



The Scottish Economy needs the Scottish Conservatives

A week ago, Chris Deerin in The New Statesman, reported that a growing number of business in Scotland did not believe that the SNP “will deliver what the economy needs”. He cited the extent of short term borrowing, the over dependance on the public sector and its anti-business policies on tax. He also questioned whether the Scottish Government understood the scale of the economic challenge ahead.

Last week too, the Fraser of Allander Institute produced statistics which told us that just under 30% of normal economic activity had been displaced during Covid19, including the fact that the hospitality sector was effectively closed, and it predicted 10% unemployment when the furlough scheme ends in October.

Both observations are grim and flag up the fact that the worst economic effects of the pandemic are yet to come further threatening livelihoods and personal security. Indeed the Fraser of Allander Institute was predicting that the economy would probably only be back to 50% capacity in 9 months time.

That timescale takes us to the Holyrood Election campaign although even that date is by no means certain. As such, the Scottish Conservatives must be very clear that we are on the side of business and families and that the commitments we make during election campaign make this a priority whether this is through

- Business friendly tax policies
- Capital expenditure on essential infrastructure
- Support for our town centres and high streets

It is also essential that we make it abundantly clear just why being part of the United Kingdom brings such benefit to Scotland. At the end of this newsletter you will find a list.

The Mail on Sunday 11.04.20

As virus lockdown hammers economy, SNP told: Get beleaguered high streets back in business

SAVE OUR SHOPS

By **Gareth Ross**
SCOTTISH POLITICAL EDITOR

Nicola Sturgeon is under pressure to avert Scotland's shut-down high streets from the threat of extinction.

As thousands of stores anxiously wait to reopen for business, experts have warned that shops at the heart of many communities are facing a challenge to survive.

Estimates suggest Scotland's shops are losing around £10 million in trade each day.

The Scottish Conservatives have now launched a campaign aimed at boosting beleaguered shopping hubs.

The move comes as the First Minister faces increasing pressure to change the two-metre physical distancing rule, which businesses fear will be disastrous for any recovery.

The Tories demand a Scottish Town Centre Rescue Plan, similar to one established in Wales.

They are also urging councils to make plans for social distancing on pavements and in town centres. Other policies could include relaxing the licensing rules to help pubs and restaurants, plus an end to town centre parking charges.

The Tories want the Scottish Government to launch a campaign reassuring people it is safe to get out and shop, as long as social distancing is observed.

That could be further incentivised by a Government-backed scrappage scheme, with people trading in unwanted white goods, such as fridges, freezers and washing machines, for money off new ones.

Scottish Tory leader Jackson Carlaw said: "The Scottish Government must step up to the plate with a radical plan to rescue jobs and the economy. The aim should be clear - to do everything under the sun to help shops."

'The longer the lockdown, the harder it will be to reopen'

Local businesses that are the lifeblood of our communities, but are going to go under without help.

Last night, the Scottish Retail Consortium (SRC) also called for parking charges to be scrapped, as well as more clarity from the Government about exactly when small and large shops will be able to open. Shops in Northern Ireland opened on Friday, with English ones following tomorrow.

Ms Sturgeon is expected to announce on Thursday that lockdown will enter phase two of her "route map" out of lockdown.

That should allow small shops to reopen, with bigger stores following in phase three, potentially next month.

But shopkeepers say that they will need absolute clarity to make it happen.

SRC director David Lowndale said: "Our high streets and town centres have been left reeling by coronavirus.

Many shops have been abandoned and the longer the lockdown, the harder it will be for them to reopen at all.

A plan with an indicative timetable is a necessary first step to breathing life back into our high streets. Toughness and hospitality there have been given a clear duty to work towards, but retailers haven't.

Both the Tories and the SRC want to see efforts to encourage shoppers back to the high street, with the SRC even calling for direct payments from the Government to poorer families, to give them spending money.

"People need a compelling reason to visit our high streets and to spend money," Mr Lowndale said. "That means measures which reassure shoppers they can spend safely, making it easier for them to do so by relaxing parking charges, and simplifying coronavirus demand strength cutting income tax or VAT."

The high street was already in a state of turmoil before the coronavirus crisis hit and the rise of online shopping has been boosted further by lockdown.

Scotland had a shops vacancy rate of 11.9 per cent in March before the crisis hit, higher than the UK one of 11.3, with 4.2 per cent empty for more than two years. Total sales in April fell more than 40 per cent compared to the same month last year.

Professor Leigh Sparks, deputy principal in marketing and retail at Strath University, warned a radical rethink was necessary, saying: "High streets face a particular challenge and they were working with an uneven playing field to start with.

"People like town centres, but there has been a rapid move to online.

"We could open up outdoor spaces, allow retailers to be outside as well as inside, blocking off streets, bringing vibrancy - high streets will need a sense of place."

Last night, classic umbrella body Coles said: "We support local authorities to identify flexible solutions to allow businesses to reopen safely."

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "We understand how difficult it is for retailers and Ministers are listening to their concerns.

"Our total package for businesses during this unprecedented crisis puts, which is under constant review, includes almost £200 million of non-domestic rates relief and a 1.1 billion business grants scheme.

We need radical measures - and we ALL need to do our bit

By **JACKSON CARLAW**
SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE LEADER

For the Government to spearhead a Town Centre Rescue Plan, the Welsh Government has already got one under way.

The aim should be clear - to help those small, local businesses that are the lifeblood of our communities.

The core problem, obviously, is us, the consumer.

Understandably, most of us are wary of going out and spending money.

So, even when lockdown is relaxed, the risk is that the economy still won't revive, because most of us are too wary about coming out and spending.

So we need a radical plan from the SNP Government to help things along. For example, the Government could relax laws on outdoor eating and drinking this summer. It could permit pubs and restaurants to spill out onto pavements.

It could also temporarily scrap parking charges in our town centres.

Another idea is a scrappage scheme, granting one-off discounts for inefficient boilers, fridges and other household items, to encourage families to spend money on efficient goods.

Then there's the simple power of a clear message. I'd like the Scottish Government to launch a major new "Buy local" summer campaign, urging people to spend money in their local shops.

Every decision we take, from spending money in local stores, to supporting a locally run café, might be the difference between an apprentice joining the Edinburgh cruise line Christmas, or staying on track for a great career.

Without radical action, we risk plunging Scotland into the deepest economic depression of modern times.

SUPPORT PLAN
Voting Power
Scotland's Best
Future

Meanwhile Jackson Carlaw has been leading the campaign to get all of us back to local shopping just as soon as we can. It is vital that every effort is done to assist our small local retailers in every way we can and hopefully that can

resume soon. Last week, at meetings with both Gloagburn Farm Shop and Bennybeg Garden Centre, I heard at first hand about the challenge they are facing.



Parliamentary Scrutiny

Readers know that, in my newsletter a month ago, I had mentioned a parliamentary question on 20th May when I had questioned the First Minister about why so many questions to her ministers go unanswered for such a long time. Since that time, I have been keeping a close watch on the situation. For the period until 3rd June there were 354 written questions to ministers yet still almost a quarter are not being properly answered. This isn't good enough especially when many of these questions are being asked on behalf of

constituents who are suffering severe hardship as a result of Covid19. I will pursuing this matter with the First Minister.

Date	SNP	Cons	Lab	Lib	Green	Total Holding	Overall No. of Qs	% unanswered
21-May		7	3			10	25	40.0%
26-May	1	3	2			6	47	12.8%
27-May			23		1	24	41	58.5%
28-May	1	1	8	1		11	28	39.3%
29-May			12			12	43	27.9%
01-Jun		6				6	43	14.0%
02-Jun		1	3			4	84	4.8%
03-Jun			6			6	43	14.0%
TOTAL	2	18	57	1	1	79	354	22.3%

Source: <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/114044.aspx>

School Shambles

What an unmitigated mess the SNP has delivered on schools and lockdown easing. Last weekend, John Swinney said that it was “very unlikely” that schools could get back to normal before the end of the next academic year because of the social distancing problem. In a BBC interview he was asked about how long blended learning would last and the strong implication was a year.

Not surprisingly, there was a huge outcry from parents, especially from those whose children are in councils like Edinburgh offering just one day a week. They were angry about the policy but even more angry about the utter confusion at the heart of government.

Then, last Monday, Nicola Sturgeon made it very plain she did not agree at all with John Swinney and that she wanted schools to be back as soon as possible.

The trouble is that she has not thought through how to make this happen, leaving thousands of parents questioning whether they can get back to work if they are still expected to home school their children.

Little effort seems to have been made to help councils find alternative classroom accommodation or to find additional help for teachers. Readers will recall in my last newsletter that I referenced the GTCS scheme to help recruit former trained teachers to help out during Covid19. It turns out that the effort has been only half-hearted and that few people have come forward.

Meanwhile, the teaching unions say they will continue to oppose any reduction in the 2m rule. This is despite the World Health Organisation recommending that people stay just one metre apart.

Confusion and incompetence are the hallmarks of SNP education policy and, at the same time, the educational future of so many young people is put into jeopardy. No wonder John Swinney was facing some of the worst headlines of his career.

BOTTOM OF THE CLASS!



- STURGEON DISMISSES EDUCATION CHIEF SWINNEY'S CLAIM THAT SCHOOLS DISRUPTION WILL LIKELY LAST FOR A YEAR
- SOCIAL DISTANCING COULD BE BINNED TO ALLOW PUPILS MORE TIME IN CLASS, EXAMS TO GO AHEAD AS PLANNED
- OPPOSITION HIT OUT OVER 'SHAMBOLIC INCOMPETENCE'

THE Scottish government is to consider lifting social distancing restrictions in schools as part of a bid to return to normal teaching 'as quickly' as possible, Nicola Sturgeon said yesterday.

However, opposition politicians accused the first minister of 'confusion' and 'mixed messaging' as her comments appeared to contradict what education secretary John Swinney had said 24 hours earlier.

He suggested it was 'unlikely' there would be a return to normal full-time face-to-face teaching in the next

by **STEPHEN DEAL**

academic year. Scottish Conservatives education spokesman Jamie Green claimed Ms Sturgeon's 'desperate attempt to wrestle back control' was 'shambolic incompetence'.

The first minister said at her daily coronavirus briefing that pupils must be back in the classroom full-time 'as quickly as is safe and feasible'.

She said it was her government's 'firm intention' that next year's exams would go ahead - after Mr Swinney

had said he could make no guarantees that the exam diet wouldn't be delayed or cancelled next spring. Ms Sturgeon also said she would 'have concerns' if any local authority plans for schools meant pupils spending less than half the time being taught in person.

Schools across Scotland will reopen on August 11 with a 'blended' mix of learning, which will mean pupils will be studying from home for part of the week. However, Ms Sturgeon dismissed

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[Click here to join the Scottish Conservatives' Back to School campaign](#)

Exposing the SNP's Care Home Failures



As everyone now knows, the SNP Government has failed on its promise to regularly test care home staff and residents.

The Health Secretary Jeane Freeman announced last month that all 50,000 care home workers and 35,000 care home residents would be offered weekly tests.

With deaths being proportionally so much higher in care home settings it was essential this testing happened quickly.

A recent FMQ saw Jackson Carlaw asking for a firm deadline on such testing after it came to light that only around one third of staff and half of residents have been tested in care homes across Scotland.

These figures, while needed, are well short of the figures touted by the government four weeks ago.

What seems to have happened is that the health boards overseeing the initiative have not been working at the same speed, and as a result there is now a huge discrepancy on testing zones across the country.

The Guardian's recent piece dubbing the situation a "Scandalous postcode lottery of coronavirus care home testing in Scotland" sums up the situation well...

Animals and Wildlife Bill

Last week saw the SNP Government's Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill debated in Parliament.

It passed with unanimous support and now enforces stiffer penalties for deliberate animal cruelty - very necessary given the worrying increase in crime in this area.

Thanks to the work of PC Dave Wardell and my colleague, Liam Kerr MSP, a "Scottish Finn's Law" also passed, offering further protection to service animals. Finn is the German Shepherd and retired police dog of the Hertfordshire Constabulary who was sadly stabbed by a youth suspected of being armed a few years ago in England. This was all part of our approach to ensure the highest standards of animal welfare are adhered to as well as our determination to protect and enhance Scotland's biodiversity.

However, the debates around several amendments were very heated - about badgers, beavers, seals and tail-shortening for working dogs. In each case, there was sufficient support in the Parliament to prevent the Greens in their mission to change the law. As a result, many farmers, gamekeepers, land managers and rural businesses have been very appreciative of the Scottish Conservatives efforts to balance the needs of the countryside with those on animal welfare. The one amendment where we did not succeed was in stopping the Greens and SNP giving blue (mountain) hares blanket protection - something that is against the recommendations of the Werritty Report on grouse moor management. It was pretty evident in this section of the debate that political bias got in the way of sound common sense.....



Beaver damage at Kinkell Bridge.

We should not tear down statues - instead we should learn from them



As everyone knows, Edinburgh's magnificent New Town, designed by James Craig in the 18th C, is one of the finest areas of Georgian architecture in the world. There are some however, who would want to change the names of many of the streets because of their links with Britain's imperialist past - those who argue that names such as Hanover, Frederick, Charlotte, Dundas and George should be expunged from history. These are the same people who would tear down statues including the splendid Henry Dundas column in St Andrew Square just as they have sought to tear down statues of Baden-Powell and Winston Churchill.

If any of these people cared to visit 22 Hanover Street, they would see Merchants' Hall - home to the Royal Company of Merchants of the City Edinburgh, founded in 1684, which has been enriching the life of Scotland for nearly 340 years. Like many merchant, guild and livery companies across the UK, the Merchant Company has been actively involved in educational and charitable works, principally through its schools which were originally founded to support the families of "decayed merchants" in the city - those who had fallen into poverty and with no education.

It is true that many of the merchants made a substantial part of their fortune in the tea, sugar-cane, tobacco and coffee plantations in Britain's colonies. It is also true that they owned slaves and exploited their labour in a way that would be unacceptable today. But, as Sir Geoff Palmer OBE, from Heriot-Watt University has said, that despite the injustices they perpetrated, we cannot re-write history and nor should we try. Instead, we should learn from it. "We must ensure that the facts about slavery are taught properly in our schools and understood in the context of the time."

The tearing down of statues is not the way forward nor is hiding away Winston Churchill in a metal box just because a thuggish mob threatens to destroy the democracy he fought for. What should really be a lasting legacy is if these people would turn their minds to expunging modern slavery from the world in which we live today. It's nature is just as vile as anything perpetrated centuries ago and is something we can act upon.

The Changing Nature of Politics



Like everyone else, I have been carefully considering the effects that the coronavirus is likely to have when it comes to communication and, in our case, political campaigning. Life will certainly not be the same and we need to adopt new styles of working, whether we like them or not.

The “Zoom Age” is here to stay, at least in part, as is the much greater use of digital technology. If you are like me, you will have reservations about the dialogue with constituents being forced onto a screen rather than taking place in the normal physical space. Certainly in Parliament, the “hybrid” and “virtual”

meetings have been difficult to navigate because of the absence of the ability to debate and intervene as normal, because of time delays and, in areas of weak broadband, dodgy reception. In turn, this has diminished the facility for good quality parliamentary scrutiny which, if left too long, could start to undermine the democratic process.

Zooming has been a necessity during Covid19 but I do not think I am alone in hoping we will, in due course, return to a more human cut and thrust within political debate. In the meantime, hold yourselves ready for a much more social media friendly election campaign, whenever that will be!

The UK Government: Delivering for Scotland

- Overall, we calculate that the UK Government has provided more than £10 billion to support Scotland through coronavirus so far. This includes £3.5 billion in Barnett consequentials, nearly £5 billion in furlough payments, nearly £700 million on the self-employed income support scheme, plus hundreds of millions in business loans and benefit increases. These numbers are an estimate based on population share. (The Scotsman, 1 June 2020, [link](#)).
- The Conservative UK Government have protected the jobs of 628,000 Scots by directly paying their wages. The Job Retention Scheme allows businesses, charities and any other employer reimbursed for 80 per cent of the wages, plus full National Insurance and pension contributions, for furloughed (non-working) employees. Employers are free to top up the remaining 20 per cent but this is not compulsory. (UK Government, 23 April 2020, [link](#); UK Government, 11 June 2020, [link](#)).
- The Conservative UK Government have paid £425 million in grants to 146,000 self-employed Scots to support their livelihoods. Self-employed people with trading profits up to £50,000 a year can access two grants worth 80 and 70 per cent of their average monthly profits over the last

three years, up to £2,500 a month. The scheme was up and running weeks ahead of schedule - and has now been extended for another three months. (UK Government, 13 May 2020, [link](#); UK Government, 29 May 2020, [link](#); UK Government, 11 June 2020, [link](#)).

- The Conservative UK Government is guaranteeing millions of pounds in loans to boost the cashflow of Scottish businesses. The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme allows any business affected by coronavirus to access loans of up to £50 million, 80 per cent backed by the Treasury. In addition, small businesses are able to access up to £50,000 within days through the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, 100 per cent guaranteed by the Treasury. All loans for small and medium-sized businesses are interest free. (British Business Bank, Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Schemes, [link](#); UK Government, 27 April 2020, [link](#)).
- The Conservative UK Government have ensured Scottish workers get sick pay from day one, and allowed businesses to reclaim the costs. If you self-isolate due to coronavirus, you will now be paid from the first day of absence rather than day 4. The Treasury will refund up to two weeks' sick pay for each eligible employee of every business with fewer than 250 employees. (UK Government, 4 March 2020, [link](#); 28 April 2020, [link](#)).
- The Conservative UK Government have increased Universal Credit and made it easier to claim. The Universal Credit standard allowance has been increased by £1,000 a year and claimants can access advance payments upfront without attending a job centre. (UK Government, 19 March 2020, [link](#); 20 March 2020, [link](#)).

- The Conservative UK Government have instructed banks to offer mortgage payment holidays to homeowners. Lenders have agreed to support customers that are experiencing financial difficulties, including through payment holidays of up to 3 months. This will give people the necessary time to recover and ensure they do not have to pay a penny towards their mortgage in the interim. It is also available to landlords whose tenants are struggling to pay rent. (UK Government, 17 March 2020, link).
- The Conservative UK Government have instructed energy suppliers to support people who cannot pay their bills. Suppliers have agreed to support customers who are unable to top up their meter or can't afford to pay their bills. (UK Government, 19 March 2020, link).
- The Conservative UK Government have committed £388 million towards researching vaccines and treatments for coronavirus. (UK Government, 17 May 2020, link).

And before this crisis, we delivered on key Scottish priorities.

- We delivered tax reliefs worth £2.3 billion for the North Sea oil and gas sector. The UK Government effectively abolished Petroleum Revenue Tax by reducing the rate from 35 to 0 per cent and reducing the Supplementary Charge from 20 per cent to 10 per cent. In the last budget it was announced that the tax history of an oil and gas field will be transferable – allowing younger smaller operators to take on older fields and continue extraction or start decommissioning. (BEIS, 30 August 2017, link).

- We delivered a seasonal workers scheme pilot for Scottish agriculture. Scottish Conservative MPs campaigned for the pilot as a first step to securing Scottish farmers access to the labour they need post-Brexit. The pilot allowed fruit and vegetable farmers to employ up to 2,500 non-EU migrant workers for seasonal work of up to 6 months, and we are quadrupling this to 10,000 workers this year. (UK Government, 6 March 2019, [link](#); Scottish Conservatives, 10 November 2019, [link](#)).
- We delivered over £211 million in additional funding for Scottish farmers. The UK Government has resolved the historical issue of convergence uplift funding and ensured that Scotland's farmers will receive their fair share of funding in the future. Scottish Conservative MPs wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs asking for a review in 2017. (The Telegraph, 11 July 2019, [link](#); Farmers Guardian, 4 September 2019, [link](#); BBC News, 6 September 2019, [link](#)).
- We delivered an extra £35 million a year to the frontline of police and fire services. Scottish Conservative MPs persuaded the UK Government to refund VAT on equipment and vehicles purchased by Police Scotland and SFRS, saving the two services an estimated £35 million each year. The SNP's plans for a centralised police force were 'predicated on VAT not being provided for', meaning that they originally planned to pay VAT. Therefore, this is a mess of the SNP's own making that we have managed to clear up (HMT, Budget 2017, 22 November 2017, p30 [link](#); Scottish Parliament, Correspondence between Kenny MacAskill MSP and David Gauke MP, 2012, [link](#)).
- We delivered compensation for armed forces personnel in Scotland who are hit by SNP tax hikes. Over 8,000 armed forces personnel stationed in Scotland will continue to be protected from SNP Government increases

to income tax, ensuring troops aren't penalised for being stationed north of the border. (UK Government, 27 March 2019, [link](#)).

- We delivered a freeze in Spirits Duty for Scotland's whisky industry – and we're now delivering a full review of duty to better support distilleries. After sustained campaigning by Scottish Conservative MPs, the Chancellor announced that spirit duty would not rise with inflation, saving an average of 30p on every bottle of Scotch. During the election we announced a full review of alcohol duty in order to boost exports. (UK Government, 1 February 2019, [link](#); Scottish Conservatives, 7 November 2019, [link](#)).
- We delivered the country's first spaceport in Sutherland. Investment will bring £2.5 million towards a vertical launch site in Sutherland and create hundreds of new high skilled jobs. The UK Government will also invest a further £2 million in horizontal launch sites – of which Prestwick is a contender for funding. (UK Government, 15 July 2018, [link](#)).
- We delivered £1.4 billion to support Growth Deals across Scotland. The UK Government has committed £500 million to the Glasgow Deal, £150 million to the Tay Cities, £125 million to the Aberdeen Deal, £53 million to the Inverness Deal, £300 million to the Edinburgh Deal and £45 million to the Stirling Deal. £260 million in funding was announced for the Borderlands Growth Deal, and more recently the UK Government has recently pledged £103 million in funding for Ayr and the Ayrshire region, and £65 million for the Moray region. (UK Government, City Region & Growth Deals, [link](#); 11 July 2019, [link](#)).

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