

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), 22 February  
2023

## PE1985: Evaluate Garage to Home Developments

<b>Petitioner</b>	Darren Loftus
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent evaluation and provide national guidance on garages to homes developments.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1985">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1985</a>

### Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 1 December 2022.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 201 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.

### Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

**Clerk to the Committee**

# Annexe A

## PE1985: Evaluate Garage to Home Developments

### Petitioner

Darren Loftus

### Date Lodged:

03/11/22

### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent evaluation and provide national guidance on garages to homes developments.

### Previous action

I have contacted my local MP, six local Councillor's, eight MSPs, Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Borders Housing Association and the Scottish Government. I have submitted various Freedom of Information requests. I have contacted Citizens Advice Bureau. I am supporting a campaign group in relation to this issue. I have researched other such projects in England, and I am analysing various documents relating to this issue.

### Background information

These developments are built in a way that means they are not classed as new builds, meaning that they are viewed as conversions and not subject to many planning regulations.

An independent investigation and evaluation of the conversion of garages to homes involving communities and taking all factors into account, including demand, rental income, social factors alongside cost and practicality is needed.

The Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) in partnership with Berwickshire Housing Association and supported by Scottish Borders Council are planning to convert around 500 garages to 100 homes. I believe plans have been progressed without any community engagement and driven purely by financial considerations, offering cheap means of addressing the affordable housing crisis within Scotland.

Based on their UK Community Renewal Fund Bid, SBHA also view their plan as a potential pre-cursor to a Scotland wide roll out.

## Annexe B

The logo for SPICe is a purple rounded rectangle with a gradient. The text 'SPICe' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**The Information Centre**  
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

### **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE1985: Evaluate Garages to Homes Developments, lodged by Darren Loftus**

#### **Background**

Anyone wishing to convert a garage into a home in Scotland first needs to obtain planning permission and a building warrant from the relevant local authority. This ensures that the proposed development is consistent with local and national planning policies and meets the requirements of Scottish building regulations, as they apply to domestic buildings.

Every application for planning permission is subject to a minimum 21-day period of public consultation. The owners, lessees or occupiers of property immediately neighbouring the proposed development site are directly notified of the proposals by the planning authority. The relevant community council, where one exists, is also notified. Anyone can submit comments to the planning authority on a proposed development during this period.

With regards the Scottish Borders Housing Association's (SBHA) proposals for garage to home conversions mentioned in the petition, [the SBHA held two pre-planning application consultation events](#) and hosted an online survey. The SBHA website states:

“Over 100 people attended across the two consultation events, with others taking part in our online survey, and we have received a lot of constructive feedback. We'll now take some time to consider this and adjust out proposals accordingly.”

These events are additional to the statutory 21-day consultation period described above, which will occur in this case once applications for planning permission have been submitted to Scottish Borders Council.

## **Scottish Government Action**

The Scottish Government has not previously considered establishing an inquiry into garage to home conversions.

## **Scottish Parliament Action**

The Scottish Parliament has not previously considered the establishment of an inquiry into garage to home conversions.

**Alan Rehfisch**

**Senior Researcher**

14 November 2022

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot). Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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## Annexe C

### Scottish Government submission of 9

December 2022

### PE1985/A: Evaluate Garage to Home Developments

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this petition *“calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent evaluation and provide national guidance on garages to homes developments”*.

#### **Background**

We understand the background to be as follows.

The proposal being considered by Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) and Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA), and noted in the petition as *“garages to homes”*, is to construct new build homes on some existing housing association owned garage sites. Both associations operate in the Scottish Borders Council (SBC) geographic area, and SBHA has identified potential sites in Jedburgh and Hawick and BHA in Eyemouth. We understand that both Housing Associations will continue to retain a portfolio of garages.

We understand that the proposed new build project is supported by Scottish Borders Council (SBC) and the South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) and meets the objectives of the Council’s Local Housing Strategy, which confirms a requirement for homes for older people. The Council’s Local Housing Strategy also has a target that 10% of new build affordable homes should be wheelchair accessible and we understand that these proposed new build homes for older people will be designed for wheelchair users and/or older people with limited mobility. Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) also notes in its Strategic Plan to support housing models that enable older people to remain in their community.

#### **Scottish Government Response**

There are five main points raised by the petitioner.

1. ***Development not subject to many planning regulations***
2. ***Independent investigation is needed***
3. ***Plans have been progressed without any community engagement***
4. ***Plans are driven primarily by financial considerations offering cheap means of affordable housing***
5. ***Pre-cursor to a Scotland-wide roll-out***

Based on our understanding and knowledge of the proposal that has been developed to date and taking each point in turn:

1. ***Development not subject to many planning regulations***

The proposed homes will require planning permission and we understand that SBHA have discussed the proposal with local planners at Scottish Borders Council and a planning application will be submitted in due course. It should be noted that planning and building standards are separate regulatory regimes. In terms of standards, we understand that these new build homes will meet current Building Regulations, Housing for Varying Needs and Scottish Government “Greener” standards.

We also understand that these new build homes will be permanent, high-quality homes, designed for wheelchair users and/or people with limited mobility. They will meet the Silver standard for energy for space heating and be Net Zero at point of use (no gas) with Solar Panels to provide on-site energy generation.

2. ***Independent investigation is needed***

We understand that the concept has been examined by a variety of stakeholder bodies. A broad feasibility study was initially undertaken as part of a Scottish Borders Council Community Renewal Fund (CRF) bid in Spring 2021 and subsequently agreed by the full Council. SBHA and BHA then submitted a joint proposal to the Council to undertake a feasibility study of the garage sites owned by both Housing Associations across the Scottish Borders. This bid was developed with partners in Scottish Borders Council with input from colleagues in the NHS and Social Care based on their understanding of need and design priorities. We understand that whilst it did not immediately proceed at this stage, the concept was considered to have merit by Scottish Borders Council and the South of Scotland Enterprise, who continue to be supportive.

### **3. *Plans have been progressed without any community engagement***

We understand that SBHA have been working on detailed design and preparation for planning consultation events. We also understand that discussions with councillors in the respective wards have taken place, a project briefing for all Scottish Borders councillors is to be developed and discussions have also taken place with local MSPs/MPs. In early November 2022, SBHA undertook a public consultation for the sites in Jedburgh and Hawick. This will have enabled attendees to find out more and allowed the Housing Association to receive feedback on the proposals, prior to any planning application.

### **4. *Plans are driven primarily by financial considerations offering cheap means of affordable housing***

We understand that these new build homes are permanent, high-quality homes, fully compliant with Building Standards and which will meet current Housing for Varying Needs and Scottish Government “Greener” standards.

We understand that costs on a m<sup>2</sup> basis may, in some cases, be more expensive than a traditional new build, but savings may be obtained with a system build, as time on site may be reduced compared with a traditional built home. As both housing associations already own the land, there will be no land acquisition cost associated with the development, but there may be costs associated with the regeneration of brownfield sites to create new build homes.

Using brownfield sites to create new build homes fits with the emphasis of the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)([National Planning Framework | Transforming Planning](#))

### **5. *Pre-cursor to a Scotland-wide roll-out***

While Local Authorities or other Housing Associations may look at the proposal, it will be for them to consider in their own context and, we understand, SBHA has no intention of leading a national roll-out of the proposals.

It should also be noted that Scottish Government does not prescribe, nor enforce, particular housing solutions, but rather it provides the planning framework against which developments are tested.



I hope the above is helpful in setting out the government's position and understanding of the proposal.

## Annexe D

### Petitioner submission of 31 January 2023

#### PE1985/B: Evaluate Garages to Homes Developments

##### **Broad Context for Consideration**

On C4 News, 06.10.2022 Cathy Newman interviewed Kwajo Tweneboa, the prominent Housing Activist. Describing his own family's situation, he states "For a couple of years we were living in a converted garage that was our temporary accommodation, you wouldn't think that would be allowed especially in 2021 or 2022 Great Britain".

Registered Social Landlords such as Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) and Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA) and emergent funding body South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) appear to offer Garages to Homes as the solution to future housing for older adults and people with a disability. The homes being earmarked for development in the Scottish Borders are permanent accommodations for older frailer adults and people with a disability.

There are numerous pieces of evidence that substantiate this plan as being a pre-cursor to a Scotland wide roll-out. "The project has the potential to provide an opportunity for social landlords across Scotland with garage sites and for the development of homes for a range of needs beyond this study" (Chief Executive, SBHA, 2021 – UK Community Renewal Fund Bid)

Is the aspiration of the Scottish Parliament to move their citizens, specifically older adults, and people with a disability, into housing units converted from garages?

This is in direct contradiction with the Scottish Government Document "Age, home and community: a strategy for housing Scotland's older people 2012 – 2021.

I implore the Committee to consider who should oversee Housing Policy across Scotland, I believe it should be the Scottish Parliament and not left to the devices of Social Landlords, Private Companies, and Funding Bodies. This is a matter of Social Policy and should be sufficiently addressed.

## **My Reply to Scottish Government Response**

I have chosen to focus on Section 2. The response attempts to provide evidence that negates the need for there to be an independent investigation.

The Scottish Government states that:

- “a broad feasibility study took place as part of the Community Renewal Fund bid in spring 2021.”

From the information I have acquired, there is no evidence of this. There was no ‘broad feasibility study as the Community Renewal Fund Bid was to initiate and finance the sole Feasibility Study.

- The format of the CRF bid process had to be submitted under a lead Local Authority.

There was no tangible evidence that the full Scottish Borders Council supported and agreed the bid. They merely provided the access route for the bid to reach Government. In relation to consultation, support, and agreement from Scottish Borders Council, this was wholly inadequate. Email communication was sent to the Council approaching the Bid deadline requesting support from any quarter. Apparently, one letter appears to have been sent but has apparently got lost in the Bid process.

- Bid being developed in partnership with Social Care or NHS Borders

I have seen no evidence of this taking place. The only exception to this was minimal email communication or inclusion by way of ‘cc’. As evidenced within the Feasibility Study conducted by surveyors, no social factors, no identifiable local housing needs were factored in, only that of financial considerations.

- When the Scottish Government states “it did not immediately proceed at this stage”

What they are maybe attempting to avoid saying is that the UK Govt turned down the CRF bid. I requested information from the UK Govt as to why the bid was turned down, but they have so far blocked this request at the bequest of both the SBHA and Scottish Borders Council.

To give some context of the actual partnership working and oversight, that has been afforded to the Garages to Homes Concept, I have included an extract from a statement made by Mr Aikman, SBC Chief Planning and Housing Officer from 7 September 2022. Responding to an email from MP John Lamont to the Council requesting information relating to Garages to Homes. Mr Aikman stated the following “The council has been consulted informally on the principle of the project and on the suitability of a number of potential sites throughout the Borders”. That was the total of the Councils involvement from April 2021 up to September 2022.

- South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) “continuing to be supportive”.

Minimal information has been released over the last three months in response to an FOI and further correspondence. SoSE provided SBHA £148,000 to conduct a feasibility study and pilot. Their due diligence and project oversight does not cover social issues, locally identifiable housing needs or social policy in general.

- SOSE will also neither confirm nor deny whether it is reasonable for someone to believe that BHA might in any way be benefactors of this funding.

This appears irregular since the Feasibility Study identifies both SBHA and BHA sites for development. -The original CRF bid, applied for by SBHA, was done so on behalf of both SBHA and BHA. Could this possibly be linked to the fact that a current SOSE Board member is the ex-Chair of BHA and another member of the SOSE Board is the current vice Chair of BHA?