
Poets' Neuk: Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, Part 5 CRTB Application

**Furthering Sustainable Development
and the Only Practicable Way of Achieving Significant
Community Benefit
(Reference Section 7.2 and 7.6 of the application form respectively)**

1. Sustainable Development (Reference Section 7.2)

The proposed use of the garden, as described in the Poets' Neuk CRTB application, would promote its sustainable development in three critical areas – Social Sustainability, Sustainable Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability, as set out below.

Social Sustainability

The proposal will convert neglected and unproductive land into a positive public asset. The conditions contained in the planning consent require that the garden will be maintained over time. The garden will promote social sustainability by providing an informal meeting space and a place of retreat in the busy town centre. It will make an attractive addition to the historical sites of St Andrews. The interpretative boards and poetry plaques will be an educational resource for schoolchildren and adults. They will provide an insight into the historic significance of the site for the many domestic and international visitors to the town. There is an assessed shortage of green space in St Andrews which is detailed in the Fife Greenspace Audit, an extract of which is provided as **[Document 30]**. This describes St Andrews as having below average accessible greenspace. Research studies noted in the Fife Greenspace Audit demonstrate that Green Space contributes to health as well as social wellbeing and cohesion and are summarised in **[Document 33]**

The Poets' Neuk proposal responds to the Scottish Government's targets for meeting the United Nations goals for Sustainable Development and specifically: Goal 1.11, which relates to Safer Cities and Communities; Goal 11.3, which relates to community empowerment; Goal 11.4, which deals with the preservation, protection and conservation of cultural and natural heritage; and Goal 11.7, which includes an objective to provide an adequate provision of green space. The relevant Scottish Government Sustainable Development Targets are noted in **[Document 32]**.

Sustainable Economic Development

As a world-renowned visitor destination, the continued success of St Andrews depends significantly on the maintenance and enhancement of its historic built heritage. This proposal will make a positive contribution to the quality of the Conservation Area by providing an attractive modern facility that will make connections to the historic use of the site in medieval times. It will enhance the experience for visitors to a town described by Historic Environment Scotland as *one of the "most historic small burghs" in Scotland*

The Poet's Neuk project will make a positive contribution to the historic environment by illustrating the use of the site in antiquity and linking it to Mary Queen of Scots, a major historical figure connected with the town. It can be expected to produce a significant economic benefit by attracting more visitors, resulting in an increase in custom for local shops, cafes, and restaurants in the town centre. The business organisation, Bid St Andrews, which has an important role in encouraging sustainable economic growth considers that Poetry Garden would prove to be a great asset. See letter **[Document 36]**. The creation of the garden will provide work for local firms. Studies have shown that publicly accessible green space makes a positive contribution to local economies, by making the destination more attractive for visitors. The summary of research in [Document 33] notes the cumulative benefits of an adequate provision of green space, which includes economic benefits.

Environmental Sustainability

The current neglected and overgrown condition of the garden has a negative effect on the urban environment. It attracts litter and antisocial behaviour and has potential adverse health impacts. The acquisition of this site and its conversion to a planned and maintained garden for the public, using volunteers wherever practical, will regenerate the land. It will provide a green breathing space in a town that is becoming increasingly busy with motor traffic. The Fife Council Greenspace Audit - Extract provided as **[Document 30]** - defines Green Space as: "*Vegetated land in and around towns and villages which is publicly usable*". This definition includes public parks and gardens.

In relation to St Andrews, the report states (Page 55): "*There is only 4 hectares of greenspace per 1,000 population. This is below the Fife average. An increase is needed to increase the quantity to the Fife average of 6 hectares.*"

Planting in the Greyfriars garden will include eight trees and a beech hedge, all of which will absorb carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and other noxious gases as well as a certain amount of particulate vehicle emissions, thus contributing to air quality in the busy town centre. As events such as poetry readings will take place in the evening, discrete lighting

will be installed in the garden, and this will be solar powered in order to achieve carbon neutral status for the garden.

2. Why the Transfer of the Land is the Only Practicable Way of Achieving a Significant Benefit to the community (Reference Section 7.6)

Efforts to secure this neglected land for community use date back to the 1990s with attempts by the Community Council that were ultimately unsuccessful. The St Andrews Preservation Trust then tried to engage the current owner in discussions about acquiring the land on behalf of the community. As offers to purchase the land were unsuccessful the Preservation Trust arranged a meeting with local councillors and Fife Council officials in June 2010. As a result, the Council sent a letter to the owner **[Document 5]**. However, this failed to achieve an improvement in the condition of the garden. Although the possibility of compulsory purchase of the garden was mentioned in their letter, the Council did not take it forward. Having explored alternative ways of achieving the purchase of garden for the community, the Community Body Poets' Neuk was set up specifically to pursue this objective.

An initially successful Part 2 CRTB application could not be brought to fruition as the owner, who was deemed to have placed the land on the market, failed to engage with the transfer process. When the matter was referred to the Scottish Lands Tribunal, the owner removed the land from sale and thus negated the referral. The present Part 5 application is considered to be the only effective route for securing a sustainable future for this historic site.

As well as the continued misuse of the site documented in this application, the failure to accord this site the respect it should have in the historical record of St Andrews represents a blight on the defined community. Its transformation to become a civic asset would represent a sensitive and appropriate regeneration of this unique site in a way which would respect its past as an important element in the medieval heritage of both St Andrews and Scotland. This would also confirm members of the defined community in the belief that they can influence their own environment in a way that will benefit them and future generations.

In the light of the experience of seeking alternative solutions to this issue, Poets' Neuk has concluded that a successful Part 5 CRTB application is the only practicable way in which a reliable plan to achieve significant community benefit can be secured.