

New Year message from Scottish Secretary Alister Jack

I think we can all agree we will be glad to see the back of 2020.

We have spent months living through a global pandemic and our lives are almost unrecognisable from a year ago. For many, the tin lid on 2020 was the last minute – but sadly essential – restrictions on Christmas and immediately after.

These restrictions, and the personal sacrifices so many people have made throughout the pandemic, are not easy, but they are vital if we want to continue to protect our NHS and save lives.

I want to send my deepest condolences to all those who have lost loved ones to this cruel virus. We must not lose sight of the individual lives behind the statistics and we must keep working together to ensure that we defeat this virus for good.

But as we say farewell to 2020, we should also take a moment to consider just how much we have all achieved in this most difficult of years.

Over the past few months, we have risen to the challenge of this new virus. Confronting it with collective resilience, compassion, and generosity.

I would like to thank everyone who has done so much this year.

Our frontline workers – from health care staff to supermarket workers, teachers and everyone in between – have been nothing short of heroic. Looking after the ill, supporting the vulnerable, and keeping the country going. They have been an inspiration to us all. And our armed forces have been magnificent, helping all parts of the country throughout the pandemic.

So many others have done their bit too. From picking up shopping and prescriptions for those who needed it, to organising spirit-lifting video chats and amazing charity fundraisers – individuals up and down the country have gone out of their way to look after friends, relatives, and neighbours, as well as strangers in need.

With vaccines now rolling out across the UK, we are starting to see light at the end of the covid tunnel. We can now look to 2021 with optimism and confidence, and make it a year of successful recovery and regeneration.

We have put in place the foundations to build back better from covid. From the New Year, with a great deal now in place with the EU, our coastal communities will flourish, and we will open up new global opportunities for Scottish businesses.

The UK Government will continue to drive forward its ambitious programme of economic growth, through city deals, our Union connectivity review, and new

freeports across the UK. We will continue to lead the world on climate change and will bring the world to Glasgow for COP26 in November.

With the UK pulling together, 2021 will put us firmly on the road to recovery. The last thing we need in a year of opportunity is for Scotland to be mired in calls for another unwanted, divisive independence referendum. Now is not the time. Scottish people want instead to see the UK Government and the devolved administrations working together, in everyone's best interest. We urge the Scottish Government to work with us to focus on supporting jobs and driving Scotland's economic recovery.

As we begin this new chapter, my firm hope is that, UK-wide, we embrace the many opportunities ahead of us. I believe that our future is bright.

I wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year, and a better 2021.