SUPERFAST BROADBAND FOR ALL: we plan to get all of rural Scotland online to help families, businesses and charities.

• *Prioritise and accelerate rural superfast broadband rollout*

  o Nothing is more important than broadband in rural Scotland – for families, businesses and the third sector

  o Over £400 million is being invested in Scotland already

  o More than two million homes and businesses have been linked to the superfast network, including 220,000 premises in Scotland

  o We will make it our priority to speed up the delivery of the 95% target and look for solutions and funding to cover the remaining 5% - work has already begun on this

• *Refocus and double the funding of Community Broadband Scotland*

  o In addition to the superfast rollout, there are several alternative broadband solutions that are available to customers

  o Currently, the Scottish Government is funding a Community Broadband Scotland scheme through which communities can apply for funding to get broadband delivered through a range of alternative solutions

  o £5m was originally provided in August 2012 until March 2015, which was extended by a further £2.5m until March 2018

  o It is, however, not open to individuals, businesses or third sector organisations, in contrast with the Welsh Access Broadband Cymru scheme

  o We want to transform CBS into a Rural Broadband Fund, double the amount of its funding to £5m and refocus it so that it offers support to individuals, businesses, third sector and communities which have not yet been reached by the superfast rollout
A LOCAL POLICE FORCE: we back a review of the national police force to ensure it is fully accountable to rural communities.

- **Review the local accountability of our police service**
  - Recent revelations surrounding armed police and stop and search made it quite clear that there are serious issues with the accountability of the new single police force
  - We have called for a thorough review of the arrangements in place and believe this must include looking at how local accountability can be restored
  - We believe the review should, in particular, look at the possibility of a multi-layered police service, which would combine national strategic cooperation with local autonomy

A COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BLOCK WIND FARMS: we will back local councils who want to put a stop to new wind farms and ensure people whose property prices dropped due to farms are compensated.

- **Allow a moratorium on wind farm applications**
  - Latest figures reveal that planning authorities deal with three wind farm application a day, clogging up the planning system
  - When local councils demanded a moratorium on wind farm applications the Scottish Government said this would be an “unprecedented step in Scottish planning practice"
  - With a moratorium on shale gas exploration announced recently the precedent has now been set

- **Discontinue business rates exemptions for large-scale renewable projects**
  - Conservatives have committed to ending all onshore wind subsidies for projects granted planning consent after the General Election
• **Scotland** also operates a renewable energy relief scheme, under which renewable energy projects are entitled to a discount on their business rates

• We would limit this to only small- and medium-scale renewable schemes with a rateable value of less than £1m

• *Introduce a compensation scheme for loss of property value due to onshore wind developments*

  • In the past we have highlighted Denmark as a country from which we could import a system of compensation for loss of property value due to onshore wind developments

  • Local residents who believe the value of their home will drop because of wind turbine developments can apply to a valuation authority which can rule the developer having to pay compensation

  • In all there are five valuation authorities covering the whole country, each consisting of a lawyer and an expert in assessing real property value in the local area.

  • The drop in value has to be estimated at over 1% and it does not apply to small turbines (under 25m tall) or offshore developments

  • If the property is located within a distance smaller than 6 times the height of the turbine there are no fees to apply – if the distance is greater the fees are waived if the claim is successful

  • As a rule claims made during the planning process, but can also be made at later stages in exceptional circumstances

**BETTER COMMUNITY TRANSPORT:** buses are a lifeline for rural communities so we will boost subsidies to boost routes.

• *Increase support for community transport schemes*

  • Community- and charity-run buses are essential to rural Scotland. For older people especially, these are often the only direct link to health care as well as friends, family or recreation
The funding for community transport schemes is patchy and inconsistent at best, with a comprehensive national strategy absent.

We believe the National Concessionary Travel Scheme should be extended beyond commercial operators to community transport and the Scottish Government should reimburse the full value of a ticket.

As we have previously argued, it would be fairer to align the NCTS with the State Pension Age - Audit Scotland calculated this would save £40 million annually (in 2010 based on 65 SPA), some of which can be used to support community transport.

A start-up transport capital fund should also be introduced as the initial costs can be the most discouraging element when considering community transport projects.

The fund would also provide support to install ticketing machines to deal with the extension of the NCTS.

**BALANCED LAND REFORM:** we will oppose moves to erode property ownership – but we also back a crackdown on tax avoidance by landowners and support funding for communities which want to lease land for the long term.

- **Increase transparency of land ownership**

  - There are elements of the Scottish Government’s land reform agenda that we support and we believe a transparent register of land ownership is in the interest of us all.

  - This will help tackle tax avoidance, but it can also make it easier for communities to register their interest in community buyouts and long leases.

- **Offer long lease funding for communities via the Scottish Land Fund**

  - The Scottish Land Fund currently provides financial support to communities which want to exercise the community right to buy.

  - Community buyouts, however, are not the only form of land use – sometimes long leases are preferable to communities as well as landowners.
- The Scottish Land Fund should be opened up to provide funding to communities interested in entering long leases

- **Fundamentally review state-owned and state-managed forestry**
  - Scottish Ministers own around 34% of the forest resource in Scotland, approximately 481,000 hectares
  - We accept that some level of state ownership is essential and beneficial in non-commercial forestry, but we see no reason why commercial timber production should be owned by the state
  - Other commercial activity (primarily tourist/recreational) forests could also be reformed, with state ownership remaining, but other community/private management models which ensure any profits are reinvested back in the asset should be trialled
  - Forest parks, as a free recreational resource, with a wide range of environmental, health and conservation benefits should be retained in public ownership

**MORE AFFORDABLE RURAL HOMES**: we back incentives for rural property owners and buyers to encourage them to provide affordable housing.

- **Introduce conditional incentives for affordable rural housing and broaden housing grant availability**
  - In rural areas especially, we have a range of empty properties that could be brought back or converted to be used as affordable housing
  - Affordable rented housing is broadly defined as mid-market or intermediate rent at lower than market rent levels
  - Fiscal and non-fiscal incentives that help rural private owners bring properties into the affordable sector would have an exponentially positive effect
  - The Scottish Government has the power to introduce conditional stamp duty exceptions for private buy-to-let investors who would have to offer affordable rents
- Rural property owners could also be incentivised through long term rent guarantee schemes, where they provide long-term (up to 10 years) affordable housing in exchange for guaranteed rent income, paid even if the property goes empty for a period of time.

- Existing stock will always only be a part of the solution – we need to look at how to support community and private developers interested in affordable housing.

- A bigger proportion of grant funding also has to extend beyond Registered Social Landlords (in 2010/11 this was only £5m out of £470m) to include community and private developers looking to develop new affordable housing.