

Ms Ariane Burgess MSP
Convener of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh EH99 1SP

21 November 2025

Dear Convener,

Follow-up Letter: BEFS Evidence on Climate Change Plan Scrutiny

I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated at the Committee Roundtable on the Draft 2026-40 Climate Change Plan on Tuesday 18 November on behalf of Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS).

I am following up to provide further reflection on one exchange I was involved with, which concerned capacity limitations in planning authorities. I said that as stretched capacity is already causing problems, if there is no change in future it will be difficult for planning authorities and other areas of local government to meet any additional demands of incorporating Climate Change Plan duties into their departmental workloads.

I quoted Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Scotland's research on planning expenditure decline during the session. In response, another witness stated that planning officers could be more productive with the same resources by changing their working practices, such as engaging in telephone conversations with applicants. I wish to clarify that BEFS does not share this position.

BEFS is keenly aware, from BEFS Members including RTPI Scotland, and from our Conservation Officers Working Group, which includes planning officers in local governments across Scotland, that the pressures busy case officers face cannot be alleviated through simple changes to working practices alone. Answering every telephone query for example would likely reduce, rather than increase, the time available to officers to progress applications and in the long run would not make planning officers more productive.

In addition, many of the factors behind planning delays, are outside the control of planning officers. This includes poor quality applications, missing or insufficient information in applications, and developers not always taking up opportunities to engage in pre-application discussions. There is, therefore, the need to look at the whole system of project delivery, and not only at planning officer productivity during the planning application process, to identify areas for intervention and improvement.

RTPI Scotland have this month published a 2025 State of the Profession report, which provides further insight into the resourcing and skills gap, and the factors in play behind delays in planning, including strained workloads in the context of high

application volume and increasing complexity. It reports that 60% of respondents feel personally overstretched frequently or all of the time. It also reports that instances of abuse towards planners have become more common in recent years, with 65% of respondents in Scotland stating that they had experienced abuse during their planning career.

BEFS and RTPI Scotland believe increasing planning workforce capacity will help to support a wide range of national outcomes, including the objectives of the Climate Change Plan and those in the realms of housing, heritage, health and more. As set out in BEFS 2026 Manifesto and the RTPI Scotland Planifesto, both organisations call for whole systems approaches and practical policy measures to improve planning capacity, with better outcomes for all parties involved in planning processes, and for wider policy implementation.

Thank you for considering this additional correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

Derek Rankine
Head of Policy and Strategy, Built Environment Forum Scotland

Supported by RTPI Scotland
Dr Caroline Brown
RTPI Director of Scotland, Ireland, Research & Practice