



MODERN SCOT

Distinctly Scottish



ISSUE 07

23 JULY 2026

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COMMUNITY | 23 July 2026

£1.5m Tennis and Padel Centre to Open at Galashiels Academy in Early 2027

Read online: <https://modern.scot/1-5m-tennis-and-padel-centre-to-open-at-galashiels-academy-in-early-2027/>



Three covered artificial-clay tennis courts and two padel courts will be built beside the new Galashiels Academy campus, creating the first year-round covered tennis provision in the Scottish Borders.

Work is due to begin on a new tennis and padel centre at Galashiels Academy after the project secured just over £1.5 million from Scotland's largest tennis infrastructure programme.

The community facility will contain three covered artificial-clay tennis courts and two canopy-covered padel courts. It is expected to open in early 2027 and

will be operated by Live Borders on behalf of the wider community as well as supporting pupils at the school.

The courts will have LED floodlighting and a smart-access system, allowing bookings to be managed without requiring the facility to be staffed continuously. Changing rooms were included within the recently completed Galashiels Academy campus and will also serve the new centre.

Scottish Borders Council says the development will create the region's first covered tennis courts, removing some of the weather restrictions faced by the area's 12 registered tennis clubs and more than 1,500 playing members.

The courts will be covered by canopies rather than housed within a conventional enclosed sports building. The announcement does not say whether the sides will be enclosed or how much protection players will have from wind and winter temperatures, but the roof should allow play to continue during rain and reduce the number of sessions lost to poor weather.

Fourth centre under £15m Scottish programme

The funding comes from the Transforming Scottish Indoor Tennis programme, known as TSIT, which is jointly run by the LTA, the LTA Tennis Foundation, sportscotland and Tennis Scotland.

The partners have committed £15 million over ten years to address geographical gaps in Scotland's year-round tennis provision. The programme is described by the organisations as the largest capital investment made in Scottish tennis.

Galashiels will become its fourth completed venue.

A six-court centre at Oriam, on the Heriot-Watt University campus in Edinburgh, opened to the public in December 2023 and was formally launched in February 2024. The facility cost £4.5 million.

A four-court centre at Moray Sports Centre in Elgin and a three-court facility at the King George V complex

in Dumfries followed. The Dumfries centre opened in March 2026 at a final reported cost of £2.36 million, including almost £1.7 million from the TSIT programme, nearly £500,000 from Dumfries and Galloway Council and £200,000 from the Holywood Trust.

Those three developments have produced 13 indoor tennis courts since the end of 2023. The Galashiels project will increase the total delivered through the programme to 16 tennis courts across four locations, alongside the two new padel courts.

The comparison also shows that the £1.5 million announced for Galashiels is the programme's contribution rather than necessarily the full construction cost.

Scottish Borders Council and the tennis bodies have not published the total project value, the council's own financial contribution, whether any of the award is repayable or the contractor appointed to carry out the work.

Artificial clay selected for player development

The Galashiels courts will use an artificial-clay surface rather than the acrylic or carpet surfaces more commonly found at British indoor facilities.

LTA chief executive Scott Lloyd said clay encouraged players to improve their movement, patience and tactical awareness and that wider access to the surface could support player development.

The surface is likely to be useful to the Border Tennis Academy and established local clubs as well as recreational players. Galashiels Tennis Club currently operates from the Borders Tennis Centre at Livingstone Place, in partnership with Live Borders, and the venue is also home to the Border Tennis Academy.

The new centre is therefore not the beginning of organised tennis in Galashiels. Its value lies in giving existing players, coaches and clubs a reliable year-round base while creating additional capacity for schools, beginners and community programmes.

Scottish Borders Council leader Euan Jardine said the investment would provide opportunities for people of different ages and abilities to play throughout the year.

“By adding the region's first covered tennis courts alongside new padel facilities at Galashiels Academy, we're creating opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to be active, develop new skills and enjoy sport all year round,” he said.

Padel included as sport expands

The two padel courts form a substantial part of the development rather than an addition announced separately.

Padel is played in doubles on an enclosed court smaller than a tennis court, with the surrounding walls forming part of play. Tennis Scotland, which governs the sport in Scotland alongside tennis, has been expanding its padel operation and recruited a head of padel and specialist partner during 2026 to develop participation, competitions and facilities.

The Galashiels announcement does not provide existing participation figures for padel in the Borders or identify the nearest alternative courts. Demand will become clearer once Live Borders publishes booking levels and the programme of coaching and introductory sessions.

Court charges have not yet been announced. Neither have public opening hours, membership arrangements, school-use periods or any reduced-price access for young people and households on lower incomes.

Those decisions will determine whether the project broadens participation or primarily provides a better facility for people already involved in racket sports.

Part of unfinished campus development

The tennis centre will form part of the second phase of the Galashiels Academy community campus.

The new school opened to pupils on 6 January 2026, replacing the former academy building. It includes a 25-metre, six-lane swimming pool, a hydrotherapy pool, a gym and indoor sports courts. Further work includes the demolition of the old school, redevelopment of Scott Park and the construction of 2G and 3G pitches.

The campus was already intended to contain tennis courts. When construction of the school was approved in 2023, the council said it had applied to Tennis Scotland for funding to add an all-weather covering to the replacement courts. The new award therefore completes an element that had remained dependent upon external investment.

The council's January opening announcement described the academy as a £64 million facility. Its separate project page continues to list a budget of £60.8 million, suggesting that the higher figure may represent a later project value or updated outturn, although the difference is not explained on those pages.

The new campus is also taking on community functions previously associated with other facilities. Scottish Borders Council's review of sport and leisure provision says Queens Leisure Centre is expected to close during 2026 once its activities have moved to the academy.

That places additional weight on the ability of the school campus to operate as a genuinely accessible community venue outside teaching hours.

Opening planned for early 2027

Construction is expected to begin immediately, with the tennis and padel centre scheduled to open in early 2027.

Before then, Live Borders and the council will need to publish the booking system, opening hours, prices, coaching programme and division of time between school and public use.

The capital investment provides the courts and covering. Their longer-term effect will depend upon affordable access, sufficient coaching capacity and whether residents from across the Borders can reach the Galashiels site.

For a region where organised tennis already involves more than 1,500 members but year-round covered provision has been absent, the project closes a clear infrastructure gap. The first evidence of its wider reach will come after the doors open and public participation can be measured.

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COMMUNITY | 23 July 2026

Renfrewshire Establishes Annual Dolly Parton Day After Delivering 230,000 Children's Books

Read online: <https://modern.scot/renfrewshire-establishes-annual-dolly-parton-day-after-delivering-230000-childrens-books/>



The first official celebration will take place on 25 September, marking the growth of a locally funded reading programme that sends a book each month to children aged two to five.

Renfrewshire will hold its first official Dolly Parton Day on Friday 25 September, after the Dollywood Foundation UK approved an annual celebration of the singer's Imagination Library programme.

The date will be used to promote early reading and recognise a scheme that has now distributed more than

230,000 books to young children across Renfrewshire.

Provost Lorraine Cameron proposed the celebration at a meeting of Renfrewshire Council. The authority says nurseries, childminders and families will be encouraged to mark the day through reading and activities connected with the programme.

The announcement follows five years of expansion in Renfrewshire, which became the first Scottish local authority to offer Dolly Parton's Imagination Library universally to children aged between two and five.

Children qualify if they live in Renfrewshire or attend a nursery within the council area. Once registered, they receive an age-appropriate book addressed to them each month, delivered at no cost to the family.

More than 25 Renfrewshire nurseries and childminders have registered every eligible child in their care.

Provost Cameron said the programme had helped children develop an interest in stories while encouraging parents and carers to read with them.

"Passing the 230,000 books milestone is a significant achievement," she said.

"This programme sets children up for a lifelong love of reading. We've seen the positive impact it has on children's learning. That's why we made the commitment to permanently fund the programme."

From a pilot to a permanent council service

Dolly Parton established the original Imagination Library in 1995 in Sevier County, Tennessee, where she grew up. She has said the programme was inspired by her father, Robert Lee Parton, who could not read or write.

The scheme began by providing books to local children before expanding through partnerships with councils, charities, businesses and community organisations.

It launched in the UK in 2007, with the first books distributed the following year. The programme now operates through locally funded partnerships in the UK, United States, Canada, Australia and the Republic of

Ireland.

The Dollywood Foundation provides much of the programme's central infrastructure, including book selection, wholesale purchasing and administration of its registration system. Local partners enrol children and secure the money needed to pay for books, packing and postage.

The current estimated cost is approximately £26 a child each year for 12 books.

Renfrewshire began its authority-wide programme in March 2021 after an earlier pilot. Its 2021–22 budget allocated £200,000 to extend the scheme to all children aged two to five in the council area.

By June 2025, the council said more than 150,000 books had been distributed. The latest total of more than 230,000 means at least another 80,000 books were issued over the following year.

The programme was initially supported through annual budget decisions. Councillors made the funding permanent in March 2025, committing £100,000 a year to continue monthly deliveries.

Where the Imagination Library operates in Scotland

The Imagination Library is available in Scotland, but it is not yet a universal national service for every child.

Renfrewshire remains the first Scottish council to make it available throughout the authority to all children aged two to five, regardless of family income or circumstances.

Other Scottish programmes operate within smaller geographical areas or for particular groups of children.

In Dundee, for example, a partnership centred on Charleston Community Library has provided the scheme in the Lochee area. The Dollywood Foundation says the local project was developed partly in response to high child-poverty levels and has helped connect families with library services.

There is also a separately funded national arrangement for care-experienced children. The Scottish Government provides £73,000 a year to the Dollywood Foundation to deliver one book each month to care-experienced children from birth until age five.

Government figures show that funding remained at £73,000 annually from 2021–22 to 2025–26, amounting to £365,000 over five years.

The programme's earlier reporting said its initiative for looked-after children had reached 26 of Scotland's local authorities. That does not mean every child in those areas receives the books; eligibility under that strand is connected to care experience.

Families elsewhere in Scotland must check the Imagination Library's postcode service to establish whether a local programme operates in their area. Coverage depends upon a council, charity, library or another partner securing sustainable funding.

The Dollywood Foundation says its long-term ambition is for every child under five in Scotland to have access, but that remains an aspiration rather than a funded national commitment.

Scotland already has a separate universal book-gifting system through the Scottish Book Trust's Bookbug programme, funded by the Scottish Government. Bookbug provides free book bags at different stages between birth and age five and supports song and story sessions in libraries and community venues.

The Imagination Library differs by posting an individually addressed book to an enrolled child every month.

Evidence and limits of the programme

Supporters argue that repeated access to books can strengthen vocabulary, encourage shared reading and help children become familiar with stories before they enter school.

The Dollywood Foundation's 2024 UK annual report said more than 100 early-years professionals in Renfrewshire reported stronger family engagement and a greater emphasis on reading for pleasure after taking part.

Access to books is one part of early language development. The effect also depends upon whether adults have the time, confidence and support to read with children, and whether families facing poverty, additional support needs or language barriers can participate fully.

For Dolly Parton's 80th birthday earlier this year, nurseries held reading sessions, music events, a hoedown, a silent disco and activities based on her song Coat of Many Colours.

Helena Barrett-Duncan, the Dollywood Foundation's regional director for Scotland, described Renfrewshire as an example of what could be achieved when a community supported early-years reading.

"It has become a beacon for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Scotland, inspiring other local authorities to follow its lead," she said.

Renfrewshire's first Dolly Parton Day will take place on Friday 25 September 2026. Families living in the area, or whose children attend a Renfrewshire nursery, can apply through the council's registration service.

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COMMUNITY | 23 July 2026

Officers Begin Daily Perth City Centre Patrols

Read online: <https://modern.scot/officers-begin-daily-perth-city-centre-patrols/>



Police Scotland has assigned officers to weekday city-centre patrols, while new council enforcement staff are expected to extend coverage across Perth and Kinross from August.

Police Scotland officers have begun daily weekday patrols in Perth city centre as part of an expanded response to anti-social behaviour and concerns raised by residents and businesses.

Perth and Kinross Council has also recruited new Community Support and Enforcement Officers, who

are expected to increase patrols across the wider council area from August.

The measures combine visible policing, council enforcement, work with schools and proposed environmental improvements. Extra street-cleaning patrols are planned for identified locations, while the council is considering investment in additional equipment to keep streets and vennels clean.

Some parts of the programme are already operating. The police officers are now patrolling Perth city centre on weekdays. The council officers are due to increase coverage next month. Investment in new cleaning equipment remains under consideration rather than confirmed.

Council leader Eric Drysdale said residents and businesses had raised concerns about anti-social behaviour and that the additional resources would be directed towards areas where problems had been identified.

“The introduction of two city centre police officers will provide a visible presence, a direct point of contact for residents, businesses and visitors, and additional reassurance for people using the city centre,” he said.

Police Scotland’s Perth and Kinross team is led by Chief Inspector Jamie Allen and already works with council services and other agencies through local community-policing arrangements. The force says local priorities are informed by public surveys, community meetings, reports from residents and intelligence about recurring problems.

Chief Inspector Allen said the officers would engage with businesses, residents and visitors while identifying emerging problems and developing a clearer understanding of local concerns.

“These officers will engage directly with local businesses, residents and visitors, act as a clear point of contact for anyone with concerns and help us identify and respond quickly to emerging issues,” he said.

The city-centre deployment is also intended to allow the council’s Community Support and Enforcement Officers to spend more time elsewhere in Perth and Kinross.

The council’s enforcement service covers a broader range of responsibilities than policing. Its officers deal with anti-social behaviour, environmental offences, community safeguarding, emergency response and visitor-management problems. The council describes the service as providing visible, intelligence-led patrols

and acting as the “eyes and ears” of communities, working with Police Scotland and other public bodies.

The expansion follows an earlier council review which proposed bringing parking and community-safety functions into a single Community Support and Enforcement Service. The stated aim was to make staff more visible, allow resources to move more easily between locations and reduce dependence on small groups of seasonal officers.

The new recruitment therefore forms part of a longer restructuring process rather than a wholly separate service.

National increase in recorded incidents

The announcement comes after a rise in several categories of recorded crime and disorder across Scotland.

Police recorded 51,531 anti-social offences in Scotland during 2025–26, an increase of seven per cent from the previous year. The total remained 35 per cent below the level recorded ten years earlier. These figures count incidents recorded by the police and do not capture all behaviour experienced or reported through councils, landlords, schools and businesses.

Retail crime is a separate but connected concern. Councillor Drysdale said senior council officials had met the First Minister, senior police officers and local retailers to discuss increased offending against businesses.

Police Scotland established a national Retail Crime Taskforce in April 2025. During its first year, the taskforce supported more than 1,300 arrests and 6,400 charges, while the national shoplifting total rose by 19 per cent. Dedicated taskforce resources are now operating in Tayside as well as Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Enforcement and early intervention

The partnership says its approach will combine enforcement with prevention and support.

Council officers are working with education staff to identify young people displaying problematic behaviour, contact parents or guardians and provide support before incidents escalate.

The council’s wider anti-social behaviour strategy recognises the need for early intervention, information sharing and coordinated action between housing, police, education and community services. Its Safer Communities Hub is staffed by police officers and receives concerns involving crime trends, vulnerable people, environmental problems and complex cases for multi-agency action.

Street cleaning forms another part of the announcement. Litter, waste and poorly maintained spaces can affect how safe and cared-for an area feels, and the council says clearing litter across Perth and Kinross already costs more than £2 million each year.

Cleaning patrols can improve the condition of streets and remove some visible signs of disorder. They cannot replace policing, youth work, addiction services, housing intervention or action against repeat offenders. The council’s decision to combine those different responses acknowledges that anti-social behaviour is not one problem with a single cause.

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COMMUNITY | 23 July 2026

Orkney Dialect Takes Centre Stage at Kirbuster Farm Museum

Read online: <https://modern.scot/orkney-dialect-takes-centre-stage-at-kirbuster-farm-museum/>



Tom Rendall and Neil Leask will explore farming words, weather, poetry and Norse-rooted place names during a free event at one of Orkney's oldest surviving farm buildings.

The changing language of everyday Orkney life will be heard in its spoken form at Kirbuster Farm Museum this Saturday, as two local voices examine the words, sounds and place names that continue to distinguish the islands.

The Wey Wae Spaek will bring together dialect researcher Dr Tom Rendall and Kirbuster visitor services officer Neil Leask for an informal conversation from 2pm to 3.30pm on Saturday 25 July.

The free event will explore vocabulary connected with farming and weather, words that have disappeared from ordinary use, and expressions that have survived despite changes in education, work, communications and population.

Rendall and Leask will also consider the Norse inheritance still visible in Orkney place names and recite dialect poetry by Chrissie Costie and Robert Rendall.

The setting is closely connected with the language being discussed. Kirbuster Farm Museum, on Orkney's West Mainland, preserves a traditional farmstead whose oldest recorded section dates from at least 1595. Its central firehouse is described by the council as the last unrestored example of its kind in Northern Europe.

Objects, rooms and working practices preserved at the museum carry their own local terminology. Farming language developed around particular tools, livestock, weather conditions, buildings and methods of working the land. As those practices changed, some of the words associated with them became less common.

Rendall said dialect had shaped much of his life and academic work.

"Dialect his played a big pairt o me life for a lot o years noo," he said.

"I wis lucky enough tae get the chance tae dae me PhD thesis on the wey wae spaek. It is important that wae

let folk hear the dialect words while Neil and me his a yarn aboot ferming and place neems along wae some poetry fae Chrissie Costie and Robert Rendall.”

Rendall completed his doctoral research in 2013 after examining the social and cultural influences affecting dialect use in Orkney. His work drew on interviews across 13 locations and 100 questionnaires, looking at migration, attitudes towards dialect and the ways demographic change had affected everyday speech.

His research described many Orcadians as effectively using two forms of speech: an Orcadian-influenced version of Scottish Standard English and a more recognisable local dialect containing vocabulary inherited from Norn.

Norn was a form of Old Norse brought to the Northern Isles by Norwegian settlement. It gradually gave way to Scots, but left a substantial linguistic inheritance in Orkney speech and place names.

Rendall has previously explained that Norn remained in Orkney for centuries and that many residents were probably bilingual during the period in which Scots increasingly displaced it. Although its full grammar was lost, words relating to work, landscape and ordinary domestic life remained embedded in Orcadian speech.

The dialect that followed was never entirely uniform across the islands. Oral-history work in the North Isles has recorded how speakers could once identify whether someone came from Westray, Papay, Sanday, Stronsay or Eday simply by hearing them speak.

Those distinctions have become less pronounced as travel, schooling, television, social media and migration have brought communities into closer linguistic contact.

That does not mean Orcadian speech has disappeared. Dialects change rather than remain fixed, and many local words continue to be used alongside forms more widely understood across Scotland and the UK.

The question is whether less frequently heard vocabulary can remain part of a living language rather than becoming something encountered mainly in archives, poems and museum displays.

Events such as The Wey Wae Spaek allow dialect to be heard rather than treated solely as written heritage. That distinction is particularly relevant because spelling cannot fully reproduce rhythm, vowel sounds, emphasis and the recognisable musical quality of spoken Orcadian.

Poetry has provided one means of preserving those qualities. Robert Rendall, born in Glasgow to Orcadian parents and raised in Orkney, wrote poetry in both English and the local vernacular. Chrissie Costie’s work likewise recorded Orcadian speech and experience through the language in which people lived and worked.

Their poems allow dialect to carry description, memory and humour rather than appearing as a collection of isolated old words.

Kirbuster also offers more than a historical backdrop. The farm first appears in surviving records in 1595, when its rental value was recorded partly in butter and poultry. Its name has been traced to the Old Norse *kirkju-bolstadr*, meaning a church farm settlement.

The property remained occupied into the 1960s. It was later preserved by the Argo family and donated to Orkney Islands Council, which opened it as a museum in 1987.

The firehouse contains a central hearth and peat fire, while the wider site includes domestic rooms, farming objects, an implement shed and Victorian gardens. These physical remains help explain why language developed as it did: words were attached to particular places, materials and forms of work.

A single afternoon cannot reverse the wider forces changing dialect use. Long-term survival depends upon families, schools, writers, broadcasters and younger speakers continuing to treat Orcadian as something that can be used, rather than merely remembered.

Rendall's previous research found that attitudes towards dialect varied according to setting and generation. Speakers may use stronger dialect among family or within their home island while moving towards more standard speech in formal situations or when speaking to people from elsewhere.

That ability to shift between forms can help communication, but it may also leave distinctive words with fewer opportunities to be passed on.

The event at Kirbuster will place those words back into conversation, using the subjects from which much of the dialect grew: farming, weather, landscape and place.

The Wey Wae Spaek takes place at Kirbuster Farm Museum on Saturday 25 July from 2pm until 3.30pm. Admission is free and no booking requirement has been announced.

The museum is open during summer from 10.30am to 5pm from Monday to Saturday, closing between 1pm and 2pm. Sunday opening is from 1pm to 5pm.

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COMMUNITY | 23 July 2026

Norman Rendall Retires After 20 Years at Orkney Council Headquarters

Read online: <https://modern.scot/norman-rendall-retires-after-20-years-at-orkney-council-headquarters/>



The senior caretaker has been thanked for two decades of work keeping the council's School Place offices running behind the scenes.

Senior caretaker Norman Rendall has retired from Orkney Islands Council after 20 years at its School Place headquarters in Kirkwall.

Mr Rendall joined the council in 2006 and became a familiar presence to staff and visitors at the building. His work included responding to maintenance problems, supporting the daily operation of the offices and dealing

with the practical issues required to keep the headquarters functioning.

Although much of the role took place away from public view, colleagues said his knowledge of the building, reliability and willingness to help had made him a valued member of the organisation.

His manager and friend Fiona Ratter said Mr Rendall had carried out much of his work without seeking recognition.

"Norman's the kind of person you don't fully appreciate until you imagine the place without him," she said.

"He goes about his work in an unassuming way, never seeking recognition but always making a difference. He's given so many years of helping staff with countless day-to-day issues across the building."

Caretaking work is often noticed most clearly when something goes wrong. Over two decades, Mr Rendall dealt with the maintenance problems and routine building demands that allow other council employees to continue their own work.

His retirement follows a period in which School Place and the wider council organisation have experienced substantial operational and technological change. Through those changes, colleagues described him as a dependable and consistent presence.

Council convener Graham Bevan thanked Mr Rendall for his service and said his contribution would leave a lasting impression at School Place.

"He has witnessed significant change across the organisation over the years, yet has remained a constant, reliable presence for staff and visitors at School Place throughout," Councillor Bevan said.

"His contribution leaves a lasting legacy, and his absence will be keenly felt by all who worked alongside him. I wish Norman a long and well-deserved retirement."

Orkney Islands Council announced Mr Rendall's retirement on 17 July, marking the end of a career spent

largely behind the scenes but closely connected with the daily working life of its headquarters.

ECONOMY | 23 July 2026

Public Grant Helped Bring Post Office Back to Motherwell After Three-Year Gap

Read online: <https://modern.scot/public-grant-helped-bring-post-office-back-to-motherwell-after-three-year-gap/>



The new branch opened on Brandon Parade East in March, creating four jobs and restoring postal, parcel and cash services to the town centre. The amount of public funding awarded has not been disclosed.

A Post Office has returned to Motherwell town centre almost three years after the previous branch closed, with public funding helping two business owners convert a vacant retail unit on Brandon Parade East.

Hithendra Cheetirala and Venkata Sudheer Chatrathi

opened the new branch at 64 Brandon Parade East on 6 March 2026. North Lanarkshire Council disclosed the financial support behind the project in July, saying its business grants allowed the owners to complete the fit-out earlier than expected.

The branch provides personal and business cash deposits and withdrawals, cheque deposits, vehicle-tax services, foreign currency, bill payments and parcel services. It also handles Royal Mail, Parcelforce and DPD business, alongside document certification and in-branch identity checks. Current opening hours are 9am to 5.30pm from Monday to Friday and 10am to 3pm on Saturday.

Its opening restores a central service that had been absent since the Muir Street Post Office closed in 2023. Local reporting also recorded the withdrawal of Post Office services from Airbles Street in February 2024, leaving residents and businesses with fewer nearby options while attempts to secure a replacement town-centre location continued. A proposed earlier site did not proceed after agreement could not be reached on its lease.

The Post Office confirmed in November 2025 that the replacement branch would operate from Parade Gifts & Stationery, formerly Bella Mani. Its consultation described two screened service positions and a third lower, open-plan counter intended to improve accessibility.

North Lanarkshire Council says the new business has created four jobs, although it has not stated whether the positions are full-time or part-time.

Public support paid for part of the fit-out

The owners received support through the council's Town Centre Retail Business Fund. The grant contributed towards a new ceiling, LED lighting, wall displays, Post Office and retail counters, disability access, printers and photocopying equipment. They also secured assistance from the council's Business Start Up Fund.

The exact value of either award has not been published.

The retail fund provides up to £20,000 for each eligible property but covers no more than half of net project

costs. The landlord and tenant must therefore provide at least the remaining 50 per cent, together with VAT and delivery costs. Payments are made retrospectively, requiring successful applicants to fund the work before reclaiming the approved grant.

That distinction is relevant to the description of the branch as a publicly supported project. The council grant helped accelerate the conversion, but it did not necessarily meet most of the cost, and the available information does not show the total investment made by the owners.

The separate Business Start Up Fund offers awards of up to £1,000 or £3,000. It may cover equipment, stock, digital investment and improvements to commercial premises, but cannot be used for wages, rent, utilities or other ordinary running costs. It is also paid retrospectively.

Both programmes are open to applications until 18 December 2026.

Bringing a vacant unit back into use

The Town Centre Retail Business Fund is a pilot scheme intended to reduce the number of empty ground-floor units across Airdrie, Bellshill, Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, Kilsyth, Motherwell, Shotts and Wishaw.

Properties must ordinarily have been empty for at least three months, and applicants must hold or agree a lease lasting at least 12 months. Businesses and landlords are required to work with a Business Gateway Lanarkshire adviser before submitting a joint application.

The fund is intended to bring vacant premises back into use while increasing footfall and supporting new businesses. In Motherwell, the Post Office has the potential to meet both aims: it occupies a formerly empty unit and provides services that require people and businesses to visit the town centre.

North Lanarkshire Council's existing Motherwell Town Action Plan recognises that town centres need to move towards a broader mix of services as traditional retail patterns change. It also proposes retaining a concentrated retail core and using grants to help businesses relocate from less sustainable locations.

A Post Office fits that mixed-use approach. Its role now extends beyond letters and stamps. The branch provides counter banking for customers of participating banks and building societies, as well as cash-handling services for local businesses.

Post Office research says more than half of UK consumers still use cash at least weekly, while 89 per cent believe continued access to cash is important. Those figures were commissioned by the Post Office and should be treated as industry research, but they reflect the continuing practical value of a counter service in a town centre that has experienced bank and retail closures.

Funding figure covers several separate programmes

UK Government Scotland Office Minister Kirsty McNeill said North Lanarkshire was receiving up to £41.5 million through the wider Pride in Place programme.

That figure is considerably larger than the pot supporting the retail grant.

North Lanarkshire's allocation from the short-term Pride in Place Impact Fund is £1.5 million over two years. The money can be used for community buildings, public spaces and high-street revitalisation, including adapting vacant premises for new use.

The larger figure cited by the minister combines that allocation with separate long-term Pride in Place

commitments for Coatbridge and parts of Motherwell. Coatbridge has been allocated £19.5 million over ten years, while Forgewood, North Motherwell and Motherwell town centre have been offered up to £19.6 million, with delivery expected to begin in April 2027.

Those wider sums should not be read as the amount invested in the Post Office or even as funding already available to the new branch. The Post Office fit-out was supported through the much smaller Impact Fund-backed retail scheme.

Motherwell's longer-term programme is still being developed. The council is consulting residents on priorities for a ten-year plan covering Forgewood, North Motherwell and the town centre.

A welcome return with commercial risks remaining

North Lanarkshire Provost Kenneth Duffy said the branch had restored a service used regularly by residents while creating employment.

"It is great to see services and facilities that people regularly use and depend on, like the Post Office, being brought back to our town centres," he said.

The opening is a practical improvement after a lengthy gap, but its long-term future will depend on whether the combined Post Office and retail business attracts sufficient use.

Most of the Post Office network is operated by independent postmasters and retail partners rather than directly by Post Office Limited. At the end of March 2025, 11,572 of the network's 11,683 branches were operated by independent businesses.

Public grants can reduce the cost of opening a branch. They cannot guarantee that it will remain commercially viable once the fit-out is complete.

The Motherwell branch now has the advantage of a central location, six-day opening and a wide range of postal, parcel and banking services. The next test is whether residents and businesses use it often enough to prevent the town from facing another prolonged loss of service.

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TRANSPORT | 23 July 2026

Arran Road Improvement Programme Under Way as Summer Closures Continue

Read online: <https://modern.scot/arran-road-improvement-programme-under-way-as-summer-closures-continue/>



The first daytime closure on the B880 String Road entered its second day on Thursday, with further work planned at Machrie, Dougarie and the Ross through to 27 August.

A five-week programme of road improvements is under way on Arran, with the first daytime closure continuing today on the B880 String Road.

Work began on Wednesday 22 July between Glenloig Bridge and a point south of the Machrie Moor junction. The road is closed between 8am and 7pm today, Thursday 23 July, and will close again during the same

hours on Friday 24 July.

North Ayrshire Council has scheduled 19 daytime closure dates across four locations between 22 July and 27 August.

The programme includes resurfacing on the B880 and carriageway improvements on sections of the C147 and at the Ross. Full closures will be required at each location to protect road users and workers and allow specialist machinery to operate.

The council has acknowledged that the work will affect journeys during Arran's main summer visitor season but says favourable weather is needed for resurfacing and that the programme has been arranged to avoid weekend working.

Vehicle access will be maintained for residents and businesses during the B880 works. Traffic marshals will be stationed at the site to assist drivers.

The signed diversion for the String Road closure runs by the A841, the String, the C147 and Whiting Bay in both directions.

After the initial three-day phase ends on Friday, the B880 will close again from Wednesday 29 July to Tuesday 4 August, excluding Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 August.

Further single-day closures are scheduled for Thursday 6 August and Monday 10 August.

The ten closure days on the String Road are:

- Wednesday 22 to Friday 24 July;
- Wednesday 29 to Friday 31 July;
- Monday 3 and Tuesday 4 August;

- Thursday 6 August;
- Monday 10 August.

The road will remain open during the intervening weekends.

Machrie works begin on 13 August

The second phase will affect the C147 at Machrie, close to the bus stop at the Old Byre.

The road will close from 8am to 7pm on Thursday 13 August, Friday 14 August and Monday 17 August. It will reopen during the weekend of Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 August.

The diversion will run through the C147, the String and the A841 before returning to the C147.

The council describes the work as necessary carriageway improvement, although the announcement does not provide the length of road being treated or the expected additional journey time created by the diversion.

Closure north of Dougarie Boathouse

A third closure will affect a 600-metre section of the C147 north of the Dougarie Boathouse.

The road will close between 8am and 7pm on Wednesday 19 August, Thursday 20 August and Monday 24 August.

Traffic will be diverted by the C147, the String and the A841 in both directions.

The separation of the closure dates means the road is expected to remain open during the weekend between the first two days of work and the final Monday closure.

Final phase at the Ross

The fourth section of work will take place at the Ross, between Bogarie Farm and the forestry access road at the mast.

That road will close from 8am to 7pm on Tuesday 25, Wednesday 26 and Thursday 27 August.

The diversion will run through the C3-A1, the Ross, the A841 and the C147 in both directions.

Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders and signs at each location will identify the precise closure points, available turning places and access restrictions.

The council says the information should help drivers establish whether individual businesses and services can still be reached directly or whether the full diversion must be followed.

This will be particularly relevant for visitors unfamiliar with Arran's road network and for businesses dependent on deliveries and passing trade during the summer.

Council says closures cannot be avoided

A North Ayrshire Council spokesperson said the work was required to maintain connectivity for residents and visitors.

“These works are vital to help keep residents and visitors on the move and maintain connectivity on the

island,” the spokesperson said.

“Decisions to close roads are not taken lightly, and we do so with the long-term benefits for residents, visitors and businesses in mind.

“We understand that road closures can be disruptive, especially in summer. However, works like these need to be done during spells of favourable weather so they can be completed in a timely and efficient manner.”

The council said the programme had been arranged to limit disruption to the shortest practical period and that work would not take place at weekends.

It added that full closures were necessary because of regulatory safety requirements and the use of specialist machinery.

The announcement does not state the cost of the programme, identify the contractor carrying out the work or provide estimated journey times for the diversion routes.

It also does not set out what would happen to the timetable if poor weather prevented work from being completed on the scheduled dates.

Residents, workers and visitors will therefore need to check for updates before travelling, particularly during the later phases when closures move between different sections of the island’s road network.

Details of the traffic orders are being published on North Ayrshire Council’s roadworks and road closures page. Updates are also expected through the council’s social-media channels, roadside marshals and island businesses.

Arran road closure dates

B880 String Road, Glenloig Bridge to south of Machrie Moor junction

8am to 7pm on:

- Thursday 23 and Friday 24 July;
- Wednesday 29 to Friday 31 July;
- Monday 3 and Tuesday 4 August;
- Thursday 6 August;
- Monday 10 August.

The first closure took place on Wednesday 22 July.

C147 at Machrie, near the Old Byre bus stop

8am to 7pm on:

- Thursday 13 August;
- Friday 14 August;
- Monday 17 August.

C147 north of Dougarie Boathouse

8am to 7pm on:

- Wednesday 19 August;
- Thursday 20 August;
- Monday 24 August.

The Ross, from Bogarie Farm to the forestry access road

8am to 7pm on:

- Tuesday 25 August;
 - Wednesday 26 August;
 - Thursday 27 August.
-

INFRASTRUCTURE | 23 July 2026

Scotland Produces 30 Million Tonnes of Construction Materials but Cannot Show How Long Supplies Will Last

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotland-produces-30-million-tonnes-of-construction-materials-but-cannot-show-how-long-supplies-will-last/>



More than 200 mineral-product sites supply the stone, sand, concrete and asphalt used across Scotland, but public records do not provide a current national account of active quarries, remaining permitted reserves or regional supply.

Scotland's plans for homes, roads, power lines, substations and renewable-energy projects depend upon materials extracted and manufactured long before construction begins.

Rock must be blasted and crushed. Sand and gravel

must be worked. Concrete and asphalt must be produced and transported to sites that may be many miles from the source. These materials are heavy, relatively low in value and expensive to move over long distances, making local and regional supply important to construction costs.

Mineral Products Association Scotland says the sector produces almost 30 million tonnes of aggregates, concrete and asphalt each year from more than 200 sites. A separate study commissioned by the association estimated that primary aggregates generated £450 million in Scottish gross value added during 2024, supported 4,930 jobs and produced £99.1 million in tax contributions.

The trade body is warning that permitted reserves are not being replaced quickly enough. It has called for changes to mineral planning and environmental permitting, shared access to specialist planning expertise, continued energy support and no increase in Scottish Aggregates Tax above the equivalent UK rate.

Those are industry claims and policy requests. They do not establish that Scotland is running out of construction materials.

The more immediate problem is that the public information needed to assess future supply is incomplete.

The figure of more than 200 sites includes quarries, concrete plants, asphalt operations and other facilities. It is not a count of active primary aggregate quarries.

Revenue Scotland publishes a Scottish Aggregates Tax Register of Quarries containing registered operator names and addresses. It is a tax register rather than a national mineral-supply inventory and does not show remaining permitted reserves, annual output, projected site life or the regions supplied.

The economic study prepared by BiGGAR Economics used Scottish Assessors Association records to identify quarries and gravel pits but described its inventory as indicative rather than comprehensive. It cannot establish with certainty how many sites are currently producing crushed rock, sand or gravel or whether particular regions are approaching a supply constraint.

Scotland is not known to be running out of rock. The risk is that suitable deposits may not have permission, operating capacity or transport access in the places and timescales required by major building programmes.

A geological deposit cannot supply construction simply because it exists. It must be capable of lawful extraction, meet engineering requirements and remain commercially viable after processing and transport.

Mineral planning is also long-term. Quarries may operate for decades, while extensions and new permissions require assessment of traffic, noise, dust, water, biodiversity, landscape effects and restoration. A delayed decision may not stop a project immediately, but it can reduce the replacement supply available several years later.

The Scottish Government's latest planning statistics do not provide a dependable current average specifically for quarry or mineral applications.

Across all major developments without processing agreements, decisions took an average of 37.4 weeks in 2024–25, with a median of 29.9 weeks. Of major applications using processing agreements, 61.4 per cent were decided within the timetable agreed by the developer and planning authority.

During the first half of 2025–26, major applications without processing agreements averaged 29.2 weeks in the first quarter and 31.9 weeks in the second. Those figures cover all major development types and do not show whether mineral applications became faster.

Historic Scottish statistics have sometimes shown mineral proposals taking longer than other development categories. The absence of a current minerals-only measure means there is no clear national account of the present quarry-planning backlog or how performance has changed.

The wider staffing evidence is clearer.

The Royal Town Planning Institute found that 89 per cent of the 28 Scottish planning authorities responding to its 2025 survey had at least one vacancy. More than 44 per cent reported between one and three vacancies, almost 30 per cent had four to six, and nearly 15 per cent had more than six.

Around one authority in nine reported vacancies equivalent to at least a third of its workforce.

The institute also found that real-terms planning expenditure had fallen by 33 per cent since 2010. More than half of surveyed planners said their teams lacked capacity frequently or all the time, rising to almost two-thirds among public-sector planners.

That does not prove that councils lack minerals specialists. No responding authority identified minerals and waste as an area in which it had recently struggled to recruit. The industry's proposal for shared planning hubs instead suggests that specialist demand is uneven: some authorities may need access to minerals expertise without requiring a full-time post.

MPA Scotland also says taxation and energy costs are discouraging investment. The available evidence requires care.

Scottish Aggregates Tax came into force on 1 April 2026 at £2.16 per tonne, matching the UK Aggregates Levy rate for 2026–27. Scotland does not currently impose a higher headline tax rate on primary aggregate than the rest of the UK.

The immediate change is administrative. Businesses operating in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK may need to deal separately with Revenue Scotland and HM Revenue and Customs. The Scottish Government's

cross-border consultation acknowledged concerns about double taxation, avoidance and administrative burden.

Industry opposition is directed mainly at future divergence. MPA Scotland does not want the devolved rate raised above the UK levy or varied within Scotland to favour recycled material.

The Scottish Government regards the tax as part of its circular-economy policy. Producers argue that recycled aggregates cannot replace primary material in every use and depend upon the location, quality and processing of demolition waste.

Energy pressures also vary across the sector.

Quarrying, crushing and screening use fuel and electricity. Cement production is more energy-intensive because it requires sustained high temperatures. Scotland has one cement works, at Dunbar, leaving domestic cement supply more concentrated than the wider aggregates market.

The industry report says energy and climate-policy costs are affecting investment, but it does not identify Scottish projects that have been cancelled, quantify deferred spending or name the sites it says have been mothballed. Those claims should remain attributed to the association.

There is no clear evidence of an immediate Scotland-wide shortage of stone, sand, concrete or asphalt.

The concern is whether permitted local and regional supply will remain sufficient as construction demand changes.

Wind farms require stone for access tracks and foundations. Transmission projects require concrete, aggregates and roads. Housing depends upon sand, cement, asphalt and drainage materials. Offshore-energy development requires ports, reinforced surfaces and coastal infrastructure.

When nearby permitted supply is unavailable, material must travel farther.

Rail can move large volumes with lower emissions than equivalent road haulage, but most construction sites still require road delivery for the final stage. Longer transport distances would generally increase fuel use, handling and cost and could move economic activity away from Scottish producers.

The available evidence does not quantify how much additional material Scotland may need to import or how much emissions would rise under different supply scenarios.

Scotland should be able to show how many primary quarries are active, their remaining permitted reserves, annual production, expected life, transport links and the regions they serve. It should also publish current minerals-specific planning performance and identify where authorities rely upon shared or external expertise.

Without that information, national plans for housing, energy and infrastructure are being developed without a clear public account of the materials required to build them.

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ENERGY | 23 July 2026

Scotland's Energy Backlog Grows as UK Prepares to Favour Strategic Data Centres

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotlands-energy-backlog-grows-as-uk-prepares-to-favour-strategic-data-centres/>



Nearly two-thirds of Scotland's live energy applications have remained in the consenting system for more than a year while the UK Government develops rules that could reserve or reallocate network capacity for selected data centres and AI Growth Zones.

Scotland is considering the power stations, storage facilities and transmission lines required for a larger electricity system while the UK Government prepares

to decide which major consumers should receive priority access to that network.

A Scottish Government environmental-information disclosure recorded 184 live energy applications within the process leading to determination. Of those, 115 had been in the system for more than a year and 52 had remained unresolved for longer than two years.

Only 29 had been live for six months or less.

An accompanying Energy Consents Unit register contains 1,728 records, including completed, refused, withdrawn, pre-application and active cases. Modern Scot identified 188 development applications carrying active procedural statuses: 75 in consultation, 49 under consideration, 29 at application stage, 27 referred to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division and eight at determination.

The four-case difference between the waiting-time table and the active records identified in the register is not explained in the published material. It may reflect different reporting dates or classifications.

The active cases include 89 wind farms, 46 overhead power-line developments and 34 battery-storage projects. The remaining cases cover solar, hydro, gas and hybrid schemes.

The queue therefore extends beyond renewable generation. It includes much of the infrastructure required to move electricity from where it is produced, store it when supply exceeds immediate demand and release it when the system requires additional power.

At the same time, Britain is moving away from a connections system that largely rewarded an applicant's place in the queue.

The UK Government has proposed arrangements allowing network capacity to be reserved or reassigned to electricity users judged to be of strategic national importance. Data centres and AI Growth Zones are expressly included among the categories that could benefit.

The proposals would operate across Great Britain through the electricity connections regime. Scottish ministers determine certain major generating stations, storage projects and power lines, but they do not control the wider system through which data centres and other large consumers obtain network connections.

Under the proposed arrangements, the National Energy System Operator and network companies could reserve future capacity for selected developments, redirect capacity released when other projects withdraw and give strategic demand projects priority within future transmission-planning rounds.

The consultation has closed, but the final policy has not yet been published. Ofgem is developing related reforms intended to remove speculative demand projects from the queue, assess whether applicants are capable of proceeding and establish a mechanism for prioritising developments considered strategically valuable.

Generation and storage projects have already been reorganised through the Gate 1 and Gate 2 process.

Projects receiving Gate 2 status are given a place in the revised connection pipeline and a full connection offer. Gate 1 projects may remain within the system but do not retain a guaranteed queue position, reserved capacity or confirmed connection date.

Large demand projects are now undergoing their own reform.

Ofgem says the demand queue contains applications that may never be built while more credible developments remain unable to connect because network capacity is blocked. It also says the current system lacks a means of giving priority to demand projects judged to have national value.

Data centres are among the sectors identified.

The UK Government's consultation reported approximately 140 data-centre projects in the transmission queue, representing about 50GW of requested capacity. That figure did not include every data-centre development seeking a distribution connection.

A parliamentary answer published in June placed combined transmission and distribution capacity allocated to data-centre applications across Britain at approximately 72.8GW. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero said it could not provide the number or total capacity of projects located in Scotland.

The absence of a Scottish figure leaves a gap in public oversight.

Scotland is processing transmission lines, substations, generating stations and storage facilities without a published account of how much future network capacity is being sought by data-centre developers, where those applications are located or when they expect to connect.

Scotland exported a net 20.8 terawatt-hours of electricity during 2025, but an annual surplus does not mean power is available without limit at every location and hour. Electricity must pass through networks with finite capacity and be balanced continuously against demand.

At the end of March 2026, Scotland had 1,236 renewable-energy projects in the planning pipeline, with an estimated combined capacity of 85.4GW. Storage proposals accounted for 41.8GW, including 32.8GW of battery capacity.

Many of those projects will not be built. Some will be refused, withdrawn, redesigned or found commercially unviable. The figures nevertheless show the volume of competing claims now being placed upon land, planning authorities, environmental bodies and the electricity network.

The eight development cases marked at determination stage in the Energy Consents Unit register are dominated by grid and storage infrastructure rather than new wind farms.

They include overhead lines or grid connections at Lorg, Quoich, Peterhead-to-Persley and Burghmuir, storage projects at Spittal, Hagshaw and Sloy, and the combined Rogerhill solar and battery development.

The register does not identify any of those projects as serving a particular data centre. Large network developments normally support wider areas of generation and demand.

The disclosure therefore does not prove that Scotland's consent backlog was created to restrain data-centre development or to hold electricity capacity for selected companies. There is no published evidence that Scottish ministers instructed officials to delay energy projects for that purpose.

It does show that a large proportion of Scotland's generating, storage and transmission infrastructure remains within a prolonged consent process while the UK Government prepares a system under which selected major consumers may receive priority treatment.

The clearest Scottish example is the Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone, centred on DataVita's Chapelhall site and being developed with CoreWeave.

The UK Government announced the designation with company-supplied projections of £8.2 billion in private investment and more than 3,400 jobs. It said the project remained conditional upon agreed milestones and legal and regulatory requirements.

The announcement did not state its requested grid capacity, connection point or confirmed connection date.

AI Growth Zones are expressly identified in the strategic-demand consultation as developments that could receive priority.

The consultation says the government intends to publish a list of demand projects considered strategically important. It proposes allowing network capacity to be reserved or reassigned to those projects and aligning future data-centre connections with regional targets established through a national data-centre strategy.

A worked example describes a hypothetical AI Growth Zone for which government and network bodies identify 500MW of possible future capacity.

In that example, an established developer has credible plans but has not secured all necessary land rights or submitted a grid-connection application. Capacity could still be reserved after the government signals its intention to designate the area.

The example is not evidence that capacity has been reserved for Lanarkshire or any other Scottish project. It does show that the proposed framework could protect future electricity capacity for a strategically selected development before it had completed steps ordinarily expected of an applicant.

Pressure for stronger controls in Scotland has increased as the number and scale of proposed data centres have grown.

A Scottish Parliament motion lodged in June called for a national planning moratorium on hyperscale data centres until their combined effects on electricity demand, decarbonisation, air quality and household bills could be assessed.

The motion stated that announced developments could require at least 6,000MW of power. That is a figure advanced in a political motion rather than a national calculation produced by the Scottish Government.

Ministers told Parliament that the government had not completed a national climate-impact assessment of hyperscale data centres and was working with the National Energy System Operator, the Scottish

Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Water to assess their cumulative demands.

No national moratorium has been introduced.

National Planning Framework 4 continues to treat green data centres as national development, although ministers are considering whether further coordination or planning guidance is needed.

The final selection system will be controlled largely by the UK Government, Ofgem, NESO and the network companies.

A government-backed data centre may have a case for priority where it supports national security, research, industrial capacity or substantial employment. The same decision could place a privately operated computing facility ahead of housing, manufacturing, public services or existing Scottish businesses seeking access to a constrained network.

The strategic-demand consultation says selected projects will be published. It does not yet provide the final criteria, scoring system, level of Scottish representation or means by which an unsuccessful applicant could challenge the decision.

The Scottish consent backlog has not been shown to be part of a plan to reserve electricity for selected data centres. The connection reforms do, however, create the machinery through which government-backed projects could receive capacity ahead of ordinary applicants.

Until the selected projects, criteria and Scottish capacity allocations are published, the public will not know who has been placed at the front of the new queue.

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HERITAGE AND ARTS | 23 July 2026

Kenneth Branagh to Defend Highland Estate from American Billionaire in New Paramount+ Drama

Read online: <https://modern.scot/kenneth-branagh-to-defend-highland-estate-from-american-billionaire-in-new-paramount-drama/>



Laird will place an inherited Scottish estate at the centre of a battle over foreign wealth, family power and control of the land, although Paramount has not yet confirmed that the series will be filmed in Scotland.

Kenneth Branagh is to star as the owner of a fictional Highland estate in a new Paramount+ drama about an American billionaire attempting to buy up the surrounding glens.

The streaming service announced on 22 July that it had commissioned Laird, a modern Scottish family saga set

around Castle Drummoch. Branagh will play the castle's laird and serve as an executive producer. Paramount describes his character as a proud Scot determined to prevent a "shadowy American billionaire" from acquiring his ancestral lands.

The series has been created by Jez Butterworth, John-Henry Butterworth and Georgia Lee. Joe Wright, whose films include *Pride & Prejudice*, *Atonement* and *Darkest Hour*, is attached to direct the pilot.

Paramount Television Studios and 101 Studios will produce the programme. Branagh will executive produce alongside David C Glasser, Jez and John-Henry Butterworth, Wright, Ron Burkle, David Hutkin, Bob Yari, Charles Finch and Keith Cox. Paramount says the series will eventually premiere globally and exclusively on Paramount+, but no release date has been announced.

No supporting cast, episode total, production timetable or filming location has been disclosed. There is also no confirmation that a Scottish production company, local authority or screen agency is involved.

That unanswered question is more than an administrative detail. A drama may be set in the Highlands without being substantially made there. The Scottish landscape can be reproduced through a combination of limited location filming, studio interiors and visual effects, leaving far less local expenditure than the setting might suggest.

If Laird is filmed extensively in Scotland, it could become part of an industry that already contributes heavily to the national economy. Screen Scotland's latest economic assessment found that Scotland's screen sector generated £718 million in gross value added in 2023, an increase of 15 per cent from 2021. Film, television and audiovisual production spending in Scotland reached £468.3 million during the year.

Large productions can support Scottish actors, technicians, drivers, accommodation providers, caterers, construction workers and location services. None of those benefits can yet be attached to Laird. Paramount's announcement concerns the commissioning and creative team; it does not establish where the money will be spent.

The involvement of 101 Studios nevertheless gives some indication of the intended scale and tone. The company produces *Yellowstone*, the American television drama about an established ranching family defending a vast inherited property against developers, political opponents and outside wealth.

Paramount has not described *Laird* as a Scottish version of *Yellowstone*. The resemblance in the underlying structure is difficult to miss. Both premises place an imposing patriarch, inherited territory and family loyalty at the centre of a conflict over who will control the land.

The Scottish setting gives that familiar formula a more complicated political character.

Paramount's description casts the American billionaire as the apparent threat. Branagh's laird is presented as the defender of home, history and continuity. The first synopsis refers to family feuds, buried secrets and star-crossed romances, but says nothing about the people living or working on the estate.

There is no tenant farmer, crofter, estate worker, community trust or neighbouring village identified in the material released so far.

That may change as the cast and story are developed. At present, however, the central conflict appears to be between two forms of private power: the hereditary landowner who already controls the estate and the foreign billionaire who wishes to acquire it.

Scotland's actual land debate does not divide so neatly between a virtuous laird and a predatory outsider.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 introduced new measures affecting large landholdings, including land-management plans, stronger community-engagement duties, advance notification when certain estates are being sold and a transfer test that may allow ministers to require large areas to be offered in separate lots. The legislation also establishes a Land and Communities Commissioner.

The Scottish Land Commission describes land reform as a question of how land contributes to housing, employment, community power, the environment and local economic opportunity. Its current position is that ownership should be more transparent and accountable to the public interest, regardless of whether the owner is an individual, company or public body.

Foreign ownership forms part of that discussion, although the evidence requires more care than the television premise is likely to allow.

Registers of Scotland recorded 28,825 registered titles with an owner address outside the UK as of 31 December 2025. Those titles represented 4.4 per cent of Scotland's land area. The United States was the most common overseas address, accounting for 3,749 titles.

A further 113,653 titles had an owner address elsewhere in the UK and represented 17 per cent of Scotland's land area.

Those figures do not mean that thousands of Highland estates are controlled by foreign billionaires. Most titles with overseas addresses were residential, while only a small proportion were classified as agricultural, forestry or undeveloped land. The statistics record the owner's address supplied at registration, which may later have changed, and cover registered property titles rather than people or complete estates.

The distinction is necessary because *Laird* risks giving an emotionally simple shape to an argument that is structurally difficult.

An American billionaire may indeed represent remote capital with little accountability to a Highland

community. An ancestral estate may also exercise remote or disproportionate control over housing, employment, access, farming and development. History can explain how ownership was inherited without settling whether that ownership now serves the public.

Paramount says the drama is about a man standing against “unchecked wealth and power”. The more revealing question will be whether the series applies that scrutiny only to the buyer or also to the laird.

A serious treatment could examine the contradiction directly. Branagh’s character may be defending the land from speculation while maintaining a system in which the surrounding population remains dependent upon one family’s decisions. The billionaire may be a destructive outsider, but the castle’s existing authority need not therefore be benign.

There is also the familiar danger that the Highlands will be presented primarily as an inheritance, battlefield and visual spectacle. International productions have repeatedly drawn on Scotland’s castles, mountains and historical associations because they are immediately recognisable to global audiences. The people living in those landscapes are more easily reduced to servants, retainers, romantic interests or picturesque witnesses.

The creative team gives Laird the capacity to move beyond that. Jez Butterworth has written extensively about land, belonging, inheritance and contested national identity, while Wright has experience directing large period and political dramas. Georgia Lee and John-Henry Butterworth bring substantial television experience to a project intended to sustain a family conflict across a series rather than a single film.

Branagh’s casting will guarantee international attention. It will also place the moral centre of the story inside the castle unless the writers deliberately widen the view.

For Scotland, the most interesting part of Laird will not be whether one rich man defeats another. It will be whether the drama recognises that the glens are neither inherited scenery nor an investment asset. They are places where people live under decisions about land that are often made far from them, sometimes in an American boardroom and sometimes from the castle on the hill.

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COMMUNITY | 22 July 2026

Volunteers and Leaders Join Forces to Widen Opportunities for Youth

Read online: <https://modern.scot/volunteers-and-leaders-join-forces-to-widen-opportunities-for-youth/>



Volunteers and school leaders from Lewis, Harris and Benbecula have met in Stornoway to examine how distance, limited local provision and the practical demands of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award can be managed more fairly across the islands.

A national youth programme can appear relatively straightforward on paper. In the Western Isles, delivering it requires schools and volunteers to work across a dispersed chain of islands, where suitable activities, adult supervision and transport cannot

always be taken for granted.

Duke of Edinburgh's Award leaders and volunteers from the Nicolson Institute, Sir E Scott School and Sgoil Lionacleit met at the Caladh Inn in Stornoway on Saturday 30 May. The three schools serve young people in Lewis, Harris and Benbecula respectively, giving the event a geographical reach extending across much of the Outer Hebrides.

The meeting was opened by DofE Scotland director Helen Anderson, supported by operations officer Alice Illingworth. It allowed those responsible for delivering the programme to compare experiences, discuss national rules and consider how the Award can remain accessible when local circumstances make conventional arrangements difficult.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has operated as a licensed DofE organisation for more than 25 years. During that period, it says more than 2,000 young people have started an Award through the local programme.

In the latest year, Western Isles participants recorded 1,885 hours of voluntary service within their communities. That represents a substantial amount of unpaid work by young people, although the published figures do not identify the organisations supported, the types of work undertaken or how those hours were distributed between islands.

The practical discussions in Stornoway included widening access, finding acceptable ways for participants to meet volunteering requirements and examining the possible use of virtual expedition arrangements. One attendee said the opportunity to discuss difficulties with people delivering the Award elsewhere had been useful and had encouraged them to promote the programme more widely.

Those conversations go to the centre of the challenge facing island participants. DofE programmes require young people to undertake sustained activities in volunteering, physical development and skills, as well as completing an expedition. Gold participants must also complete a residential section. Activities can be delivered online or in person in some sections, but expeditions must be conducted through a licensed organisation or approved provider.

The expedition element is intended to test teamwork, preparation, navigation and independent decision-making. DofE guidance permits remote supervision, but that still requires trained adults, appropriate routes, risk assessments, communication plans and the ability to provide help quickly when necessary. Remote supervision means adults observing participants from a distance; it does not mean leaving groups unsupported or replacing an outdoor journey with an online exercise.

That distinction may require clearer explanation following the Stornoway discussions. The reference to “virtual expeditions” in the account of the event was not accompanied by details about what form these would take, whether they would replace any part of a qualifying expedition or how they would satisfy the Award’s existing requirements.

Flexibility is reasonable where geography or individual needs create genuine barriers, but the value of the Award also depends upon maintaining a recognisable standard. The proper objective is to remove avoidable obstacles without quietly reducing the substance of what participants are expected to accomplish.

Transport support removes part of the financial burden. Young people under 22 in Scotland are eligible for free bus travel, while residents of the Outer Hebrides in the same age group can use their National Entitlement Card for free foot-passenger travel on inter-island ferry services within the council area. That assistance cannot by itself ensure that transport is available at the time an activity, placement or expedition begins and ends.

Finding regular volunteering placements can also be more complicated in small communities. A suitable role must meet the Award’s requirements, remain available for the necessary period and provide someone able to assess the participant’s work. Where the number of organisations and adult volunteers is limited, several young people may be drawing upon the same small pool of opportunities.

Alice Murray, DofE operations manager for the Western Isles, said bringing volunteers together had allowed them to exchange ideas and learn from the difficulties encountered in different parts of the islands.

“The DofE is more relevant now than ever before for young people,” she said, pointing to resilience, teamwork and self-belief among the skills developed through the programme.

The networking day was supported financially by the Western Isles Development Trust. The amount awarded for the event was not stated, nor was a breakdown provided showing how the money was used.

Across Scotland, more than 19,000 young people began a DofE programme during 2025–26, while more than 33,800 were actively participating. The charity says Scottish participants contributed more than 370,000 volunteering hours, to which it assigned a total value of £2.9 million. That figure is an estimated economic value for the time contributed rather than money paid to local organisations or to the young people themselves.

The charity’s new UK strategy aims to provide more than two million young people with a DofE experience by 2031. Its stated priorities include reducing financial barriers for low-income families and reaching more young people outside conventional education, including those within the youth justice system. Between April 2021 and March 2026, it says 1.6 million young people started an Award and more than £4.2 million was distributed to help disadvantaged participants.

The Western Isles figures demonstrate sustained local participation, but they offer only part of the picture. The council has reported how many young people started an Award over 25 years, without publishing how many completed Bronze, Silver or Gold, how participation differs between islands, or how many withdrew because of cost, transport, staffing or difficulty securing an activity.

Starting an Award and achieving one are different measures. Completion figures would allow the council and local volunteers to identify where young people are being lost from the programme and whether the barriers discussed in Stornoway are being removed in practice.

The next test will be whether the ideas exchanged at the Caladh Inn lead to more placements, stronger volunteer support and a clear route to completion for young people throughout the islands. Anyone interested in supporting the Western Isles programme can contact Alice Murray at widofe2@cne-siar.gov.uk

HERITAGE AND ARTS | 22 July 2026

Nolan Blockbuster Places Scotland's North-east Coast Before Global Audience

Read online: <https://modern.scot/nolan-blockbuster-places-scotlands-north-east-coast-before-global-audience/>



Findlater Castle, Sunnyside Beach and Culbin appear in Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey*, which opened with worldwide ticket sales of almost \$264 million. Moray and Aberdeenshire are now trying to turn brief screen exposure into visits, local spending and a longer place in Scotland's film economy.

A ruined Scottish castle above the Moray Firth has become a mythical island in one of the largest cinema releases of the year.

Findlater Castle and Sunnyside Beach in Aberdeenshire, together with Culbin Forest and Culbin Sands in Moray, appear in Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey*, released internationally on 17 July.

"The release of *The Odyssey* marks a truly proud moment for Aberdeenshire and the wider north-east of Scotland. Audiences across the world will now experience the breathtaking beauty of our coastline, with the dramatic cliffs, seascapes and iconic ruins of Findlater Castle taking centre stage in one of the most anticipated cinematic events of recent years," said Cllr Judy Whyte, Provost of Aberdeenshire.



Cllr Cowe and Cllr Whyte Findlater Castle

Cllr Cowe and Cllr Whyte Findlater Castle

"We hope that audiences who fall in love with the landscapes they see on screen will be inspired to visit North East Scotland for themselves, experience our world-class natural environment and heritage, and enjoy the warm welcome that awaits them here," said Cllr John Cowe, Civic Leader of Moray Council.

The locations were used to represent parts of the ancient world through which Odysseus travels during his long return from the Trojan War. Findlater Castle provided the setting for Aeaea, the island associated

with Circe, while Sunnyside Beach and Culbin were used for scenes in which Odysseus and his crew arrive on shore and move inland. Buckie and Burghead harbours also supported the production's logistical work.

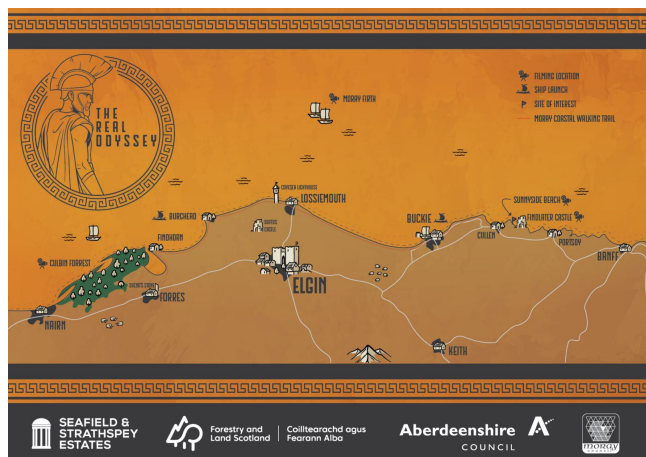
Moray and Aberdeenshire councils have responded by producing a visitor map linking the filming locations with coastal communities, heritage attractions, walking routes and archaeological sites across the north-east.

The opportunity is considerable. Universal Pictures reported that *The Odyssey* opened at number one worldwide with ticket sales of approximately \$263.8 million, around £197 million, during its first weekend. The studio described it as Nolan's largest global opening, ahead of the initial unadjusted totals for *The Dark*

Knight Rises, The Dark Knight and Oppenheimer.

The film opened in 73 international markets and was shown at more than 12,700 locations on 25,600 screens. It earned an estimated \$123.5 million in North America and \$140.3 million internationally, according to Universal's opening figures.

That does not mean every audience member will recognise the Scottish coast or know where to find it. It does mean that landscapes in Moray and Aberdeenshire have been placed before an audience on a scale far beyond the reach of an ordinary regional tourism campaign.



Odyssey filming locations

Scotland presented at IMAX scale

Nolan described Homer's epic as "not a story – it's the story" when he presented footage to cinema owners at CinemaCon in Las Vegas earlier this year.

He said filming The Odyssey entirely with IMAX cameras had been his longest-held ambition. The equipment was used for intimate dialogue as well as ships, battles and large exterior scenes, making the physical landscape part of the film's intended spectacle.

IMAX says the production used approximately 2.1 million feet of film. It was the first complete feature filmed using IMAX film cameras, including a quieter new-generation camera and enclosure that allowed synchronised dialogue to be recorded during scenes shot in the large format.

IMAX cinemas accounted for \$52 million of the opening weekend, around 20% of the film's global total. The company said the release set new opening records across comparable international markets, with \$29.6 million earned from 444 IMAX screens in North America and \$22.2 million from 441 international screens.

For the north-east, this is more than an incidental credit at the end of a film. The cliffs, beaches and woods were photographed for presentation on some of the world's largest cinema screens.

Matt Damon plays Odysseus, with Anne Hathaway as Penelope and Tom Holland as their son Telemachus. The cast also includes Charlize Theron, Zendaya, Robert Pattinson and Lupita Nyong'o. Nolan wrote and directed the film and produced it with Emma Thomas.

Findlater's history is separate from the myth

The visitor promotion identifies Findlater Castle with Aeaëa, but the ruin has its own history rooted in medieval Scotland.

The castle occupies a high, detached rock connected to the mainland by a narrow approach. Archaeological records describe defensive ditches, ramparts and probable drawbridges guarding an extensive fortress whose buildings once covered much of the promontory. Only parts of the vaulted structure and high ruined walls survive.

The site was held by the St Clair family from the reign of David II and later passed to the Ogilvies, who became Earls of Findlater. It is protected as a scheduled monument of national importance.

Its exposed position and isolation made it convincing as a mythical island, but it is not a conventional managed visitor attraction. The surviving structures are ruinous, the approach crosses uneven coastal ground and the surrounding cliffs require care.

That presents the councils with a practical problem. The image likely to attract visitors is also the location least able to absorb large, unmanaged numbers without pressure on paths, parking and the historic fabric.

Economic benefit may therefore depend on persuading film visitors to spend time in nearby communities such as Cullen, Portsoy, Sandend and Banff rather than treating the castle as a single photograph-and-depart stop.

Culbin carries a different Scottish story

Culbin supplied the production with a combination of forest, dunes, beach and open coast. The landscape extends for more than eight miles between the Nairn area and Findhorn Bay and contains an extensive network of paths and forest tracks.

The modern forest conceals a landscape altered repeatedly by people, wind and sea.

The councils' promotion refers to lost settlements and shifting sand, while Forestry and Land Scotland presents Culbin as an ever-changing coastline in which woodland now grows across large dune systems. The forest is managed for environmental value, timber production and public recreation.

The area also retains evidence of wartime defence. Culbin formed part of the coastal system intended to hinder a German invasion during the Second World War. Anti-glider poles and other defensive remains were placed along the shore, and traces can still be seen at Culbin Sands.

Its environmental value is substantial. Culbin's shoreline includes saltmarsh, mudflats, sand, shingle and feeding areas used by wading and water birds. Most of the shoreline between the forest and the low-water mark is managed as an RSPB reserve, while Culbin Sands, Culbin Forest and Findhorn Bay form a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The qualities that made Culbin useful to the film — open shore, apparent remoteness and dense woodland — also make visitor management necessary. Increased attention should be directed towards established car parks and paths rather than encouraging uncontrolled access to sensitive dunes and bird habitat.

Screen tourism has measurable value in Scotland

The councils expect the film to bring longer-term interest in the north-east. There is evidence that cinema and television can influence where visitors travel.

VisitScotland's 2023 survey found that 19% of visitors said film, television or literature had helped inspire their decision to visit Scotland. The proportion rose to 36% among European visitors and 37% among visitors from long-haul markets.

Research commissioned by Screen Scotland estimated that Scotland received 1.14 million overnight screen tourists in 2023. Those visitors spent £787 million in total, of which £161.4 million was attributed directly to screen-tourism activity in Scotland. The research calculated a direct economic contribution of £89.4 million and support for 2,260 full-time-equivalent jobs.

Those national figures show the size of the market. They are not a forecast for Moray or Aberdeenshire, and they do not demonstrate that *The Odyssey* will produce comparable local results.

Long-term benefit depends on whether viewers know that the places are in Scotland, whether the film gives them enough reason to travel, and whether local businesses can convert interest into accommodation bookings, meals, tours, transport and visits to other attractions.

Screen tourism also has a long life when the connection becomes established. VisitScotland continues to record visitors influenced by films such as *Local Hero*, *Braveheart* and *The Wicker Man* decades after their release.

The north-east already has experience of that effect. Pennan's association with *Local Hero* remains part of its visitor identity more than 40 years after the film was released. Aberdeenshire held anniversary screenings and events in 2023, with the village's red telephone box continuing to attract visitors.

Whether *The Odyssey* creates a comparable legacy will depend on how clearly the Scottish locations are identified and how well the new interest is sustained after the initial release campaign ends.

Aberdeenshire Council said hundreds of cast, crew and support workers stayed or worked in the area, bringing business to hotels, restaurants, shops and transport companies.

WATCH THE TRAILER

COMMUNITY | 22 July 2026

Gorebridge Couple Mark 60 Years of Marriage

Read online: <https://modern.scot/gorebridge-couple-mark-60-years-of-marriage/>



Wallace and Susan Clark have celebrated their Diamond Wedding anniversary at the Birkenside home where they have lived for more than half a century.

A Gorebridge couple have received congratulations from the King after reaching their 60th wedding anniversary.

Wallace and Susan Clark were visited at their Birkenside home by Midlothian councillor Ellen Scott and Depute Lord Lieutenant Harriet Dalrymple, who presented them with a royal message and flowers from Midlothian Council.

The couple married at Stobhill Parish Church in Gorebridge on 2 July 1966.

They had met two years earlier at the village café run by the Rossi family, shortly after Susan moved to Gorebridge from East Lothian.

Wallace, now 83, was born and raised in the village. He worked as a coal miner until the pits closed before joining Lothian and Borders Police as a traffic warden.

He later became a familiar figure in Newtongrange as a school crossing guide, continuing in the role until he was 75.

Susan, 79, worked at Duncan's chocolate factory in Edinburgh before leaving to start a family. She later returned to work after their daughter, Gillian, had grown older.

The couple began married life in Victoria Street, locally known as Tattie Row, where Gillian was born in 1967. They later lived in McLean Place before moving to Birkenside in 1972.

They have remained there ever since.

Wallace and Susan are grandparents to Jamie and Erin, while their son-in-law, Dougie Hall, has become an important part of the family.

Wallace, once a keen fisherman, continues to spend time in his garden and grows his own vegetables. Susan has enjoyed holidays and days out during their years together.

Their anniversary marks six decades of marriage rooted in the Gorebridge community, from the village café where they first met to the family home they have occupied for the past 54 years.

ECONOMY | 22 July 2026

Inverclyde Offers Cash Grants in Attempt to Slow Population Decline

Read online: <https://modern.scot/inverclyde-offers-cash-grants-in-attempt-to-slow-population-decline/>



One-off grants of up to £400 have been introduced to encourage people to remain in or move to Inverclyde, where the population has fallen by about 22,000 since 1981.

Inverclyde Council has launched two small grant schemes as part of an attempt to reverse decades of population decline.

The £400 Relocation Grant is intended to help people

moving into Inverclyde, including those already living in temporary accommodation who are moving into a permanent home.

A separate £300 Stay and Study Grant was introduced for residents who travel outside the council area for education, training or an apprenticeship but continue to live locally.

A third payment, the £300 New Scots Support into Work Grant, is due to be launched for people from minority ethnic communities facing costs associated with preparing for work, training or employment.

The grants are being awarded on a first-come basis until July 2028 or until the available money is exhausted. Inverclyde Council has allocated an initial £22,000 across the three schemes.

The Stay and Study scheme attracted applications rapidly. By 20 July, four days after the grants were publicly announced, the council said applications had closed because of high demand. Applications already received will be assessed in order, while residents can register an interest in case money becomes available later. The Relocation Grant remained open on the council's Inverclyde Living page.

At the advertised rates, the £22,000 allocation would fund between about 55 and 73 awards if it were spent entirely on the grants. The final number will depend on the balance between the £300 and £400 payments and any other costs charged to the fund.

Council leader Stephen McCabe described the payments as the “first baby steps” in a wider repopulation strategy.

He said Inverclyde needed to retain residents who might otherwise leave for education or employment while also encouraging people from elsewhere to settle in the area.

Population fell despite more people moving in

National Records of Scotland estimated Inverclyde's population at 78,550 on 30 June 2025, a fall of 190 people, or 0.2%, over the previous year.

The decrease was caused principally by the gap between births and deaths. There were 571 births and 1,092

deaths during the year, producing a natural population loss of 521.

Net migration added an estimated 310 people, meaning more people moved into Inverclyde from elsewhere in Scotland, the rest of the UK or overseas than moved away. That inward movement offset much of the natural decline but was not sufficient to prevent the population falling overall.

The pattern is not unique to Inverclyde. Population fell in 20 of Scotland's 32 council areas during the year to mid-2025, while deaths exceeded births in all but Glasgow and Midlothian. Scotland's overall population grew by fewer than 2,200 people, with migration continuing to compensate for a national excess of deaths over births.

Decline followed loss of industrial employment

Inverclyde's population challenge stretches back much further than the latest annual figures.

The council's repopulation strategy says the area has lost approximately 22,000 residents since 1981. Between 1998 and 2023, its population fell by 8.5%, described in the strategy as the sharpest decline recorded by any Scottish local authority over that period, while Scotland's population grew by around 8%.

Greenock and Port Glasgow expanded around maritime trade, engineering and shipbuilding. Greenock's harbour grew rapidly during the Industrial Revolution, while shipyards and related industries became major employers along the Clyde.

The contraction of heavy industry during the later 20th century required the area to move towards electronics, services, tourism and other employment. Inverclyde Council identifies the legacy of deindustrialisation, economic restructuring, housing problems and the movement of younger residents elsewhere for work and study as continuing causes of depopulation.

The decline briefly appeared to ease when migration produced population growth in 2023 and 2024. The return to a small fall in 2025 shows how dependent the area has become on attracting new residents to counter its low birth rate and ageing population.

The council's strategy says approximately 23% of residents are aged 65 or over, compared with about 20.5% across Scotland, while Inverclyde has smaller proportions of children and working-age residents than the national average.

The new payments are therefore one limited part of a broader programme rather than a complete response to the area's demographic position. The council has appointed a community repopulation officer and says its longer-term work will include housing, employment, business support, regeneration, place marketing and research into why younger residents leave.

The immediate test will be whether the grants help recipients remain in Inverclyde or settle there for the long term. The rapid closure of the Stay and Study scheme indicates demand for assistance, but the initial £22,000 allocation means its direct reach will remain limited.

COMMUNITY | 22 July 2026

George Square Reopening Delayed

Read online: <https://modern.scot/george-square-reopening-delayed/>



Families will be invited into traffic-free streets around George Square in early September as Glasgow marks the reopening of the western section of the city-centre landmark.

The event, planned for the first weekend of September, will include street play and activities for all ages as fencing is removed from the Queen Street end of the square.

The western section is expected to be completed by the end of August. Further areas will reopen in stages, with the final fences now expected to be removed by the end of October.

Glasgow City Council had previously hoped to complete the entire project in time for an official opening in early September. The timetable has been revised after contractors discovered underground pipes, cables and other infrastructure that did not appear on existing plans.

Council leader Susan Aitken said the phased approach would allow people to begin using completed areas rather than waiting for the whole site to reopen.

The footways on all four sides of the square are now largely complete, while the north carriageway reopened to traffic on 26 June.

George Square's 11 bronze statues are due to return in early August. Restoration of the Sir Walter Scott Monument is nearing completion, while granite paving work has resumed on the western side.

Paving will pause for two weeks while the statues are returned to their plinths. Work is also continuing on the eastern section and around the Cenotaph, where stone repairs will be followed by a final clean.

INFRASTRUCTURE | 22 July 2026

Caledonia Wind Farms Secure Consent for 140 Turbines in Moray Firth

Read online: <https://modern.scot/caledonia-wind-farms-secure-consent-for-140-turbines-in-moray-firth/>



Scottish ministers have approved two offshore wind farms with a combined anticipated capacity of 2GW. The decision removes a major regulatory barrier, but construction still depends on a seabird compensation plan, a UK electricity contract, final investment approval, finance and workable transmission charges.

The Caledonia offshore wind development has secured consent for up to 140 turbines in the outer Moray Firth, although permission does not guarantee that the

project will be built.

Scottish ministers granted Section 36 consents and marine licences for Caledonia North and Caledonia South on 17 July. Together, the two areas cover approximately 429 square kilometres and have an anticipated generating capacity of 2GW. Ocean Winds estimates that their annual output could be equivalent to the average electricity use of around two million homes.

The household figure is an annual energy comparison rather than a promise of continuous electricity for two million identified properties. Wind production varies, and electricity generated in the Moray Firth would enter the wider transmission system alongside power from other sources.

Caledonia North would be a fixed-foundation wind farm with an anticipated capacity of 1GW. It has consent for up to 77 turbines and would lie approximately 28 kilometres from the Wick coastline and 48 kilometres from Banff.

Caledonia South would also have an anticipated capacity of 1GW but may combine fixed and floating foundations. Its consent permits up to 78 turbines, no more than 39 of which may be floating. It would lie approximately 45 kilometres from Wick and 35 kilometres from Banff. Although the individual limits add up to 155 turbines, the combined development cannot exceed 140.

The application envelope permits turbines with a maximum tip height of 355 metres, up to four offshore substation platforms and four export cables. Those cables are intended to come ashore at Stake Ness on the Aberdeenshire coast. The final turbine number, dimensions and foundation choices will depend on detailed engineering and commercial decisions.

Consent is not a construction decision

Ocean Winds describes the consent as the final major regulatory hurdle, following Aberdeenshire Council's approval of the associated onshore infrastructure. The company expects offshore construction to begin around 2030, subject to the project securing a Contract for Difference and then reaching a final investment decision.

A Contract for Difference is a long-term agreement between a low-carbon generator and the government-owned Low Carbon Contracts Company. It protects a project from wholesale-price volatility by making payments around an agreed strike price, while requiring the generator to return money when the market reference price rises above that level. The scheme is the UK Government's principal mechanism for supporting new low-carbon electricity generation.

Obtaining a contract would provide greater revenue certainty, but it would not itself be a final commitment to build. Ocean Winds must still complete engineering and procurement work, arrange finance and decide that the expected revenue justifies the capital expenditure.

Caledonia also currently holds seabed rights through the ScotWind option process rather than a full operating lease. Crown Estate Scotland says a full lease enabling construction and operation is offered after a developer has secured the necessary consents, licences and finance.

The developer's current timetable places onshore construction from 2028, offshore work around 2029–30 and operation in 2031–32. Those dates remain forecasts rather than guaranteed delivery dates.

Transmission charges remain a commercial concern

Ocean Winds has publicly identified transmission charges as a critical remaining issue for Caledonia.

Adam Morrison, the company's UK country manager, said uncertainty over those charges would help determine whether the project could proceed to final investment approval as planned. He called for changes to Transmission Network Use of System charging, commonly known as TNUoS.

TNUoS charges vary by location and are intended to reflect the effect that generators and consumers have on the transmission network. Projects in northern Scotland can face higher generator charges because they are distant from the largest centres of electricity demand.

The argument from Scottish generators is that the system may discourage renewable projects in the parts of Britain with some of the strongest wind resources. The counterargument is that transmission has a real cost: electricity generated in the Moray Firth must be carried through substantial offshore and onshore infrastructure before it reaches consumers.

Consent answers whether the project may be developed within the approved area. It does not determine whether Ocean Winds will consider the eventual cost of generating and transmitting the electricity commercially workable.

£1.7 billion is not money already spent

The Scottish Government said Ocean Winds' latest Supply Chain Development Statement commits the company to £1.7 billion of expenditure in Scotland across Caledonia North and South. The potential work includes engineering, manufacturing, foundations, electrical equipment, ports, vessels, construction services and long-term operations.

That figure should not be reported as money already invested or as signed contracts with Scottish businesses.

Crown Estate Scotland describes Supply Chain Development Statements as records of anticipated economic activity. Developers update them as project timing, design, technology and supply-chain availability become clearer. The latest portfolio data also acknowledges continuing obstacles including grid delays, supply-chain

bottlenecks, rising costs and shortages of suitable skills.

The £1.7 billion is therefore a substantial commitment within the ScotWind leasing process, but its eventual value to Scotland will depend on procurement decisions. Scottish companies and ports must have the capacity, finance, workforce and competitive offers required when contracts are awarded.

Ocean Winds says Caledonia, Moray East and Moray West together would take its long-term operational workforce in the Moray Firth to more than 200 skilled roles. That is a combined figure across the three developments, not 200 new permanent jobs created solely by Caledonia.

Construction would involve a larger temporary workforce, but the government announcement and current public project information do not give a confirmed number of Scottish construction jobs or identify where all of those workers would be based.

The useful measure will be how much of the stated expenditure becomes firm orders with Scottish suppliers, how much work passes through Scottish ports and fabrication facilities, and how many posts remain after construction ends.

Seabird compensation remains unresolved

The consent requires Ocean Winds to prepare a detailed compensation plan addressing adverse effects on seabirds. Scottish ministers must approve that plan before Caledonia North and South proceed.

The condition means the ecological question has not ended with the consent decision. Ocean Winds must minimise environmental harm and provide compensatory measures for residual effects that cannot be dealt with through avoidance and mitigation alone.

Scottish offshore-wind guidance says compensatory measures should ordinarily be delivered before the predicted impact where possible. Any departure from that approach must be justified, supported by evidence and consistent with the precautionary principle.

The government's announcement does not identify the final Caledonia measures. Their adequacy will depend on the species affected, the evidence connecting each measure to the predicted harm, the timing of delivery and the arrangements for monitoring whether the compensation works.

The plan should therefore be treated as a substantive condition of development rather than paperwork following an otherwise complete approval.

Fishing and other marine users

The project would also occupy an area used by fishing vessels, commercial shipping and other marine interests.

The Scottish Government said it would continue working with Ocean Winds, fishing organisations and conservation interests to minimise effects on the marine environment and other sea users.

Caledonia's environmental assessment proposes a Fisheries Management and Mitigation Strategy covering continuing liaison during construction and operation. It also includes proposed navigation measures, including lighting, marking and minimum blade-clearance requirements.

Those arrangements may reduce disruption, but they do not remove competition for marine space. The eventual construction programme, cable routes, safety zones and vessel movements will determine how the

effects are experienced by individual fishing businesses and other users.

Floating wind remains an option

The Scottish Government has highlighted Caledonia South as an opportunity to advance Scotland's floating-wind industry.

The consent allows no more than 39 floating turbines. It does not require Ocean Winds to install that number, or any particular balance between floating and fixed foundations.

The final design will depend on seabed conditions, engineering, turbine selection, supply-chain capacity and cost. Floating wind may create opportunities for Scottish ports, anchor manufacturers, fabricators and marine contractors, particularly where experience can be transferred from offshore oil and gas.

Commercial-scale floating wind remains less mature and generally more expensive than conventional fixed-bottom development. Permission to deploy floating turbines is therefore an industrial opportunity, not a guarantee that the option will be used at its maximum approved scale or that the equipment will be manufactured in Scotland.

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INFRASTRUCTURE | 22 July 2026

Glasgow Power Network Under Enhanced Monitoring Ahead of Commonwealth Games

Read online: <https://modern.scot/glasgow-power-network-under-enhanced-monitoring-ahead-of-commonwealth-games/>



SP Energy Networks has introduced additional engineering support and trialled mobile fault-detection technology before the Games begin on Thursday. The measures may help engineers identify hidden electrical hazards, but the company's public announcement does not provide its forecast for additional demand, the results of the survey or its detailed contingency arrangements.

Glasgow's electricity distribution network has been placed under enhanced monitoring before the

Commonwealth Games, with engineers using mobile equipment to identify contact-voltage risks and other indications of faults associated with underground distribution infrastructure.

SP Energy Networks announced the preparations on Tuesday, two days before the Games begin. The company said it was combining new fault-detection technology with increased monitoring and additional engineering support to improve the resilience of the city's network during the event.

The measures are a reasonable precaution. A serious interruption during an international sporting event could affect competition venues, broadcasting, communications, ticketing, security systems, transport and surrounding homes and businesses.

The mobile survey is also capable of finding electrical conditions that may not be visible during an ordinary inspection. Engineers can investigate alerts and address confirmed defects before they develop into a public hazard or interruption.

Mobile equipment searches for electrical hazards

The most clearly described part of the programme is a trial conducted with Osmose Europe using a Power Survey Mobile Asset Assessment Vehicle, known as a MAAV.

The vehicle was driven through Glasgow streets to detect weak electric fields associated with faults in underground distribution equipment. These fields may indicate that a structure or surface has become unintentionally energised.

Osmose says the equipment can scan streets while travelling at speeds of up to 20mph. It is designed to detect contact-voltage risks involving infrastructure and surfaces such as street lights, manholes, fences, roads and pavements.

Signals identified by the vehicle are investigated with handheld equipment. The system can record locations, measurements and photographs and transmit reports to engineers for further examination.

The technology has previously been tested in Britain. UK Power Networks ran a £544,322 trial in central London between 2016 and 2018. Vehicles surveyed accessible streets in an area containing more than 2,000 kilometres of low-voltage underground cables and joints.

That project examined whether contact voltage could be used as an indication of faults in buried distribution infrastructure and whether the equipment was suited to British urban networks.

No demand forecast has been published

Glasgow 2026 will run from 23 July until 2 August. Ten sports and six Para sports will be held across four established venue groups: Scotstoun Stadium, the Scottish Event Campus, Tollcross International Swimming Centre and the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome and Arena, which the organisers are calling the Glasgow International Arena.

The venues lie within an eight-mile corridor. Organisers expect approximately 3,000 athletes from 74 nations and territories, supported by around 3,000 volunteers and attended by thousands of spectators.

Using established venues should be less complicated than constructing and powering a new estate of temporary buildings. The facilities already host sporting, entertainment and conference events and are existing users of Glasgow's electricity network.

The Games can nevertheless be expected to add or shift local demand through longer operating hours, broadcasting, lighting, communications, catering, security, hospitality facilities and temporary event installations. Demand around venues may also change during busy competition sessions.

SP Energy Networks says additional engineering support will be available during the Games.

Renewable electricity and physical resilience

EDF is the official energy and utilities principal partner of Glasgow 2026.

Organisers have said that Scotstoun Stadium, the Glasgow International Arena and Tollcross International Swimming Centre will be supplied through a zero-carbon electricity tariff available under the Scottish public-sector framework. Glasgow 2026 says the arrangement covers 5.4GWh of renewable electricity during the Games and beyond.

The cost has not been disclosed

SP Energy Networks has not disclosed the cost of the mobile survey, enhanced monitoring or additional engineering cover.

Electricity distribution companies operate under Ofgem's RIIO-ED2 price control, which covers the period from 2023 to 2028. The regulator sets the revenue that network operators may recover while requiring them to meet standards for reliability, safety, customer service and value for money.

Glasgow has increased monitoring before

This is not the first time SP Energy Networks has expanded monitoring in Glasgow before a major international event.

Ahead of COP26 in 2021, the company announced that 165 VisNet monitors had been installed at Glasgow

substations. The devices supplied real-time information about local electricity use and available capacity, allowing engineers to identify areas where demand was placing pressure on the network. The equipment was presented as an investment with continuing value after the conference, helping the company understand changing demand and plan future connections.

SP Energy Networks' latest announcement does not say whether all 165 monitors remain operational. It also does not confirm whether the MAAV survey will become part of Glasgow's routine inspection programme after the Games end.

ECONOMY | 22 July 2026

Scottish Ministers Disclose Scale of Opposition to Kintore–Tealing Power Line

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scottish-ministers-disclose-scale-of-opposition-to-kintore-tealing-power-line/>



More than 10,000 people and organisations were notified that they had a right to participate in the examination of SSEN Transmission's proposed power line between Aberdeenshire and Angus. The project is intended to remove constraints on Scotland's electricity network, but its route across farmland, private water catchments and rural landscapes remains contested.

Scottish ministers are considering more than 10,000 representations associated with one of Scotland's

most contested current electricity transmission projects.

A Scottish Government environmental-information release concerning objections to the Kintore–Tealing line was published on 20 July. Separate figures provided to the Scottish Parliament show that the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division notified 10,524 individuals and organisations that they had a right to take part in the examination. The total comprised 10,493 interested parties and 31 statutory consultees. Of the interested parties, 10,005 were contacted by email and 488 by letter.

Those figures require careful description. The government did not say that 10,524 separate objections had been submitted. The total includes statutory consultees and interested parties entitled to participate, rather than a verified count of individually written objections opposing every aspect of the development.

Campaigners have described the response as approximately 11,000 objections. That conveys the scale of organised opposition, but the official participation figure is the more precise measure.

The number of representations will give the decision political weight. It will not decide the application by itself. Electricity consent is not determined by counting submissions as votes. Reporters and ministers must consider the planning, environmental and technical substance of the evidence alongside national energy policy and the developer's case.

SSEN Transmission applied on 19 September 2025 for consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 and for deemed planning permission under Scottish planning legislation.

The company describes the main development as an approximately 106-kilometre, double-circuit 400kV overhead line between Kintore and Tealing. It would run from the existing Kintore substation to a proposed substation at Hurlie in Fetteresso Forest and then to the proposed Emmock substation near Tealing. The steel lattice towers would average around 57 metres in height.

The formal Energy Consents Unit description is more extensive. It records 105.2 kilometres of principal new 400kV line, together with approximately 13.84 kilometres of crossings, diversions, realignments and reductoring involving existing 132kV and 275kV lines.

Including those associated works, the application comprises approximately 119.04 kilometres of new overhead line. The maximum support height recorded in the application is 71.67 metres. The familiar 106-kilometre description is therefore accurate for the main connection, but does not include every overhead-line intervention forming part of the application.

Consultation feedback was not a formal representation

SSEN held several rounds of public consultation before submitting the application. The company says feedback influenced the development of the project and the examination of route alternatives.

Comments submitted to SSEN during that period did not automatically become formal representations before Scottish ministers.

SSEN's own project information made the distinction clear. Comments sent to the applicant during the development process were consultation feedback. People wishing their views to form part of the statutory decision-making process had to submit them separately to the Energy Consents Unit after the application was lodged.

A resident could therefore attend an exhibition, write to SSEN and object to the proposed alignment, yet still have no formal representation before ministers unless the objection was submitted again through the government process.

Some of the later objections were prepared with assistance from ObjectNow, an artificial-intelligence tool trained using the application documents and material assembled by campaigners.

The Financial Times reported that the software facilitated approximately 11,000 objections within three weeks. It allowed users to generate lengthy submissions, review the text and add personal information. Campaigners said the tool helped people engage with hundreds of complex planning and environmental documents. Industry representatives raised concerns about duplication, administrative pressure and the possibility of automated systems overwhelming consenting bodies.

The use of a drafting tool does not make a representation invalid. Equally, the repetition of the same argument across thousands of submissions does not necessarily increase its evidential weight. The examination must distinguish between the scale of public concern and the strength of the planning and environmental points raised.

Angus and Aberdeenshire reached different positions

Angus and Aberdeenshire councils did not reach the same conclusion about the line.

Angus Council held a special meeting on 17 November 2025. Planning officers had recommended that the council raise no objection, subject to conditions, but councillors voted unanimously to object.

The council's case included unacceptable landscape and visual effects, cumulative effects arising from other energy infrastructure, risks to biodiversity and the loss of ancient woodland.

An objection from a relevant planning authority requires ministers to arrange an examination before determining a Section 37 application. The case was referred to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division on 19 January 2026.

Reporters David Liddell and Christopher Warren have been appointed. The case is being considered through hearings and further written submissions, including community sessions and hearings on landscape, visual

effects and planning conditions.

Aberdeenshire Council submitted no objection.

The Aberdeenshire response was issued through the council's planning service rather than following a vote of the full council. The published material includes a covering letter, report of handling, proposed conditions and comments from elected members.

A no-objection response does not mean the council found the development harmless. It can still request mitigation and detailed conditions. Angus Council's objection is not a veto either. It triggered examination of the disputed issues, but Scottish ministers retain the final decision.

The procedures nevertheless gave residents different forms of visible political participation. Angus councillors debated the matter publicly and rejected the recommendation made by their officers. In Aberdeenshire, the council's response was completed through established delegated arrangements.

Private water supplies required further information

Private water supplies have become a distinct part of the examination.

The Energy Consents Unit requested additional information on 19 January. SSEN submitted further material on 27 February covering private supplies, groundwater abstractions and updates to the hydrology, hydrogeology and soils sections of its environmental assessment.

Many rural homes and businesses are not connected to the public water network. They depend on springs, wells, boreholes or surface catchments that may be affected by changes to drainage, soil conditions and groundwater movement.

Construction of the line would involve tower foundations, access tracks, vegetation clearance, compounds, heavy vehicles and work near watercourses. The potential risk to an individual supply depends on the location and design of the work and the characteristics of the catchment.

The request for further information is not evidence that water supplies will be contaminated. It shows that the original environmental material was not accepted as the final evidence on the subject. The reporters must decide whether supplies have been properly identified and whether avoidance measures, monitoring and contingency arrangements are adequate.

The route would also cross productive agricultural land in Angus and Aberdeenshire. Farmers and landowners have raised concerns about foundations, drainage, soil compaction, access tracks, construction traffic and the effect of overhead conductors on the operation of machinery.

Some effects would be temporary. Others, including tower bases, access rights and safety restrictions, would remain for the operating life of the line.

SSEN says it has refined the proposed alignment in response to environmental, technical, economic and community considerations. It describes its task as identifying a technically feasible and economically viable route expected to cause the least practicable disturbance.

Campaigners argue that the cumulative presence of towers, substations, access routes and related energy developments would alter the character of rural Angus and Aberdeenshire.

An average tower height of approximately 57 metres makes the visual effect unavoidable. Its severity will

vary according to terrain, distance, screening and the number of structures visible together. The statutory examination must test both the developer's visualisations and the evidence provided by residents, councils and specialist consultees.

The network has a genuine capacity problem

The case for reinforcement begins with a documented limitation in Scotland's transmission network.

The National Energy System Operator expects electricity transfers from north to south to increase as more onshore and offshore renewable generation connects in northern Scotland.

Its assessment says the B1a transmission boundary is limited to 2GW because of a thermal constraint on the existing Kintore–Tealing 275kV circuit. Farther south, the B4 boundary between the SSEN Transmission and SP Transmission networks is limited to 4GW by a thermal constraint on the Tealing–Westfield 275kV circuit.

When more electricity is generated than the network can carry, the system operator may pay generators to reduce production and arrange replacement electricity elsewhere. Those constraint costs are ultimately recovered through the electricity system.

The proposed line forms part of the Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment programme approved by Ofgem. The wider East Coast reinforcement is intended to carry more electricity along Scotland's eastern transmission corridor, accommodate additional generation and reduce reliance on older 275kV infrastructure.

That establishes a need for greater transmission capacity. It does not settle whether SSEN's chosen alignment, tower design and mitigation are acceptable.

Underground cables, subsea links and alternative overhead routes have different construction costs, technical limits and environmental effects. Undergrounding can reduce long-term visual effects but requires extensive excavation and may create greater disruption to soils, drainage and agriculture during construction. Subsea alternatives require landing points, converter or substation infrastructure and connections back into the onshore system.

The question before ministers is therefore not simply whether the grid requires investment. It is whether the submitted project is a justified and proportionate way to provide it.

Consumers ultimately fund approved costs

SSEN Transmission is a privately owned, regulated network company. It raises initial capital for transmission projects through debt and equity rather than receiving the full construction cost as a direct government grant.

Ofgem determines which efficient costs the company may recover through regulated revenues. Those revenues are ultimately paid through network charges forming part of household and business electricity bills across Great Britain.

Ofgem has awarded early construction funding equal to 20 per cent of the budget for SSEN's wider East Coast Onshore 400kV project, which includes the Kintore–Tealing line, substations and associated reinforcement.

The cash value has not been published for commercial reasons. The allowance can support surveys, design work, procurement, enabling activity and the early ordering of scarce equipment. Ofgem has stressed that the funding is not planning consent.

A full efficiency assessment is still required. Costs judged inefficient should not be recovered from consumers, while approved expenditure would be repaid over time through network charges.

The regulator argues that greater network capacity should reduce constraint costs and exposure to volatile gas prices. Whether the eventual savings outweigh the cost of construction will depend on delivery, future generation, electricity demand and the performance of the wider system.

Current UK Government guidance recommends a community fund of £200,000 for each kilometre of qualifying new overhead line, alongside separate amounts for substations and other installations.

Applied to a 106-kilometre line, that would imply approximately £21.2 million for the overhead-line element. The guidance makes clear that these funds are ultimately financed by Great Britain's electricity billpayers. They are separate from payments or compensation due to individual landowners.

Community funding may support useful local projects. It does not determine whether the environmental and social effects of the proposed route are acceptable.

No decision date has been confirmed

The Scottish Government has stated an ambition to determine priority transmission applications within 52 weeks of submission. For Kintore–Tealing, that period began when the application was lodged on 19 September 2025.

Ministers have confirmed that no specific determination date has been agreed. They said a decision would be taken only after consideration of the evidence and the reporters' assessment and recommendations.

The Planning and Environmental Appeals Division currently lists 4 January 2027 as its target date. That is a target for the examination and reporting process, not a guaranteed date for a ministerial decision. It also falls beyond the government's 52-week ambition.

The disagreement cannot be reduced to a choice between renewable energy and rural protection. Scotland's electricity network requires greater capacity, while communities along the proposed route would carry much of the project's physical effect.

The decision is whether this line, on this alignment, using these towers and these safeguards, is a proportionate response to the capacity the electricity system requires.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 22 July 2026

Legal Aid Reform Promises a Planned System but Does Not Guarantee Access to a Lawyer

Read online: <https://modern.scot/legal-aid-reform-promises-a-planned-system-but-does-not-guarantee-access-to-a-lawyer/>



Ministers are proposing simpler applications, greater freedom for accredited solicitors and stronger powers to direct services towards areas where private firms are unavailable. The consultation does not immediately widen eligibility or say how many additional practitioners would be secured in places already described as legal aid deserts.

A person in Scotland can satisfy the financial and legal tests for public funding and still be unable to find a solicitor willing or available to take the case.

That gap between qualifying for legal aid and obtaining legal help is the central problem behind a new Scottish Government consultation published on Tuesday.

Ministers are seeking views on a Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill intended to modernise the statutory framework currently governed by the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986. The consultation closes on 13 October and is expected to inform legislation during the first year of the current parliamentary session.

Legal aid pays for advice or representation when an individual cannot reasonably afford a solicitor. It covers criminal defence and civil matters including family disputes, housing, debt, immigration and mental health proceedings.

Most publicly funded legal work is delivered through the judicare system. A person must first find a private solicitor prepared to accept the case. The solicitor then assesses eligibility or applies to the Scottish Legal Aid Board, depending on the assistance required.

Firms remain free to decide which clients, subjects and geographical areas they will serve. The Legal Aid Board administers the fund but cannot compel a registered solicitor to accept a client. Its chief executive has previously said the existing system does not allow the board to secure services where and when they are needed or readily connect people with practitioners who have capacity.

The proposed reforms would retain judicare at the centre of the system while making more strategic use of commissioned services and solicitors employed directly by the Legal Aid Board. Both forms of provision already exist, but currently account for a relatively small share of legal aid work.

Ministers argue that clearer commissioning powers would allow services to be directed towards communities or areas of law where ordinary private provision is failing.

The consultation does not identify which towns or subjects would receive commissioned services, how many solicitors might be employed or what additional budget would be available. The practical value of the new powers will therefore depend on later funding and delivery decisions.

Fewer applications and a higher-trust system

One substantial proposal is to simplify the divisions between advice and assistance, assistance by way of representation and full legal aid.

Clients can currently face different financial assessments, applications and approvals as a case moves from initial advice towards formal proceedings. The government wants cases to follow a more continuous path, reducing repeated checks and delays.

Solicitors could also apply for accreditation under a new high-trust system. Accredited practitioners would be allowed to progress cases with fewer advance approvals from the Legal Aid Board.

Oversight would move towards auditing how solicitors apply the rules rather than checking each decision before work proceeds. Practitioners who did not seek or receive accreditation could continue using the existing application process.

The consultation acknowledges that safeguards would be required where public funding was misused or the rules were applied incorrectly.

Improved data sharing between public bodies is also proposed. Someone receiving a qualifying benefit could be passported into legal aid more easily, reducing the need to prove the same financial circumstances repeatedly.

These changes could make the system quicker to navigate. They would not, by themselves, increase the number of solicitors accepting legal aid work.

Eligibility is not being broadly expanded

The consultation describes improved access, but it does not propose an immediate general expansion of financial eligibility.

For initial civil advice and assistance, the current maximum disposable income is £245 a week, with a disposable-capital limit of £1,716 unless an exemption applies.

Civil legal aid for court proceedings can be available where disposable annual income is no more than £26,239 and disposable capital does not exceed £13,017. Contributions may still be required, and money or property recovered or preserved through a case can sometimes be used to repay legal costs.

Ministers propose clearer and more consistent contribution arrangements. Under the proposed governance system, the Legal Aid Board would report annually on eligibility and contributions, with changes requiring parliamentary approval.

The consultation explicitly says there are no plans to extend non-means-tested legal aid into additional areas through the Bill, citing affordability and the sustainability of the fund.

That is narrower than recommendations made by Holyrood's previous Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee.

The committee called for higher eligibility thresholds, the removal of financial tests for civil protection orders and some homelessness cases, and consideration of wider non-means-tested support for people affected by domestic abuse. It also asked ministers to reconsider client contributions and clawback where these might deter people from pursuing legitimate cases.

Those recommendations are not ruled out permanently, but they are not promised in the present consultation.

Record spending alongside gaps in service

Scotland spent £169 million on legal assistance in 2024–25, the highest cash total recorded and 12 per cent more than the previous year. Around £142 million was paid to solicitors, advocates and solicitor advocates.

Despite the higher expenditure, the number of grants fell by three per cent to approximately 170,000. Civil grants fell by four per cent and criminal grants by three per cent.

The increase in spending partly reflected fee rises and changes in criminal case management rather than a straightforward increase in the number of people receiving help.

The longer-term figures show the same tension. The number of grants has fallen from about 203,000 in 2017–18 while total expenditure has risen.

National spending therefore coexists with serious shortages in particular places and fields of law.

A Scottish Parliament inquiry found legal aid deserts in both geographical areas and subjects including housing, welfare, employment, immigration and asylum.

Grampian Women's Aid reported making between 50 and 60 calls to locate one solicitor. The committee also heard of a woman in the Highlands contacting more than 100 lawyers unsuccessfully about a divorce.

In February, Parliament was told that a Law Society survey found 41 per cent of solicitors were either planning to stop legal aid work within two years or were unsure whether they would continue.

The Scottish Government has approved a 13 per cent increase in fees from September. It has also created a £1.5 million traineeship fund intended to support up to 40 places and established an independent group to consider a longer-term system for reviewing fees.

Those measures are intended to improve recruitment and retention. Their effect will depend on whether firms regard legal aid work as financially and professionally sustainable over time.

Rural provision will test the proposal

The planned commissioning powers could be most valuable in the Highlands, islands and rural south, where long travel distances, low population density and a limited number of firms make ordinary provision fragile.

A small number of practitioners may be expected to cover large areas. When one retires, reduces legal aid work or cannot act because of a conflict of interest, clients can be left with few practical alternatives.

The government says existing arrangements can fund solicitors to travel and that Legal Aid Board projects and directly employed services can cover wider areas.

Parliamentary committees have remained unconvinced that this amounts to equal access. One inquiry described it as unacceptable that rural residents had so few practical options and rejected the suggestion that the existing system was generally effective in remote communities.

A future Bill could give the Legal Aid Board stronger powers to identify need, enter funding agreements, employ solicitors and publish strategic delivery plans.

Scottish ministers would set priorities, objectives and resource allocations, while Parliament would approve

changes to eligibility and contributions.

That structure will require safeguards. Legal aid is intended to respond to the needs of individual cases. A planned system also directs resources towards identified government and board priorities.

The legislation will need to ensure that commissioning fills gaps without quietly narrowing access elsewhere or leaving less visible areas of law with fewer resources.

The consultation is more substantial than an administrative tidy-up. It proposes machinery capable of directing lawyers and funding towards unmet need, simplifying applications and reducing some of the bureaucracy faced by solicitors and clients.

It does not yet establish where commissioned services would operate, how many additional practitioners would be secured, what the reforms would cost or when people currently making dozens of unsuccessful telephone calls would notice a difference.

The consultation remains open until 13 October 2026.

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HIGHLAND | 22 July 2026

Cairngorms Wildfire Enters Second Week

Read online: <https://modern.scot/cairngorms-wildfire-enters-second-week/>



Around 10 square kilometres of land have been affected across Glenmore and Abernethy, while emergency crews warn that the incident remains active despite progress containing its spread.

The wildfire burning across the Cairngorms National Park has entered its second week, with significant hotspots remaining across a large area of Glenmore and Abernethy.

More than 100 firefighters have been deployed since the alarm was raised shortly before noon on Wednesday 15 July. The response has also involved specialist wildfire units, helicopters carrying out water-bombing operations and a high-volume pump drawing water from Loch Morlich.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service said around 10 square kilometres of land had been affected. Although crews had made progress, the remaining hotspots were spread across what it described as a large and complex landscape. An operational presence is expected to continue throughout this week until the incident can be brought to a safe conclusion.

The figure of more than 100 firefighters refers to personnel deployed during the response as a whole, rather than the number working at the scene at one time.

The latest updates present a more stable position than during the first days of the fire, when changing winds drove flames through heathland, trees and woodland and forced the evacuation of homes, businesses, campsites and visitor facilities.

By Sunday, the Cairngorms National Park Authority said the fire was largely surrounded. That represented progress in preventing further spread, but did not mean the fire had been extinguished. Dry ground, deep-burning vegetation and inaccessible terrain can allow hotspots to remain beneath the surface and flare again when temperatures or winds change.

The Park Authority said on Tuesday evening that the incident remained live and that continued dry weather required vigilance. It has asked visitors to follow emergency guidance and check current alerts before travelling.

Police Scotland's latest published access information said an exclusion zone remained around Glenmore, Loch Morlich and Abernethy. The C7 Cairngorm Ski Road remained closed at Coylumbridge, along with public access to Loch Morlich, to keep routes clear for emergency crews and partner organisations.

Walkers and visitors were being asked to stay away. People displaced by the fire who need access to collect belongings were instructed to register through Highland Council's emergency contact arrangements rather than attempt to enter the exclusion zone independently.

The response has involved the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland, Highland Council, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forestry and Land Scotland, RSPB staff, landowners, gamekeepers,

estate workers, farmers, contractors and helicopter crews.

Firebreaks have been created across parts of the affected landscape, while aircraft and ground teams have worked to suppress flames and identify areas that continue to retain heat.

First Minister John Swinney visited Glenmore on Tuesday and met firefighters and representatives of organisations involved in the response. He also spoke to businesses affected by the closures and evacuations.

A separate very high wildfire-risk warning has been extended until Friday 24 July across the Central Highlands and much of southern and eastern Scotland.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has asked people in affected areas to avoid outdoor fires and barbecues completely. Cigarettes should be fully extinguished, glass and other litter should be removed, and any large fire in the open should be reported immediately through 999.

The warning follows the Cairngorms incident and a separate grass fire at Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh. It reflects the condition of vegetation and the ease with which fire can start and spread during prolonged dry weather.

No official cause has yet been announced for the Cairngorms fire.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 21 July 2026

Burnham Closes Door on Scottish Referendum in First Call with Swinney

Read online: <https://modern.scot/burnham-closes-door-on-scottish-referendum-in-first-call-with-swinney/>



The new Prime Minister promised deeper devolution and more pragmatic relations with Holyrood, but made clear that his government was not preparing to transfer the power required for another independence vote.

The language of co-operation lasted three paragraphs. By the fourth, the boundary was clear.

Andy Burnham used his first telephone conversation with First Minister John Swinney to promise a more collaborative relationship between Westminster and

the devolved governments. Downing Street said the new Prime Minister wanted to find common ground, deepen devolution and concentrate on practical measures intended to reduce household costs. It then added that Burnham was focused on practical policies rather than “constitutional changes like further referendums”.

The wording amounts to a refusal, although it stops short of a formal declaration that a Scottish referendum will never be permitted during Burnham’s premiership. It leaves no realistic prospect of an early agreement to transfer the necessary power to Holyrood.

Downing Street published one combined account covering Burnham’s calls with the leaders of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It did not provide a transcript, attribute every part of the conversation to a particular call or report what Swinney said in response. The reference to further referendums was therefore presented as a general statement of the Prime Minister’s priorities rather than a direct quotation addressed only to Scotland. Its meaning for the Scottish Government is nevertheless difficult to mistake.

Burnham became Prime Minister on 20 July after replacing Keir Starmer as Labour leader and entering Downing Street with promises of political stability, council housebuilding, action on rough sleeping and help with living costs. He also holds the title of Minister for the Union, giving his early approach to Scotland greater constitutional weight than an ordinary statement of government priorities.

His refusal continues the central position maintained by successive Conservative and Labour governments: the Scottish Parliament cannot be allowed to decide for itself when another independence referendum should take place.

That position now carries a clear legal effect. The UK Supreme Court ruled unanimously in November 2022 that Holyrood does not have the power to legislate unilaterally for an independence referendum because the Union and the sovereignty of the UK Parliament are reserved matters. Under the current settlement, a lawful referendum would require either UK legislation or a Section 30 order temporarily expanding the Scottish Parliament’s authority.

A Section 30 order was used before the 2014 referendum. It would require agreement between the governments and approval from the House of Commons, House of Lords and Scottish Parliament. Burnham cannot grant a referendum through a telephone call, but his government's participation is indispensable. Without it, the legal route used in 2014 remains closed.

The timing of his intervention is politically important. The May 2026 Holyrood election returned 58 SNP MSPs and 15 Scottish Greens, producing what the Scottish Government describes as the largest pro-independence majority elected to the Parliament. Neither party holds an overall majority alone, but together they occupy 73 of the Parliament's 129 seats.

On 26 May, MSPs voted by 72 to 55 for a motion calling on the UK Government to make a Section 30 order and transfer referendum powers. The motion also acknowledged that no single party controlled Holyrood and argued that the Scottish Government should use its existing devolved powers more effectively. Burnham's first conversation with Swinney therefore came less than two months after Scotland's Parliament formally renewed its request.

The disagreement also exposes the limit within Burnham's language of deeper devolution. Powers over transport, economic development, public services or local government may be extended while Westminster continues to reserve the authority to decide whether Scotland can vote on leaving the United Kingdom. Burnham's position offers greater administrative autonomy while keeping the constitutional boundary under UK control.

It is likely to shape relations between the two governments. Burnham has presented himself as an advocate of decentralisation, drawing heavily on his experience as mayor of Greater Manchester and promising to move decision-making away from Whitehall. Scotland, however, is not an English city region. Holyrood already has a national legislature, a separate legal system and a government elected on a programme that includes another independence vote.

TRANSPORT | 20 July 2026

Corran Ferry Infrastructure Works Move into Marine Phase

Read online: <https://modern.scot/corran-ferry-infrastructure-works-move-into-marine-phase/>



Construction work on the £30 million Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme has moved into its main marine phase, five months after work began at Nether Lochaber and Ardgour.

The project, funded through the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, includes £20 million from the UK Government and £10 million from Highland Council. It is expected to take 18 months, with completion scheduled for summer 2027.

The scheme includes new slipways, an overnight berth, a breakwater and improvements to parking, vehicle marshalling and access at the crossing.

At Nether Lochaber, six foundation piles have been installed for the new vessel-alignment structure. Earthworks for parking and marshalling areas are well advanced, while part of the new A82 junction has opened without traffic signals.

Rock armour is being placed along the shoreline to reduce erosion, and dredging work has resumed.

At Ardgour, the underwater foundation for the new slipway has been completed and sheet piling is under way. A new foreshore retaining wall is largely finished, while the base and basement walls for a substation have also been constructed.

Dredged material from the marine work is being reused within the project, including as part of the new Ardgour slipway, to reduce waste and the amount of imported material required.

Marine Mammal Observers are present during offshore operations. Noise and vibration monitoring is also continuing, with work planned around tides where necessary.

Archaeological investigations were carried out near the existing Ardgour slipway before construction began. No artefacts were found.

Highland Council said increased activity, including barges and offshore construction, would make the work more visible and could cause disruption for residents and road users.

Monthly community liaison meetings are being held at Ardgour Memorial Hall.

The Corran Ferry service is continuing to operate during construction. Timetables, live queue cameras and service updates remain available through Highland Council and the ferry's social-media accounts.

COMMUNITY | 20 July 2026

Performers Rally Behind Aberdeen Arts Centre

Read online: <https://modern.scot/performers-rally-behind-aberdeen-arts-centre-for-rescue-campaign/>



More than 100 performers from across north-east Scotland will take part in two fundraising shows this autumn as Aberdeen Arts Centre continues its three-year campaign to secure the venue's future.

The Big Variety Show will be held on Friday 2 and Saturday 3 October, with a completely different programme on each night. Drama, musical theatre, live music, dance, comedy, magic, gymnastics and acrobatics will be brought together in the centre's 350-seat auditorium.

Aberdeen Arts Centre has now raised £260,032.40 towards its wider £660,000 Save Aberdeen Arts Centre target. The campaign was launched in May 2025 after the charity was affected by a combination of rising operating costs and the loss of public funding.

An urgent six-week appeal within the wider campaign raised £87,966.15, exceeding its £60,000 target by almost £28,000. The centre said the result was helped by a substantial anonymous donation.

The organisation said the appeal had placed the Arts Centre in a stronger position, although continued fundraising remained necessary to reach its three-year target and protect the venue's future.

There is no individual fundraising target attached to the October performances. However, the centre estimates that the two shows would generate approximately £12,000 after costs if all 700 available tickets were sold.

The centre said all performers, hosts and production personnel are donating their time, although other production costs and expenses will still be deducted from the ticket income. Tickets went on sale on 15 July and cost £20, or £18 for concessions, before the booking fee.

The Friday programme will feature Aberdeen Magical Society, Aberdeen Songwriter Sessions, Community Integrated Care, Danz Creations, Eclipse Gymnastics, Lamour School of Dance, Leading Lights, Ocean's 3 and West End Dance Studio.

Saturday's performers include Aberdeen University Show Choir, the Academy of Expressive Arts, Four Magicians, Gray School of Dance, Leanne MacVeigh Dance Academy, Natalie Tough School of Dance, RC Performing Arts, Studio Theatre Group and TaleGate Theatre Productions.

Both nights will be hosted by Aberdeen comedy and magic double act Smith & Burns, who have appeared in Hollywood, Las Vegas and off-Broadway.

Programmer Philip Napier described the performances as a celebration of the organisations and artists associated with the centre. Many of those appearing use the venue regularly, while others developed their careers on its stages.

Celebrating the Aberdeen Arts Centre

“Every act has a deep connection with Aberdeen Arts Centre,” he said. “There’s no better way for an arts organisation to raise funds than by embracing the joy of the arts themselves.”

The fundraiser will also demonstrate the scale of the creative community that depends upon the venue. Aberdeen Arts Centre provides a stage for local theatre companies, dance schools, musicians and emerging professional artists, as well as operating learning and development programmes for children and adults.

The King Street building includes its main auditorium, a café bar and several flexible spaces used for performances, meetings, exhibitions and community activity. It also contains the Children’s Theatre, established in the 1950s and now used for professional artist development.

The centre is operated by Castlegate Arts Limited, a registered charity which has managed the venue for more than 25 years. The wider organisation says Aberdeen Arts Centre has contributed to the north-east’s cultural life for more than six decades.

Fundraising manager Julia Smith said the response from performers and the wider community had been considerable.

“We have been blown away by the level of support from the community throughout the Save Aberdeen Arts Centre campaign,” she said.

The £660,000 campaign is intended to cover the organisation’s core running costs while it prepares for an opportunity to apply for longer-term funding from national bodies including Creative Scotland.

The centre said the money would support staff wages, electricity, maintenance and essential repairs, while allowing it time to develop a more sustainable operating strategy.

The centre said it currently receives £8,000 from Aberdeen City Council’s Common Good Fund, which contributes towards rent.

For an organisation operating a substantial public venue, employing staff and maintaining a large city-centre building, that leaves a considerable proportion of its costs dependent upon ticket income, donations, sponsorship and project fundraising.

The £12,000 potentially generated by the variety shows would make a useful contribution. It also gives audiences a chance to see more than 100 performers drawn from professional, amateur and community organisations that use the centre as a stage and creative development base.

Wheelchair spaces are available within the auditorium, with further access information published on the centre’s website.

Aberdeen Arts Centre’s Big Variety Show 2–3 October 2026 at 7pm Aberdeen Arts Centre, 33 King Street, Aberdeen Tickets: £20, or £18 concessions, plus booking fee

ECONOMY | 20 July 2026

If the AI Bubble Bursts, What Happens to Scotland

Read online: <https://modern.scot/if-the-ai-bubble-bursts-scotland-will-be-left-with-the-wreckage/>

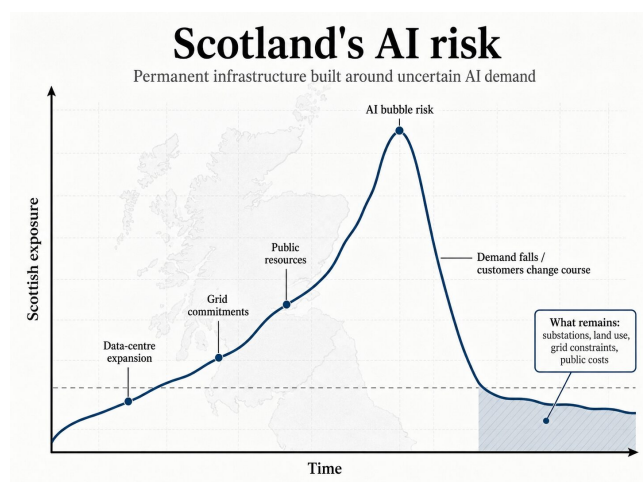


Editor's Note: This investigation concerns more than the financial risk of an AI bubble. Data centres depend upon AI companies, while much of the commercial AI economy depends upon a continuing supply of human-created work, human behaviour, personal information, professional knowledge and everyday digital activity. If Scotland ties jobs, electricity infrastructure, public revenue and industrial policy to that economy, it may acquire a financial interest in keeping people permanently connected, measurable and available for data extraction. The country could become

economically dependent upon systems it is supposed to regulate, systems that reward surveillance, weaken anonymity and turn ordinary human life into commercial input. The danger is that, once Scotland has built its economy around keeping it inflated, resistance to tracking, profiling and compulsory digital participation may be treated as a threat. In plain terms, Scotland risks tying part of its economy to its own digital enslavement.

Scottish public bodies are helping data-centre investors address planning and electricity constraints before Scotland has completed a national assessment of the combined pipeline. CoreWeave, the American company at the centre of the Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone, warns its own investors that changing customer demand could leave it carrying excess capacity, leases, construction costs and financing obligations. The companies can change course. Scotland's land and infrastructure cannot.

Scotland is being built into an economic wager it did not design and cannot control.



Across the country, developers are seeking land, substations, water, roads and grid connections for data centres intended to serve a global artificial-intelligence boom. Ministers, officials and public agencies are helping investors address planning and electricity barriers before Scotland has completed a national assessment of the combined demand.

The assumption beneath that work is that today's extraordinary appetite for AI computing will continue long enough to justify the infrastructure built around it.

It may.

But financial markets have mistaken rapid expansion before. If AI investment proves to be a bubble, the companies involved can cancel projects, reduce orders, change suppliers, restructure debts or move their computing elsewhere.

Scotland cannot move a substation.

It cannot easily return an industrial site to its previous use, recover years of constrained grid capacity or undo public decisions made around jobs and investment forecasts that failed to endure.

That is the wager now being made: rapidly changing commercial demand, set against permanent Scottish consequences.

CoreWeave's Scottish Entrance

The clearest example is CoreWeave, the American AI cloud company working with DataVita in the Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone.

The UK Government announced the zone in January with claims of £8.2 billion in private investment, more than 3,400 jobs and a community fund worth up to £543 million over 15 years. The published notes say the investment and employment estimates were provided by DataVita. North Lanarkshire Council has emphasised that the proposals remain subject to the full statutory planning process.

CoreWeave has separately announced £1.5 billion of investment in partnership with DataVita.

The company was founded in 2017. Before 2022, much of its limited revenue came from cryptocurrency-mining services that it subsequently discontinued. Its present cloud platform was launched in 2020.

CoreWeave is now growing at extraordinary speed. It reported revenue of approximately \$5.1 billion for 2025, alongside a net loss of \$1.17 billion. At the end of the year it had \$60.7 billion in remaining contracted obligations, with committed contracts lasting about five years on average. It also carried \$21.6 billion in debt and \$8.2 billion in operating lease liabilities.

Scotland is dealing with a young, highly leveraged company expanding rapidly in a market whose future requirements remain uncertain.

A five-year customer contract is a serious commercial commitment. It is not a guarantee that the same customer, company, technology or quantity of computing demand will remain in place for the useful life of Scottish grid and industrial infrastructure.

Microsoft Supplied Two-thirds of CoreWeave's Revenue

Microsoft accounted for approximately 67 per cent of CoreWeave's revenue during 2025. In the first three months of 2026, the company's two largest customers together accounted for 65 per cent of revenue: 45 per cent from the customer labelled A and 20 per cent from the customer labelled B. CoreWeave does not identify either company in that revenue table and says its alphabetical labels may refer to different customers in different reporting periods. Elsewhere in the filing, it names Microsoft and Meta as significant customers and describes its agreements with OpenAI.

OpenAI committed to pay CoreWeave up to approximately \$11.9 billion through October 2030 under one agreement. A later arrangement involves up to approximately \$6.5 billion through May 2031. Meta initially committed up to approximately \$21 billion for computing capacity extending into 2032.

NVIDIA and Jane Street are also customers as well as shareholders. NVIDIA paid CoreWeave about \$326.3 million for services during 2025. Jane Street paid approximately \$100 million during 2025 and \$220.6 million during the first quarter of 2026 under its service arrangements.

CoreWeave is therefore supported by real contracts with some of the largest companies in technology and finance.

It is also exposed to their decisions.

The Warning CoreWeave Gives its Investors

CoreWeave tells investors that its customers may develop services that compete with its own. They may redesign systems so that they require fewer CoreWeave services, decline to renew or expand purchases, build their own infrastructure or adopt a competitor's platform.

It also describes what could happen after capacity has been commissioned.

If customers fail to perform, CoreWeave says it may be left with excess capacity while remaining responsible for equipment, infrastructure, data-centre leases, building work and associated financing for which it receives no corresponding revenue. The company says it does not currently maintain insurance against customer credit risk.

Those are not claims made by opponents of data centres. They are warnings issued by CoreWeave to the people buying its shares and lending it money.

Scottish communities deserve the same candour before permanent infrastructure is organised around the company's expected demand.

Scotland would not automatically inherit CoreWeave's debts if a customer left. Its corporate liabilities would remain with CoreWeave, its subsidiaries, landlords and financiers.

Scotland's exposure is different.

It includes land-use decisions, council resources, grid capacity, substations, road and water infrastructure, skills programmes, the possible displacement or delay of other developments and the opportunity cost of organising public policy around commercial demand that may later change.

Who Owns and Finances CoreWeave

CoreWeave is listed on Nasdaq, but its founders retain control through Class B shares carrying ten votes each.

At 15 April 2026, chief executive Michael Intrator held 38.70 per cent of the company's total voting power. Brian Venturo held 20.30 per cent and Brannin McBee held 14.59 per cent. Directors and executive officers together controlled 72.32 per cent of the vote.

The largest disclosed outside shareholder was a group of funds managed or advised by Magnetar Financial. Those funds held 17.07 per cent of the ordinary Class A shares but 5.34 per cent of total voting power.

NVIDIA held 10.66 per cent of the Class A shares and 3.27 per cent of total voting power. Jane Street held 6.53 per cent of the Class A shares and two per cent of voting power.

NVIDIA occupies an unusually broad position. It is a shareholder, supplier and customer. CoreWeave says all the

graphics processors used in its infrastructure are NVIDIA units because of requirements in its customer contracts. NVIDIA accounted for 17 per cent of CoreWeave's purchases from suppliers in 2025 and bought \$2 billion of additional CoreWeave shares in January 2026.

Jane Street is similarly both an investor and customer. It bought approximately \$1 billion of shares in April.

CoreWeave's debt funding has involved many of the largest institutions in private credit. A \$7.5 billion facility announced in 2024 was led by funds managed by Blackstone, with Magnetar as co-lead investor and participation from Coatue, Carlyle, CDPQ, DigitalBridge Credit, Eldridge, Great Elm and funds or accounts managed by BlackRock. A preceding \$2.3 billion facility was led by Magnetar and Blackstone with participation from several of the same institutions.

Blackstone and BlackRock are separate companies. Blackstone was a lead financier. BlackRock-managed funds participated as lenders. BlackRock is not disclosed as CoreWeave's controlling shareholder.

There is no need to invent a hidden owner. The disclosed structure is serious enough: founder control supported by concentrated customer demand, NVIDIA hardware, hedge-fund investment and tens of billions of dollars in debt and lease obligations.

Government Was Not Merely Waiting for an Application

Scottish Government documents released under freedom of information law show that public bodies were doing more than waiting for CoreWeave and DataVita to enter the ordinary planning process.

A briefing said the government wanted to facilitate the investment and "find a path through" planning and grid-connection problems. DataVita and CoreWeave sought a dedicated taskforce dealing with planning, electricity and coordination between government and industry.

Officials proposed a "Team Scotland" approach involving the Scottish Government, UK Government, North Lanarkshire Council, Scottish Enterprise, ScottishPower Energy Networks and the National Energy System Operator.

Scottish planning officials met CoreWeave to explain the planning system and build confidence in the process. Senior economic officials and the business minister also met company representatives.

The documents record CoreWeave UK general manager Mike Mattacola expressing a wish to move urgently towards another four Scottish data centres after the initial one was established.

He considered Scotland well placed to meet the company's lower-carbon electricity requirements and commercially attractive because grid constraints had created "significant pockets of inexpensive power".

The records do not identify four selected sites. They do not show four planning applications, four completed financial packages or four customers assigned to Scottish facilities.

They show a corporate ambition being discussed at senior levels while public institutions examined how to address the barriers to delivering it.

The Scottish Government cannot lawfully order a council to approve an application. It cannot simply instruct NESO or ScottishPower to put CoreWeave ahead of another applicant. The government documents acknowledge those limits.

They also reveal an imbalance in access.

CoreWeave and DataVita could discuss planning, electricity, investment obstacles and a coordinated delivery structure with ministers, government directors, council executives, economic agencies and network organisations.

Most communities will meet the same programme later, through a planning notice, a public exhibition or a council website.

The Government's Public-good Promise

The Scottish Government's March AI strategy makes its intentions explicit.

It promises to promote Scotland as a centre for green data centres, support delivery of the Lanarkshire Growth Zone, identify further investment and work with potential investors to progress the wider pipeline.

It also says green data centres should gain timely access to renewable electricity and grid infrastructure.

The same strategy promises that infrastructure investment will maximise benefits for the wider good, produce tangible benefits for communities, support domestic capability and be guided by public trust.

The article's criticism is therefore not based on opposition to the government's stated purpose. It asks whether the actions now being taken meet that purpose.

A public-good policy requires more than attracting investment.

It requires Scotland to know who receives the electricity, who pays for the infrastructure, who owns the resulting assets, how many permanent Scottish jobs are contractually secured, whether communities have enforceable benefits and what protection exists if commercial demand changes.

The government has a published policy basis for encouraging data centres. National Planning Framework 4 also gives national-development status to major green data centres, although that status does not grant permission to any particular site.

What Scotland has not received is a single national proposition showing the combined scale of the projects, their electricity and water demand, the companies and customers behind them, the network consequences and the binding public return.

An earlier planning framework is not a blank cheque for an unlimited, undefined pipeline.

No Completed National Assessment

Scotland had no operative national moratorium on hyperscale data centres when this article was checked.

On 18 June, Ross Greer asked First Minister John Swinney to pause new centres above 50MW until Scotland had a national strategy and clearer guidance for councils. Swinney did not agree, defending decision-making by local planning authorities within the existing national framework.

A parliamentary motion lodged the following day called for a national moratorium pending assessment of electricity demand, climate effects, air quality and domestic electricity bills. It noted estimates that the known pipeline could require at least 6,000MW. A standard parliamentary motion is a political call rather than a legal prohibition.

On 24 June, Climate Action Secretary Gillian Martin told Parliament that the Scottish Government had not undertaken a wholly national assessment and was not conducting a formal cumulative assessment. She said

the government was working with industry, councils, NESO, SEPA and Scottish Water to improve its understanding while applications continued to be considered individually.

The government has promised guidance on what should count as a green data centre.

The sequence is difficult to defend as orderly national planning. Applications are advancing, investor barriers are being addressed and electricity access is being discussed while the government is still developing the guidance and cumulative understanding needed to assess the industry as a whole.

The Grid Warning

Supporters of Scottish data-centre development argue that the facilities can consume renewable electricity that would otherwise be curtailed.

That may be true for a properly located and sufficiently flexible centre after it has been connected.

The government's own papers show that obtaining the connection may create a different problem.

ScottishPower Energy Networks advised that projects considered critical to the UK's Clean Power 2030 programme could potentially be delayed to accommodate a data-centre request, even if a regulatory process existed to prioritise it.

The reason is physical as well as commercial.

Data centres and renewable generators may require the same scarce transformers, cables, substations, switchgear, engineering teams and manufacturing slots. A centre might eventually consume electricity that would otherwise be constrained while first competing for the infrastructure needed to connect new generation, industry or housing.

The Scottish public therefore needs a project-level account.

For each centre, that should identify the connection point, demand, connection date, new network works, responsibility for costs, backup requirements, private-wire arrangements and any other connection that could be delayed.

No single Scottish public register currently brings that information together.

Cheap Electricity for Whom?

DataVita says its proposed Lanarkshire energy parks would supply more than 1GW of renewable generation directly to data centres through private wires.

The company says the arrangement could provide electricity below 10p per kilowatt-hour by reducing exposure to public-network, balancing and policy charges. Those are developer projections rather than a published final tariff independently verified by the regulator.

The relevant public question is not whether a private-wire arrangement might be commercially efficient.

It is who receives the lower-cost electricity, which charges are avoided, which costs remain in the public network and whether households, Scottish manufacturers and public services receive any comparable benefit from the country's renewable resources.

The public grid would still be needed for resilience when private generation was unavailable or insufficient.

Jobs, Water and Community Promises

The UK Government says the Lanarkshire Growth Zone could produce more than 3,400 jobs, including 50 apprenticeships, and a community fund worth up to £543 million over 15 years.

The full fund does not presently exist as a pot of cash. Its value depends on the proposed capacity being delivered over time. The job and investment estimates were supplied by DataVita and remain dependent on planning and project delivery.

Internal records show officials were still considering what additional benefits should be secured, including access to computing capacity for universities and the wider Scottish technology sector. North Lanarkshire Council was increasing planning, building-standards and environmental staffing “at risk” and considering changes to education provision in anticipation of future employment.

Water questions were also unresolved.

The due-diligence work referred to a closed reservoir about three kilometres from one proposed site. Scottish Water said further work was required to establish how much water could be taken without environmental harm and whether drainage or other network upgrades would be needed.

None of this establishes that the benefits will not materialise.

It establishes that Scotland was presented with the headline totals before every underlying commitment, cost and environmental solution had been completed and published.

Scotland’s Current Data-centre Register

The following register covers the publicly identified hyperscale proposals, substantial expansions and named development prospects found by Modern Scot. It does not include every existing telecommunications room, university computing facility or ordinary commercial colocation site.

Capacities are proposed figures and do not represent actual consumption unless a centre is built and operating.

Lanarkshire

DataVita Fortis and the AI Growth Zone, Chapelhall and Airdrie: DataVita operates an existing facility and is the Scottish partner named alongside CoreWeave. The wider Growth Zone has government designation but remains subject to planning and regulatory approval. The original government assessment referred to sites in North and South Lanarkshire, while later announcements concentrated on North Lanarkshire.

Fortis extension: A separate DataVita development is associated with application 25/00150/FUL and a stated capacity of 40MW.

Ravensraig: Apatura proposes a 550MW campus. Environmental screening and pre-application consultation have taken place. No anchor cloud customer has been publicly identified.

Drumshangie, Greengairs: Apatura’s stated 500MW proposal remains at pre-application stage.

Aurelius, Newhouse: ILI Group proposes a 400MW centre as part of its Stoics network. It remains at pre-application stage, with no named ultimate operator or customer.

South Lanridge: DataVita or HFD-related material has referred to a proposed 500MW project. Its precise planning status and relationship to the wider Growth Zone require clearer public confirmation.

Haspielaw, South Lanarkshire: An Apatura proposal has entered environmental screening. Its final capacity and eventual operator remain undisclosed.

North Lanarkshire remains the densest identified Scottish cluster.

Fife

Cato, Auchtertool: ILI Cato Ltd submitted application 26/01243/PPP for planning permission in principle for a 600MW data-centre campus. The proposal includes data halls, substations, roads, plant, drainage, security and landscaping. A separate request for a ministerial environmental-impact screening direction was received in June. No eventual computing operator or anchor customer has been named.

Longannet: The former power-station site has been marketed as a possible data-centre location. Modern Scot has not identified a current hyperscale application and classifies it as an opportunity site.

Falkirk

Larbert, Glenbervie Business Park: Apatura submitted full application P/26/0237/FUL for a 300MW AI data centre. The application was awaiting decision when checked. No anchor customer has been publicly identified.

Jawcraig: A possible 180MW demand connection has appeared in electricity connection material, but no corresponding public hyperscale planning application has been verified.

Edinburgh

South Gyle: Shelborn Drummond's proposal was refused by the City of Edinburgh Council on 9 February. The company appealed on 31 March. The appeal remained with a Scottish Government reporter, with a target date of 18 August.

Wester Hermiston: Apatura's stated 200MW proposal has entered environmental screening and pre-application consultation. No final permission or anchor customer has been identified.

Edinburgh BioQuarter: This appears in investment material as an opportunity location rather than a verified hyperscale application.

Ayrshire

Rufus, Hurlford: ILI Group proposes a 540MW centre in East Ayrshire. It remains at pre-application stage and forms part of the developer's Stoics network.

Creoch, Ochiltree: Apatura's stated 200MW proposal has entered environmental screening.

Hunterston: Eneus Energy has promoted a data-centre and energy development associated with substantial battery storage. The centre's ultimate capacity, operator, customer and construction finance have not been publicly established.

Irvine: AI Pathfinder has been linked to a possible 1,000MW project, but the proposal had not entered formal planning when the public map was checked.

Tournament Park: This remains an opportunity site rather than a live application.

East Dunbartonshire

Westerhill, Bishopbriggs: Apatura proposes a 300MW campus. Consultation and environmental work have taken place, but no final permission or named customer has been identified.

Scottish Borders

Coldstream: Apatura proposes a 300MW centre. It has entered environmental screening but has not received final planning permission.

Southside, Longformacus: Sunlaws Development Company submitted proposal-of-application notice 26/00809/PAN. Public consultation is under way for a proposed centre west of Duns. A full application had not been submitted when checked.

West Lothian

West Calder or Freeport: Apatura's stated 250MW proposal remains at pre-application stage. No ultimate customer has been named.

Delta M8 Distribution Park, Eliburn and the former Freeport Leisure Village have appeared separately as opportunity locations.

Argyll and Bute

Killeen: Argyll Development has named American AI company SambaNova as a technology partner. Public descriptions have ranged from an initial 100MW to 600MW and much larger eventual ambitions. Those figures remain promoter aspirations rather than proof of a financed and consented physical campus.

East Lothian

Dunbar: Thistle Sands Data Ltd has been linked to a 62.5-hectare site. The proposed capacity, customer and complete financing package remain undisclosed.

Cockenzie: Data-centre use has been considered in connection with the former power-station land. No current hyperscale application with a confirmed capacity has been verified.

Dumfries and Galloway

Chapelcross: The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and CX Power have been linked to a possible 1,000MW development. The project remained outside formal planning when checked.

Castle Kennedy Airfield, Peelhouses Farm and the University of the West of Scotland's Dumfries campus have appeared as possible opportunity sites.

Inverclyde

Former IBM site, Greenock: Slate Islands Development has promoted redevelopment involving a data centre and battery infrastructure. The eventual operator, customer and financing remain undisclosed.

Aberdeenshire

Blackdog: Ashfield Land and TechRE are promoting a large campus north of Aberdeen, with a stated first phase of 600MW and larger long-term ambitions. No ultimate cloud operator or anchor customer has been named publicly.

Other named connection prospects

Five additional possible data-centre demand entries have appeared in electricity connection records without a clearly matched public planning project: Clydebridge at 360MW, Edzell at 800MW, Inchinnan at 180MW, Jawcraig at 180MW and Easterhouse at 500MW.

A grid connection entry is not planning permission. It does not prove that land, financing, a tenant or a construction programme exists.

Opportunity sites are not projects

Further Scottish locations have been advertised or assessed as potentially suitable for data centres, including Dounreay, MeyGen, Fearn Airfield, Ardersier, Forss, Fort William, Inverness Airport Business Park, Inverness Campus, Kinlochleven, Norfrost, Sullom Voe, Hillington, Claverhouse, Perth Eco Innovation Park, Bandeath, Kildean, Eurocentral, Gartcosh and Maxim.

They should not be counted as approved or committed data centres. They are evidence that Scotland is being marketed for further development.

What Scotland should require

Scotland does not have to reject every data centre to protect itself.

It does need to stop treating private demand forecasts as though they were permanent public guarantees.

Every major application should disclose the legal applicant, controlling owner, intended operator, anchor customers, equity investors, principal lenders and the company carrying the construction risk.

The public should be told whether the centre is speculative or supported by signed customer commitments, how long those commitments last, whether the building can be adapted for another operator and what happens if the original customer leaves.

Employment figures should distinguish temporary construction work from permanent jobs. Scottish jobs should be separated from UK-wide estimates. Aspirations should be separated from enforceable commitments.

Every project should publish its electricity demand, connection point, connection status, private-wire arrangements, backup generation, required network works and responsibility for each cost. It should identify whether another connection could be delayed.

Community funds should be supported by published legal agreements. Heat-reuse claims should identify a real customer able to use the heat. Water claims should cover cooling, construction, fire protection, drainage and normal operations.

Large permissions should be phased against demonstrated demand. Developers should provide evidence of

financing before occupying scarce land and grid capacity. Restoration, completion and closure provisions should be settled before construction begins.

CoreWeave already explains customer concentration, technological change, debt, excess capacity and non-performance risk to its investors.

Scotland deserves no lower standard.

EDITORS NOTE: Given the volatility of the artificial intelligence sector, Scotland would be wiser to strengthen the industries that provide lasting employment, essential goods and genuine economic resilience: farming, fishing, food production, forestry, manufacturing, engineering, construction, energy, transport, tourism, textiles, shipbuilding, whisky and the creative industries. Data centres may form part of a balanced economy, but they should not be allowed to consume disproportionate amounts of electricity, water, land and public infrastructure while tying Scotland's financial future to speculative demand from a small number of heavily financed technology companies. If the AI investment boom proves to be a bubble, Scotland should not be left with stranded industrial sites, expensive grid commitments and weakened traditional industries after the investors have departed.

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INFRASTRUCTURE | 17 July 2026

SaxaVord Reaches Launch Point

Read online: <https://modern.scot/saxavord-reaches-launch-point/>

SaxaVord has reached a pivotal launch point, prompting Unst to critically assess the potential gains, restrictions, and risks associated with the ambitious project. As Shetland eyes the space industry, local stakeholders are weighing the economic benefits against environmental and logistical challenges. The community's future hangs in the balance as discussions unfold, highlighting the intersection of innovation and sustainability in this remote yet strategic location.

After nearly a decade of planning, construction and delayed launch dates, SaxaVord Spaceport is preparing for a possible test flight from Unst. The project has brought jobs, investment and strategic importance to the island. It has also introduced road controls, maritime exclusion areas, public expenditure and unresolved questions for fishing, tourism and the wider community.

SaxaVord Spaceport is preparing for a possible test flight from Unst during a five-week launch window beginning on 10 August. If an attempt is confirmed, temporary controls will apply to roads, surrounding waters and airspace, with some residents using vehicle passes to move through the traffic-management area.

The controls will apply only if a rocket launch attempt is confirmed. They are intended to distinguish local vehicles from visitors, rather than prevent residents from making ordinary journeys. They will operate for a four-hour period, with at least 24 hours' notice, on specified Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays during a five-week window beginning on 10 August.

The first launch will begin to show whether the economic benefits forecast for Unst can be delivered alongside the practical restrictions, environmental controls and demands on existing industries that accompany commercial spaceflight.

Why the spaceport is on Unst

Lamba Ness lies at the north-eastern end of Unst, close to the settlement of Skaw. Its position provides a relatively clear route north over the sea, allowing rockets to reach polar and sun-synchronous orbits without flying over large centres of population.

The geography had strategic value long before the arrival of commercial spaceflight. Lamba Ness contains the remains of RAF Skaw, a Second World War Chain Home radar station. Historic Environment Scotland describes it as the northernmost station in the Chain Home network and an important part of the wartime defence of the United Kingdom.



Photo courtesy of SaxaVord.

The later RAF Saxa Vord radar station remained a major presence on Unst during the Cold War. Its closure in 2006 removed employment and families from an island with a population now estimated at roughly 600. The Ministry of Defence subsequently restored a remote radar capability, but the economic activity associated with the original staffed station did not return on the same scale.

Entrepreneur and former RAF officer Frank Strang acquired the former RAF domestic site after the closure. His original plans centred on accommodation, tourism and other commercial uses.

The direction changed after studies identified Shetland as a strong location for small-satellite launches. In 2017, Strang, former RAF Tornado pilot Scott Hammond and Debbie Strang began assembling what became Shetland Space Centre Limited.

Frank Strang led the effort to secure investment, government engagement and regulatory approval. Hammond concentrated on trajectories, rocket assessment, operating procedures and the physical development of the site. Debbie Strang brought experience in RAF logistics, tourism and economic development.

Strang died from cancer in August 2025 at the age of 67. Hammond succeeded him as chief executive, while Debbie Strang remains chief operating officer and co-founder.

What has been built

SaxaVord currently has one operational launch complex, occupied exclusively by the German company Rocket Factory Augsburg, known as RFA. The complex includes a launch pad, integration hangar, tracking equipment, telemetry systems and a flight-termination capability.

Two further launch complexes remain under development. SaxaVord says the completed spaceport will be capable of supporting as many as 30 orbital and suborbital launches each year. That is its intended maximum capacity, rather than a confirmed annual launch programme.

The UK Space Agency reported on 14 July 2026 that mission control, telemetry, tracking systems and site security had been completed. RFA delivered the first and second stages of its replacement RFA One vehicle to SaxaVord earlier this year, following further testing and redesign work after a serious accident in 2024.

SaxaVord became the first British spaceport licensed for vertical orbital launches in December 2023. It later received a range-control licence, allowing it to clear and supervise safety zones and monitor rockets during flight.

RFA received its launch-operator licence in January 2025. Skyrora received a separate licence in July 2025. These licences establish the legal and regulatory framework for launches but do not guarantee that a flight will take place or succeed. Operators must continue to meet conditions concerning safety, insurance, international agreements, communications and marine licensing.

Ownership has changed since the project began

Shetland Space Centre Limited remains the legal operator of SaxaVord.

Companies House records Wild Ventures Limited as its only active person with significant control. Wild Ventures owns more than 50 per cent but less than 75 per cent of the shares.

Wild Ventures is part of the investment interests associated with Danish businessman Anders Holch Povlsen, whose wider Scottish businesses include land, tourism, property and conservation interests.

The available register does not show every smaller shareholding because Companies House reporting rules identify only those meeting the relevant control thresholds. It does establish that majority control rests with an investment company based outside Shetland.

SaxaVord therefore remains a project conceived and developed by its founding team, employing people and contractors in Shetland, while majority corporate control lies outside the islands.

There is no publicly disclosed Unst community shareholding, guaranteed local percentage of launch revenue or formal community right to participate in company decisions. That does not rule out private agreements or future arrangements, but none is identified in the principal ownership, planning and licensing records examined for this article.

The planning decision changed Lamba Ness

The main planning application was submitted to Shetland Islands Council in January 2021. It covered three launch complexes, satellite tracking equipment, assembly and integration buildings, roads, fencing and supporting infrastructure.

The proposal affected the nationally protected remains of RAF Skaw. Historic Environment Scotland initially refused scheduled monument consent because of the damage the original design would cause. Contemporary records indicated that several surviving structures would have been removed.

After revisions and further discussion, Historic Environment Scotland concluded that the public benefits were sufficient to outweigh the remaining effect on the monument. Revised scheduled monument consent was granted with conditions in February 2022. Shetland Islands Council subsequently granted planning permission.

The planning permission contained 29 conditions covering noise, lighting, peat, drainage, pollution, otters, birds, traffic, visitors, restoration and eventual decommissioning.

Launches and static-fire tests are restricted during part of the seabird breeding season. Monitoring is required before, during and after operations, with further mitigation possible if adverse effects are identified.

The conditions also anticipated a reduction in public access. One required an Access Management Plan addressing the “loss of unrestricted access to parts of the development site”.

The restriction was therefore recognised when the development was approved. Parts of Lamba Ness that were formerly crossed or visited without industrial controls are now occupied by fencing, launch equipment and safety systems.

This has not abolished Scotland’s general right of responsible access across Unst, nor is there evidence that

community-owned land was confiscated. It has changed the practical use of part of the peninsula and placed access close to the launch site under industrial and public-safety controls.

What Unst has gained

The economic case for SaxaVord is substantial for an island of Unst's size.

Promote Shetland reports that SaxaVord employs more than 80 people across its Unst site and other Shetland bases. Local construction, transport, engineering, plant-hire and supply companies have also received work.

Forecasts suggest that a fully operating space sector could support approximately 139 jobs in Unst and 209 across Shetland, including direct, indirect and induced employment. Those projections include work beyond the spaceport itself, such as hospitality, logistics and supporting services.

Forecast employment should not be confused with permanent jobs already in place. Its eventual scale will depend upon how frequently rockets launch, how many operators remain commercially viable and how much expenditure is retained within Shetland.

The development has also created technical and educational opportunities that did not previously exist on the island. SaxaVord has supported school activities, space-related training and local recruitment into engineering and operational roles.

For Unst, the attraction is not merely the total number of jobs. A functioning spaceport could provide skilled employment capable of retaining younger residents, bringing families to the island and broadening an economy otherwise dependent on a small number of sectors.

The same growth could increase pressure on housing, ferries and local services. Rotational workers housed temporarily on the island would produce a different economic effect from permanent employees settling with families. These outcomes cannot yet be measured because regular launch operations have not begun.

Public money and private risk

SaxaVord has been developed through substantial private investment. Its investors have carried considerable financial and commercial risk.

It has also received direct public support.

The UK Government announced £10 million for SaxaVord in the March 2024 Budget, initially subject to due diligence. The UK Space Agency later described the money as an investment towards the further development of spaceport infrastructure.

Separate awards have supported RFA and equipment used at the site. The UK Space Agency provided £3 million to construct the RFA launch mount and a further £1 million towards rebuilding it after the 2024 accident. RFA UK also received £3.5 million through the European Space Agency's Boost! programme for launch technology, equipment and preparations.

These sums should not all be described as unrestricted payments to SaxaVord. Some were awarded to launch companies or for specified infrastructure and programmes. Together, they show that SaxaVord's progress forms part of a publicly supported UK strategy to establish domestic access to space.

The spaceport remains commercially unproven.

Accounts for 2024 reported revenue of approximately £2.5 million and a pre-tax loss of £5.4 million, compared with a £5.1 million loss during 2023. The directors described the company as remaining in the build phase and seeking further capital to complete infrastructure and support operating costs.

Delays and changes to launch plans

No orbital rocket has launched from SaxaVord as of 17 July 2026.

Several earlier dates and launch arrangements did not proceed. HyImpulse moved its first SR75 suborbital test to Australia, although it has since agreed that a later SR75 flight will use SaxaVord.

ABL Space Systems had been selected by Lockheed Martin to provide the RS1 rocket for the UK Pathfinder mission from SaxaVord. The company withdrew from the commercial launch market in November 2024 after two major failures at the Pacific Spaceport Complex–Alaska on Kodiak Island.

Its first RS1 rocket fell back onto the launch pad shortly after lift-off in January 2023. Alaska's environmental regulator recorded the release of at least 5,200 gallons of aviation fuel to land, while subsequent local reporting put the quantity above 6,000 gallons. Contaminated soil was excavated and transported from Kodiak to the Lower 48 for disposal. The environmental case remained open until April 2024.

A second flight vehicle was destroyed during a static-fire test at Kodiak in July 2024. State records list a further release of 1,800 gallons of aviation fuel and two gallons of hydraulic oil to land. The final cleanup report was submitted in February 2025 and the case was closed in May.

Four months after the second accident, ABL announced that it would leave the commercial satellite-launch market and concentrate on missile-defence technology. The company cited reduced opportunities in commercial launch and growing national-security demand rather than identifying the accidents as the sole reason for its decision. The loss of ABL nevertheless ended the original plan for its RS1 vehicle to conduct the UK Pathfinder launch from Unst.

Orbex moved its intended first launches from Sutherland to SaxaVord before entering administration in February 2026.

The UK Space Agency's latest annual report acknowledges Orbex's collapse while recording that the first and second RFA stages are now in the United Kingdom and that preparations continue for a 2026 flight.

RFA's previous launch vehicle was destroyed during a static-fire test at SaxaVord on 19 August 2024. The test area had been cleared and nobody was injured, but the fire damaged the launch mount and delayed the programme.

RFA says the causes have been understood and addressed. A new first stage was built and tested in Germany, while engines and other systems have undergone further work in Germany and Sweden.

The proposed August flight is a test mission. Failure remains a recognised possibility in the development of a new launch vehicle. The CAA's own guidance states that spaceflight can never be made completely safe and that launch failures remain sufficiently likely for extensive exclusion and emergency arrangements to be required.

Roads, visitors and ordinary movement

The five-week launch window beginning on 10 August does not mean five weeks of continuous closures.

A launch may be attempted only on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday between 4pm and 8pm. SaxaVord says residents and visitors will receive at least 24 hours' notice, although technical or weather conditions may cause postponement at shorter notice.

During a confirmed attempt, a launch exclusion zone will operate around the spaceport. Temporary traffic orders will support a visitor-management plan in northern Unst. Some residents have been invited to apply for vehicle passes so that they can move through those controls without being treated as launch visitors.

Separate viewing passes will allow a maximum of 600 people into an authorised viewing area, with Unst residents given first access. The launch will also be livestreamed. SaxaVord has discouraged people from travelling to Unst solely to see the test flight because a launch may be cancelled.

The traffic arrangements are safety and visitor-control measures rather than a transfer of public roads to the spaceport. Their operation will nevertheless affect ordinary movement during an attempt.

Unst's single-track road system, limited accommodation and reliance on ferries leave little spare capacity for a sudden influx of spectators. The first attempt will show whether the agreed management plan can prevent launch tourism from disrupting residents and other visitors.

The unresolved dispute at sea

The most substantial outstanding disagreement concerns fishing and the marine environment.

RFA's marine-licence documents state that the rocket's first stage and payload fairing are expected to fall into the sea north of Shetland. The hazard and warning areas extend towards waters east of Iceland and Jan Mayen.

The components are expected to sink. No recovery operation is planned. RFA argues that retrieval would be costly and hazardous and that maritime activity is low relative to the size of the warning area.

Its assessment also acknowledges that the fairing could fragment during descent and that fishing activity increases during seasonal mackerel and herring fisheries.



The Radiance (LK 101), a shellfish boat built in 1968 by A Noble and Sons Ltd, Girvan. Photo by John-Arthur Robertson courtesy of the Shetland Fishermen's Association.

The fishing industry's concern is broader than the statistical probability of a falling component striking a vessel. Material on the seabed could snag trawled gear, while exclusion areas may prevent vessels from working during launch periods.

The Shetland Fishermen's Association said in October 2025 that no compensation arrangement had been agreed for fishing days lost through launch restrictions. It also raised concerns about debris damaging equipment.



The Copious (LK 985), a whitefish trawler built in 2022 by Tehnomont shipyard. Photo by Ivan Reid courtesy of the Shetland Fishermen's Association.

In July 2026, SaxaVord chief executive Scott Hammond said damage caused by launch debris would be covered through the launching state and the operator's insurance. The handling of such a claim has not been tested by an actual launch from Unst.

The operator and fishing industry are therefore measuring different forms of risk. RFA assesses probability across a warning area of more than 100,000 square nautical miles. Fishermen are concerned with the practical effect of a submerged object entering a particular working ground or net.

The marine licence, launch notices, debris tracking and any compensation claims will determine how those risks are managed in practice.

Tourism may gain and lose

The Shetland Tourist Association has said it was not adequately consulted during the licensing process and has raised concerns about public safety and disruption to tourism.

SaxaVord rejects the suggestion that visitors will face an unacceptable danger. Hammond says exclusion zones are designed to keep third parties outside hazardous areas and argues that launches could attract additional visitors to Shetland.

Both effects may occur. Spaceflight could generate publicity, specialist tourism and accommodation bookings. A broad launch window could also bring congestion and disappointed visitors where a flight is cancelled.

The first launch season will provide evidence of whether interest in SaxaVord adds to Shetland's visitor economy or places pressure on an already constrained summer transport and accommodation system.

What the first launch will establish

SaxaVord has achieved something no other British site has yet completed. It has created jobs, brought construction and supply work to Shetland and attracted private and public investment to Unst.

It has also altered access at Lamba Ness, introduced temporary controls over roads, sea and airspace, and created new questions for fisheries, tourism and public accountability.

None of these facts alone determines whether the development is good or bad for Unst.

The first flight will begin replacing forecasts with measurable evidence. The years that follow will provide the larger answer. The spaceport has already changed Lamba Ness. What remains unknown is whether the industry built there can operate reliably while retaining the confidence of the community.

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TEA WITH GUNNS | 18 July 2026

Mrs Gunn and the Postie Apocalypse

Read online: <https://modern.scot/postie-apocalypse-mrs-gunn/>



At eleven minutes past two, my mobile informed me that a parcel had been delivered.

This was encouraging, as I had been at home all afternoon and had heard neither a van nor a knock at the door. The animals had heard nothing either, and they can hear a food packet being opened in another room through two closed doors and a running washing machine.

The message included a photograph.

It showed a cardboard box beneath something green.

The green object might have been a plant pot. It might also have been a wheelie bin, a hedge or a small shrub in another county. The image had the murky confidence of surveillance footage shown during an appeal for witnesses.

The parcel was described as having been left in a safe place.

I put on my coat.

The parcel contained curtain hooks. They cost £4.89 and had already travelled farther than I had this year. According to the tracking history, they had left a warehouse, passed through four distribution centres, crossed several local authority boundaries and reached the Highlands before disappearing into what the courier considered a safe place.

I checked the front step, although I had already seen the front step several times that afternoon. I checked the back door, the shed, the coal bunker and the space behind the recycling bin where delivery drivers occasionally place items with the solemnity of men concealing state papers.

There was nothing.

My husband suggested checking the neighbour's house.

I asked which neighbour.

He said the one with the similar house.

This did not narrow matters appreciably. Half the Highlands consists of similar houses separated by several miles, a cattle grid and a historical disagreement about access rights.

I began with the nearest cottage.

There was no parcel on the steps, but there was a pair of wellington boots, a folded feed sack and a small wooden stool which had not appeared in the delivery photograph. I moved on.

Rural delivery is not easy, and I have some sympathy for those required to perform it. Houses have names rather than numbers. Postcodes can cover areas of considerable ambition. Roads become tracks, tracks become gateways and gateways occasionally lead to fields in which no human being has conducted business since 1987.

Satellite navigation is not always helpful. One driver once phoned to say that his map had brought him to a burn. He sounded as though he believed this was my fault.

Another arrived from the opposite direction after following a forestry road and appeared at the gate looking less like a courier than the survivor of a minor expedition. I gave him tea.

I do not expect perfection. I expect only that the word “delivered” should retain some connection with the arrival of the object.

Modern commerce has developed a more flexible interpretation.

There was a time when the postman knew the name of every house, the inhabitants, the dog and, quite often, who had fallen out with whom. A letter addressed only to “Mrs Mackenzie, near the old bridge” stood a reasonable chance of arriving before lunch.

Today, a parcel supplied with a full postcode, satellite coordinates, a mobile phone number and live tracking can be placed in a hidden spot and declared successfully delivered.

We have gained satellites and lost the ability to find a front door.

The old postman’s knowledge was informal, human and difficult to enter on a spreadsheet. He knew which track remained passable after rain, which gate led to which cottage and where an elderly resident lived alone.

Modern systems possess considerably more data, but data is not the same as knowing where somebody is.

A parcel may now be delivered to a doorstep, a neighbour, an outbuilding, a hedge, a shed or a location described simply as “other”. Once it has been scanned and photographed, it enters the realm of administrative truth.

The parcel is no longer missing. The customer is merely unable to locate it. This distinction appears to matter greatly to computer systems.

The tracking page showed a green tick beside the word “Delivered”. The company had evidence that its work was complete. Somewhere, a dashboard had improved. A target had been met. A small box had turned the correct colour.

Only the curtain hooks remained unresolved.

This is not confined to parcels.

More and more of modern life is measured by recording an action rather than confirming an outcome. The system can prove that it has done something. The citizen is left to discover whether anything has actually happened.

The receipt has begun to replace the result.

A referral may exist without an appointment. A repair may be scheduled without a date. A fault may be closed because someone has updated the record. A complaint may be resolved on the system while remaining entirely unresolved in the life of the person who made it.

Every institution possesses a dashboard showing progress.

Every kitchen table possesses somebody trying to work out where the progress went.

In rural places, the gap between the recorded outcome and the actual one is often concealed by people quietly correcting it.

Someone recognises the steps in the photograph.

Someone knows the delivery driver.

Someone telephones a cousin three glens away.

Someone puts the parcel in the car and finishes the journey.

The error disappears because the community repairs it before it becomes visible to the organisation that made it. This is usually called resilience. Rural resilience is often admired most warmly by those who benefit from it being free.

A delivery company can use fewer drivers, tighter schedules and automated routes because it knows, although it may never say so, that people in small communities will complete the final stage among themselves.

A parcel left at the wrong cottage will probably reach the right one.

An elderly neighbour's shopping will be brought in.

A prescription will be collected by whoever is already going into town.

A stranded motorist will be found by someone with a tow rope, a flask and no official role whatsoever.

Neighbourliness is one of the finest things about rural life.

It is also becoming an increasingly useful item in other people's business models.

The delivery charge remains commercial.

The last mile becomes voluntary work.

After several calls and a closer study of the photograph, I recognised a green container beside a door and a strip of roughcast wall.

The parcel was sitting beneath a plant pot outside a building that had been empty for more than ten years.

It was 4.5 miles from my home.

The company later emailed to ask how satisfied I was with the delivery.

There were five stars available. I gave it four. The safe place had been extremely hard to guess.