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- SNP scheme to boost protected areas fails as just 1 in 3 sites improve

7 Jul 2017



Just a third of protected areas earmarked by the Scottish Government for special attention three years ago have improved in quality, it has emerged.

Under an environmental scheme, 556 designated areas – including sites of specific scientific interest – were included in the Delivering Favourable Condition (DFC) action plan.

This was supposed to dedicate time and resource to some of Scotland's most treasured environmental zones, including conservation areas.

However, it has now emerged that of these only 183 have "improved in condition", with 201 showing no change and 58 actually getting worse.

In addition, the Scottish Government admitted 114 sites renewed an agreement for fear they would slip into an "unfavourable condition".

The statistics were released following a parliamentary question by Scottish Conservative MSP Maurice Golden.

Environment secretary Roseanna Cunningham admitted in her answer that areas which were included in the plan expected to see improvements within three years.

But following the publishing of the figures, it turns out just 32.9 per cent have benefited.

Reasons for areas being designated can vary; including protection of woodland, lochs and rare insects.

However, a breakdown of which areas are included in the action plan has not been published.

Scottish Conservative MSP Maurice Golden said:

"This process was established to help some of Scotland's most treasured areas.

"However, three years on and it seems around two-thirds of these important places have seen no improvement, or have even got worse.

“This reflects very badly on the SNP’s commitment to improve Scotland’s natural environment.

“Ministers should now examine why this has been such a failure, and outline what they intend to do to change this.

“These areas – which are crucial for a wide variety of reasons – deserve better, and so do the future generations who ought to be able to enjoy them.”

A copy of the parliamentary question by Maurice Golden, along with the answer, is below:

31 March 2017 (Holding Reply Issued 30 March 2017)

Index Heading: Economy

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government (a) how many and (b) what percentage of designated areas have seen (i) an improvement in, (ii) no improvement to and (iii) a decline in their Favourable status after three years of being included in a Delivering Favourable Condition Partnership action plan.

S5W-08160

Roseanna Cunningham:

Of a total of 5,368 designated features of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Natura sites across Scotland, 556 have been included in a Delivering Favourable Condition Partnership Action Plan. After three years of these features being included in an Action Plan:

- i) 183 (32.9%) have improved in condition;
- ii) 201 (36.2%) have not yet improved from an unfavourable condition; and
- iii) 58 (10.4%) have declined in condition.

In addition, 114 features (20.5%) have retained their ‘favourable’ status or their ‘unfavourable recovering due to management’ status by renewing arrangements to support sympathetic management, where failure to take this action would result in the features slipping into unfavourable condition.

In another response, environment secretary Roseanna Cunningham said the aim of DFCs was “to improve the condition of designated areas” and that “improvements will be achieved within three years of an area’s inclusion in the action plan”.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advanced&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-07615>

[Bed cuts lay bare the 'deliberate downgrade' of major hospital](#)

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- Bed cuts lay bare the 'deliberate downgrade' of major hospital

7 Jul 2017



The number of beds at one of central Scotland's biggest hospitals reduced significantly over recent years, despite promises it would not be downgraded.

New figures have revealed that general beds and intensive care beds at St John's Hospital in Livingston has reduced steadily.

This is despite repeated promises from the SNP that it was an essential acute hospital, and would not have its status reduced.

In 2007, then health secretary Nicola Sturgeon even visited West Lothian to give her "personal commitment" to the hospital.

However, last month it emerged the hospital's paediatric ward would cease to take admissions.

And now it's been revealed – despite a national increase – the number of intensive care beds has nearly halved.

In 2003, when the hospital was considered a major acute facility, there were 25 ICU beds.

But in 2016, that had dropped to just 14.

Over the same period, Scotland-wide intensive care beds rose from 700 to 943.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said the fall was a sign that the Scottish Government considered the hospital increasingly irrelevant.

And bed numbers generally also fell, from 503 in 2003 to 432 last year.

Campaigners have long accused successive Scottish Governments and NHS Lothian of stripping away services from St John's.

In the 2007 local government elections, a number of councillors were elected as part of the Action to Save St John's action group, specifically to push the interests of the hospital.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Nicola Sturgeon gave her word to the people of West Lothian that her

government was committed to St John's.

"But one closed children's ward and a halving of intensive care beds later, that is clearly not the case.

"This is a deliberate downgrade.

"People in the area have long suspected that St John's was being eroded from a respected acute hospital to little more than a day unit.

"In recent weeks, those fears have been confirmed.

"Everyone accepts cash is tight in the NHS, but St John's is a facility of critical importance.

"Instead of chipping away at the services it provides, the Scottish Government should be ensuring it can provide a top-class service to the huge swathes of central Scotland who rely on it."

Damian Timson, leader of the Scottish Conservatives on West Lothian Council, said:

"The reduction in beds is extremely disappointing.

"It confirms the fears of patients and staff that the SNP just doesn't take St John's seriously.

"But the truth is people all across West Lothian, as well as many in Edinburgh and elsewhere in central Scotland, depend on this facility.

"When you add the partial closure of the paediatric ward at St Johns to this, the question is how committed to West Lothian healthcare are the SNP and NHS Lothian.

"The residents of West Lothian are being treated like second class citizens and the SNP need to start providing a quality healthcare service across the central belt."

[Grievances by officers against Police Scotland double in 12 months](#)

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- Grievances by officers against Police Scotland double in 12 months



The number of grievances made by police officers to single force bosses in the last year has doubled, new figures have shown.

In 2016/17, 29 officers lodged formal complaints with Police Scotland, compared to just 14 the previous year, and seven in 2014/15.

And when the statistics include grievances submitted by other staff, the total number for last year increases to 59, which is 10 more than in 2015/16 and considerably higher than the 32 made three years ago.

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

Shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said the figures pointed to a decrease in morale among officers as Police Scotland continues to be hit by negative publicity.

The organisation has been criticised heavily for a lack of transparency and accountability, particularly in relation to the Scottish Police Authority, culminating in the departure of its chair Andrew Flanagan and accusations of bullying and secrecy.

There have also been concerns about police on the frontline being stretched, and officers forced to “back fill” to make up for shortages in other departments.

Bosses said reasons for lodging a formal grievance included bullying and harassment, change of work location, the behaviour of a line manager or organisational change.

However, it could not provide an exact breakdown of complaint topics.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“This doubling of grievances goes to show how morale is suffering at Police Scotland.

“A police officer is unlikely to make a formal complaint lightly, and each of these has to be taken extremely seriously.

“Police Scotland is only a young organisation, but already the trend seems to be for both officers and staff to be more likely to find cause for complaint.

“The Scottish Government has to reflect on these findings carefully.

“We cannot afford for mood among our officers to sink any lower – we need them to keep our communities safe.

“They take risks most of us never have to think about, and deserve at the very least to be happy at their work.”

Below are the number of grievances lodged in Police Scotland in the last three years:

2014/15

Police officers – 7

Police staff – 25

Total – 32

2015/16

Police officers – 14

Police staff – 35

Total – 49

2016/17

Police officers – 29

Police staff – 30

Total – 59

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- Scotland dodges recession – but more work for the SNP still to do

5 Jul 2017



Scotland's economy returned to growth in the last quarter, meaning technical recession has been avoided north of the border.

The Scottish Conservatives welcomed the 0.8 per cent increase in growth, but warned there was more for the SNP to do to ensure sustained improvement.

In the previous quarter the economy shrank, meaning a repeat performance this time around would have plunged Scotland into recession for the first time since the global downturn.

Instead, a marked improvement in production of 3.1 per cent helped move the figures in the right direction, although on an annual basis Scotland still lags behind the rest of the UK.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

“The return to growth in the Scottish economy after declining in the last quarter of 2016 is a positive change in direction.

“However, the SNP cannot escape the fact it dragged Scotland halfway to recession.

“Scotland continues to under-perform the UK economy on an annual basis at this vital time for growth.

“Compared to the same period last year, the Scottish economy grew by 0.7 per cent compared to two per cent for the UK economy as a whole.

“There are more than enough levers for ministers here to ensure growth north of the border remains sustained, and we’re not brought to the brink of recession again.

“For example, Scotland is the highest-taxed part of the UK, and in the long-term that is going to continue to damage growth and job creation.”

For more on the figures, visit:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-40498752>

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives set out five things the SNP could do to boost growth:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/07/5-measures-snp-must-adopt-as-scotland-stands-on-brink-of-recession/>

[Scotland’s ‘high risk’ NHS buildings revealed](#)

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- Scotland’s ‘high risk’ NHS buildings revealed

5 Jul 2017



Mental health facilities, maternity units and some of Scotland’s largest acute hospitals are among those whose buildings are deemed to be a “significant” or “high” risk.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed a list of NHS facilities earmarked by health boards as needing urgent repairs.

Last year, it was reported that nearly half of Scotland's hospital and healthcare buildings which featured in a maintenance backlog list were considered significantly or highly risky.

Now, after a series of Freedom of Information requests, it has been revealed which buildings these warnings apply to.

In the Lothians, both the Royal Victoria and the Astley Ainslie have building issues deemed "high risk", as well as the current Sick Kids hospital and St John's Hospital in Livingston

Aberdeen Maternity Hospital has one "high risk" backlog in relation to health and safety, as well as several "significant risk" backlogs.

NHS Borders said problems in relation to theatres and other equipment at the Borders General Hospital were "high risk".

And in Fife, boilers at Stratheden hospital were also considered a "high risk" problem.

Reasons set out for problems being considered "high" risk included boilers and water systems, electrical issues, legionella, asbestos and fire safety.

It is estimated the total cost of the NHS's maintenance backlog is around £900 million.

Of those buildings, 44 per cent are considered significant risk, of which nine per cent are high risk.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"We tend to focus on what goes on in hospitals and less so on the quality of buildings provided.

"But this shows that, right across Scotland, there are NHS buildings in a desperate state.

"And the Scottish Government can't simply brush these off as disused or administrative facilities.

"They quite clearly include maternity hospitals, mental health facilities and paediatric units.

"This will be of concern to both patients and staff, who at the very least deserve to work in a safe and comfortable environment.

"There are real question marks hanging over the life expectancy of some of our NHS buildings.

"The SNP is in sole charge of health, yet in almost a decade has let this completely spiral out of control."

For full copies of the FoI responses, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NHS-Maintenance.zip>

Below is a summary from each health board on which buildings are deemed high and significant risk:

NHS Ayrshire and Arran – Water systems at Crosshouse Hospital are on the high risk maintenance backlog. Significant risks include issues at two mental health facilities and a learning disability centre.

NHS Borders – Borders General Hospital deemed issues in relation to theatres and other pieces of equipment as high risk. Another issue on the significant list included external doors at a facility for dementia patients.

NHS Dumfries and Galloway – The health board said there were issues of high and significant risk at facilities including Castle Douglas hospital, the Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary and Moffat Hospital.

NHS Fife – Boilers at Stratheden Hospital are on the high risk list, as well as numerous issues of significant risk.

NHS Forth Valley – Issues in mental health services, a dentist and a community hospital.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde – The health board claims none of its buildings are at significant or high risk.

NHS Grampian – Fire code and health and safety issues at Aberdeen Maternity Hospital are among those considered high risk, while Aberdeen Royal Infirmary has high risk issues with disabled access and safe water temperatures.

NHS Highland – Didn't provide a specific list, but said most of its issues centred around ventilation and electrical systems.

NHS Lanarkshire – Health board says it has no issues of high risk maintenance backlogs. Significant issues exist at Monklands Hospital, as well as two administrative buildings.

NHS Lothian – Buildings with high risk issues include Roodlands Hospital, the Royal Victoria, Astley Ainslie hospital, the Royal Edinburgh and the Sick Kids hospital. All of those facilities are in the process of moving or being refurbished. St John's hospital in Livingston also has issues of high risk in relation to roofs and windows.

NHS Orkney – No current issues.

NHS Shetland – No specific issues outlined.

NHS Tayside – The health board set out a number of high and significant risk issues at facilities like Ninewells hospital and the Perth Royal Infirmary.

NHS Western Isles – Only high risk issue was at a non-clinic site on the isle of Barra.

Scotland's NHS maintenance backlog currently sits at around £900 million:
http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14665734.NHS_backlog_maintenance_figure_reaches_almost_1_billion/