



PRESS RELEASE

7th March 2008

**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL PLANNING DECISION DELAYS CRITICISED;
COUNCIL LIES NEAR FOOT OF COUNCIL LEAGUE TABLE**

Concern is growing over the continuing decline in the performance of Scottish Borders Council in the length of time it takes for the authority to determine major planning applications.

Councils are supposed to process 80% of all major planning applications within four months. However figures for Scottish Borders Council showed that in 2004/05 only 24 of a total of 65 major applications (37%) were decided upon within four months. Instead of the Council's performance improving, figures for 2006/07 show that only 9 (18%) out of 49 major applications were decided within the four month time frame.

Scottish Borders Council compares unfavourably with the Scottish average. In 2006/07 46.5% of all Scottish major applications were decided within 4 months. The Council is now second bottom of the Scottish local authority league table.

Blair Melville, Head of Planning Strategy, Homes for Scotland said:

Scottish Borders Council needs to take a serious look at the way in which its planning function is being carried out. If we want to grow the local economy we cannot take such a laid back approach to dealing with planning applications. The length of time taken by the Council to decide on major applications is a significant disincentive for companies who might consider investing in the area."

He drew attention to the 2007 Accounts Commission Audit of Best Value. The Commission's comprehensive report on Scottish Borders Council stated:

The performance of the planning application service has been deteriorating and the Council remains in the bottom quartile among Scottish councils in the time taken to process planning applications. The service was subject to review in 2000 which led to significant improvements, however from 2003 forwards, performance has declined."

The Report went on to conclude that the Council needed to take *immediate* action to *focus attention on poorer areas of service performance such as planning.*

More...



Blair Melville continued:

"We already know that the Council has fallen far behind the planning approvals necessary to help fund the reopening of the Waverley Line. If we are to connect the local economy with not only the national economy but the wider European and global economies a fast, efficient transport link to and from the area is essential. We will be shooting ourselves in the foot if we do not deliver the appropriate number of permissions. I hope that the measures introduced under the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, designed to streamline the process, will help improve the Council's performance but perhaps the time is now right for the Council to engage with stakeholders to review the way the Planning Department operates."

ENDS

Notes to the Editor:

Homes for Scotland (www.homesforscotland.com) represents the country's home building industry which:

- is the largest source of private investment in Scotland
- contributes £5bn to the economy annually
- builds 20,000 new homes per annum
- employs more than 110,000 people
- is the largest user of the planning system in Scotland