

Tens of thousands of businesses won't benefit from SNP rate relief plan

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- Tens of thousands of businesses won't benefit from SNP rate relief plan

22 Feb 2017



Nearly 100,000 businesses facing rates rises will not benefit from the relief plan announced by the SNP Government yesterday.

Following pressure from the Scottish Conservatives, finance secretary Derek Mackay announced a one-year 12.5% cap on rates rises for the hospitality industry and for office premises in the North East.

However it was condemned as a mere 'sticking plaster' by the Scottish Retail Consortium.

And a detailed breakdown of Scottish Government figures has revealed that the relief plan will benefit just 9,530 businesses, with 98,777 not receiving any help at all from the Scottish Government.

This includes 8,899 businesses in Glasgow, with just 563 being helped by yesterday's announcement.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"For weeks the SNP ignored the issue of business rates, and now it turns out that their proposed plan will only help a fraction of businesses.

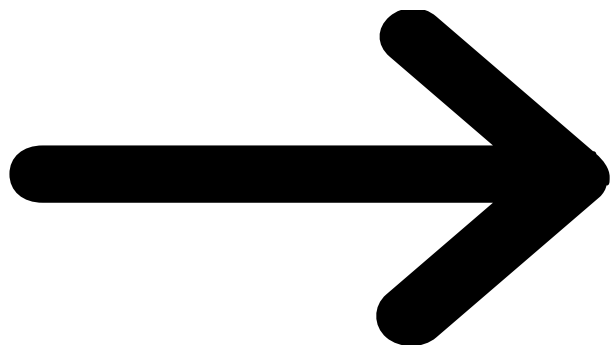
"Around Scotland businesses are facing closure if they don't receive real help from the Scottish Government, but these figures show that the vast majority will still not receive any assistance.

"It's no wonder that Derek Mackay's statement has done little to ease concerns in the business community, especially as even those who do benefit from this plan will only see their rates capped for a year.

"We need to see meaningful action from the SNP if we are to avoid seeing these businesses going to the wall, and it's becoming clear that the SNP need to go back to the drawing board on this plan."

BBC announces major investment in Scotland

22 Feb 2017



Significant investment in news and programming in Scotland by the BBC has been welcomed by the Scottish Conservatives.

Shadow culture secretary Jackson Carlaw said the additional £20 million injection would provide viewers north of the border with exactly what they wanted, while not jeopardising access to UK-wide programming.

The corporation's director general, Tony Hall, announced today there would be a new BBC channel for Scotland.

Broadcast every evening, it will have an initial budget of £30 million and carry news and entertainment programmes.

It will also provide the opportunity for journalists and programme-makers in Glasgow to work on wider BBC projects, creating 80 new jobs.

Despite the benefits set out today, SNP MP John Nicolson still found fault with the news, saying the Beeb had "missed an opportunity to deliver for the people of Scotland".

Scottish Conservative shadow culture secretary Jackson Carlaw said:

"This is an extremely welcome announcement.

"It's good for jobs, journalism, scrutiny and programming.

"It also ensures those who still prefer the UK-wide BBC news at 6pm, and other programming on BBC1, get to keep that too.

"It's no surprise, despite this fantastic investment, to see SNP MPs complain about it.

"Only they, with their inherent and serial grievance agenda, could find fault with this.

"The fact Scottish-based journalists will now have a chance to showcase their

work elsewhere across the network is also a development which should be applauded.”

[Scottish Conservatives launch major policy paper on the environment](#)

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- Scottish Conservatives launch major policy paper on the environment

22 Feb 2017



A series of new initiatives designed to protect Scotland’s environment and tackle climate change have been published today by the Scottish Conservatives in a major new policy paper.

Timed to mark Scottish Environment Week, the country’s main opposition party is setting out a range of new ideas in a bid to lead the debate on how we best reduce carbon emissions, protect Scotland’s natural resources and encourage sustainable growth.

Writing in the paper’s foreword, shadow environment secretary Maurice Golden warns that our natural resources cannot be consumed at the current “unsustainable” rate – and more work must be done by the Scottish Government to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

The paper also sets out new ways to ensure Scotland’s rich biodiversity and natural landscape is protected to the highest environmental standards – and to work with urban and rural communities to grow Scotland’s economy.

The new paper today includes policies which support:

- A step change in support for electric cars including incentives for electric car ownership – such as free town centre parking and allowing use of bus and taxi lanes. The document also proposes a new fund to expand electric vehicle charging across Scotland and urges public bodies to consider electric vehicle ownership.
- A target to ensure 50 per cent of Scotland’s energy comes from renewables by 2030, with individual targets for heat, transport and electricity sectors.
- The establishment of new national parks where there is public support.
- The creation of a new Centre for Circular Economy Excellence – a world-leading facility to examine how best to maximise our use of natural resources.

- Support for nuclear as part of a low carbon economy – with new plants at Torness and Hunterston.
- Backing for 10 per cent of all the Scottish Government’s capital budget should be spent on energy efficiency measures – with the aim of ensuring all homes are energy efficiency by 2030.
- A new target to ensure 75 per cent of all waste is recycled by 2035 through the creation of an easy-to-use collection system.
- The creation of 15,000 hectares of new quality woodland per year – up from 7600 a year.
- New developments to maximise solar energy capture and install heat pumps in design considerations.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“How we protect our environment and tackle climate change says a lot about us.

“It says what kind of nation we want to live in. It says how we want to engage with the world and each other. It says what sort of future we want to build for our children.

“The Scottish Conservatives believe in protecting and enhancing our natural heritage.

“We must do more than just repair damage, we must also improve our environment. We believe it is our duty to the next generation to leave Scotland a better place than we found it.

“Our approach will provide Scots with a greener and more pleasant land to call home.

“We set ourselves this task because it is one of the greatest challenge of our times.

“It is for this generation to tackle the issue and ensure that the next will live in a better, more productive and more sustainable world. I ask you to join us as we meet that challenge head on.”

Scottish Conservative shadow environment secretary Maurice Golden said:

“We must decrease our reliance on products manufactured abroad in order to reduce our carbon emissions but also increase jobs here in Scotland.

“To successfully transition to a circular economy, we need to refocus current Scottish Government intervention.

“Leadership on technological advancement, education and behaviour change, and the creation of a Centre for Circular Economy Excellence will together help to achieve an estimated £3 billion economic boost.

“The bottom line is that a circular economy will be a win for businesses, a win for consumers and a win for the environment.”

To access the paper, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Global-Challenge-Local-Leadership.pdf>

[SNP's £1 million-a-year splurge on ministerial cars](#)

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22 Feb 2017



The Scottish Government spends more than £1 million a year on ministers travelling in luxury taxpayer-funded cars.

New figures have revealed the scale of the expense as the country prepares to mark Scottish Environment Week.

In 2011/12 ministers spent £1.07 million on the Government Car Service.

By last year that had risen to £1.15 million, despite claims from the SNP that it runs an environmentally-friendly administration.

In 2015/16 alone the Scottish Government spent £243,000 hiring vehicles, a new high, and £765,000 staffing them.

A further £11,000 was forked out on "travel and subsistence" while fuel costs dropped to £79,000.

In addition, nearly £50,000 was spent on repairs.

The statistics were obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information.

Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Liam Kerr said:

"The SNP likes to pretend it runs a green-friendly government, but the reality is quite the reverse.

"Despite repeated claims to be a different kind of administration, it seems the nationalists are quite happy for ministers to be cutting around in luxurious cars funded by the taxpayer.

“Everyone appreciates the need for ministers to get from A to B, but many will question the sheer scale of these costs.

“It’s particularly ironic that this should emerge during Scotland’s Environment Week.

“The SNP is very happy to persuade other people to get out of their cars and find alternative modes of transport.

“Maybe it should be telling its ministers to be doing the same thing.”

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- Another budget u-turn after SNP ‘falls asleep at wheel’ on business rates

21 Feb 2017



Finance secretary Derek Mackay has performed another budget u-turn as he seeks to address Scotland’s business rates crisis.

Addressing Holyrood today, he said up to £40 million had been discovered within a budget that had previously been “maxed out”.

It means some sectors in certain areas of the country will have their increases capped at 12.5 per cent, although many others will still have to endure the crippling increases.

Mr Mackay eventually conceded to MSPs that the cap would only be in place for one year, a move described as a “sticking plaster approach” by the Scottish Conservatives.

It’s another surprise discovery of cash by the finance secretary, after he found more than £180 million to appease the Greens in budget negotiations earlier this month.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“For weeks the SNP has been ignoring this issue, claiming it had no control over this process.

“In the typical style of this SNP government, it fell asleep at the wheel and

only woke up when it crashed into the wall.

“We’ve heard on more than one occasion that this budget has been maxed out, yet once again Mr Mackay has been able to find a bit more money down the back of the couch.

“It’s a desperate eleventh-hour move which will do very little to ease concerns within Scotland’s business community, given that it is for one year only.”

Finance secretary Derek Mackay only made the statement to the Scottish Parliament after demands by the Scottish Conservatives:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/mackay-to-face-holyrood-on-business-rates-crisis/>