

## **NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Conservation charity welcomes progress on planning but condemns the consequences of current flaws**

Scotland's largest conservation charity has welcomed the Scottish Parliament's Stage 1 Report on the Planning (Scotland) Bill.

But on the day of the report's publication, the charity has expressed sorrow about the direct consequences of the existing flawed and iniquitous planning system.

The 360,000-member National Trust for Scotland was one of the contributors to the Local Government and Communities Committee's scrutiny of the Bill, which is intended to improve, integrate and simplify the system of development planning in Scotland.

The Committee's report, as published on 17 May, sets out a number of interim findings based on a review of the Scottish Government's proposals. These include sustaining the current statutory framework for regional planning until a more robust arrangement is found, the introduction of defined public purposes for planning and bringing about more equitable means of ensuring communities have a say in planning decisions.

In the meantime, a situation that arose in 2013 due to weaknesses in the existing planning system finally reached its climax on the same day – Highland Council was given no choice but to approve the construction of luxury houses at Viewhill Farm, Culloden, despite the location being within a conservation zone and the historic boundaries of one of the most pivotal battlefields in all of Scotland's history.

The National Trust for Scotland's Head of Policy Diarmid Hearn said:

"The situation at Culloden perfectly illustrates why the current planning system has to be reformed and that the current balance between the rights of

communities, the significance of national heritage and the profits of developers is out of kilter.

“Local people and the democratically elected Highland Council rejected the application to build houses at Viewhill Farm in 2013; yet developers were able to use a route of appeal not open to ordinary residents to have this decision overturned by the Scottish Reporter.

“This was the wrong decision in the wrong place.”

Reviewing the Committee’s report, Diarmid Hearn added:

“The original draft of the Bill caused us great concern because it seemed to us that it would actually undermine residents’ and communities’ rights in the planning system even further in favour of developers. This would be a curious thing to do given the Government’s commitment to community empowerment.

“We are very heartened that the Committee took note of the evidence that we and many others presented and recognised that communities’ rights need to be better harmonised with those of developers along with more robust consultation.

“The fundamental truth that the Committee has recognised is that Planning should be for public benefit, not just for a few.

“We are also very pleased to see that the Committee accepted that heritage and culture should be important factors in assessing plans and proposals for particular landscapes and buildings.

“With these kinds of insights we look forward to an eventual planning bill that protects the magnificent heritage that the public values and provides a better environment that enhances the standard of living for us all. With this we can avoid situations like Viewhill arising again.”

**- ENDS -**

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**Editor’s Notes:**

The National Trust for Scotland is the charity that celebrates and protects Scotland's heritage. It relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage of Scotland for everyone to enjoy.

Every day, the hundreds of thousands of members, donors, volunteers and staff at the charity help to protect Scotland's natural and national treasures for us all to enjoy. From coastlines to castles, art to architecture, wildlife to wildernesses, we do what we do... for the *love* of Scotland. Join us at [www.nts.org.uk/love](http://www.nts.org.uk/love)

