

# Scottish Government submission of 29 March 2023

## PE1985/C: Evaluate Garage to Home Developments

Thank you for your letter of 1 March 2023 noting that the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered the above petition at its meeting on 22 February 2023 and agreed to write to the Scottish Government. It is noted in your letter that following consideration of the petitioner's recent written submission, the Committee is keen to understand:

- what consideration the Scottish Government has given to the national implications of “garages to homes” developments in the Scottish Borders;
- whether the Scottish Government believes that a broader, independent evaluation of such developments is required; and
- whether the Scottish Government recognises the value in assessing factors such as social impact as part of any evaluation of such developments.

Based on our understanding and knowledge of the proposal that has been developed to date and taking each point in turn we would comment as follows:

### **1. What consideration the Scottish Government has given to the national implications of “garages to homes” developments in the Scottish Borders**

This proposal, similar to some other brownfield developments, will involve partial demolition to construct new homes on some housing association owned sites. Planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan for the area unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The current statutory development plan for the Scottish Borders area comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (February 2023) and the Scottish Borders Council Local Development Plan (2016). These cover a range of policy areas which deal with new homes and brownfield land.

We understand that planning applications from Scottish Borders Housing Association were received and validated by the Scottish Borders Council

planning department on 24 March 2023 for sites in Hawick & Jedburgh. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for the Scottish Government to comment on any proposals that have come forward as planning applications to the Council, or may or may not come forward in future, as this may prejudice the outcome of the decision making process, should the case be notified to Ministers.

Planning and building standards, whilst separate regulatory regimes, involve robust processes for assessing and adjudicating on such considerations and the proposed developments, whether in the Scottish Borders or elsewhere, will require planning permission. In respect of building standards, we understand that these proposed new homes will be permanent, high-quality homes which will meet current Building Regulations, Housing for Varying Needs and Scottish Government “Greener” standards.

Given the robust and longstanding nature of the planning and building standards regulatory regimes in assessing different types of proposals, and that this proposal has similarities to other brownfield developments, we do not consider that there are any national implications to this proposal in the Scottish Borders.

## **2. Whether the Scottish Government believes that a broader, independent evaluation of such developments is required**

We do not believe that a broader, independent evaluation of such developments is required, because, as noted in point 1 above, the planning and building standards regulatory regimes involve longstanding processes for assessing and adjudicating on such considerations.

## **3. Whether the Scottish Government recognises the value in assessing factors such as social impact as part of any evaluation of such developments**

In respect of the potential social impact of this proposed development, the Scottish Borders Council Local Housing Strategy confirms a requirement for homes for older people and also has a target that 10% of new affordable homes should be wheelchair accessible.

We understand that these proposed new social rented homes will be designed for older people/people with limited mobility and/or wheelchair users. This will expand housing options to enable people to age well and live in their chosen community. The homes will also meet the Silver

standard for energy for space heating and be net zero at point of use with solar panels to provide on-site energy generation.

The proposal has been examined by a variety of stakeholder bodies who are supportive of the social impact of the proposed developments. A broad feasibility study was undertaken initially and the proposal developed by partners in Scottish Borders Council and South of Scotland Enterprise with input from colleagues in the NHS and Social Care based on their understanding of need and design priorities.

This recognised the social impact of such developments in providing much needed net zero affordable housing for wheelchair users and/or older people that would enable them to live independently in their community.

Whilst we understand that there may be disappointment that selected garage sites may not have their leases extended by the Housing Associations, the Housing Associations have indicated that there is a broader portfolio of garages available and they will work with individuals to find solutions where possible. In any event, the leasing or otherwise of selected garage sites owned by the Housing Associations is not a matter for the Scottish Government.

I hope the above is helpful in answering the follow up questions of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.