

Roseanna Cunningham MSP: Beautiful Scotland Parliamentary Reception Speech

Good evening. Thank you for your words of welcome. I am delighted to be here and I am grateful to Bruce Crawford for hosting this reception.

As John mentioned, a Keep Scotland Beautiful event was one of my very first engagements when I was made a Minister back in February 2009. I well remember walking into the meeting and just before I went through the door, John (I think) asked if I would do a Q&A! The request filled me with terror!

I am delighted to have this opportunity to recognise the importance of all your voluntary effort in the Beautiful Scotland awards scheme.

The Beautiful Scotland awards scheme has developed from a fantastic floral competition to embrace the wider sustainability of the local environment.

Improving and creating well-designed, sustainable places is one of the Scottish Government's national outcomes. It's not rocket science. We all want to live in places that are clean, safe and attractive - and we want to be able to access decent levels of service and amenities. But to achieve that we need strong communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others. That means, we all need to start by valuing our environment. Then we can go on to protect it and enhance it for future generations.

The environment, wellbeing and the economy are closely linked.

If local residents take more responsibility to improve the local area - which can begin with keeping it clean and tidy and, as you have all shown, go on to be so much more - it becomes a better place in which to live and work. There are benefits too for tourism and local businesses and a general 'feel good factor' in cleaner, safer communities. There is evidence that contact with nature has a positive impact on people's health. Woodlands adjoining communities and greenspaces within them can have a beneficial effect and I have visited areas where this is clearly happening

When I launched the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity in Scotland on 13th January, I said that "we as humans are very much part of Scotland's ecosystems" and "protecting our natural environment makes ecological and financial sense". The United Nations-led International Year of Biodiversity aims to involve individuals and organisations in activities to enjoy and safeguard our flora and fauna. I'm glad that Beautiful Scotland newsletters and seminars have provided advice on encouraging and protecting native biodiversity. Some very small changes can have big impacts.

Invasive non-native species are one of the greatest threats to global biodiversity. They can harm native species and habitats as well as having serious economic consequences. The Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill, likely to be introduced in Spring, seeks to improve legislative provision on invasive non-native species. It will also address other issues intended to enhance the sustainable management of the natural environment in the public interest.

Another way to improve the quality of local environments and develop safe and secure communities is through projects tackling waste issues such as litter and flytipping, as well as graffiti. This can help to reduce the incidence of vandalism. I know some of you here have been involved in this work and I thank you for that. The Scottish Government has adopted Zero Waste as its goal and the Plan is being developed to outline how we can all play a part to reduce, reuse and recycle resources to help make Scotland a zero waste society.

One of the greatest challenges facing us all today is that of climate change. Recently, the Scottish Parliament passed strong legislation, in the form of the Climate Change Act, which sets a world-leading framework for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

We aim to remain a world leader as we take the steps needed to respond to climate change. Communities such as yours taking action to improve not just the appearance of places but crucially the **sustainability** of them are a key part of that response. Everyone needs to be involved. We all need to think about what we buy, what we use and what we throw away and we all need to participate fully in our local recycling collection and reuse schemes.

Community action can make a difference locally and globally.

We aim to deliver a Greener Scotland. The Beautiful Scotland scheme and awards are in tune with this vision. I welcome the contribution you are all making through that scheme. Thank you very much.