



a million voices for nature

Getting your message across to local politicians

Your views are important. You have local knowledge and are most affected by changes to your environment. Your voice can therefore carry considerable weight.

Taking action

When trying to protect the environment, your local politicians can be useful allies. Some of the suggestions in this PDF are simple to do by yourself; others would be more suited to a group of interested people.

Why not talk to other people in your area and find likeminded individuals who can work together?

Influencing your local council

Your local council has a key role in maintaining the quality of your local environment.

In Scotland, there are 32 directly elected local authorities (councils). Your local councillor will have been elected to represent your council ward. The new multi-member ward system means you will be represented by three or four councillors. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities website has more information about Scottish local government (www.cosla.gov.uk).

You can also find out who your councillors are and any details of committees that are relevant to your concerns by telephoning your local council.

How to gain the support of your local councillor, and what they can do for you

To secure the help of your councillor, you should write to them, or visit them at their surgery.

Provide them with as much information as you can to support your arguments. Find out from a councillor, or council officers, what issues are likely to be discussed at the next relevant committee and go along.

Arrange to meet the officer who will write the report for the council committee to discuss your concerns. It is the role of councillors to develop links with the community and represent that community's interests in the council.

Involving your MP or MSP

Your Member of Parliament (MP) is your representative in the House of Commons (Westminster) and you are also represented by Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) which sits at Holyrood. In addition to your directly elected constituency MSP, you may also seek support from your seven regional MSPs.

Since the Scottish Parliament's re-establishment in 1999 many matters that concern us, such as education and agriculture, have been devolved and are decided at a Scottish level. Other subjects – reserved matters – remain the responsibility of the UK government.

Generally, your Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) will be your first port of call. Contacting MPs or MSPs by writing a letter or visiting their advice surgery, to gain support for an issue can be very useful. However, you should be aware that they are more likely to take up your cause if the site is of major importance and you have already raised the issues with the local council or relevant authority.

You can find out who your MP is by telephoning the House of Commons Public Information Office on 020 7219 4272. All MPs can be reached in writing at: House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

You can find the name of your MSPs by telephoning the Scottish Parliament Public Information Service on 0800 092 7500, or by visiting The Scottish Parliament website (www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps.aspx). All MSPs can be written to at: The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP.

What your MP or MSP can do for you

Your MP/MSP might have a column in your local newspaper. Securing their support may lead to them giving your issue local coverage.

They can:

- write to Ministers to raise your concerns
- table, or sign, a Parliamentary Motion
- raise issues during debates
- table parliamentary questions.

Tips on making your letter effective

- Keep it short, as very long letters are less likely to be read.
- Be polite. The response you get is likely to be more positive and helpful if your approach is a constructive one. Thank your MP/MSP for their reply as this will help to build a better relationship with them.
- Use your own words. You are more likely to make an impact if you express the points in your own words.

- If possible, give an example from your local area supporting the points you have made.
- If you are writing about a specific site, you may wish to offer them the opportunity to visit it.

Writing letters for us

You may like to consider becoming one of our campaign letter writers.

We have regular letter writing campaigns, targeting MPs, MSPs and MEPs (Members of the European Parliament), and others on a range of issues. We know that these campaigns can have a significant impact on political decision-making.

For more information, and a registration form, please email: campaigns.Scotland@rspb.org.uk, or phone 0131 317 4100 and ask for the Parliamentary Campaigns Team