

**NOT SO**

**PRETTY VACANT**



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION  
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

# Transforming vacant and derelict land in Scotland

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 55%.

The consequences of this for wellbeing are enormous. Each year around 5,000 more people die in Scotland than should be the case. One of the reasons for this is the poor quality physical environment in some communities.

The importance of this has been laid bare by the ongoing public health crisis. Never has the importance of high quality places been more important or their absence so keenly felt.

But it doesn't have to be this way. These sites could be so much more – they could help us solve some of our biggest challenges.

Bringing abandoned and unloved urban places back into productive use could help us tackle climate change, improve health and wellbeing, create more resilient communities and rebuild our economy in a way that helps everyone achieve their full potential.

**Here are some inspiring examples of how this can be done.**

# Contents



Places to live 03



Places to Power 04



Places to grow 05



Places to play 06



Places to connect 07



Places to learn 08



Places to work 09



Places to renew 10



Places to imagine 11

# Places to Live

Bringing people, and life, back into our town and city centres could help to support struggling high streets throughout Scotland. From small gap sites through to larger developments and redevelopments, innovative, high quality housing, and the new residents it attracts, can form the backbone of local economies, reduce housing costs, and improve living standards.

## Putting Life back into Town Centres – Raining Stairs, Inverness

Once a thriving part of the medieval core of Inverness, this had become a complex derelict site in the heart of the city encompassing a 27m rise, suffering from poor access and attracting anti-social behaviour.



A series of aborted redevelopments over nearly 50 years had failed to bring the site back into use, until a collaborative approach of private, public and third sector interests working in partnership took the chance to increase the supply of desperately needed affordable housing.

The close working relationship was critical to the success of the project, which now boasts 16 new homes available on a mix of affordable and mid-market rents, as well as providing an attractive pedestrian link within the town centre.

 [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)



**16**  
new  
homes  
created  
in the  
town  
centre

National Outcome	Indicator
 <p>We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of living</li> <li>• Satisfaction with housing</li> <li>• Relative poverty after housing costs</li> </ul>
 <p>We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of local area</li> <li>• Perceptions of local crime rate</li> <li>• Places to interact</li> </ul>

# Places to Power

Renaturalisation may be a positive outcome for some derelict sites, where the contribution to biodiversity and urban greenspace is to be welcomed. But such sites, and greenspace more generally, could possess a valuable resource just below the surface. Generating geothermal heat and power is getting cheaper and easier and once installed leaves little above ground. Producing sustainable, green, local heat and power is one way such spaces can be used to develop and demonstrate new technologies and ways of doing things that work with nature rather than against it.

## Green Energy from Greenspace – Saughton Park, Edinburgh

Spread over 48 acres, Saughton Park is a large tract of well managed open space with playing fields and an athletics track, the biggest skateboard park in Scotland and a modern creative play area. It also boasts a classic formal garden.

But just below the surface it is home to two ground source heat pumps, which provide all the heat needed for the facilities, café, and greenhouses. Additionally, a 36kW micro hydro scheme provides electricity for the parks lighting and buildings.




Both sources combined save over 150 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions each year, making it Edinburgh's first green powered park.

Although not a vacant and derelict site, this approach demonstrates what could be done with sites that are returned to amenity use or allowed to naturalise.

 [www.greenspacescotland.org.uk](http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk)



**150t** of CO<sub>2</sub> saved by renewable heat and electricity generation in one park

National Outcome	Indicator
 We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carbon footprint</li> <li>• Natural capital</li> <li>• Greenhouse gas emissions</li> </ul>
 We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of local area</li> <li>• Access to green and blue spaces</li> </ul>
 We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to the outdoors</li> <li>• Energy from renewable sources</li> <li>• Biodiversity</li> </ul>

# Places to Grow

Using vacant and derelict spaces to grow food is a great way of making sure communities have access to a reliable source of healthy, locally produced fresh food. Growing food closer to where it is consumed improves resilience in the supply chain, and also helps to reduce unnecessary food miles, which is important in the fight against climate change.

## Urban Market Garden – Locavore, Glasgow

Converting overgrown tennis courts into an urban market garden has helped Locavore build a successful social enterprise – supplying their shop, delivering veg boxes to local customers, as well as wholesale supply of fresh veg to cafés and restaurants.

The enterprise has continued to grow, recently taking on a plant nursery vacated by the Council.




With a clearly defined mission to scale up, becoming a large social enterprise grocery store which offers a viable alternative to supermarkets, they aim to shape a food system which is better for society and our environment. This includes supporting local growers by providing starter plots, facilitating volunteering and informal training opportunities, and reinvesting profits locally.

The fact that the short supply chain is resilient, demand for fresh local produce outstrips supply, that two vacant sites have been brought back into use, and that the business is thriving, demonstrates the value of this approach.

 [www.glasgowlocavore.org](http://www.glasgowlocavore.org)



**200+** of CO<sub>2</sub> savings  
per ha per year

National Outcome	Indicator
 We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to the outdoors</li> <li>• Reduction in waste generated</li> </ul>
 We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community ownership</li> <li>• Places to interact</li> </ul>
 We have a globally competitive entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to greenspace</li> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• Carbon footprint</li> </ul>

# Places to Play

Everyone knows that doing enough exercise is vital for physical and mental health, but despite this most of us are not as active as we should be. Repurposing empty spaces as parks and playgrounds for all ages can help to make sure that everyone in Scotland lives close to somewhere where they can safely exercise and relax outdoors.

## Cycle and Skateparks – Wishawhill Wood Pump Track, Wishaw

Creating a world-class community facility in an area of multiple deprivation was the work of a partnership between Central Scotland Green Network and the Wishaw MTB Club, with the long term vision of providing an outlet for positive engagement with young people and discouraging anti-social behaviour in the area.

Since opening in 2018, police and fire service call outs to the previously derelict site have dramatically reduced, and neighbours report a drop off of vandalism and anti-social behaviour.





The Wishawhill Wood Pump Track facility has also brought the community together, and inspired the launch of a new social enterprise to support track based activities.

It's clear that this development has been successful in changing perceptions, outlooks, and lives by providing a place where young people are welcome and are free to learn new biking skills.

 [www.CSGNT.org.uk](http://www.CSGNT.org.uk) 



**£2,000** saved every time the fire service isn't called out to deal with anti-social fire raising

National Outcome	Indicator
 We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have positive relationships</li> <li>• Child wellbeing and happiness</li> <li>• Child social and physical development</li> <li>• Children's voices</li> </ul>
 We are healthy and active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical activity</li> </ul>
 We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of local area</li> <li>• Perceptions of local crime rate</li> <li>• Crime victimisation</li> <li>• Places to Interact</li> <li>• Access to greenspace</li> <li>• Social capital</li> </ul>
 We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A positive experience for people coming to Scotland</li> <li>• Scotland's reputation</li> </ul>

# Places to Connect

Community growing isn't all about food. Allotments and community gardens are also great ways of bringing people together. They can provide opportunities to meet friends and help people feel more connected to their communities, both important for tackling loneliness and improving mental health.

## Community Growing – Shettleston Growing Project, Glasgow

Originally owned by a local housing association, this site was not needed for housing and had lain unused for years. The site was an eyesore and a magnet for anti-social behaviour so local residents decided to form a committee to look at how it could be incorporated into everyday living.





The Shettleston Community Growing Project emerged from those early discussions. The project uses raised beds (ideal for sites where ground contamination is an issue) to provide growing space for local residents.

Today the project is a successful community enterprise that provides opportunities for local people to grow their own food as well as training on how to cook it. It provides valuable opportunities for social interaction for users and a popular after school club for local children.

 [www.shettlestongrowing.org.uk](http://www.shettlestongrowing.org.uk) 



**1000** people using the facility every year

National Outcome	Indicator
 We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to the outdoors</li> <li>• Biodiversity</li> </ul>
 We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food insecurity</li> </ul>
 We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child healthy start</li> </ul>
 We are healthy and active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy life expectancy</li> <li>• Mental wellbeing</li> <li>• Healthy weight</li> <li>• Physical activity</li> </ul>

# Places to Learn

Studies have shown that play is really important for healthy brain development. Transforming unused spaces into outdoor classrooms can be a great way of helping children to learn, particularly if they don't have a garden at home. It is not just the factual element of outdoor education that is important, but also the social and interpersonal skills developed that enhance wellbeing.

## Outdoor Learning – Baltic Street Adventure Playground, Glasgow

Recognising the demand for a safe outdoor space to play for children in one of Scotland's most deprived areas, an arts and architecture led project set out to create the Baltic Street Adventure Playground. Collaborating with the community, not least the children, they formed a Community Interest Company, took over a plot of derelict land, and created a facility that has become a cornerstone of community life.




Crucially, the supervised playground allows children to freely learn and develop at their own pace and in their own way without adult intervention or direction, building confidence, resilience, and strong personal relationships – all in a safe space.

Ultimately the aim is to help break a cycle of chronic deprivation by investing in and trusting children, making space for them to grow, learn and thrive, and giving them respect and freedom they can act upon.

 [www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk](http://www.balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk)



**250** children who now have access to a safe outdoor space

National Outcome	Indicator
 <p>We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child social and physical development</li> <li>• Child wellbeing and happiness</li> <li>• Children's voices</li> <li>• Healthy Start</li> <li>• Children have positive relationships</li> <li>• Child material deprivation</li> </ul>
 <p>We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered resilient and safe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of local area</li> <li>• Places to interact</li> <li>• Access to greenspace</li> </ul>
 <p>We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to the outdoors</li> </ul>



# Places to Work

Scotland’s legacy of vacant and derelict land is closely tied to the decline of heavy industry, so it’s no surprise that many of the most problematic sites are found in areas of high unemployment. This land could be put back into productive use, creating jobs where they’re most needed. New offices, green manufacturing sites and places to work built to the highest environmental standards with 21st century connectivity, all replacing old industry with new enterprise, the manifestation of the ‘just transition.’

## Old Industry to New Enterprise – Red Tree Magenta, Shawfield

Occupying part of one of the most complicated remediation sites in Europe, Red Tree Magenta is the first Grade A major office building on the 64ha Shawfield site being redeveloped by Clyde Gateway.

The cost of remediating the sprawling former chemical works made it unattractive to the private sector but public sector leadership and the creation of the Clyde Gateway Urban Regeneration Company has been able to overcome market failure and begin development of a new, nationally significant business district.




Within six months of completion the office building was fully occupied, supporting 340 jobs, and saving business around 37% in costs compared to city centre offices.

Improved infrastructure and connectivity, especially for active travel, are the icing on the cake, and the wider site has the potential to bring 12,000 jobs to one of the most deprived areas of Glasgow when complete.

 [www.redtreebusinesssuits.com](http://www.redtreebusinesssuits.com)



**37%** savings for businesses versus using city centre office space

National Outcome	Indicator
 We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of businesses</li> <li>• Contractually secure work</li> </ul>
 We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scotland’s reputation</li> </ul>
 We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International exporting</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial activity</li> <li>• Carbon activity</li> <li>• Economic growth</li> <li>• Access to superfast broadband</li> </ul>

# Places to Renew

Many homeless people are marginalised and living on the edges of society, with significant social intervention needed to help them break out of the cycle of homelessness. With a housing first approach, the right support and an opportunity to get into employment within a matter of months many homeless people can once again become thriving, independent members of society.

## Breaking the Homelessness Cycle – Social Bite Village, Edinburgh

Securing a long-term lease from the Council on a vacant site allowed social enterprise, Social Bite, to build an innovative, low cost, safe living environment for up to 20 people who are currently living in mostly unsupported temporary accommodation, shelters, and B&Bs.



The Social Bite Village is much more than just housing, it's also a community where residents learn new skills to get their life back on track, and receive extensive work placements and employability support.

After 12-18 months, residents transition into permanent accommodation, breaking out of the cycle of homelessness and becoming an independent member of society.

 [www.socialbitevillages.co.uk](http://www.socialbitevillages.co.uk)



**12-18 mths** needed for an individual to break the homelessness cycle

National Outcome	Indicator
 We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cost of living</li><li>• Wealth inequality</li><li>• Persistent poverty</li><li>• Food insecurity</li></ul>
 We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceptions of local area</li><li>• Loneliness</li></ul>

# Places to Imagine

We currently face a range of big, short and long-term challenges from climate change and loss of biodiversity, to a broken economic model, to the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Fundamental change in the economy, society, and environment is needed. Derelict spaces may remind us of past failures, but with a bit of imagination they can help us to build a better future, putting Scotland at the forefront of green innovation and technology.

## Agriculture reimagined – Vertical Farm, Invergowrie

Located on the James Hutton Institute campus outside Dundee is arguably the world’s most technically advanced indoor farm. Although not occupying a formerly vacant and derelict site itself, it demonstrates ground-breaking, patented power and communications technologies to address the key challenges facing the indoor farming industry.

Significant demand is already being realised amongst growers, retailers and national governments aiming to address food security issues and alternative methods of production in their regions.




Vertical farming offers huge reductions in water wastage, the elimination of the use of pesticides and a huge reduction in food miles. Without having to rely on the soil quality underneath, they could allow produce to be grown in an urban setting and on demand, which could reduce fresh food waste by up to 90%.

 [www.hutton.ac.uk](http://www.hutton.ac.uk)



**918t** of CO<sub>2</sub> savings per ha per year\*

\*assuming all energy inputs are from renewable resources

National Outcome	Indicator
 We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• International exporting</li> <li>• Economic growth</li> <li>• Carbon footprint</li> <li>• Greenhouse gas emissions</li> <li>• Spend on research and development</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial activity</li> </ul>
 We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative businesses</li> </ul>
 We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scotland’s reputation</li> <li>• International networks</li> <li>• Contribution of development support to other nations</li> </ul>



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## Further Information

The Scottish Land Commission has established a major focus on vacant and derelict land. Bringing together a host of public and private agencies as the Vacant and Derelict Land Taskforce, together we are transforming the existing approach to bringing those abandoned and unloved urban spaces back into productive use.

Further information about the taskforce and our work on vacant and derelict land can be found on our website

[www.landcommission.gov.scot](http://www.landcommission.gov.scot)

[www.landcommission.gov.scot/notsoprettyvacant](http://www.landcommission.gov.scot/notsoprettyvacant)

[#notsoprettyvacant](https://www.instagram.com/notsoprettyvacant)