

# The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland

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Dave Thomson  
Land Reform Review Secretariat  
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Dear Mr Thomson

## LAND REFORM REVIEW GROUP – CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Thank you for inviting APRS to submit evidence to assist the work of the Land Reform Review Group. APRS is the charity which promotes the care of **all** of Scotland's rural landscapes.

### Introduction

We note that the Group's remit extends to urban as well as to rural Scotland. However, our charitable remit as set out in our Memorandum and Articles of Association only extends to "the rural scenery and the amenities of country districts and towns and villages in Scotland", so this response focuses mainly on the issues facing rural Scotland, including its towns and villages.

### Scotland's Rural Landscapes

The rural landscapes of Scotland are one of its greatest environmental, social and economic assets. They are of vital importance in supporting the cultural heritage and identity of Scotland, its socio-economic wellbeing and the health and welfare of its people. In particular they form the fundamental basis for tourism, our largest industry. The significance of Scotland's landscapes is well set out in the excellent [Scotland's Landscape Charter](#). The Land Reform Review Group's remit gives insufficient recognition to the importance of protecting and enhancing the rural landscapes which both local people and visitors value so highly; indeed the word 'landscape' appears only in relation to the interests and expertise of one of the Group's advisers.

The rest of this response is set out under the three headings outlined in the Group's remit, which are reproduced in bold.

## **Enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land, which will lead to a greater diversity of land ownership, and ownership types, in Scotland**

### Land Use Strategy

The key issue in this regard is what we as a society want to get out of our land. Our town and country planning system doesn't address this issue particularly well, principally because agriculture and forestry are excluded from its scope. That is one of the reasons why Scotland needed a sustainable Land Use Strategy and, now that we have one, why it is so important that its implementation should be followed through to make it effective at a local level.

Processes should therefore be developed which encourage meaningful dialogue between communities of interest, local residents and land managers, so that the Strategy's national objectives can be effectively implemented across Scotland, suitably tailored to local circumstances. The involvement of public agencies in this process is important, as not only can they ensure that current public policy priorities are included in the debate, but as they also administer the funds that can help to deliver whatever outcomes are agreed as desirable.

Discussions as to whether greater diversity of land ownership is desirable in any area should ideally take place within this context. This process would help to clarify how far any particular proposal for community acquisition was in the wider public interest and therefore worthy of public financial or other support.

### Community Councils

The Review Group's remit rightly seeks to enable more people to have a stake in the governance, management and use of land as well as its ownership. In our experience, people in rural Scotland do not necessarily want to own or manage land, but they do want to have a greater stake in its management and use. A key issue in this respect is the long-term trend over the last 40 years or so towards larger local authorities more distant from the people they serve and towards greater centralised control of those local authorities by the Scottish Government.

Closely linked to this is the long-term gradual decline witnessed in the resourcing and influence of Community Councils, which have the potential to make a substantial contribution towards greater local involvement in land management and use, but which largely depend on voluntary effort. The Scottish Government recently took a further step towards reducing the potential of Community Councils by withdrawing funding from the Association of Scottish Community Councils, meaning that there is no longer any effective co-ordination of their work. We are also aware of some local authorities cutting Community Councils' budgets, whilst expecting them to continue to fulfil their roles as statutory consultees. One way in which the Land Reform Review Group should seek to increase people's stake in the management and use of land is therefore through the revitalisation, accountability and resourcing of Scotland's network of Community Councils.

## Strategic Planning Framework

A sound strategic planning framework is required to guide the development and use of land in the right direction. This should start with the National Planning Framework, Scottish Planning Policy, the sustainable Land Use Strategy and the National Marine Plan and should filter down to strategic and local development plans, and preferably also to local indicative land use plans.

## Protected Landscapes

We need to look after all our landscapes, but particularly the finest, the most accessible and those most valued for recreation, through mechanisms tailored to the circumstances of individual areas. One way in which this can best be done is through our network of protected landscapes, including our National Parks, National Scenic Areas and Green Belts, all of which need more resources to achieve their goals effectively. In particular there is a significant opportunity to expand the number of National Parks in Scotland. APRS is working in partnership with the Scottish Campaign for National Parks on the [Scottish National Parks Strategy Project](#) to promote the need for a national strategy for future National Parks in Scotland; our report *Unfinished Business*, calling for the designation of more National Parks, will be published in April 2013.

**Assist with the acquisition and management of land (and also land assets) by communities, to make stronger, more resilient and independent communities which have an even greater stake in their development**

## Evidence-based Policy-Making

The Review Group's remit appears to assume that greater acquisition and management of land by communities is inherently beneficial for the environment and society, whereas this may not necessarily be the case. We have experience of excellent land management by private owners and public agencies as well as by charities and communities; quality land management is not confined to one or more of these sectors. It is therefore important that the Group's policy recommendations are based on available evidence as to whether land is better managed in private, public, charitable or community ownership. A wide range of criteria should be used to assess the quality of land management in this respect, including for example the protection and enhancement of landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage, soil and water quality, the promotion of public access and enjoyment and the provision of local employment.

## Wind Energy Developments

The biggest current threat to Scotland's rural landscapes is the rapid unplanned expansion of badly located, poorly designed or excessively large wind turbines; residents across rural Scotland contact us on an almost daily basis to raise concerns about specific proposed developments. The principal issues raised by this expansion are:

- The industrialisation of many of our rural landscapes by tall steel turbines and pylons, extensive concrete hardstandings and wide roads

- The major visual impact caused by the increasing size of modern wind turbines, many now over 100m tall, which can dominate most Scottish landscapes and are visible over extensive areas
- The erosion of our particularly precious resource of wild land
- The cumulative impact of large numbers of individual turbines, which the current subsidy regime encourages to be excessively large in a domestic context
- Bitter and unnecessary battles between communities, developers and planning authorities across Scotland
- Potential grid instability due to intermittency, need for back-up and mismatch between supply and demand

Scotland does need to generate less of its energy from fossil fuels, both to reduce carbon emissions and to reduce the rate of depletion of finite fossil fuel resources. However, there are a number of ways in which this can be achieved more effectively, particularly through demand reduction, energy conservation and energy efficiency, in rural as well as urban areas.

The Scottish Government should exclude all wind farms from our National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Search Areas for Wild Land, historic gardens and designed landscapes, plus substantial buffer zones. In addition it should introduce a strong presumption against large-scale wind farms in our Areas of Great Landscape Value, Local Landscape Areas, Special Landscape Areas, Regional Parks and Green Belts, plus substantial buffer zones.

The Scottish Government and local planning authorities should prepare a national locational strategy which, by means of a thorough planning process, identifies a limited number of specific sites capable of accommodating the major visual impacts caused by the size of modern turbines.

Our full policy on Wind Energy Developments can be seen on our [website](#).

### Affordable Housing

The provision of affordable housing for local people is one of the most pressing issues in many parts of rural Scotland. However, several complex issues need to be addressed in order to achieve this, including the desirability of introducing residency qualifications in some pressured parts of rural Scotland and the need to control the untrammelled development of open market housing.

**Generate, support, promote and deliver new relationships between land, people, economy and environment in Scotland**

### Sustainable Development

The Scottish Government has a single-minded, and in our view misguided, focus on so-called 'sustainable economic growth'. In many parts of rural Scotland, economic stability is more important than growth; the real goal of Scotland should be genuinely sustainable

development on the internationally-accepted model, in which environmental protection and social justice are advanced alongside economic development. This should include reducing the need to travel and reducing the generation of waste in rural Scotland. This argument is explored in more detail in Scottish Environment LINK's recent publication [\*Helping Scotland to Flourish\*](#).

## Tourism

As argued above, Scotland's magnificent landscapes are the essential basis for tourism, our largest industry and a crucial component of most Scottish local economies. Tourist attractions, accommodation providers and catering outlets generate employment and income throughout rural Scotland. These in turn generate local demand for services such as building repair and maintenance, laundry, catering and tour guiding, and so contribute to the overall viability of rural communities.

## Scotland's Rural Economy

Rural Scotland already depends on a broader range of economic activity than the traditional primary industries of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and its future success depends on yet further diversification. It is important therefore to avoid prejudicing the prospects of economic activities with the potential for start-up or expansion. As well as leisure and tourism, these include a wide range of knowledge-based businesses that with the benefits of modern IT can be conducted from relatively remote locations. The key is to maintain and if possible enhance the qualities that are likely to attract dynamic and active people to rural Scotland. This means protecting landscapes from industrialisation by insensitive renewables development and its associated infrastructure and from intensive farming with its prominent sheds and tracks and its land denuded of attractive natural features and wildlife.

The goal should be a countryside sufficiently diverse and beautiful to provide the context for a diversified and dynamic economy, supporting lively and well-balanced rural communities and providing recreational and other resources for the urban population. To achieve this we need both control of negative developments and active encouragement of positive ones including by finance, advice and example. Rural areas need access to infrastructure and services crucial to the successful pursuit of this development path, particularly reliable high-speed broadband.

The transformed fortunes of much of the Highlands over the last few decades shows that a rural future of this kind is not a pipe-dream. Scotland is fortunate in having so much beautiful and sparsely populated countryside that it can achieve such a goal, but we must not squander its undoubted assets in the pursuit of perceived short-term gain.

## Access to the Countryside

Good opportunities to gain access to the countryside are vital if the population at large is to appreciate and value our landscapes, and to derive from them the benefits that they deserve – especially given the amount of public money that goes into supporting land-based activities. Part 1 of the 2003 Act provides an excellent basis for relationships between access takers and providers, but its practical benefits have been limited so far, largely because inadequate time and resources are being devoted to bringing about

genuine improvements in low ground access. Many Core Path Plans are insufficiently ambitious, and local authorities have been reluctant to take advantage of the provisions in the Act to create worthwhile new routes. Resources for this work have been limited, so it is particularly important to make sure that links are developed with key potential funding sources, in particular the Scotland Rural Development Programme.

### Coastal and Marine Environment

Scotland's coastal and island landscapes and seascapes are of particularly high quality, diversity and distinctiveness. These features need to be protected, including against the current pressure to build near-shore wind farms as public resistance to onshore wind development intensifies.

### Further Information

I hope that you will be able to take these comments into account in developing whatever policy emerges from this process. Please contact me if you think that we might be able to provide any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely



John Mayhew MA MSc DipTP MRTPI  
**Director**

#### APRS - Scotland's Countryside Champion

APRS is the charity which promotes the care of **all** of Scotland's rural landscapes.

##### Our aims:

- Protect and enhance Scotland's rural landscapes for future generations
- Promote effective planning and landscape protection systems in Scotland
- Encourage genuinely sustainable development in rural Scotland
- Raise awareness of the importance of Scotland's landscapes to its people and economy
- Promote the activity of land managers who care for Scotland's landscapes

##### What we do:

- Work in partnership with individuals, other charities, local authority, government and public bodies
- Take an active part in national policy development and advocacy
- Advise members of the public on how to respond to proposals which affect their local landscapes
- Publicise our work to our members and beyond through our website, quarterly newsletter *Rural Scotland* and regular email bulletins