

Scotland's planning system is "skewed in favour of developers" who can successfully challenge refused planning applications while the communities that object have no such right of appeal, a charity has complained.

The odds of halting an unpopular development "are stacked in favour of developers", who can appeal when they are rejected but face no further public obstacles when they are approved, the John Muir Trust said.

It has joined the Planning Democracy campaign to call on Holyrood to introduce "equal rights of appeal" to create "a level playing field" between developers and local communities.

Helen McDade, head of policy for the John Muir Trust, said: "As things stand, the odds are stacked in favour of developers.

"They have an automatic right of appeal when a decision goes against them, while local people are left powerless to challenge the verdict of a planning authority or a government minister.

She pointed to the example of the 103-turbine Viking Wind Farm, a joint project between SSE and Shetland Council, which was opposed by thousands of residents and Scottish Natural Heritage.

"The Scottish Government approved this application - and the community had no right to appeal," she said.

"Consequently, the biggest wind farm north of the central belt was approved with zero public scrutiny."

The campaign group, Sustainable Shetland, has taken out a judicial review.

"The huge expense of taking legal advice is unaffordable for most communities," Ms McDade said.

"It is also inadequate as the decision on whether to proceed is further skewed in favour of developers by the fact that the expense incurred is only to challenge the legality of the process, and not the rights or wrongs of the decision itself.

"The John Muir Trust believes that there can be no social or environmental justice until communities and environmental charities have the same rights as developers."