

Planning our city's future

✘ An interesting article as always by Edinburgh-based journalist, [Rob Edwards](#), who explains in his opening sentence that:-“A new government plan for Scotland's land is running into fierce opposition because it would fail to stop developments that threaten to wreck the environment – like David Murray's huge housing scheme proposed for Edinburgh's greenbelt.” Edwards highlights the Draft Land Use Strategy which is open for consultation till the end of November. You can access the consultation document [here](#).

Land use strategy is one of the main ways in which The Scottish Government's might reach its ambitious emissions targets. This will embody the wide angle view of planning, and the way in which we use the limited resource that we have in Scotland of land suitable for sustainable development.

The narrower view relates to the planning process itself. The proposal by Sir David to develop a [green belt site](#) to form a £1 billion array of housing and sports facilities has been accused of flying in the face of many planning policies, and the scheme already has many critics. Murray aims to develop land on the fringes of the city boundary which environmentalists say will only increase car usage and CO2 emissions. In some respects, the scheme appears to be a rehash of an earlier attempt by Murray to build a sports stadium (or football stadium) on the fringes of the city.

[Brian Ferguson](#) writing in The Scotsman, explains that Finance Secretary John Swinney appears to back the plan – and he also backs the Scottish Government Chief Planner, Jim McKinnon, who has caused controversy over this particular planning proposal, as he not only attended the formal launch of the planning consultation, but also delivered the keynote speech in which he described the proposal as 'exciting'. Criticism has been levelled at McKinnon and questions have been asked as

to whether his attendance at the launch was appropriate.

It has become the norm for major planning proposals to be launched in a very public fashion, presumably in a valid effort on the part of developers to try and short circuit objections which might otherwise delay the planning procedure. On one view, this could be thought of as admirably transparent. The developers seem to think that these 'charrettes' are worth the large financial cost. It has been widely reported that Murray Estates spent about £400,000 in staging such a launch in Edinburgh last week, using venues such as Murrayfield Stadium as a forum to consult with interested parties. Murray Estates go to some lengths on their website to explain what a [charrette](#) is.

Murray is not a stranger to controversy, particularly in the realms of planning matters. Hardly a month goes by when he does not lodge another planning application in Edinburgh for development of another part of his extensive land bank. Property is a large part of what the Murray business is about. Ratho was the focus earlier in the year, when he lodged plans for a housing development there, apparently on land earmarked for the resiting of The Royal Highland Show ground. (The repositioning of the showground to allow expansion of the airport is another planning matter which has dragged on apparently so far without resolution.) Murray also lodged plans to partly demolish and rebuild his own home on Easter Belmont Road. These plans appear to have been given permission, notwithstanding the objection by Murrayfield Community Council that the "proposed dwelling will not enhance the Conservation Area."

Scotland, and Edinburgh, need businessmen like David Murray who have brought wealth and investment to the city and the country. The city needs developments of all kinds, but that has to be tempered with some caution as to due process, particularly in the planning process, responsibility for which

is delegated to the city Council.

And it is to be hoped that The Scottish Government will consider carefully the land strategy that they adopt in future years. You can affect that by having a look at the [draft land use strategy](#) mentioned above and answer some of the questions that are put by the government in trying to firm up the draft plan.