

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

Public Interest, Benefit and Harm (Reference Sections 7.3,7.4 and 7.7 of the application form)

These are interlocking issues which relate to each other, and this document seeks to demonstrate how the adverse effects of the current condition of the garden and the potential benefits of development and management by a community group could bring multiple benefits to the community. The converse is that if this initiative fails, a public harm will remain unresolved. Aspects of the response to Section 7.3 are equally relevant to Section 7.4 and 7.7 of the application form.

Public Interest (Section 7.3 of application form)

The long-term issues about the beneficial use of this land have remained unresolved for several decades and continue to be a matter of concern to members of the defined community as it adversely affects their amenity and the quality of their lived environment. It also detracts from the experience of visitors to a town which is one of the major international visitor destinations in Scotland. St Andrews currently enjoys a world-wide reputation as the home of golf, a town with strong historical associations, an attractive resort on the Fife Coast and the location of a university with a global reputation. The wider community support evidenced by the letter from the Royal Burgh of St Andrews Community Council [**Document 29**] shows that the benefits of community ownership and guardianship of this historic site would be in the interest of townspeople as well as domestic and international visitors to the town.

Anything which detracts from the experience of residents and visitors will inevitably damage the town's economy at a time when the expectations of tourists, who have experienced holidays abroad, are rising. The location of the land, at the hub of the community, makes it very visible and its transformation from a neglected and unsightly area into a positive public resource makes this project a major priority for the resident community. Nearby small retail businesses, who have observed the misuse of the garden actively support the Poetry Garden scheme [**Documents 25a and 25b**].

A garden centrally located in a Conservation Area, neglected for several decades, which attracts anti-social behaviour, is clearly a candidate for regeneration. Poets' Neuk's Business Plan demonstrates its ability to carry out the necessary regeneration of the garden and its long-term commitment to its maintenance utilising community volunteers whenever practical.

Pride of Place makes a powerful contribution to wellbeing, and this is encouraged by a feeling that ordinary people can positively influence decisions about their home environment and help to make improvements. The Garden described in this application would be a valued public asset which would enhance the experience of living in St Andrews.

Environmental improvements have been shown to be important factors in both mental and physical wellbeing. Pleasant green areas with carefully chosen plants benefit both people and biodiversity and contribute to air quality. St Andrews has been assessed as having a deficiency of green space. See **[Document 30]**. The beneficial effects of publicly accessible green space are evidenced in **[Document 33]**

Significant Benefits to the Defined Community (Section 7.4 of application form)

The Scottish Government policies of improving the quality of the built and natural environment will be met by this proposal. A successful outcome to this application will engage members of the community in a project which they can feel ownership of and provide opportunities to involve them in a project which has widespread support. Members of the defined community consulted in a previous poll for a Part 2 application strongly supported the proposals to transform it into a positive asset for the community. One hundred percent of the defined community members who responded to the poll voted for it.

Members of the defined community consulted in the poll for the current CRTB application showed a similar level of enthusiasm for the Poetry Garden project with only two dissenting voices. The health and economic benefits of publicly accessible Green Space are evidenced in **[Document 33]**.

There is a large elderly population in the defined community and the wider community of St Andrews, that would benefit from a quiet green area in the St Andrews town centre. The poetry garden will also be a resource for school children, university students and other residents of the town, as well as an attraction for visitors from further afield

Public Harm (Section 7.7 of application form)

Unless a long-term future is secured for this site at the heart of the community, it can be expected that it will remain as a blot on the urban landscape. It will continue to offend against good practice for the maintenance of properties in the historic core and Central Conservation Area of St Andrews, which Historic Environment Scotland has described as "*One of the most historic small burghs in Scotland*". This land deserves to be valued as an important historic site, but this is unlikely unless it can be developed and cared for by local people committed to respecting its historic associations and its potential as an important resource for townspeople and visitors alike. The reports from cleansing and environmental workers noted in **[Documents 17a and 17 b]**, the letters from two local businesses whose

premises overlook the garden [Documents 25a and 25b] together with the photographs in [Document 24] graphically illustrate the dangers to public health caused by the use of this garden as a toilet and site for drug abuse, with discarded needles a major concern. Discarded rubbish attracts vermin and has significant health hazards. Without a viable future, the current insanitary condition of the garden and its misuse as a lavatory and source of anti-social activity will remain unresolved.

The land appears to be held in the hope that it can be utilised as a site for built development, but as this has been ruled out by the planning authority, it remains in limbo, and this is likely to be its future unless it can be put to a beneficial use.

The Poets' Neuk proposal has overwhelming local support and had previously received grant approval for purchase of the land by the Scottish Land Fund and a generous local pledge for funds to develop the garden. Failure to achieve its objectives would be a blow to a community that sees the project described in this application as resolving a serious long-standing problem while creating a valuable community asset. An inability to realise its aspirations after producing a viable plan to achieve this would cause great disappointment and have a negative effect on those who have given such strong support and have already experienced disappointment when a successful Part 2 CRTB failed to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

There is a keen interest from members of the defined community to improve their lived environment and be involved in an imaginative project which would respect the history of this important site. The introduction of Part 5 of the Land Reform Act has raised anticipation that a solution will be found at last to a long-standing problem. Failure to achieve these aspirations would be a significant blow to public confidence and undermine motivation to participate in future community efforts to achieve environmental improvements in their community.