

SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVES RESPONSE TO JUST & GREEN RECOVERY SCOTLAND ELECTION LETTER

4 May 2021

The Scottish Conservatives agree that there is a landmark opportunity in the next Scottish Parliament to secure a recovery from this crisis that is fair to all and that helps protect our planet for future generations.

We share the coalition's concern about training opportunities, particularly for the sectors most-affected by the switch away from fossil fuels. That is why the Scottish Conservative manifesto commits us to offering a £500 grant to every Scot, every year to be spent on training and skills. This will enable a shift to lifelong learning and make it easier for people to change profession in the coming years.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission predict that unemployment will peak at over 200,000 people this year. For those who have been made newly unemployed, and who do not have the luxury of waiting around to complete a six-month course, we will design 'rapid retraining' courses in collaboration with colleges, employers and others – with a particular focus on digital skills.

Few things are as urgent as the climate emergency and preventing its disastrous consequences for people here in Scotland and all over the world. We voted to set a target for net zero by 2045 and we were disappointed when the SNP failed to meet their emissions reduction targets last year. The Scottish Conservatives support the North Sea Transition Deal which will deliver a net zero future for the industry while protecting jobs. We want to make the Scottish Government a partner in the deal.

We would ensure that Scotland continues to be at the forefront of the offshore wind sector, and we support the expansion of onshore wind where there is local community benefit. The Scottish Conservatives are also committed to exploiting the potential of green hydrogen and a feasibility study on a 'hydrogen network' linking Aberdeen and Inverness. We will expand electric vehicle infrastructure.

The Scottish Conservatives agree with Just and Green Recovery Scotland that good quality, warm homes are crucial. We are committed to building 60,000 affordable homes over the course of the next Parliament, of which two thirds will be for social rent. This would mean 40,000 new social homes – the largest building programme in the history of devolution. We also need to boost the drive to improve energy efficiency, so our manifesto contains proposals to spend £2.5 billion over the next five years to get as many homes as possible to EPC C rating or higher. Using World Economic Forum estimates, this will create as many as 24,000 green jobs.

We would also set up a Help to Renovate scheme to offer loans and grants to support the transition to energy efficiency. We do not want to see the costs of achieving our net zero targets fall on those who are least able to afford it.

The COP26 summit in Glasgow this year offers a historic opportunity to secure global action. I am proud that as part of the UK, Scotland contributes to the third-largest aid budget in the world. This funding, as well as combatting hunger and educating girls, is helping countries around the world turn the tide against climate change and species loss. And it was recently announced that the UK Government would double the UK's spend on international climate finance (ICF). We can achieve so much more when we work together – across the UK, Europe and the world.

Turning to the biodiversity crisis, it is unacceptable that one in nine species in Scotland faces extinction. In recent decades we have experienced catastrophic loss of species and their habitats, accelerated by climate change. That's why the Scottish Conservatives will introduce an ambitious Nature Bill in the next Parliament, to strengthen environmental protections on land, in our rivers and at sea - so that we can reverse the decline in native species. As part of this, we will create 'nature networks' to allow animals to roam, increase peatland restoration and tree planting, and expand Marine Protected Areas.

The Scottish Conservatives are also committed to tackling child poverty. Our first priority, given the number of children living in workless households, is to deliver a growing economy with full employment. However, while work is the best route out of poverty, that is not the only action we should take. That is why we would deliver free school lunches and breakfasts for all children in primary school, ensuring that they get a decent meal twice per day. In addition, we would complete the rollout of the Scottish Child Payment and increase payments to £20 per week by the end of the Parliament.

Finally, I wholeheartedly agree that we must take this opportunity to strengthen our NHS and schools after years of decline under the SNP. That's why the Scottish Conservatives will hire 3,000 extra teachers – to cut class sizes and improve subject choice – and why we will invest at least £2 billion extra in our NHS.

Douglas Ross
Leader, Scottish Conservatives