



National Planning Improvement

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

East Lothian Council



East Lothian NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

We are pleased to provide our first update of the East Lothian Planning Service Improvement Action Plan. This offers us an opportunity to highlight our achievements and show what progress has been made in terms of completing the actions. This update also identifies areas where some further work is needed for achieving our goals. During the preparation of this update, we met with our planning colleagues from Stirling Council, who are the East Lothian's Planning Service peer partner authority, to discuss our Improvement Action Plan. Of course, we are very grateful for their feedback and comments. Also, when preparing this update, we asked for comments from those who participated in the peer review in July 2024. We have received only two responses from the Key Agencies with no comments. Over the last year the Planning Service continued to enable progress towards the delivery of development on a number of major sites within East Lothian.

We remain one of the fastest growing areas in Scotland and this is reflected in the provision of record numbers of new homes being built in East Lothian. East Lothian Council has been taking a cross sectoral approach towards responding to the Housing Emergency. Private and Affordable housebuilding rates have been strong in recent years, although the delivery of planned affordable housing parcels of private sites has slowed in recent years due to well known Scottish Government funding challenges. Over 23% (850) of 3,644 homes built in East Lothian between April 2021 and March 2025 were affordable. At present the Council also has a healthy housing land supply pipeline of over 6,300 homes and is proposing to produce a Proposed Plan later in 2026, which will allocate further housing land. East Lothian is a very successful housing market and there are no sites which could be referred to as stalled at present.

A number of actions identify the use of new digital technology in LDP mapping, public engagement and information or data sharing. We have successfully used ArcGIS mapping tools during our LDP Evidence Report stage and are planning to utilise it through the proposed plan stage. However, we are keen to embrace new technologies in our day to day work and will continue with a horizon scanning of digital technologies that could support our engagement with stakeholders and local communities during the proposed LDP stage. Over a year ago, the Planning Service introduced regular collaboration sessions for all our staff and members of other services. These sessions often include CPD style presentations covering a wide array of topics delivered by members of the Planning Service as well as from other Services within the Council. I have recently started as Service Manager for Planning but am highly fortunate to have inherited such a high-quality service, delivered by an excellent team. We are looking forward to continue working together with partners and our local communities to ensure we continue to deliver a high achieving planning service and the most sustainable outcomes for East Lothian.

Graeme Marsden MRTPI, Chief Planning Officer



Introduction

The National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) was piloted incrementally in three separate cohorts throughout the 2024/25 financial year. This was to test a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities. The pilot aimed to test the new framework, to explore what works and what doesn't. This resulted in each planning authority producing an improvement action plan and performance assessment.

Each improvement action plan sets out:

- What the planning authority has agreed as its priority activities
- Whether these have short-, medium- or long-term timescales
- The owner of the actions
- The resources needed

[Link to action plan for 2023/24.](#)

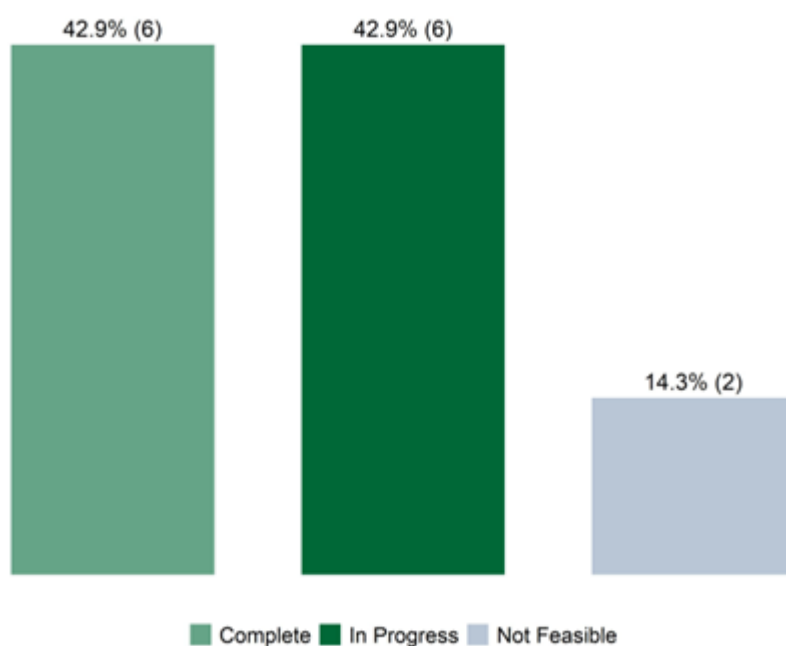
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress East Lothian has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.



Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

This section details each of the improvement actions and the progress the planning authority has made.

East Lothian has 14 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Start monthly collaboration sessions for all Members of the Planning Service, and look to involve external stakeholders in giving some of the presentations

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Completed and ongoing. Our regular collaborate sessions include presentations on a wide array of topics from members of the Planning Service as well as from other Services within the Council. These sessions proved to be very popular amongst the staff and will continue in 2026. It has been agreed to extend a range of topics and aim to invite external speakers who will provide a more specialised CPD style presentations.

In February 2026, the Mining Remediation Authority will be running a 2 hour CPD session, which will be highly relevant given the significant scale of development in the western half of East Lothian, where the former coalfield is located. Also planned is training from external solicitors on Public Local Inquiries, especially relevant as East Lothian officers are likely to be involved in 3 inquires over the next couple of years.



Action 2: Chief Planner to hold a training session with Business Service about the Scottish planning system and of the roles of the various teams within the Planning Service

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The Chief Planning Officer held a meeting with Business Services (formerly Planning and Building Standards had in team administration support) which focused on the Scottish planning system and the roles of the various teams within the Planning Service. As a result of this training session Business Services have a greater overall understanding of the national planning system and also know more about the specific teams and their roles within the Service.

Action 3: Consider implementing the ‘pre-validation service’ for planning applications

Not Feasible

This action was not feasible for the following reason: New Circular 2/2025, which provides guidance on the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 as amended (“the Regulations”), came into force in June this year. However, the Circular does not allow LPAs to implement a ‘pre-validation service’ for planning applications.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: As there is no provision in the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 for charging for implementing a pre-validation service for planning applications then this action should be deleted.

Action 4: Elected member training (including for specialist areas e.g. Battery Energy Storage)

In Progress

Progress against this action: Members training is being arranged but not yet completed. It is anticipated that this action will be completed by Spring 2026.

The following next steps are proposed: Preparations for this training are on-going. It is anticipated that this action will be completed by Spring 2026. Details will be confirmed by end of January 2026.



Action 5: Consider the use of new digital technology in LDP mapping

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

This action has been discussed, and it is considered that ArcGIS will be used as our main mapping tool for the next stage of the LDP preparation process. Using ArcGIS may require changes to our license agreement with ESRI as well as some internal and external training for members of the planning team. It is likely that our internal mapping tool Earthlight will continue to be used for creating mapping layers which, when required, will be transferred to ArcGIS. It is our intention to use ArcGIS option for creating StoryMaps and utilise it for public consultations.

Action 6: The Policy and Projects Team will seek to use an online platform that would allow wider access to the data from the Evidence Report and the next stages of the LDP

In Progress

Progress against this action: This action is closely linked to the one above. At this stage, it is considered that ArcGIS will be the best tool to use for sharing spatial data from the Evidence Report. In addition, all the Evidence Report and any supplementary information providing wider context to the spatial data will be available to access on the council website.

The following next steps are proposed: Include ArcGIS mapping on our Planning Service webpage with information about the LDP2 Evidence Report. Implementation: 1st Q of 2026.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Change the Action's timescale to medium term.

Action 7: Raise with HOPS and Scottish Government that circular 4/1998 (model Planning Conditions) should be revised and updated to consider NPF4 requirements

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The Chief Planning Officer raised this with the Scottish Government. The clarity on this and / or the revised Circular would help the Planning Service with application of planning conditions and possibly minimise the risk of a legal challenge.



Action 8: To support the Councils Information Governance team in the preparation of an Information Strategy

In Progress

Progress against this action: This support is ongoing, a meeting with the Information Governance team took place in September 2025 and a new Information Strategy is currently being prepared. A new Access to Information Policy, which addresses statutory information requests including FOI/EIRs has been recently published.

The following next steps are proposed: The Planning Service staff will contribute towards the preparation of the ELC Information Strategy.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Change the Action's timescale to medium term.

Action 9: Run a month-long customer and stakeholder survey to gauge satisfaction with the Planning Service

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The National Customer and Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey was advertised on the ELC website. The feedback received was generally negative and whilst we appreciate that surveys can form an important part of the service review process, we need to point out that the feedback was largely quantitative. We are still considering the most urgent service improvements that are required to overcome any of the concerns raised.

Action 10: To conduct a horizon scanning of digital technologies that could support our engagement with stakeholders and local communities during the proposed LDP stage

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Planning Service is engaged in on-going discussions with other services in the council about using digital technologies to facilitate engagement and public consultations.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue our discussions with other services and the coms team.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Change the Action's timescale to medium term.



Action 11: Run an Annual Developers Forum

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Planning Service is in the process of finalising the event that will take place in early February 2026.

The following next steps are proposed: This action has not been completed yet. It is proposed to keep this as an action but amend the timescale to medium term. The Planning Service continues to have regular discussions and meetings with Homes for Scotland as well as with individual developers and planning agents nevertheless it is considered that an Annual Developer Forum would be a helpful mechanism to further our understanding of the local and national issues relevant to the building industry. We are also planning to engage with developers during the Proposed LDP stage in the first half of 2026.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Change the Action's timescale to medium term.

Action 12: To issue a planning newsletter more frequently during the Proposed LDP stage

Not Feasible

This action was not feasible for the following reason: The Evidence Report and Gatecheck stage has been delayed. However, a Planning Newsletter providing update on the current stage of the LDP process and other planning matters was issued in January 2026.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Change the Action's timescale to medium term.

Action 13: Explore using tools such as the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes for the Proposed LDP

In Progress

Progress against this action: We have and will continue to use the Place Standard Tool during our engagement on the LDP2. The 20-minute neighbourhood principles are very closely linked to the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes (movement, space, resources, civic and stewardship) which are also aligned with the Six Qualities of Successful Places. These NPF4's Six Qualities of Successful Places together with the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes will be instrumental in the next stages of the LDP2 preparation.

The following next steps are proposed: We have and will continue to use the Place Standard Tool during our engagement on the LDP2.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Change the Action's timescale to medium term.



Action 14: Explore possible funding mechanisms sufficient to employ a planner dealing with energy related proposals, possibly for a temporary 2-year period

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

We have employed a part time position with an exclusive focus on energy applications. Person employed works remaining hours in planning officer role on non-energy applications.

Peer Collaborative Review Follow Up

As part of the pilot, each planning authority held a peer collaborative review workshop. This brought together key stakeholders and customers to discuss and provide constructive feedback on the improvement action plan.

Status of the peer review follow-up meeting: We have sent an email out updating on progress.

Additional information: During the preparation of this update we met with our planning colleagues from Stirling Council to discuss our Improvement Action Plan. We are very grateful for their feedback and comments. Also, we asked for comments from those who participated in the peer review in July 2024. We have received only two responses from the Key Agencies with no comments.

