Local Government and Communities Committee

Planning (Scotland) Bill

Submission from the Historians’ Committee on Culloden

The document attached was issued as a preliminary summary to help inform the recent debate on the development submissions for Viewhill Farm, part of the protected area of Culloden battlefield. A detailed dossier of our findings, including updated maps, and a list of scholars supporting our research and conclusions will be made public in the next few weeks.

This Committee believes the issues we are addressing to be of significant relevance to this bill.

Of particular concern is our belief, and our findings which support that belief, that the actions of the Scottish Government Reporter at the time referenced were based on:

1. Misinformation supplied to him,
2. A lack of consideration for the findings of other significant institutions which had expert knowledge,
3. The scope of the Scottish Reporter’s own expertise, as a waste management specialist, which gave him no appropriate understanding or background with which to address a situation of critical importance both nationally in Scotland and around the world.

Specifically, our current findings are that the Scottish Reporter apparently relied exclusively on a statement made by the then Chief Executive of Historic Scotland which contracted Historic Scotland’s own published research at the time, as well as the conclusions of the National Trust for Scotland, The Highland Council, and the work of renowned historians and archaeologists whose specific expertise is the history of this particular ground. All of the latter disagreed with the statement on which the Reporter relied.

It is our submission, therefore, that no final decision without possibility of appeal on planning should be exclusively in the hands of either local Councils or the Scottish Government as there is opportunity for serious error from both. If it can be proved that significant errors were made in the decision making process, this evidence must be allowed to be considered by governing bodies.

We gather from the language describing this bill that its intent is to facilitate more available housing in Scotland. While the intention is admirable and a reduction in the complexity and length of the planning permission process may be desirable in some cases, we are concerned that there is also significant risk that, as presented, the bill will aid in irrevocable damage to critically important historic sites and, specifically in the case of Culloden, a war grave.
We ask you, therefore, to rethink the provisions of this bill so that it strikes a balance between local control and national interest and that, under the appropriate circumstances, nothing is beyond fair and legitimate appeal.

Respectfully submitted by

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Administrator
Historians’ Committee on Culloden
A Chomataidh eachdraidheil mu Chùil Lodair

'Culloden, the Endangered Battlescape'

A panel has been formed of historians with specialized knowledge of the battle of Culloden and related events. This panel is spearheaded by Dr. Christopher Duffy, author of two comprehensive, scholarly volumes on the Rising of 1745, renowned military historian and Senior Lecturer in War Studies, RMA Sandhurst, and Research Professor in History of War at De Montfort University whose works on 18th century armies and battles have become standard texts; and Arran Johnston, author of two authoritative books on battles of the '45 and Director of the Scottish Battlefields' Trust.

The panel is currently completing the first phase of detailed research with a particular focus on the action at the north end of the battle array (the Jacobite left and the Hanoverian right) which took place at the site of the present Viewhill Farm.

The work is on-going and detailed maps are being prepared to illustrate our findings, but here are our initial conclusions, based on Dr. Duffy’s current research:

1) The battle array (the Jacobite left and the Hanoverian right) reached up through the present site of Viewhill Farm, with the current B9006 cutting through the centre of the battle lines. The statement made by Historic Scotland, and relied upon by the Scottish Government Reporter in their decision to support the Viewhill Farm housing development, was therefore inaccurate and contradicted HS’s own published research and that of many major historians.

‘The left wing played a much more active part in the action than has been generally accepted' [Woosnam-Savage, R.C. in Pollard, T.,2011, 175]

2) The area of Viewhill Farm likely saw heavy casualties toward the end of the battle as the Hanoverian cavalry bore down on the retreating forces of clan Donald, Gordon of Glenbucket, and the Duke of Perth. Three days later, when the bodies of the fallen were finally allowed to be buried, exceptionally boggy and difficult ground lay between the dead of Viewhill and the pits dug for burial by the present-day cairn. It is likely that those who were slain at Viewhill were not removed to the pit graves, but were either buried on site or
allowed to rot there. Viewhill Farm is therefore likely to be part of the war grave of Culloden.

3) The objections to the housing development therefore, are far more than just inferring with the viewscape of Culloden Muir, but will forever damage a site which has not yet been studied as thoroughly as it warrants and is likely part of a war grave.

The first thorough and scientific investigation of the scene of the actions on the northern wing was completed by the AOC Group, working for The Highland Council. Digital Viewshed Analysis showed that:

‘Any development to the north of the B9006 could potentially diminish our ability to understand and appreciate the northern extensions of both the Jacobite and Government lines’

The report further states that the vicinities of Blackpark, Treeton, and Viewhill farms were particularly important for conservation, being areas that

‘contribute to our understanding of the landscape context of the Battle of Culloden Muir, they make appreciable the tactical and strategic reasons for fighting the battle on Culloden Muir and facilitate our understanding of the position of both armies’ movements across the battlefield and the consequent rout’ [Bradley-Lovekin, T., and Olesky, V., ‘Proposed Culloden Muir Conservation Area’ 2015, 49.50]

As this panel’s research progresses over the coming weeks, we will be holding a press conference, issuing a press release, and sending our findings to various government agencies. In the meantime, we hope you find the above useful in your decision-making process.

‘The battle of Culloden is one of the decisive battles of the world, and one of the most powerful in its continuing influence on cultural memory.’

Professor Murray Pittock, Bradley Professor and Pro Vice-Principal, The University of Glasgow, ‘Culloden’.