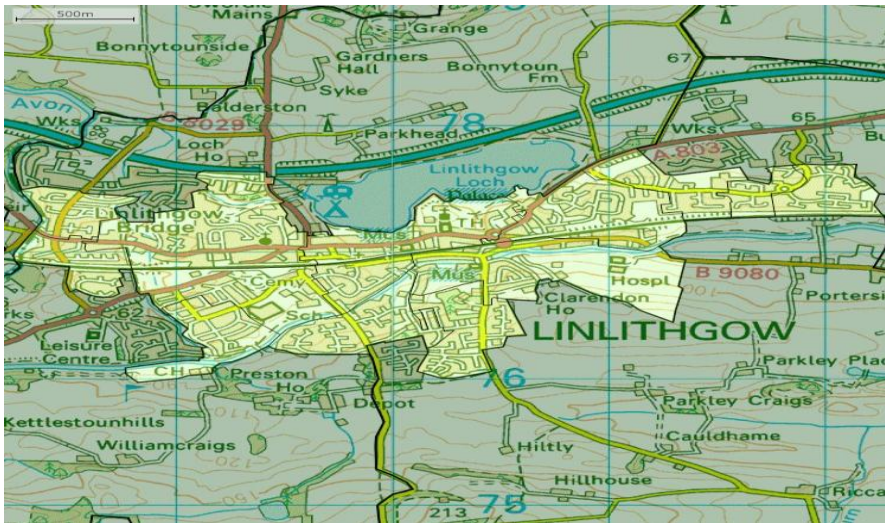


futurecitygame

Linlithgow Futures Game Linlithgow Dossier



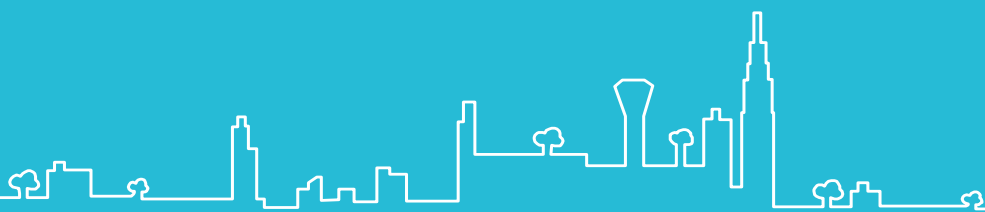
Introduction and overview

Linlithgow has been referred to as the ‘jewel in the crown of West Lothian’: a medieval town in the heart of central Scotland, and the former place of residence of the kings and queens of Scotland; an attractive place to live, work and play, which has grown from a small market town in the 1970s into a bustling commuter town, with easy access to the surrounding rail and road networks, and the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Stirling beyond; and is a tourist and visitor attraction of some note with fine historic buildings along the High Street, the Vennel and around the Cross, and Kirk Wynd leading to the Palace and St Michael’s Church, overlooking the ‘Peel’ and Linlithgow Loch.

However, it is much more than just a tourist and visitor attraction but also a living and breathing community of some 13,500 people (2009), with a wide range of facilities and community services, and a buoyant lively community, set within an attractive landscape and townscape.

However, it is also a town and community under significant pressure, which is experiencing numerous challenges, derived from the swift pace of development and population expansion, while being physically and topographically constrained by its narrow linear medieval road pattern, wedged between the Palace, Linlithgow Loch and the M9 motorway beyond to the north and the Glasgow to Edinburgh railway-line, the Millennium Link canal, and extensive established residential development and the hills to the south.

While viewed by others from outside the town as attractive, buoyant, and a great place to live, work, play, and visit, from the inside there is an awareness, that the pressures and challenges being experienced by the local community and population in general merit a careful assessment to ensure Linlithgow can continue to



be the best it can be, and have a clear picture of how as a community it can continue to sustainably prosper in the future.

Economy

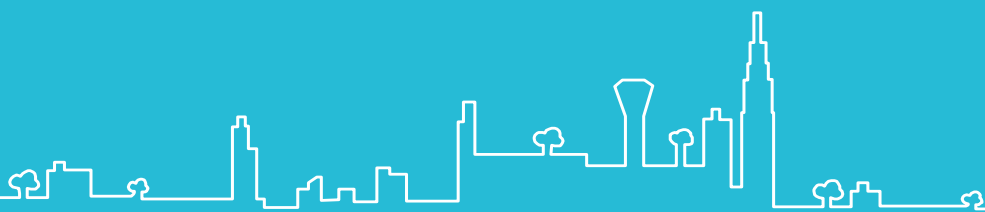
The town’s economy is a mixture of conventional indigenous **economic activity** together with largely seasonal tourism and visitor activity, the latter which has the potential to grow significantly. There are few major employers, with the exception of the public sector, and Sun Micro (the latter, which is undergoing corporate restructuring), and the majority of businesses are small to medium sized or ‘micro-businesses’. About 4,800 employees are based in the town, with the principal industry sectors being: real estate, renting and business activities (26.6%), the wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycle and personal and household goods (16.9%), manufacturing (14.1%), construction (10.0%), and hotels and restaurants (8.2%). Each of these sectors has a representation above the Scottish average.

In terms of **shopping and retail services** much of the space is focused around the High Street and the Regent Centre, with Stockbridge Retail Park and Sainsbury’s an alternative focus to the west at Linlithgow Bridge. The West Lothian Local Plan (2008) assessed Linlithgow: *“as having adequate convenience floorspace to meet the existing local need,”* referring to food shopping and other goods bought on a regular basis, including groceries, toiletries, and cleaning materials; while the West Lothian Retail Capacity Study (November 2008) also concluded that: *“there will be no retail capacity in Linlithgow due to its satisfactory current retention levels, the modest increase sought and lack of significant future housing allocations.”* Despite this, proposals continue to be made for new shopping space, the most recent of which being for a superstore development (and other uses) at Blackness Road to the north east of the town centre.

In terms of the ‘health and vitality’ of the town centre, shop occupancy figures¹ show Linlithgow to be the best performing of the area’s town centres, even during the current economic recession, and despite the evident impact that the new retail park at Stockbridge has had on town centre trading. Despite the obvious empty units being seen in the town centre these have generally swiftly been taken up by a variety of retailers or service providers, which shows the roller coaster nature of retailing at the current time, but also the continuing entrepreneurial spirit of the local business population.

Shop unit occupancy comparing July 2009 and July 2007 - expressed as percentage of total town centre shop units				
Town Centre	July 2009 (%)		July 2007 (%)	
	Overall occupancy	Charity shops	Overall occupancy	Charity shops
Armadale	91.2	0.0	91.2	0.0
Bathgate	93.0	0.0	94.2	3.3
Broxburn	85.8	0.8	95.2	0.1
Linlithgow	95.3	2.0	98.0	2.0
Whitburn	87.8	1.7	91.3	1.0
Almondvale	87.1	0.6	-	-

¹ www.westlothian.com/Home/wl_economy/facts_figures



Subsequent to these figures, Linlithgow has shown an improved position to October 2009² with 96.6% unit occupancy, last experienced in October 2007 prior to the start of the current economic recession, and better than the low point of 91.9% experienced in October 2008. However, difficulties continue to be experienced by the physical constraints of the town centre, with inadequate parking, difficult loading / unloading, and vehicle access. Further, the loss of public sector activities (the Sheriff Court and Procurator Fiscal's office etc) has removed 'footfall' and business from the local retail and other facilities, further exacerbating the current recessionary conditions.

Tourism is an important contributor to the economy, the town acting as a focus for visitors to its historic and heritage attractions, but also as a gateway to the surrounding hinterland. Data are not available specifically at a Linlithgow level but tourism does support some 3,600 jobs across West Lothian, attracted almost 1million visitors (over the 9month period to September 2008), and contributed c£140million to the district's economy in the same period.

At a local level the local tourist information centre's visitor numbers have held up well over the recession, as have those to other attractions including Blackness Castle, Linlithgow Canal Centre, and Beecraigs Country Park, while visitor numbers to the Palace³ have increased by +56% over July/August 2009 from 2008, the biggest increase of all visitor attractions over the last tourism season in Scotland.

However, thus far this tourism potential has not received the recognition from the authorities in terms of promotion of the town or area as the key tourism or visitor destination in the area that it might merit. However, to compensate for this deficit, private sector and voluntary organisations have done much to promote the town particularly through 'twinning' arrangements and an increasing groundswell of visitor business activity, yet much remains to be done.

Social

For Job Seekers Allowance claimant rates for the wards making up Linlithgow (incl Philipstoun) show very low levels of **unemployment**, ranging from 1.1% for Kingsfield (the lowest % in West Lothian), to 2.0% for Preston, rising to 2.9% for St Michael's. This compares with an average West Lothian figure of 4.3% (at June 2009), and a peak ward figure of 8.3% in Craigshill in Livingston.

Deprivation can be measured through a number of factors, and overall Linlithgow has no datazones in the 15% most deprived in Scotland. However, it does have one, Bridgend, in the 20% most deprived in Scotland. Bridgend is also in the most deprived 10% of datazones in Scotland within the education domain. However other than small concentrated pockets of deprivation, the Linlithgow population is not seen generally to be extensively affected by such factors. The following figures illustrate that Linlithgow has low levels of deprivation by income, health, and employment, shaded blue to the top centre of each of the maps.

² http://www.westlothian.com/Home/wl_economy/facts_figures/shop_occupancy/

³ <http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/scotlandsholidayindustry/39Staycation39--boost-for-.5629208.jp>

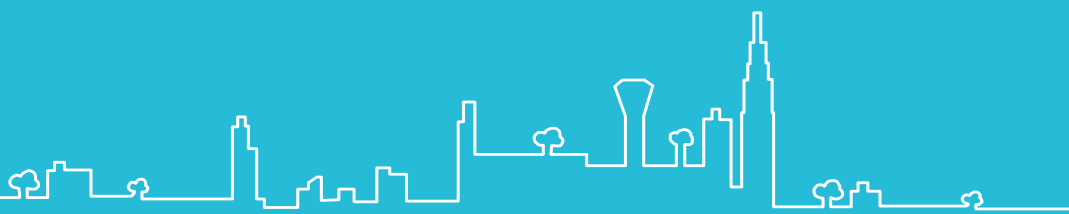


Figure 3.4: Income Deprivation

Source: Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics, 2006

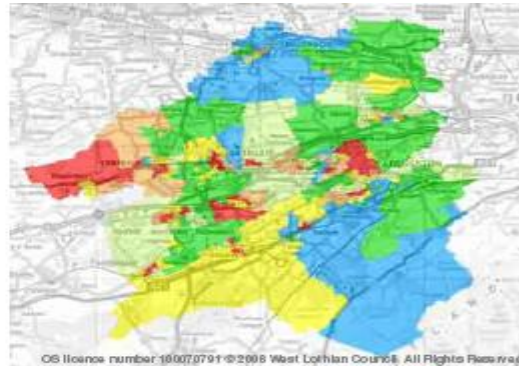


Figure 3.6: Health Deprivation

Source: Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics, 2006

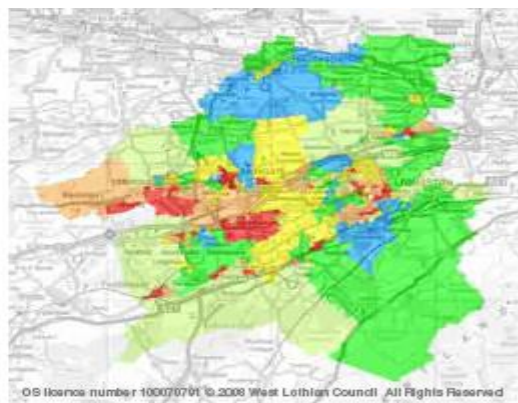
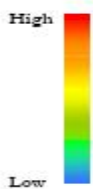
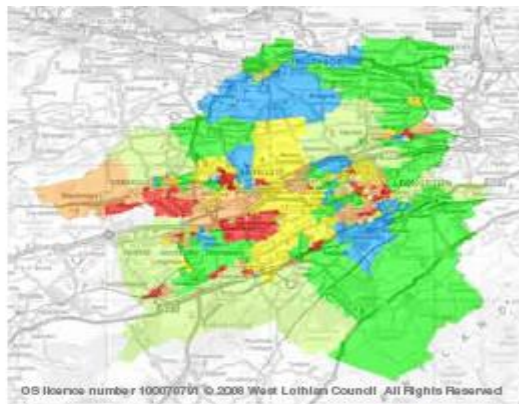


Figure 3.6: Health Deprivation

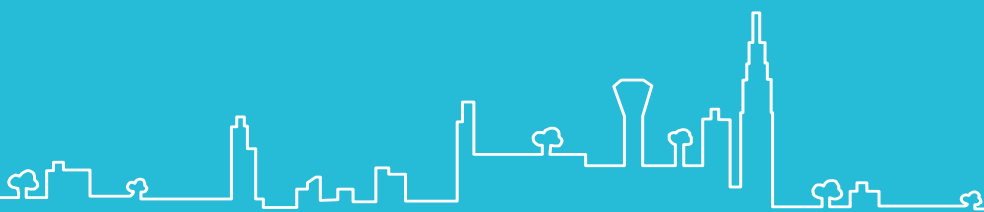
Source: Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics, 2006



Linlithgow is notable for the excellent **educational performance**⁴ particularly of its secondary school Linlithgow Academy and of its feeder primary schools. However, capacity of the Academy has been constrained over a number of years by lack of space and the popularity and attraction of the school due to its exam performance. Generally the Academy is always oversubscribed by requests from out-of-catchment parents, and over a number of years this issue has presented problems and has in part been addressed at least in the short term by expanding the school's capacity from about 1,200 to 1,300 pupils⁵. This restriction

⁴ <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishschoolsonline/>

⁵ http://www.linlithgowacademyparents.org.uk/media/Submission%2420to%2420WLC%2420June%242009_1.pdf



imposes constraints upon extensive further planned housing development, particularly of 'family' homes, and has led in turn to pressure on house prices in a constrained market. However, continued piecemeal and infill housing development within the town continues to exacerbate this problem

Thus, **house prices** remain buoyant and are holding up reasonably well, following declines from the peak of the market in 2008. However, Linlithgow continues to be part of the extended Edinburgh housing market, and is in turn affected by the high prices paid in the capital. Discussions with property agents and solicitors in the town suggest good well located properties continue to sell fairly swiftly with little signs of price deflation, while the 'froth' of excessive premium prices being paid through the 'offers over' system has rather been replaced by more reasonable prices using the 'offers in the region of' system instead. Nevertheless, lack of affordability continues to be an ongoing issue particularly for 1st time buyers in or those attracted to the town. The continued lack of **new supply of affordable or social housing** in the town also particularly leads to difficulties in finding appropriate accommodation for the less affluent members of the community.

Cultural

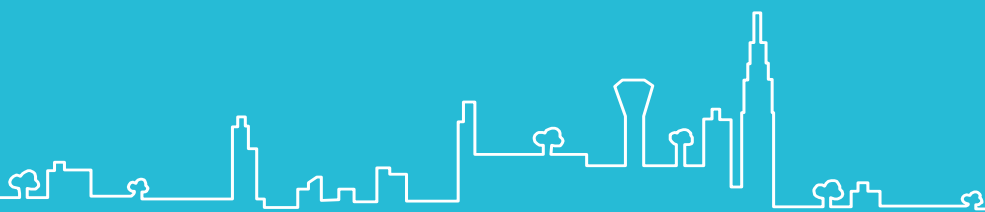
Linlithgow has a strong sense of identity, particularly in its long established historic past and heritage. This identity is reflected in the extensive range of **cultural events and festivals** staged in Linlithgow, the principal ones including among others being the Marches, Civic Festival, Childrens Gala Day, Celebrate Linlithgow, Linlithgow Folk Festival, Linlithgow Book Festival, Advent Fair, Scotch Hop, and Linlithgow has both Cittaslow and Fairtrade town status. It has a multitude of active community groups too numerous to set out fully here but these include Lithca Lore, Linlithgow Players, Linlithgow Union Canal Society, Linlithgow Jazz Club, music groups, sports clubs, and other clubs and societies for all age groups and all parts of the community.

Due to this bustling activity, venues for the hosting of events are always in short supply in the town, with Linlithgow Academy, the Low Port Centre, the various primary schools, the new Donaldson's School, and the various sports clubs providing such facilities. A major boost to the cultural life of the town is also likely to be provided by the refurbished and remodeled **Burgh Halls building**, which is due to reopen as a multi-purpose arts venue for community use in the Spring of 2010, and potentially also the redevelopment of the Victoria Halls, which is currently a 'work in progress'.

Environment

The town has an active environmental network through the local Linlithgow Climate Challenge (LCC) group, which recently undertook⁶ a survey of public attitudes to **climate change** and actions in Linlithgow, highlighting the perceptions of a sample of the community. This highlighted a number of issues including that: *"On an individual level, residents seem enthusiastic to save energy, insulate their homes, to waste less and to buy local food and produce. However there's less enthusiasm in flying less, driving less, or installing*

⁶ A Survey of Public Attitudes to Climate Change and Actions in Linlithgow: LCC (January 2009) - <http://www.linlithgowclimatechallenge.org.uk/>



renewables. Growing local food also rates lower, and there is some interest in Green Energy provision.” There are also “good rates of commitment to recycle paper, cardboard and plastics, with glass and tins less in comparison. When asked for individual comments on what prevents you recycling more, a high percentage of replies were focused on the loss of glass recycling points to the east of the town, and a lack of facilities for those living in flats. Quite a few comments were also around the confusion of what can and cannot be recycled.”

Data on **recycling** in the town show that in terms of street-side domestic collections 44.6% of waste was recycled in 2008-2009, and in terms of recycling centres, some 62% on average was recycled over the same period; or 46.8% overall. This compares reasonably well against the average for other local authority areas in Scotland⁷ of 39% but significantly less than the best performing authority of Clackmannanshire at 51.2%, but also demonstrates that much more can still be achieved, particularly in the context of tougher landfill targets in the future and a ‘zero waste’ society.

In addition, in terms of **consumption of energy** domestic consumers in Linlithgow were on average (2007) 106% for electricity and 105% for gas compared to West Lothian domestic consumers as a whole, and have shown little variation over the period 2005-2007.

Equally, LCC’s estimate of the **CO2 footprint** of the town shows that the community’s global footprint is 5.1 ha/person, which is greatly in excess of the average – i.e. the population is living as if there were 3+ planets worth of resources to consume, compared to the global average of 1.7 if it were shared equally.

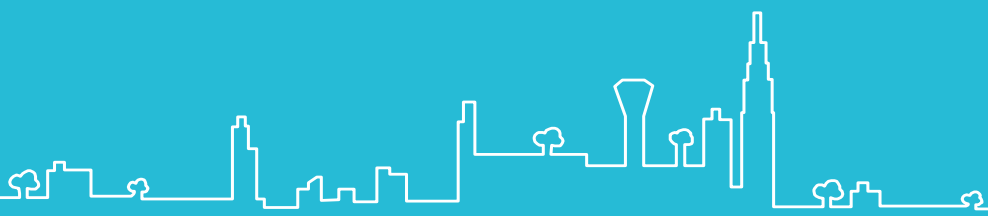
What this demonstrates is the awareness of the community of environmental issues and imperatives, and also the potential for savings, which offers a useful base upon which Linlithgow can develop sustainably as part of a forward vision for the town.

The town centre and much of its surroundings have Conservation Area status and is the only one in West Lothian designated as ‘outstanding’ by the Scottish Government. Further afield the Linlithgow is located within Areas of Great Landscape Value, which form the landscape setting for the town. While the town possesses this **rich townscape and building heritage**, the quality of the environment and public realm leaves something to be desired, as much through the traffic congestion and difficulties in car parking and access experienced on the High Street as from the condition of street and pavement surfaces. However, while there is no sign of funding assistance or action for the co-ordinated improvement in the fabric of the buildings, improvements by West Lothian Council are intended imminently in the streetscape and public realm in the High Street through Town Centre Regeneration funding.

The heritage community in the town has questioned the thrust of the existing Local Plan in terms of its vision for the future and has set out concisely the issues and challenges experienced by the town in the Civic Trust’s Vision for Linlithgow 2005-2015,⁸ together with their views on how such challenges might be resolved.

⁷ http://www.sepa.org.uk/waste/waste_data/waste_data_reports/landfill_allowance_scheme.aspx

⁸ Linlithgow Civic Trust - http://www.lct.org.uk/docs_pix_2006/vision.pdf



Access + Movement

Vehicular access, traffic movement, congestion, and car-parking are key issues in the town and there is much debate as to how these might be addressed ranging from creating a four-way junction at Burghmuir junction on the M9 motorway, through town centre bypasses, to commuter and shopper car-parking, and railway station relocation. Suffice to say this is possibly one of the most contentious if not intractable challenges for the town, and arises in any discussion or debate. Whatever is the solution(s) to a complex series of problems, to be able to resolve some of these inherent problems would greatly improve the operation of the town, its environment and its enjoyment by both the local community and visitors alike.

What does this mean for Linlithgow?

The town and its community compared to the West Lothian and Scottish averages on most indicators performs well and in general can be seen to be well-skilled, well-educated, mainly productively employed, affluent, buoyant, and is generally a pleasant accessible place to live, work and play. The community has a strong sense of identity, a rich range of cultural and artistic activities available to it, and grass-roots based community activities are extensive; while it's set in a reasonably high quality environment.

However, its very attractiveness induces pressure for more development, a further increase in population and greater pressure on the infrastructure, facilities and services which sustain it, and generate congestion, traffic and air and other pollution; while the constraints on available property, facilities and space add to such pressures and drive up the value of both land and property. This represents a key issue in terms of what might be the future strategy for the town's development – potentially unsustainable constraint or sustainable and master-planned expansion?

A further key issue is the level of commuting in / out of the town for employment, shopping and other activities, which is very much characteristic of a small town within the hinterland of a major city. While this creates pressures from rail station access and commuter parking, which must be dealt with, other considerations include how the spending of these households can be brought to bear for the benefit of local services is a challenge, and also how can commuting households' involvement in local community activities be encouraged?

Finally with a town and community under pressure as Linlithgow is, the key question must be how can the future of the town be shown to be environmentally sustainable, respecting and sustaining the very qualities that make the town such a pleasant place to live? It cannot be that current wellbeing and buoyancy is a reason for neglect or assumption that such generally positive conditions will continue in the future. Hence a decisive vision, strategy and action plan for the future is essential to ensure that what those outside the town see as positives are equally experienced by the community and population at large.