment. It is also an important document as it provides a context for planning applications relating to employment land.

The audit covers strategic investment projects as well as windfall sites approved through the plan.

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1. Introduction

Employment Land

The Employment Land Audit (ELA) has been undertaken to identify land that is available for employment use, which means it is designated for general industrial and business/office use, storage and distribution, business parks and specialist technology parks, including research and development uses in the Local Development Plan (LDP) or is a windfall site, which is land not allocated in the LDP, but which has current planning permission for employment uses and where no works have started.

This mainly comprises Classes 4, 5 and 6 of the 1997 Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order, but is not exclusive to these uses. It does not include land allocated for retail purposes or windfall sites which include buildings that are vacant but not derelict.

A range of relevant information is recorded against each site including site details and type, information on take up, and information to assess marketability and effectiveness

Purpose of the Audit

The Employment Land Audit (ELA) provides an overview of the supply and availability of employment land through the monitoring of employment land sites, identifying serviced business land and highlighting take up of sites. The West Lothian ELA has been produced to provide up to date and accurate information on the supply and availability of employment land for business and industrial use within the West Lothian Council area.

It provides an evidence base for monitoring and reviewing policies and proposals included within the Local Development Plan (LDP). In addition, it assists in identifying areas where further analysis and investigation are required alongside providing evidence as to the possible future requirement for employment land to be identified for the next iteration of the LDP, LDP2.

Whilst the availability of property is an integral component of economic development and growth, this audit is primarily concerned with the supply of land, and its delivery through the planning process. It does not comprise a detailed market analysis or a detailed assessment of past and likely future property requirements.

In addition a biennial survey of industrial estates is carried to ascertain the percentage of existing units which are occupied (Table 3).

2. National Planning Policy

The Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 4 and the current West Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP) provide the context for the provision of employment land within West Lothian and now form the statutory Development Plan, superseding Scottish Planning Policy, and is also recognised as one of the key documents that will help inform the next iteration of Local Development Plans.

National Planning Framework 4

Scotland's 4th National Planning Framework (NPF4) is a long-term spatial plan for Scotland with an outlook to 2045. It sets out Scottish Ministers' policies and proposals for the development and use of land and was adopted in February 2023.

NPF4 now contains detailed national policy on a number of planning topics and for the first time, spatial and thematic planning policies are addressed in one place.

NPF4 states that 'LDPs should allocate sufficient land for business and industry, taking into account business and industry land audits in particular ensuring that there is a suitable range of sites that meet current market demand, location, size and quality in terms of accessibility and services. This allocation should take account of local economic strategies and support broader objectives of delivering a low carbon and net zero economic recovery, and a fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

With regards to employment land this is mainly covered by NPF4 Policy 26.

Policy Intent:

To encourage, promote and facilitate business and industry uses and to enable alternative ways of working such as home working, live-work units and micro-businesses.

Policy 26: Business and Industry

- a) Development proposals for business and industry uses on sites allocated for those uses in the LDP will be supported.
- b) Development proposals for home working, live-work units and micro-businesses will be supported where it is demonstrated that the scale and nature of the proposed business and building will be compatible with the surrounding area and there will be no unacceptable impacts on amenity or neighbouring uses.
- c) Development proposals for business and industry uses will be supported where they are compatible with the primary business function of the area. Other employment uses will be supported where they will not prejudice the primary function of the area and are compatible with the business/industrial character of the area.

- d) Development proposals for business, general industrial and storage and distribution uses outwith areas identified for those uses in the LDP will only be supported where:
 - i.* It is demonstrated that there are no suitable alternatives allocated in the LDP or identified in the employment land audit; and
 - ii.* The nature and scale of the activity will be compatible with the surrounding area.
- e) Development proposals for business and industry will consider:
 - i.* Impact on surrounding residential amenity; sensitive uses and the natural and historic environment;
 - ii.* The need for appropriate site restoration at the end of a period of commercial use.
- f) Major developments for manufacturing or industry will be accompanied by a decarbonisation strategy to demonstrate how greenhouse gas emissions from the process are appropriately abated. The strategy may include carbon capture and storage.

3. Local Planning Policy

Local Development Plan

[The West Lothian Local Development Plan](#) adopted in September 2018, recognises the importance of its businesses as a key driver of sustainable economic growth and maintaining and improving their competitiveness is vital to the West Lothian economy.

The Plan also recognises the need for new businesses to be established and through its spatial strategy and general policies it seeks to create a positive and flexible framework to encourage new wealth creation opportunities. In addition to employment sites the Plan promotes mixed use sites to help minimise the need to travel by car and most sites should be within or on the edge of existing settlements.

The Employment Land Strategy is a main component in the LDP in order to ensure that there is a readily available supply of employment land. The ELA adopts a hierarchical approach with larger employment land allocations in larger settlements. It also promotes sites that will allow existing businesses to expand or for new ones to establish.

The interim [Regional Spatial Strategy for Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region](#) includes a section on Economic Renewal and in relation to West Lothian this can be summarised as:

- Committed and potential opportunities provide sufficient employment land for economic renewal, regeneration and redevelopment. The region includes a number of significant business clusters. These are broad locations where groups of similar business sectors operate where there are opportunities for expansion. Some of these largest clusters are around west and southeast Edinburgh, Mid Fife, Dunfermline, and Guardbridge / St Andrews, Galashiels, Midlothian and the M8 corridor.
- Support for investment along key transport corridors – M8, M9, M90 and existing rail corridors – is crucial to provide for economic development and growth in business clusters at Newbridge, Livingston, Winchburgh, Bathgate and Whitburn, and the M90 through Fife.

As of 31 March 2024, there was approximately 544 hectares of undeveloped employment land within West Lothian, a 342% oversupply on the previous fallen Strategic Development Plan target. Given the rate of take up of employment land, as evidenced in the tables within this report, it appears a more than adequate land supply going forward exists as perceived demand is not considered to have significantly altered.

4. Preparation of the Audit

The base date for the published data is 31 March 2024 and reflects the financial year and the timescales of most reporting including the Housing Land Audit (HLA).

Employment sites included in the audit are those defined within the LDP and windfall sites which have valid/current planning permission for employment uses (use class 4, 5, 6). Each site must be a parcel of land at least 0.01 hectares in size. All figures are given in hectares and are approximations of gross site areas, unless otherwise stated.

Each site is assessed for provision of services and any potential constraints. The assessment includes the following criteria; access, drainage and water, onsite broadband, gas networks, flood risk and presence of peat soils with high carbon levels. The historic environment is also considered which includes proximity to listed buildings, conservation areas, battlefields and gardens, and Designed Landscapes.

The natural environment is assessed regarding protected species or if the site is within a Special landscape Area.

Employment land site details recorded for the purposes of this audit are as follows:

- Location and address
- Local Development Plan/planning application reference number
- Size (including serviced, constrained, marketable and immediately available area)
- Site status (including brownfield or greenfield; ownership; under construction / partially developed; planning history and potential constraints)

Monitoring

This audit has been prepared from information provided in the Local Development Plan (LDP) and through the monitoring of planning application approvals and building warrant site records. The following internal services are consulted during the ELA process; Development Planning & Environment Team, Climate Change, Building Standards, Development Management and Property.

Each employment site is surveyed annually and cross reference with other land use assessments such as:

- the Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey (SVDLS),
- the Housing Land Audit,
- building standards site inspections records, and
- site inspections

However, given the NPF4 requirement:

“LDPs should allocate sufficient land for business and industry, taking into account business and industry land audits in particular ensuring that there is a suitable range of sites that meet current market demand, location, size and quality in terms of accessibility and services. This allocation should take account of local economic strategies and support broader objectives of delivering a low carbon and net zero economic recovery, and a fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.”

it is clear that, planning status apart, the qualifying criteria for a suitable range of sites are highly subjective. This requires a degree of professional judgement to be made in determining a site’s marketability

5. Marketability and Constraints

A key part of the Employment Land Audit is identifying the level of constraints affecting the site, and its marketability and effectiveness. Constraints can include:

- Ownership issues (for example, multiple owners or unwilling sellers),
- Physical constraints including poor ground conditions or difficult topography,
- No/poor road access or transport links,
- Poor availability of services to the site including water, gas, electricity,
- Contamination,
- Flood risk,
- Water and drainage,
- Financial viability.

Based on the identified level of constraint, several categories of employment land supply are identified in the audit.

Total Available Employment Land

This includes all land that has been zoned for business, industrial and general employment use in the adopted Local Development Plan and windfall sites which have current permission for use classes 4,5 and 6 but building works have not started, irrespective of the level of constraint.

Marketable Land but with Constraints

These sites have constraints, but the extent of the constraints is judged to be at a level such that they can be overcome and the land made marketable within 5 years. This also includes immediately available land.

Immediately Available Land

This is land which is subject to minimal constraints such that it is available for immediate development:

Non-Marketable Land

These sites are subject to major constraints which are not likely to be overcome within the foreseeable future, so that they could not become marketable within 5 years.

6. Assessment of Existing Employment Land Supply

Employment Land Supply Summary Figures

Key characteristics of the council's employment land figures are:

- There have been three identified LDP site removals (E-AD01, E-BU1 and E-EC3) from the 2022/23 audit due to employment development.
- There have been eleven windfall site removals (0558/FUL/21, 0626/FUL/22, 1075/FUL/20, 0990/FUL/20, 0788/FUL/18, 0631/FUL/19, 0790/FUL/19, 0706/FUL/19, 0645/FUL/21, 0342/FUL/23 and 1269/FUL/19) from the 2022/23 audit due to either employment development or the planning approval has lapsed.
- There has been one site size reduced by partial removal (E-LV41) from the 2022/23 audit due to employment development.
- There have been two site removals (E-LV36 and E-LV44) from the 2022/23 audit due to non-employment use approval or development.
- There are currently 117 Employment sites in total, consisting of 92 Local Development Plan sites (78.63% of Total Sites) and 25 Windfall sites (21.37% of Total Sites)
- The total area of Employment Land is 541.09 Hectares.
- The total area of marketable land is 378.83 Hectares.
- The total area of immediately available marketable land is 217.81 Hectares.
- Of the total area of identified employment land:
 - 29.76% could be considered to be immediately available.
 - 40.25% could be considered to have minor constraints (Marketable but not immediately available).
 - 29.97% could be considered to have major constraints (Non marketable).
- 9.91 hectares of land has been identified as employment take-up.
- 2.28 hectares of employment land has been lost to other uses.

It is important to consider how the availability of Employment Land is dispersed.

A summary of total employment land supply by percentage is shown below in Table 1 and by area in Table 2.

Table 1 – Percentage land Constrained or Immediately Available

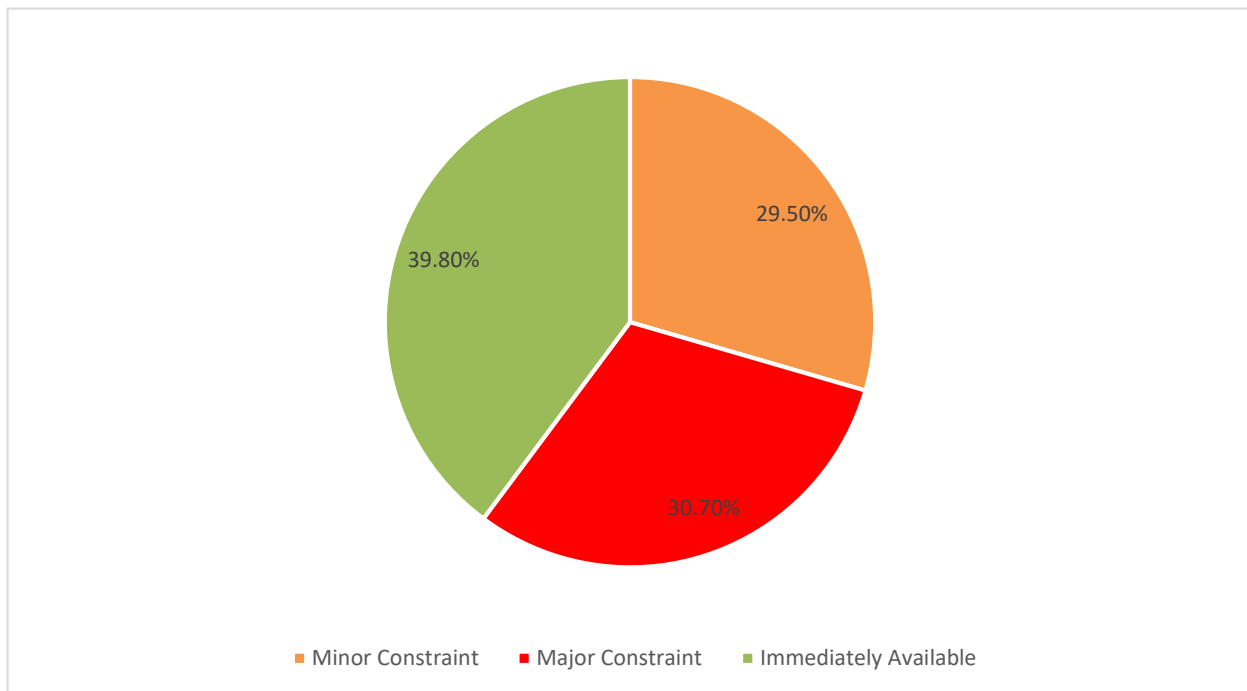


Table 2 – Marketable / Non-marketable Land

	Marketable Land (Ha)		Non-Marketable Land (Ha)
	Immediately Available	Minor Constraint	Major Constraint
Addiewell	0	0	1.2
Bathgate	4.93	1.11	0
Blackburn	59.45	1.65	0
Bridgend	0	3.32	0
Broxburn	0.63	5.03	0
East Calder	0.87	20	0
East Whitburn	0	1.8	0
Landward	1.02	0	56.97
Linlithgow	0.15	9.53	0
Livingston	62.07	118.55	104
Polbeth	2.73	0	0
Uphall	12.79	0	0
Whitburn	34.48	0	0
Winchburgh	38.71	0	0

Table 3 – Percentage of Building Units on Allocated Employment Land Occupied

2023/24	Number of Occupied Building Units on Allocated Employment Land Identified	Total Number of Building Units on Allocated Employment Land	Percentage of Building Units on Allocated Employment Land Occupied
Addiewell	25	25	100%
Armadale	19	24	79.17%
Bathgate	254	295	86.1%
Blackburn	12	12	100%
Blackridge	4	4	100%
Broxburn	181	241	75.1%
East Calder	43	52	82.7%
East Whitburn	2	2	100%
Fauldhouse	5	5	100%
Linlithgow	3	3	100%
Linlithgow Bridge	61	92	66.3%
Livingston	631	807	78.2%
Newton (by)	5	5	100%
Polbeth	12	12	100%
Stoneyburn	1	1	100%
Uphall	12	12	100%
West Calder	16	18	88.9%
Whitburn	66	92	71.7%
Winchburgh	3	4	75%

Table 4 – Percentage of Occupied Buildings on Allocated Employment Land

	2016/17	2018/19	2022/23	2023/24
Occupied	1027	1269	1381	1352
Vacant	256	330	318	352
No data	304	0	0	0
Total Identified Premises	1587	1599	1699	1704
%age Total Identified Premises Occupied	80.05%	79.36%	81.28%	79.34%