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2 Feb 2017



The SNP's business rates hike has been slammed by its own party, after a nationalist north east branch was priced out of a hotel it's been using since the 1970s.

The Banff Springs Hotel in Aberdeenshire has been hit with a £50,000 rates rise thanks to Scottish Government changes.

As a result, it's been forced to pass on that additional cost to customers, or face going out of business.

And now it's emerged the Banff and Macduff branch of the SNP is one of those customers refusing to pay the increased rate.

It told the hotel: "The increase in hire fee is excessive to say the least. Should this apply ... I can confirm there will be no further booking and our business will be taken elsewhere."

The embarrassing revelation was raised at First Minister's Questions by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, as she attacked the SNP on its increasing of business taxes.

That move, along with income tax hits to be announced in the budget later, makes Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

However, instead of addressing the concerns shared by her north east branch, she merely said the hotel would have an opportunity appeal the rise.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"Even the SNP's own branches are opposing the hike in business rates, so perhaps it's time for Nicola Sturgeon to listen.

"These unfair increases, which see businesses like the Banff Springs Hotel paying more than double their current rates, could force closures and job losses.

"The SNP won't listen to reason or hard evidence, so perhaps it will take notice now it's been embarrassed in the Scottish Parliament.

“If the First Minister’s own party doesn’t support this policy, surely even she recognises it’s time to do something about it.”

To see the letter of complaint by the SNP Banff branch, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hotel-complaint.jpg>

The SNP organisation has been using the hotel since 1976:

<https://www.facebook.com/BanffandMacduff/posts/1104255902998301>

[News story: Defence Secretary hails global outlook of Midlothian naval engineers](#)

Sir Michael Fallon visited MacTaggart Scott, who design, build, install and maintain engineering systems for the Royal Navy – the company’s “shop window” – and 40 of the world’s navies, including the US, French, Canadian, Australian and South Korean.

The visit is part of the Defence Secretary’s on-going engagement with Scotland’s industrial base, 10% of which is defence-related, directly supporting 11,000 Scottish jobs with thousands more sustained. During the visit he met with some of the company’s 32 engineering apprentices, which make up nearly 18% of the firm’s industrial workforce.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

MacTaggart Scott is a terrific example of the benefits that combining innovation, a global outlook and an entrepreneurial spirit can deliver for Scotland as part of the UK.

They are a leading hub of international naval innovative design, manufacture and maintenance and should also be applauded for investing in our young people through their apprenticeship programme.

MacTaggart Scott designed, built and installed the huge lifts that will carry jets and helicopters between the flight decks and hangers on the Royal Navy’s new aircraft carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, currently being built in Rosyth. They also design and build helicopter handling systems, and are competing for contracts relating to the new Clyde-built Type

26 on which the first steel will be cut this summer.

Remarkably, the company has been involved in every submarine built for the Royal Navy since 1915, and manufacture and provide support to a range of specialist submarine equipment, including stealth mast raising equipment for periscopes, optronics and communications equipment, sonar handling gear, hydroplane, rudder and ballast tank valves and actuators for submarines across the globe.

Bill Marsh, Managing Director of MacTaggart Scott said:

Our innovative work for the Royal Navy's surface ships and submarines provides us with a vital shop window which sees half of our £35m turnover come from export.

Our ambition is to design, manufacture and install vital equipment and provide through life product support to every single Royal Navy ship and submarine.

- MacTaggart Scott is a privately owned engineering company founded in 1898 and employs 350 people, 32 of whom are apprentices.

Defence Budget

- The UK is investing £178bn in a decade long equipment programme.
- The UK Defence budget has a "double lock" which ensures that it will rise every year by at least 0.5% annually, above inflation and always exceed 2% of GDP.

UK

- Trade with the rest of the UK makes up over half of Scotland's exports, and is four times the value of exports to the rest of the EU.
- The UK Government is firmly committed to the future of Defence in Scotland and its continued vital role in Defence.
- Scotland is home to military bases that provide essential capabilities for the Defence of the UK as a whole.
- By 2020, Scotland will be home to all of the Royal Navy's submarines, one of the Army's engagement and resilience Infantry Brigades, one of three RAF fast jet main operating bases and new P8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft.

After years of dither and delay, it is welcome that progress is finally being made on runway expansion – Andy McDonald

Andy McDonald MP, Labour's Shadow Transport Secretary, commenting on the Government's statement on Heathrow, said:

"Labour has consistently been pushing for a decision on runway expansion in the South East of England so after years of dither and delay, it is welcome that progress is finally being made.

"However, there are still outstanding issues including how Heathrow expansion can be squared with meeting the UK's climate change objectives and demonstrating that local noise and environmental impacts can be minimised.

"This can be achieved, but only in the context of a coherent aviation strategy that works for the country not just London. It starts with confirming our membership of the European Aviation Safety Agency, as well as action on cleaner fuels and improving road and rail access to our international gateway airports."

News story: UK invests in new submarine training school on the Clyde

HM Treasury this week approved the Initial Gate Business Case for the new submarine school to be built at Scotland's largest military establishment this week. Final design approval is expected soon, which will allow work to begin later this year.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

We are now making a long-term investment of hundreds of millions of pounds to improve and upgrade the waterfront at Clyde to make sure it is ready to support the United Kingdom's whole submarine fleet.

As well as a boost to the Scottish economy, this will also bring welcome stability for our personnel, who work hard to help keep Britain safe and secure.

The new schools will provide academic and technical training for all Royal Naval personnel entering the submarine service from 2022. It is an important step for both the Royal Navy and Scotland as it means all submariners' careers, whether afloat or ashore, will be principally conducted from Faslane as part of a £1.3 billion investment in making the Clyde Britain's submarine hub.

All 11 Royal Navy submarines will be based at HMNB Clyde from 2020, seeing the number of people employed at the base will rise from 6,800 people to 8,200. The school will support the Astute hunter killer submarines, as well as the delivery of training for the new Dreadnought nuclear deterrent boats, which provide the United Kingdom with its continuous nuclear deterrent.

Head of the Submarine Service, Rear Admiral John Weale said:

Our new single integrated operating base will make significant improvements to the work-life balance of our 5,000 submariners.

By putting our boats and training in one place, our submariners can put down roots in Scotland knowing that they are no longer required to commute from one end of the country to another.

The re-location of submarine training from HMS Sultan and HMS Raleigh is consistent with the Better Defence Estate Strategy, published in November, which set out the department's plans sets out plans to achieve a more efficient, modern and capability focused defence estate and bring greater harmony to Service families.

Key milestones in the development of a Submarine Centre of specialisation at HM Naval Base Clyde include:

- A drumbeat of arrivals of the last four Astute class submarines on the Clyde due to be commissioned into the Royal Navy between 2018 and 2024 (eventually replacing the Trafalgar class).
- The move of the last two Trafalgar class submarines, HM Submarines Talent and Triumph, to the Clyde in 2019 and 2020 from Devonport

(Plymouth). On current plans, the end of service date for Talent is 2021 and for Triumph is 2022.

- The move of the Submarine Escape Rescue Abandonment and Survivability Training capability from Hampshire to the Clyde by 2019.
- A new Nuclear Support Hub, providing modern standard effluent disposal by 2020 which will remain compliant with Scottish and UK environmental standards.
- The Faslane Nuclear Infrastructure Continuous Availability Programme to replace or refurbish Nuclear Facilities by 2024.
- The four Dreadnought nuclear deterrent submarines will start to arrive at Faslane from the early 2030s (replacing the Vanguard-class boats).

Press release: Kerry Ingredients UK Limited paying £127,000 over pollution incident

The Environment Agency has accepted an offer of more than £127,000 for an enforcement undertaking from Kerry Ingredients UK Limited following a pollution incident in the River Cam in Gloucestershire.

The incident, which took place in June 2014, resulted in the deaths of more than 200 fish.

As a result, a financial contribution of £127,975 is being shared between Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (£40,451), Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (£19,766), Severn Rivers Trust (£52,758) and Bristol Zoological Society (£15,000)

The Environment Agency's ability to accept Enforcement Undertakings was extended in 2015 to a far wider range of offences. The Environment Agency is increasingly using this method of enforcement for suitable cases to swiftly restore the environment, improve practices of the offending company and avoid longer criminal court cases. However prosecutions will still be taken, particularly in the most serious cases.

The Kerry case is one of a number revealed today in which charities will receive more than £1.5 million for projects benefitting wildlife and the

environment as a result of enforcement action by the Environment Agency.

Peter Kellett, Legal Director for the Environment Agency said:

We take pollution incidents very seriously and the payments of £1.5 million we're announcing today are the result of our firm but fair enforcement action and will benefit people and the environment across the country.

Enforcement Undertakings allow those who commit offences to restore the environment and to take steps to prevent a recurrence. When appropriate, they allow a quicker resolution than a prosecution and help offenders who are prepared to take responsibility for their actions to put things right with their local communities.