

Topic Schedule	12. Rural Homes
Information required by the Act and NPF4 regarding the issue addressed in this section	<p>Town and Country Planning (Scotland) (Act) 1997, as amended:</p> <p>Section 15(5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the housing needs of the population of the area, including in particular, the needs of persons undertaking further and higher education, older people and disabled people; • the availability of land in the district for housing, including for older people and disabled people; • the desirability of allocating land for the purposes of resettlement; and • the extent to which there are rural areas within the district in relation to which there has been a substantial decline in population. Section 16(2)(ab) • in preparing the LDP the planning authority are to have regard to the list published under section 16E of persons seeking to acquire land in the authority's area for self-build housing. <p>Regulation 9 have regard to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any Local Housing Strategy which is required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, as amended, to be informed by an assessment of housing provision that is carried out by a HNDA. <p>National Planning Framework 4 (adopted 13 February 2023)</p> <p>NPF4 Policy 17 Rural Homes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDPs should be informed by an understanding of population change over time, locally specific needs and market circumstances in rural and island areas. • LDPs should set out tailored approaches to rural housing and where relevant include proposals for future population growth – including provision for small-scale housing such as crofts and woodland crofts and the appropriate resettlement of previously inhabited areas. The Scottish Government's 6 fold Urban Rural Classification 2020 (WLC 192) should be used to identify remote rural areas. Plans should reflect locally appropriate delivery approaches. Previously inhabited areas that are suitable for resettlement should be identified in the spatial strategy. <p>NPF4 Policy 29 Rural Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDPs should identify the characteristics of rural areas within the plan area, including the existing pattern of development, pressures, environmental assets, community priorities and economic needs of each area. The spatial

	<p>strategy should set out an appropriate approach to development in rural areas which reflects the identified characteristics. The Scottish Government’s 6 fold Urban Rural Classification 2020 (WLC 192) should be used to identify remote rural areas. Spatial strategies should support the sustainability and prosperity of rural communities and economies. Previously inhabited areas which are suitable for resettlement should be identified in the spatial strategy.</p> <p>The Scottish Government Local Development Planning Guidance (WLC 142) sets out;</p> <p>‘The information for the Evidence Report in relation to rural homes will be similar to the information outlined for the Quality Homes section above. Particular rural elements will relate to the consideration of areas where there has been a substantial decline in population and where there may be a desirability of allocating land for resettlement’. To prepare a plan that is informed by an understanding of population change over time, locally specific needs and market circumstances in rural areas, the Evidence Report can consider National Records of Scotland (NRS) data on population estimates.</p> <p>Previously inhabited areas which are suitable for resettlement should be identified in the spatial strategy.</p>
<p>Links to Evidence referenced in this Topic Schedule</p>	<p>WLC 042 Homes for Scotland: Briefing Paper – Barriers to housing delivery WLC 044 Diffley / Rettie Report on behalf of Homes for Scotland (HFS) Existing Housing Need in West Lothian WLC 067 Urban Rural Dashboard WLC 102 Scotland’s Census 2022 Rounded population estimates WLC 105 West Lothian ‘Lowland Crofting’ and farm diversification research project WLC 142 Scottish Government Local Development Planning Guidelines WLC 146 National Planning Framework 4 WLC 192 Urban Rural Classification 2020 WLC 342 Lowland Crofting handbook WLC 359 Report on ‘Lowland crofting’ planning policy to the Development and Transport Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel, 22 June 2022 WLC 362 West Lothian Self-build Housing Register WLC 375 Development in the Countryside, Supplementary Guidance</p>
<p>Summary of Evidence</p>	
<p>Purpose, scope and structure of this Topic Schedule</p> <p>This Topic Schedule focuses on Rural Homes.</p> <p>This section is structured in the following order:</p>	

- Part 1 - The Scottish Government 6-fold Urban Rural Classification 2020
- Part 2 - Current policy in LDP1
- Part 3 – Self build analysis

Part 1 - The Scottish Government 6-fold Urban Rural Classification 2020

- 1.1 The Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020 (**WLC 192**) provides a consistent way of defining urban and rural areas across Scotland. The classification is based upon two main criteria: (i) population, as defined by the National Records of Scotland (NRS), and (ii) accessibility, based on drive time analysis to differentiate between accessible and remote areas in Scotland. The classification is available in multiple forms, including a 6-fold classification which distinguishes between urban, rural, and remote areas through six categories.

Settlements can be grouped into the following categories:

- (1) Large Urban Areas - populations of 125,000 or more
- (2) Other Urban Areas - populations of 10,000 to 124,999
- (3) Small Towns - populations of 3,000 to 9,999
- (4) Rural Areas - populations less than 3,000

- 1.2 Accessibility is measured in terms of drive times to an urban area. This is done by calculating 30 and 60-minute drive times from the population weighted centroids of Settlements with a population of 10,000 or more (i.e. Large and Other Urban Areas). The results allow areas to be classified in terms of accessibility by the following categories:

- (1) Accessible - Areas within a 30-minute drive time of a Settlement with a population of 10,000 or more.
- (2) Remote - Areas that are more than a 30-minute drive time.

Table 43. Percent of population in each 6-fold Urban Rural category, by Local Authority.
Source: Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020 (**WLC 192**).

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Local Authority	Large Urban	Other Urban	Accessible Small Towns	Remote Small Towns	Accessible Rural	Remote Rural
Aberdeen City	96.3	0	2.1	0	1.5	0
Aberdeenshire	0	30.5	14.3	6.5	36.4	12.3
Angus	8.3	53.4	11.5	0	26.1	0.7
Argyll and Bute	0	17.7	4.3	30.4	4.4	43.2
Clackmannanshire	0	40.5	44.9	0	14.6	0
Dumfries and	0	29.8	20.1	5	25	20.1
Dundee City	99.1	0	0	0	0.9	0
East Ayrshire	0	42.2	29.3	0	22	6.4
East Dunbartonshire	59.8	27.5	7.5	0	5.2	0
East Lothian	22.7	39.9	12.2	0	25.2	0
East Renfrewshire	87.2	0	9	0	3.8	0
City of Edinburgh	96	2	1	0	1	0
Falkirk	0	89.7	1.9	0	8.4	0
Fife	0	64.1	17.7	0	18.2	0
Glasgow City	99.6	0	0	0	0.4	0
Highland	0	35.7	1.4	15.4	10.4	37
Inverclyde	0	85.2	9.6	0	5.1	0
Midlothian	0	76.3	12.3	0	11.4	0
Moray	0	26.2	26.9	4.8	32.6	9.5
Na h-Eileanan Siar	0	0	0	27.5	0	72.5
North Ayrshire	0	71.9	17.3	0	6.5	4.3
North Lanarkshire	38.8	48.4	4.2	0	8.6	0
Orkney Islands	0	0	0	33.5	0	66.5
Perth and Kinross	1.2	31.2	11	10.9	35	10.9
Renfrewshire	75.8	9.4	10.7	0	4.2	0
Scottish Borders	0	25.3	21.7	6	38.3	8.8
Shetland Islands	0	0	0	29.6	0	70.4
South Ayrshire	0	68.9	4.1	5.6	17.9	3.5
South Lanarkshire	19.2	59.4	11	0	8.7	1.6
Stirling	0	53.1	13.2	0	29.5	4.3
West Dunbartonshire	47.6	51.1	0	0	1.2	0
West Lothian	0	81.2	10.6	0	8.2	0
Scotland	37.8	33.9	8.6	2.6	11.6	5.5

1.3 The above table shows that the majority (81.2%) of West Lothian's population is located in other urban (settlements of 10,000 to 124,999 people). The next most popular category is accessible small towns (Settlements of 3,000 to 9,999 people, and within a 30-minute drive

time of a Settlement of 10,000 or more) where 10.6% of people in West Lothian reside. The third category is ‘accessible rural’ (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and within a 30-minute drive time of a Settlement of 10,000 or more), where 8.2% of West Lothian’s population reside.

- 1.4 No one resides in a large urban settlement (over 125,000 people), nor are located further than 30 minutes from a settlement of at least 10,000 people (remote areas).

Urban Rural Classification 2020

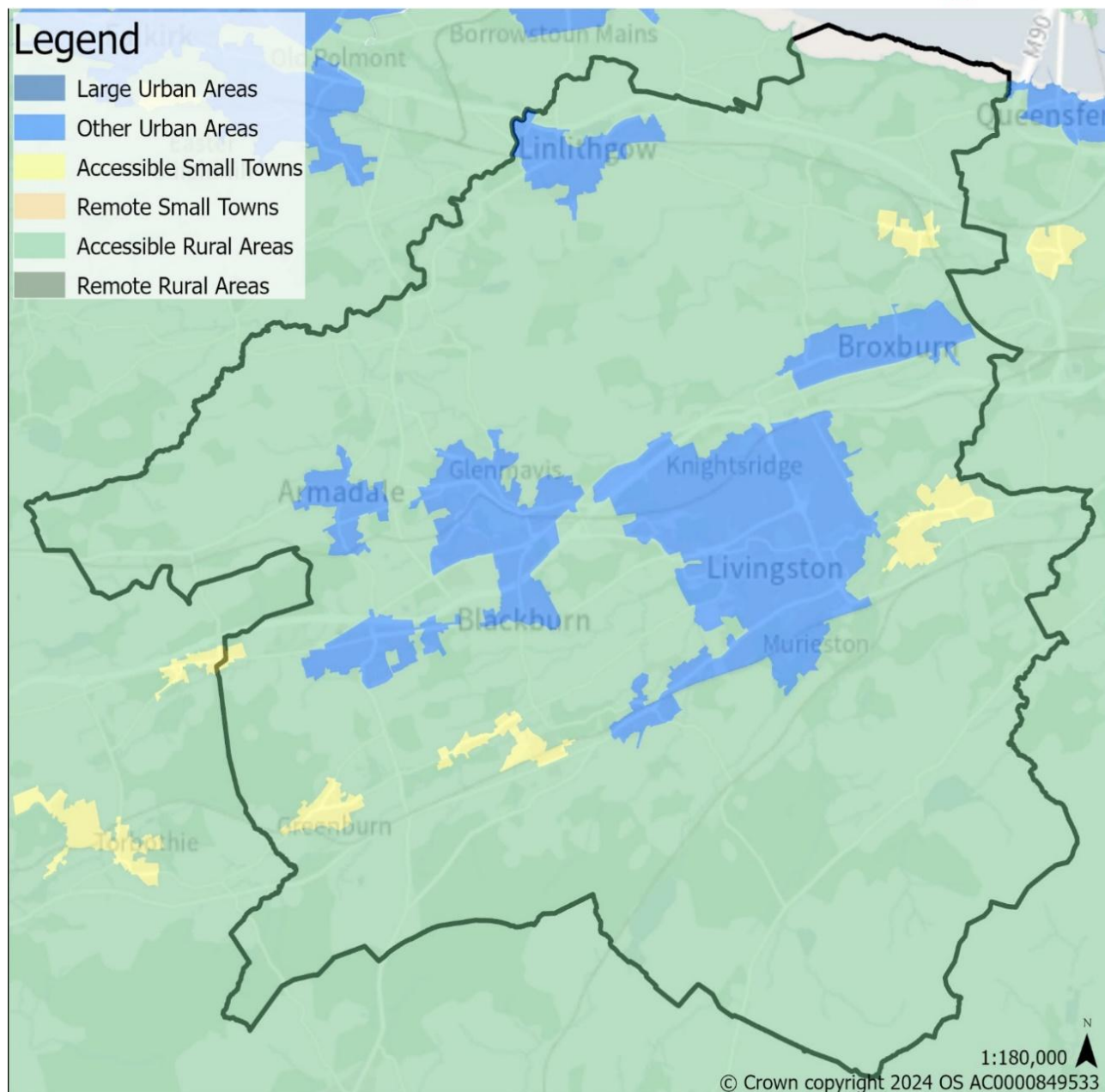


Figure 36. Map of West Lothian’s 6-fold urban rural classification.

- 1.5 NPF4 sets out that greater constraint will be applied in areas of pressure whilst in rural areas with fragile communities, a more enabling approach has been taken to support communities

to be sustainable and thrive. LDPs are required to set out an appropriate approach to development in areas of pressure and decline informed by an understanding of population change and settlement characteristics and how these have changed over time as well as an understanding of the local circumstances including housing and travel.

- 1.6 As can be seen from Figure 37, population decreases are concentrated in the West and South West of Scotland. Some areas of Scotland are expected to decline, the population of West Lothian is however projected to increase. Rural areas in West Lothian, due to their high accessibility and proximity to Edinburgh are areas of pressure.

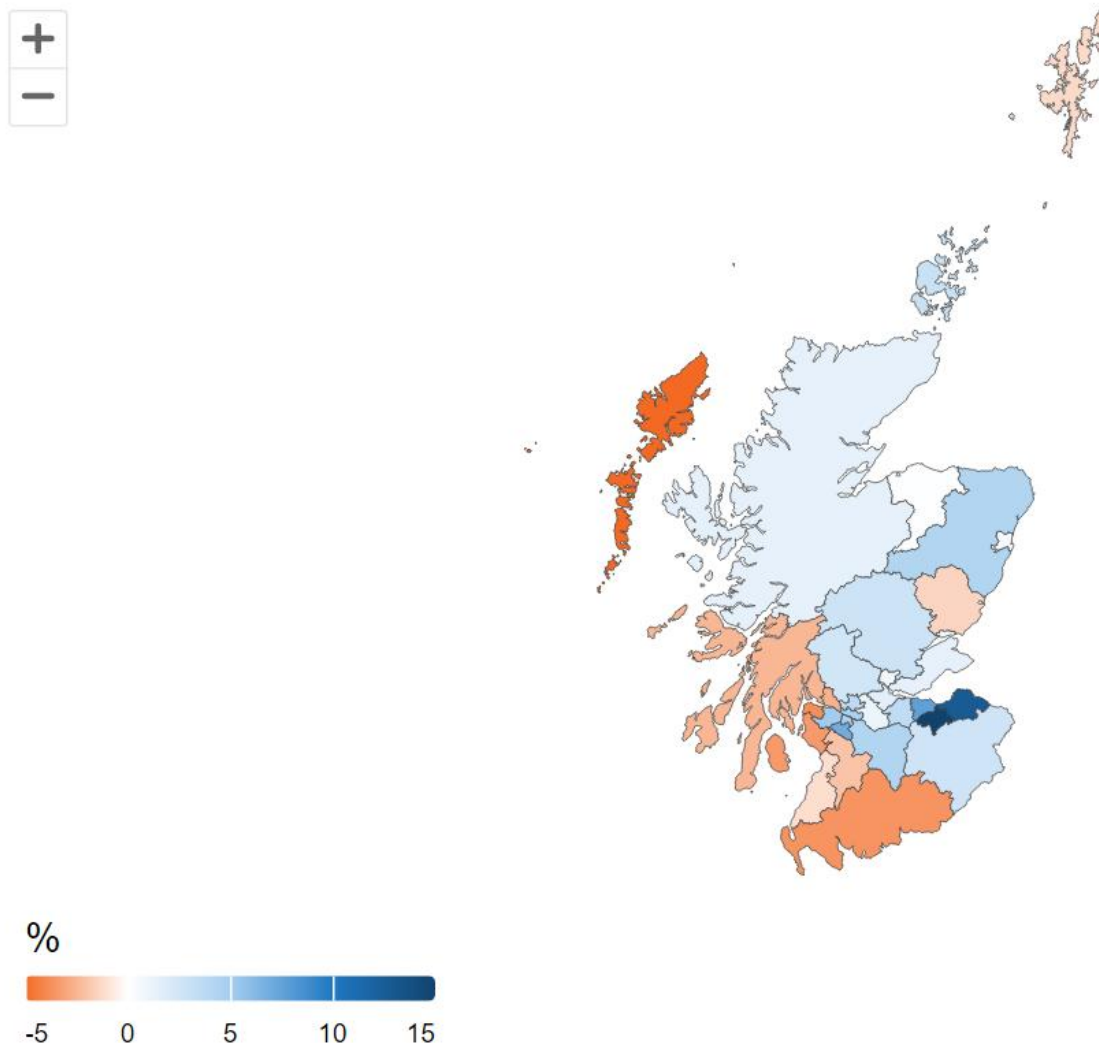


Figure 37. Population Change by Urban Rural Area 2011-2021. Source: Scotland's Census, 2022 Rounded Population Estimates (**WLC 102**).

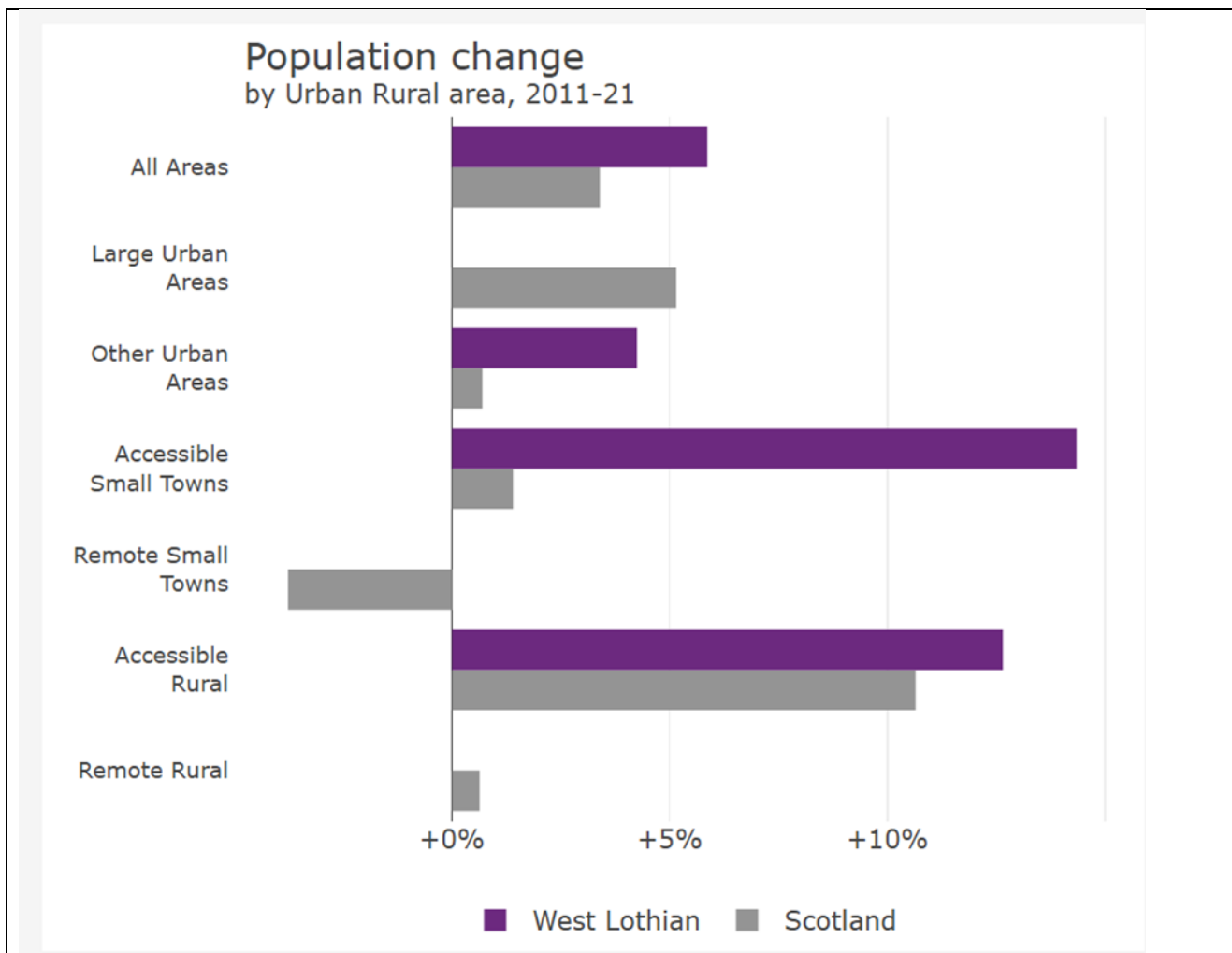


Figure 38. Population Change by Urban Rural Area 2011-2021. Source: Urban Rural Dashboard - National Records of Scotland (WLC 067).

1.7 West Lothian is not experiencing decline in its rural populations and as such does not consider rural population decline a significant issue. The current LDP policy on restricting rather than enabling homes in the countryside is considered to be appropriate. No previously inhabited areas that are suitable for resettlement have been identified.

Analysis of past completions and trends in rural areas or explanation of why not appropriate

1.8 It is not considered appropriate to include a detailed analysis of past completions and trends in rural areas. Rural housing delivery is typically characterised by small-scale, site-specific developments and windfall permissions, meaning past trends are not a reliable indicator of future capacity or policy effectiveness.

1.9 There is no specific requirement within Scottish Government Local Development Plan guidance to provide a rural-specific analysis of past completions as part of the Evidence Report. Recent Scottish Government advice on Evidence Reports and Gatecheck processes notes that past completions may serve as a useful benchmark but are not a measure of future need and

demand; this advice relates to the authority area as a whole rather than disaggregated rural areas.

- 1.10 Furthermore, Scottish Government Housing Land Audit guidance does not require completions data to be recorded or analysed separately for urban and rural areas. As such, the inclusion of a rural-specific completions analysis is not considered necessary or proportionate to informing the strategy set out in this topic paper.

Part 2 - Current policy in LDP1

- 2.1 The approach taken under LDP1 has sought to restrict development out with settlement boundaries unless specific criteria could be met. For housing this includes:
- Restoration of a brownfield site
 - replacement of an existing house in the countryside which is of a poor design or in a poor structural condition
 - Infill development
 - the proposal involves the conversion or rehabilitation of existing rural buildings
 - the proposal is supported by the council's lowland crofting policy.
- 2.2 The Council's Lowland Crofting policy (**WLC 342**) allows for very low-density rural housing and woodland development. The policy was formulated and adopted in the 1990's. The aim was to divide up poorer-quality farms to provide a small number of rural homesteads, and at the same time transform bleak areas into pleasant well-wooded landscapes.
- 2.3 The Lowland Crofting policy can be seen at odds to NPF4 namely, Policy 1 - significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises, reducing the need to travel by private car, local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods.
- 2.4 NPF4 Policy 17 (c) sets out the circumstances where development proposals for new homes in remote rural areas will be supported. West Lothian does not have any areas that are remote rural areas under the 6-fold urban rural classification (see Table 43), therefore the LDP2 will require to clarify that there are no remote rural areas in West Lothian and therefore NPF4 Policy 17 (c) will not be applicable in West Lothian.
- 2.5 Likewise, NPF4 Policy 17 (d) sets out development proposals for new homes that support the resettlement of previously inhabited areas will be supported where the proposal is in an area identified in the LDP as suitable for resettlement. There are no previously inhabited areas in West Lothian for LDP2 to identify for resettlement.
- 2.6 NPF4, Policy 17 (a) sets out the circumstances where new homes in rural areas will be supported. This is a wider set of circumstances than what LDP1 currently allows for.
- 2.7 The current LDP1 approach (including supplementary guidance on Development in the Countryside **WLC 375**) to rural housing has been successful in directing new housing to sustainable locations and restricting inappropriate development in the countryside. An

analysis to evaluate if the wider criteria set out by NPF4 Policy 17 (a) will lead to inappropriate development is an identified evidence gap.

- 2.8 A report was prepared by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), West Lothian 'Lowland Crofting' and farm diversification research project (**WLC 105**) and (**WLC 359**) under commission by West Lothian Council, to assess the impact of the Lowland Crofting Policy (LCP) on agricultural activity in the West of West Lothian throughout the duration of the scheme.
- 2.9 The LCP's aims have been to facilitate rural business and employment, provide higher-end housing, increase woodland cover and improve landscape in the West of West Lothian (WWL), as part of a wider strategy for rural development, and has been open to applications since 1990.
- 2.10 LDP1 target area was identified based on criteria for landscape enhancement and woodland planting, provision of rural housing, and poorer quality agricultural holdings. Within this 'Lowland Crofting area' 51 farms were marked as suitable for the scheme, of which 13 have participated between 1990 and the present day.
- 2.11 The last planning application for the scheme submitted in 2005 was approved in 2009, and there have been no new applications approved since. Across these 13 farms a total of 139 crofts have been built or have received planning permission for housing (with a small number still being built).
- 2.12 The report (**WLC 105**) examines reasons and barriers that have prevented the other eligible farms from using the LCP scheme. The workshop and interviews with stakeholders highlighted the complexity and time involved in diversification through the LCP, the main developer (New Lives, New Landscapes) going into abeyance, a change to public grants for woodland, high construction costs associated with quality rather than quantity of the houses and large average plot sizes (4 acres) has meant that no new lowland crofting schemes have come forward since 2009.
- 2.13 The report notes the outcomes of the LCP. These include the creation of 139 new high-end, large houses in the WWL, including at least 12 small businesses from these properties, as well as an estimated 304 hectares of new woodland in the area, with associated access. Although it is noted some public access has proved controversial.
- 2.14 Since its inception, planning policy has moved to direct development to the right location. This includes minimising the need to travel by private car. The policy is outdated, is not actively used and is contrary to NPF4 policies. It is therefore recommended that the policy is removed in LDP2.

Part 3- Self- Build Analysis

- 3.1 As of August 2024, there were 15 intimations of interest in self-build. These are recorded on the council's Self-Build Housing Register (**WLC 362**). Four of these specifically sought a rural location and a further three specifying the whole of West Lothian as a suitable location.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan
Based on the evidence the proposed plan will; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removal lowland crofting policy from LDP1.• Clarify that West Lothian do not have any remote rural areas, nor any areas of previously inhabited areas that are suitable for resettlement.
Summary of Stakeholder Engagement
To be updated post engagement in April 2026
Statements of Agreement / Dispute
To be updated post engagement in April 2026