



**FOR A *GREENER***  
***FAIRER* COUNCIL**

## ***HIGHLAND GREENS MANIFESTO COUNCIL ELECTION 2022***

For a Greener, Fairer Council. Delivering for our communities.

**VOTEGREEN.SCOT**



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# INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Greens in Government have won Green policies and investments that WILL happen, set out in the Scottish Government/Scottish Greens **Cooperation Agreement**. Green councillors in the Highlands will make sure they are delivered locally where needed most. We will work across party lines for people and the planet.

## GREEN PRIORITIES

Green Councillors will work towards:

- More affordable **Warm Homes** for local people, particularly good quality homes for rent.
- Improving **Active Travel and Public Transport**.
- Policies and projects which address the **Climate and Environmental Crises**, provide good jobs and create a people-centred **Just Transition** to the new economy.
- Going beyond recycling, to build the **Circular Economy**.
- What you need... where you want it. A **New Green Vision for Highland Communities**.

## GREEN ACHIEVEMENTS

With just one Green councillor, Pippa Hadley in Badenoch & Strathspey, we:

- Helped persuade the Highland Council to declare a **Climate and Ecological Emergency** and aim to be carbon neutral by 2025. Since then the Council has ramped up its carbon reduction and cut its emissions by 42%.
- Put pressure on the **Highland Council pension fund to divest** from arms companies, fossil fuel companies and those linked to habitat destruction. Instead, the pension fund will invest in the carbon neutral economy.
- Made progress on a system for **limiting second homes and controlling short-term lets**.
- Stood up for a **fair spending** of Highland Council resources.



# **THE HIGHLAND GREENS MANIFESTO**

**“FOR A GREENER, FAIRER COUNCIL. DELIVERING FOR OUR COMMUNITIES.”**

## **GREEN HOMES**

Young people are being forced out of the Highlands because of the cost of housing. As a recent example, a two-bedroomed wooden chalet, fifty years old, sold recently on Skye with an asking price of £600,000. An alarming number of people are in fuel poverty.

One way to guarantee affordable housing long-term is to build homes for rental. There are now experienced craft builders, small businesses based in the Highlands, able to build low- carbon, designer- built houses, designed to minimise fuel bills.

The Greens’ national Cooperation Agreement will lead the way with at least £1.8bn invested in making Scotland’s homes greener, warmer and more efficient and therefore cheaper to run, and Greens will help secure the Highlands’ part of that investment and make sure it is well spent.

Greens in government will deliver rent controls and new rights for tenants. Greens on the Council will consult with Living Rent Highland to support a more localised look on issues and solutions for the region.

Green Councillors will work to;

- Ensure that more publicly-owned high quality properties are available for young people and families.
- Push for all new publicly-owned housing to be built to Passivhaus standards to reduce fuel poverty, increase quality of life and help the Highlands meet its climate targets. We should follow Scandinavian standards to build homes future-proofed, rather than have to pay to retrofit insulation.
- Support the control of short-term lets of properties which would otherwise be suitable as homes for local people.
- Support community-owned housing initiatives.
- End rip-off rents and rent rises.

## TRANSPORT

There is growing support for better infrastructure for active travel. During 2021 large numbers of people enjoyed being able to walk or cycle with less traffic. More would leave their car behind if the alternatives were more attractive. We need to cater for them, to reduce pollution and make it easier for essential services to get around. Greens in government have already implemented free bus journeys for under 22s from January 2022.

Cyclists and pedestrians need to be separated from buses, cars and lorries. Every driver knows that. Pedestrians and cyclists certainly do!

Green Councillors will work to:

- Increase active travel. We will establish priorities for building safe walking and cycling paths between population centres. Thanks to the Greens Co-operation Agreement, 10% of the national travel budget will be allocated to active travel – three times the current budget. We will work with Council officials, Sustans, HiTrans, and Transport Scotland to allocate this investment efficiently.
- Support recent calls for the creation of a publicly-owned Highland bus service, providing an efficient integrated service. The most successful bus company in Scotland is Lothian Buses, run for efficiency, not profit, on behalf of the Council who own it.
- Contribute to the national Fair Fares Review to ensure the unique issues faced by Highlanders are represented when considering concessionary schemes for bus, rail and ferry.
- Make 20mph the speed limit in residential areas This is something which has been agreed in the Co-operation agreement by 2025.
- Deliver more Safe to School initiatives. The aim is to ensure every child who lives within two miles of school is able to walk or cycle safely
- Support the improvement of Highland's railways. Under the Cooperation Agreement, the government has pledged to invest £5 billion in maintaining, improving and decarbonising Scotland's rail network. We will work with the newly renationalised ScotRail to deliver better links to rural areas and improve timetables, create more capacity for bike storage, support dualling of the Highland Mainline and increase infrastructure for freight.
- Support the expansion of Electric Vehicle infrastructure, as well as encourage the establishment of EV car clubs for rural communities.

## THE CLIMATE CRISIS

More than ever, Green policies are needed and wanted here and now.

As we all emerge from the Covid pandemic, only to be faced with the looming climate crisis, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Greens in Government offer the power to enact long-overdue changes to tackle our greatest long-term problems.

Social inequality and the breakdown of our environment go hand in hand. To tackle both, we need effort on all levels of government and all levels of society. The people of this region deserve a more engaging local politics - to be listened to, empowered, and given the changes they want to see.

Green Councillors will work for policies which address the climate crisis and social inequality at the same time – planet and people - and increase the resilience of local communities.



***"I want to build a world my  
grand-children can be proud  
of"***

**Anne Thomas, Green candidate for the Black Isle**

## **CIRCULAR ECONOMY**

The Highlands has a brilliant opportunity to be amongst the pioneering UK and European councils developing a local Circular Economy. We aim to move from a system where resources are dug up, used once or twice and then buried in landfill, to one where materials are constantly reused and repurposed. This is a priority project for us because of its low cost and high benefit for every aspect of our local economy.

Last year we produced 4,000 tonnes less waste than the previous year. This downward trend is due to continue, even without plans for circular economies. Half the waste currently landfilled is just put in the wrong bin, wasting £4m a year. Further public information is needed to reduce this.

Green Councillors will work;

- To build the Circular Economy within the Highlands, collaborating with local businesses and agencies in preparation for the upcoming Circular Economy Bill from the Cooperation Agreement.
- To launch a Highland Circular Economy Alliance brand, to join together and promote local businesses, community projects and individuals who participate in the circular economy.
- Toward a system where there is less waste to dispose of, rather than going ahead with the proposed incinerator in Inverness. Burning valuable resources and turning them into toxic ash (which still has to be landfilled), while expelling carbon emissions and pollution, makes no sense when we could reuse materials. Landfill in the sky – it simply moves pollution from the ground to the air.
- To encourage re-use of waste, for example composting to help produce high quality food in the Highlands or by turning organic waste into gas for heating via anaerobic digesters.
- To increase recycling services to extend the range of items which can be recycled.

## **PLANNING AND PLACE**

The planning system should deliver positive benefits for people, wildlife and the natural environment. We need a planning system based on sustainability, climate resilience, carbon restoration and protecting and restoring biodiversity and natural habitats.

The planning system must manage development in a way that creates vibrant communities and healthy environments, with communities put at the heart of decision-making.

Green Councillors will work to;

- Bring vacant and derelict land and property back into productive use, in cases where there is clear land banking/neglect.
- Support the introduction of 20 minute neighbourhoods, where feasible, into planning decisions and to liaise with the relevant bodies to ensure their introduction. Our ultimate aim should be to ensure that people can access the services they need.... where they want them.
- Ensure that all new residential developments prioritise pedestrians and cyclists over cars.

## COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

The last 10 years of Tory austerity have been devastating for communities. The pandemic has recently made these inequalities worse.

We believe that community projects which patch up failings in government policy should be supported and rewarded, rather than being left underfunded and ignored.

Moreover, people in communities know what is best for them and so should be at the centre of decision-making.

Green Councillors will work to;

- Support community projects which were established in the pandemic, to keep them going and to expand. The problems created by the pandemic continue, so it is important to keep these groups running. They need support to prevent their volunteers burning out and to find long-term solutions to keep them viable for as long as they're needed.
- Prepare the Highlands for the Cooperation Agreement's Community Wealth Building Bill, which will prioritise a people-centred approach to local economic development, redirecting wealth back into the local economy, and decentralising control and benefits into the hands of local people.
- Support more local social enterprises; maximise community benefits through spending; increase fair work practises; grow the social, ecological and economic value from land and property; ensure that flows of investment work for local people.
- Support and strengthen Community Councils who do an amazing amount of unpaid work. We will make sure they are properly funded, having costs such as insurance covered, and are more accountable to the communities they represent.
- Help communities to run, own or have more say over their local community infrastructure such as buildings, parks and sports facilities.
- Make ethical policies a condition of any Council-funded support. Council should use public money to reward good behaviour such as paying the Living Wage and taking environmental responsibility.
- Welcome refugees and asylum seekers into the Highlands and ensure they have the support services they need and are able to use their skills to contribute to society.

## **LAND USE AND LAND REFORM**

We believe that the people of the Highlands need more opportunities for access to land. Lack of access to land is a fundamental problem which many of our greatest challenges stem from. Because of this, we align with the principles of Scotland's land reform movement.

Many of the other changes which we set out in this manifesto can't happen if people don't have even small parcels of land/green space within 20 minutes of their homes.

Green Councillors will:

- Represent the Highlands in the wide-ranging consultation on land reform. We will contribute to and support the Land Reform Bill, due to be introduced by the end of 2023, specified in the Cooperation Agreement.
- Contribute to the Regional Land Use Partnerships Pilot. The Scottish Government launched new pilot schemes being launched in some areas of Scotland. One of these regions is the Highland Council region, as well as the Cairngorms National Park.
- Prioritise and support community ownership of land. The barriers against communities purchasing land have been exacerbated by the recent explosion in the property market.
- Strengthen and support existing community right-to-buy processes.

## FORESTRY AND WOODLANDS

The Cooperation Agreement has set ambitious woodland creation targets – 18,000 hectares per year by 2024/25. Much of this will be in the Highlands, being the region with most capacity to reach those targets. We want to see the Highlands as a beacon of reforestation, both for environmental restoration and sustainable economic activity. The benefits for the region, if done in the right way, could be huge and long-term.

There could be a wealth of green, sustainable jobs, proven carbon sequestration, improved biodiversity, and the opportunity for everyone in the Highlands to enjoy the physical and mental health advantages of easy access to high-quality forests and woodlands.

We must urgently consider ways to control the use of the Highlands for big business to plant trees to avoid having to do anything about its own carbon emissions. Carbon credits for rewilding must benefit local people, not just big landowners. The people working the land - as crofters, farmers, gamekeepers - have generations of experience and must help shape the future.

Green Councillors will work to;

- Support the expansion of woodland creation, while ensuring it benefits rather than excludes communities, and enriches biodiversity.
- Champion the planting of diverse native tree species to increase resilience to disease and the effects of climate change.
- Support forestry practices which create sustainable craft jobs, producing high quality pieces of work. Highland woodwork could be a mark of high quality.
- Increase the number of publicly-owned forests and community woodlands. Priorities are access, nature restoration and protection, along with public health and mental health benefits.
- Support the rollout of the National Register of Ancient Woodlands. Set out in the Cooperation Agreement, this will encourage owners and managers of ancient woodland to maintain them and improve their condition, providing support through the Forestry Grant Scheme.
- Promote rewilding as a concept where people are brought back into the landscape, not where it creates exclusive preserves for the wealthy. People in the Highlands have always been part of nature.

## **TOURISM**

Tourism growth in the Highlands has been sudden and massive with many communities feeling overwhelmed, with little public benefit.

Communities must benefit from tourism rather than suffering from the unwanted consequences of mass tourism. Therefore, communities must have a lead role in tourism development.

Tourism must work within the ecological and human/social carrying capacities of the regions/areas. These carrying capacities need to be defined and used to develop reasonable limits to tourism in any locality.

Communities in tourism areas must remain as living communities and not just be destinations. Accommodation for tourism should not be at the expense of communities. Housing in tourism hotspots must be protected to ensure availability for local families.

Green Councillors will;

- Promote the Highlands as a high quality “slow tourism” destination.
- Work to further the introduction of Transient Visitor Levy in the Highlands. Money raised will help alleviate tourist-related infrastructure pressure such as repair of roads and potholes; public toilets; waste disposal facilities. All of this will improve visitor experience and benefit communities in tourist hotspots. Upon paying the levy, tourists could receive rewards such as free public transport in tourist hotspots.

## **SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION**

We believe that Scottish education needs to deliver excellence to ensure children and young people develop a broad range of skills and capacities at the highest levels, while also ensuring equity, so that every child and young person can thrive and have the best opportunity to succeed, regardless of their social circumstances or additional needs. The Greens' Co-operation Agreement will deliver 150 new teachers to the Highlands.

Green Councillors will work to;

- Properly fund Additional Support Needs, reversing recent trends. Charities supporting children with additional needs also need support.
- Make school buildings more energy efficient. Energy bill savings will be spent on education.
- Increase the use of outdoor learning, such as forest schools.
- Maintain the availability of Professional Development courses in climate issues and the circular economy for council staff, councillors and teachers.
- Involve parents, teachers, trade unions and young people in Council education committees.
- Support school and community food growing projects.
- Give young people access to schools-based counselling by qualified mental health practitioners.

## HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

The pandemic has exposed how stretched the NHS is. However, we can lighten the load immediately by investing more in preventative health initiatives such as making sure we all have access to good nutrition, green spaces and outdoor exercise opportunities, vitamin D supplements, and lower environmental pollution in the places where we live and work.

We have consulted with local health professionals successfully practising the NHS' Realistic Medicine ethos to collate these issues and solutions.

Green councillors will work towards;

- Ensuring the Good Food Nation Bill works for the interests of Highlanders by improving access to good quality food; supporting local growing initiatives, and helping link these to the people who would benefit; increasing the number, quality and accessibility of green spaces in towns.
- Greening the NHS. Healthcare contributes to 5% of Scotland's CO2 output through inhalers, anaesthetic gases, and the travel of patients to clinics and GP surgeries. There is also a lot of plastic waste and medicine waste. We will work with healthcare professionals to find solutions to reduce these impacts.
- Increasing access to active travel. Exercise improves overall health.
- Improving rural healthcare. Greens support parity of provision for people living in rural areas.
- Liaising with organisations like NatureScot to create Greenspace projects which improve mental health through access to nature.

## AGRICULTURE

We have recently felt the effects of a fragile food supply chain. We believe that the Highlands can and should be far more self-sufficient than it is. The Highlands is also well-placed to be a leader in quality sustainable produce while integrating production with the upcoming Circular Economy.

Greens will:

- At least double the area of land under organic management. This is a Scotland-wide aim, which we will enact in the Highlands with guidance from the upcoming Organic Food and Farming Action Plan from the Cooperation Agreement.
- Represent the Highlands' interests in the 2023 Agriculture Bill. This is set out in the Cooperation Agreement to deliver a new support framework that will include delivering climate mitigation and adaptation, nature restoration and high quality food production; integration of enhanced conditionality against public benefits, with targeted outcomes for biodiversity gain and low emissions production; increased equality of opportunity, improving business resilience, efficiency and profitability.
- Ensure procurement contracts require the provision of locally produced food where relevant.

## ENERGY

The Highlands is well-placed to be a world leader in renewable energy. With our wealth of skills and natural resources, there is no good reason why we can't maximise benefits for the region in a fair and equal way. We will scrutinise renewable energy scheme proposals and ensure that they benefit communities and the environment.

Green Councillors will work to support;

- A Just Transition to renewable energies. Most skills and training required by the oil and gas sector are readily transferable to the renewable energy industry, and there are massive opportunities from growth of the renewable energy industry. We acknowledge the importance of community-owned energy projects in the Highlands as a vital part of this.
- The growth of onshore and offshore wind, particularly community-owned, and where appropriately sited. The Cooperation Agreement has set an ambitious aim of producing between 8 and 12 GW of installed onshore wind by 2030, subject to consultation. Hydro was the renewable which transformed the Highlands in the 1950s - wind could do the same for this generation. We will of course scrutinise environmental impacts and prioritise community ownership and benefit.
- The utilisation of solar energy. All suitable council houses and buildings should have photovoltaic systems installed, and any businesses with suitable buildings should be supported to do so too.
- Solar carports to be installed on council-owned car parks where possible.
- Tidal and wave energy and anaerobic digestion to add to capacity and resilience
- Energy storage schemes which use sustainable technologies where they don't have adverse impacts on the environment, for example Green Hydrogen for HGVs, the Far North and Kyle rail lines and ferries; liquid air energy storage in Caithness, and Greens welcome the first development of this in Inverness.

## **CROFTING**

Most land in the Highlands and Islands region is classed as marginal, fit only for rough grazing or improved grassland at best - despite its potential. The contribution from crofting to rural livelihoods and the local economy is undervalued. Crofts can contribute to carbon sequestration, environmental protection, production of high-quality food, population retention and the sustainability of local communities. But crofting faces many serious problems, which need to be rectified as quickly as possible.

Future crofting communities could be beacons of sustainability and innovation: growing vegetables and food for the local community; using renewable energy sources such as wind and sun to heat glasshouses to produce exotic commodities; growing fruit crops and trees; growing flax for linen manufacture; hemp for rope, plastic and medicine; producing wool for local industries; beekeeping; employing hundreds of people who would prefer a life in the country.

Green Councillors will work to:

- Back the Scottish Crofting Federation in their lobbying for crofting law and grant scheme overhaul. There is a desperate need for acknowledgement and support for crofters diversifying their crofts, as well as to address the issues of vacant or misused crofts. Access to crofts must increase to meet demand of new entrants.
- Encourage and help the community right to buy land to establish new croft holdings and townships.
- Promote wool as a natural alternative to many artificial and plastic-based fibres.
- Link up wool producers with potential local users in the Circular Economy.

## **ART, CULTURE, & SPORT**

The Arts and culture reflect and define how communities see themselves. A vibrant arts scene benefits tourism and is a vital tool in keeping young people in the Highlands.

In a time of economic difficulty it is all too easy to cut spending on arts provision, but it is essential that we do not fall into this trap.

Good sports facilities are essential to improving the health of our citizens.

Green Councillors will work to;

- Support increased funding into the arts.
- Encourage young people to become involved in drawing up an events strategy, designed to improve the Highlands as a place for young people.
- Continue to encourage the interest in and growth of Gaelic.
- Improve sports facilities, ensure they are not all centralised in a few locations, and that they are conveniently sited for public transport.
- Support community-led festivals.

## **PAYING FOR IT**

Local government income has been squeezed by successive Holyrood governments, making it increasingly difficult for local councils to provide the services they want.

Green politics puts community empowerment and localism at its heart. In recent years Greens in Holyrood have frequently been able to require the SNP government to put more money into local authorities, in return for Green support for Holyrood budgets.

We will continue, through our Holyrood MSPs and our agreement with the government, to press for a bigger budget to be spent locally.

In the long-term we believe that it would be fairer to scrap the Council Tax, and raise local income through Land Value Taxation, and we have agreed with the government for a Citizen's Assembly into local taxation during this parliamentary term.

In the meantime we do not feel that it is right to raise Council Tax in the Highlands during an economic and energy cost crisis. We would prefer to find other ways of raising money (such as the Transient Visitor Levy).

We accept though, that in future years, rather than cut vital services which help people in poverty, it may be necessary to look at rises in the higher bands of Council Tax so that more of the burden falls on those with larger homes.

## **THE GREEN NEW VISION**

What you need... where you want it. The Green new vision for Highland communities will ultimately ensure that almost no-one needs to travel more than 20 minutes to access basic essential services.

There is a postcode lottery in the Highlands. As an example, one village of 1000 people has a health centre, pharmacy, food shop, primary school, library, sports pitches and pavilion, and a post office. Twelve miles away, another village of the same size has just a primary school and post office.

Our vision is to provide all these services in every village of at least 1000 people, and across town neighbourhoods. This can be achieved by councillors, planners, health providers, community councils and businesses working together. Wherever possible Green Councillors will work with these actors to form alliances that deliver our vision for Highland communities.

The Green vision will give people the opportunity to work from home or in the local community. Workshop and small office spaces will be available in the local community, to address issues arising from working from home.

Why go to Raigmore Hospital for a ten-minute consultation when you could just as easily do it over the internet from home, or from a private room at your chemist's?

Journeys into the city will be occasional and usually done by reliable, integrated, environmentally-friendly public transport. Realtime information boards at all bus stops will notify of any delays.

The Green new vision for communities will recenter our local community as the primary location for all these basic essential services. In doing so, we will not just travel less, saving time and carbon emissions, we will also create and maintain year-round jobs that anchor communities. The Green new vision takes ownership of the Highland's diversity: rural and urban areas working with each other.

## **THE GREEN WAVE**

The 2019 Highland Council Performance Survey shows that the public see Highland Council as behind the times, inefficient and not listening. Young people feel especially left out and ignored, and do not engage with local politics. We want to change this.

The Scottish Green Party is truly democratic, participatory and inclusive. Every single member gets a say in every aspect of the party. Behind every Green councillor is an organised group of active members.

We have no time for the simple insult-slinging politics of aggressive opposition. We are ordinary people who want to get things done. We will oppose where needed – but we prefer to work together where we can.

Thanks to this approach to politics, we have achieved a disproportionately large amount with just one Green councillor. If the Green wave in Scotland's recent parliamentary elections and the 2021 by-election in Fort William & Ardnamurchan is repeated in the Highlands, we hold a real hope of putting in the work necessary to make a huge positive impact.

## **VOTE GREEN #1 TO WIN!**