

Right to Buy suspended in Flintshire

The move comes ahead of the Welsh Government introducing legislation to abolish the Right to Buy across the whole of Wales.

The Right to Buy allows eligible social housing tenants across the UK to buy their council or housing association property at a discount. The proposed legislation will end these rights, protecting social housing stock from further reduction.

Over the past 30 years, the Right to Buy has resulted in a significant reduction in social housing stock. Between 1981 and 2014, 138,709 council homes were sold – this is a 45% reduction in the social housing available since the policy was first introduced.

Research also indicates that many of these homes end up in the private rented sector and, as a result, cost local people more to rent and, in some cases, the public purse more in housing benefit.

The First Minister said:

“I have agreed to Flintshire council’s application to suspend the Right to Buy to help them deal with the pressure their social housing is facing and to ensure that homes are available to those who need them.

“While this will help one area for a short period of time, we also need to address this issue for the long term. This is why we will be introducing legislation to abolish the Right to Buy in Wales.

“The Right to Buy is depleting our social housing stock. This damaging policy is further increasing the pressure on our social housing supply and is forcing many vulnerable people to wait longer for a home.

“Legislating to end the Right to Buy is the only sure way to prevent this and give social landlords the confidence to invest in building more of the affordable homes Wales needs.”

Chinese entrepreneur to open two new stores in Wales

The news announced today (Wednesday 22 Feb) in China follows a meeting in

Shanghai between Economy Secretary Ken Skates and Bobby Zhou, CEO Anbo Holdings, a wholesale and retail business specialising in engineered and solid wood flooring products.

In the UK the company operates under the retail brand Flooring REPUBLIC which already has six stores in South Wales employing twenty people. The new stores will be in Bridgend and the other potentially in North Wales.

Ken Skates, who is leading a trade mission to China to further strengthen trade and export links between the two countries, said:

“Anbo, which was set up in the UK ten years ago by entrepreneur Bobby Zhou, is a great success story. Since its inception the business has flourished and seen an average 15% annual increase in turnover, with a projected £16m turnover this year.

“The Welsh Government has worked closely with Anbo Holdings in both in China and in Wales and this support has helped the business to expand and increase its footprint in Wales. I was particularly pleased to hear that its stores in Wales are amongst its most successful in the UK which has been attributed to the strong work ethic and enthusiasm of its staff.

“The news, confirmed today, that it is to open a further two stores in Wales is excellent while discussions are also underway on the potential of Flooring REPUBLIC opening a new manufacturing and training facility in Wales.”

Bobby Zhou said:

“Our Welsh stores are amongst our most successful across the country and our sales performance in Wales exceeded our forecasts .

“We chose to expand in Wales because of the fantastic infrastructure, hardworking people and the warm acceptance that we received. We are impressed with the business environment, the ease which you can get things done, and most of all because our people in Wales have a fantastic work ethic and understand our passion for great customer service – which is core value of Flooring Republic brand!

“The Welsh Government has assisted greatly by helping us find new suitable properties and has advised on expansion areas. One of our main development areas is the introduction of an apprenticeship scheme which we are currently discussing with the Welsh Government.”

Speech: The world is sleepwalking towards catastrophic famine – Britain will help prevent this

This year the world is facing numerous humanitarian crises which, taken together, are on a scale not witnessed in recent times. The extent of the challenge is unprecedented, set against a backdrop of immense human suffering. Before this week there has been only one certified famine globally since 2000.

Parts of South Sudan are now in famine and there is a credible risk of famine in Yemen, North East Nigeria and Somalia – drought and conflict are pushing families to the brink of starvation. That is why today I am announcing new support combined with a call to the international community to step up to ensure 2017 is not defined as a year where people died of hunger and drought on a catastrophic scale.

As a nation, we face a choice. With parts of the world on fire, can we ignore the despair beyond our borders? Or do we use our global influence and leadership to confront these challenges head-on? The answer lies in the great British values of fairness and compassion for those less fortunate. The immense generosity of the British public shines through in responses to emergency appeals. British aid workers will always be among the first on the ground bringing relief and now the world is looking to Britain for our leadership once again.

So far the international response to these crises has been inadequate. We are sleepwalking towards catastrophe. Earlier this week famine was declared in parts of South Sudan. In Somalia, a country that saw a quarter of million people die from famine in 2011, the drought conditions are as bad, if not worse than five years ago.

The challenge is unprecedented and the warnings are growing louder: we need a comprehensive response. In Somalia, more than 6 million people have no reliable access to food and there are 360,000 acutely malnourished children. When I visited Somalia it was clear we have to act now to avoid major loss of life. That's why I am announcing a package of UK humanitarian relief that will provide emergency food aid and water to 1 million people.

In South Sudan almost 5 million face the daily threat of going without enough food and water and 3 million people have been forced from their homes because of ruthless violence and widespread use of rape. That is why this year UK aid will provide food assistance for over 500,000 people, life-saving nutritional support to more than 27,500 children and safe drinking water for over 300,000 people.

Within these crises the risk of famine is exacerbated by conflict, instability and a lack of respect for international humanitarian law. Without political progress to allow access to the areas of the country where famine is taking hold we will not be able reach those in desperate need. The international community must exert pressure on the South Sudanese regime to end the ethnic violence which risks collapsing the country into famine and genocide.

As we step up our response it is vital we ensure UK support goes to where it is desperately needed. I have seen for myself how, in times of crisis, the world looks to Britain not just for our work on the ground, but also for our leadership internationally. Britain will use our place in the world to build a faster, more effective humanitarian system fit for the 21st Century. And to ensure all of this happens at pace, I recently brought together a group of major donors to work together on driving forward much needed reform.

If the international community steps up, quickly, we can save countless lives this year. From painful experience, we know the longer we wait the higher the price humanity will pay. I will be lobbying other governments, the UN and international agencies hard in the weeks and months ahead. We will continue to exert diplomatic pressure to get food flowing into Yemen and humanitarian aid to people under siege in Syria, while continuing to work towards political solutions.

As well as providing urgent humanitarian support, we are also working with refugee host communities to create jobs and education to reduce the pressure to migrate to Europe.

Wherever possible our help will be branded with the Union Jack – so people around the world can see support UK taxpayers are providing. When people in refugee camps or remote communities see our flag displayed proudly on our emergency supplies, they know they have a friend and an ally in Britain.

This is why we make our commitment to UK aid, for these times of crisis.

Britain is at its best when we stand up for the values that we believe in. In the coming months I will ensure my department's energy is focused on relentlessly tackling these crises and galvanising others to step up as we seek to avert catastrophe. Doing so is in the world's interest and ours. 2017 could be the ultimate test of our international system and a test of our shared humanity; the world cannot afford to fail it.

This article was first published in The Telegraph on 22 February 2017.

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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>

UD Ministry officials get a gymnasium for after office hours work outs

Ministry of Urban Development has set up a Gymnasium in Nirman Bhawan for the benefit of its employees for keeping them fit by doing physical exercises.