Background to the Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers

Founded in 1978, the Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers (ASSC) is the leading source of knowledge on short-term letting and holiday homes in Scotland. The ASSC is the only trade body representing the interests of the traditional self-catering sector. It has more than 650 Members, operating in excess of 7,000 self-catering properties throughout Scotland, and has close links with other European countries, as founding members of the European Holiday Homes Association (EHHA). The ASSC commits its members to maintaining the principles of “quality, integrity, cleanliness, comfort, courtesy and efficiency” and to offering visitors to Scotland consistently high standards within their self-catering properties. The ASSC’s vision is to place our members at the forefront of a professional, vibrant and prosperous Scottish self-catering sector.

Introduction

The ASSC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government’s Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry into empty homes in Scotland. The Committee’s focus on this topic is timely, necessary and will examine an area which has hitherto not received a sufficient level of scrutiny by policymakers.

The ASSC also appreciates the chance to engage in an evidence-based discussion on housing policy. As the leading industry body representing the traditional self-catering sector, we are concerned about the nature and tenor of the housing debate in Scotland as our sector is frequently highlighted as one of the principle drivers of housing shortages when the available evidence suggests that this is not the case.

In recent times, our industry has been used as a convenient scapegoat for longstanding failures in housing policy. However, in reality, the challenges facing Scotland are far more multifaceted than the existence of short-term and holiday lets alone, with the number of empty homes across Scotland being a case in point.

Empty Homes in Scotland

In 2018, the ASSC commissioned Frontline Consultants – a specialist research agency – to obtain more evidence about the short-term letting sector and its impact across Scotland.¹ This continued the ASSC’s commitment to ensuring that the most

accurate and reliable data is used to inform decision-making on short-term lets, an important part of Scotland’s tourist economy.

There have been concerns raised over the impact of increasing tourism and the growth of short-term lets on the housing market. As part of this research, Frontline conducted a review of the housing environment in Scotland to understand the factors driving market demand and supply and to ascertain whether concerns about the growth of short-term lets were valid.

Overall, there are 79,000 empty homes in Scotland compared to 16,692 short-term lets. That means that there are almost five times as many empty homes in Scotland as there are self-catering units; and in light of this, the ASSC believes that more attention should be given to occupying vacant homes than suggesting self-catering units alone are adversely affecting local housing markets.

The ASSC believes building too few homes and not the impact of the STR market that is the cause of the country’s housing crisis and that decision-makers should focus on its primary drivers: the undersupply of land, the complexity of the planning process, lack of investment and capacity challenges in construction.

Conclusion

As the leading trade association for the traditional holiday and short-term let sector, the ASSC values the opportunity to engage in holistic and evidence-based discussions about housing in Scotland.

As our research has demonstrated, there are almost five times as many empty homes than self-catering units across Scotland. The ASSC maintain that more needs to be done to address the problem of empty homes in Scotland when policymakers focus on tackling Scotland’s housing challenges.

Ultimately, building too few homes remains the core cause of Scotland’s housing problems, not the holiday let sector.

Fiona Campbell
Chief Executive, Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers.

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The Benefits of the Short-Term Rental Sector to Scotland A report by Frontline for The Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers (June 2018).