

SCOTLAND ... FUTURES

NEXT STEPS FOR LAND REFORM

SUMMARY

February 2026



Scottish Land Commission
Coimisean Fearainn na h-Alba



Scotland's land reform journey: The road ahead

Land underpins Scotland's homes, communities, economy and environment. It shapes whether people can afford to live where they grew up, whether local economies thrive, and whether Scotland can meet its climate and nature ambitions in a way that is fair and lasting.

Over the past 25 years, Scotland has taken important steps on land reform. But the pressures on land today are sharper and more urgent. Housing need is rising, land values are escalating, major land use change is underway, and too many people feel locked out of decisions that shape their places and futures.

Through ScotLand Futures, the Scottish Land Commission has listened carefully to people across Scotland. What we heard was consistent and practical. People want land to work better for everyday life. They want clarity about who owns land, fair access to opportunity, stronger local voice, and confidence that land is being used responsibly.

This document sets out a clear focus for action. It is grounded in public experience, informed by international evidence, and focused on what will actually deliver change. It calls for leadership, coordination and pace.

Why Scotland must act now

Land shapes almost every major policy ambition Scotland has: housing, economic resilience, climate action, nature recovery and community wellbeing. Yet the way land is owned and governed is not keeping pace with these demands.

Scotland continues to have one of the most concentrated patterns of land ownership in the world. High land prices and limited supply shut many people, businesses, and communities out. Decisions about land use are often distant and difficult to influence. Derelict and underused land blights places despite clear potential for change.

These are not abstract concerns. They are practical barriers to delivering homes, jobs, climate action and thriving places.

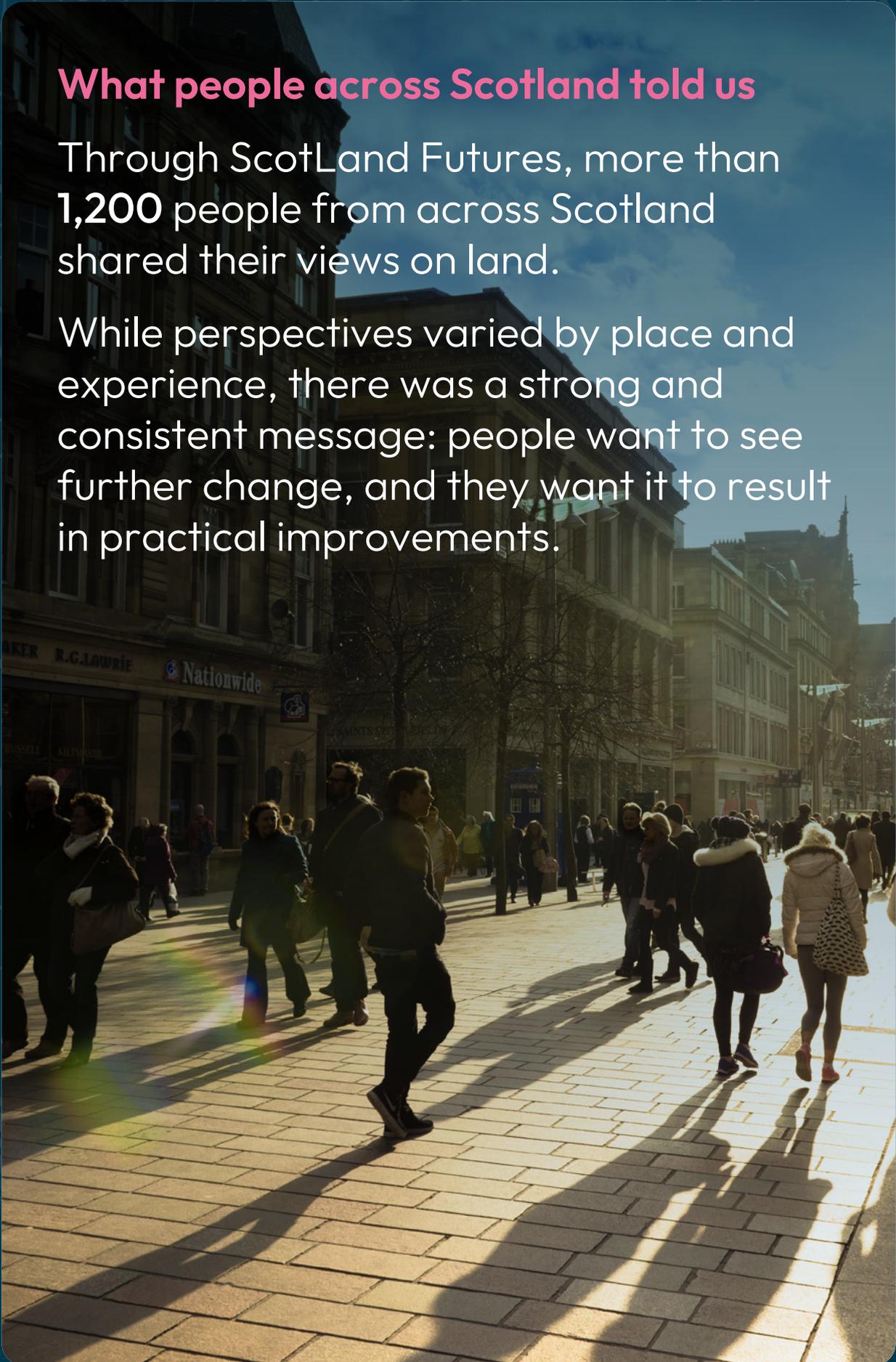
International experience shows these challenges are not inevitable. Other countries routinely intervene to open up land opportunities, regulate the power that flows from ownership, and empower local decision-making. Scotland now needs to do the same.



What people across Scotland told us

Through ScotLand Futures, more than **1,200** people from across Scotland shared their views on land.

While perspectives varied by place and experience, there was a strong and consistent message: people want to see further change, and they want it to result in practical improvements.



People's priorities for land reform



A strong appetite for action – more than nine in ten respondents (96%) said Scotland needs to go further in reforming how land is owned and used.



Concern about concentration of power – around a quarter of respondents highlighted that too much land, and too much influence, sits in too few hands.



A lack of transparency – people find it difficult to know who owns land and see this as undermining trust and accountability.



Connection to place matters – around one in five people said landowners should be meaningfully connected to the places their decisions affect.



Too little local influence – more than one in ten respondents said they feel unable to influence land use decisions in their area, particularly where change is significant and long term.



Frustration with wasted potential – derelict and underused land, and the limited use of tax to encourage productive use, were seen as signs that existing tools are not being used to their full effect.

Taken together, this feedback points to a clear conclusion. People believe the case for change is already well understood. What they are now looking for is leadership, clarity and delivery.



Learning from international experience

Scotland's pattern of land ownership is unusual by international standards, a conclusion consistently highlighted through the Scottish Land Commission's long-standing programme of research and analysis. This international evidence has been considered alongside the recent ScotLand Futures engagement, bringing together comparative experience and public views from across Scotland.

Together, this work shows that many countries have taken deliberate steps to widen access to land, regulate the power associated with ownership and strengthen local control. While approaches differ, international experience points to common features of land systems that deliver public confidence and practical outcomes:

- ✔ Strong local or municipal roles in land ownership and land use decisions.
- ✔ Widespread use of community, co-operative and shared ownership models.
- ✔ Clear expectations that land ownership should serve the public interest.
- ✔ Effective use of tax and land value to encourage productive use and fairness.
- ✔ Modern, joined-up land data systems that support transparency and decision-making.

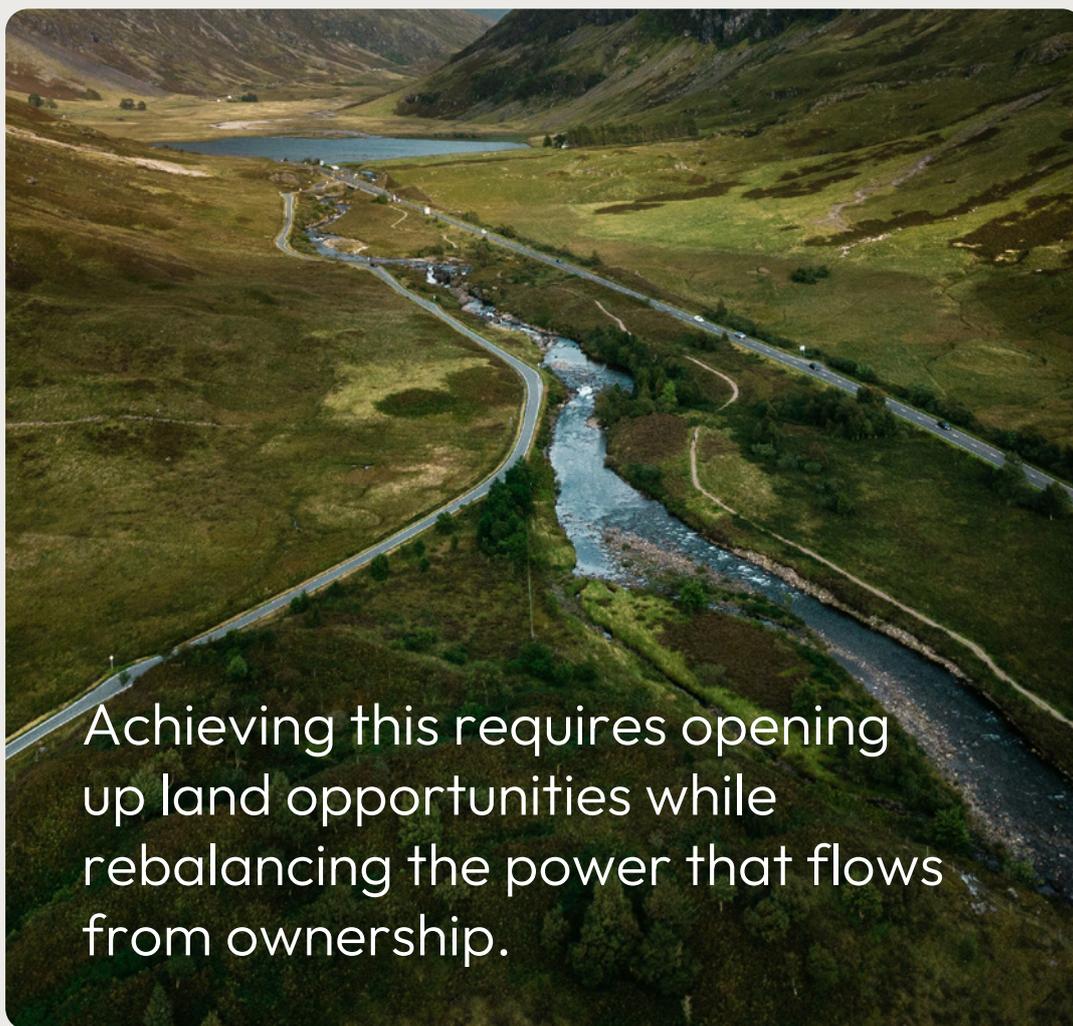
There is no single model Scotland can adopt wholesale, but the combined evidence from ScotLand Futures and international experience is clear: **meaningful land reform requires leadership, coordination and an active public role.**

What success looks like



A reformed land system would give people confidence and unlock opportunity. Success would mean:

- ✓ People and businesses can realistically own, lease or utilise land.
- ✓ Communities that want to own land or shape its use can do so meaningfully.
- ✓ Landowners have clarity and confidence to invest responsibly.
- ✓ Information about land ownership, use and value is open and accessible.
- ✓ Where land ownership creates harm, there are clear and effective safeguards.



Achieving this requires opening up land opportunities while rebalancing the power that flows from ownership.



Three priorities to unlock Scotland's land potential



Opening up land: making ownership and use possible for more people

Scotland must act to widen who can own and use land.

- ✓ Commit to a national programme to create small-scale land holdings across Scotland.
- ✓ Use public land proactively to open up new land opportunities.
- ✓ Simplify and strengthen routes into community and co-operative ownership, in urban and rural Scotland alike.

This will diversify ownership, support housing and enterprise, and build community wealth.





Rebalancing power: ensuring land ownership works for the public good

Land ownership brings power. Where that power is overly concentrated or misused, it must be possible to safeguard the public interest.



- ✓ Introduce ways to consider and protect the public interest when significant areas of land are acquired, including expectations around local presence.
- ✓ Establish clear mechanisms to intervene where the power of land ownership is misused.

This approach protects the public interest while ensuring power is exercised responsibly.



Shaping change locally: putting people at the heart of land use decisions

Scotland is undergoing major land use change. Public support depends on local involvement and benefit.



- ✓ Strengthen regional land use planning with real decision-making and delivery powers.
- ✓ Give communities and local authorities a decisive role in shaping land use change.
- ✓ Make local ownership and benefit a normal feature of renewable energy, nature and climate investment.

This will carry public confidence and deliver better outcomes.

How reform is done

Land reform will not be achieved through a single bill. It requires a coordinated programme across government. This means:

- ✓ Using public land ownership actively to lead change.
- ✓ Deploying tax and fiscal levers to encourage productive use and fair sharing of land value.
- ✓ Giving local government stronger powers to tackle dereliction and unlock stalled sites.
- ✓ Transforming land data, starting with completing the Land Register and building a joined-up national system.



Providing clarity and confidence

The question now is not whether further land reform is needed, but how Scotland delivers with pace, clarity and ambition. ScotLand Futures shows a strong public appetite for change and a clear direction of travel. The next phase of land reform is an opportunity to create the confidence that all interests seek. Confidence that reforms are delivering practical outcomes that people see and feel in their lives, and confidence that the direction of reform opens up opportunities, innovation and investment.

Realising this will depend on working together. Government and Parliament have a vital leadership role, and success will be built through collaboration across public bodies, local government, communities, landowners, businesses and partners. Each has a part to play in shaping change and creating opportunities.

The focus set out through ScotLand Futures is grounded in public experience, robust evidence and international learning. It provides a common direction and a shared basis for action, helping all those involved to ensure Scotland's land works in the public interest — now and for generations ahead.

Ma tha sibh ag iarraidh lethbhreac den sgrìobhainn seo sa Ghàidhlig, cuiribh post-d gu commsteam@landcommission.gov.scot no cuiribh fòn gu **01463 423 300**.

If you would like to request a copy of this document in Gaelic, please email commsteam@landcommission.gov.scot or call **01463 423 300**.



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