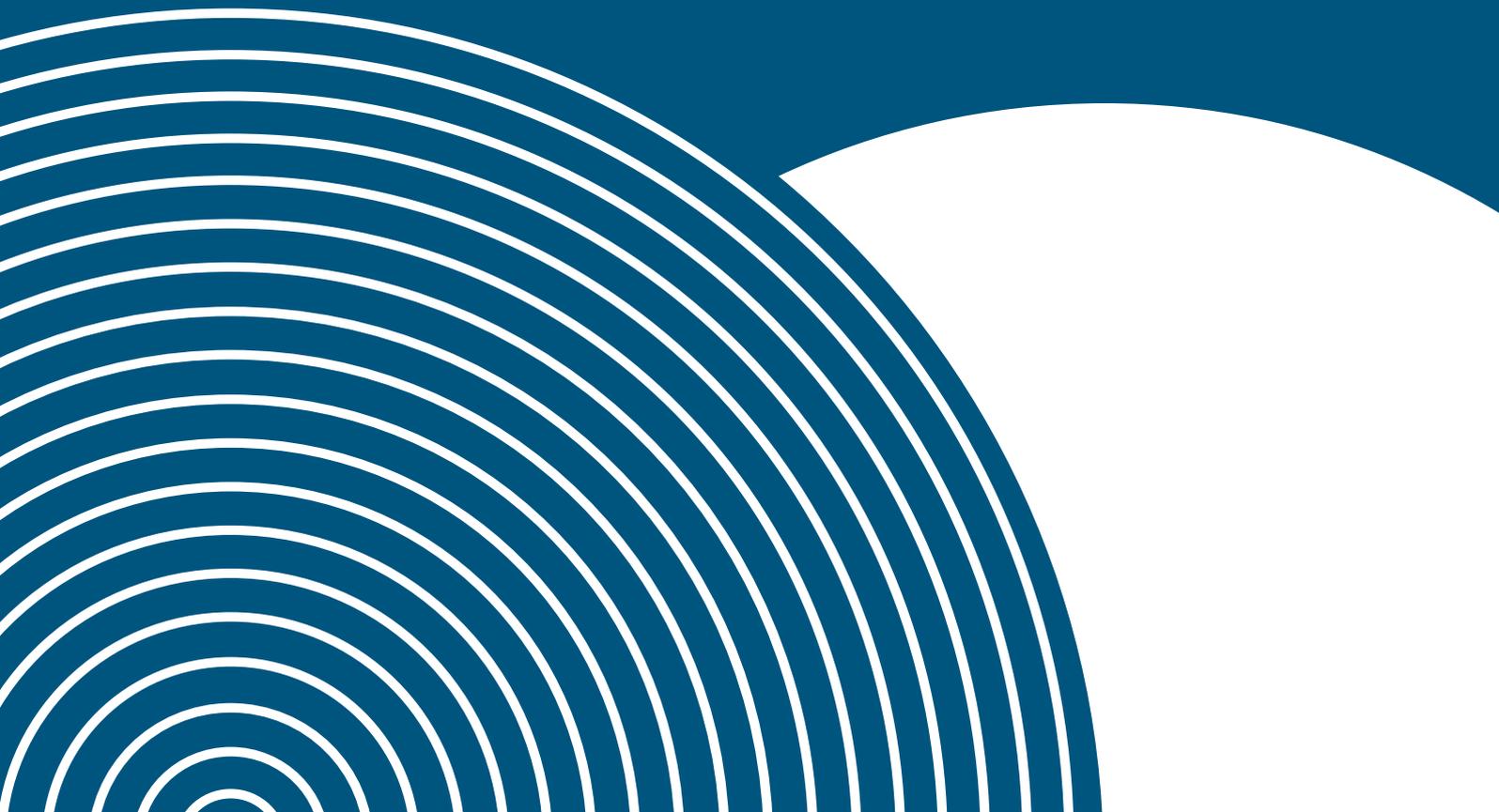


**Scottish  
Countryside  
Alliance**



# **PRIORITIES FOR RURAL SCOTLAND**

**MANIFESTO  
2021**



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# Introduction

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The Scottish Countryside Alliance manifesto sets out how the next Scottish Government can protect, connect, grow and enrich rural Scotland.

Rural Scotland is an interwoven tapestry of cultural, economic, environmental and community issues. A threat to any one aspect could lead to the unravelling of the whole, which is why promoting and protecting Scotland's rural communities will be important for the next Scottish Government, especially now we have left the European Union and as we recover from the devastation COVID-19 has caused.

In order for the rural economy to recover, rural communities to thrive, and the environment to be enhanced rural Scotland must have the support of government with policies designed to do something for the countryside, not to do things to the countryside. As such all policy related to rural Scotland, from tackling crime to land management must be based on sound evidence, and of course, be rural proofed. The success of rural Scotland is dependent on each sector, community and business working together to deliver on Scotland's environmental and economic ambitions.

## “What support do you need from the next Scottish Government to perform your role?”

“The next Scottish Government must support the work of keepers and all those who manage the Scottish countryside. Our work must be recognised for the contribution it makes to achieving the environmental outcomes we all want to see. The Government must understand that only by working with us can we enhance Scotland’s biodiversity and deliver a prosperous and sustainable rural Scotland. Too often those who manage Scotland’s wildlife and countryside are treated as a problem, rather than a key part of the solution. There needs to be a new spirit of partnership between the Scottish Government and rural Scotland, with policies that are based on sound evidence and not divisive animal rights thinking.”

Bruce Cooper, Estate Manager, North East Scotland



The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls on the next Scottish Government to:

- ◆ Pursue rural policy that will protect, connect, grow and enrich rural Scotland.
- ◆ Pursue policy based on sound evidence and research, taking into consideration the wider implications to those it will impact.
- ◆ Pursue policy designed to do things *for* the countryside, not to do things *to* the countryside.

# Protecting Scotland's rural communities

A recent Scottish Countryside Alliance survey revealed that 84 per cent of those surveyed believe rural crime is a significant issue in their community. There is also a perception that rural crime is getting worse not better, despite official statistics saying rural crime has improved in the last decade.

## Cost of rural crime in Scotland has increased 44 per cent to £2.3 million.<sup>1</sup>

Our Survey found that 32 per cent think the police do not take rural crime seriously and that 39 per cent of those who have been a victim of rural crime do not report it to the police.

### Rural crimes to tackle in order of priority<sup>2</sup>



The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls on the next Scottish Government to:

- ◆ Undertake research to find out why people feel the police do not take rural crime seriously.
- ◆ Create a rural crime initiative to encourage all crimes to be reported to the police.
- ◆ Tailor solutions to address rural communities' policing needs.

<sup>1</sup> NFU Mutual.

<sup>2</sup> According to SCA Rural Crime Survey 2020.

# Connecting rural Scotland

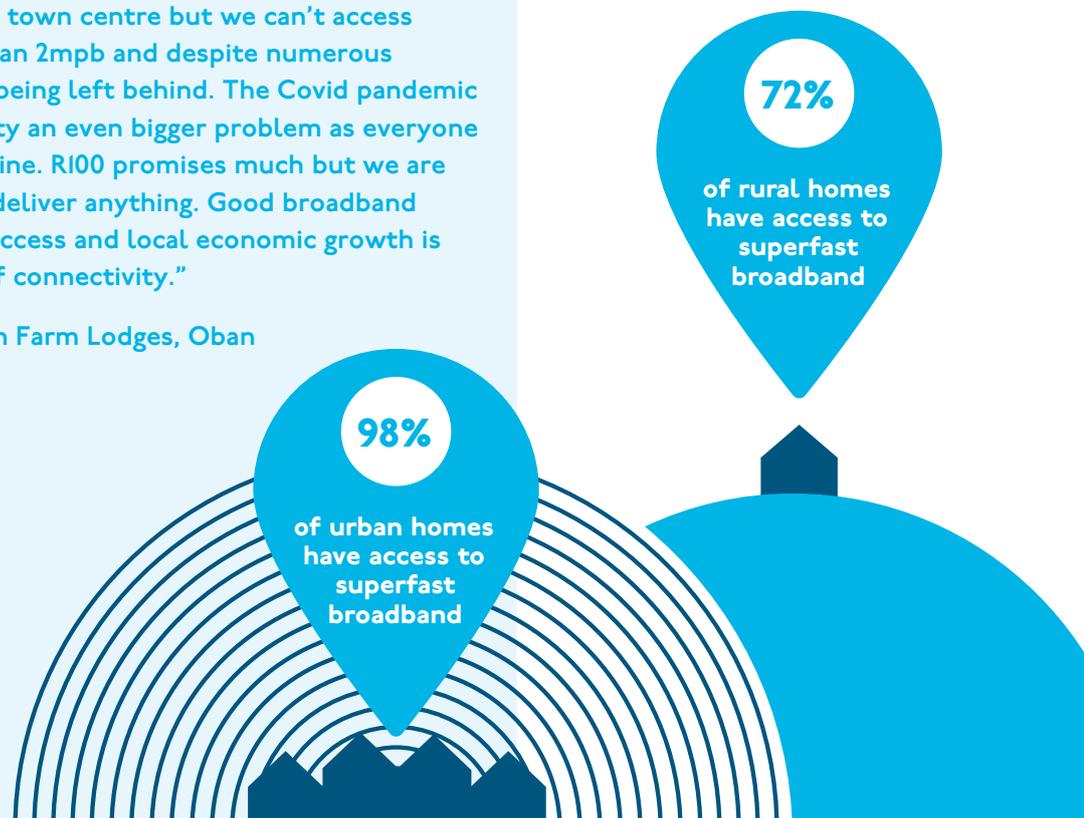
Connecting rural Scotland digitally remains a significant challenge.

**Only 72 per cent of rural residential homes in Scotland have access to superfast broadband compared to 98 per cent for urban homes. Only 59 per cent of commercial properties have access to superfast broadband compared to 90 per cent in urban areas.<sup>3</sup>**

For businesses to recover from COVID-19 it is essential that they are afforded the same conditions as elsewhere in Scotland. These businesses have always been at a disadvantage due to poor connectivity, and this has only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

“Cologin relies on a decent broadband connection. BT ‘community’ broadband wanted to charge us more than £100k to bring fibre to our Glen and more recently we were asked for £54k in ‘excess connection’ costs to bring fibre to Cologin. We are less than 3 miles from high speed fibre in Oban town centre but we can’t access it. Our upload speed is less than 2mpb and despite numerous government promises we are being left behind. The Covid pandemic has made our poor connectivity an even bigger problem as everyone and everything has moved online. R100 promises much but we are sceptical that it will actually deliver anything. Good broadband is crucial for rural business success and local economic growth is being restrained by the lack of connectivity.”

Linda Battison, Owner, Cologin Farm Lodges, Oban



<sup>3</sup> OfCom, Connected nations 2020 Scotland Report.

Mobile connectivity is also poorer in rural areas. All 4G not-spots in Scotland (19 per cent) are found in rural areas, the highest not-spot percentage in the UK. The geographic coverage by a single operator is also significantly behind urban areas. The next Scottish Government must make connecting rural Scotland a priority. Doing so will help Scotland become a world leader in digitalisation, which could mean a GDP increase of £13 billion by 2030 – a 15 per cent increase in GDP for rural areas alone.<sup>4</sup>

### The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls on the next Scottish Government to:

- ◆ **Prioritise digital connectivity in rural Scotland so that those hard-to-reach places are connected first.**
- ◆ **Establish clear deadlines for the roll-out of the R100 project.**
- ◆ **Work constructively with the UK Government to ensure that rural Scotland is connected, especially the hardest to reach places.**

Becoming a world leader in digitalisation could mean a GDP increase of £13 billion by 2030



<sup>4</sup> Scottish Futures Trust, The economic and social impacts of enhanced digitalisation in Scotland.

# Growing rural Scotland's economy

Tourism is an important sector for rural Scotland, in which country sports is a key part, especially during late autumn and winter months, after the summer tourism season has ended. The next government must recognise that each community and business in rural Scotland is dependent on each other, the success of one industry helps the success of others.

Sporting enterprises contribute to their local economies and help achieve environmental outcomes.

## **Grouse shooting can generate significant economic impacts for communities, with impacts generally localised and disproportionately important in regions where grouse shooting is most prevalent.<sup>5</sup>**

The latest available data (2009), found that 2,500 FTE jobs (both direct and indirect) were reliant on the grouse moor sector, this number will have likely grown as will have the £23-£50 million Gross Value Added per year associated with grouse shooting. To ensure that sporting enterprises can benefit their local communities as much as possible the next government should reverse the reintroduction of sporting rates.

“Here in the Borders fishing and shooting play an important part in attracting visitors, which is particularly important in supporting my business over the winter months, after the high summer season. The quality of shooting and fishing is some of the best, if not the best, in Scotland, if not the UK. Indeed, we have seen how with shooting and fishing experiences getting better and better there have been more and more visitors to our part of Scotland. Country sports have an important role here in our rural community, and indeed we all felt the pain when Covid forced shooting and fishing to be suspended. The next Scottish Government must recognise the contribution of country sports and carefully consider the impact that policy decisions related to them have on the rural economy and rural businesses. A policy that impacts one will impact us all.”

Nick Henderson, Hotelier, Scottish Borders



<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government, The Socioeconomic and biodiversity impacts of grouse moors and the employment rights of gamekeepers.

Indeed, all policy with regards to moorland, including its management, must be considered carefully, so as not to risk the economic benefits to the wider community or its contribution to the environment. The Scottish Countryside Alliance does not agree with the decision to bring forward the licensing of grouse moors before a five year probationary period is over, as recommended in the Werritty Review. However, if the next Scottish Government does decide to progress with this move, then it must work with moorland managers and all other interested parties to ensure that it is workable on the ground, given the enormous importance of these places, and those that work there.

Deer management often has a symbiotic relationship with both grouse shooting and salmon fishing on mixed estates in Scotland, all of which can form vital income sources and support increased employment and investment by landowners. These enterprises in turn subsidise woodland management. In recent times Scottish Government deer management policy has been driven by reducing deer numbers, to support other initiatives such as rewilding. However, this focus risks negatively impacting deer stalking enterprises, which are worth £140.8 million to the Scottish economy each year. The next Scottish Government must work together with those responsible for deer management to agree on a balanced approach that respects the wider context and the welfare of deer, too.

Still planned are reforms to short-term rental accommodation. The reforms, planned for before the election, but which have now been withdrawn, would have forced all operators to pay for a licence. Traditional short-term rentals, already struggling because of intense competition from Airbnb should not have to pay further costs as they seek to recover from the lack of trade because of COVID-19. It was judged that if the reforms had passed it would have risked over 5,500 jobs and £113 million annually to the rural economy. Any future reforms, planned to be reintroduced after the election, must respect concerns expressed by the sector and be rural proofed.

## The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls on the next Scottish Government to:

- ♦ Rural proof all national policy to ensure that it works for rural areas.
- ♦ Recognise the economic benefits that grouse moor enterprises bring to rural communities and re-abolish sporting rates.
- ♦ Work with sporting enterprises and all other interested parties to ensure future policies are workable on the ground and beneficial for communities and the environment.

# Enriching Scotland's countryside

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Farmers, gamekeepers and huntsmen all play an important role in the management of Scotland's landscapes and will be central to Scotland's green recovery. A successful green recovery will depend on how land is used and wildlife managed.

**A survey of upland breeding birds in parts of England and Scotland found that the densities of golden plover, curlew, redshank and lapwing were up to five times greater on managed grouse moors compared to unmanaged moorland.<sup>6</sup>**

Already management practices, such as muirburn, contribute to Scotland's environmental outcomes. Muirburn, done on a rotational basis, ensures that there is a mixture of older heather for protection and nesting, younger heather for feeding, and a fresh burn where regrowth is just starting. It also encourages the growth of peat forming sphagnum moss which filters and absorbs water – helping to prevent flooding. It also helps create lots of micro habitats so that within one acre of moorland the widest possible range of biodiversity, from insects to reptiles, and mammals to birds, have the full range of habitats they require. It is important not to ignore what has already been proven to further biodiversity, but rather to ensure that these management practices can continue and are supported in any future agricultural support scheme(s) that replace the Common Agriculture Policy.



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<sup>6</sup> GWCT, Predation control and conservation.

Scotland proudly produces world-class beef, lamb, poultry and game. If these industries are to continue to be world-class, we must ensure that the conditions are right for them to do so. For example, it is imperative that farmers are still able to carry out essential pest control to protect their livestock. For this reason, flushing to guns by dogs must continue and there should be no reduction in the number of dogs that can be used to do so. As Lord Bonomy found in the Scottish Government commissioned review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 "...searching and flushing by two dogs would not be as effective as that done by a full pack of hounds, but also that imposing such a restriction could seriously compromise effective pest control in the country, particularly on rough and hilly ground and in extensive areas of dense cover such as conifer woodlands"<sup>7</sup>

Farmers rely on hunts to carry out effective pest control to protect their livestock, especially lambs in the spring when at their most vulnerable from fox predation.

"The Lauderdale Hunt, our local hunt, provides a vital service to farmers not just during lambing but throughout the year. By being able to call upon the hunt at any time when foxes are known to be in the vicinity, the hunt has proved time and time again to be successful in either eradicating or at least reducing the problem.

The farm here [Galashiels Selkirkshire] participates in the Agri-Environmental Climate Scheme (AECS), with a large part of the farm coming under "Wader grazed grassland" and "Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland". We provide an environment to encourage "waders" like curlew, lapwings and oyster catchers to visit and nest here, which has worked well. However, without rigorous control of foxes, all of this conservation work would be in vain as foxes predate these ground nesting birds, taking the parent birds as well as their eggs and chicks. It is a constant and uphill struggle for these birds to survive and without the intervention of the hunt in keeping fox numbers under control, there simply would not be any ground nesting waders left.

Over the years hunting with a pack of foxhounds has proved to be the most effective as well as the most humane method of controlling the fox population."

C.B. Strang Steel, Sheep Farmer (1,100 breeding ewes)

<sup>7</sup> Lord Bonomy, Report of the review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002.

Similarly, when one considers live animal exports to slaughter abroad, it is the length of the journey that must be considered above all else. Currently Scotland only has 24 licensed red meat abattoirs. In an effort to reduce the journey time, improving the welfare for livestock, the Scottish Countryside Alliance is calling for the introduction of local mobile abattoirs in mainland Scotland, as evidence suggests this is where supply is most needed.<sup>8</sup>

There is much to do for rural communities, and it is what the next Scottish Government can do for, rather than to the countryside that it should prioritise in the next 5 years.

### The Scottish Countryside Alliance calls on the next Scottish Government to:

- ◆ Support landscape management practices by including them in future agricultural scheme(s).
- ◆ Introduce mobile abattoirs to reduce journey time and improve animal welfare to support our world leading livestock industry.
- ◆ Ensure farmers can continue to undertake effective legal pest control to support and protect their livelihoods.

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<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government, Assessing the viability and sustainability of mobile abattoirs in Scotland.

**Scottish  
Countryside  
Alliance**



**Countryside Alliance**

Email: [political@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:political@countryside-alliance.org)

Telephone: 0207 840 9260

[countryside-alliance.org](http://countryside-alliance.org)

