

Ref: AM/SAR

The Editor
The Herald
200 Renfield Street
Glasgow



20 August 2008

Dear Sir

GREENBELT: Recent articles printed in Glasgow Herald.
Journalist Graeme Smith

I refer to recent articles in your newspaper regarding Greenbelt.

I and my staff are extremely disappointed about the tone and content of these articles as they do not represent a fair and just reflection on Greenbelt. Many of the comments are inaccurate, unsubstantiated and misleading.

I would hope that Graeme Smith disclosed to you that he is a homeowner on one of the developments managed by Greenbelt. I also hope that he made you aware that his own development is not yet complete and that currently there are areas of responsibility resting with not only Greenbelt but the developer and the Local Authority. As Greenbelt communicates regularly with our residents he should be fully aware of the relative responsibilities regarding the developments open space areas. Certainly Greenbelt is fully aware of its responsibilities and works very hard to ensure the other parties meet their responsibilities on behalf of the residents who have moved into the development. Mr Smith has received additional information from my staff on the ground and my customer care team to clarify issues which typically arise on "phased build" developments. With all this supporting information to hand there is no case for printing comments which have serious and potentially damaging impact on Greenbelt. The articles have referred to:

1. A serious matter relating to "police involvement into the company" which after checking with both Grampian and Northern Constabularies has been confirmed as unsubstantiated. Neither force has any reference to Greenbelt, indicating that it was not a matter for police involvement. Both also indicated that if it had been reported as such then they regard this approach as irresponsible. There is no reason for this matter to be referred to and your journalist should have verified what the actual situation was prior to going to print.
2. A dispute between Greenbelt and one particular contractor who has claimed for works not completed. In fact Greenbelt terminated the relationship with this contractor to protect residents from work that was either not performed or not up to our specification. Greenbelt has every right, and indeed a responsibility, to pursue or dispute wrongful claims to ensure appropriate service provision to residents. We also have a responsibility to obtain best value for our customers, which is also key objective in local authority services. Such matters are in the normal course of commercial business and will be sorted out through the normal channels. Your articles appear to provide a voice to one side of a commercial dispute and again this should have verified prior to print.

3. Greenbelt liaises with Trading Standards on any real disputes raised by representative resident groups from developments. Currently there are no disputes which Trading Standards are involved in. Greenbelt is a member of the "Home Authority Scheme" which centralises and resolves any dispute effectively and swiftly. Trading Standards have expressed disappointment at the media reporting and have advised that I write to you, indicating that there is an established and effective process of resolving any dispute.
4. There is a small but effective campaign group who represent a limited number of residents on developments we manage. Despite repeated invitations by Greenbelt and other parties, including Trading Standards, to meet this group, it has chosen not to take up these offers and instead tried to progress their "story" through the media. In doing so this group has frequently either been economical with the truth about the work that Greenbelt is doing or misled the media by suggesting that areas of uncared for land were the responsibility of Greenbelt when in fact these were the responsibility of others.
5. Despite the comments regarding maintenance, Greenbelt does provide a good maintenance and management service to many developments and have many satisfied customers. We have acknowledged a problem in the North of Scotland and have responded appropriately to our customers.
6. The company manages many sites throughout the U.K. There are no planning enforcement actions on any of these sites.
7. Your article on 16 August states that a play area in Falkirk is "unsafe" and a pond dangerous to children. Greenbelt does not yet own these areas. Your report is wrong to infer that Greenbelt is responsible for them, and this needs to be corrected. All our play areas are regularly inspected to British and European standards and repaired.
8. We provide expert management of Sustainable Drainage Systems which help protect houses from any flood, sustainable management of all our woodlands and recognition of the biodiversity value on new developments. These benefits are not recognised in any of the articles which would perhaps have provided a fair reflection for readers to digest.
9. We acknowledge that the house buying experience can be improved with more informed point of sale literature and also proactive legal conveyance for new homeowners. This is a matter we have emphasised to the other parties involved in this process. Most of our customers are fully aware of details of their new home and engage with Greenbelt well, with a view to establishing new communities.

Greenbelt is a hard working Scottish company with good staff providing the service all homeowners on our developments deserve. If there are problems, which any company can be faced with, then we would make every effort to sort out and meet the customer expectation. This requires both parties to be willing to enter a dialogue to achieve resolution – something Greenbelt does not have a problem with.

Yours faithfully

Alex Middleton
Managing Director