

COMMITTEE:	East Lothian Council
MEETING DATE:	28 April 2026
BY:	Depute Chief Executive – Resources and Economy
REPORT TITLE:	Infrastructure Strategy – Consultation Response
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval of East Lothian’s response to the Scottish Government consultation on the Infrastructure Strategy 2027-2037.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the draft response set out in Appendix 1.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Scottish Government published a draft Infrastructure Strategy and 10-year framework (2027 to 2037) to guide infrastructure planning, investment and delivery across Scotland on 13 January 2026.
- 3.2 Alongside this, the Scottish Government has published a consultation seeking views on a range of questions on the scope, priorities and governance principles set out within the strategy which will be used to shape the final version which is anticipated to be published in late 2026.
- 3.3 The Council owns, operates and enables a wide range of public infrastructure which supports our communities to access a wide range of services and systems that shape the foundations of our daily lives. Public infrastructure underpins many of the foundations we all rely on such as transport, housing, schools and wider community-based services, and ensures we have appropriate infrastructure assets which are aligned to longer-term vision, are vital to support economic growth,

communities to thrive, and underpin the delivery of national and local outcomes, and are also important to support the transition to net zero.

3.4 The draft strategy is set in the context of a 10-year focus and is informed by a 30-year national needs assessment focussed on three key enablers:

1. Public asset
2. Place-making
3. Private investment.

The ability to align strategic long-term planning with the scale and significance of public investment which is needed to support and underpin local infrastructure requirements both now and, in the future, will be an important determination of the deliverability and outcomes achieved through the national plan.

3.5 This Council has over recent years continued to receive updates setting out the scale of investment required to support current and future local infrastructure requirements. How we are using public infrastructure to support the way in which services and infrastructure assets are used within our communities continues to evolve and change particularly in the context of changing demographics and rapid population growth.

3.6 The Council is well placed to support and enable the delivery of public infrastructure and economic growth and key outcomes set out within the draft strategy. We support the principle of Infrastructure First and are already developing significant and critical plans that can and will unlock long-term strategic local, regional and national economic growth. Nevertheless, the Council is currently estimating that required infrastructure investment of over £2.6bn is needed to meet ongoing asset requirements. Given the fiscal challenges across the public sector and within this Council, balancing the realism and scale of the investment that is required to support existing public assets, alongside progressing with infrastructure opportunities that will support economic growth remains a significant challenge.

3.7 Furthermore, East Lothian's future public infrastructure needs must be planned and aligned with population growth and changing demographics. This requires consideration not only of capital investment in infrastructure, but also of the ongoing revenue costs associated with operating and maintaining these public assets.

3.8 The consultation seeks views on a wide range of questions and closes on 5 May 2026, and a proposed response from East Lothian Council is set out in **Appendix 1**. The consultation response reflects the challenges and opportunities faced by East Lothian Council and draws on practical experience of delivering, managing and planning public infrastructure within a constrained financial environment.

3.9 Alongside the consultation, officers are continuing to engage through professional networks and wider stakeholder forums to shape the development of the final Infrastructure Strategy.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The National Infrastructure Strategy will align national policy and infrastructure investment decisions over the next 10 years. Once approved, the Council will need to consider this alongside our local and regional strategic plans.

5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Finance: None
- 5.2 Human Resources: None
- 5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None
- 5.4 Risk: None

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	

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
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 – draft East Lothian Council Response to Infrastructure Strategy Consultation

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/consultation-infrastructure-strategy-2027-2037/>

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

Report Author(s)

Name	Tom Reid
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Date	13 April 2026

Head of Service Approval

Name	Sarah Fortune
Designation	Depute Chief Executive Resources and Economy (Chief Financial Officer)
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	Confirmed
Approval Date	13 April 2026

Scottish Government Consultation – Draft Infrastructure Strategy 2027 – 2037

East Lothian Council response

Role of Infrastructure Strategy

1. Do you agree with the scope and role of the Infrastructure Strategy?
 - a. *Yes. The strategy recognises the interdependencies across sectors and provides an appropriate framework for long-term planning and investment decisions.*

2. Do you think the proposed framework, linking the 30-year Needs Assessment, 10-year Infrastructure Strategy, Spending Reviews and annual Budgets will support improved strategic planning and delivery? Are there any further improvements you want to suggest?
 - a. *The overall framework is a positive step toward aligning long-term infrastructure needs with medium-term planning and short-term financial decision-making. The 10 year strategy needs to be fully underpinned by the 30-year Needs Assessment in particular is vital for understanding the scale of the challenge across national, regional, and local levels.*

 - b. *Whilst noting the intent to looking beyond political cycles, there is a need to align the strategy with longer term funding investment which support strategic long term joined up infrastructure investment plans and allows flexibility to support and deliver national, regional, and local infrastructure requirements.*

Infrastructure Governance Principles

3. Do any elements of the infrastructure lifecycle need to be strengthened to promote more effective infrastructure planning and delivery?
 - a. ***Investment Certainty and Long-Term Funding***
While the lifecycle model is robust, investment remains the critical enabler and the primary constraint on effective delivery. Local authorities are facing prolonged financial pressure, and infrastructure budgets have not kept pace with the scale of renewal, adaptation, and net-zero demands.

Long-term, multi-year funding commitments which allow for flexibility and creativity would significantly strengthen the early stages of the lifecycle—particularly options appraisal, prioritisation, and strategic design.

In addition, infrastructure investment cannot be looked at in isolation of the associated revenue budgets which are needed to support the wider running costs and on-going maintenance. There is a need to ensure that the infrastructure investment strategy remains aligned with revenue budget allocations.

b. Consistency of Asset Data and Condition Assessment

Local authorities vary significantly in capability, resources, and maturity of asset management systems. Strengthening lifecycle stages would require consistent national data standards; shared digital asset platforms and improved condition and performance data.

c. Capacity and Skills Across Local Authorities

Many local authorities lack specialised capacity in areas such as digital design, carbon modelling, and commercial contract management. Areas such as shared specialist resource pools, central support from SFT and the Scottish Government and common training pathways could be explored.

4. In what areas could changes to governance or planning processes across the public sector improve the impact of the investment hierarchy?

a. Stronger National–Regional–Local Alignment

Current governance arrangements often result in mismatched priorities between national strategy, regional frameworks, and local delivery. Introducing more structured alignment mechanisms particularly through Regional Economic Partnerships could support wider regional alignment.

b. Streamlined and More Predictable Approval Processes

Local authority projects often face delays due to complex or sequential approvals between councils, Scottish Government, and funding bodies. Governance reforms need to accelerate decision-making and better align with investment hierarchy principles.

c. Governance for Place-Based and Cross-Boundary Infrastructure

Infrastructure challenges particularly transport, digital, climate resilience, growth, housing and energy are not confined to local boundaries. Improving cross-boundary governance and planning will be required.

Infrastructure Themes and Enablers

5. Do you agree that enabling net zero and environmental sustainability, driving economic growth, and building resilient places continue to be the right outcomes to guide infrastructure investment over the next decade?
 - a. *Yes. However, these can only be achieved by consistent and long-term financial and regulatory support.*

6. Are the three proposed enablers, public assets, place-making and private investment, sufficient to deliver the Strategy's outcomes? Are there other enablers we should consider instead/additionally?
 - a. *The proposed enablers are important but need to be widened to include:*
 - *Long-term capital and revenue certainty to support multi-year planning for public infrastructure assets*
 - *Skills, technical capability and commercial capacity across local authorities.*
 - *Consistent digital infrastructure and data standards for asset management.*
 - *Regulatory alignment across planning, energy networks and procurement.*

7. What mechanisms or approaches should the Infrastructure Strategy adopt to ensure that critical cross-cutting priorities, such as housing delivery, regional economic development, and natural infrastructure are systematically embedded in investment planning and decision making?
 - a. *The Strategy should:*
 - *Require regional place-based joint investment plans that takes a holistic approach across all sectors (housing, transport, energy, etc)*
 - *Mandate early engagement with utilities and national agencies.*
 - *Align decisions with NPF4 and Regional Spatial Strategies.*
 - *Allow enhanced local / regional direction in the setting of future housing allocation targets which take cognisance of the on-going infrastructure and revenue requirements.*
 - *Housing and Economic development needs to be clearly mapped out geographically to ensure infrastructure plans at a regional level integrate with housing pipeline*

8. Are there any findings from the Scottish Future's Trust Needs Assessment (perhaps from drivers of change, cross-cutting themes or enablers) that we should more fully integrate into this 10-year Infrastructure Strategy?

- *There needs to a clearer focus on the scale and financial cost of asset renewal needed across local authorities, especially for roads, schools, health assets and flood infrastructure. There also needs to be clear understanding as to the opportunity cost and impact on outcomes of not investing in the essential public infrastructure.*
- *The interdependencies between sectors, particularly energy grid constraints affecting development.*
- *The urgency of climate adaptation, nature restoration and resilience.*
- *The impact of long-term revenue pressure on local authorities' ability to operate new or refurbished assets.*

Place Based Approach

9. Do you support the proposal that infrastructure investment is more directly driven by the priorities of places across Scotland?

a. Yes. Scotland's geographies—rural, island, urban and remote require differentiated approaches, and there is a need to ensure a place-based approach is adopted to address local needs and opportunities.

10. Are the proposed principles, national spatial priorities and place partnerships, the right ones to guide a place-based approach? Are there other principles we should consider?

a. Additional improvements include:

- i. Stronger regional coordination, particularly for cross-boundary assets.*
- ii. Clearer governance and accountability for place partnerships.*
- iii. Explicit alignment with NPF4, RSSs, and Regional Economic Strategies.*
- iv. A stronger emphasis on economic infrastructure, including transport and digital connectivity.*

11. Do you agree with the Scottish Government's proposal to empower communities to play a more active role in infrastructure decision making? What mechanisms would best support meaningful community involvement and help to maximise local social benefits?

a. Yes – community engagement is essential to support place-based infrastructure. This engagement must be supported and aligned to local communities, which may differ across the regions in Scotland. This could include:

- *Community design workshops and citizen panels.*
- *Clear, accessible digital engagement tools.*
- *Support for community anchor groups to participate effectively.*

12. Do you believe the current landscape of local and regional partnerships (e.g. Community Planning Partnerships, Regional Economic Partnerships, HubCos, Regional Adaptation Partnerships) provides an effective framework for delivering place-based infrastructure investment? Please explain your answer, including any suggestions for improvement of existing structures.

a. *In theory yes, but there is a need to develop this further to effectively support and maximise the opportunities for supporting place-based infrastructure investment.*

Challenges

- *Overlapping roles and unclear accountability.*
- *Availability and flexibility of resources, and national direction of funding which impact on flexibility to support fiscal investment priorities.*
- *Capacity and resources within public bodies to support and develop integrated investment plans*
- *Lack of co-ordination across public agencies.*
- *Lack of integration across housing, transport, health, energy and digital.*

Improvements

- *Simplify regional governance and clarification of roles.*
- *Develop integrated regional investment plans.*
- *Develop an investment appraisal that prioritises multiple outcomes such as the impact of housing supply, where regional growth reduces inequalities to ensure infrastructure priorities actively enable development to produce better outcomes (workforce skills should also align with this assessment)*
- *Alignment with national agencies and flexibility in funding streams deliver holistic and strategic plans.*
- *Expand shared services and expertise.*
- *Strengthen alignment with national spatial and economic priorities.*

Enabling Private Infrastructure

13. Are there additional sectors or opportunities that should be considered for strategic investment to support economic growth and maximise opportunities for longer-term growth?

a. *Yes. East Lothian and the wider South East of Scotland region has the opportunity to deliver significant economic growth with wide reaching local, regional and national opportunities. This includes:*

i. *Development of a new town at Blindwells with the opportunity to deliver up to 10,000 new homes.*

- ii. Development of a new innovation park aligned to the Edinburgh Innovation Centre at QMU.*
- iii. Development of a new cultural and arts hub in Musselburgh, with the opportunity to explore commercial alignment.*
- iv. The delivery of a new skills and innovation centre aligned to support green skills, technology and innovation in energy.*

b. More wider, investment in the following sectors must be prioritised to unlock and support longer term growth;

- i. Strategic energy-including grid infrastructure and connectivity, as well as wider net zero energy opportunities to support local heat and energy production including regional heat networks.*
- ii. Regional transport infrastructure in road and rail to enable model shift and connectivity and inward investment.*
- iii. Natural infrastructure including flood, coastal and nature restoration to support well-being, net zero, place and sustainability*

14. To make the most of the strategic opportunities in renewables, housing, and natural capital, what will the economy need from our infrastructure to grow and thrive up to 2037?

- i. A modernised, high-capacity energy network*
- ii. An Infrastructure first approach that unlocks housing, including; schools, transport, health, digital connectivity, utilities and community services, and on-going supported revenue running costs to support the running and on-going maintenance of these public infrastructure assets.*
- iii. Investment in natural infrastructure—coastal protection, flood management, peatland restoration, woodland expansion.*
- iv. High-quality digital and transport connectivity supporting innovation, skills mobility and economic growth.*
- v. Maximise and accelerate the delivery of affordable housing*