

Landscape pressures in Scotland

Key findings

The National Trust for Scotland's public opinion research has found that Scotland's landscapes are important to the overwhelming majority of Scots (91%).

Adverse industrial development, and neglect and dereliction remain the two greatest public concerns for landscape, since our last survey in 2012. However, neglect and dereliction has overtaken industrial development as the greatest public concern.

Introduction

Scotland now has an updated Scottish Landscape Charter, supported by the Scottish Government, and launched by Scotland's Landscape Alliance¹, with support from NatureScot. [Scotland's Landscape Charter](#) highlights Scotland's continued commitment to the European Landscape Convention, and focuses on the commitments required to sensitively manage changes in our landscapes, including changes needed to address the climate and nature emergencies.

The Charter's vision is that as a nation we will all cherish our landscapes, recognise them as a vital resource, fundamental to our prosperity and wellbeing - and that we will play an active part in decisions that affect them. It has three principles:

- Collaboration between sectors and organisations to achieve a joined-up approach;
- Dynamic management of landscapes, taking account of changing needs, circumstances and challenges;
- Diversity in our landscapes alongside good planning, thoughtful design and active collaboration to positively manage change is key to resilient landscapes for the future.

Fittingly, 2025 also marks the 25th anniversary of the European Landscape Convention, developed by the Council of Europe, and which aims to promote the protection, management, and planning of all landscapes across Europe.

Recently, the National Trust for Scotland commissioned public opinion research via Survation on landscape issues, with a representative sample of the Scottish population and ascertained their views on three areas:

- The value of landscapes
- The role of landscapes in planning for onshore renewable energy
- The range of pressures on landscapes

Importance of Scotland's landscapes

We asked the public:

"How important, if at all, are Scotland's landscapes to you?"

We found that respondents considered landscapes to be very or somewhat important (91% on average across all age groups), rising to 94% for over 45s and 95% for over 65s.

¹ The National Trust for Scotland is a founding member of Scotland's Landscape Alliance.

Table 1: How important, if at all, are Scotland's landscapes to you? Sex and age					
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not that important	Not at all important	Don't know
Female	54%	37%	7%	0%	2%
Male	58%	33%	7%	1%	1%
16-24	45%	35%	11%	2%	6%
25-34	49%	42%	8%	0%	1%
35-44	57%	34%	8%	1%	0%
45-54	59%	35%	5%	1%	0%
55-64	59%	34%	4%	0%	2%
65+	64%	31%	4%	0%	1%

We also examined opinions by voting patterns at the last Scottish Parliamentary election. We found that landscape was of greater importance to smaller party voters, such as the Scottish Green Party (Other 100%) and Scottish National Party voters (96%), but only a little lower for other parties – Conservative (93%), Liberal Democrat (91%), and Labour (89%).

The survey found that people of all political opinions equally saw the protection and management of Scotland's landscapes as important. This suggests that all political parties should consider it a shared concern of the majority of people in Scotland.

Table 2: How important, if at all, are Scotland's landscapes to you? Results by voting in 2021 Scottish Parliament elections					
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not that important	Not at all important	Don't know
SNP	67%	29%	3%	0%	0%
Conservative	50%	43%	3%	3%	2%
Labour	51%	38%	11%	0%	1%
Liberal Democrat	72%	19%	9%	0%	0%
Other	92%	8%	0%	0%	0%

Landscapes and wind energy

One commonly raised concern is the transition to renewable energy as Scotland – and the wider world – moves away from fossil fuels.

We asked the public whether:

"...the protection of landscapes, seascapes, or places of historic interest or natural beauty should or should not be a consideration when determining the location of new windfarms?"

The majority of respondents (76%) thought that landscapes should be a consideration in deciding locations for windfarms, with a minority (17%) stating that they should not be a consideration, and 8% saying they did not know.

Similar to overall importance of landscapes, older respondents were more likely to consider landscape to be an important consideration when determining the location of new windfarms.

Table 3: The protection of landscapes, seascapes, or places of historic interest or natural beauty should be a consideration when determining the location of new windfarms

	Should be a consideration	Should not be a consideration	Don't know
All	76%	17%	8%
Female	75%	16%	10%
Male	76%	18%	6%
16-24	61%	30%	9%
25-34	70%	19%	11%
35-44	76%	12%	11%
45-54	78%	16%	6%
55-64	81%	15%	4%
65+	82%	13%	5%

When the results were considered by region, more rural areas appear to attach greater importance to the siting of windfarms, with Highlands & Islands (86% think should be a consideration), West of Scotland (82%), and South Scotland (81%) having the highest scores, and Mid-Scotland and Fife (72%), Central Scotland (70%), and Glasgow (67%) having the lowest.

Table 4: The protection of landscapes, seascapes, or places of historic interest or natural beauty should be a consideration when determining the location of new windfarms

	Should be a consideration	Should not be a consideration	Don't know
Highlands and Islands	86%	12%	2%
Mid Scotland and Fife	72%	22%	6%
North East Scotland	77%	15%	7%
Lothian	75%	15%	7%
South Scotland	81%	15%	4%
Glasgow	67%	18%	15%
West Scotland	82%	13%	5%
Central Scotland	70%	22%	8%

Leading pressures on valued landscapes

Finally, we asked the public what they considered to be the leading pressures on landscapes, asking them: *"When thinking about changes in the landscape, what pressures, if any, are you most concerned about?"*

Respondents were asked to choose up to three landscape pressure from nine commonly cited issues: neglect and dereliction, industrial development, high-density housing, electricity pylons and powerlines, plantation forestry, windfarms, motorways and dualling of roads, monoculture farming, and fish farms.

Table 5: Leading pressures on landscapes, by sex and age									
	All	Female	Male	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Neglect and dereliction	63%	60%	66%	51%	50%	56%	64%	74%	74%
Industrial development	44%	49%	40%	51%	48%	48%	48%	50%	29%
High-density housing	35%	37%	33%	31%	38%	31%	44%	35%	33%
Electricity pylons and powerlines	31%	32%	30%	24%	24%	30%	33%	35%	36%
Plantation forestry	29%	31%	28%	39%	35%	34%	25%	20%	26%
Windfarms	23%	18%	29%	13%	23%	22%	17%	26%	34%
Motorways and dualling of roads	23%	26%	20%	26%	29%	24%	21%	21%	19%
Monoculture farming	13%	12%	13%	18%	13%	9%	12%	9%	15%
Fish farms	13%	11%	15%	11%	14%	8%	10%	14%	16%

Neglect and dereliction was the most commonly cited landscape pressure, for the population as a whole, for both sexes and for almost all age groups at 63%.

There was some variability by age cohort in terms of other pressures, with people in the youngest cohort, aged 16-24, concerned over adverse industrial development, and plantation forestry; and 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54 year olds with industrial development and high-density housing. Respondents in the two oldest age cohorts were more likely to cite electricity pylons and powerlines, and windfarms as a concern.

Table 6: Leading pressures on landscapes, by region								
	Highlands and Islands	Mid Scotland and Fife	North East Scotland	Lothian	South Scotland	Glasgow	West Scotland	Central Scotland
Neglect and dereliction	59%	57%	63%	62%	66%	67%	72%	57%
Industrial development	49%	49%	42%	46%	42%	42%	44%	43%
High-density housing	33%	29%	36%	40%	33%	36%	32%	41%
Electricity pylons and powerlines	37%	29%	31%	24%	29%	29%	32%	38%
Plantation forestry	23%	31%	27%	34%	33%	30%	27%	27%
Windfarms	23%	22%	29%	18%	24%	20%	24%	26%
Motorways and dualling of roads	18%	25%	21%	25%	19%	24%	21%	26%
Monoculture farming	14%	15%	14%	12%	14%	15%	10%	10%
Fish farms	14%	6%	10%	13%	19%	11%	15%	14%

When looked at by region, there were some differences among respondents. In every region, the foremost landscape pressure was identified as neglect and dereliction, followed by industrial development.

However, when the third most prominent pressure was identified, this was electricity pylons and powerlines for respondents in the Highlands and Islands, and plantation forestry for respondents in Mid Scotland and Fife. For all other regions, high density housing was the third leading pressure on landscapes.

Comparison with 2012 research results

We had asked an identical set of questions in 2012, and so were able to compare responses after a decade of landscape change in Scotland.

Pressure	Percentage concerned – 2023	Percentage concerned – 2012
Neglect and dereliction	63% (1)	44% (3)
Industrial development	44% (2)	65% (1)
High-density housing	35% (3)	29% (4)
Electricity pylons and powerlines	31% (4)	45% (2)
Plantation forestry	29% (5)	8% (8)
Windfarms	23% (6)	27% (5)
Motorways and dualling of roads	23% (7)	26% (6)
Monoculture farming	13% (8)	6% (9)
Fish farming	13% (9)	8% (8)

There have been substantial shifts in the top three highest risks – **industrial development**, which was the greatest concern in 2012, has dropped by 21%, to the second highest concern (44% of respondents). **Neglect and dereliction** (63% of respondents) has risen from the second highest concern in 2012 to the top concern, a 19% rise.

Littering and fly tipping are a pervasive problem in Scotland, though we lack robust data on levels and trends. Keep Scotland Beautiful's survey² evidence found that 87% of Scots thought littering was a problem nationally, and 67% thought littering was an issue in their local area.

Perceptions of neglect and dereliction may also relate to unused assets, which are vulnerable to vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Electricity pylons and powerlines have dropped from the second-highest concern in 2012, to the fourth highest concern (31% in 2023, 45% in 2012).

We would need to question respondents individually to understand why they have made these selections, and what events in 2012 or 2023 might have driven these changes. However, in 2012, there were a number of significant events: The Beaully-Denny power-line inquiry, which had the then longest public inquiry in Scotland, gave final consent in 2011, with construction commencing in 2012.

Industrial development remains a concern; however, it has now dropped from first to second highest concern. Based on future contracts for private industrial construction, **industrial development** has actually increased over this period, based on data on future construction orders – both in absolute terms and as a percentage of all construction.

² Keep Scotland Beautiful (November 2022), *Scottish Litter Survey*

Table 9: Future Construction orders
Source: Office for National Statistics - Construction statistics, Great Britain: 2021 and Barbour AB

Year	Industrial construction (£m)	All construction (£m)	Industrial orders as percentage (%) of all orders
2010	2,131	52,350	4.1
2011	2,146	45,911	4.7
2012	2,659	48,423	5.5
2013	3,603	55,611	6.5
2014	3,934	59,018	6.7
2015	4,994	62,651	8.0
2016	4,619	66,125	7.0
2017	4,905	70,987	6.9
2018	5,094	61,652	8.3
2019	5,498	63,168	8.7
2020	4,809	55,631	8.6
2021	9,676	72,578	13.3

More research is needed to understand what the basis of this perception is. It could be that new industrial developments are better planned, better landscaped and are perceived as less intrusive. It may also be that the negative perceptions in 2012 are a result of Scotland's industrial legacy, and that over time these facilities have been demolished or adapted. Alternatively, an increasing pattern of neglect and dereliction has overtaken industrial development pressures.

High-density housing, taken to mean housing developments on a scale likely to alter the existing landscape, are now the third highest concern, a rise from 29% of respondents in 2012, to 35% in 2023.

However, house construction in Scotland had actually dropped during this period, between 2010 and 2020, with only two years above 20,000 houses. This contrasts with new house construction in Scotland being higher on average between 1996 and 2009, never dropping below 20,000 new houses during that period.

Table 10: All new housing completions in Scotland 2010-11 to 2020-21 (private new build, housing association new build, local authority new build)

Year	New housing completions
2010-11	16,438
2011-12	16,068
2012-13	14,099
2013-14	15,139
2014-15	16,745
2015-16	16,857
2016-17	17,196
2017-18	17,573
2018-19	21,267
2019-20	22,039
2020-21	14,798

If public perceptions are that house building is now having a greater negative environmental impact, despite overall house building rates reducing, this suggests that the types of development, their design, or their location may be resulting in a greater impact than previously.

Plantation, or monocultural forestry has risen sharply as a concern, from 8% of respondents in 2012, to 29% of respondents in 2023. The Scottish Government is seeking an increase in forest cover in Scotland, from around 17% of land cover to 21% by 2032. This result suggests we must be careful in what form forestry expansion comes if landscapes are not to be degraded.

Onshore windfarms remained a concern for respondents, though they had dropped slightly to sixth highest concern, from fifth in the 2012 survey. Onshore wind developments increased in number and capacity over the past decade, though have largely plateaued in the past three years. The repowering of existing sites, using taller turbines, and the ambition to increase onshore wind energy may bring this back into prominence.

Motorways and dualling of roads fell slightly over the period, from the 6th highest concern in 2012, to 7th in 2023. The main dualling project in Scotland is the dual carriageway under construction between Perth and Inverness. This is being carried out in eleven stages and completion will now be sometime beyond 2025.

Monoculture farming and **fish farming** remained relatively low landscape concerns in both surveys, though monoculture farming overtook fish farming in the 2023 survey.

Conclusion

It is clear from our research with Survation that our landscapes are valued by almost all Scots. In terms of managing change, there are consistent messages coming from the research, with the greatest concerns around neglect and dereliction followed closely by industrial development. This argues for care for our landscapes, and for planning and implementation of infrastructure that meets public expectations.

Scotland's Landscape Charter will provide a springboard for these ambitions to be addressed, providing a framework for increased collaboration and joined up working, encouraging diversity and good planning of our landscapes and embedding principles for a Scotland where we will all cherish our landscapes, positively manage change, recognise landscapes as a vital resource and play an active part in decisions that affect them.