

Response to misleading articles in The Sunday Herald and The Herald

1. There has been no misuse of public funds for conservation as alleged in the headline in an article printed in The Sunday Herald on 25th October. This headline is inaccurate and misleading.
2. The Sunday Herald was notified of the facts on Friday, 23rd October in advance of the deadline for the article, yet chose to ignore or misrepresent these. Their “story” was presented in such a way as to mislead the reader from the actuality. Indeed The Herald on Monday 26th went further in presenting allegations that are completely unfounded and we suggest call into question the credibility of the reporting on that paper.
3. Greenbelt received funds in 1998 from SEN for the management of woodland and landscaping areas at Inchinnan Business Park in perpetuity. The SSSI at the Black Cart formed part of the same land title but was not subject to the same management obligations as the Business Park areas.
4. Greenbelt did not receive any “swan grant” as reported in The Herald – indeed we have been unable to find any public bodies administering such grants!
5. Greenbelt has managed the Inchinnan Business Park for the last 12 years, at its own cost based on the monies received from SEN, and continues to do so. This is appropriate as this is the area in respect of which funds were provided. The SSSI land at the Black Cart was sold earlier this year with the full knowledge of SEN.
6. Greenbelt also provided specialist management of the SSSI site for some 12 years prior to its sale. The sale of this land was considered in the best future interests of the land. The purchaser also owned SSSI land and is familiar with the annual presence of and importance of the whooper swans on the land. The sale price reflected the responsibilities which attach to the land and its designation.
7. RSPB have subsequently intimated that they wanted to purchase the land themselves, although never made any approach to Greenbelt prior to being advised of the proposed sale. RSPB have been directed to the new owner if they remain interested in its acquisition.
8. Greenbelt were not, prior to the article appearing in The Sunday Herald, advised of any perceived mismanagement of the land and indeed significant numbers of whooper swans have returned every year under Greenbelt management and there is no reason why they will not flock to the site this year again. ***The quoted individuals employed by SNH, RSPB, and SOC*** have all been fully aware of Greenbelt’s ownership and management of the Black Cart since the outset and their comments are surprising given that certain of these parties received consultancy fees for management advice/plans directly related to this area commissioned by Greenbelt.
9. Greenbelt has a good record of land management and provides organisations linked in the article, along with many Local Planning Authorities with information, advice and assistance on many land management, sustainability and conservation matters ***where they have a problem solving by themselves***. It is notable that this positive relationship has not been mentioned by either The Sunday Herald or The Herald.
10. Some time ago, and recently reiterated, open invitation was made to The Herald group newspapers to visit our offices and developments with us so that we could provide information that would help them better understand what Greenbelt does and how we do it. Again it is of note that this offer has never been taken up.
11. A complaint in respect of the content of the two articles and the actions of Herald group newspapers has been submitted to the Press Complaints Commission.