Local Government and Communities Committee
Planning (Scotland) Bill
Submission from Wildland Limited

Established in 2007, Wildland Limited now owns 220,000 acres, spanning three management areas: Badenoch, Sutherland and Lochaber, encompassing some of Highland Scotland’s most rugged and beautiful landscapes.

The company has a unique 200 year vision for restoring and transforming the estates in its care by developing a world class portfolio of quality, design-led tourism experiences that allow guests to enjoy the best of Scotland’s hospitality, natural heritage and landscape.

Investing £25-30m over the next 3 years, in buildings and property investment alone, its strategy is to build vibrant tourism businesses that support diverse economic opportunities for rural communities, while ensuring that environmental sustainability and conservation lie at the heart of its proposition.

With a staff of 59 in Scotland, Wildland Limited will also contribute directly into the communities in which it operates.

Wildland Limited has a management board of five who bring a wealth of experience and expertise in the provision of tourism and land resource restoration.

Current portfolio

Wildland Limited’s three landholdings are; Wildland Cairngorm, Wildland North Coast and Wildland Braeroy and encompass the following estates: Aldourie, Braeroy, Eriboll, Gaick, Glenfeshie, Hope, Killiehuntly, Kinloch, Lynaberack, Loyal and, Strathmore.

The company currently operates a diverse range of offerings for visitors to the Highlands looking for extraordinary and unforgettable getaways in scenic locations. These include Kinloch Lodge, Sutherland, Killiehuntly Farmhouse and Cottages, Glenfeshie Estate and Cottages, both within the Cairngorm National Park and Aldourie Castle Estate, Loch Ness.

Future growth

As a tourism business, Wildland Limited already has a large presence that is growing quickly through targeted investment across its estates.

Some £25-30 million in further investments will improve or expand this portfolio over the next few years, with many projects currently underway. The aim is to make Wildland Limited’s estates as sustainable economically as they are environmentally. In doing so the company will offer accommodation and food offerings for a range of price points, from world class luxury lodges to family getaways in scenic cottages.
Wildland Limited is committed to contributing directly back into the communities in which it operates. Whether that’s through investing directly into local lifeline businesses or donations to good causes.

Our interest in the 2017 Planning Bill

Wildland Ltd makes very many planning applications in the Highlands. We are carrying out developments in an environment which is extremely sensitive. We are committed to developments of the very highest standards, ranging from the restoration of the remote Ruigh Aiteachain bothy in Glen Feshie to the conservation of historic castles such as Aldourie or Caisteal Bhairraich. We not only understand the importance of context in terms of design and construction but also as the backdrop to the business. Scotland’s scenic beauty and wild environment are the most important factors in all that we do.

It is no secret that we have challenged a decision of the Scottish Government made under the Electricity Act. The Creag Riabhach proposals are an industrial scale development in an outstanding environment and landscape. The process by which this proposal gained consent relied on Westminster legislation designed to make the construction of power stations easier. The words ‘wind farm’ do not appear anywhere on the face of the Act. It is an ‘Energy Consents Unit’ which deals with such proposals on behalf of the Scottish Government.

A cursory examination of the map of windfarm developments (see attached work from Leeds University) shows that it has become the biggest land use change over the last 30 years in Scotland. In 1990 there were only two significant turbines in Scotland whereas today we have approaching 3000 turbines.

Wildland Ltd is not opposed to renewable energy, but in terms of the Cairngorms National Park and the remoter parts of the North West Highlands we do ask whether the continued spread of large industrial scale developments has reached its limits. It was our understanding that the development of the Wild Land Area approach was in direct response to the seemingly unstoppable spread of industrial scale developments.

We are very supportive of these designations Scotland that deploys to protect its scenic and environmental heritage. We find it hard to imagine how there could be further industrial scale development in our National Parks, Natura 2000 sites, National Scenic Areas or within the newer Wild Land Areas. Wildland Ltd is also supporting this framework through its active support of the Peatlands/Flow Country candidacy for UNESCO World Heritage status AND though our support for the North Coast 500 initiative.

Yet in spite of these protections and initiatives, adverse developments still appear, leading Wildland Limited to ask whether the designations are strong enough or whether the spirit, if not the letter of the law is actually adhered to. We also ask whether the processes and regulations governing such development proposals affords such designations sufficient weight. The fact that there was government discretion as to whether there should or should not be a public inquiry into Creag...
Riabhach – one of the largest windfarm developments in the Highlands – in itself speaks volumes.

So, in conclusion, we would ask the Local Government and Communities Committee to consider whether the Planning Bill is an opportunity to strengthen the weight given to the natural and scenic heritage of Scotland. It should be the key material consideration when considering industrial scale development proposals in such designated areas or affecting our highly valued protected species. It would be unconscionable if it continued to be possible to increase the scale of such industrial scale proposals, such that they are dealt with under the Westminster Electricity Act (instead of Scotland's Planning Acts) and this results in a lesser level of scrutiny.

We will watch closely to see whether the Committee considers this representation in their deliberations.

On behalf of Wildland Ltd

Bob Reid
Development Director
Wildland Limited