



**APRS**  
The Association for the  
Protection of Rural Scotland

## Parliamentary Briefing

### The Climate Emergency – The Role of Scotland’s Rural Landscapes

Our landscapes have a key role to play in tackling the climate emergency and nature crisis. They are central to many of the likely changes which will result from climate change itself and from the actions we must take to tackle it. Taking an overall landscape view enables an integrated approach to the climate emergency to take place. We need to protect carbon stores in our soils, woodlands and seas, and to enhance their ability to remove and store carbon. This means for example restoring our globally significant peatlands, regenerating native woodlands and preventing building on precious Green Belt soils when nearby brownfield sites are available. Natural capital and rewilding projects are under way across rural Scotland, supported by substantial private and public investment in carbon sequestration and nature restoration; rapid landscape change is likely as a result over the next few years. We need to support people in local communities to use less energy to heat their homes through better insulation and draughtproofing, through retrofitting older properties and zero-carbon standards for new ones. We need to generate more renewable electricity, but in a carefully planned way, so we do not unnecessarily sacrifice beautiful scenery or valuable habitats for the sake of more and more generating capacity.

#### What is Landscape?

“Landscape is the relationship between people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives and is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: our urban areas, countryside, coasts and waterways, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty, as well as everyday spaces. Landscapes are an essential component of people’s surroundings, an expression of diversity of our shared cultural and natural heritage and a foundation for our identity, now and in the future”<sup>1</sup>.

#### The Importance of Scotland’s Rural Landscapes

Scotland’s rural landscapes are the products of our history and culture as well as the forces of nature. They have evolved over thousands of years through the interaction of geology and climate with plants, animals and people. This dynamic process has created many outstanding and highly-valued landscapes, now some of our greatest environmental, social and economic assets. Scotland’s rural landscapes are vitally important to supporting the cultural heritage and identity of Scotland, our socio-economic well-being and our mental and physical health. The increasing pace of change and the form of some developments can often threaten the quality of these landscapes. However, some sustainable development can enhance the landscape as well as strengthen economic and social life. The success of our largest industry, tourism, largely depends on the health of our natural and cultural landscapes to support jobs in local communities. The Covid-19 crisis exposed the damage caused by years of declining investment in rural infrastructure, and reinforced the importance of promoting responsible access to the countryside. Our rural landscapes are of course the valued settings for the everyday lives of many people, and essential sources of food, timber and other natural resources.

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<sup>1</sup> **Landscape and Place for Success** Scotland’s Landscape Alliance, 2020

## APRS

APRS is the charity which promotes the care of **all** of Scotland's rural landscapes, working to tackle the climate emergency and to promote sustainable land use for people and nature. We support and advise local communities, promote effective planning, champion sustainable rural development and raise awareness of the socio-economic benefits of Scotland's rural landscapes. We do this through education, community engagement, innovative projects, high-level advocacy and partnership working. Our work has always promoted sustainable development, but our focus has broadened to consider how our concerns fit with the global need to tackle the climate emergency and nature crisis.

## Green Belts

APRS campaigns for better protection for Scotland's Green Belts, which contribute to tackling the climate emergency through directing development to more appropriate and sustainable brownfield sites, including vacant and derelict land and re-use of existing buildings. They provide many important benefits to quality of life and well-being in addition to their original planning purposes. They contain significant areas of prime agricultural land, important for home-grown food production, and semi-natural woodland. They can provide havens for wildlife so can help to tackle the nature crisis, especially as part of wider nature networks. Green Belts have great potential, through appropriate management, to do even more to tackle the climate emergency and nature crisis and to promote home-grown food, outdoor education and recreational opportunities for local communities.

## National Parks

Scotland's National Parks can lead the way in promoting an integrated approach to tackling the climate emergency and the nature crisis, supporting mental and physical health and well-being, boosting employment in rural communities and celebrating our world-class landscapes. Scotland's two existing National Parks already promote climate mitigation, for example through peatland restoration and native woodland regeneration. The Scottish Government's recent commitment to designate at least one new National Park, following an 11-year campaign led by APRS, will augment the resources available for these crucial tasks in other parts of rural Scotland.

## Deposit Return

The current focus of our education and community engagement work is Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers, for which we led the campaign and which starts in July 2022. This is a major national initiative to reduce carbon emissions and support a transition to a circular economy. Our interest in DRS initially stemmed from its role in reducing litter in the landscape, but we rapidly realised that it also benefits the climate. DRS will greatly increase the consistent supply of high-quality glass, metal and plastic for Scotland's recycling sector. Making packaging from recycled materials rather than new reduces demand for oil and can cut carbon emissions by up to 60%.

## Countryside Protectors

Our Countryside Protectors education and community engagement project aims to inform and inspire children, young people and communities about all these issues and more, through engaging and entertaining activities and workshops both in person and online. By doing this we aim to encourage the next generation to share our vision of a carbon neutral Scotland rich in wildlife, by raising awareness of our work and encouraging them to support our campaigns.

## Further Information

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