

SNP Manifesto 2021

What we're doing for our island communities

Not all communities are the same. What works in urban Scotland may not be fit for our rural or island communities and vice versa. In the last parliament, the SNP delivered the Islands Act, giving specific legal rights to Scotland's islands to ensure that government works with and for our island communities.

Through the pandemic the SNP has also worked to recognise the unique status of our island communities, tailoring restrictions and supporting the NHS to develop new and innovative ways to support island communities.

Re-elect the SNP to:

Invest in a green recovery and create jobs

Over the next five years, we will invest at least £30 million in a specific programme to invest in island infrastructure and support a green recovery.

We will invest an additional £500 million nationally over the next parliament to support new jobs and reskill people for the jobs of the future.

To provide more employment opportunities, we will deliver islands-focused activity through the Young Person's Guarantee, green and nature based skills activity to create more nature and land based jobs on islands and support more islands-based small and micro businesses to deliver training.

We will create opportunities for new businesses to grow and flourish in every part of Scotland. To breathe new life into the economies of rural Scotland we will create a new, £20 million Rural Entrepreneur Fund – this will provide grants of up to £10,000 to support the creation of 2,000 new businesses.

Revitalise communities

To help stem depopulation, we will establish an Islands Bond – offering 100 bonds of up to £50,000 to young people and families to stay in or to move to islands currently threatened by depopulation. The bonds will support people to buy homes, start businesses and otherwise make their lives for the long term in these communities.

We will also give local authorities the powers to manage the numbers of second homes in their area and will work with Community Land Scotland so we can find the right land to deliver more housing in our rural areas.

As part of our commitment to deliver 100,000 homes over the next ten years we will invest in new affordable rural housing, including on our islands.

Opportunities for all

As part of our drive to ensure everyone gets a fair start, and drawing from the experience of online education during the pandemic, we will expand our digital learning offer to develop a National Digital Academy.

This will allow learners to access the full higher curriculum, regardless of school or location. This new approach would end the postcode lottery of subject choice - making all subjects available in all communities,

and enable people to study for their Highers later in life, in their own time, fitting it around work or caring commitment.

Rebuild a thriving tourism sector

We will maintain investment of £6.2 million per year in the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to alleviate some of the pressure that tourism can have on local rural communities.

We will expand the Islands Passport to encourage more people to visit more of our islands, promoting more off season visiting and creating more equitable benefit for communities.

We will invest a further £1 million in a Seasonal Ranger scheme to help support responsible tourism in our rural and remote areas.

Improve connectivity

We will deliver an Islands Connectivity Plan to replace the current Ferries Plan looking at aviation, ferries and fixed links, and to connecting and onward travel.

Ferries provide a truly lifeline service for the islands they serve, and we are committed to funding these services and maintaining Road Equivalent Tariff on all current island ferry routes.

We will invest in more sustainable ferries, reducing the carbon footprint of our ferry fleet. We are committed to 30% of state-owned ferries being low emission by 2032.

We will explore the potential to build more fixed links to island and remote communities and work with island communities to reduce reliance on ferries.

The Smith Commission paved the way for the devolution of Air Passenger Duty to Scotland, but this was held up as a result of state-aid concerns regarding the Highlands and Islands Exemption.

We remain committed to finding a solution with the UK Government that would allow for the exemption to remain post-devolution. We will undertake a review of APD rates and bands to ensure that once devolution takes place, we have a policy that aligns with our climate change plans. This review will explore the possibility of levying a higher tax on more polluting aircraft.

We will continue our work to pilot low or zero emission planes between Scotland's islands.

By the end of 2022, 16 new subsea fibre cables will have been laid to Scottish islands. We will use this to support the creation of gigabit islands with full 5G services and connectivity from mobile providers, testing the concept on 8 islands in 4 local authority areas.

Over the course of this Parliament, on top of the 11 already built, we will invest £25 million to install at least 39 masts to provide mobile coverage in remote rural and island communities.

Healthy islands

We want to see as much health care as possible provided in the community and closer to people's own homes, because that is what we know patients want.

We will roll out more mobile health services for direct delivery of care, particularly in rural areas. This will include additional screening services, stroke units and mental health services.

We will also continue the expansion of digital health care that took place during the pandemic, helping people to get treatment faster and without having to travel to a hospital.

We will create a new centre of excellence for rural and remote medicine and social care to provide expertise and advice on the delivery of care in different rural, island, and remote settings in Scotland and invest in our rural general hospitals.

We recognise that addressing issues such as mental health, loneliness and drug use are as important in our island communities as it is in our urban ones and our investment in supporting mental health and tackling drug use will support community based approaches, as well as offering residential rehab services where appropriate.

Work to Net Zero

We will support Carbon Neutral Islands which would be in the vanguard of reaching net zero emission targets by 2045. This would include pilots for some islands to run on 100% renewable energy, to create circular economies tackling and processing waste and exploring more sustainable transport options. We will work with at least 3 islands over the next Parliament to enable them to become fully carbon neutral by 2040.