

An aerial photograph of Dunbar and West Barns, Scotland. The foreground shows the Dunbar Castle ruins on a rocky peninsula, with waves crashing against the shore. The middle ground is filled with a dense residential area of houses and buildings, many with red roofs. A harbor with several boats is visible. The background shows a wide expanse of green fields and distant hills under a cloudy sky.

The Dunbar and West Barns Local Place Plan 2025 – 2035 Report

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We welcome you to read our Local Place Plan Report, the result of community consultation and steering group meetings over a fifteen month period. This report details the work that informed and led to the production of the Action Plan. It is framed within the context of the National Planning Framework 4.



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Introduction

Our Place Plan journey....

The Dunbar and West Barns Local Place Plan brings together the concerns and aspirations of our community. It sets out to provide a framework for developing practical, collaborative responses that involve the community and strategic local partners.

In 2019 Scottish Government passed legislation to reform the Planning system. The new Act emphasised the part planning must play in addressing climate change, the nature emergency and the need to involve communities in the development of plans that affect their quality of life.

The Plan has been developed with regard to National Planning Framework 4 Policies on Sustainable Places. The findings and recommendations are organised around the themes of creating Liveable Places, Productive Places and Distinctive Places. ELC Local Development Plan 2018 and other strategic documents have also informed our Plan



Since January 2023 representatives of Dunbar and West Barns Community Councils, Sustaining Dunbar, Dunbar and East Linton Area Partnership and Dunbar Trades Association have worked together to conduct surveys, hold consultation days and analyse findings to inform this Plan.

The survey process was guided by the Place Standard Tool. Over 800 people of all ages across the Plan Area responded to the questionnaire in Spring 2023. A further 300 people engaged with the on-line Connecting Dunbar Active Travel survey and drop in sessions in Autumn 2023.

We thank all our contributors for their generosity and hope that the Local Place Plan will be a source of guidance and inspiration to realise our vision.

Our Story

Dunbar and West Barns – A Growing Community

Dunbar and West Barns are two communities which sit, along with Belhaven, at the eastern most part of East Lothian. The area is steeped in history with settlements dated here from the Iron Age and the remnants of centuries of trade, agriculture and fisheries, travellers, armies and industrious locals still evident across the area.

The traditional industries of fishing and farming have been replaced locally by employment at Torness Nuclear Power Station, Tarmac Cement Works and the Valencia waste management landfill and incinerator operations.

The Local Authority is one of the County's biggest employers and Dunbar resident's work locally and across the wider area. Retail, hospitality and tourism are still significant occupations.

Many people commute to Edinburgh and beyond but working from home is becoming more common.



“no more large house building”
“no more loss of green space”
“better facilities and services”

In the last two decades the population of the area has grown from around 7,500 in 2001 to 11,000 in 2022 with 1781 new family homes fringing the old town and village centres. A further 413 homes are still to be built.

New families have made this area their home and have brought new energy and a younger population to the area. This development has created opportunities and stimulus to the local economy but provision of amenities and infrastructure has not been able to keep pace with the growing population.

The new residents are welcomed but there is concern at the implications of how to satisfy the needs of a growing community without undermining the qualities that contribute to a positive sense of place.

Distinctive Places

Our Locality has many distinctive and attractive features – its location between the hills and the sea, its historic town centre and working harbour and a strong sense of community.

The Planning Framework exists to help us to preserve what is special about these features.

Protecting natural places

The area is defined on its northern edge by glorious open spaces – John Muir Country Park, Belhaven Bay, a cliff top walk with stunning views and the harbours and East Beach.

There are also much appreciated green and play spaces within the area including Lauderdale and Winterfield Parks, a number of allotments, Springfield Park, Tree Scheme Recreation Areas, Seafield Pond, West Barns Park, and Dunbar Community Woodland.

These listed sites are already protected and should not be undermined through over use and insensitive development.

More recent housing developments have been built on agricultural land and these developments have now extended to the A1 - the town's southern barrier; the new estates are also built to a high density.



One of the strongest messages we received in the survey was to protect (and enhance or increase) green space and we should guard against further development of these in existing neighbourhoods

Another special case is the Belhaven Community Garden adjacent to the, now closed, NHS Belhaven Hospital. We must ensure it is retained as a therapeutic space for education, training, community connection, mental health and supporting biodiversity.

There is strong demand for allotment plots but given the complex pressures on land use this is a particularly difficult issue to address. Community collaboration and creative thinking could lead to a new solution as as part of an initiative to identify suitable sites for rewilding and tree planting.

The Oxwellmains Landfill Site presents an opportunity to satisfy demand for more accessible green space where new wildlife habitats and walking and cycling routes could be opened up. It is within the boundary of East Lammermuir Community Council which is also keen to see this area developed. Its proximity to Dunbar warrants inclusion to this Plan and we would wish to support and participate in the development.

Protecting the built environment

There is significant support to revitalise the High Street, Harbour and East Beach areas and develop a Town Centre Action Plan to address a range of issues.

A major town centre challenge is the repair and maintenance of buildings in the Conservation Area. Co-ordinating work is complicated as many are in shared ownership and there is reluctance to take responsibility for common repairs.

Derelict buildings that are difficult to restore, such as the Abbey Church, are also a source of concern that is extremely difficult to address but lack of action will result in highly negative impacts on the townscape.



Fortunately some of the necessary renovation can be funded through the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme which is jointly managed between Historic Environment Scotland and East Lothian Council.



Successful Town Centre regeneration also relies on the stimulus of the local economy through revitalisation of the High Street. The East Lothian Council Town Centre Strategy 2019 provides a detailed analysis of the situation.

Expansion of the retail park on the edge of town will create further challenges to traders in the historic town centre therefore the town centre must be attractive and made accessible to the widest possible range of residents and visitors.

A Town Centre Development Group has been set up to work with local residents, traders and the visiting public. Its aim is to support the regeneration of the town centre looking at street furniture, signage, cleanliness and the celebration of its long and significant history.

LIVEABLE PLACES

What Three Words

In our survey we asked everybody to try to capture in 3 words how they felt about Dunbar and West Barns now and how they would like to feel about their place in 2035.

The overall response shows that most people felt very satisfied or satisfied with their lives in Dunbar and West Barns. However, their choice of what three words captures the emotions that residents experience, together with their optimism that much could change for the better.

NOW



IN TEN YEARS



Friendly, Community,
Kind, Safe, Inclusive, Peaceful,
Beautiful, Vibrant, Thriving,
Inspiring, Opportunities,
Improving, Changing, Growing,
Coastal, Green, Historic,
Good facilities, Connected

**Busier, Overcrowded
Getting Spoiled,
Overbuilt, Lost wildlife,
Lost Agriculture,
Traffic, Scruffy, Litter,
Run Down, Boring,
Old Fashioned, Mismanaged,
Unmaintained, Poor services,
Poor infrastructure, Lack of
Facilities, Expensive.**

Vibrant, Thriving, Supportive, Calmer,
Connected, Improved, Peaceful,
Green, Safe, Prospererous, Healthy,
Clean, Uncrowded, Friendly, Beautiful,
Welcoming, Natural, Caring,
Affordable, Active, Diverse,
Sustainably Net Zero, Bold, Tourists,
Crime Free, Viable,
Rewilded,
Accessible, Welcoming

**Busy, Strangers, Ruined
Unsustainable, Overcrowded
Over populated, Spoilt
Lost authenticity**

Liveable Places : Housing

The Steering Group looked at all the available sites in and around the town but other than green space there are few sites that could be made available for small, accessible and affordable units.

The temptation is to build on these green spaces but this goes against the desire expressed by the community to retain these spaces. The survey showed it is important to retain these for our resident's wellbeing.

Land at Eweford by West Barns is owned by Taylor Wimpy but not suitable for the development of family homes as this would create impossible demand for places at the local primary school. Nor would housing for older people be appropriate due to the distance from local services.



Flats for single people and couples of all ages would be more feasible but this infill would blur the boundary between Dunbar and West Barns – a scenario that is not viewed favourably by the community. There was strong opposition to additional house building on agricultural land.



Distance from quality green space and services and the inadequate network of routes for active travel make access more difficult for these residents and has led to an over reliance on cars.

These factors undermine the potential for promoting the 20 Minute Neighbourhood concept.

Liveable Places : Housing

There is a need for different types of housing. The existing stock, and that planned, makes little provision for residents who want smaller homes.

Whether to downsize, first homes or for and those that currently or will need, adapted or single level living (trends indicate these needs will expand).

There is little future provision for those who will have 'live-in' care needs. Families will not be able to offer care and support across the generations.

Satisfying the demand for housing presents many complex challenges. The Local Authority is required to identify sites for new developments. However land is in short supply and development has extended to the town's physical boundaries.



Increasing demand has also driven up prices of accommodation and this inflation has created serious social and economic impacts. Dunbar and West Barns depend heavily on local labour to service hotels, restaurants, shops, local businesses and social care.

Hospitality, retail and social care are relatively low paid occupations and these workers need affordable homes. Many people are struggling with the cost of living and stuck in a cycle of in work poverty.

We are experiencing a housing crisis. Existing Government policies do not deliver housing that meets our social needs. While we understand the complexities and contradictions that are at the root of this problem, our ambition is to work with the Local Authority and strategic agencies to identify a process of co-production to bring forward housing that will accommodate all our generations.

Liveable Places : Moving Around

We now understand that over-dependence on car use has negative impacts on our health, environment and the climate, as well as our towns and cities but we need the right infrastructure and alternatives to change our habits.

The concept of Liveable Places where essential services can be accessed locally using active travel modes is attracting interest. It is known that this could improve wellbeing and reduces harmful emissions and other negative impacts.

While many people would like to walk and cycle more there are barriers to active travel. The recent Connecting Dunbar study has looked at these issues and identified possible ways to remove them and make walking, wheeling in all its forms a viable choice. The needs of people with impaired mobility is a particular concern.



Opportunities to rent and try different types of bike and Bike Buddy schemes are being developed.

Other improvements include more and better routes, improved signage and lighting, dropped kerbs, more cycle parking, and changes to road layouts that will increase safety for all users.

This is especially important for children and young people who want and need to be independent travellers.

Many children already walk or cycle to school and this experience can help to develop lifelong habits of active travel at an early age, but children and parents share high levels of anxiety about road use.

Liveable Places : Moving Around

The Dunbar and West Barns area is relatively flat and many places are within a short walk or cycle ride. The weather is also generally bright which can also encourage people to choose to leave the car at home.

There are however locations where people feel less safe and these have been identified in the survey work undertaken by the Connecting Dunbar project. The Belhaven Master Plan has identified issues affecting that area.

One of the main challenges is to create a safer environment on Spott Road and its side streets. These are already busy streets where road traffic is high and vehicles tend to dominate access.

The need to improve pedestrian and cycle approaches to ASDA and the Garden Centre has already been identified. Spott Road already carries heavy road traffic and future new developments at the Business Park will further increase traffic bringing additional danger from large construction and delivery vehicles entering the Business Park.



Increased traffic will also affect the environment for nearby residents and retail customers which will be impaired by an increase in noise and air pollution.

Accessibility

During our surveys accessibility came up regularly and the community proposes that an accessibility strategy should be devised. This should cover a wide breadth of issues including dropped kerbs and street furniture. Improved accessibility to a range of locations including beaches, green spaces and town centre must also be included.

Transport Links

Dunbar has a railway station and bus services that make connections across East Lothian, to Edinburgh, the Borders and Berwick. However feedback from the survey reflects that services across the local area are poor.

Liveable Places : Moving Around

The frequency, timing and routes of services and connections between bus and train services are poor and must be improved to encourage wider use of public transport especially for village residents. Neighbouring Community Councils also raise issues/details in their Local Place Plans.



The idea of a Transport Hub that creates a supported interchange at Dunbar Train Station is viewed with enthusiasm.

This should deliver additional parking for cars and bikes, bus and taxi pick up points. Improved access to the southern platform is critical as it will enable active travel and reduce car use.

Car use and parking issues

For some journeys, cars remain the most practical choice despite the problems associated with parking. Surveys and reports tell us that the problem appears most acute in the Town Centre and is a deterrent to using the High Street.

There are 385 available parking spaces that are not well known or used. Better signage could encourage people to access these parking spaces, all within a short walking distance of the Town Centre facilities

However these spaces may not be convenient for High Street residents and traders. Proposals to introduce charges on the High Street have been met with opposition by traders and drivers and would make conditions even more difficult for both shops and shoppers. In addition, free parking at the edge of town retail park creates an unfair competitive advantage for customers in cars.

Campervans are now more popular but the town lacks facilities for this type of tourism. Managers/owners of edge of town sites - East Links Family Park, West Barns Bowling Club, John Muir Country Park, could be contacted to explore opportunities to provide different levels of facilities but investment would be needed. Shore Road, Swimming Pool, Lauderdale car park car parks could also be considered.

Liveable Places

Social Activities in the Community

Our community is fortunate to have a number of groups, clubs and events that bring people together but teenagers and older people are less well served.

There are many opportunities for sports activities but the East Lothian Play Association Study found that 12 – 17 year olds would like more opportunities to simply 'hang out' together.

Not all young people wish to play organised sport or take part in physical activities. There is scope to engage with young people about their social needs to ensure we deliver what they want.

There are new proposals to build additional tracks for skating and wheeling. The edge of the community woodland is the chosen site for the new tracks but this will cause further erosion of the natural space and the potential to support biodiversity. Substantial resources will be required to manage and supervise the site but hopefully it will provide a positive focus for this age group.



The Space is another potential response to this need. It proposes a bold plan that will develop a multi-generational project for Action, Learning and Enterprise delivering a diverse range of high quality facilities powered by youth for the whole community.

Social purpose, economic self-reliance and environmental sustainability will be central to its vision.

This project is a strong response to needs identified in East Lothian Play Association Study but the currently proposed location is not ideal being situated on agricultural land and at the very south eastern edge of town. However given the lack of suitable alternatives then this site should be considered.

Liveable Places

Social Activities in the Community

Social isolation can be a real possibility for older people. Church, association membership or simply having grown up in this community were more likely to connect people in the past and provided social networks.

There are a number of community projects involving this age group that could attract more members with better publicity for their activities.

A community news output could benefit a range of projects and help to maximise the use of existing facilities such as the Bleachingfield and Hallhill Healthy Living Centres. The ourDunbar website has an up to date "What's On" listings that is well used.



Comment was made that the town lacks art related activities but once again better publicity would promote the music events, visual arts courses and exhibitions and performances that do take place.

With the closure of the Craft Centre on Spott Road the community has lost another important creative hub.

More arts classes at Hallhill and the Bleachingfield could compensate for this and increase daytime usage of these facilities.

Transport requirements for those attending should be considered.

The community is currently exploring the return of an annual Open Arts Week-end.



Liveable Places

Healthcare Provision

This Plan has been written and evolved in the shadow of severe local and national financial pressures - an expanding population and the cost of living crisis. Our survey data reflect these issues and finding solutions to complex problems is not straightforward.

Closure of Belhaven Hospital is a severe blow to those involved in care of vulnerable elderly people and those requiring respite or palliative care.

Local replication of these services is not possible and while some of these services have been transferred to Haddington even this relatively short journey can place additional stress on relatives at a very difficult time. Access to a car should not be presumed.

Identifying practical responses to the range needs created by the relocation should be explored.

However the community garden, which has already been shown to have such a positive impact on people's wellbeing, must be retained for its social, therapeutic and environmental benefits.

Access to dental care and other NHS services was identified as a problem but the roots of these problems lie within wider issues of Government policy and delivery.

The ability to influence strategic decision-making processes is crucial if we are to succeed in our purpose of ensuring we have the services we need to live healthy, productive lives.

However the foundation of our strategy is to build resilience by strengthening connections across the community to promote partnerships, conserving our resources and assets and having a realistic appraisal of our capacity and responsibilities



Productive Places : Economy and Tourism



Sustainable Tourism

The town's main attractions all have positive environmental features. Its setting between sea and hills provides a sense of wild open spaces and its main tourist attractions – East Links Family Park, John Muir Country Park, Foxlake Adventures, Coast to Coast Surf School, Winterfield and Dunbar golf courses all benefit from this and manage their sites and activities responsibly. The John Muir Birthplace Museum has a strong environmental ethos.

Initiatives to promote active and sustainable travel solutions should be considered in new proposals

Culture & creativity

Dunbar is a creative community and boasts a broad range of groups and activities led by people who give generously of their time and other resources.

Opportunities are created for and by musicians, visual artists, crafters and writers.

There is no focal point for these activities but a range of venues across the town benefit from this use.

Visitors are attracted to The John Muir Birthplace and Town House Museum & Galleries and events such as Dunbar Music and Stone Stacking Festivals, however promotion of the Town should place more emphasis on its cultural life.

Revitalisation of the town centre, East Beach and Harbour areas offers many opportunities for creative responses and involving artists and community in Public Art projects should be strongly encouraged.



Productive Places

Business and Employment

The Dunbar Business Park will undoubtedly create new jobs but while the range of new retailers will be welcomed there is understandable concern at the threat (competition) that this may bring to local businesses for loss of both trade and employees

The development has potential to meet the demand for co-working, start-up/incubator, industrial and business units.



Sustainable energy

The massive expansion of renewable energy infrastructure both on and off shore will make a significant impact on the landscape as hundreds of batteries are installed leading to loss of more agricultural land and disruption for residents close to these installations.

Large scale developments in the pipeline will impact on local communities and acknowledgement of this will come through community benefit schemes. Models of community ownership should also be explored and promoted through Government policy to extend community empowerment.

Local community groups and ELC Officers are working together to develop ambitious, locally co-ordinated projects to decarbonise and improve the energy efficiency of domestic heating systems.

Productive Places : Business and Employment

Renewable energy home upgrades could help to stimulate the local economy, however financial and planning barriers often prevent these being progressed. Opportunities include insulation, solar panels, uPVC window frames, double glazing and air source heat pumps. Removal of some planning barriers and more financial support would be welcome.

Local support for home renewable improvements is available through BeGreen (on the High Street) and Sustaining Dunbar is collaborating with local communities to identify ways to enable residents to carry out home energy efficiency measures.



Skills development is an important consideration in supporting young people and those wishing to return to work. Locally based opportunities are invaluable in managing this transition.



The Ridge currently offers some training in construction skills and would consider expansion of the range if schemes to support were available.

Developing the infrastructure associated with on and offshore installations will generate employment opportunities though it is not yet clear how this will affect the local job market and the skills that will be in demand. This information would be enormously valuable and help to identify training requirements to equip a local workforce.

Accommodation in the area will be under pressure with the arrival of the renewables workforce who will compete with tourists for availability. This development must be managed in the light of the housing and land use issues that have been identified.

Dunbar and West Barns In 2035

The Tipping Point

Respondents to our community consultation expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of life in the area but also significant concerns focused on the recent transformation of the area.

All the schools have been extended and now operate on a very different scale. Roads are busier and houses are now built out to the physical limits of the town and the agricultural green belt has disappeared. There is concern that the town's strong sense of identity and cohesion is being dissipated.

The incoming population has undoubtedly brought much appreciated new energy and vitality to the town.

Many come as young families and through their children forge new networks and connections but they still have links with families, friends and occupations in other places. This dynamic differs from traditional patterns of community and needs to be acknowledged and understood.

We wish to support our young people to stay and work in the area and older people to move on from their family homes and stay in our community.



For those with additional needs we want to ensure that they have homes adapted to different levels of physical capacity

Local Place Plans

The LPP is a way for the community to achieve change in their local area. It is a tool to stimulate ideas and conversations about how to make our “place” even better, agree priorities, and take action to make change happen.

It is more than just a plan: it can help the community understand how to develop and realise a vision for the future and work with the Local Authority and other partners to make positive change happen.

We all have a role to play in Community Planning even if we are not aware of it. The things we do and the choices we make on a daily basis all make a difference.

If we understand what makes Dunbar and West Barns such a special place then we can nurture and sustain these qualities. We hope that this Local Place Plan can be a catalyst for that process.

Dunbar and West Barns Local Place Plan Report 2025



With thanks to representatives from:
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