Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

Planning and the Scottish Parliament [1]

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When I was in Edinburgh last week, I went to have a look at the Scottish Parliament building. I had seen pictures of it, of course, but wanted to reserve judgement until I had viewed it myself. The question is, how well spent was the British taxpayer's £414.4 million (the original budget estimate was £10-40 million)?

In my opinion, not well at all. The Scottish Parliament is without doubt one of the most monstrous buildings I've seen ? and I tend to like modern architecture. It may be pleasant on the inside, but the exterior looks like a misshapen concrete block with bits of bamboo randomly stuck on it. I'm told the design was based on up-turned ships, which explains a lot and is, perhaps, symbolic.

Anyway, the Scottish Parliament building got me thinking about town planning. One of the arguments commonly made in favour of our restrictive planning system is that without it, there would be a free for all, with ugly, poorly designed buildings popping up all over the place. But the Scottish Parliament wasn't just approved by government, it was built for government. And it's hideous.

Look at the rest of Edinburgh. New Town, a wonderful example of Georgian architecture at its best, was a privately planned development (street layout aside), just like the equally picturesque Bath. Developers made the buildings attractive because they wanted people to buy them. Compare that with the council estates that surround Edinburgh (and other great Northern cities). Built by the state after development rights were nationalised in 1947, little regard was given to the people who would be living in them, and they have been regretted ever since.

It's time we finally returned planning and development to the free market. There can be little doubt it does a better job than the state.

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