

East Lothian

Open Space Strategy 2026

East Lothian's Strategic Vision for Community and Nature



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Contents

- **What our Open Space Strategy is**
- **What does it aim to do?** – vision and outcomes-driven
- **Why is it important?** – link to national & local policy context
- **Our OSS findings and baseline**
- **Our key proposals and priorities**
- **Delivery** – how we are delivering our strategy on the ground in & with our communities
- **Next steps and future goals**

East Lothian Open Space Strategy 2026

- Sets out a **10-year strategic framework (2026–2036)** for the development, enhancement and management of parks, greenspaces, sports pitches and other open spaces across East Lothian.
- It aims to:
- **Protect and enhance existing publicly accessible open spaces.**
- **Guide the provision of high-quality new open spaces.**
- **Address climate resilience, biodiversity, health and wellbeing, and social equity.**
- **Fulfil statutory obligations under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and inform the next Local Development Plan ('LDP2').**
- Our new strategy was **produced in-house** by ELC's Amenity Services, with Planning Service and input from officers across Council Service Areas including the 'Climate and Nature Emergency Group'





East Lothian's Parks and Open Spaces

- East Lothian's parks, greenspaces, open spaces, civic spaces and sports areas are the green hearts of our communities
- Function as fundamental spaces to benefit people's health and wellbeing, to tackle climate change, and to support and enhance nature.
- Form the character and setting of our towns and villages, provide places for outdoor play, sports and physical activity, social gathering, civic events, and local food growing, in the heart of our communities, and bring economic benefits to the area through tourism.

Our new strategy includes

- **Stronger standards** (quantity, quality, accessibility)
- **Equity focus**
- **Health & Wellbeing, Climate & Nature embedded in design approach**
- **Integrated green infrastructure**

The East Lothian Open Space Strategy includes:

- Assessment of the
 - **Quality**
 - **Quantity**, and
 - **Accessibility**

of open spaces across East Lothian's towns & villages

- **Mapping**
- **Updated Standards** for open space in East Lothian
- **Application of the open space standards** to different types of open space
- Findings from **public consultation & engagement**
- **Strategic management proposals** for open space & green infrastructure with outcomes-focused **Action Plan**
- **Guidance and expectation** for open space in **new developments**, to inform LDP2



Our Vision & Ambition set out in our Strategy

East Lothian Council will work collaboratively with our community partners to create greener, fairer, and healthier urban environments in East Lothian, improving the climate resilience of our places, enhancing spaces and networks for nature, enabling access for all to improved, safe and welcoming parks and green spaces, while building community wealth – benefiting people and nature alike for generations to come.

The Strategy aims to deliver outcomes based around three key interconnected and overarching themes, with community engagement & involvement at every stage:



National Drivers & Policy Context

Open Space as critical infrastructure

- Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 → requirement for an OSS
- Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023
- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4):
 - Climate mitigation & adaptation
 - Nature networks & biodiversity
 - 20-minute neighbourhoods
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045
- Scotland's National Framework Physical Activity for Health → active places and spaces
- UNCRC / UNCRPD → inclusive design



Local Alignment: Delivering Local Priorities for East Lothian



- Importance of parks, greenspaces & outdoor playspaces in tackling
 - Health, Wellbeing & Physical Activity
 - Climate Emergency – mitigation & adaptation
 - Nature Emergency – nature networks & access to nature
 - Ensuring equity so everyone benefits

Understanding Our Baseline: Open Space Audit 2024/25

- **462 open spaces audited across East Lothian**
- Publicly accessible
- Council owned/managed and privately owned/managed
- Within and on the edge of settlements
- Sites over 0.2 hectares in size, plus other smaller urban open spaces that have important functions locally
- All sites were mapped into GIS
- Total amount of open space in the Open Space Audit: **1,869.59 hectares**





The types of open space assessed & analysed:

- Green Networks
- Public Parks & Gardens
- Amenity Greenspace
- Civic Spaces
- Sports Areas / Sports Pitches
- Playspaces and Equipped Play Areas
- Allotments and Community Growing Spaces
- Cemeteries and Churchyards

East Lothian Open Space Audit: Scoring criteria for quality indicators:

- Access & Community
- Attractiveness / Place Appeal
- Biodiversity
- Functionality
- Community Benefits
- Tackling Climate Change (new category added for this updated OSS)
- 48 indicators per site in total

➡ **Identification of sites scoring lower**
➡ **Enabling targeted funding spend on these priority sites**



Quality scoring for each category:

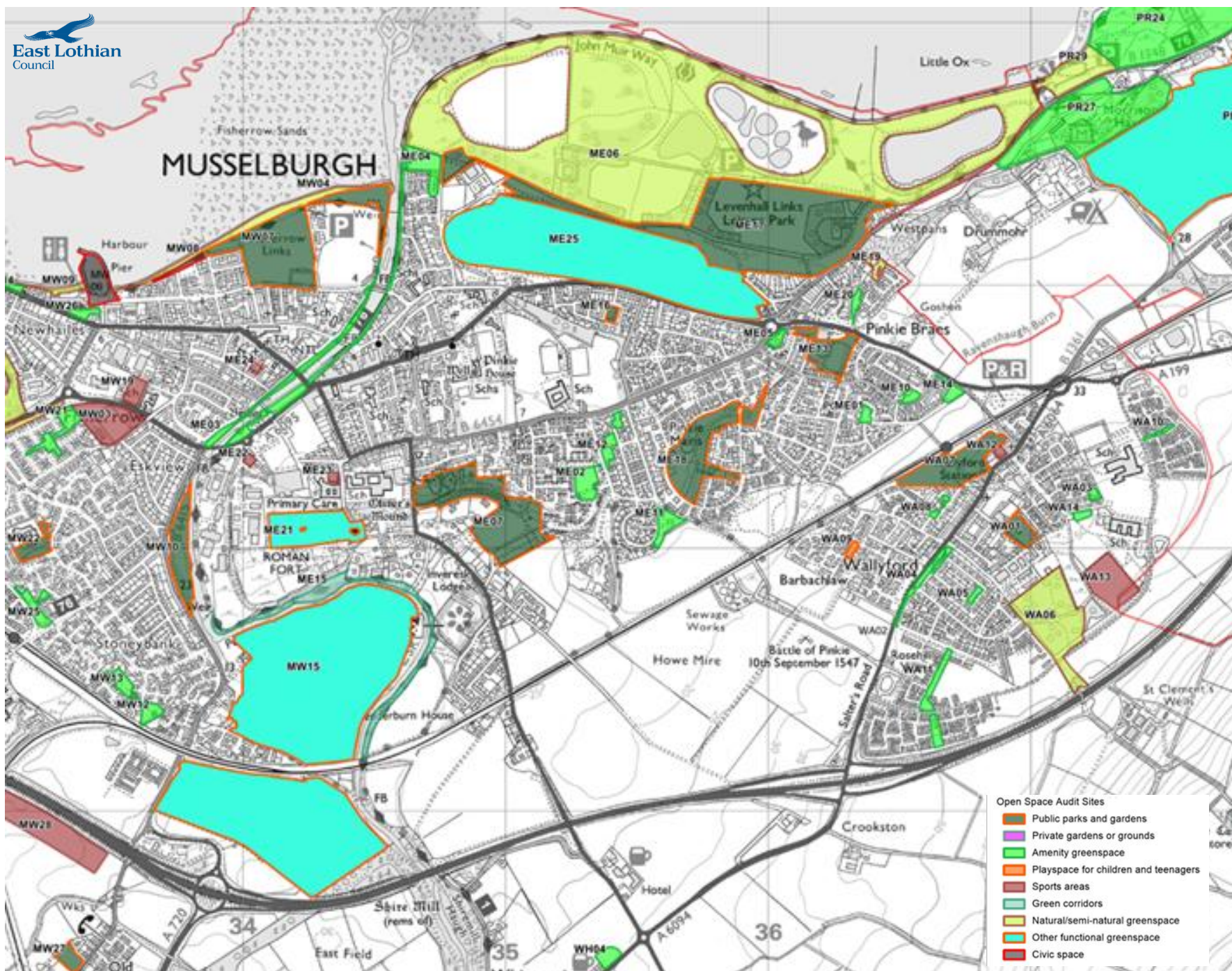
- Scores allocated of **0 to 5** (0 = 'not present' / lowest quality to 5 = highest quality)
- N/A = Not applicable to that site

Fitness for purpose quality scoring:

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E
Score of 75% or more	Score of 65 - 74%	Score of 55 - 64%	Score of 45 - 54%	Score of less than 45%
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Failing

Fit for purpose | Not fit for purpose

MUSSELBURGH



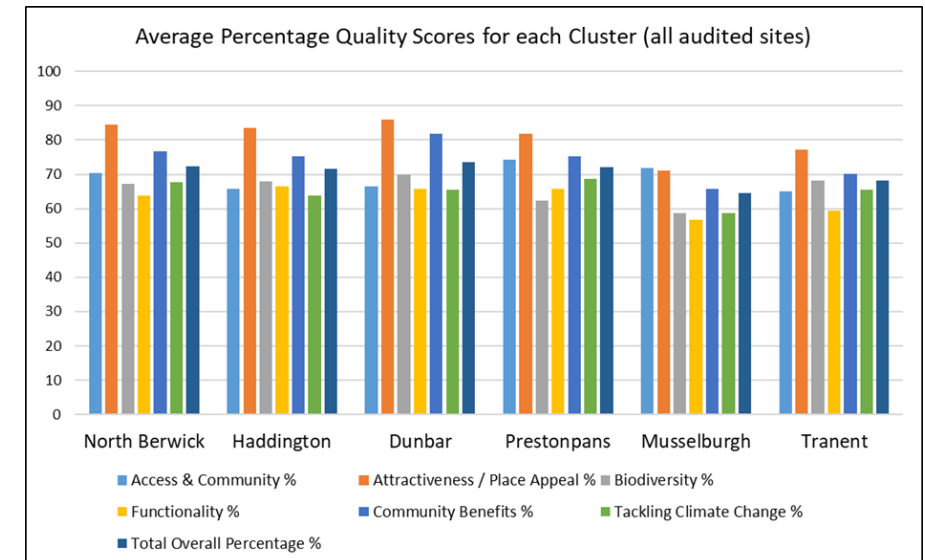
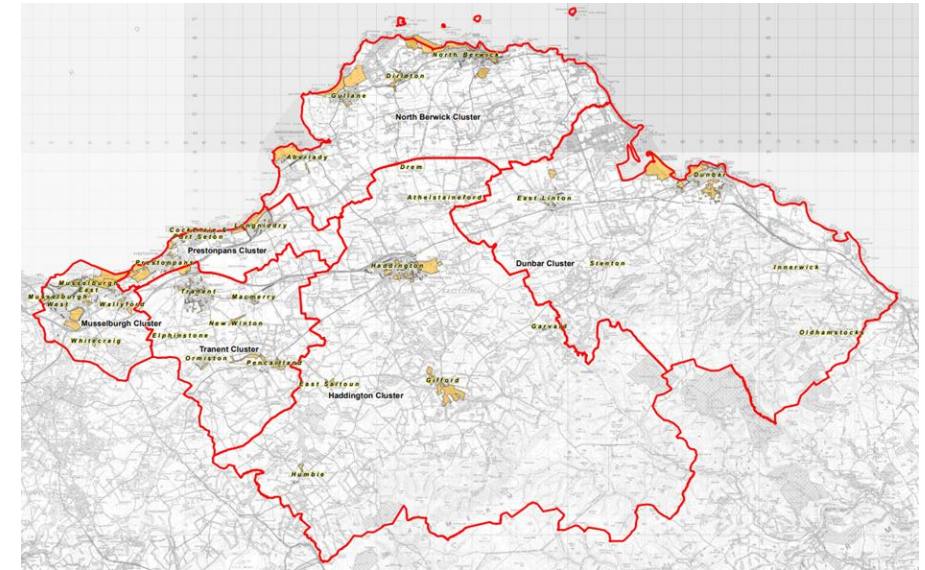
Findings of Open Space Audit:

categorisation & mapping of all open space sites in each settlement

- Across East Lothian as a whole, there is a good range and overall **quantity** of open spaces accessible to local residents
- All Cluster Areas met the minimum open space quantity standard of **at least 60m² per household**

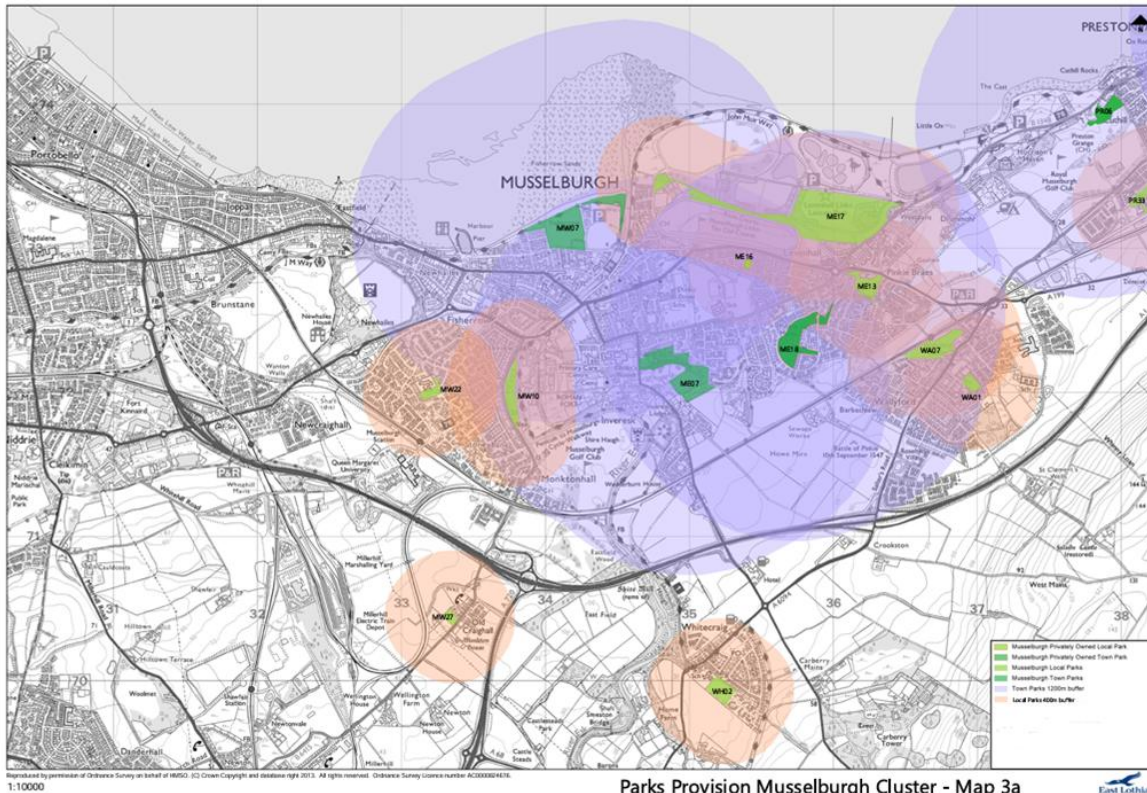
Results of assessments: Quality of Open Space

- Across East Lothian as a whole, there are **good quality** open spaces of all types
- The open spaces in all Cluster Areas meet the average Open Space Quality Standard of 55% and above and are 'fit for purpose' for each Cluster Area.
- The majority of Public Parks and Gardens meet the higher 'parks quality score standard' of 65%.
- Most meet the **new aspirational quality standards of 60% for amenity greenspaces and 70% for parks**
- Some sites are below the quality threshold: these are the **focus for targeting improvements**
 - Functionality and accessibility gaps exist – particularly seating and infrastructure for a range of abilities
 - Biodiversity enhancements are a focus area



Accessibility:

Distance threshold mapping and assessment through the Audit



East Lothian Open Space Accessibility Standard:

East Lothian Council sets an **accessibility standard** for open space that seeks to ensure all communities and settlements have access to:

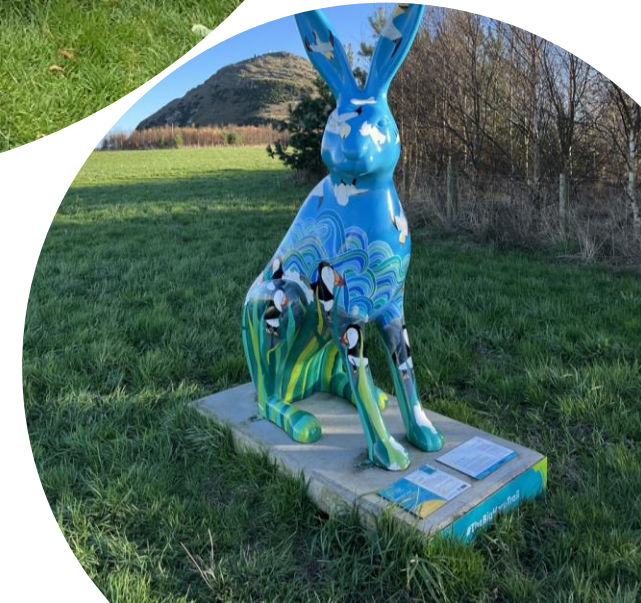
- Green Networks (semi-natural greenspaces, green corridors, other green space, countryside) within 300m
- Country Park (incl. non-designated country parks) within 10km
- A Town Park within 1.2km
- Local Park within 400m
- Regional Athletics facility within 36km
- Full Size Sports Pitch within 1.2km or within the Cluster Area as appropriate
- Either a Local Area of Play (LAP) within 240 metres, a Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) within 400 metres, or a Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP) within 800 metres

- Open spaces within and on the edge of settlements meet the accessibility standards across the majority of areas of East Lothian

Public Consultation & Engagement

Consultation to find out:

- Local communities generally agreed with our draft findings – new open spaces added in
- What they think makes a good park or greenspace to visit and use
- If they don't visit or use parks, why not?
- Targeted engagement with representatives of specific groups – including women's groups, and ethnic minority representative groups
- Community involvement in parks & greenspaces: 33% of respondents, including our national award-winning 'In Bloom' groups
 - The responses informed our strategy and are helping us to manage our existing open spaces, and help our future planning of open space with our communities



Health & Wellbeing at the heart of the Open Space Strategy

East Lothian Open Space Strategy 2026

Health & Wellbeing: Why It Matters

- Health & Wellbeing is one of the Strategy's three core themes.

The strategy recognises that

- Access to local, high-quality greenspace improves both physical and mental health and can help reduce health inequalities
- Parks and greenspaces are essential public health infrastructure
- Quality greenspace supports healthier, happier and more connected communities
- The strategy aims to reduce health inequalities through better access to quality open space.



Greenspace is now recognised not just as an amenity, but as vital public health infrastructure

Why Open Spaces Matter for Health

Benefits of Parks and Greenspaces recognised in our strategy

- Encourage walking, cycling, sport and physical activity.
- Improve mental wellbeing and reduce stress.
- Provide opportunities to relax and connect with nature.
- Reduce loneliness and social isolation.
- Support healthier lifestyles for all age groups.
- Create opportunities for outdoor play, outdoor learning and recreation.
- Opportunities for volunteering and participation.
- Green health and social prescribing initiatives.

Access to quality greenspace improves physical and mental health outcomes and supports a preventative approach to health.



Tackling Health Inequalities

- A major focus of our strategy is ensuring **equitable access to quality greenspace**.
- We worked with **NHS Lothian Partnership & Place team** on aspects of our strategy development.
- Access to greenspace is a social determinant of health.
- Benefits are greatest for disadvantaged communities.
- Our strategy recognises that access is not only about distance. Barriers identified through consultation & engagement can include:
 - Disability and mobility issues.
 - Safety concerns, particularly for women and girls.
 - Cultural exclusion and racism.
 - Lack of facilities or suitable paths.
- The strategy commits to:
 - Improving greenspace provision in deprived areas.
 - Prioritising investment where health inequalities are greatest.
 - Addressing barriers faced by specific groups.



- **Our vision is that everyone in East Lothian should have access to quality greenspace that supports healthy living and wellbeing.**
- **Our strategy recognises that open spaces must be safe, inclusive, welcoming and accessible so everyone can benefit.**

What Our Communities Told Us: Public Priorities for Public Parks & Greenspace Improvements and Enhancements in East Lothian

Priority	Parks & Greenspace Enhancement Option
1	Nature areas (such as wildflower areas, nature trails)
2	Trees
3	Open areas of grass for multi-use, informal recreation / enjoying the outdoors
4=	Seating
4=	Good paths and access routes
6	Landscaping including shrubs, hedges, planting, flowerbeds
7=	Play equipment
7=	Local food growing areas / allotments
9	Lighting along paths
10	Signage / information panels
11	Outdoor gym / exercise equipment
12	Artwork / sculpture or other focal point



Key Proposals & Priorities identified through our Open Space Strategy

for the development, maintenance and use of parks, open spaces and other green infrastructure in East Lothian, all with **community input & engagement**, and as funding permits:

- Protect and enhance existing parks and greenspaces
- Improve accessibility and active travel connections for all abilities
- Create safer, more welcoming spaces
- Expand nature networks and nature-based solutions
- Improve infrastructure and facilities for all ages and abilities, including seating and rest points
- Support outdoor play, sport and recreation, and community events
- Expand opportunities for community growing and volunteering
- Strengthen connections to nature and green networks
- Identify sustainable funding mechanisms to ensure deliverability
- Park Management Plans, co-produced with local communities
- Partnership working with communities, NHS Lothian and other organisations is central to delivery.



Connectivity to the next East Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP2)

East Lothian Open Space Strategy

- provides a strategic framework **to inform LDP2**
- contains **proposals / guiding principles**, including on
 - Minimum open space quantity and quality thresholds / requirements for new developments
 - Importance of green infrastructure connectivity
 - Phasing the delivery of open space
 - Principles / conditions for accepting off-site contributions

The LDP2

- will contain the **detailed policies** for implementation
 - The policies in LDP2 will be informed by the Open Space Strategy



Delivering our Open Space Strategy:

Multi-functional spaces for people and nature

Greenspace Delivery & Monitoring Working Group – key delivery colleagues across Council Service Areas, working with community representatives

- Improving usability & inclusion
- Working with communities
- Targeting inequality
- Climate-adapted spaces
- Enhancing nature networks
- New development standards – guidance for incorporating into LDP2 policies



Parks & Greenspace enhancement projects already underway through the Open Space Strategy: Infrastructure improvements

New benches and seating, including social seating, being installed across the county with community input & engagement



Cycle racks and other active travel improvements in parks – working with ELC Active Travel team in Roads Services

Paths & access improvements in parks, including in Tranent Crookston Willow Greenspace – funded by SEStran (South East of Scotland Regional Transport Partnership)

Community involvement, such as ‘Book Barn’, outdoor chess board and sensory trail installed in Lauderdale Park, Dunbar, with Community Council involvement & funding



Improving Accessibility & Inclusion and Hang-Out Spaces for Older Children and Teens

- Our East Lothian Play Sufficiency Assessment (2024) identified that our play spaces need to
 - be more inclusive for a range of abilities including disabilities
 - include more hang-out spaces for older children & teens
 - could incorporate '[Make Space for Girls](#)' principles
- Delivery of these aspects is underway
- Partnership working with East Lothian Play Association ('Choose Play') & communities
- External East Lothian Play Space Advisory Group now in place
- Recent example: Crookston Willow Greenspace in Tranent:
<https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/news/2026/new-play-area-opened-tranent>



New Pump Tracks, Skatepark and Pétanque pitch



- Pump Tracks installed around East Lothian including Ormiston, Dunbar and North Berwick

- Sportscotland article on the growing impact of pump tracks in East Lothian in getting people active:

<https://sportfirst.sportscotland.org.uk/articles/community-in-motion-the-growing-impact-of-pump-tracks>

- North Berwick Community Skatepark installed, led by local community group
- Community-led Pétanque pitch installed in Lauderdale Park, Dunbar





Community Gardens & Growing Spaces

- Community-led projects in Council parks & greenspaces
- Reflect local history & heritage
- 'Garden of Reflection', Polson Park, Tranent
- Prestonpans Community Garden
- 'Tranent Wombles' Forest Garden and Pollinator Parklet, Tranent

Delivering Nature Networks in East Lothian's Parks and Greenspaces

- Project funded in 2023 via Greenspace Scotland by the Scottish allocation of the Levelling Up Parks Fund provided to the Scottish Government by the UK Government
- **88% use East Lothian's parks and greenspaces to get outdoors and 75% use them to be close to nature.**
- **81% strongly agreed that they wanted to see more nature and biodiversity enhancement in East Lothian's parks and greenspaces.**

Top 5 habitat types

that respondents wanted to see more of in East Lothian parks and greenspaces:

- **Pollinator friendly planting**
- **Naturalised longer grassland**
- **Meadows**
- **Hedgerows**
- **Tree planting**

Nature Networks delivery has been underway in East Lothian parks and greenspaces since 2023





New ponds funded by Nature Restoration Funding from Scottish Government administered by NatureScot



Moving beyond “maintained grass” to nature-rich spaces

Key elements:

- 🌿 Nature networks
- 🌳 Tree planting & canopy expansion
- 🌸 Habitat creation
- 💧 Nature-based solutions
- 🌍 Multi-functional green infrastructure
- Spaces that deliver:
 - Biodiversity
 - Flood resilience
 - Health & wellbeing, recreation
 - Climate mitigation



Tree planting initiatives



In partnership with
Edinburgh & Lothians
Greenspace Trust



Open space / greenspace enhancement projects already underway through the Open Space Strategy

- **‘Greening the Grey’** projects delivered in ELC Housing areas:

BEFORE:



AFTER:



- **West Byres Cemetery:**
planting creeping plants around gravestones to reduce grass/weed growth – Amenity Services with ELC Countryside Rangers



- Path & active travel improvements in parks





Recently launched partnership project: Tranent Tree Town

- A community-led partnership project to plant 3000 trees/year for 3 years across Tranent
- Led by Natural Connections charity in Tranent in partnership with ELC
- Funding received from the Urban Forestry Challenge Fund from Future Woodlands Scotland (2026)
- To address Tree Equity by expanding urban tree canopy
- Expand East Lothian Climate Forest in our urban areas
- Pilot Tree Warden scheme in Tranent



Next Steps and Future Goals

- **Currently developing Park Management Plans / Management Statements – with our communities**
 - Based on Audit findings and community views / input
 - Focus on:
 - Quality
 - Biodiversity
 - Access for all
- **Community co-design and co-production**
- **Monitoring & Evaluation Framework**
- **Planning & Policy** – Embed into **Local Development Plan (LDP2)**
- **Develop new and blended funding mechanisms - combining**
 - Public investment
 - Developer contributions
 - Green finance and partnerships
 - Community benefits & Community Wealth Building
 - Open spaces as key economic & tourism assets





Thank you

Any Questions