

ON THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND'S SIDE

On May 7th choose a Scottish Government that works for Scotland. Choose an SNP government that, day in and day out, is always on Scotland's side.

Your first SNP vote at this election will deliver an SNP Government. It delivers a better NHS, GP walk-in clinics, help with the cost of living, the first-time buyers' deposit, a growing economy, and a massive increase in childcare that leaves no one behind.

Your second SNP vote delivers independence. It secures a majority that will lay the path to a referendum. A referendum that we will win.

Here's what we'll do for the South of Scotland.

A FAIRER SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

Food Pricing

The escalating cost of living crisis, particularly the sharp rise in food prices, requires targeted intervention to protect people's ability to afford essentials. This is vital to ensure that everyone can get a balanced diet that meets nutritional needs.

That's why we will take a public health intervention to establish statutory price ceilings on a basket of 20 to 50 essential food items at large supermarkets, such as bread, milk and eggs to provide tangible relief to families struggling with grocery bills, ensuring that necessities for a balanced diet remain affordable.

The system would require large supermarkets to make one example line of the listed essential food items available at the capped price and would not require

them to make every variation of that type of food they stock available at that price. As with Minimum Unit Pricing, we would introduce a sunset clause through the legislation to ensure that it was effective in order to continue.

Crucially, this will be implemented alongside a robust support framework designed to shield Scottish producers with support mechanisms and monitoring to ensure that this will not be allowed to impact on farmers and food producers and we will work with them to ensure Supermarkets make the change.

Rural and Island Housing Plan

We know that our rural and island communities face unique housing challenges, from limited affordable supply and high build costs, to pressure from second homes and the migration of younger people.

Our £75 million Rural and Island Housing Fund will help address this by supporting the construction of more affordable homes of all tenures in rural Scotland.

This includes £25 million Rural Affordable Housing for Key Workers for local authorities to identify affordable homes for key workers in rural areas and support the retention and attraction of key workers in these areas and £20 million through the Rural and Island House grant scheme to support more families to live in rural areas.

We will also invest in our crofting communities, through measures such as the Croft House Grant Scheme that has delivered £24.5 million of investment under the SNP.

We will take bold action to tackle the impact of second homes in rural and island communities. To reverse depopulation and support communities, the SNP government has given local authorities the powers to manage the numbers of second homes in their area and has worked with Community Land Scotland to find the right land to deliver more housing in rural areas.

We will work with local authorities to introduce more targeted market interventions in areas facing acute housing pressures, including powers to better regulate second home ownership, prioritise homes for permanent residents and support communities where local housing markets are being distorted.

Youth Built

We will introduce a package of measures to help young people build a home and make it easier to remain in their communities. We will remove land transfer fees for people under the age of 30 for the purpose of building a single domestic housing unit.

We will provide targeted support of £10,000 for households to construct a single unit, specifically for a primary resident - not for rental. This will initially be concentrated on our highland and island communities.

A PROSPEROUS SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

Childcare

Every child in Scotland deserves the best start in life, which is why we are committed to eradicating child poverty and giving families the support they need. We have always recognised that a child's earliest years are the most crucial for their development and future success.

That's why we will extend childcare support to every child in our country from 9 months old to the end of primary school by the end of the next parliament. This new system will be designed to fit around families - rather than expecting families to fit around the system. The new system will give support 52 weeks a year and mean families benefit from between £1,400 up to over £11,000 dependent on need. Helping both with the cost of living and helping parents take up employment opportunities that also grow our economy.

£2 Bus Fare Cap

Our vision for transport is rooted in affordability, accessibility and sustainability. We have made real progress towards this with free bus travel for under 22s and over 60s. But we want to go further. That's why by the end of the parliament we will take forward legislation to put in place a £2 bus fare cap across Scotland, building on our pilot in the Highlands, Orkney, and Shetland.

This step of providing more affordable bus travel will help with modal shift and reduce household costs. Our action will benefit families, the economy, and the environment.

We have taken action in government to support local transport authorities to have more flexibility to respond to their own unique transport challenges through franchising, using powers created in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. We will carry out a rural bus service review to explore further opportunities for franchising with a focus on Scotland's rural communities. This builds on existing work to support Local Transport Authorities to build business cases for local bus improvements through franchising, backed by £4 million investment in 2026-27.

Tackling depopulation

We know that Scotland is facing a number of demographic challenges, including a falling birth rate which is coinciding with an increasingly ageing population, and a changing relationship with migration following Brexit and the end of free movement.

Scotland's population change is not felt equally across the country, and we know that our rural communities are facing unique challenges. Learning from the 'Move to Dumfries and Galloway' campaign, we will extend the Addressing Depopulation Fund to support local authorities to take forward pilots, encouraging remote workers, young families and young professionals to make the region home.

Rural Renewal Bill

The SNP cares passionately about rural Scotland – rural and island communities are at the very heart of our identity and our economy.

Our rural industries are ripe with potential for new growth and new opportunities. Rural and island communities are home to Scotland's world-class food and drink producers, fishing and aquaculture sectors, pioneering businesses and renewable energy potential.

That's why over the course of the next parliament we will consult on, and bring forward, a new Rural Renewal Bill. As we develop the Bill we will explore:

- Rural planning reform, improving permitted development rights, such as for small-scale renewable energy production, business diversification and opportunities to streamline processes.
- Review industry levy bodies across the rural and marine sectors.
- Create new small land holdings to support rural repopulation.
- Review and revitalise support and opportunities for crofting for new entrants.
- Action to protect unique Scottish landscapes such as the machair, including on options on species management.
- The bill will continue our land reform journey and consider a range of strategic proposals. It will also include steps to make land ownership transparent, implementing robust anti-avoidance measures, supporting existing tenants and providing new long-term opportunities for progressing farmers, and enhancing opportunities and support for community right to buy and ownership.

Scotland's Agriculture & Food Production

We have delivered the most generous package of direct farming and crofting support in the UK, investing over £660 million in support to agriculture. We are committed to supporting active farming and food production with direct payments - to provide certainty to the industry in stark contrast to policies in other parts of these islands. Farmers and food producers are vital contributors to our economy and to rural Scotland.

We will ensure support is better targeted towards active farmers and crofters, including new approaches to advice to build on whole farm plans to develop individual farm action plans which support actions for nature and climate and sustainable food production.

We will help farmers and crofters deliver for nature by ensuring appropriately targeted support through the new 4 tier framework - this will include increasing the level of support provided to Tier 2, 3 and 4. This will directly support nature and climate-friendly farming, ensuring agriculture remains resilient in the face of climate change impacts and protects our natural landscapes.

Small producers and crofters have an important place in our food systems, which is why we have continued funding the small producers fund with funding tripled to £1.5 million in this year.

We are committed to ensuring that public procurement is improved to better support local and sustainable producers. As part of this we will establish a public sector food procurement taskforce - working with stakeholders at pace to review key barriers to local procurement and make recommendations to strengthen local procurement which supports local economies and reduces food miles.

Tourism

Scotland is a leader in 21st century tourism, which delivers the very best for our visitors, our businesses, our people, our communities and our environment.

In the next parliament, we will invest further in the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) – which aims to improve the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that are experiencing visitor management issues.

Digital Economy

We will accelerate the rollout of full fibre broadband in Scotland by supporting providers to reach more rural/remote areas. We will establish a digital skills development initiative, to empower digitally excluded people to gain the skills necessary to access digital services and employment opportunities.

We recognise the vital importance of good digital connectivity – for work, for business and for day-to-day life. We will put an end to mobile ‘notspots’ by investing a further £29.4 million in the Scottish 4G Infill Programme (S4GI), accelerating digital

connectivity across rural and island Scotland and ensuring rural communities are not left behind.

We will target investment in areas with limited or no reliable signal, delivering new infrastructure that improves coverage for residents, businesses and visitors.

We will also explore the feasibility of rolling out further connections to low earth orbit (LEO) satellites, similar to the connection between OneWeb’s LEO and Papa Stour, Shetland, to strengthen the resilience of digital connectivity and infrastructure for rural and island communities.

A HEALTHY SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

Reducing waiting times

We want to build on the significant progress we have made to reduce NHS waiting times. We have invested to drive down waiting times in the past year we will ensure that dedicated funding of at least £200 million – up £90 million - for improving waiting times is in place for each year of the coming parliament.

Through investment and NHS renewal we will ensure no patient waits longer than 26 weeks for treatment by the end of the parliament.

GP walk-in clinics

We are wholly committed to ensuring that everyone has timely access to quality care close to their home. To do this, we are taking forward new ideas, including a network of new walk-in GP clinics, open 7 days a week, no appointment needed and without the 8am rush. We will start by piloting 30 sites before rolling out to the rest of the country.

Backed by £36 million of investment, we have committed to an initial 16 sites across Scotland in Hawick, East Ayrshire, Clydesdale and Stranraer. Several of these sites are now up and running.

We know people are keen to see more of these walk-in clinics, so we will commit to expanding to at least a further 14 sites. We will scope options with health boards to deliver these services in communities including in East Kilbride and Tweed Valley.

Capital

We will invest in Scotland's NHS estate and in state-of-the-art equipment like MRI scanners, CT scanners and imaging equipment. We will also increase the number of mobile MRI and CT scanners in Scotland to mitigate the impact of people having to travel long distances for the scans they need.

We will continue our programme of refurbishment within the NHS estate, including our commitment to refurbishment in the Borders General.

Workforce in Rural and Island Communities

We will respond directly to the concerns of rural and island communities to ensure workforce planning accounts for the unique challenges, including revising the 'Golden Hellos' initiatives to attract more GPs, consultants and dentists to rural and island communities.

We will also continue the expansion of NHS Near Me, a programme supporting the roll-out of technology and training to enable web-based video consultations and access to specialist services without the need to travel.

A SKILLED SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

Rural midwifery apprenticeships

To strengthen Scotland's maternity workforce and protect access to local services, we will establish a new midwifery apprenticeship pathway, targeted at rural and island communities.

Working with universities and rural health boards, we will develop earn while you learn routes into midwifery that allow people to train closer to home while gaining practical experience in local maternity settings. By expanding routes into the profession, we will ensure families across rural Scotland can continue to access safe, high-quality maternity care closer to home.

Skills & Apprenticeships

We will increase the number of apprenticeships to deliver 150,000 over the Parliament. We will introduce an Apprenticeship Accelerator Grant, backed by the Apprenticeship Levy, as a targeted intervention which will ensure that young people, who will make up our future workforce, have the opportunity through apprenticeships to build their confidence, gain industry insight and develop valuable skills that employers require.

A SUSTAINABLE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

Our publicly owned railway

Peak rail fares will not be re-introduced as long as there is an SNP government. We are proud to have delivered a publicly owned, modernised rail service with improved reliability, accessibility and long-term investment.

We want to see improvements across the country, so we will explore the feasibility of a link from the Borders Railway to Carlisle. We will also commission a rail feasibility study to connect the south of Ayr to XXXX. We will also explore potential options to either remove peak fares from cross border trains serving Reston and Lockerbie – or provide ScotRail Services to those stations.

Forestry & Native Woodlands

We will expand Scotland's native woodlands through funding 18,000 ha of woodland creation annually by 2029, with at least 40% of new native woodland by 2045. To protect our native woodlands from threats we will support firm deer control incentives, implement a national deer management and venison. We will also complete the National Register of Ancient Woodland, and strengthen biosecurity among other actions.

We will set an ambitious target of 23% canopy cover in urban areas to drive action to increase planting and build on our existing work to encourage an increase in tree canopy cover in urban areas.

Climate adaption

Adapting to the impacts of climate change is at the heart of our mission to improve the wellbeing of people living in Scotland, now and in the future.

We will support local authorities to adapt our coasts to better respond to the rise in sea levels and reduce the risks associated with coastal erosion through a £14m Coastal Change Adaption fund by the end of the parliament. We will also publish coastal erosion plans for all 24 coastal authorities with an erodible shoreline by 2029.

We will allocate additional investment of £15 million in flood mitigation and prevention, with resources targeted in areas most impacted by flooding, including on the Nith.

A SECURE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

Improving Roads

As we have set out in our Infrastructure Investment Pipeline, we will explore improvements to a number of roads, including to the A75 and A77 road infrastructure given their links to Cairnryan port.

To deliver better roads we will establish the 'Better Surfaces' fund to support local government capital expenditure in fixing potholes, carrying out resurfacing, and improving drainage from roads across the country. This could deliver up to £350 million of supported investment over the next parliament.

We will commission an accident black spot review to identify and improve dangerous junctions and stretches of road across Scotland. The review will consider collision data, traffic patterns and road design to pinpoint high-risk locations and deliver practical safety improvements, prevent collisions and improve driver safety.