



**FOCUSING ON THE
REAL PRIORITIES OF THE
NORTH EAST**

GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2024



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FOREWORD



In the coming weeks, the people of Scotland will have a once in a generation opportunity to send a clear message to the SNP. One that rejects their 17 years of failure in government. That rejects their decades of division and constitutional handwringing at Westminster. And rejects their neglect for vast tracts of rural Scotland. Nowhere is that felt more keenly than in the North East, where the nationalists are definitely in decline.

Only the Scottish Conservatives can speed them along on their way down, with a positive policy platform which takes the North East forward.

The SNP have never been more vulnerable than they are now. People here saw the signs earlier than most – it didn't take a campervan, a missing £600,000 or the Michael Matheson scandal.

It didn't take Sturgeon to topple, Yousaf to crumble, or Honest John to wobble. It was when the party made a pact with the devil, in the form of the Greens Lorna Slater and Patrick Harvie, merely because they coveted a pro-independence majority at any cost. The newly-minted coalition of chaos came for emergency log burners in Braemar, they came for your hard-earned income year after year, and they came to laugh and jeer after they cut public services to the bone, to pay for a host of failed Central Belt policies. That coalition may be over but its policy agenda remains.

In the North East, and in swathes of seats across Scotland, this election is a straight fight between the Scottish Conservatives and the SNP. Every seat here is a two-horse race, and any pro-UK vote that doesn't go to our excellent local candidates will only help elect a nationalist, who will use every vote they get as a supposed mandate for independence, who will be a false friend to fishermen, farmers and those working in the North Sea and who won't represent you nearly as well as a Scottish Conservative MP in Westminster.

Douglas Ross MSP

Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Ross', written in a cursive style.





OUR LOCAL CANDIDATES

Redrawn parliamentary boundaries mean there are some changes to constituencies in this election. But one thing has definitely not changed – Scottish Conservative candidates who live in your area will have your best interests at heart.

We have an experienced, talented and local team of candidates ready to take the fight to the nationalists on July 4.

John Swinney wants an “independence day” to “get rid of the Tories”. But he’s playing to a fringe of nationalists with no positive message. I know people in the North East want effective and helpful MPs at Westminster who will represent their constituents, and Scottish Conservatives can point to a proven track record of doing so.

From Moray to Broughty Ferry, we have selected one of the strongest teams of candidates ever seen.

They are already local champions, and they want to continue championing the farming, fishing, tourism, whisky, and oil and gas sectors for years to come.

For the North East to have any hope of effective representation in the next UK Parliament, it needs to elect as many of these candidates as it can.

The alternative is an SNP MP more interested in independence than the real priorities of Scotland – fixing the roads, getting more police officers on the street, bringing back standards in our schools, cutting taxes for hard-earned workers, and easing the backlogs in the NHS.



INTRODUCTION

The North East is a vital part of Scotland's economy and society. For decades it has been central to energy security and innovation in the UK and has played a key part in Scotland's tourism and food production sectors.

However, the North East has come under strain in recent years thanks to an SNP Government that is opposed to further oil and gas exploration, ignorant of the needs of rural and coastal communities, and continues to be distracted by independence over the issues that really matter, and are holding Scotland back from tackling the big challenges facing struggling families.

The Scottish Conservatives are the only party that are standing up for the North East. We believe that the region will be essential for our energy security as we transition towards Net Zero, deliver economic growth and food security within Scotland, and will be at the forefront of renewable innovation. The policies outlined in this manifesto will help grow the economy of the North East, implement a transport system that has been stymied by years of broken promises by the SNP, support our farming and fishing communities, deliver fair funding for North East councils, support the development of its cities

and town centres, ensure that the development of new energy infrastructure considers the views of local people, and provide a modern, efficient, local health service that can look after communities across the North East for decades to come.

The SNP, by contrast, do not have a plan for the North East. John Swinney has said that independence will be "page one, line one" of the SNP manifesto and that every SNP MP elected will contribute to a mandate for independence. **The SNP have said that "most seats across Scotland are a straight fight" between them and the Scottish Conservatives.**

At this year's General Election, the choice for the North East is clear: vote together for the Scottish Conservatives to beat the SNP and elect a local MP who will focus on your priorities OR the SNP candidate will win and spend the next five years campaigning for independence.

The SNP are holding the North East back and only the Scottish Conservatives can be trusted to focus on the North East's real priorities.



OUR PROMISES FOR THE NORTH EAST

1 Backing oil and gas workers across the North East by ensuring that the domestic production continues as it will be vital for Scotland's transition to Net Zero and the UK's energy security, supporting new developments and opposing any expansion of the energy profits levy.

2 Growing the economy of the North East by lowering the tax bill for ordinary workers and families, and passing on 75% business rates relief to all businesses.

3 Securing fair funding for North East councils, ensuring that local government receives a set portion of the Scottish Government's budget, and that local taxes raised in the North East are used to maintain council services.

4 Tackling crime across the North East by recruiting 1,000 additional officers and properly funding Police Scotland.

5 Supporting local concerns about new energy infrastructure by ensuring new pylons and substations are completed with the consent of residents, and that those responsible must engage with communities and consider their views.

6 Improving broadband and mobile phone signal to roll out full fibre broadband across Scotland by 2027.

7 Upgrading key roads by dualling the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness, and improving the A90 at Laurencekirk and Ellon.

8 Revitalising city and town centres by opposing Low Emission Zones and working with the UK Government to ensure that Levelling Up funding and the Towns Fund further delivers for the North East.

9 Improving rail and bus connections by reviewing the reopening of lines and stations across the North East and enhancing the provision of bus services.

10 Protecting farming and fishing communities by using the freedoms acquired since the withdrawal from the European Union to promote genetic technology and food security, and by returning Bew Review Funding to the agricultural budget.

11 Delivering a modern, efficient, local NHS for the North East by employing 1,000 extra GPs across Scotland and by banning local closures to reverse years of SNP centralisation.

PROTECTING THE NORTH SEA ENERGY SECTOR

The North Sea oil and gas sector is worth over £20 billion to the UK economy and **supports around 100,000 Scottish jobs**. It is therefore essential that any future UK Government gives its backing to this key component of the Scottish economy and as such, the Scottish Conservatives will always stand up for this sector.



The UK Conservative Government has already negotiated the North Sea Transition Deal with the sector, which will unlock up to £16 billion of investment and create up to 40,000 new jobs.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to Scotland reaching its Net Zero targets by 2045 but we also believe that this should be achieved fairly and not damage livelihoods and communities.

While we must deliver on our transition to renewables this must be a managed transition away from oil and gas rather than a kneejerk turning off of the taps. It must also be **a practical transition delivered here in Scotland and with a view to protecting our energy security**, rather than replacing domestic production and Scottish jobs with foreign imports, potentially from countries that do not share our values, and increased emissions.

As the Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce, Offshore Energies UK and others have warned, the next UK Government must rapidly restore confidence and stability to the North Sea sector. However, both Labour and the SNP have said that they are opposed to all new oil and gas licenses in the North Sea. This is a short-sighted, dogmatic position based on ideology rather than practicality.

New projects are essential to ensure continued investment and protect jobs as the sector moves naturally from oil and gas to renewables.

The UK Government has already announced that hundreds of new licenses will be granted in the North Sea and **the Scottish Conservatives would support the granting of further licenses** that are economically viable and meet the already strict environmental standards.

The Energy Profits Levy was a product of its time and allowed for the public to be given support at a time of sky-high energy prices driven by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. However,

now that energy prices are coming down for most households, it is right that this measure is considered in line with the need for investment to protect and create jobs and secure our transition to Net Zero.

That is why Scottish Conservatives MPs opposed the extension of the energy profits levy and why we will oppose any further extension, such as Labour's reckless plans to hike the rate of tax even higher.

While we understand the financial pressures that the country continues to face, we do not believe that increasing taxes on one of Scotland's largest employers is the right way to deal with these challenges.

Protecting Scottish energy jobs is essential

to ensure that the North East remains an epicentre of the European energy sector and for retaining the skills that we need to successfully transition. The Scottish Conservatives would set up a National Centre for Green Energy Skills in Aberdeen to ensure that the demand for skills and jobs is managed across our energy sector and that workers always have opportunities available to them.

Carbon Capture Technology is one of the most exciting advances that has emerged from the transition to Net Zero.

The Scottish Conservatives fully support the Acorn Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage Project which has been awarded Track 2 funding by the UK Government and aims to be operational by 2027. The Scottish Government, by contrast, has yet to release any of its promised £80 million for the project.

Onshore and offshore wind play a key role in our generation makeup and that role will only grow in the years ahead.

The Scottish Conservatives support the continued expansion of our wind sector, however, and especially in the case of onshore, **this must be done by working with, rather than against local communities.**

That is why we would campaign to strengthen community benefit provisions, including by providing cheaper bills, and have called for

planning decisions to stay at a local level rather than being appealed to the Scottish Government. We also support the development of hydro-electric power and solar energy schemes to diversify our renewables sources.

While it is still in its infancy, green hydrogen has the potential to create new opportunities for workers and businesses, while helping us to decarbonise industry and transport. The Scottish Conservatives will work to support the development of a green hydrogen network for storage and exporting where it is economically viable to do so.

Nuclear technology has undergone rapid developments in recent years, particularly in small modular reactors, and **the North East stands to benefit if it was not for the SNP's ill-thought-out opposition to new nuclear developments.**

We support the UK Government's Civil Nuclear Roadmap which will result in the largest expansion of nuclear power for over 70 years. **This will reduce electricity bills, support thousands of jobs, and improve energy security in Scotland,** and provide opportunities for a major new power station and investing in advanced nuclear production.



SECURING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE NORTH EAST

Scotland's economy has stagnated under the SNP. We are now the most highly taxed part of the UK and the SNP have preferred to push vague ideas like the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and a "Wellbeing Economy" rather than actively promoting economic growth.

Scotland's economy needs to grow to deliver more well-paid jobs and to provide the essential revenues to fund our public services in the future.

The Scottish Conservatives are the party of economic growth, and our policy paper *Grasping the Thistle* has a clear plan to grow Scotland's economy and provide wider benefits for the North East.

A prosperous North East is essential to delivering economic growth and the region will be key to Scotland's economic transformation as we look to the future. This has been recognised by the UK Government as the North East will benefit from an overall funding envelope of £80 million over a five-year period after being chosen by the UK Government as one of Scotland's two Investment Zones.

Despite this, businesses across the North East have been hit by the global cost-of-living crisis and by the SNP's failure to support them. **The Scottish Government should introduce a 75% rates relief for business.** This would bring them in line with businesses in England, to whom the UK Government extended its 75% rates relief for the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors in the 2023 Autumn Statement.

Refusing to pass on rates relief could result in many businesses across the North East closing down.

Town centres across Scotland have deteriorated thanks to a lack of support from the SNP. The Scottish Conservatives believe that **thriving town centres are not only essential to promote economic growth but can also lead to resilient communities.**

It has recently been announced that Elgin would benefit from the UK Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns, and we would work to ensure that towns across the North East can benefit from these schemes to help them **revive their high streets and grow the local economy.**

We would also work with the UK Government to ensure that the North East economy is further enhanced through Levelling Up.



In total, the UK Government has awarded more than £75 million in Levelling Up funding for Aberdeen, Dundee, Peterhead and Elgin.

The money has gone towards regeneration projects including a new Aberdeen market, a green transport hub in Dundee, a museum and cultural quarter in Peterhead and transforming derelict buildings in Elgin town centre. In addition, the **UK Government's Towns Fund is helping to drive economic growth** throughout the North East to the tune of £80 million. We would work to ensure that this success continues and that the North East can be levelled up more.

High-speed broadband is key to future economic development in the North East. The SNP's R100 scheme was meant to be bring faster internet access to 60,000 properties across the North and North East. However, only 9,320 properties have been connected so far, with 51,444 still to be connected, and the completion date has been delayed until 2028.

We would work with the UK Government on a joint programme of full fibre broadband delivery in Scotland to complete the rollout by 2027. This will also include voucher schemes for those areas that R100 will never reach.



A RESILIENT TRANSPORT NETWORK FOR THE NORTH EAST

Transport services and infrastructure have deteriorated across the North East thanks to **years of broken promises by the SNP** that have left the region increasingly isolated.

Roads across the North East, in particular, have declined under the SNP. **In 2011, the SNP Government promised to fully dual the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness.** However, in 2021, as part of the Bute House Agreement with the Greens, a review of the project was announced. The findings of this review are still to be published after repeated delays and this has cast doubt on dualling between Aberdeen and east of Huntly, along with new bypasses at Inverurie and Keith.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to ensuring that the A96 is fully dualled.

Other key roads across the North East should also be improved. The Toll of Birness junction has long been an accident blackspot and we believe that the A90 between Ellon and Peterhead should be upgraded to a full dual carriageway to ensure that safety is improved on this pivotal road. We also support plans for a new £24 million upgrade separated junction at Laurencekirk. This was announced by the Scottish Government in 2016 but has yet to materialise due to technical objections.

Railway connections both to, and within, the North East have worsened since the SNP nationalised ScotRail in 2023. The SNP Government should release the full £200 million they promised to speed up railway journey times by 24 minutes between Aberdeen and the central belt. Only 3% of this funding has been delivered so far and it has recently been announced this pledge is under review. Rail users across the North East clearly deserve better.

We also support the reopening of stations across the North East that were lost during the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. Communities in Brechin, Cove, and Newtonhill have long called for these stations to be reopened to cater for the

expanding population, and former lines such as the Formartine and Buchan Railway should be reopened to connect communities in Dyce and Fraserburgh. Sadly, the SNP on Angus Council lost Brechin a golden opportunity to secure up to £18 million of investment in the Caledonian Railway. **Scottish Conservatives will ensure such incompetence does not happen again.**

A reliable bus network is also essential to connect our local towns and villages that do not have a rail connection. Furthermore, the bus services that currently operate do not run frequently, are often overcrowded, and sometimes do not show up. This can prevent people from reaching essential appointments and could cause our rural communities to become further isolated. We would work closely with First Bus, Stagecoach, and Nestrans, **to enhance and improve bus services across the North East.**



REVITALISING ABERDEEN AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE REGION

Aberdeen City is the economic heart of the North East and will be central to the region's economic development. Despite this, the city needs to be revitalised if we are to secure the region's prosperity. The Scottish Conservatives recognise this and our plans to offer 75% business rates relief, and revitalise town centres, would help to rejuvenate the city.

The SNP, by contrast, do not share these views and their plans to introduce a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) in Aberdeen would decimate businesses that have not yet recovered from the pandemic.

The Scottish Conservatives oppose the introduction of the LEZ and would work constructively with businesses in Aberdeen to help renew the city and deliver economic growth.

We are committed to backing communities across the North East that have been challenged by SNP policies. **The SNP's ban on wood-burning stoves shows their utter contempt for households in the North East.** Whilst it is welcome that – following pressure from the Scottish Conservatives – a review into the ban has been announced, this simply is not enough. New homes are already being built across the North East without wood-burning stoves, leaving families far less resilient in the event of bad weather and power cuts. **We will continue to oppose this short-sighted ban.**

Safe communities are also essential to revitalising the North East. However, the region has been severely impacted by the SNP's 'soft-touch' approach to justice which has resulted in Police Scotland being underfunded and has placed communities at an increased risk of crime.

Numerous police stations across the North East could shut after **Police Scotland recently announced the mass closure of stations**, with five stations in Aberdeen alone now being at risk of closure. Furthermore, the SNP's disastrous pilot scheme in the North East to not investigate certain crimes now looks set to be rolled out

across Scotland.

Communities across the North East have been betrayed by these decisions. **Police numbers are at their lowest level in Scotland since 2008**, and people deserve a strong police presence in their area.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives would properly fund Police Scotland and recruit an additional 1,000 police officers to more than make up for the shortfall that the SNP have presided over.

The North East is often hard-hit with severe weather, such as Storm Arwen in 2021 and Storm Babet in 2023. However, the Scottish Government's response to these events was totally inadequate. The Storm Babet taskforce only met one month after the storm caused extensive damage in Brechin and across Angus, and the funding that it has offered to victims and businesses affected by the flood has been described as 'derisory'.

We would ensure that flood protection schemes are regularly maintained and upgraded to prevent them from becoming overtopped.

Councils across the North East have suffered from years of SNP underfunding and have been forced to make cuts to essential public services. Aberdeen is the second lowest funded council in Scotland, receiving £1,997 per head. Aberdeenshire (£2,181) is the fourth lowest, while Moray is sixth (£2,222) and Angus is ninth (£2,300). Resilient local authorities are central to economic growth.

We would **create a permanent and fair financial settlement for councils**, preventing the SNP Government from raiding their budgets. This would require the Scottish Government to deliver a ring-fenced percentage of their budget to councils.



DELIVERING FOR FARMING AND FISHING COMMUNITIES

Farming and fishing have been at the heart of the North East's social fabric for centuries. Scotland's farmers, crofters, and fishermen produce award-winning produce and help to maintain the UK's food security.

However, our rural and coastal communities have been abandoned by an SNP Government that has a clear Central Belt bias.

The SNP is ignorant of the needs of rural Scotland, and is pursuing objectives that will damage communities and hinder domestic food production across the North East.

Scotland's farmers have been repeatedly let down by the Scottish Government and should not be used to fill the **£1.5 billion blackhole that the SNP created through their financial incompetence.**



The Scottish Conservatives are strongly committed to securing the return of the £46 million in ring-fenced Bew Review Funding that the SNP took from the agriculture budget.

Supporting our rural communities also means maintaining our rural landscape and ensuring that it is not damaged by new infrastructure. Proposals for new pylons and substations through Aberdeenshire, Angus and the Mearns have rightly generated substantial local opposition and it is apparent that the energy companies who are proposing these projects have failed to give enough consideration to these local concerns.

We would ensure that new pylons and substations are completed with the consent of residents, and mandate that those responsible must engage with communities and consider their views on the planning and delivery of proposed routes.

Conserving our rural landscape also means ensuring that prime agricultural land is used for food production and is protected from being redesignated as sites for battery storage sites or solar farms. We would ensure that the planning process reflects these concerns so that **landscapes are protected across the North East and agricultural production is maintained.**

Scientific innovation is essential to futureproof agriculture and food security in the North East. However, the SNP's opposition to gene-editing is regressive considering that UK Government have advanced this science in England, and even the European Commission, which the SNP have long been at pains to align with, has softened its opposition to genetic technology.

The Scottish Conservatives would propose legislation to approve genetic technology in Scotland.

This would allow North East farmers to produce more resilient crops and livestock, and would enhance the UK's food security and make it less reliant on imported produce.

Fishing is essential to the social fabric of the North East, but fishing communities have been repeatedly alarmed by the policies pursued by the SNP and their former Green coalition partners.

Decisions such as the disastrous attempt to designate 10% of Scotland's waters as Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), would have

destroyed coastal communities. We remain opposed to this plan.

We will make sure that the HPMAs are not brought back under a different guise.

Fishermen across the North East have been provided with new opportunities since withdrawing from the European Union and being out of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This is evident from the fact that, according to recent Scottish Government figures, Scottish vessels made over £3.5 million in 2022 compared to £3 million in 2021, and £2.8 million in 2019.

Scottish fishing fleets also now have a far stronger voice in coastal state negotiations than when we were in the EU. The SNP would gladly sacrifice this advantage by breaking up the UK and putting Scottish fishermen back under the hated CFP.

The Scottish Conservatives will always back our fishing communities in the North East.

The food and drink producers in the North East are among the finest in Scotland with products ranging from whisky produced in Speyside, fish landed at Peterhead, and beef produced in Aberdeenshire, having a global impact.

We will support North East Scotland's food and drink producers by growing and establishing foreign export markets in some of the fastest growing economies around the world as well as the EU.





A MODERN, EFFICIENT, LOCAL NHS FOR THE NORTH EAST

Scotland's NHS is our most precious public service. It is there for us when we start life and cares for us during our final moments. However, our NHS has deteriorated thanks to years of SNP mismanagement.

Despite the efforts of our hardworking staff, **NHS waiting times have reached a record high of over 840,000** – one in seven people across Scotland – while performance is at its lowest ever level against waiting time standards.

The Scottish Conservatives understand the need for urgent reform in our healthcare service, but also know that it must be balanced against the core principle of the NHS – that it must be free for everyone at the point of use.

Our policy paper, *Modern, Efficient, Local: A new contract between Scotland's NHS and the public*, set out numerous plans to reverse years of SNP centralisation. **These include the recruitment of 1,000 extra GPs**, a ban on local closures, and maximum waiting times for all major NHS metrics.

NHS services across the North East have suffered from SNP centralisation and underfunding. NHS Grampian, for example, was one of the lowest funded areas per head of the population in Scotland in 2023-24. Although the area contains 10.71% of Scotland's population it only receives 9.74% of the National Resource Allocation Formula. This is not acceptable, and **our plan will deliver a modern, efficient, local health service** that will benefit communities across the North East.

A key part of this is protecting local health services, as well as building new ones.

We back plans for new health centres in Ellon and Banchory and support the reopening of Inch War Memorial Hospital and the Mulberry Unit at Stracathro Hospital.

We also support the full mobilisation of minor injury units across the North East to prevent A&E units from coming under strain and, with our plans to recruit extra GPs and ban local closures,

we would ensure that communities can access quality healthcare in their locality rather than travelling far.

We would also work to reverse years of SNP centralisation to ensure that residents can access essential services in North East.

The Scottish Government has stopped planned work on a new £130 million national treatment centre for Grampian, including an MRI suite for Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin.

We would also seek to enhance maternity services in the region. New mothers have to frequently travel to Dundee for specialist infant feeding support rather than being seen locally. Furthermore, we would support the opening of a dedicated Mother and Baby Unit in the North East for perinatal mental health support. These projects must be allowed to proceed.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to tackling mental health and loneliness across the North East. Men's Sheds provide a vital support network that can help tackle these issues and foster lifelong friendships. We would work with the Scottish Men's Sheds Association to further expand the network of Men's Sheds into parts of the region, such as Huntly or Ballater, that have not yet had a shed established and would work to expand the network into more isolated communities.



CONCLUSION

The North East is central to Scotland's future prosperity and **only the Scottish Conservatives have a clear plan to ensure that the region remains a great place to live and work.**

By protecting energy production, securing economic growth, providing fair funding for councils, improving transport and connectivity services, protecting communities, and creating a modern, efficient, local NHS, **we will ensure that the North East remains thriving for generations to come.**

The SNP's fixation with independence has meant that they have ignored the real priorities of the

North East, and the Labour Party's opposition to new oil and gas production would decimate the region's economy and stifle its communities. The SNP and Labour are ignorant when it comes to the North East's real priorities, and **only the Scottish Conservatives can be trusted to protect the North East** and take the region forward as we look forward to the future.

By voting for the Scottish Conservatives you can beat the SNP across the North East, bring the focus back to the region's real priorities and help move Scotland forward.



