



APRS
The Association for the
Protection of Rural Scotland

PLANNING BILL STAGE 1 DEBATE

29 MAY 2018

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Stronger Protection for Green Belts

Our response to the Planning Review preceding the Planning Bill called on the Scottish Government to give stronger protection to Green Belts. We propose that the Bill should require local authorities to publish a register of brownfield land in their areas and that Green Belt land should not be released while land on that register remains undeveloped. Also, local Councils should use their Local Development Plans to give stronger protection to Green Belts.

Scotland's Green Belts

Scotland's eleven Green Belts are a precious resource of national importance. They protect and enhance the landscape setting of the towns and cities they surround, and help to direct growth into appropriate locations within settlements. They provide access to the countryside for people living in towns and cities, often those in deprived areas with limited access to open space. However, the integrity of our Green Belts is seriously threatened, primarily for housing development which should mostly take place on brownfield land. The Scottish Government and local Councils should give stronger protection to Green Belts and should promote their positive management for landscape and recreation.

Public Support for Green Belts

The term "Green Belt" is well-understood and popular with the general public; it is a well-known brand whose purposes and benefits are clearly understood by most people. In a poll of Scottish residents carried out for APRS by Survation in June 2017, 74.6% of those who expressed an opinion agreed that "All Green Belt land in Scotland should have stronger protection from building development".

Green Belts Under Threat

For many years national Green Belt policy has guided development to the most appropriate locations, whilst protecting the rural character of the landscape settings of towns and preventing them from merging. However, the Scottish Government's strong promotion of growth, including through the National Planning Framework, increasingly cascades down through the planning system, to the detriment in many places of both the environment and the quality of life of local communities. Community groups in and around Scotland's Green Belts report serious concerns about significant losses to Green Belts and the need for their stronger protection by the planning system. Substantial developments are proposed within Green Belts around Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, St Andrews and Stirling. The Scottish Government has recently approved major developments in the Edinburgh and Stirling Green Belts, in both cases overturning decisions to refuse them by the local planning authorities, Midlothian Council and Stirling Council.

Benefits of Green Belts

Green Belts provide many important benefits to the quality of life and health and well-being of society in addition to their planning purposes. They often include important designations for the protection of landscape, nature conservation, informal outdoor recreation and cultural heritage as well as containing significant areas of prime agricultural land, needed for home-grown food production. The purposes of Green Belts remain as valid now as ever; they are an important quality of life investment for future generations and deserve stronger protection.

An Equal Right of Appeal

The planning system is the principal means by which communities can promote the protection of landscapes they value. However, developers have the right to appeal against the refusal of planning permission, whereas communities affected by a development have no such right to appeal against its approval. This creates a fundamentally unfair system biased in favour of developers. This has regular adverse consequences for valued landscapes and leads to disillusionment by the local communities involved. The Scottish Government's own research clearly demonstrates that there is a significant lack of public confidence in planning.

The single most important step which the Bill could take to achieve a fair and open planning system that works well for local communities would therefore be to introduce an equal right of appeal for communities. Such an equal right of appeal could be limited in various ways to discourage excessive use. For example, it could apply only to recognised national or local groups, to objectors to the original application and to proposals contrary to the local development plan. We therefore continue to support the introduction of an equal right of appeal in the planning system, which would improve decision-making by substantially increasing public confidence in the system and would support the Scottish Government's aspiration to achieve a Fairer Scotland.

Cairngorms National Park Authority

The CNPA currently has full development planning powers but only a call-in procedure in relation to development management. This is confusing for all concerned including local authorities, developers, local communities and the CNPA itself. The Planning Bill should correct this anomaly to bring the CNPA into line with the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority.

APRS

APRS is the charity which promotes the care of **all** of Scotland's rural landscapes. We campaign with others for better national landscape and planning policies. We advise our members and others how best to protect the local landscapes which they value as the settings for their lives.

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