

COMMITTEE:	East Lothian Council
MEETING DATE:	28 October 2025
BY:	Head of Infrastructure
REPORT TITLE:	Asset Review - Place Making Project Proposals
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present key findings from the placemaking project engagement and to seek approval for proposals aimed at securing and enhancing service delivery. These proposals introduce a financially sustainable service delivery model that also promotes resilience, addresses inequalities, and empowers local communities. The report highlights the extensive public and stakeholder engagement undertaken to date, demonstrating strong community support for existing facilities and the services provided. It also acknowledges concerns raised regarding challenges with room bookings, inconsistent fee structures, and restricted opening hours, which are largely attributed to current Council budget constraints.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Instruct the Head of Infrastructure to develop an Outline Business Case to present options and costings for the creation of six core Library & Area Hubs. This includes undertaking a range of feasibility studies as outlined in the report.
- 2.2 Agree that officers consider alternative service delivery models at various libraries in partnership with local communities.

- 2.3 Agree that officers engage with local communities to assess the feasibility of implementing a revised operating model at various community centres, village halls, Haddington Town House and Dunbar Town House.
- 2.4 Instruct the Head of Infrastructure to develop a Community Benefits Subsidised Lease Policy to provide clarity and transparency around the process for applying discounts on rent for community organisations.
- 2.5 Agree to establish the feasibility of relocating North Berwick Youth Project to the former nursery adjacent to North Berwick Community Centre which arose from the place-based engagement.
- 2.6 Note the decision by Council on 24 June 2025 as part of 'Learning Estate Paused Capital Projects' to incorporate the Elphinstone Community Centre into the Primary School to address future pupil roll requirements.
- 2.7 Agree that officers should engage with community representatives to investigate the feasibility and benefits of greater commercialisation of Dunbar Town House.
- 2.8 Agree to assess the feasibility of creating a publicly accessible list of all community facilities available in East Lothian, in conjunction with our community partners.

3 BACKGROUND

Property Asset Strategy & Management Plan 2024 to 2028

- 3.1 The East Lothian Council Property Asset Strategy & Management Plan, approved in June 2024, outlines the Council's vision for its property portfolio and the guiding principles for asset strategy, management, and investment. These principles are:
 - Effectively manage property assets
 - Meet immediate savings targets and bridge affordability gap
 - Meet demographic need for services
 - Generate income and encourage economic development
 - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
 - Work with communities and partners to maximise shared opportunities.

A comprehensive review of property assets is central to delivering an efficient and effective estate. The Asset Review Programme has already delivered measurable savings and service improvements. The Place Making Project forms part of this programme and aligns with the strategic principles set out in the approved plan.

Place Making Project Summary of Engagement

- 3.2 East Lothian Council has undertaken a comprehensive Place Making review of properties that currently, or could potentially, support face-to-face public services such as customer advice, libraries, and community spaces. Community engagement was a key part of this process, and the feedback gathered will inform the long-term property asset strategy.
- 3.3 Following Executive Management Team approval in October 2024, Clear Futures was appointed to lead a programme of engagement under the Place Making project. This work supported the development of proposals for future delivery of face-to-face services and included:
- Asset performance scorecards.
 - Public engagement proposal.
 - Conduct early engagement.
 - Recommendations report for submission to council.

Council officers worked closely with Clear Futures to ensure the programme was delivered effectively and captured a broad range of views.

- 3.4 Staff participation was actively encouraged. Two town hall-style briefings were held on 19 and 27 March 2025 to raise awareness of the project and its objectives. Staff were invited to share feedback via an online survey hosted on the East Lothian Consultation Hub, with regular updates provided through Inform articles.
- 3.5 Key building stakeholders and community groups were invited to a series of workshops as part of “Phase 1a” which took place from the 2 April to 15 April 2025. They were given the opportunity to review summary asset information as well as express their views on the opportunities and challenges faced for each of the buildings within their area.
- 3.6 “Phase 1b” was a wider public engagement using an online survey on the East Lothian Consultation Hub. This ran from the 19 May to 29 June 2025. This was supplemented by drop-in sessions in each area where members of the public were able to review the engagement information, ask questions and provide feedback. The online survey generated 894 responses. A version suitable for children and young people generated an additional 109 responses. A breakdown of the number of responses per building from both surveys can be found in Appendix 1.
- 3.7 Heads of Service and Service Managers have assisted in collating a detailed list of face-to-face services currently delivered and have identified where these services could be redesigned and incorporated into a hub.

- 3.8 The project team also worked closely with fellow community planning partners such as NHS Lothian, East Lothian Integrated Joint Board/Health & Social Care Partnership, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh College, Volunteer Centre East Lothian, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service to ensure that they could contribute to the engagement.
- 3.9 Key themes emerging from the engagement include:
- Communities provided positive feedback in favour of keeping all assets as they are all important and deliver valuable services.
 - There are operational issues at some buildings such as restrictions to opening times, difficult-to-use booking systems and inconsistent charging.
 - Concern over lack of agreed plans for several important landmark assets.
- 3.10 A summary of feedback is provided in Appendix 2.
- 3.11 The feedback from the engagement has been analysed and proposals for “Library & Area Hubs” and “Community Hubs” have been developed. This approach aims to balance the delivery of the East Lothian Council Plan objectives and the needs of communities while delivering premises cost savings for the council. It also aligns with the East Lothian Partnership Poverty Plan priorities on reducing inequalities and improving community resilience and the Community and Learning Development Plan around building capacity and skills in communities.
- 3.12 A summary of the proposals for each area can be found in Appendix 3.

Library & Area Hubs

- 3.13 This section outlines the proposal to establish a network of Library & Area Hubs for core Council service delivery, including recommended locations and required facilities. It also includes the opportunity to consider redefining and producing alternative library provision in rural areas working in partnership with our communities
- 3.14 It is proposed that the Council establish six strategically located Library and Area Hubs, each designed with a multi-sector focus to integrate face-to-face and information services under one roof. This approach aims to reduce duplication, enhance collaboration, and improve service accessibility. These Hubs could host services delivered by key public sector partners—including NHS, East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership, and Police Scotland—as well as third sector organisations and community groups. Opportunities for social enterprise activity linked to the Hubs should also be explored.
- 3.15 Library and Area Hubs should generally be situated in the largest town within each locality and be owned and managed by East Lothian Council. Council library services would be consolidated into these Hubs to

maximise efficiency and community benefit. The remaining library premises should be made available for use by community organisations, encouraging local stewardship and continued public value with the express intent of considering collegiately delivering alternative library service provision in partnership.

- 3.16 The Council has embraced the shift toward digital engagement, as reflected in our Customer Strategy, which prioritises innovation in online service delivery. While digital channels remain the preferred method of interaction, community engagement has highlighted the continued need for accessible, in-person services. The Bleachingfield Centre and George Johnstone Centre have served as models, informing the development of Library and Area Hubs across East Lothian.
- 3.17 Library and Area Hubs should be configured to have the following facilities as a minimum:
- Customer information point
 - Library
 - Hot Desks
 - Interview room(s)
 - Private booths with screens/MS Teams, where customers can speak to members of council staff.
 - Meeting room capable of hosting confidential meetings
- 3.18 East Lothian Council aspires to create trauma-informed services by embedding the five core principles of trauma-informed and responsive practice—safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment—across all its services. The Council recognises that trauma can affect individuals at any stage of life and is committed to ensuring that staff understand the impact of trauma and respond in ways that prevent further harm. The Library and Area Hubs approach aims to foster environments where people feel safe, respected, and supported to access services. This project will not only look at how trauma informed spaces are designed but also how services are delivered.
- 3.19 The proposed Library and Area Hub locations have been selected with consideration for town centre accessibility and proximity to public transport, supporting increased footfall to local businesses alongside access to face-to-face services:

Area	Number of Library & Area Hubs	Location
Dunbar & East Linton	1	The Bleachingfield Centre
Fa`side	1	The George Johnstone Centre
North Berwick Coastal	1	North Berwick Library & Coastal Communities Museum
Preston Seton Gosford	1	Prestonpans Library
Musselburgh, Wallyford & Whitecraig	1	<p>Conduct feasibility work into developing Musselburgh Old Town Hall into the Area Hub to incorporate the library and Museum and any wider benefit opportunities.</p> <p>See paragraph 3.27 for further details.</p> <p>This projected pressure on local services should be carefully monitored and addressed within the feasibility study to ensure that, if needed, additional capacity can be supported through coordinated access to services across these three distinct communities</p>
Haddington & Lammermuir	1	<p>John Muir House - with a feasibility study to consider incorporating the Council Chambers and the library services on the ground floor of John Gray Centre Services into the Courts and explore wider benefit opportunities.</p> <p>See paragraph 3.30 for further details</p>

3.20 To encourage use as multi agency information hubs, hot desks, interview rooms, and meeting room facilities should be available for other public sector partners based on a cost recovery model.

3.21 All facilities and services currently delivered from these existing buildings will remain, but the following additional services could be delivered subject to further engagement with partners including:

- Multi agency information hubs.
- Clinics/equipment services (NHS/ East Lothian Health & Social Care Partnership).
- Police Scotland local officer drop-in sessions.

3.22 There are service delivery benefits to co-located services, but further opportunities may exist, and these should continue to be explored both internally and with public sector partners.

Dunbar & East Linton Library & Area Hub

3.23 It is proposed that The Bleachingfield Centre in Dunbar be designated the Library & Area Hub for the Dunbar and East Linton area, and some reconfiguration works may be required to achieve this. Community feedback from both engagement phases strongly supported the value of library services. As a result, it is proposed that core library services for the area be delivered from the Bleachingfield Centre, and consideration be given to working with the community to implement an alternative delivery model at East Linton Library.

Fa`side Library & Area Hub

3.24 It is proposed that the George Johnstone Centre be designated as the Library & Area Hub for Fa`side. The George Johnstone Centre requires the office area to be upgraded to the Council's New Ways of Working standard layout and soundproofing improvements to interview rooms to be carried out. Community feedback from both engagement phases strongly supported the value of library services. As a result, it is proposed that core library services for the area be delivered from the George Johnstone Centre and to continue supporting Lily's Ormiston CIC who are currently operating in the community rooms at Ormiston Library. This will support the local aspiration of it becoming a Community Hub.

North Berwick Coastal Library & Area Hub

3.25 It is proposed that North Berwick Library be designated as the Library & Area Hub for North Berwick Coastal area. Some existing library/museum floor space in North Berwick Library & Coastal Communities Museum will require to be reconfigured to provide a hot desk area. A feasibility study will be required to establish the options and costs for achieving this. Community feedback from both engagement phases strongly supported the value of library services. As a result, it is proposed that core library services for the area be delivered from North Berwick Library & Area Hub and consideration be given to working with the community to implement an alternative delivery model at Gullane Library.

Preston Seton Gosford Library & Area Hub

- 3.26 It is proposed that Prestonpans Library be designated as the Library & Area Hub for Preston Seton Gosford area. Some existing library/museum floor space in Prestonpans Library will need to be reconfigured to provide a hot desk area. A feasibility study will be required to establish the options and costs for achieving this. Community feedback from both engagement phases strongly supported the value of library services. As a result, it is proposed that core library services for the area be delivered from the Prestonpans Library & Area Hub and consideration be given to working with the community to implement an alternative delivery model at Port Seton and Longniddry East Linton Libraries.

Musselburgh Library & Area Hub

- 3.27 In August 2025, the Council approved a Public Information Notice to gauge market interest in redeveloping the Brunton Hall site to include the provision of a theatre and performance space. This approach aims to attract potential commercial partners to support the continuation of arts services in Musselburgh.
- 3.28 While market engagement could provide a potential pathway for The Brunton Hall, uncertainty surrounding the future of Musselburgh Old Town Hall remains a concern for the community. Throughout the engagement process, Musselburgh Conservation Society has expressed a willingness to collaborate with the Council to identify a sustainable solution, including securing funding to bring the building back into use. As a Grade A listed building and one of Scotland's most complete examples of a tolbooth, its preservation and reuse are of significant cultural importance.
- 3.29 Musselburgh Library is not currently considered suitable for long-term service delivery due to the absence of public toilets, accessibility challenges, and ongoing condition issues that frequently disrupt operations, particularly in winter. Substantial investment would be required to maintain the current service model. Consequently, it is proposed that a feasibility study be undertaken to explore the development of Musselburgh Old Town Hall as the town's Library & Area Hub. This would secure a long-term future for the building and establish it as a central location for Council service delivery in Musselburgh.

Haddington & Lammermuir Library & Area Hub

- 3.30 The library for the Haddington & Lammermuir area is currently based in The John Gray Centre. Customer services for the area are currently based in John Muir House. It is proposed that this arrangement continue but that a place-based development project be undertaken to look at the feasibility of co-locating the library and customer services in a single building.

- 3.31 There was no public consensus in feedback on the future of the former court building at John Muir House. However, given its location and potential strategic importance it should form part of the Haddington place-based development project.
- 3.32 Elected members are currently located in various parts of John Muir House. A project is underway to consolidate working spaces into a single area within the building including the council chambers. This will free up Block C for redevelopment as a commercial venture in partnership with East Lothian Land. Relocating elected members from the office on the northwest of John Muir House will also free this part of the building for disposal if not required.
- 3.33 There is concern in the community regarding the future of Haddington Town House. By moving the Council Chambers to John Muir House, the Town House would be completely vacant and operationally surplus. Given the significant community value of this building, it is proposed the Council engage with community organisations to assess the viability of Community Asset Transfer of the building.
- 3.34 Feedback from the Phase 1a workshops indicated that some third sector organisations were interested in relocating within Haddington. The opportunity to create space for the third sector should be included in the place-based development project based on the principle of a community benefit lease, with premises costs recovered.

Alternative Library Development Opportunities

- 3.35 Community feedback from both engagement phases strongly supported the value of library services. To meet required savings targets, it is proposed that the following libraries be considered for alternative service delivery models in partnership with communities. This would consider alternatives such as utilising space within community buildings to potentially offer self-service access to lending along with a staffed presence for part of the week. They are:
- East Linton Library
 - Ormiston Library
 - Gullane Library
 - Longniddry Library
 - Port Seton Library
- 3.36 The Council acknowledges that libraries continue to serve as one of the few free, safe, and stigma-free public spaces available. In recognition of their value, we are committed to working collaboratively with communities to explore alternative service delivery models prior to any proposed closures. Communities will be given the opportunity to assume responsibility for these library premises Alternative library and book

lending opportunities will be considered in partnership with local stakeholders to ensure continued access to essential resources.

- 3.37 Gullane and East Linton Libraries are based in shared premises with lease agreements involving third parties. The Council will work with these parties when considering alternative service delivery models.
- 3.38 Ormiston Library occupies a prime location with revenue generating potential. There is also strong community interest in using the building to deliver a range of valuable services including a cafe.
- 3.39 Prior to making any final decisions, the Council will conduct a statutory consultation specifically concerning these libraries. This process will evaluate the potential impact of any proposals or expressions of interest submitted by community groups, including those related to asset transfer or alternative models of service delivery for the library buildings.

Wallyford & Blindwells

- 3.40 The anticipated growth in Wallyford, Whitecraig, and the Musselburgh expansion at Craighall necessitates a review of service demand, particularly in relation to the Musselburgh Hub. Wallyford alone is projected to reach a population of approximately 7,000, based on development approved in the 2018 Local Development Plan (LDP), positioning it as the seventh largest town in East Lothian. This projected pressure on local services should be carefully monitored and addressed within the feasibility study to ensure that, if needed, additional capacity can be supported through coordinated access to services across these three distinct communities.
- 3.41 Blindwells has a future population of approximately 3,700 based on the 1,600 houses identified in LDP 2018. It is proposed that residents would use the Library & Area Hubs at Prestonpans and Tranent. However, should the population increase significantly as a result of further development in Blindwells then consideration could be given to designating an additional Library & Area Hub for the area.

Community Hubs

- 3.42 Feedback on community centres and village halls has been overwhelmingly positive. While the Council remains committed to maintaining access to these facilities, ongoing financial pressures necessitate a shift in approach. It is proposed that communities assume greater responsibility for the ownership and operation of these assets, supported by revised operating models such as:
 - Full repairing and insuring leases
 - Community Asset Transfers (CAT)
 - Recharging premises costs to management committees or community groups

- 3.43 Under all proposed models, premises costs would be borne by the community. A combination of income from lets, fundraising and grant funding not available to the Council could allow communities to sustain these facilities
- 3.44 Where no existing management committee or community group is in place, the Council will work with local stakeholders to establish appropriate governance structures. This may include support for new management committees, assisting with the creation of community development trusts to oversee one or more buildings, or partnering with existing community groups.
- 3.45 To encourage financial viability, a Community Benefit Subsidised Lease Policy will be developed. This framework will enable rent discounts based on community impact. Leases will be long-term to encourage access to external funding not normally available to the council.
- 3.46 The Council recognises the invaluable contribution of volunteers and their critical role in the success of revised operating arrangements. However, it is acknowledged that the management and operation of facilities may fall outside the current skill set of many community groups. To address this, Community Development Officers will work in partnership with organisations such as Volunteer Centre East Lothian to support communities in building the necessary capacity and skills. This support will also include guidance on accessing programmes such as the Community Ownership Support Service, enabling communities to take on greater responsibility with confidence and sustainability.
- 3.47 Community engagement on the revised operating models will take place with a view to implementing them as soon as agreement is reached. Those where agreement cannot be reached by December 2026, will be reported to Council thereafter, as part of projected Asset Review savings for 2027/28.
- 3.48 The list of properties within the scope of implementing a revised operating model:
- Macmerry Village Hall
 - Ormiston Community Centre
 - Trevelyan Hall
 - Nungate & Haddington Community Centre
 - Haddington Town House
 - Whitecraig Village Hub
 - North Berwick Community Centre
 - Gullane Recreation Hall

- Longniddry Community Centre & Library
- Pennypit Centre
- Port Seton Centre & Library
- Prestonpans Community Centre

- 3.49 Revised operating models cannot be applied to Musselburgh East Community Learning Centre and Wallyford Learning Campus due to existing PPP/FM contracts. However, feedback from both phases of engagement have indicated that the community use arrangements at Wallyford requires review and this is in progress. Feedback received from the Dunbar engagement on Bleachingfield, requires further discussion with the management committee. No other feedback relating to buildings where management committees operate was received which required a follow up.
- 3.50 Musselburgh East Community Learning Centre is part of the Council's PPP contract covering several high schools. Its future should be considered within the broader PPP hand-back strategy, noting it is not designated as an Area Hub

Other Property Proposals

- 3.51 North Berwick Youth Project (NBYP) are currently based in the Hope Rooms and have been for around 20 years. They use dedicated space within the building to provide a range of youth services through a service level agreement in place with East Lothian Council. The remaining parts of the building are available for let using the councils room booking system. NBYP indicated a potential interest in being relocated to the former nursery building at North Berwick Community Centre. This would provide them with the dedicated space required for the services they deliver. This would allow the Hope Rooms to be declared surplus. Officers should progress the feasibility of undertaking this. This requires further engagement and exploration.
- 3.52 East Lothian Council recently agreed to reinstate several previously paused Learning Estate projects. This included a project at Elphinstone Primary School to address a forecast breach in capacity. A number of options have been prepared detailing the alterations required, but the most cost-effective option was to repurpose the spaces currently used as the community centre to school use. This has resulted in protecting community access to the building being limited to outwith school operating hours, similar to arrangements at other primary school and in addition, Elphinstone Miners Welfare is currently providing community use and has benefited from recent council support to do this.
- 3.53 Feedback regarding Dunbar Town House has indicated a community desire to unlock benefits from greater commercialisation of the building. The space and location offer tremendous potential for visual arts which should be explored further with local community groups.

Non-Property Proposals

- 3.54 A key theme emerging from the engagement was lack of visibility and promotion on the range of facilities that are available for community use. No single list of both council-owned, and community-owned facilities and their available facilities exist. Improving access to this information could encourage greater use of facilities and help support their future. As a result, it is proposed the feasibility of creating a publicly accessible list of all community facilities in East Lothian should be developed.
- 3.55 Feedback from the Phase 1a engagement highlighted a perception that the booking system used by the council was difficult to use. A project is currently underway to implement a new room booking and payment system as part of the councils Transformation Programme.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report proposes that a Community Benefits Subsidised Lease Policy be developed to allow consistent and transparent decision to be made on discounts available to voluntary groups, registered charities, community groups and other community-based organisations as tenants of East Lothian Council assets.

5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Finance:

In February 2024, East Lothian Council approved a budget that includes a £3.6 million revenue savings target from the Asset Review project. An additional £1.598 million from the previous year remains outstanding, bringing the total savings target to £5.198 million over the next five years. The current phasing of these savings is outlined in the table below.

Financial Year	Asset Review Revenue Savings Target (£'000)
Previously agreed/not yet delivered	1,598
2026/27	1,000
2027/28	1,100
2028/29	1,000
2029/30	500
Total	5,198

In addition to revenue savings, a capital receipts target of £20 million has been set by Council, primarily through land and property sales. To date, £3.550 million has been achieved, leaving a balance of £16.450 million to be delivered by the end of 2027/28. While the Place Making project will contribute to this, additional workstreams will be required to achieve the full target.

5.2 Human Resources:

An alternative service delivery model in some libraries and greater community operation and management of some community centres and village halls could have an impact on some staff. This will be assessed as more detailed proposals are developed and individual service reviews are undertaken to address the impact on staffing requirements.

5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT):

A statutory consultation will be required to be carried out before making any changes to library provision.

A statutory consultation will be required should there be any significant changes to Common Good assets. This includes:

- Dunbar Town House
- The Bleachingfield Centre
- Haddington Town House
- The Brunton Hall
- Musselburgh Old Town Hall
- Port Seton Community Centre & Library

5.4 Risk:

As set out within the body of the report.

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 ***Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.***

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.



or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:



Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

[Enter information on impacts that have been identified]

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report has been published and can be accessed via the Council's website:

https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments

7 APPENDICES

- 7.1 Appendix 1: Number of Survey Responses per Building
- 7.2 Appendix 2: Summary of Emerging Themes (Clear Futures)
- 7.3 Appendix 3: Summary of Proposals per Area

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 East Lothian Council 26 August 2025 – Brunton Hall Replacement Project
- 8.2 East Lothian Council 18 February 2025 – Budget, Council Tax and Rent Setting 2025/26 Onwards
- 8.3 East Lothian Council 24 June 2025 – Learning Estate Paused Projects (Elphinstone Primary School)

- 8.4 East Lothian Council 29 October 2024 – The Brunton Hall RAAC Update, Proposals for Closure and Alternative Service Delivery.

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

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Date	28 October 2025	

Head of Service Approval

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Designation	Head of Communities & Partnerships
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	Yes
Approval Date	13 October 2025