

Scottish Government submission of 6 March 2024

PE2063/A: Increase funding for local authorities to enable better management and protection of conservation areas

Thank you for your email dated 08 November 2023 requesting the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in Petition PE2063: Increase funding for local authorities to enable better management and protection of conservation areas.

The petition is asking for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide additional funding to all local authorities in Scotland, enabling them to better manage and protect the character and appearance of designated conservation areas.

The Scottish Government recognises the financial challenges that local government are currently facing which is why their overall share of the 2024-25 Scottish Budget has been increased despite the profoundly challenging financial situation. In the most challenging budget settlement, the 2024-25 Local Government settlement provides record funding of over £14 billion to local authorities, including £147 million of funding for the Council Tax Freeze, this represents an increase of £574.6 million, equivalent to a 4.3 per cent cash terms increase.

Local authorities are accountable to the public as democratically elected bodies and the Scottish Government's policy towards local authorities' spending is to allow local authorities the financial freedom to operate independently. As such, the vast majority of funding is provided by means of a block grant. It is then the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their own budgets and to allocate the total financial resources available to them, including on management and protection of conservation areas, on the basis of local needs and priorities, having first fulfilled their statutory obligations and the jointly agreed set of national and local priorities.

Ultimately, it is for locally elected representatives to make local decisions on how best to deliver services to their local communities and proposals to hypothecate funding for this specific purpose would run counter to the principles set out in the Verity House Agreement.

The Scottish Government is proud that Scotland is internationally renowned for the quality and diversity of its historic environment, and considers our heritage has an important role to play in shaping our future, so we must ensure it is protected to benefit future generations. Our shared heritage defines who we are as a nation and is hugely inspirational, helping to create a powerful sense of place and providing a backdrop against which we live, work and have fun.

The Scottish Government delivers support for the historic environment through sponsorship of Historic Environment Scotland (HES). HES is Scotland's leading public body for the historic environment whose purpose is to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment. HES lead and enable Scotland's national historic environment strategy, Our Past our Future, which sets out how our historic environment will be managed. It ensures our historic environment is cared for, valued and enhanced, both now and for the future.

HES delivers grants and funding schemes of circa £14.5 million annually to individuals and organisations for the support of projects that promote and protect our historic environment. You can find more information about them here - <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/grants-and-funding/our-grants/>

Conservation areas are largely the responsibility of individual local authority, however there is published guidance from Historic Environment Scotland online here - <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationid=e4800852-69da-46fd-bd49-aa3a0108bb80>

I hope that this response is helpful to the Committee in setting out the current position of the Scottish Government.

Local Government and Housing Directorate