

SCOTLAND ... FUTURES

WHAT WE
HEARD

A national call
for change

November 2025



Scottish Land Commission
Coimisean Fearainn na h-Alba



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SCOTLAND'S LAND

The way Scotland's land is owned and used shapes almost everything about our lives — where we live, the homes we can afford, the jobs available, and the health of our local environment and economy. But for many people, that connection feels distant. Decisions about land often happen far from the places and people affected by them.



Over the past 25 years, land reform has brought real change, but the journey isn't over. The **ScotLand Futures** initiative was launched to change that — to open up a national discussion about what people in Scotland want land to deliver in the years ahead. We asked two simple but important questions:

- What changes would you like to see in how land is owned and used in Scotland and what difference would that make to you, your community or your work?
- When you think about land in your area, what's most important to you?

More than **1,200 people** took part — individuals, communities, landowners, farmers, tenants and organisations across rural and urban Scotland. The response was remarkable in its consistency: **over 96% said that Scotland needs change.**

People told us that land matters because it underpins so many of the issues they care about, from housing and jobs to the climate and nature crises. They spoke about fairness and belonging, about pride in place and opportunity, and about the desire for decisions to be made closer to home.

This summary brings together those voices. It captures the main themes and ideas people shared through **ScotLand Futures** and reflects, in their own words, how Scotland's land could work more fairly and more effectively for everyone.

It is not a set of policy recommendations. Instead, it represents an articulation of what people want to see — a public call for change. People across Scotland want to see land contributing more directly to the nation's shared goals: tackling the housing shortage, restoring nature, supporting local economies and giving communities greater influence over the places where they live.

“Land shapes everything — where we live, how we work, how our communities grow. People want to see that power shared more fairly.”

Alongside this report sits Voices From Scotland, a companion piece sharing perspectives from community leaders, landowners, campaigners, researchers, young people, and practitioners. Together they explore one central question: **what would completing Scotland's land reform journey look like, and what benefits would it bring?**

These voices don't offer a single answer but invite collaboration, reflect diverse views, and focus on better outcomes for people and nature.

The Scottish Land Commission will use what we heard through ScotLand Futures to inform our ongoing work and advice, making it clear that Scotland's land should work for everyone and that continued action is needed to achieve that goal.



Michael Russell
Chair, Scottish Land Commission

96%

OF PEOPLE
SURVEYED SAID
SCOTLAND
NEEDS CHANGE.

LISTENING TO SCOTLAND

1,236 survey responses



21 thought leader blogs



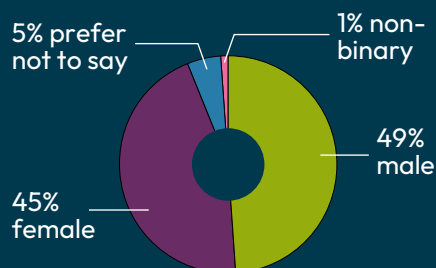
120+ attendees at our public meetings

2 in-depth submissions



WHO TOOK PART

GENDER

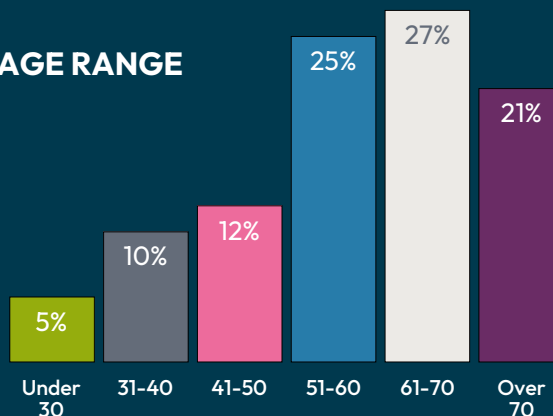


45%

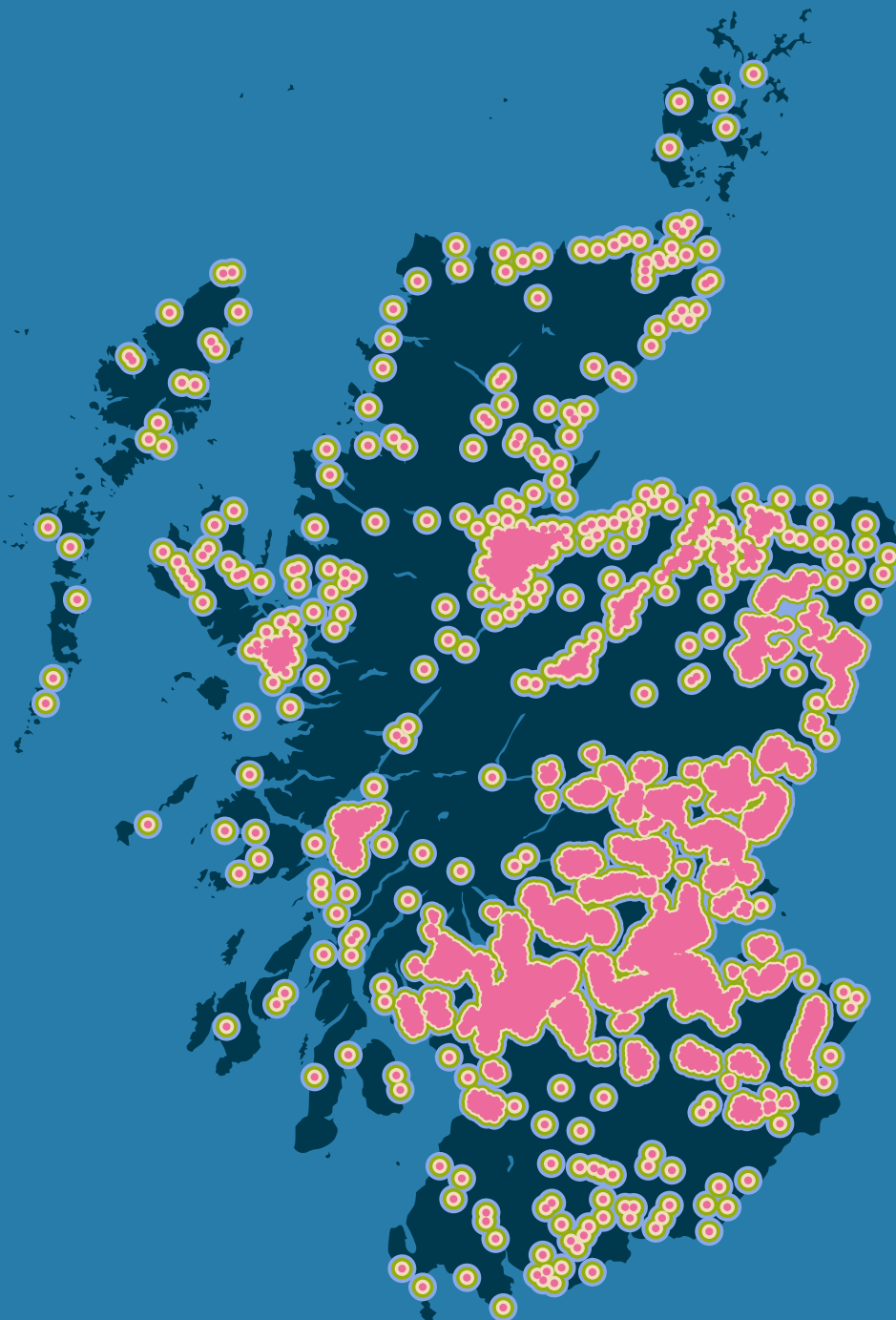
of respondents described themselves as interested citizens

Responses came from landowners, community organisations, professionals and others.

AGE RANGE



RESPONSES CAME
FROM ACROSS
SCOTLAND ● ● ●



WHAT THEY SAID



1 in 20

flagged a lack of
transparency in the
current system



24%

said too much
control lies with too
few people



Over 1 in 5

said landowners
should be present in
the community



13%

feel left out or
unaware of local land
decisions



1 in 40

said more must be
done about vacant
and derelict land



1 in 10

suggested tax changes
as a route to fairness
and productivity

1 IN 20 FLAGGED A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM



PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW WHO OWNS SCOTLAND



Across cities, towns, villages and islands, one of the strongest messages was about openness. People told us that finding out who owns land is far too difficult, and that the lack of transparency undermines trust. Around one in 20 (5.4%) respondents explicitly called for greater transparency about who owns land in Scotland.

“Communities shouldn’t need to use the grapevine to find out who owns land that directly affects community aspirations and people’s quality of life.”

JOHN, EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE

Many described situations where a field, forest or derelict building had been unused for years, yet no one knew who was responsible for it. When ownership is unknown, they said, communities are left powerless to act or even to start a conversation.

Respondents called for a complete, accessible Land Register, cheaper or free searches, and clearer information about what owners intend to do with their land. Some emphasised that ownership alone isn’t the problem — it’s the absence of openness and accountability that causes frustration.

“It should be possible to readily find out who owns a piece of land and, in the case of large landholdings, to have the ability to gain a broad understanding of what the key management objectives are.”

BOB, FIFE

Dozens of people also identified changes of ownership as a particularly important time when transparency is needed, noting that communities often have little information about new owners or their intentions, which can lead to rumours and worry. There is support for the role that Land Management Plans can play in improving transparency.

People see transparency as the first step to rebuilding trust and creating a sense of shared responsibility for Scotland’s land.



TOO MUCH LAND AND POWER IN TOO FEW HANDS



Around a quarter of respondents (24.4%) believe that ownership — and the power that comes with it — is concentrated in too few hands. They described the consequences in very human terms: the young family unable to find land for a house; the small business that can't expand; the community that sees its future shaped by decisions taken elsewhere.

“Land is power and those owning great swathes of it can exert economic, political, social, and environmental influences which may not be to the advantage of local communities and thus the country as a whole.”

LESLEY, STIRLINGSHIRE

“Ownership of land gives a small number of people disproportionate control over how Scotland looks, lives and works.”

DONNA, SUTHERLAND

People want a fairer, more diverse pattern of ownership. As well as concerns about the impacts of concentrated power and ownership, people expressed the positive opportunity of creating more small-scale individual ownership. They spoke positively about family farms, crofts, community trusts and small local enterprises — models that keep money and decision-making rooted in the local area.

They identify a wide range of potential opportunities for small-scale land holdings, from self-build housing, food production, woodland stewardship, business, environmental and amenity uses.

Many also called for bolder public action to open up opportunity: stronger support for community ownership, help for individuals to access land for housing or business, and clearer limits on excessive concentration.

“Like many others, I want to feel rooted in a place I can help shape. I want to build something lasting for my family. I want the chance to live, work and grow in a community where the land supports us, not just those who profit from it.”

RORY, FIFE

“Opportunities for communities to partner with private land owners should be incentivised to enable the creation of jobs, wealth retention and natural capital.”

SCOTT, EDINBURGH

This theme of fairness ran through almost every response. Whether in rural or urban areas, people want land to be part of the solution supporting livelihoods, homes and local resilience, not a barrier to them.

“Ideally, buyers and owners should be resident in Scotland and living within the community where the land is located. This would help ensure that decisions about how land is used are made by people who truly understand the local context and who are invested in its long-term wellbeing.”

RACHEL, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY



A scenic coastal town with colorful houses and a forested hill under a dramatic sky. The image shows a row of multi-story houses in various colors (white, pink, blue, green) along a waterfront. Behind them is a lush green hill with trees. The sky is filled with large, white clouds, and the water in the foreground has several small boats.

**OVER 1 IN 5 SAID
LANDOWNERS
SHOULD BE PART OF
THE COMMUNITY**

BEING PART OF THE PLACE



Linked to questions of ownership is a sense of belonging. Around one in five people (21%) told us that those who own significant parts of Scotland should also be part of the communities whose lives their decisions affect.

“If you own land in Scotland, then you should live in Scotland.”

THERESA, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

“Absentee ownership is a problem with no accountability. The people who own land should live and work there — they should be part of the community.”

SHIREEN, EDINBURGH

Absentee ownership, whether by individuals, companies or overseas investors, was seen as a major source of frustration. People described the economic and social consequences as reduced local spending, a lack of engagement, and a feeling that decisions are made from a distance.

The perceived rapid rise in absentee corporate and international land ownership was seen as particularly corrosive to community cohesion, the feeling of being hostage to fortune when land changes hands or trying to engage with a faceless corporate entity was highlighted by many as a real and demoralising challenge.

Others acknowledged that not every owner can or will live locally, but they still want a sense of accountability. Ownership, they said, should come with an expectation of presence, care and contribution.

“Less absentee landowners — ownership should come with responsibility to the place and its people.”

JOHN, OBAN

People want to feel that those who own and benefit from Scotland’s land are connected to its people and places.

A REAL SAY IN WHAT HAPPENS LOCALLY



When it comes to how land is used, developed and managed, more than one in 10 people (13%) people repeatedly said they feel locked out of decisions that affect their lives.

“Let local people have a real say in what happens on the land around them to stop people feeling alienated and disenfranchised from their local landscapes.”

ANON, HIGHLANDS

“Having a seat at the table would allow our community to be part of the initial talks and plans for creation and growth, rather than feeling that changes are imposed and that residents are given lip service rather than real consideration.”

MAGGIE, RENFREWSHIRE

Respondents described a planning system that feels distant and technical. They said consultations often take place too late, when decisions have already been made. This leaves communities feeling unheard and powerless. People called for earlier and more meaningful involvement in decisions, particularly around housing, renewable energy, forestry and large-scale investment projects. They want to be part of shaping their area’s future, not just reacting to change.

“I think landowners should engage with communities nearby on any proposed change of land use and make use of local knowledge.”

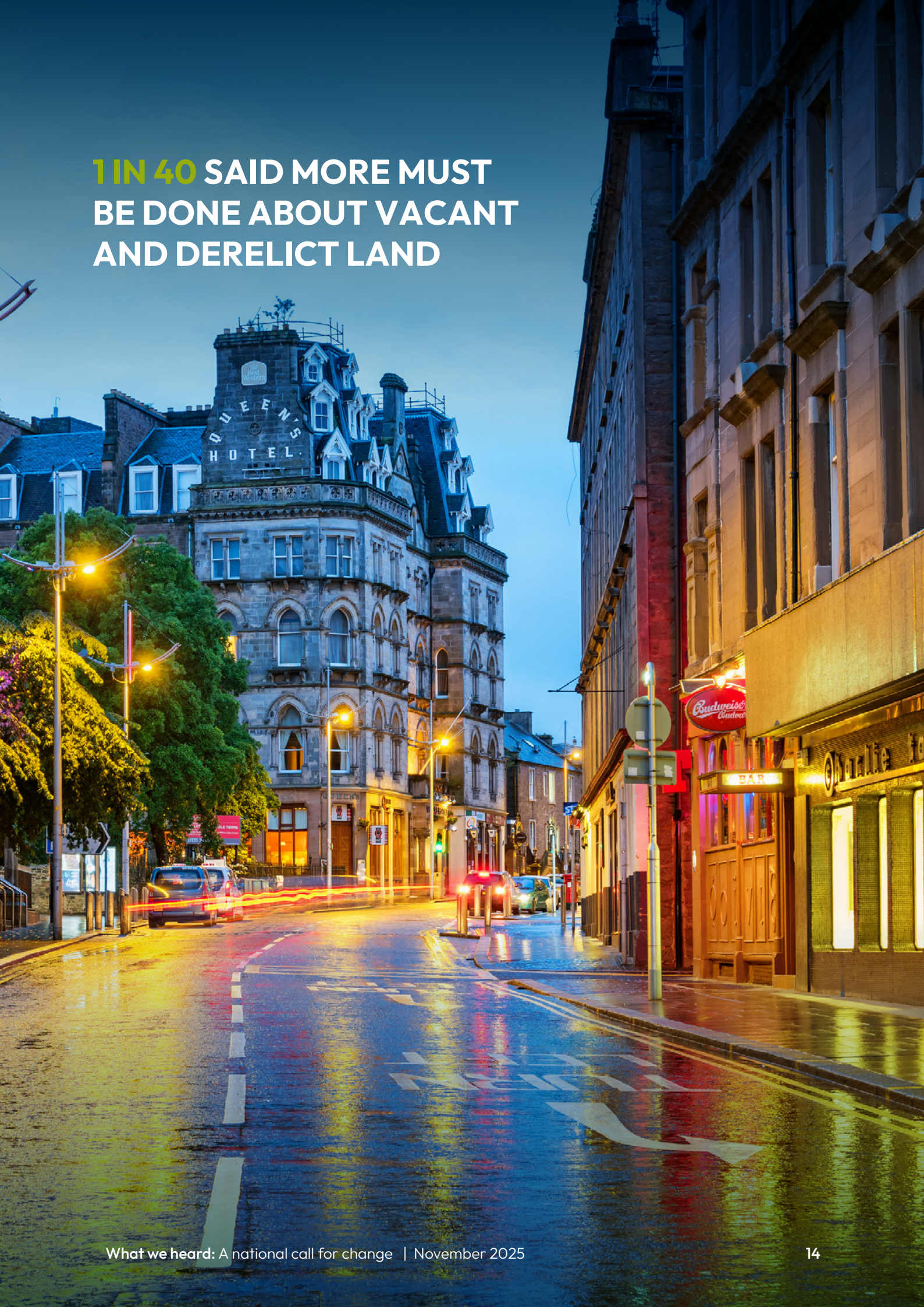
MAIRI, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

“Embed community-led approaches in land ownership and management — not as a token exercise but as a genuine partnership.”

VICKY, HIGHLANDS

What we heard was that genuine participation isn’t just about fairness, it leads to better results. When communities are involved early, development is more likely to reflect local needs and build long-term support.

1 IN 40 SAID MORE MUST BE DONE ABOUT VACANT AND DERELICT LAND



BRINGING WASTED PLACES BACK TO LIFE



From small towns to city neighbourhoods, the sight of derelict or abandoned sites provoked strong feelings. Around one in 40 people (2.5%) described the frustration of living beside empty land or buildings left to decay year after year.

“Owners should have legal responsibilities to ensure their land is kept in a decent state.”

ALISON, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

These sites are seen not only as eyesores but as symbols of neglect — wasted potential in the middle of communities that need homes, green space or places to work.

Many respondents said local authorities need stronger powers to take action where owners fail to maintain or repurpose their land. Others focused on opportunity: turning derelict areas into community gardens, social housing or enterprise hubs.

“Owners of derelict and vacant land and buildings compelled to use them, sell them or offer them to the local community.”

NICK, RENFREWSHIRE

“Land should be available to everyone. Planning should focus on reusing derelict and underused land before allowing new developments.”

JOE, SCOTTISH BORDERS

People see tackling derelict land as a test of fairness and ambition: if Scotland can't fix what is visibly broken, it will struggle to build confidence in wider change.



TAX: A PROBLEM AND A SOLUTION



Almost one in ten people (9.4%) said that changes to the tax system could help make a big difference to how land is owned and used in Scotland.

People talked about using tax in new ways — such as bringing in a land value tax, taxing absentee owners, or using tax to make land ownership fairer and more focused on community benefit.

Some felt the current tax system makes it harder for land to be owned and used in a fair and productive way. They mentioned issues with Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates, Inheritance Tax and how farming tenancies are treated.

“Introduce Land Value Taxation (LVT), initially modest but increasing over time, to encourage better land use.”

JOHN, STIRLING

“Land ownership should be taxed in Scotland in a fair and equitable way.”

IAN, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

“A land and property tax to properly fund our public services and make the system fairer.”

SIMON, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY



While people suggested different ideas, many agreed that tax could be used to encourage better decisions about land. Some supported a new land value tax to bring wider change. Others said smaller changes could help meet specific goals, like bringing derelict land back into use or cutting carbon emissions from peatland.

**1 IN 10 SUGGESTED
TAX CHANGES AS A
ROUTE TO FAIRNESS
AND PRODUCTIVITY**

PEOPLE ARE READY FOR ACTION



Across every theme, one feeling came through strongly: impatience. People believe the need for change is well understood and they want to see progress.

“Action, action, action. Not more consultation.”

RODDIE, HIGHLANDS

Some said government and agencies have moved too slowly on long-standing issues; others said there's been too much talk and too many short-term initiatives. By contrast, a small number feel that a perception of continual legislative change is getting in the way of investment and development, but even those wary of change would welcome clarity and certainty. All agree that leadership and delivery are needed.

“Less bureaucratic interference. Trying to earn a living from the land is hard enough without endless layers of process and regulation.”

ANON, ANGUS

“Land ownership is currently overburdened by regulation and policy. It feels like every new law just adds another layer instead of simplifying things.”

ANON, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

Despite the frustration, the mood is hopeful. People believe that change is possible — that Scotland can be fairer, greener and more locally rooted if it chooses to act with purpose.

“It would give me hope that resilient and sustainable land use could be a reality rather than an aspiration.”

BILL, ABERDEEN

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT...



The Scottish Land Commission will use what we heard through ScotLand Futures to shape our advice to government. The findings will inform how we focus our work ensuring that the voices captured here influence practical steps and real outcomes.

This publication closes one phase of ScotLand Futures but opens another. The conversations, ideas and challenges set out here will continue to shape our direction and Scotland's wider approach to land in the years ahead. The Scottish Land Commission will use what we heard through ScotLand Futures to inform our ongoing work and advice, making it clear that Scotland's land should work for everyone and that continued action is needed to achieve that goal.

"It's over two decades since Scotland's world-leading land reform laws were passed, and we're still waiting for real change on the ground."

GAVIN, EDINBURGH

"The changes I would like to see are based around a straightforward vision: that the main purpose of land in Scotland should not be for visiting or gazing upon, but for living. To 're-people' Scotland should be the main goal of land reform."

KARA, EDINBURGH

"The Gaelic word dùthchas describes a relationship between people and the land — one of belonging, care and shared responsibility."

SEASAIDH, HIGHLANDS

People across Scotland have made their views clear that land should work for everyone. The task now is to turn that shared ambition into shared confidence that Scotland is making the changes needed.

This insight will directly contribute to a new policy agenda and advice on completing Scotland's land reform journey, which the Commission will publish in the New Year.

Ma tha sibh ag iarraidh lethbhreac den sgrìobhainn seo sa Ghàidhlig, cuiribh post-d gu **commsteam@landcommission.gov.scot** no cuiribh fòn gu **01463 423 300**.

If you would like to request a copy of this document in Gaelic, please email **commsteam@landcommission.gov.scot** or call **01463 423 300**.



Scottish Land Commission
Coimisean Fearainn na h-Alba

Scottish Land Commission

An Lòchran

10 Inverness Campus

Inverness

IV2 5NA

info@landcommission.gov.scot

01463 423 300

www.landcommission.gov.scot

© f x @ v in b

© Scottish Land Commission

November 2025