

Re-use derelict land to support economic growth and wellbeing, says Taskforce

Derelict land is a wasted resource that should help to deliver national ambitions for a fair and green recovery, a national taskforce said today.

This media release has been issued by [Scottish Land Commission](#).

The Vacant and Derelict Land Taskforce has made a [series of recommendations](#) to Scottish Government which aim to transform Scotland's approach to tackling the legacy of derelict land and ensure that it is no longer acceptable to allow land to fall into long term disrepair.

A new approach is now even more important as the COVID-19 response shifts the way city centres are used and businesses adapt to different working arrangements. The pandemic is laying bare the needs and demands for access to safe quality space in our neighbourhoods. With the very real threat of more buildings and spaces lying empty and in disrepair it is imperative that Scotland not only tackles a 30-year-old legacy of vacant and derelict land but prevents a new legacy from forming. The recommendations outline how land can be reused to help achieve Scotland's targets for climate change, wellbeing and the economy.

Taskforce Chair, Scottish Land Commissioner Andrew Thin, said:

"Scotland's legacy of derelict land reaches into all communities, but our research shows that it is areas of most economic disadvantage that have the greatest concentration. These sites could instead be assets for their communities, providing much needed greenspace, growing space, community facilities, housing or businesses.

"Our recommendations require commitment from every level of government, as well as public and private organisations and landowners. The proposals not only call for a commitment to responsible practice by owners but recommend using planning guidelines, tax laws and other actions such as compulsory sales orders to halt the practice of leaving land unused.

"We must see urban land as a reusable resource, one that can be brought back into viable life to the betterment of local communities and the wider economy."

The Taskforce was jointly created by the Scottish Land Commission and SEPA in 2018. Part of the research it has carried out has helped to identify some priority urban sites, which have lain empty since before 2000 and have the best potential for reuse (<https://landcommission.gov.scot/duste-map>). There are also many examples of regeneration of disused land already in Scotland. These can range from major redevelopment such as the Clyde Gateway project to

community growing or education spaces and social housing.

“Our recommendations call for a national approach to tackling vacant and derelict land and to stem the flow of new sites. We need to make it unacceptable for land to be left to fall into disrepair. Scotland cannot afford to ignore this land any longer and as the pandemic changes the way people work and shop, we cannot let it happen again,” Mr Thin said.

Scotland has almost 11,000 hectares of vacant and derelict urban land. This legacy of Scotland’s industrial past means that almost a third of the Scottish population lives within 500 metres of a derelict site. So the Taskforce believes this matters to us all. These sites blight communities, harm wellbeing, and limit opportunities – but they could be so much more and help solve some of society’s biggest challenges.

Taskforce members including Scottish Futures Trust, Scottish Enterprise and the Development Trusts Association of Scotland (DTAS) are part of the solution. They are committed to work on changing attitudes and daily practice within planning, development and regeneration sectors to galvanise a changed approach to derelict and vacant sites.

Communities Secretary Aileen Campbell said:

“The coronavirus pandemic has been an unprecedented global crisis, with its effects felt most acutely in local communities. It has also highlighted the urgent need to ensure that our recovery from the pandemic is a green recovery focused on wellbeing.

“Tackling Scotland’s legacy of vacant and derelict land has always been a key objective, but our recovery from COVID-19 makes it even more important. Bringing these sites back into use can deliver multiple benefits such as providing space for housing, growing food and playing, as well as helping to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, attracting more inward investment and improving people’s wellbeing, whilst supporting our transition to becoming a net-zero society.

“I welcome the Vacant and Derelict Land Taskforce’s report and look forward to working with the Scottish Land Commission and other stakeholders to discuss and develop detailed proposals based on its recommendations to help deliver a culture change in Scotland’s approach to vacant and derelict land.”

David Harley, Head of Water and Planning at the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) said:

“As a member of Vacant and Derelict Land Taskforce, SEPA fully supports these recommendations. Scotland cannot ignore the waste of this finite resource any longer and action to tackle this legacy aligns with our One Planet Prosperity strategy. We will continue to work with businesses and partners to bring vacant and derelict land into environmental, social and economic use, and we will play our part in implementing the recommendations.”

The Taskforce [makes 13 recommendations](#) to the Scottish Government. They cover:

- **Better use of data**

- Reforming the national register of vacant and derelict land, including more information to help bring sites back into use through the planning system
- Map the sites on the register to make it more interactive in a format that anyone can access.

1. Land as part of the circular economy

- Reform Scotland's regeneration strategy to focus on place-based regeneration and land reuse to empower communities and give the public sector a more active role in in development.
- Make derelict sites that have been unused for a long time as a top priority in the new National Planning Framework. Make fixing 'brownfield' sites a priority in the next national Infrastructure Investment Plan.
- Make it easier to buy land for reuse, with new laws for compulsory sales orders and review the current ways land is bought and sold by the public sector.

2. Supporting delivery through funding

- Increase funding to support local authorities to bring vacant and derelict land back into use and review the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund.
- Review Scottish Government funding to make sure areas that need it most are prioritised. Change how the public sector views investment that includes the benefits of wellbeing and not just the financial return.
- Develop new ways of funding improvements to vacant and derelict land including a new compensation mechanism so that unavoidable loss of biodiversity from building on green areas is made up for by improving derelict sites, a new fund to improve derelict sites by creating a publicly-owned development bank of land, and providing money for communities to redevelop small derelict sites that are causing harm in their local area.

3. Stopping the flow of vacant and derelict sites

- Corporate social responsibility objectives should include the understanding that it is unacceptable to let land become derelict or left vacant indefinitely. Public funding should only be given to responsible landowners.
- Plans should be made for public land and property that is lying empty to be brought back into use. Landowners should identify buildings and sites that they might not need in the future and put plans in place to avoid the sites falling into disuse. To help with this, existing support for public sector asset disposal needs to be expanded.
- The Government should use the tax system to encourage landowners to repurpose empty commercial property. This will help prevent a new legacy of vacant and derelict land as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Tackling the legacy

- Scotland should set up a national programme of investing in green infrastructure, to bring derelict land and buildings back into use in an environmentally friendly way that will support jobs and skills development and help rebuild community resilience. The programme should focus on urban green spaces, regeneration led by communities, low carbon housing and renewable energy, and it should be planned and funded over several years to attract long term investment. Local authorities should take responsibility for coordinating.
- The Scottish Government should make a clear commitment to eradicating urban dereliction, put arrangements in place for keeping track of this goal and appoint a national coordinator to help achieve this.

Scottish Land Commission's full release can be viewed [online](#).