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Scotland should create an environmental court, which would allow communities to contest government decisions on major windfarm applications and quickly resolve issues like pollution of rivers and the wider countryside.

The policy commitment from the Scottish Conservatives would also see a streamlining of environmental cases which currently take too long to progress through current court processes.

Shadow environment secretary Donald Cameron said the move would improve access to justice for people in rural communities, and organisations working to safeguard Scotland's environment.

As it stands, most environmental disputes are heard in courts with no specific environmental expertise, and can often prove too expensive to pursue.

For example, in 2016 the John Muir Trust had to abandon an appeal in relation to a 67-turbine windfarm after being faced with legal bills of £500,000.

Creating a specific environmental court, the Scottish Conservatives said, would improve efficiency, have a wider positive impact on the environment, and create a fairer balance between those defending and launching cases.

Following the UK's decision to leave the European Union, a replacement for the role played in environmental cases by both the European Commission and the EU's Court of Justice will be required.

Under the Scottish Conservative plans, one possibility is for an environmental court to be part of the Scottish Land Court, which already holds some environmental jurisdictions and is used for specialist lay members sitting with legally qualified judges.

Scottish Conservative shadow environment secretary Donald Cameron said:

“Creating a one-stop shop for environmental disputes would make life significantly easier for communities and environmental organisations.

“As it stands, when a group wants to appeal a major windfarm decision taken

by the Scottish Government, or a village wants to stop pollution of a local river, the pathway to actually doing this is often complex, expensive and drawn-out.

“But now we have the chance to do something to directly help such people, and making the justice system much fairer when it comes to environmental issues.

“We can see examples where major environmental cases have fallen because those appealing simply can’t afford to go all the way through traditional court routes.

“That’s unfair, denies access to justice, and has to change.

“We’re forever hearing of the challenges Brexit will pose, usually from the SNP government.

“Well, this is an opportunity once Britain leaves the EU for Scotland to lead the way when it comes to environmental justice.”