

West Lothian Council Landscape Character Assessment 2026 Update

West Lothian Council

Draft report

Prepared by LUC

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1	Pilot LCT/ LCA profile and draft methodology	LUC	LUC	LUC	2 March 2026



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West Lothian Council Landscape Character Assessment

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Context

Background and purpose

1.1 LUC was commissioned in January 2026 to prepare an updated Landscape Character Assessment for West Lothian Council covering the local authority area.

1.2 This study updates the [2014 West Lothian Landscape Character Classification](#). The landscape character types and landscape character areas identified in the 2014 review have been reviewed and updated to reflect changes in the baseline. The methodology detailed in Chapter 2 highlights where the approach reflects guidance published since the original study.

1.3 The location of the study area for the 2026 West Lothian Landscape Character Assessment (i.e. the local authority boundary) is shown on [Figure X](#).

1.4 The purpose of the study is to undertake an updated local landscape character assessment of landscape within the West Lothian Council area. The assessment provides information to understand how West Lothian's landscape character may be conserved or enhanced, guiding development that responds to local character and the qualities of the landscape. It can help inform locational policies for strategic development as well as appropriate design and mitigation and providing baseline evidence for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

1.5 The character assessment also provides a framework for more detailed landscape studies, including reviews of Local Landscape Designations and Countryside Belt policy being undertaken in parallel.

1.6 Local landscape character assessment can inform both development management decisions and landscape management. This update was specifically commissioned to inform the preparation of the Council's next Local Development Plan (LDP2), reflecting the information planning authorities may wish to prepare, as outlined in the [Scottish Government's 2023 Local Development Plan Guidance](#).

1.7 Whilst change in the landscape is often a long-term process, land use pressures and the climate and the nature emergencies are accelerating the pace of landscape change, requiring periodic review of baseline data.

The role of Landscape Character Assessment

1.8 Landscape character is defined as:

“A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.”

(Source: [Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Agency’s 2002 Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland](#))

1.9 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It established the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management, and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The ELC remains relevant despite the UK’s departure from the EU.

1.10 The ELC definition of ‘landscape’ recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded, or outstanding:

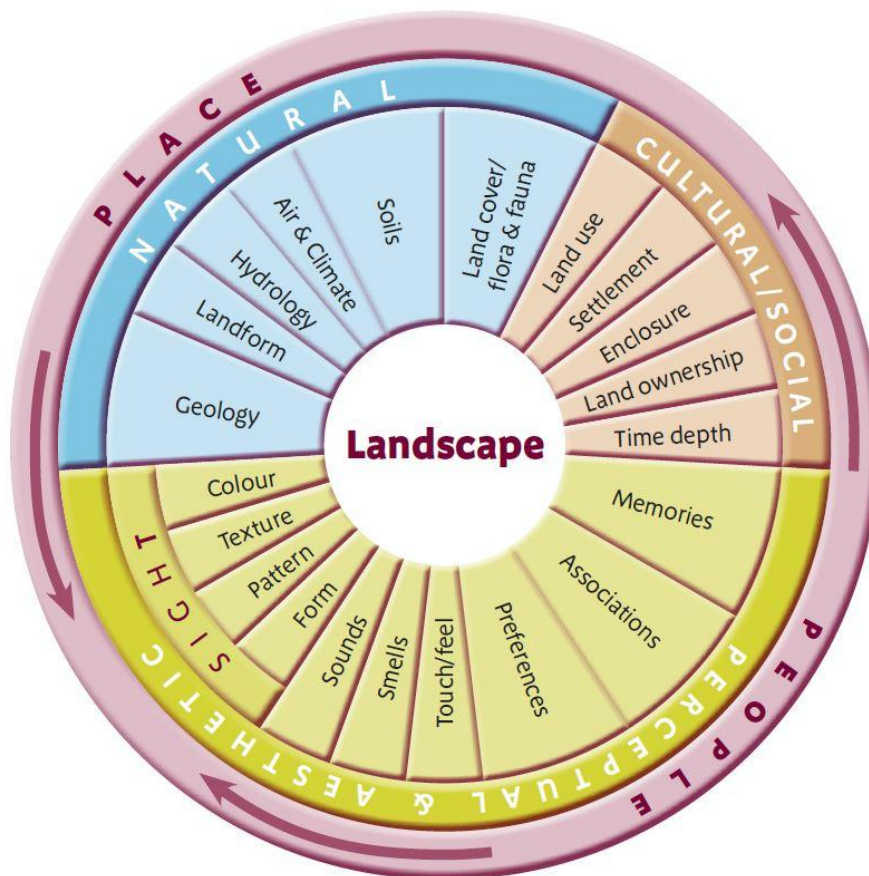
“Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”

1.11 Signing up to the ELC means that the UK is committed to protect, manage, and plan our landscapes for the future. The Convention also advocates work to raise landscape awareness, involvement and enjoyment amongst local and visiting communities. The ELC definition of landscape, quoted above, reinforces the underlying message that all landscapes matter.

1.12 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and place which gives an area a local identity. The ‘landscape wheel’ below (**Figure 1.1**) illustrates how the different natural, cultural, and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to influence the landscape character.

Figure 1.1: Landscape Influences (from 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (Natural England, 2014))

Figure 1: What is landscape?



1.13 The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (2002). [Updated guidance, An Approach to for Landscape Character Assessment](#), was published by Natural England in October 2014. The [Landscape Institute's 2016 Technical Information Note 08/2015: Landscape Character Assessment](#) confirmed that the previous (2002) guidance remains relevant to Landscape Character Assessment in Scotland, with the methodology and approach described by both versions of the guidance document being broadly similar. The 2014 guidance includes an additional section on updating landscape character assessment, which is of relevance as this study forms an update to the 2014 West Lothian Landscape Character Classification.

1.14 As such, the Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) is considered the primary source of guidance for this study, though reference is made to the 2014 guidance where relevant. Methodology is discussed further in **Chapter 2**.

1.15 Understanding the character of a place and evaluating an area’s defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably. It will ensure that the inherent character and qualities of the West Lothian landscape can continue to be appreciated. An understanding of character can be used to ensure that change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape, and can help guide positive change that conserves, enhances or restores local character.

Related studies

1.16 Assessment of landscape character can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail. The West Lothian Landscape Character Assessment is part of a hierarchy of landscape character information, cascading down from the national to the local level.

National Level

1.17 Landscape character across Scotland is described in the 2019 Landscape Character Type map and associated Landscape Character Type Descriptions published in [NatureScot’s 2019 Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions](#). These national level LCTs replace the previous regional landscape character assessment studies (as found on [NatureScot’s Landscape Character Assessment in Scotland webpage](#)). The national level LCTs in West Lothian are shown on **Figure X** and listed in **Appendix A**. These form the basis for the present study as described in Chapter 2.

1.18 Coastal character across Scotland is described by the thirteen Coastal Character Types (CCTs) identified by NatureScot (as found on [NatureScot’s Coastal Character Assessment webpage](#)). The coastline of West Lothian is located within Coastal Character Type 5: Developed Inner Firths. Key characteristics of this CCT include *“low rock platforms, small rocky headlands and raised beaches, often highly modified by settlement and communications”* (as defined in [NatureScot’s Description of Coastal character types](#)). The Forth is noted as a *“focus in views, the flat plane of light reflective water, although narrow, acting as a foil to land either side; the strong containment of hills direct views towards the water”*.

1.19 National datasets identify broad differences in landscape character at a wider scale. However, the national dataset does not reflect nuances in the landscape at a more local level. As advocated in the guidance mentioned above, landscape character assessment should be undertaken to a level of detail and scale appropriate to its use. A local landscape character assessment, as undertaken for this study, enables a greater level of detail that can help inform and guide appropriate development.

Adjoining Local Authorities

1.20 Landscape does not stop at administrative boundaries but continues into surrounding local authority areas. This assessment therefore sits alongside the Landscape Character Assessments of adjacent local authorities, which have been reviewed where available to inform this study.

1.21 Cross-boundary relationships, in terms of landscape features, have been noted in the study (e.g. ridgelines, watercourses or woodland features which continue into neighbouring local authorities), as well as intervisibility (e.g., views to landforms, landscape features, and notable landmarks within adjacent authorities).

Chapter 2

Methodology

Introduction

2.1 This Landscape Character Assessment follows the methods described in the 2002 and 2014 guidance discussed in Chapter 1, which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it.

Study Area and Scale

2.2 The study area for this updated Landscape Character Assessment is the same as that used for the 2014 Landscape Character Classification, i.e. the whole of the area within the West Lothian Council boundary.

2.3 1:25,000 scale was considered an appropriate scale of review for the LCT and LCA boundaries. This approach is aligned with best practice guidance.

Classification

2.4 Classification is concerned with dividing the landscape of the study area into areas of distinct, recognisable, and consistent common character, and grouping areas of similar character together.

2.5 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are broad landscape classifications defined by shared patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, human influences, and perceptual qualities, and can recur in multiple geographic locations.

2.6 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are unique geographical areas within an LCT. While they share the 'generic' characteristics associated with a given LCT, they will also have their own, more specific characteristics and identity.

2.7 It is important to note that boundaries between one LCT or LCA and the next are transitional in nature, and there is rarely a clear-cut change on the ground.

[Insert LCA/LCT map with names shown]

Process of Assessment

Data collection / collation

2.8 The initial desk-based stage involved the collation of a wide range of up-to-date mapped information to ‘sense-check’ the existing landscape classifications and to update the baseline. Designations relating to nature conservation (**Figure XX**) and cultural heritage (**Figure XX**) were checked for any substantive changes since the 2014 Landscape Character Classification.

2.9 Planning data and aerial imagery from the past 12 years was also reviewed to understand changes in the landscape. Data used within the study, including data collated in the GIS database, is shown in **Appendix C**.

Review of LCTs and LCAs

2.10 The LCTs and LCAs identified in the 2014 Landscape Character Classification were reviewed against changes to the current baseline. Amendments were made to reflect changes, and also in cases where it was felt a more logical approach could be taken.

2.11 In 2014, almost all settlements were excluded from the assessment. It is common to exclude large urban areas as the built-up character tends to override underlying landscape characteristics. This is not the case with smaller settlements which form features set within a surrounding landscape and thereby may contribute to the characteristics of that landscape.

2.12 On this basis, only the largest settlements, or groups of contiguous settlements, are excluded from the updated classification. This included the following settlements:

- Livingston, including the adjacent settlements of Pumpherston, Mid Calder, Polbeth and West Calder;
- Bathgate and Blackburn;
- Broxburn and Uphall;
- Armadale;
- Whitburn;
- Fauldhouse;

- East Calder;
- Winchburgh; and
- Linlithgow.

2.13 All other settlements are treated as part of the landscape character types and areas within which they are sited.

2.14 Planning data provided by West Lothian Council, including settlement boundaries and data pertaining to consented and built developments, was reviewed with reference to the existing LCAs. This enabled changes in the landscape to be identified which have occurred since the previous study, as well as consented developments which are likely to change the landscape in the near future.

2.15 Refer to **Appendix A** for more information regarding changes to the boundaries of the LCAs. The updated boundaries of the LCTs and LCAs are shown on **Figure XX**.

[insert nature conservation designations figure]

[insert historic environment designations figure]

Outputs

2.16 The process for undertaking the study has involved the following key stages, summarised below:

- Baseline data collection/ collation of mapped data in GIS;
- Review of landscape classification (see **Appendix A** for more information);
- Field survey from publicly accessible locations to check/ identify key characteristics, collecting aesthetic/ perceptual information, take photographs and observe forces for change within the landscape; and
- Draft and final reporting.

2.17 The Landscape Character Assessment is presented by Landscape Character Area (LCA), arranged by their respective Landscape Character Type (LCT), in **Chapter 3**.

2.18 Each LCT profile is structured as follows:

- Introduction to the LCT, including:
 - **Name of the LCT**
 - **List of the component LCAs** within the LCT;
 - **Representative photograph** of the LCT;
 - **Overarching Key Characteristics** of the LCT (not included for LCTs which only have a single LCA);
- Profile of each component LCA, including:
 - **Name of the LCA**
 - **Location and description** of the LCA;
 - **Representative photograph** of the LCA;
 - **Location map** illustrating the extent of the LCA;
 - **Key Characteristics**, providing a summary description of the character of the LCA in relation to:
 - Geology, hydrology and topography;
 - Land cover (vegetation, land use);
 - Land use;
 - Settlement pattern;

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- Key infrastructure;
- Historic features and cultural influences;
- Recreational use;
- Prominence/intervisibility and visual character; and
- Perceptual or experiential characteristics of the landscape.
- **Key Sensitivities and Valued Features of the LCA**, identifying the qualities that are particularly valued for their contribution to landscape character (i.e., if any one of these attributes ceased to exist, it would change the character to the detriment of the landscape). These could relate to important characteristics and are selected by considering:
 - Rarity;
 - Scenic Qualities (including prominence and intervisibility);
 - Enjoyment (including recreational use);
 - Cultural qualities; and
 - Naturalness and tranquillity.
- **The Changing Landscape of the LCT**, including:
 - **Forces for Change**, outlining existing and future development pressures which may alter landscape character within the LCT.
 - **Landscape Management Guidelines**, outlining recommended courses of action to maintain and improve landscape character within the LCT, in response to the forces for change identified.