

Topic Paper – Tourism ELC 015

Context: NPF Spatial Strategy, NPF 4 Policy 30 Tourism

- 15.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide a condensed summary of the evidence on the topic of Tourism in East Lothian. The topic paper identifies what information has been collected and assessed, and the relevance of this information in relation to the development of the East Lothian Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) particularly in relation to the needs of communities, visitors, the industry, and the environment.
- 15.2 The paper specifically provides information on the key tourism issues in East Lothian drawn from relevant local strategies, surveys, commercial need assessments, economic activity monitoring, tourism statistics and commissioned research.

LINKS TO EVIDENCE

ELC 398	<u>Scotland Outlook 2030 - Scotland's Tourism Strategy</u>
ELC 051	<u>East Lothian Local Economy Strategy (2024 - 2034) – Vision and Evidence Paper – Approved at committee April 2024</u>
ELC 401	East Lothian Visitor Accommodation Sector, Commercial Needs Study, Avison Young (2021)
ELC 402	<u>East Lothian Visitor Survey (2021)</u>
ELC 403	East Lothian Visitor Management Plan – February 2022 ¹
ELC 404	East Lothian STEAM (Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) 2022 year in review
ELC 405	<u>Local Transport Strategy 2018-2024</u>
ELC 038	East Lothian Council's <u>Climate Change Strategy 2020-25</u>

¹ This document is an internal working document used by ELC officers in determining tourism infrastructure projects. It has identified clear projects and initiatives to assist with visitor management of predominantly East Lothian's coastline. The document will be reviewed in the future and may become public.

ELC 407	<u>Visit Scotland Scottish Tourism Statistics & Research</u>
ELC 408	<u>Research into the Private Rented Sector in East Lothian - Arneil Johnson (November 2022)</u>
ELC 409	<u>Public Register of Short Term Let licenses in East Lothian</u>
ELC 449	<u>North Berwick Local Place Plan</u>
ELC 450	<u>Dunpender Community Action Plan and Local Place Plan</u>

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

East Lothian Local Economy Strategy (Vision and Evidence Paper) 2024-2034

15.3 Local Economy Strategy for East Lothian 2024-2034 which will replace the East Lothian Economic Development Strategy 2012 – 2022 (EDS). It will include the Visitor Economy and negate any requirement for a separate tourism strategy or action plan.

15.4 Proposed Actions:

- **Visitor Levy Feasibility:** Explore the cost / benefits and potential opportunities of implementing a visitor levy scheme as a mechanism for funding future visitor economy activity.
- **Net Zero Skills Accelerator** - Assess the feasibility of establishing a Net-Zero Skills Accelerator Hub location in East Lothian.
- **Heating & Powering Businesses and Communities** - Support the delivery of the actions in the Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategy which have the potential to support economic development in East Lothian.
- **East Lothian Food, Drink, Hospitality & Leisure Sector Development Programme** - Develop targeted interventions to support food, drink, hospitality & leisure sector businesses to access new markets, including building partnerships between local providers, public sector organisations and visitor destinations, and routes to market to showcase opportunities for East Lothian, attractions, businesses, and produce.
- **Agritourism** - Work with the sector to promote and advise those already operating or interested in diversifying into agritourism. Ensure that work to develop the next Local Development Plan considers how such developments can be enabled. Provide advice to support farm businesses who are looking to diversify into other sectors, including retail, hospitality, and accommodation (including short-term letting to grow bedstock).
- **Cycling & Walking Tourism** - A programme to support businesses to enhance their cycling and / or walking tourism facilities. Work to maximise the potential of existing routes and product and link to the Regional Prosperity Framework and enable opportunities for cycling and walking tourism to be factored into any wider infrastructure development.

East Lothian Visitor Accommodation Sector, Commercial Needs Study, Avison Young (2021)

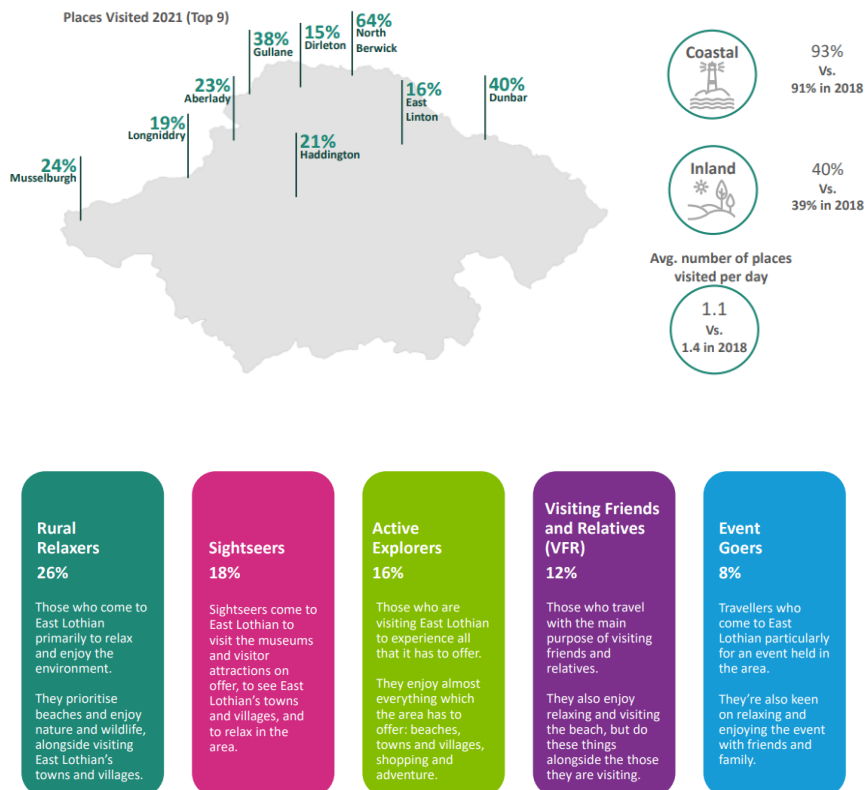
15.5 This study looked at the trends for visitors, amount and suitability of tourism accommodation, and post-covid tourism recovery. Key issues arising from the study were:

- the lack of a large hotel/resort.
- the issue of seasonality and how to increase visitor numbers.
- short-term lets including the quality of lettings and potential impact on the housing market.
- the proximity to Edinburgh, while viewed as positive, important consumers are aware of the unique nature of what East Lothian has to offer.

East Lothian Visitor Survey (2021)

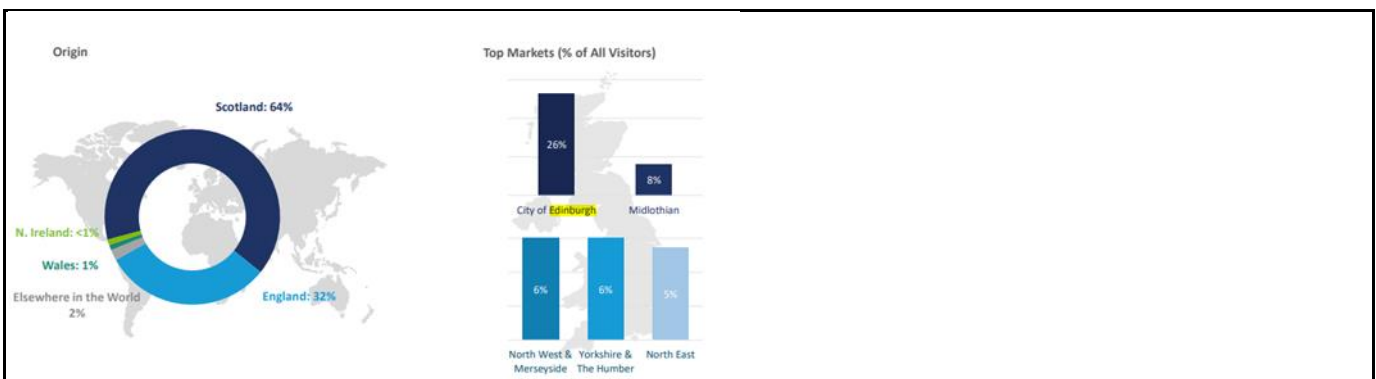
- 15.6 Since the LDP 2018 was adopted, there have been quite significant changes to the economic and environmental context of East Lothian. The impacts of Covid on the industry continued to be felt as travel began to open up with ongoing restrictions on facilities and travel and changes in visitor numbers and type of trip. This is reflected in the East Lothian Visitor Survey 2021 which was commissioned by East Lothian Council. Some of the key statistics are highlighted below.

Reasons for Visit



Visitor Origin:

- Visitor numbers to coastal areas remained roughly the same. It is the area visited by most people coming to East Lothian.
- 64% of the visitors came from within Scotland, 34% from the rest of the UK, and 2% came from overseas.
- Edinburgh residents alone made up around 25% of all visitors.
- In terms of visitor origin, 64% of the visitors came from within Scotland, 34% from the rest of the UK, and 2% came from overseas. Edinburgh residents alone made up around 25% of all visitors. In terms of overseas tourists, the United States, Netherlands, and Canada had the highest representation, in that order, with the United States accounting for half of all overseas visitors. The continuing impacts of travel restrictions are evidenced in these figures, and it should be noted that the overseas markets had not yet fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.



Activities Undertaken:

Activities Undertaken

Places Visited	2003	2011	2015	2018	2021
Visiting the beach	48%	64%	62%	62%	77%
Sightseeing/touring	45%	68%	51%	55%	57%
Going to cafes	-	60%	32%	40%	43%
Countryside / country parks	7%	34%	35%	35%	38%
Going to restaurants	17%	52%	28%	29%	34%
Visiting gardens / parks	9%	14%	12%	18%	29%
Other shopping	22%	32%	20%	18%	24%
Farm/local food & drink	8%	16%	20%	22%	22%
Museums / galleries / exhibits	8%	43%	28%	30%	21%
Visiting friends/relatives	-	-	21%	19%	18%
Going to pubs	-	24%	15%	16%	18%
Historical buildings	27%	31%	23%	24%	17%
Craft centres / shops	8%	20%	13%	14%	11%
A specific event	-	1%	21%	19%	7%
Other	-	1%	3%	7%	6%

- Visiting the beach was by far the most popular.
- Second most popular activity was going to restaurants and cafes.
- Sightseeing and touring, and shopping.
- Over half (54%) of sampled shoppers reported visiting farm shops during their visit, highlighting the importance of local produce.
- North Berwick was the most visited town, followed by Dunbar and Gullane.

Accommodation:

- Caravan parks and camping (33%) where the most popular type of accommodation for overnight visitors. followed by rented accommodation (24%).
- hotels (19%).
- staying with friends or relatives (16%).
- Airbnbs (6%).
- The average spend per day was found to be £63.54.

Travel:

- The highest domestic source of trips is Edinburgh.
- 86% of visitors travelled by car.
- Visitor numbers are highest in North Berwick which is also an area of known pressure in terms of parking.

Places Visited	2021
North Berwick	64%
Dunbar	40%
Gullane	38%
Musselburgh	24%
Aberlady	23%
Haddington	21%
Longniddry	19%
East Linton	16%
Direlton	15%



15.8 Local Transport Strategy 2018 – 2024

- Improvement is needed to travel patterns such as shifting towards more sustainable modes (walking, cycling including electric bikes), public transport access, congestion, multi-modal routes.
- Ongoing consultations across several towns propose the introduction of a variety of measures to make it easier for residents and visitors to park as well as enhance the environment for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Visitor numbers are highest in North Berwick which is also a known area of pressure in terms of parking.

15.9 East Lothian Council Climate Change Strategy 2020 – 2025

- Climate emergency in East Lothian.
- Seven outcomes for the 5-year period including Active Travel and Sustainable Transport, Net Zero Energy Efficient Homes and Buildings, and a Low Carbon and Sustainable Economy.
- Tourism will inevitably be shaped by the impacts of climate change, but it also has the potential to contribute meaningfully to climate resilience and sustainability.
- Achieving sustainable tourism will be a central priority, ensuring the sector thrives in a way that supports both environmental stewardship and long-term economic vitality.

15.10 East Lothian Local Development Plan – Tourism Policy Review

Indications are that policies TOUR2 – TOUR3 are underutilised, and consideration may be given to removing them. Tourism policies, TOUR1 and particularly TOUR4, could be retained but reworded and updated to cover a wider tourist development decision-making basis. More information can be found in the Review of Current Plan Topic Paper (ELC 005).

15.11 Short-Term Lets

Short term lets continue to be an area of considerable interest within East Lothian. Some operators think that the change in legislation has resulted in too many STLs having to close, whilst some local residents feel that they can be harmful to amenity and can reduce the amount of housing stock, to the detriment of local communities. Short terms lets can also bring economic benefits to an area and work is ongoing to provide more information on their economic impacts. Part e) of Policy 30 of NPF4 provides a robust policy basis on which to assess planning applications for STLs.

15.12 Short-Term Let Data

At the time of the Evidence Report submission there was uncertainty around the data relating to the number of short-term lets in East Lothian due to a backlog in processing short-term let licensing applications. This process is now up to date and the Council has robust data in terms of short-term let numbers across East Lothian through the public register. Data from August 2025 indicates there have been 519 applications for short-term let licenses within East Lothian. In addition, this data is now available spatially which allows us to view the location of properties across East Lothian. Musselburgh is our highest need area for affordable housing therefore the potential for spillover impact on Musselburgh from the Edinburgh short term let control zone must be considered to ensure there is no detrimental impact on the housing system.

15.13 Research into the Private Rented Sector in East Lothian - Arneil Johnson (November 2022)

A key question underpinning the research study related to the extent to which the PRS in East Lothian has been affected by the growth of short-term lets (STLs). The results indicated limited effects on the private rented sector however in certain locations this may be more significant.

15.14 Local Place Plans

Registered local place plans for North Berwick and the Dunspeir area both seek the introduction of short-term let control areas.

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

15.15 The Council carried out extensive consultation with the local community and other stakeholders. Engagement activities ran for 14 weeks, between June and September 2023. Specific meetings were held with East Lothian Economic Development colleagues.

15.16 A Summary of Evidence Report Engagement Topic Paper (Document 060) has been completed for all the consultation undertaken in the development of the Evidence Report. A summary of the engagement carried out can be found in that report.

15.17 The key themes that came out of the analysis from consultation and engagement for tourism were:

- **Sustainable day Trips**
90% of respondents suggested that day trip visits to, and within, East Lothian could be made more sustainable by improving sustainable transport options throughout the area. We already know that there are areas of pressure particularly around the beaches and coastal towns, where there can be high levels of congestion during peak season.
- **Encouraging overnight stays**
Many of the responses focused on sustainable transport, as noted for day trips above. Most of the suggestions, however, were around supporting the accommodation offer we already have in East Lothian while recognising that there may be a need to encourage some new development in the form of a hotel. The issue of short term lets was mentioned by some respondents and will be a key issue for consideration.
- **More year-round activities**
Just over 60% of those who responded felt that there are opportunities to encourage a wider range of activities which are not solely based around the summer season. While it was noted that East Lothian already has a lot to offer, work around encouraging more year-round activities would hopefully help to address the impact of tourism during peak season.
- **Tourism without negative environmental impacts**
Respondents suggested that the Council should identify trigger points that overburden infrastructure while there were several suggestions to relieve these issues through the implementation of sustainable transport options. It was recognised that rural tourism is very important in East Lothian and that this should be supported through sustainable management.

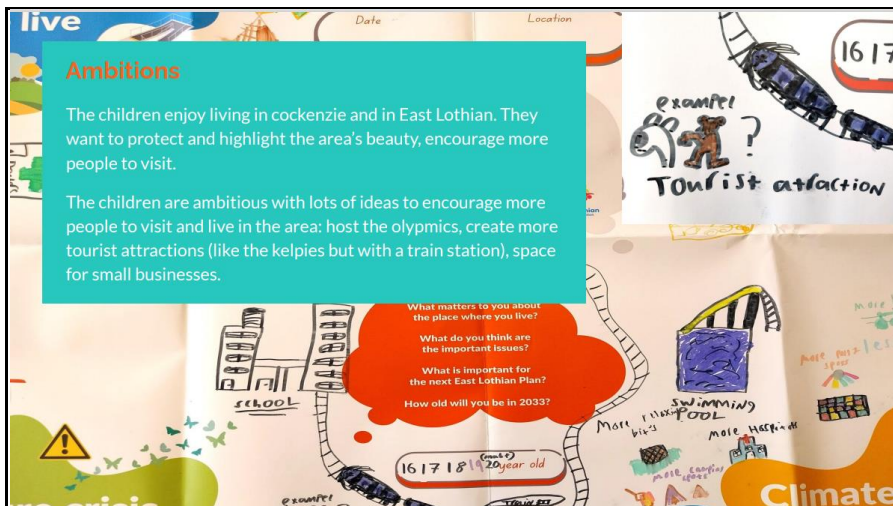
15.18 **Children and Young People Engagement:**

Through engagement with children and young people, the following were identified, with relevance to tourism:

Cockenzie Primary School:

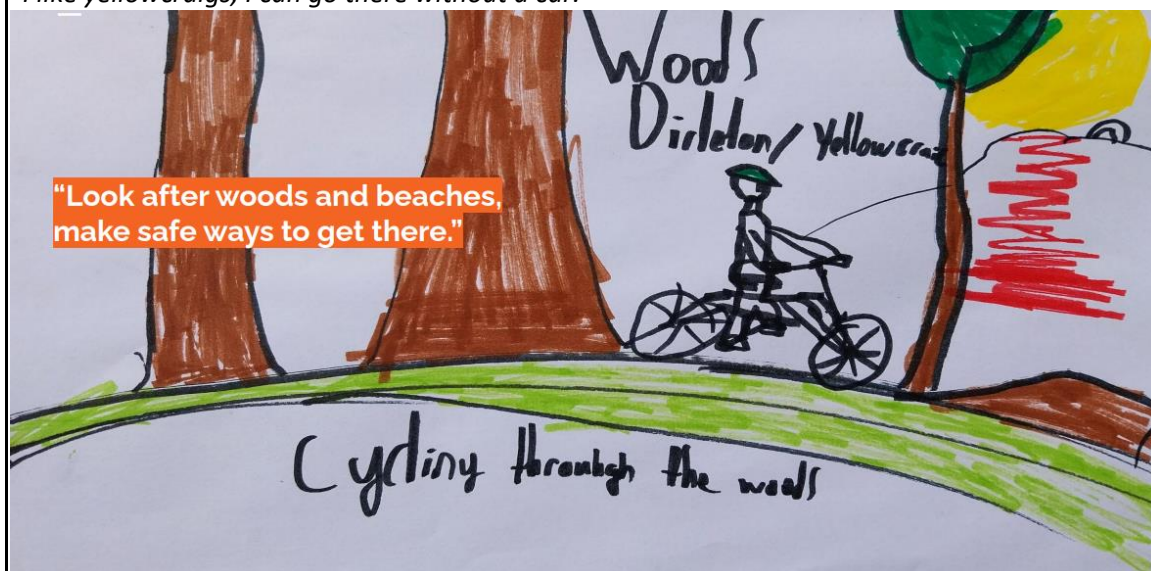
The children want to “protect the and highlight the areas beauty, encourage more people to visit”.

They are ambitious with lots of ideas for people to visit and live in the area: “host the Olympics, create more tourist attractions (like the kelpies but with a train station, space for small businesses”.



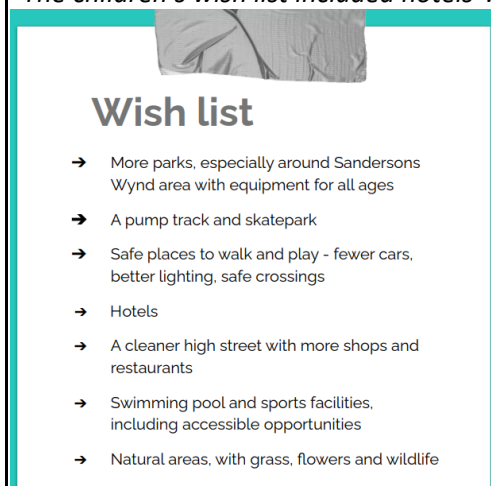
Dirleton Primary School:

"I like yellowcraigs, I can go there without a car."



Sandersons Wynd Primary School

"The children's wish list included hotels".



The children want to *“protect the and highlight the areas beauty, encourage more people to visit”*.

They are ambitious with lots of ideas for people to visit and live in the area, for example one commented that East Lothian should *“host the Olympics, create more tourist attractions (like the kelpies but with a train station, space for small businesses”*.

Another young person commented *“I like yellowcraigs, I can go there without a car.”*

The children’s wish list included the provision of hotels.

Short-Term Lets Consultation

15.19 To gather information on short-term lets (STLs) in the area and to understand more about public opinion, the Planning Service carried out a public consultation between February and April 2022. The consultation provided figures for the total number of Short-Term Let properties in five of East Lothian’s main towns and an analysis of STLs against designated town and local centres against a percentage of the total dwellings. At the time of the consultation there were 572 STLs available in East Lothian. It was recognised that this figure fluctuates daily. There were 194 respondents to the consultation, 175 were resident in East Lothian and 19 out with. Overall responses gathered across the five towns were divided. Many respondents considered STLs to be important in terms of tourism, jobs and supporting the local economy, particularly in the winter months. Many respondents raised concerns around the availability of housing, anti-social behaviour, lack of sense of community and the cumulative impact on residents.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PROPOSED PLAN?

15.20 The following key issues will need to be considered in the Local Development Plan:

- LDP policies will be reviewed to ensure alignment with the key objectives of NPF4, including the shared ambition to address the global climate emergency. This process offers an opportunity to consider how tourism development can be more strategically guided, particularly along the coast and in the countryside, to support both environmental sustainability and the continued vitality of East Lothian’s visitor economy.
- The LDP will need to determine whether specific sites should be identified to assist in the availability of hotel/visitor accommodation, including caravan and camping sites. Hotel/visitor accommodation uses will be sought as part of the call for sites exercise.
- Evidence from consultation suggests there are areas pressure in some settlements linked to visitor numbers. This presents an opportunity to explore solutions that enhance access while also continuing to support the resilience and wellbeing of communities.
- Agritourism is a growing sector, particularly in East Lothian, offering exciting opportunities for rural diversification and jobs. The LDP can continue to play a key role in enabling this growth while promoting the long-term sustainability of the countryside and coast.
- The issue of Short-term lets will be further examined as part of the development of the proposed plan. Registered Local Place Plans for North Berwick and the Dunpender area both seek the introduction of short-term let control areas. Therefore, as part of the proposed plan we will need to consider these proposals. This work will be undertaken alongside colleagues from Housing, Economic Development and

Licensing to ensure balanced and evidence-based policy approaches. Any future policy approach will include consultation with the community and industry operators.

- When implementing the spatial strategy, it will be essential to ensure that the character of the area is preserved. The housing land requirement, as outlined in the evidence report, will necessitate the identification of additional sites. These sites must be sensitively located and designed to integrate with the existing built environment and landscape.

AREAS WHERE THERE IS AGREEMENT OR DISPUTE ON ISSUES AND POSSIBLE APPROACHES.

Agreement on Evidence

15.21 The Tourism background paper and evidence within it, was developed through a series of meetings with Economic Development colleagues, particularly the Council's Tourism Officer. This process coincided with the development of the Council's Local Economy Strategy, ensuring alignment between the two documents.

15.22 No comments from other agencies were received.

Disputes with Stakeholders

15.23 No disputes to consider at gate check.