

**NOT SO**

**PRETTY VACANT**



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION  
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

# Transforming vacant and derelict land in Scotland

## Vacant & Derelict Land Taskforce STATEMENT OF INTENT

The legacy of Scotland's industrial past means that almost a third of the Scottish population lives within 500 meters of a derelict site. In deprived communities that figure increases to 58%. These sites blight communities, harm wellbeing and limit opportunities – but they could be so much more – they could help us solve some of society's biggest challenges.

Bringing abandoned and unloved urban spaces back into productive use could play a major role in tackling climate change, reducing inequalities, improving health and well-being and delivering inclusive growth. Contributing to the Scottish Government's National Outcomes to make Scotland a better place to live and a more prosperous and successful country:



Economy



Poverty



Communities



Health



Environment

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## Long-term vacant or derelict sites could be used to:



### **Build new homes –**

limit urban sprawl, protect our green spaces and revitalise our town centres.



### **Provide new allotments and city farms –**

make it easier for people to choose fresh, seasonal, locally grown food.



### **Create new parks and green spaces –**

great for physical and mental wellbeing and for biodiversity.



### **Attract new investment –**

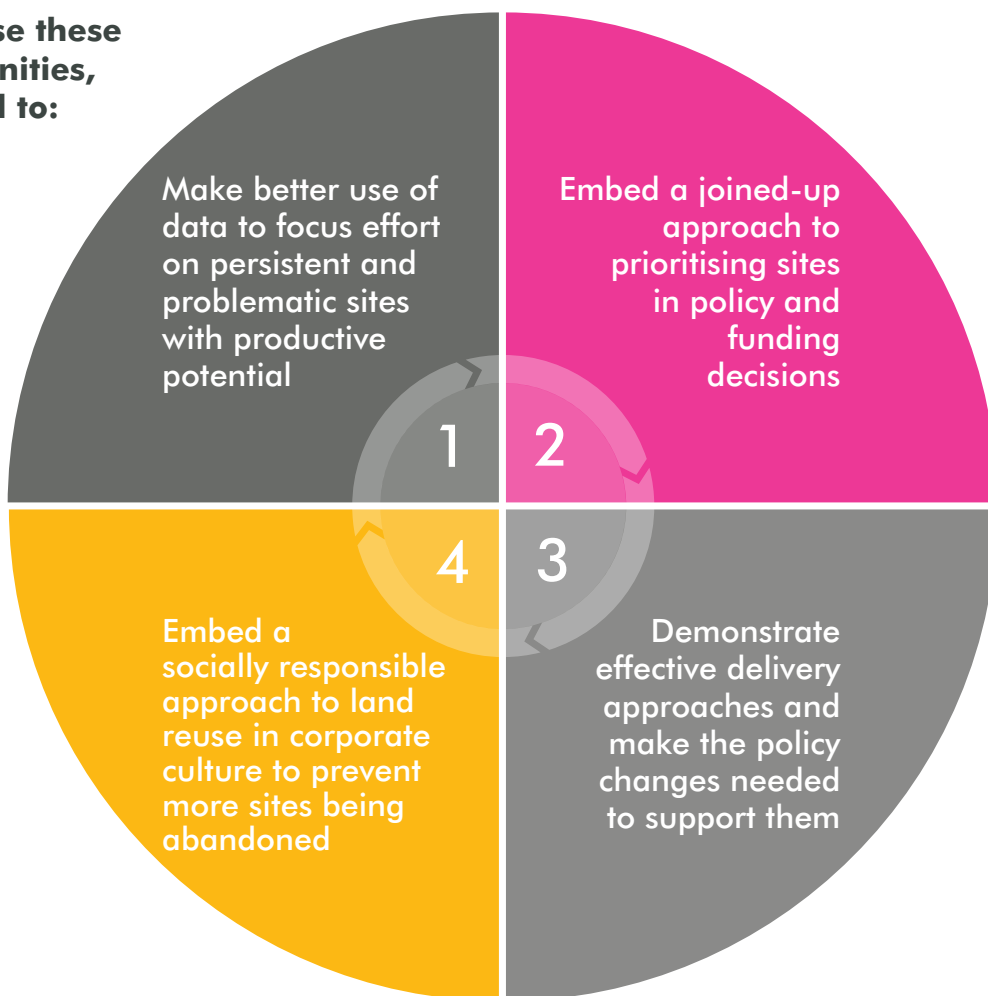
creating jobs and wealth in parts of the country that need it most.



### **Generate renewable energy –**

helping to tackle fuel poverty.

**To realise these opportunities, we need to:**



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# 1. Better use of **data** to **focus** effort

## FOCUS

Scotland's register of vacant and derelict sites is a valuable resource that provides a unique and rich baseline of information but many of the sites on the register should not be there and some may not be priorities for public investment. Some face no significant barriers to short-term reuse, while others have no realistic prospect of redevelopment but could provide valuable greenspace. Including these sites on the register masks a hard-core of persistently problematic sites.

**Reforming the register to focus on these sites is an urgent priority.**

## UNDERSTAND

Assessing the productive potential of a site requires detailed information about barriers to and potential for reuse. Information on everything from planning status to flood risk and ground contamination to market potential is needed. A lot of information is already available but there are gaps – and what is available isn't always easy to find.

**Improving the availability and accessibility of information about sites will be critical for better decision making.**

## PRESENT

**Making this information available through a well-designed, simple to use, map-based portal would make it easier for communities and investors to identify opportunities to bring sites back into productive use.**

# 2. **Prioritise** and **align** funding to support delivery

## SOCIAL

Crime, anti-social behaviour, health and well-being.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

Carbon capture & emissions, natural environment.

## ECONOMIC

Jobs, investment and wealth creation.

## COSTS & BENEFITS

Traditional approaches to cost-benefit analysis focus too narrowly on financial returns and often overlook wider benefits to society. New approaches, capable of assessing the full benefit of productive reuse and the full costs of long-term dereliction are needed to focus effort and resources on the communities that need it the most.

## PRIORITIES

A better understanding of costs and benefits will allow sites to be prioritised and policy and funding decisions to be aligned to support delivery.

**PLANNING POLICY**

**PUBLIC FUNDING**

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### 3. Demonstrate effective delivery & learn lessons

#### DEMONSTRATION

The scale of Scotland's legacy of vacant and derelict land means that a site by site approach to reuse will be inadequate. There are simply too many sites to be tackled individually. A thematic approach is needed in which solutions for different types of sites are developed and then applied to other sites with similar characteristics.

#### LARGE SITES

There are some large sites on the register that will require a coordinated, multi-agency approach to delivery. Identifying and driving forward these sites should be a national priority.

#### LOCAL SITES

Local authorities have a wealth of experience in bringing vacant and derelict sites back into use. We need to build on this experience, get better at sharing it and create a funding and policy environment to support it.

#### SMALL SITES

The collective impact of reusing small sites could be huge. Communities could play a big role in realising this potential but will need support to develop the skills needed to deliver.

Recommendations for policy change & lessons for similar sites elsewhere

### 4. Change culture to support prompt & productive land reuse

#### PREVENTION & EARLY INTERVENTION

A commitment to socially responsible land reuse needs to be embedded in corporate social responsibility obligations so that it becomes unacceptable for surplus land to become derelict or remain unused indefinitely. Sites at risk of obsolescence must be identified quickly so that early action can be taken to prevent them from becoming problematic.

#### DEMAND

There is not enough market demand for all vacant and derelict sites to be developed commercially. This will mean difficult choices and sometimes a need to accept lower financial returns than desired.

#### VOLUNTARY MEASURES

Guidance and good practice

Enhanced corporate social responsibility

#### COMPULSORY MEASURES

Compulsory sales orders and fiscal incentives

Recommendations for legislative change

#### RESPONSIBILITY

Unwilling landowners who hold back development in the hope of future financial gain are not exclusive to the private sector. Responsibility for the productive reuse of land rests with everyone.

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Realising the potential of Scotland’s vacant and derelict land will require a coordinated national effort. We need to work together to achieve the strategic priorities and unlock this opportunity for the communities living around these sites, and for Scotland.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	WE PROPOSE THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT COMMITS TO:	TASKFORCE PARTNERS WILL:
Make better use of data to focus effort on persistent & problematic sites with productive potential (4P sites).	Reforming the vacant and derelict land register.	Identify persistent and problematic sites.
	Providing the IT infrastructure to support the development of a new map-based opportunity portal.	Identify and address gaps in site information.
Embed a joined up approach for prioritising sites in policy and funding decisions.	Recognising reuse of 4P sites as priority within NPF4 and other strategic policy frameworks.	Develop an approach for assessing the consequences of persistent dereliction and wider benefits of productive reuse.
	Requiring government agencies and departments to prioritise 4P sites in funding and investment decisions.	Develop an approach for assessing the environmental potential of vacant sites.
Demonstrate effective delivery approaches and make the policy changes needed to support them.	Investing in 8-12 large-scale pilots to demonstrate how 4P sites can be returned to productive use.	Help identify strategic sites and play an active role in delivery.
	Ensuring that lessons learned from previous regeneration experience are reflected in policy.	Listen to experienced regeneration professionals, share best practice and identify ways of improving policy and regulations.
	Recognising community-led regeneration as a strategic priority and bring forward proposals for supporting local initiatives.	Develop innovative approach for scaling-up community-led regeneration.
Embed a socially responsible approach to land reuse in corporate culture to prevent more sites from being abandoned.	Requiring all public bodies to review landholdings and commit to prompt and productive land reuse.	Support culture change by encouraging landowners to adopt a responsible approach to land reuse as part of their corporate social responsibility obligations.
	Reviewing guidance on best value within the public finance manual.	Develop proposals for innovative statutory mechanisms for bringing vacant and derelict sites back into productive use.
	Bringing forward legislation for compulsory sales orders.	

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