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Distinctly Scottish



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CONTENTS

Modern Scot - 20/08/2026

POLICY AND GOVERNMENT

Scotland Declined £20,675 to Restore Five Drug-Wastewater Monitoring Sites	1
--	---

ENVIRONMENT

SEPA Plans to Stop Sending Draft Pollution Permit Decisions to People Who Object	4
--	---

COMMUNITY

DataVita's North Lanarkshire AI plan gets public backing as Flynn repeats disputed 3,400 jobs claim	6
---	---

POLICY AND GOVERNMENT

ScotAccount Brings Digital Identity Into Scotland's Property Ownership System	11
---	----

ECONOMY

Ferguson Marine faces 70 Job Losses While Four Vessel Contracts Remain Unsigned	16
---	----

INFRASTRUCTURE

More Than 1,000 Customers Connected to GoFibre Network Around Eyemouth	19
--	----

INFRASTRUCTURE

China Is Making the Renminbi Easier to Use in Europe — What It Could Mean for Scotland	22
--	----

POLICY AND GOVERNMENT

Scotland, Rebuilt: What 81 Years of Progress Did, and Did Not, Solve	28
--	----

POLICY AND GOVERNMENT

Britain Will Keep Brazilian Meat Market Open as EU Restrictions Begin	47
---	----

ENVIRONMENT

NatureScot Challenges Wind-Farm Bird Model as Scotland's Own Records Show 71 Raptor Deaths	52
--	----

ECONOMY

Bluetongue Reaches Four Scottish Premises as Vaccine Evidence Sharpens the Questions Ahead	58
--	----

ENERGY

Two Scottish Hydro Schemes Fall Below Ofgem Financial Test as Regulator Weighs Consumer Risk	62
--	----

HERITAGE AND ARTS

Mackintosh's Hill House Moves Towards New 'Breathable' Exterior After 120 Years of Damp	65
---	----

ECONOMY

Nearly One in Four Larger Manufacturers in Scotland Reports Impact From US Tariffs	68
--	----

POLICY AND GOVERNMENT

NHS Scotland Seeks Provider for £9m Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Service	73
--	----

INFRASTRUCTURE

Nearly £1bn of Glasgow Building Work Passes Through Service Missing National Response Targets	78
---	----

TRANSPORT

ScotRail's £83.8m Retail Contract Comes Into View After Troubled App Launch	81
---	----

TEA WITH GUNNS

Nobody Move: He's Calling Edinburgh	83
-------------------------------------	----

POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 20 August 2026

Scotland Declined £20,675 to Restore Five Drug-Wastewater Monitoring Sites

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotland-declined-20675-to-restore-five-drug-wastewater-monitoring-sites/>



Internal records show the Scottish Government was offered the chance to return five sites to a UK drug-monitoring programme after Home Office funding was cut. Officials said the cost was affordable but advised against paying it.

The Scottish Government declined to spend £20,675 to restore five wastewater sites used to monitor illicit-drug consumption, despite officials describing the cost as affordable.

The decision was taken by Drugs and Alcohol Policy

Minister Maree Todd in February after the Home Office removed all eight Scottish sites from its Wastewater Analysis for Narcotics Detection programme, or WAND, because of budget pressures.

The Home Office later secured funding for another sampling cycle between late January and March and offered to put five Scottish sites back into the programme if the Scottish Government met the £20,675 cost.

An internal submission to Todd said restoring the sites would provide further information about drug-consumption patterns in Scotland and more evidence about the possible future uses of wastewater surveillance.

Officials described the requested funding as "relatively small" and said it was affordable from the Scottish Government's budget for responding to synthetic drugs.

They nevertheless recommended that it should not be paid. Todd accepted that recommendation.

The decision did not cause the original removal of the Scottish sites. That was a Home Office decision. But it meant Scotland did not return to the programme when the opportunity arose.

A Scottish Government Freedom of Information response published on 13 August says it is now not undertaking, supporting, funding or considering wastewater monitoring relating to illicit drugs or psychoactive substances. It also says the Government is unaware of any such testing currently operating elsewhere in Scotland.

WAND has operated since 2021 by testing untreated wastewater for traces of drugs and their metabolites. The system does not identify individual users, but can provide estimates of drug consumption across large populations.

By its third phase, the programme covered 50 wastewater-treatment sites in England and Scotland. Its Scottish sites served catchments representing about 46 per cent of Scotland's population.

Home Office analysis found differences in drug use between locations, with Scottish sites among those recording comparatively high estimated consumption of cocaine and heroin.

There are, however, important limits to what wastewater analysis can show.

Public Health Scotland concluded last year that its additional value to existing Scottish drug surveillance was uncertain. Scotland already receives information through post-mortem toxicology, hospital testing and other sources feeding into its Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response system, known as RADAR.

Wastewater testing can also struggle with some emerging synthetic drugs because they may be consumed in extremely small quantities. The Home Office has cautioned that failing to find nitazenes in wastewater does not prove that they are absent.

PHS therefore recommended that wastewater epidemiology for psychoactive substances should not be progressed as a public-health surveillance priority. The National Drug Deaths Incident Management Team accepted the recommendation.

That position contrasts with some earlier assessments.

In 2023, Scottish officials recommended participation in the Home Office programme, saying wastewater analysis could help identify changing drug habits and new substances and could complement existing surveillance.

Research commissioned by Scottish Water, with support from PHS, also concluded in April 2025 that wastewater monitoring was feasible in Scotland and recommended pilot testing.

The internal papers show that the Government expected the question to be reconsidered in mid to late 2027.

The decision comes against a changing drug picture.

National Records of Scotland recorded 1,017 drug-misuse deaths in 2024, down 13 per cent from the previous year and the lowest total since 2017. Nitazenes were implicated in 76 deaths, more than three times the number recorded in 2023, although officials have cautioned that testing for the substances was previously limited.

The latest Public Health Scotland RADAR report recorded 320 suspected drug deaths between March and May 2026. Drug-related emergency-department attendances rose 19 per cent compared with the previous three months.

Nitazene-type opioids were detected in 13 per cent of deaths between January and March in which a controlled drug was found.

Those figures do not establish that continued wastewater monitoring would have detected dangerous substances earlier or prevented deaths.

The issue disclosed by the Government papers is more limited: Scotland had an opportunity to retain a population-level source of drug intelligence for a further sampling cycle at a cost officials considered affordable, but concluded that its additional public-health value did not justify the expenditure.

There are currently no known Scottish sites undertaking wastewater surveillance for illicit drugs.

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ENVIRONMENT | 19 August 2026

SEPA Plans to Stop Sending Draft Pollution Permit Decisions to People Who Object

Read online: <https://modern.scot/sepa-plans-to-stop-sending-draft-pollution-permit-decisions-to-people-who-object/>



Scotland's environmental regulator is proposing to stop routinely sending draft permit decisions to people who have already objected to or commented on applications involving waste, water and industrial activities.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is consulting on changes to its Public Participation Statement, with responses due by 24 August.

At present, people who submit representations during a

permit consultation can be contacted again with information about SEPA's draft permit and draft decision.

SEPA is proposing to remove that routine step.

Under the proposed system, information about final decisions would instead be made available through SEPA's Consultation Hub or Public Register. In most cases, there would be no further consultation on a draft decision before it was finalised.

The change would apply across environmental authorisations covering activities including waste management, water use and industrial operations.

SEPA says the proposal follows changes to the law which removed an earlier third-party call-in procedure. It says the current wording of its guidance no longer reflects the legal process.

The regulator is therefore asking whether the requirement to contact everyone who responded to a permit consultation should be removed.

The proposal does not end public consultation on environmental permits.

People would still be able to submit representations when an application is first consulted upon.

Certain industrial emissions applications would also continue to be subject to a statutory 28-day consultation on draft decisions, while SEPA could choose to carry out further consultation in other cases where there was substantial public interest.

For most applications, however, people who had already raised concerns would no longer routinely receive the draft permit or draft decision directly.

Instead, they would need to check SEPA's online consultation system or public register to find the outcome.

That distinction could be important for communities following applications involving potential pollution, waste facilities, water abstraction or other regulated activities.

COMMUNITY | 18 August 2026

DataVita's North Lanarkshire AI plan gets public backing as Flynn repeats disputed 3,400 jobs claim

Read online: <https://modern.scot/datavitas-north-lanarkshire-ai-plan-gets-public-backing-as-flynn-repeats-disputed-3400-jobs-claim/>



A £300 million expansion of DataVita's North Lanarkshire AI data centres is receiving substantial public financial backing while the Scottish Economy Secretary continues to repeat a claim that the wider development will create more than 3,400 new jobs.

The latest finance will expand DataVita's existing DV1 facility and build DV3. The publicly owned National Wealth Fund is guaranteeing £202 million of commercial-bank lending, while the Scottish National Investment Bank is contributing £35 million to the financing package.

The two facilities themselves are expected to create around 600 construction jobs and approximately 100 permanent skilled jobs. Their full computing capacity has already been

contracted to American AI company CoreWeave for 15 years.

Yet on Tuesday, Scottish Government Economy Secretary Stephen Flynn again used the much larger figure attached to the overall AI Growth Zone.

"This investment marks a milestone in the creation of Scotland's first AI Growth Zone in North Lanarkshire," Flynn said.

"I welcome the economic growth it is set to deliver across the region – including more than 3,400 new jobs and private investment totalling more than £8 billion."

The limitations behind the 3,400 figure are no longer obscure, they are now part of the public record.

Public support came before firm jobs commitments

Modern Scot reported in July that Scottish Government papers showed officials were already working to support DataVita and CoreWeave while still trying to establish what employment benefits CoreWeave would actually commit to.

A briefing for the First Minister said the Scottish Government wanted to "facilitate this investment" and "find a path through" grid-connection and planning difficulties.

Officials discussed reducing barriers, helping with electricity connections and adopting a "Team Scotland" approach involving the Scottish Government, North Lanarkshire Council, Scottish Enterprise, ScottishPower Energy Networks and the National Energy System Operator.

But in the same briefing officials said they wanted to discuss employment and skills and "understand what

commitments CoreWeave are considering in this area”.

They were also advised to ask what CoreWeave could actually bring to Scotland through universities, the technology sector and wider economic activity.

North Lanarkshire Council was meanwhile increasing staffing in planning, building standards and environmental services “at risk”, while Scottish Enterprise was making internal changes to organise its work around green data centres.

Officials were still discussing what additional benefits could be secured from DataVita’s investment and said arriving at a “full, defensible position” was important.

The sequence is therefore significant.

Public bodies were already organising themselves to help the development proceed while some of the most important questions about jobs and public benefit were still being worked out.

The 3,400 figure is not 3,400 identified jobs

When the UK Government announced the Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone in January, it promoted the project as supporting more than 3,400 jobs.

Subsequent information obtained by Action to Protect Rural Scotland showed how that estimate had been calculated.

The UK Government said the number was based on employment projections for the proposed Cambois data-centre development in Northumberland, adjusted for the proposed scale of Lanarkshire and then increased using employment multipliers of around 1.5 to 1.6.

Using that methodology, APRS calculated the headline 3,400 figure as roughly:

333 operational data-centre jobs;

1,000 construction jobs; and

about 2,066 indirect or induced jobs elsewhere in the economy.

That is APRS’s calculation of the Government methodology, not an official Government breakdown.

But it exposes a crucial distinction.

More than half of the headline figure appears to depend upon jobs predicted to arise indirectly through economic modelling rather than people directly employed to build or operate the data centres.

The UK Government has itself acknowledged another limitation.

When asked in Parliament to break AI Growth Zone employment down between construction, permanent on-site posts, remote jobs and indirect employment, AI minister Kanishka Narayan said the Government did not make specific assumptions about the geographical location of indirectly generated jobs.

That means an indirect job included in the Lanarkshire forecast does not necessarily have to be in North Lanarkshire.

It may not even be in Scotland.

Today's £300m project has a much clearer jobs number

The latest financing provides something against which the larger political claim can now be measured.

DataVita is raising approximately £300 million.

The National Wealth Fund is guaranteeing £202 million of the commercial lending.

The Scottish National Investment Bank is investing £35 million.

CoreWeave has contracted the full capacity of DV1 and DV3 for 15 years.

And the employment forecast attached specifically to those two facilities is around 600 construction jobs and approximately 100 permanent positions.

Those are much firmer numbers than the wider 3,400 figure.

There is no contradiction in saying a large infrastructure project can generate jobs outside the buildings themselves. Construction, suppliers and subsequent investment can all create employment.

The problem is presenting an economic projection in language which can easily be understood as 3,400 new jobs being created in the area without making clear how much of the figure depends upon multipliers and indirect employment.

That distinction became particularly important when Flynn repeated the number on 18 August.

By then, the methodology behind the estimate had already been challenged publicly.

The Government had already told Parliament it could not specify the geographical location of indirect jobs.

Scottish Government papers had already shown officials seeking clarification about CoreWeave's employment commitments.

And the actual facilities receiving £300 million of finance now had a published forecast of about 100 permanent jobs.

Flynn nevertheless described the project as delivering "more than 3,400 new jobs" across the region.

CoreWeave wanted to go much further

There is another reason the jobs question needs resolving now.

Modern Scot's earlier investigation revealed that CoreWeave had told Scottish officials it wanted to expand much further.

The government briefing recorded that Mike Mattacola, then CoreWeave's UK general manager, wanted to invest more in Scotland and move "with urgency" to build another four data centres after the initial one was established.

The documents did not show four approved projects or four financed developments.

They did show the scale of CoreWeave's ambition.

The same papers showed the Scottish Government agreeing to a Team Scotland approach and discussing ways

to remove barriers to further data-centre investment.

This week, the National Wealth Fund described DV1 and DV3 as laying the foundation for the wider Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone.

That makes the employment question larger than one financing announcement.

If Scotland is to support further expansion, the public should know what measurable economic return is attached to it.

What has actually been promised?

There is currently no published document identifying 3,400 individual jobs.

There is no published list showing which employers will provide all of them.

There is no published timetable showing when 3,400 workers will be recruited.

There is no published breakdown demonstrating that all of the indirect employment will be in Lanarkshire or Scotland.

And the Scottish Government papers previously examined by Modern Scot show that officials were still discussing employment, skills and wider benefits while simultaneously seeking to facilitate the investment.

That does not prove the 3,400 jobs will never exist.

Nor does the published evidence establish that Flynn knowingly made a false statement.

It establishes something narrower and more important for public scrutiny: the phrase “more than 3,400 new jobs” is being repeated as a political benefit while the underlying figure includes modelled indirect employment whose location the Government itself says it does not specifically assume.

Meanwhile, the public support is no longer theoretical.

The £202 million guarantee exists.

The £35 million Scottish National Investment Bank commitment exists.

The £300 million financing exists.

The 15-year CoreWeave contract exists.

And the presently published permanent employment forecast for the two facilities receiving that money is about 100 jobs.

If Stephen Flynn and the governments backing the project are confident that more than 3,400 new jobs will be delivered, there is a straightforward way to settle the issue.

Publish the breakdown.

Show who will employ them.

Show which are permanent.

Show which are temporary.

Show which exist only through an economic multiplier.

And show how many will actually be in North Lanarkshire.

The public backing is now concrete.

The jobs claim should be held to the same standard.

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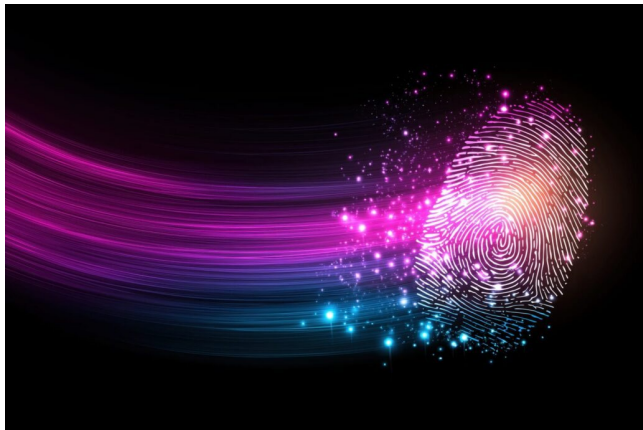
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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 18 August 2026

ScotAccount Brings Digital Identity Into Scotland's Property Ownership System

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotaccount-brings-digital-identity-into-scotlands-property-ownership-system/>



Scotland does not currently require a government Digital ID to buy or sell a home, but Scotland is promoting its government Digital ID system, ScotAccount. Through it, Scotland's land and property infrastructure is being rebuilt around digital submissions, machine-readable records, automated processing and computer systems capable of exchanging data directly.

While there is no compulsory Digital ID requirement for ordinary house purchases, Registers of Scotland has

explicitly identified digital verification, greater interoperability and increased data sharing as developments that align with its plans.

The UK Government announced on 21 July that it was cancelling its separate £1.8 billion national Digital ID programme. That did not abolish digital identity in Scotland. ScotAccount is a different programme and it remains operational. The Scottish Government's own 2025–28 digital delivery plan describes ScotAccount simply as “a secure digital ID” intended to allow people to access multiple Scottish public services with one login.

The Westminster cancellation did not dismantle Britain's wider digital-verification infrastructure. The statutory Digital Verification Services regime created under the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 remains operating. The official register was updated as recently as 12 August 2026 and contained 63 certified services from 46 providers.

Scotland has its own property law and conveyancing system. Most of the UK Government's recently announced Home Buying and Selling reforms are aimed principally at England and Wales. Registers of Scotland reviewed those proposals internally in November 2025 and concluded that many addressed problems which either do not arise in the same way here or are already dealt with through Scotland's Home Report, earlier solicitor involvement and the system of concluding missives.

But RoS reached a different conclusion about the technological part of the programme.

Its policy paper said the broader ambitions involving artificial intelligence, digital verification and execution, greater interoperability and new methods of data sharing “all broadly align” with the existing Registers of Scotland roadmap. It said work was already under way with the Open Property Data Association, the Society of Licensed Conveyancers and a UK Government digital home-buying pilot.

Digital ID is not required for a house purchase, but identity verification is

Anyone buying or selling property in Scotland already has to establish who they are through the regulated

conveyancing process.

Solicitors must carry out customer due-diligence and Know Your Client checks. Registers of Scotland's own assessment says those checks are already required and notes that broader developments in digital identity verification “may provide opportunities or benefits that could apply in Scotland as well”.

That does not mean ScotAccount is compulsory. At present, there is no published requirement that an ordinary buyer or seller must have ScotAccount to purchase, sell or register ownership of a home in the Land Register.

Even someone registering a deed without a solicitor can currently provide an identification form through the existing process. Registers of Scotland specifically tells such applicants not to send copies or originals of their identity documents unless requested.

So a passport, driving licence or other accepted evidence can still be used without creating a reusable government Digital ID.

How you prove your identity is one question.

What happens to the property information after your identity has been established is another.

Refusing Digital ID does not keep your personal data offline

If a property transaction is registered in Scotland, information about it enters the registration system regardless of whether the owner established their identity digitally or using conventional documents.

Registers of Scotland says it has a statutory obligation to compile and maintain public registers. For the Land Register and General Register of Sasines (the oldest national public land register in the world) it collects the names and addresses of buyers and sellers. Personal data held on the public registers is retained permanently.

Registers of Scotland also states that Land Register information is made available under licence to customers where there is a legitimate commercial interest. It can use information from registration applications, deeds, title records and related systems for service improvement, research, analytics, testing and development of automated registration processes.

Refusing a reusable Digital ID does not prevent the legal record of your ownership from becoming digital. The property record follows the property-registration rules, not your chosen method of identification.

Scotland's property records are becoming machine-readable

Registers of Scotland is now going beyond simply allowing documents to be viewed online.

Its main Register Land and Property service is the standard process for most Land Register applications. RoS also operates APIs (application programming interfaces) which allow professional computer systems to communicate directly with its systems.

The ScotLIS Land Register API allows customers to download structured title data, title sheets, plans and pending applications directly into their own systems. A second API allows case-management systems to import information directly into the RoS registration process, reducing duplicate entry.

Registers of Scotland has explicitly described APIs as allowing applications to “extract and share data within

and across organisations”.

It is also examining what could come next.

Digital property logbooks are not currently part of Scotland's system. RoS nevertheless concluded in its November assessment that they could potentially be beneficial here.

Its paper said many of the registers it already maintains could provide a rich source of information for future digital property packs. Much of its data is already aligned to Unique Property Reference Numbers, and RoS considered it realistic that information could eventually be supplied through ScotLIS, through APIs to third-party providers or alongside information from other Scottish datasets.

Where does ScotAccount enter the picture?

ScotAccount was launched by the Scottish Government in 2023 as a reusable way of signing into public services and, where required, proving identity.

Users can verify their identity and choose to retain verified personal information for reuse when dealing with other public services. The Government calls this its attribute store. Its March 2026 equality assessment says this can reduce repeated checks and improve interoperability between services.

The Scottish Government says using that attribute store is optional. It says information is shared only while the user is present and actively gives permission for individual pieces of information to be supplied to the requesting public service.

But ScotAccount has already entered the Registers of Scotland environment.

Citizen applicants using the online Register of Assignations or Register of Statutory Pledges are authenticated through ScotAccount. The connection demonstrates that Scotland's digital identity infrastructure and its registration authority are no longer entirely separate worlds.

And RoS itself has identified occasions when it needs to verify customers' identities, including personal applications presented to the Land Register. Its November paper says more efficient identity-verification processes, increased automation, digital submission and greater possibilities for reuse and sharing of data could present opportunities for the organisation.

That is the point at which it becomes a legitimate matter of public scrutiny.

Banks are already inside parts of the digital property process

Financial institutions are not hypothetical participants.

A Scottish mortgage is normally secured through a standard security registered against property. Registers of Scotland already operates a Digital Discharge Service through which solicitors send information electronically to lenders, lenders approve the discharge, and the transaction passes back to RoS without requiring a paper discharge deed.

That does not give a bank general access to someone's government information.

It does show that secure digital links between solicitors, lenders and Scotland's property-registration infrastructure already exist for defined purposes.

The wider UK Smart Data programme could potentially add another layer. Property is one of the sectors

included in the Government's current call for evidence on possible Smart Data schemes. The Government is examining how authorised third parties might receive customer data securely under future sector-specific rules.

Modern digital systems do not necessarily have to merge into a single database to become deeply interconnected. APIs, common identifiers, standardised data and verified digital attributes can allow separate systems to exchange selected information while the underlying databases remain separate.

The public-interest questions therefore concern the rules around those connections.

Who gets access? What information can be requested? Is access logged? When is consent genuinely optional and when does refusing it make a service substantially harder to use? Can information originally verified for one purpose later be requested for another? What happens when incorrect data is replicated between systems? And will non-digital identification remain a genuinely equivalent option as digital services become the ordinary route?

Those are not objections to technology, they are questions about the architecture of government and the limits placed upon it.

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ECONOMY | 18 August 2026

Ferguson Marine faces 70 Job Losses While Four Vessel Contracts Remain Unsigned

Read online: <https://modern.scot/ferguson-marine-faces-70-job-losses-while-four-vessel-contracts-remain-unsigned/>



Up to 70 workers could leave Ferguson Marine as the Port Glasgow shipyard runs into a gap between the completion of MV Glen Rosa and the start of a four-vessel programme announced by the Scottish Government five months ago.

The publicly owned yard opened formal consultations on voluntary redundancies on Tuesday, saying work is reducing as Glen Rosa moves through final outfitting and commissioning ahead of an expected handover in the final quarter of 2026.

Ferguson Marine says the reductions are necessary to keep the business financially sustainable until new construction begins. The problem is that the four vessels intended to provide that next body of work are still subject to due diligence and no formal contract awards have yet been made.

Chief executive Graeme Thomson said the yard faces an “inevitable gap in workload” while preparations continue with the Scottish Government for contract negotiations. Ferguson Marine said the redundancy process would not affect completion or delivery of Glen Rosa.

The timing has brought a sharp response from GMB Scotland, the largest union at the yard, which described the proposed job losses as a “betrayal of a blameless workforce”.

GMB Scotland secretary Louise Gilmour said skilled workers were being encouraged to leave before the vessels intended to provide the yard's future workload had arrived. The union has placed responsibility on ministers for failing to establish a continuous pipeline of orders after Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa.

The dispute exposes an uncomfortable gap between what was announced in March and what exists at the yard today.

On 3 March, the Scottish Government proposed directly awarding Ferguson Marine contracts for four new vessels: two ferries under the second phase of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme, a replacement for the marine research vessel Scotia and a replacement for the marine protection vessel Minna.

Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes told Parliament that the programme was intended to create a steady sequence of construction, allowing employees to move from one vessel to another. Ministers said the four ships would form the core of the yard's workload for around five years.

But the announcement was not the award of four completed contracts.

The Scottish Government made clear at the time that the proposals had to pass legal, commercial and subsidy-control assessments. Engagement with the Competition and Markets Authority was also required before formal award decisions could be taken.

Those processes are still under way.

That distinction has become considerably less academic now that Glen Rosa is approaching completion.

In March, only days after the proposed vessels were announced, Ferguson Marine also unveiled its largest apprenticeship recruitment programme in five years. It planned to take on 24 apprentices, with ten beginning in August 2026 and a further 14 in January 2027.

At the time, Ferguson Marine said the proposed four-vessel programme would provide a five-year pipeline of work and greater employment certainty.

Five months later, the yard is simultaneously bringing in a new generation of shipbuilders and asking as many as 70 existing employees to consider leaving.

The situation does not mean Ferguson Marine has been entirely without other work. In July it completed three structural units for BAE Systems' Type 26 frigate programme at Govan, work the yard hopes could lead to further opportunities in defence supply-chain construction.

But the four proposed public-service vessels are intended to provide the substantial, continuous workload on which the yard's next phase depends.

Glen Rosa itself is now at Inchgreen Marine Park near Greenock for commissioning, quality assurance and preparations for sea trials. Ferguson Marine moved the vessel there in July, partly to free space at Port Glasgow for modernisation work at the shipyard.

Its completion will close one of the most difficult chapters in recent Scottish industrial history.

Glen Rosa and sister vessel Glen Sannox were ordered under a £97m contract in 2015 and were originally expected to be delivered in 2018. Ferguson Marine was brought into public ownership in 2019 after the previous company entered administration.

Glen Sannox eventually entered service in January 2025. Glen Rosa's expected delivery has moved to the fourth quarter of 2026, while its projected cost to complete rose to £197.5m in January. The Scottish Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee has continued to scrutinise the vessel's cost and timetable.

Against that history, the Scottish Government announced the four-vessel programme in March as part of an attempt to give Ferguson Marine something it has repeatedly lacked: a predictable order book.

It is also supporting modernisation of the yard, with up to £14.2m committed for improvements including equipment, infrastructure and production systems, although elements of that investment have themselves been subject to due diligence.

Economy Secretary Stephen Flynn said on Tuesday that the voluntary redundancy programme was part of efforts to modernise Ferguson Marine and make it more competitive. He said the action being taken by the yard's leadership was necessary to help secure its future and that of commercial shipbuilding on the Clyde.

He also confirmed that steps required before the four vessels can be formally awarded are continuing, including engagement with the Competition and Markets Authority.

That leaves the yard in an unusual position.

The ships intended to underpin its next five years have been identified. The workforce needed to build them

already exists. Money is being spent modernising the facility, and new apprentices are being recruited.

What Ferguson Marine does not yet have are the four completed contracts required to turn that proposed future into work on the shop floor.

As Glen Rosa nears the end of construction, up to 70 workers may now leave during the gap.

For a yard which was taken into public ownership partly to preserve Scotland's commercial shipbuilding skills, that gap has become the central issue.

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INFRASTRUCTURE | 18 August 2026

More Than 1,000 Customers Connected to GoFibre Network Around Eyemouth

Read online: <https://modern.scot/more-than-1000-customers-connected-to-gofibre-network-around-eyemouth/>



A broadband company founded in the Scottish Borders has passed 1,000 customer connections around Eyemouth, less than nine years after the business was established in Duns.

GoFibre said homes and businesses connected to its full-fibre network can receive broadband speeds of up to 1Gbps, while its wider network in the Scottish Borders now has more than 34,000 premises ready to connect.

The 1,000 figure covers the wider Eyemouth exchange area rather than the town alone. Broadband analysts ThinkBroadband sought clarification from GoFibre after the milestone was announced and said the company had almost 4,000 premises ready to connect across an area which includes Eyemouth, Coldingham, St Abbs, Ayton, Reston, Burnmouth and Chirnside.

That would put customer take-up across the area at about 25%.

The milestone is also the latest stage in the growth of a company which began in the Borders and has since become involved in some of Scotland's largest rural broadband projects.

GoFibre Holdings Limited was incorporated in Scotland in November 2017 as Borderlink Broadband Limited. It changed its name in 2023 and is now registered in Edinburgh. Companies House records classify the business as operating in wired and other telecommunications services.

Its origins, however, remain firmly in the Borders.

The company was established in Duns at a time when broadband provision in parts of the region was still conspicuously uneven.

Eymouth itself appeared in evidence submitted to the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee in January 2018.

Kenneth Walker, technical director of Eyemouth-based technology company Inspired By Technology, described a town in which the availability of fibre broadband could effectively change depending on which side of the harbour a business occupied.

He told MPs that the more heavily populated residential side had high-speed fibre connectivity while the less populated industrial and commercial side did not.

The company said poor or unaffordable connectivity was sufficiently serious that it advised some clients to disregard particular locations when looking for business premises. It also reported cases elsewhere in the Borders where businesses had experienced delays or unusually high construction costs when trying to obtain

better connections.

The wider problem was acknowledged by Scottish Borders Council.

Its 2018 monitoring statement said that although significant parts of the Borders had become fibre-enabled, there remained places where fibre broadband was unavailable, naming the Ettrick Valley, Yarrow Valley and Tweedsmuir. The council said improved digital connectivity in remote rural areas continued to require attention and described connectivity as critical to the region's economic development and competitiveness.

GoFibre has expanded into that market through a combination of commercial network building, private investment, institutional lending and government-backed broadband contracts.

In 2022, infrastructure investor Gresham House announced a £164m investment in Borderlink Broadband through its British Sustainable Infrastructure Fund strategy. That followed an earlier £10.5m investment in 2021.

Gresham House said at the time that the larger investment would allow the company to accelerate fibre construction and recruit additional staff, with a particular focus on communities where broadband provision had historically been weaker.

Publicly backed infrastructure contracts have since become another substantial part of the company's expansion.

In February 2025, GoFibre was awarded the first Project Gigabit contract in Scotland.

The £26m contract covers the Scottish Borders and East Lothian and was expected at the time of its award to bring gigabit-capable broadband to around 11,000 homes and businesses in harder-to-reach areas.

Project Gigabit is funded by the UK Government, while the Scottish Government is responsible for procuring and managing the Scottish contracts.

Communities identified for the Borders and East Lothian programme included St Abbs, Broughton and Ettrickbridge in the Borders, alongside Athelstaneford and Innerwick in East Lothian.

A considerably larger contract followed five months later.

In July 2025, GoFibre was awarded a £105m Project Gigabit contract covering parts of north-east Scotland. The Scottish Government said around 63,000 premises across Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen, Angus, Dundee, Moray, Highland and parts of Perth and Kinross were expected to benefit.

Funding for GoFibre's expansion has also come from the Scottish National Investment Bank and Hamburg Commercial Bank.

In August 2025, the two institutions announced a combined £125m financing package. The Scottish National Investment Bank provided a £45m debt facility, with Hamburg Commercial Bank providing a further £80m.

The financing was intended to support construction of gigabit-capable broadband to more than 130,000 premises, including delivery of the company's two Scottish Project Gigabit contracts.

The Scottish National Investment Bank described GoFibre as an independent Scottish provider and a Scottish scale-up.

The money from the Scottish National Investment Bank and Hamburg Commercial Bank is lending rather than

grant funding. Gresham House is an infrastructure investor. Project Gigabit, by contrast, uses government funding to support construction in places where commercial deployment alone is unlikely to provide gigabit-capable connections.

Together they illustrate the amount of capital required to turn a locally established telecommunications company into an infrastructure builder operating across large areas of Scotland.

GoFibre says its wider network now covers more than 135,000 premises across the north and east of Scotland and northern England.

The company has also continued activity closer to home.

In Eyemouth it has sponsored the Herring Queen Festival, supported mental health resources created by pupils at Eyemouth High School and held a careers event at the school.

It has also launched its GoFurther Fund in the Scottish Borders, providing support for community and charitable organisations within areas served by its network.

Andy Hepburn, GoFibre's chief operating officer, said the company was proud to have reached the latest milestone in the region where it began.

“As a Borders-born company, we are incredibly proud to reach this milestone in Eyemouth,” he said.

He said improved connectivity was making activities ranging from working from home to gaming easier, and added that the company intended to continue investing in Borders communities.

For Eyemouth, the arrival of another full-fibre network is part of a much broader change in telecommunications infrastructure.

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INFRASTRUCTURE | 17 August 2026

China Is Making the Renminbi Easier to Use in Europe — What It Could Mean for Scotland

Read online: <https://modern.scot/china-is-making-the-renminbi-easier-to-use-in-europe-what-it-could-mean-for-scotland/>



Deutsche Bank has become the first non-Chinese bank in Europe authorised to clear China's renminbi directly. It sounds like a Frankfurt banking story. For Scottish whisky producers, manufacturers, food exporters and businesses buying Chinese goods, it could eventually change how they are paid, what they pay and who carries the currency risk.

A Scotch whisky producer sells a shipment to a distributor in Shanghai.

An engineering company in Aberdeen supplies machinery to a Chinese industrial customer.

A Scottish retailer orders electrical equipment manufactured in China.

All three transactions have something in common that rarely appears on the invoice or container manifest.

Somebody has to move the money. And the system through which that money moves has just changed.

On 10 August, the People's Bank of China appointed Deutsche Bank as a renminbi clearing bank in Frankfurt. It is the first non-Chinese bank in Europe to receive that designation. Deutsche can now provide direct processing, clearing and settlement of cross-border transactions in China's currency, connecting European financial institutions and companies more directly with Chinese payment systems.

That does not mean Scotland is changing currency or that the pound is being replaced by the renminbi. Nor does it mean a Scottish company must bank with Deutsche Bank.

It means another substantial piece of financial infrastructure has been created through which European businesses can conduct trade with China in Chinese currency.

For Scotland, that is not a remote financial concern.

China is already embedded in Scotland's supply chains and export markets. Scotland exported £24 billion of goods internationally in 2025. Drink accounted for £4.9 billion, power-generating machinery £4.3 billion and general industrial machinery £1.7 billion. Scottish goods imports reached £24.9 billion, with particularly strong growth in power-generating machinery, telecommunications equipment and office machinery.

Scottish companies therefore already stand on both sides of the transaction.

They sell to China.

They buy from China.

And every time they do either, currency matters.

What has actually changed

The renminbi, usually abbreviated RMB and also commonly called the yuan, is China's currency.

Suppose a Scottish business sells something to a Chinese customer.

The Scottish seller would naturally prefer to be paid in pounds. Its wages, taxes, rent and many other costs are in sterling.

The Chinese buyer may prefer to pay in renminbi because its revenues and domestic costs are in RMB.

Someone therefore has to accept the cost, inconvenience and risk of converting one currency into another.

Banks sit in the middle of that transaction.

An RMB clearing bank outside mainland China provides a route through which renminbi payments can be processed and settled and through which banks and companies can obtain access to RMB liquidity.

Deutsche Bank says its new designation will allow it to offer direct RMB processing and settlement, payments and collections, offshore RMB liquidity, trade finance and liquidity management to European businesses and financial institutions. It says the system should provide faster payments and reduce some operational and counterparty risks.

Those are Deutsche Bank's claims for the service, rather than guaranteed savings for every customer.

London has already had official renminbi clearing infrastructure for more than a decade, so Scottish businesses have not suddenly acquired access to something that was previously impossible.

China Construction Bank was appointed the official RMB clearing bank in London in June 2014. What is changing now is the depth and competition of Europe's RMB infrastructure.

China has given a major European-owned international bank direct clearing status in Frankfurt. Deutsche already operates across London, Frankfurt, Singapore, Hong Kong and China and has participated directly in China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System since 2015.

In plain English, China is making it easier for European money and Chinese money to meet.

That is where Scotland enters the story.

Imagine a Scottish distiller

Take a hypothetical independent Scotch whisky producer with a Chinese distributor prepared to buy a substantial shipment.

The distiller might quote £250,000.

That is convenient for the Scottish company. If it receives £250,000, it knows exactly what has arrived.

But the Chinese purchaser must obtain sterling and may carry both conversion costs and the risk that sterling becomes more expensive before payment is due.

The distributor could instead ask the Scottish producer to quote in renminbi.

Deeper RMB banking infrastructure makes that easier for a European company to consider. Its bank may be

able to settle the transaction more efficiently, convert the proceeds, hedge the currency exposure or provide trade finance against the payment.

There is a genuine Scottish market behind the example.

China bought £161 million of Scotch whisky in 2025. Although export value was broadly unchanged from 2024, volumes increased by 14 per cent to the equivalent of 34 million bottles.

Then, in January 2026, China agreed to halve its tariff on Scotch whisky from 10 per cent to 5 per cent, a reduction the UK Government estimated could be worth £250 million to the UK economy over five years.

For a Scottish distiller trying to expand in China, being able to deal more easily in the customer's own currency could therefore become another competitive tool.

But there is a catch.

If the distiller agrees today to receive a fixed amount of renminbi three months from now and the renminbi falls against sterling before payment arrives, the company receives fewer pounds when it converts the money.

The clearing system has not eliminated currency risk.

It has changed who carries it.

Large international businesses routinely manage such exposure. A small Scottish exporter may have neither a treasury department nor much experience of currency hedging.

For that company, easier access to RMB could create an opportunity and a new risk at precisely the same time.

Now reverse the transaction

The consequences may be just as relevant for Scottish importers.

Imagine a Scottish company buying machinery from a Chinese manufacturer.

The Chinese factory pays its workers and many domestic suppliers in renminbi, yet the international order might traditionally be priced in dollars or pounds.

The Chinese supplier may therefore be paying conversion costs or protecting itself against exchange-rate movements.

If the Scottish buyer offers to settle directly in renminbi, the supplier may be prepared to offer different commercial terms.

The price might be better. A deposit might move more quickly. A supplier might prefer a customer willing to transact in its domestic currency.

None of those benefits is automatic. They depend upon the contract, the banks involved, exchange rates and the bargaining strength of the companies.

But the development matters because the currency of the transaction becomes another part of the negotiation.

Scotland imported £24.9 billion of goods in 2025, up 8 per cent in real terms from the previous year, while non-EU imports increased by 13 per cent. Machinery, telecommunications equipment and office machinery were among the areas driving that increase.

A financial change that makes Asian-European settlement easier therefore concerns Scottish companies bringing goods into the country as much as those sending Scottish products out.

An Aberdeen engineering order could look different too

Consider another hypothetical exporter.

An Aberdeen engineering company wins a contract worth the equivalent of £2 million to manufacture specialised equipment for a Chinese customer.

The equipment will take six months to produce.

The Scottish company must buy materials and components and pay engineers long before receiving the final payment.

The problem may therefore not be winning the Chinese customer.

It may be financing the six months between the order and the money arriving.

Trade finance exists for precisely this reason.

If deeper European RMB banking allows the company to receive an RMB deposit more efficiently, finance an RMB receivable or obtain better banking support around the Chinese contract, that can affect working capital inside the Scottish factory.

The difference is not glamorous.

Nobody cuts a ribbon because an invoice cleared sooner.

But companies can be profitable on paper and still fail because they run out of cash waiting to be paid.

Deutsche specifically identifies trade finance and liquidity management among the services its new RMB status is intended to support.

That is how something happening inside Frankfurt's banking system can eventually reach a payroll in Aberdeen.

Scotland has other goods China wants

Whisky is merely the obvious example.

China reopened its market to some British pork processors in December 2024, including a major Scottish processor, after pandemic-era restrictions. The Scottish Government has treated improved market access for pork, crab and whisky as part of its wider trade work.

Scottish Government export analysis also identifies opportunities in China for food and drink, engineering and advanced manufacturing, technology, chemicals and business services.

The Scottish question is therefore practical.

If Chinese customers increasingly prefer to trade in renminbi, will Scottish companies have banking

arrangements that allow them to compete comfortably?

Imagine a Scottish engineering company and a German competitor bidding for the same Chinese order.

Their products are equally good. Their prices are similar.

The Chinese purchaser asks both companies to quote and finance the contract in renminbi.

The German company already has RMB banking, hedging and trade-finance arrangements in place.

The Scottish business insists upon sterling because the financial side is unfamiliar or expensive.

The contract may be decided without either machine being demonstrably better.

Financial infrastructure can become industrial infrastructure remarkably quickly.

There is a larger Chinese strategy here

The Frankfurt decision is also part of something bigger.

China has spent years encouraging greater international use of the renminbi.

That should not be confused with the imminent replacement of the US dollar. The dollar remains overwhelmingly more important to the international financial system.

But international currencies require infrastructure. Businesses need to be able to invoice, borrow and invest in them; banks need to clear them; and payment systems must allow them to move reliably across borders.

One clearing bank does not revolutionise a currency.

Thousands of ordinary transactions gradually can.

Deutsche Bank describes its appointment as part of the continuing internationalisation of the renminbi and expects greater RMB use between European and Chinese businesses.

Its own analysis goes considerably further than simple trade settlement. Deutsche Bank Research argues that China is attempting to develop the renminbi from a currency used heavily for trade into one that is increasingly used for investment and financing. Its analysts say capital and financial-account transactions now account for around three-quarters of total cross-border RMB settlement.

That makes Frankfurt part of a wider financial project rather than an isolated banking appointment.

Scotland should understand that process without either celebrating or fearing it.

China represents commercial opportunity, but dependence upon any single market, currency or financial system creates exposure too.

A Scottish company earning significant revenues in renminbi becomes more exposed to movements in that currency. A business heavily dependent upon Chinese customers becomes more exposed to Chinese economic conditions. One reliant upon Chinese suppliers becomes more exposed to trade restrictions, geopolitics and disruption between China and the West.

Easier payments remove none of those risks.

They simply make the underlying trade easier to conduct.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 17 August 2026

Scotland, Rebuilt: What 81 Years of Progress Did, and Did Not, Solve

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotland-rebuilt-what-81-years-of-progress-did-and-did-not-solve/>



The Scotland that emerged from the Second World War faced a housing shortage measured in hundreds of thousands, decades of outward migration, dependence on heavy industry and severe inequalities of health and geography. The Scotland of 2026 is institutionally and materially transformed. Yet an examination of eight decades of evidence reveals something more difficult than either success or failure: many of the country's hardest problems were solved in one form only to reappear in another.

Modern Scot Research | 17 August 2026

On 17 October 1945, George Buchanan rose in the House of Commons shortly before ten o'clock at night to answer a debate on housing. Buchanan was the Joint Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, a former Glasgow councillor and MP for the Gorbals, and housing was his responsibility.

He did not disguise the scale of the inheritance.

"Housing is the greatest social need," he told the House. Scotland, he said, had "failed housing for the common people."

The arithmetic confronting Scottish politicians that autumn was severe. A pre-war committee had estimated a shortage of 300,000 Scottish homes. One MP told the Commons that the deficit might by then have risen to 500,000. At the pre-war peak, Scotland had managed only 17,200 new homes in a year. Six years of war had interrupted normal construction while overcrowding, deterioration and pent-up household formation continued.

The higher 500,000 figure was a parliamentary estimate, not a subsequent statistical count, but nobody in the debate disputed the existence of a housing crisis of extraordinary scale.

It is tempting, 81 years later, to draw an easy line from that argument to Scotland's present housing emergency.

It would also be wrong.

The Scotland of 2026 is not the Scotland of 1945 with better technology. Its housing is overwhelmingly better; its population has a National Health Service; educational participation has widened beyond anything imaginable in the immediate post-war years; the economic dominance of coal, steel and shipbuilding has gone; electricity, roads, telecommunications and private transport have altered the geography of daily life; sustained national net emigration eventually reversed; and Scotland has a legislature exercising substantial authority over domestic policy.

Any serious account of the period must acknowledge the magnitude of that achievement.

But that is not where the evidence ends.

Across housing, population, employment, health, education, transport, energy, land and public services, a recurring pattern emerges. Scotland became vastly better at treating the immediate manifestations of its problems. What proved harder was altering the structures beneath them.

The post-war state confronted shortage. Modern Scotland increasingly confronts distribution: where homes are built and who can afford them; where economic value is created and where it remains; where people live and whether services can follow them; whether greater educational access produces equal opportunity; whether universal healthcare produces anything approaching equality in health; and whether possession of natural resources ensures that their economic benefits remain in the communities around them.

The problems changed shape.

Housing: Scotland built its way out of one crisis and into another

Housing provides the clearest example because the physical transformation was so extensive.

The post-war problem was not principally one of mortgage affordability or private rents. It was a shortage of dwellings compounded by overcrowding, unfitness and homes without amenities now regarded as elementary.

The response was construction on a scale modern Scotland has not approached for generations. Scottish Government historical statistics show peaks in the early 1950s and again in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when roughly 41,000 to 43,000 homes were being completed annually. Much of that building was public-sector housing associated with reconstruction, slum clearance and the creation of new communities.

It altered Scotland physically. Families left overcrowded rooms, tenements scheduled for clearance and deteriorating rural housing for new council estates, new towns and expanding suburbs.

Then the housing system changed again.

Public-sector construction fell. Private building became more important. Home ownership expanded dramatically. Right to Buy transferred 494,580 council and housing-association homes into private ownership between 1979-80 and 2014-15 before the policy ended in Scotland in July 2016.

The modern emergency is therefore not a resurrection of 1945. It is the product of a different housing system.

The Scottish Parliament supported the declaration of a national housing emergency in May 2024. By March 2026, fourteen councils had declared local housing emergencies. The pressures identified by Parliament include rising homelessness, growing use of temporary accommodation, insufficient affordable housing, long waiting lists and a widening mismatch between wages, house prices and rents.

In 2024-25, Scottish councils received 40,688 homelessness applications. At 30 September 2025, 18,092 households were living in temporary accommodation, 9 per cent more than a year earlier and the highest figure in that statistical series. The average household had spent 237 days there. By April 2026, the Scottish Housing Regulator assessed two local authorities as experiencing systemic failure in homelessness services and another nine as being at heightened risk.

Nothing in those figures makes contemporary Scotland equivalent to the housing conditions Buchanan confronted.

The more useful conclusion is that Scotland demonstrated an extraordinary ability to increase the physical quantity and quality of housing, but did not permanently solve the relationship between housing supply, tenure, income, land, household formation and location.

The old question was whether Scotland could build enough decent homes. The new question is whether the homes Scotland has and builds can be accessed by the people who need them.

It is not the same housing crisis, but it is the same unresolved relationship.

Work: the industries disappeared, the productive problem remained

The Scotland of the post-war decades was much more visibly an industrial economy.

Coal, steel, shipbuilding, heavy engineering and manufacturing supported entire communities and formed part of Scotland's economic identity. They also made the country vulnerable to the performance of a relatively narrow industrial base.

Even when Scotland's headline unemployment rate appeared relatively low, there were often too few jobs available for those seeking work. In 1957, Ministry of Labour figures cited in the House of Commons showed just 36 notified vacancies for every 100 unemployed people in Scotland, or roughly one job for every three jobseekers. In the North Midlands of England, there were 192 vacancies for every 100 unemployed people, almost two jobs for each person seeking work. Scottish unemployment that May stood at 2.6 per cent, compared with 1 per cent in London and the South-East, while Scotland was still losing workers to England and Wales.

The economy that produced those figures largely disappeared.

Coal mining contracted to a fraction of its former scale. Steelmaking diminished. Shipbuilding survived but ceased to employ anything resembling its historical workforce. North Sea oil created a different centre of industrial expertise. Finance and business services expanded. Tourism grew. Technology became more important. Services came to dominate output.

Manufacturing nevertheless remains economically substantial. Scottish Government figures put direct manufacturing employment at about 178,000 and describe it as a comparatively high-wage and high-productivity part of the economy.

Its vulnerability has not disappeared. Scotland's economy grew by 1.4 per cent in 2025, but manufacturing output fell by 4 per cent. The Scottish Government's chief economist attributed the decline to a combination of international pressures and domestic developments, including the cessation of oil-refining activity at Grangemouth.

The policy vocabulary has changed. Governments now speak of productivity, innovation, advanced manufacturing, investment, skills, clusters and supply chains rather than the industrial reconstruction discussed in the post-war Commons.

Beneath it lies a recognisable question. Can Scotland create enough productive, well-paid work in enough places to retain people and generate economic value?

Scotland escaped dependence on the industrial structure of 1945. It did not escape dependence on having a

productive economy worth depending upon.

Population: from losing people to requiring them

For much of the twentieth century, Scotland's demographic problem had a simple direction.

People left.

Scottish Government historical analysis estimates that almost 6 per cent of the population left Scotland during each of the 1950s and 1960s. Population decline continued through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s while the United Kingdom as a whole generally grew.

The reversal after the turn of the century was one of the most consequential changes in modern Scottish demography. Migration became positive and Scotland's population began growing again.

The latest figures reveal how thoroughly the problem has changed.

National Records of Scotland estimates that 5,545,500 people lived in Scotland at mid-2025, the highest population recorded. Yet the increase over the previous year was only 2,200 people. There had been 45,400 births and 61,600 deaths: a natural decrease of 16,200. Net migration of 17,900 was what kept the total population growing.

This is an inversion of the post-war anxiety. Scotland once worried that it was producing people whom its economy could not retain. It now increasingly relies upon people arriving from elsewhere to offset the gap between births and deaths.

The latest national projection intensifies the point. Under the 2024-based principal projection, population rises only slightly to about 5.56 million in 2033 and then begins falling, reaching about 5.47 million by 2049.

These are projections based on assumptions, not forecasts of what must happen. Their value lies in showing what follows if the underlying demographic relationships persist: positive migration may no longer be sufficient to outweigh natural decline.

The problem of national depopulation was not carried unchanged from 1950 into 2026.

Scotland reversed it, and exposed another: a low-birth, ageing society whose population increasingly depends upon migration.

Geography: one Scotland can contain several demographic futures

National totals conceal the next difficulty.

Scotland's population rose slightly between mid-2024 and mid-2025. The populations of 20 of its 32 council areas fell. Na h-Eileanan Siar was among those recording one of the largest proportional declines.

That is why discussion of Scottish population without geography rapidly becomes misleading.

Rural Scotland contains approximately 17 per cent of the population across 98 per cent of the landmass. The proportions alone describe an unusual problem of public administration: services, infrastructure, transport and economic activity have to operate across a vast territory occupied by a relatively small and dispersed population.

The consequences reinforce each other.

Housing affects whether an employer can recruit. Employment affects whether a young household remains. Population determines whether a school, shop or bus service has sufficient demand. The loss of a service can make a community less viable for the next household considering whether to stay.

Post-war intervention transformed the physical isolation of much of the Highlands and islands. Roads improved. Electricity reached places where its arrival was once transformative. Telecommunications changed access to information and work. Air and ferry connections altered the practical meaning of distance.

What those investments could not abolish was agglomeration: the economic force by which employment, capital, services and people tend to accumulate where other employment, capital, services and people already exist.

Scotland's regional problem is therefore not simply that remote places lack infrastructure; it is that infrastructure alone cannot guarantee population.

Health: universal healthcare did not produce universal health

The creation of NHS Scotland in 1948 altered the relationship between illness and personal means. Healthcare was not made costless: it was moved largely from direct payment by the patient to collective funding through taxation. Most NHS care in Scotland remains free at the point of use, meaning that people ordinarily do not pay a direct charge when they visit a GP, attend hospital or receive emergency treatment.

The achievement is so embedded in modern life that its historical importance can be underestimated.

Yet the most severe contemporary health statistic in Scotland is not principally a measure of access to doctors.

It is a measure of inequality between lives.

Public Health Scotland's latest long-term monitoring finds an 11.1-year gap in male life expectancy between the most and least deprived fifths of Scotland and an 8.7-year gap for women. For healthy life expectancy (the years someone can expect to live in good health) the inequalities are larger still: 20.8 years for men and 23.4 years for women. Mortality among people under 75 is more than three times higher in the most deprived areas than in the least deprived.

Few statistics in this 81-year review better illustrate the distinction between institutional achievement and social outcome.

Scotland gained universal healthcare, but it did not gain universal health.

The reasons extend far beyond the NHS. Housing, income, work, education, physical environment, behaviour and social conditions accumulate across a lifetime. The health service treats the consequences of forces over which it possesses only partial control.

Demographic ageing is adding another pressure. NRS estimates that 21 per cent of Scotland's population was aged 65 or over by mid-2025, up from 16.3 per cent twenty years earlier.

The NHS settled one of the great moral questions of post-war Britain: whether access to medical care should depend principally upon the ability to pay. It could not settle why two people living in the same country can still have radically different prospects of living a long and healthy life.

Education: Scotland widened the door without equalising the road to it

Post-war Scotland progressively widened secondary, further and higher education. University moved from being an experience available to a small minority to an ordinary destination within the education system. Vocational and technical routes expanded alongside it.

Modern participation statistics are consequently high. Some 95.7 per cent of 2024-25 school leavers were recorded in a positive initial destination - education, employment, training, voluntary work or personal skills development - three months after leaving school.

But averages obscure social selection.

Among school leavers from Scotland's most deprived fifth of areas, 27.9 per cent entered higher education. Among those from the least deprived fifth, the figure was 63.9 per cent. Unemployment among leavers from the most deprived areas was 6.4 per cent, compared with 1.7 per cent among the least deprived.

There has been measurable progress in widening university access. In 2024-25, 17.4 per cent of full-time degree entrants came from Scotland's 20 per cent most deprived areas, the highest proportion recorded and closer to the long-standing target of 20 per cent.

These figures should neither be dismissed nor overclaimed.

They show a country in which educational participation has been transformed and social access widened, while family and neighbourhood circumstances continue exerting powerful influence over destination.

The post-war challenge was to extend education. The present challenge is harder: determining how far an education system can equalise opportunity when inequality has already entered the classroom with the child.

Poverty: scarcity receded; insecurity survived

It is methodologically unsound to take a modern relative-poverty measure and apply it backwards to 1945. The societies being compared are too different.

Material living standards have changed profoundly. Domestic sanitation, heating, appliances, healthcare, communications, transport and consumer goods place contemporary households in circumstances that cannot sensibly be mapped onto the immediate post-war economy using a single poverty statistic.

But rising national wealth does not abolish relative deprivation.

The Scottish Government's latest estimates put 17 per cent of Scotland's population, or around 940,000 people, in relative poverty after housing costs over the three years 2022-25. Among children the proportion was 21 per cent. Three-quarters of children in relative poverty lived in households in which somebody was in paid work.

That final figure removes one of the simpler assumptions available to public policy.

Employment remains one of the strongest protections against poverty. It is no longer sufficient to assume that employment and poverty are opposites.

Housing costs, household composition, hours, wages, insecure work and other income sources determine whether earnings translate into economic security.

Post-war Scotland became enormously wealthier in material terms, but the distribution of security

remained much harder to engineer.

Transport: Scotland conquered distance without abolishing isolation

The physical mobility available to someone living in Scotland in 2026 would have been scarcely recognisable in 1945.

Mass car ownership, motorways, trunk roads, bridges, aviation, modern rail services and ferries altered the distances between communities. Telecommunications subsequently removed the need to travel for activities that once demanded physical presence.

Yet transport provides another example of a national success that becomes less complete when examined geographically.

There were 457 million journeys by bus, rail, air and ferry in Scotland in 2024-25. Buses accounted for 73 per cent, rail for 19 per cent, air for 6 per cent and ferries for 2 per cent. Bus use rose during the year but remained 7 per cent below its 2019-20 level, following a 10 per cent decline over the decade before the pandemic.

Those numbers describe very different realities.

In a large city, a reduced bus frequency may be an inconvenience. In a remote community, the loss of the only workable service may determine whether somebody can accept employment, attend college, reach an appointment or remain living independently.

That is the paradox of modern Scottish connectivity.

The country has never possessed more sophisticated means of movement, yet particular communities can become more isolated if a single fragile connection disappears. Scotland's transition away from petrol and diesel adds another complication. Government policy is driving the replacement of conventional vehicles and supporting bus operators to move from diesel fleets to zero-emission buses as part of the country's wider decarbonisation programme.

For densely populated routes, the transition may be comparatively straightforward. For small operators serving long rural routes, islands and sparsely populated communities, the economics are less forgiving. A new bus requires capital; an electric fleet requires charging infrastructure, sufficient electrical capacity and vehicles capable of completing the route reliably. The Scottish Government itself has recognised that smaller operators and those providing vital services can struggle to meet the costs of decarbonisation.

The danger, therefore, is that a policy intended to improve Scotland's environmental future could weaken transport resilience in the places already most dependent upon a handful of services if the transition moves faster than the infrastructure and financial support required to sustain them.

For rural Scotland, replacing the fuel is not enough.

The route must survive as well.

Distance has been reduced.

Dependence upon particular routes has not.

Energy: possessing the resource is not the same as capturing its value

Energy may be the clearest example of Scotland repeatedly changing the means of production while retaining the same economic question.

Coal powered industrial Scotland. The great hydroelectric schemes transformed parts of the Highlands. North Sea oil and gas created an engineering economy centred particularly on Aberdeen and the north-east. The twenty-first century has brought wind, hydro, solar, storage and an electricity system increasingly built around low-carbon generation.

The scale of that transition is substantial. Scotland generated 51.8 TWh of electricity in 2024, of which 37.9 TWh, or 73.1 per cent, came from renewable sources. Scotland was also a substantial net electricity exporter to other parts of the United Kingdom.

That makes the remaining economic question stronger.

An energy-rich country can capture value through ownership, finance, engineering, construction, component manufacture, operations, maintenance, ports, transmission, intellectual property, employment and community benefit.

Or it can generate the resource while much of the value created around it goes elsewhere.

That is becoming harder to ignore in Scotland because the electricity network itself is being rebuilt on an extraordinary scale. Scotland already generates substantially more electricity than it consumes. In 2025 it exported 21.7 TWh and imported 0.9 TWh, leaving net exports of 20.8 TWh with an indicative wholesale value of £1.7 billion.

The new transmission system is intended to increase that capacity substantially further.

Britain's electricity-system planners expect more than 30 GW of offshore wind to be operating in Scottish waters by 2035, against projected Scottish peak electricity demand of about 6 GW. New subsea links, reinforced transmission lines and a north-to-south electrical spine are therefore being developed not simply to supply Scotland, but to carry much larger quantities of electricity generated in and around Scotland to consumers elsewhere in Great Britain.

That is an engineering achievement.

It also exposes an economic problem.

The capacity to extract and transmit value from Scotland's natural energy resources is expanding faster than any guaranteed mechanism for retaining a corresponding share of that value in Scotland. Community benefits exist, and new transmission infrastructure can bring construction work, investment and local funds. But these benefits are not equivalent to ownership of the generating assets, a share of their profits or a continuing claim upon the value of the electricity leaving Scotland. Scottish Government guidance itself describes renewable community benefits as voluntary, while the newer transmission-community funds are calculated largely according to the infrastructure a community hosts rather than the value of the electricity carried through it.

The result is an increasingly peculiar national balance sheet: Scotland can host the turbines, substations, converter stations, pylons and transmission corridors; produce considerably more electricity than it requires; and send ever greater quantities south through a grid specifically being enlarged for that purpose, without the economic return to Scottish households and communities necessarily increasing in proportion.

The Scottish Government now places considerable emphasis on domestic supply chains, shared ownership and community benefit. The need to do so is revealing. Electricity being generated in Scotland does not mean that its ownership, profits, industrial supply chain or long-term economic value are Scottish.

At the same time, mature North Sea production is declining, creating a separate challenge for the communities, businesses and workers whose expertise was built around oil and gas.

Scotland's energy story has therefore moved from coal to hydro, from oil and gas to wind, and now towards a transmission network capable of moving more Scottish-generated power than ever before.

The technology has changed.

The grid is getting larger.

The enduring question is not how much energy Scotland can produce.

It is how much of its value Scotland keeps.

Land: an old concentration beneath new demands

Land differs from several other issues in this review because an unusually old structure remains plainly visible.

The Scottish Land Commission's assessment in 2026 was direct: concentration of land ownership in Scotland is increasing from a starting point already unusually concentrated by international standards. Without intervention, it said, ownership patterns tend to remain remarkably consistent and the market increasingly inaccessible to people, communities and smaller businesses.

What has changed is the number of competing claims placed upon the land.

Agriculture remains the dominant use across much of Scotland, but land is simultaneously required for housing, forestry, renewable electricity, transmission, peatland restoration, biodiversity, tourism, carbon projects and infrastructure.

Nor is farming a marginal economic activity. Initial official estimates put agricultural GVA at about £2.5 billion in 2025 and gross farm output at roughly £5.1 billion, a record in nominal terms. Livestock accounted for 58 per cent of agricultural output. The figures are provisional and will be revised as fuller data become available.

One of Scotland's oldest questions — who owns the land, who controls its use and on what terms — is therefore colliding with some of the country's newest demands.

That collision is already visible across Scotland.

Communities are contesting new transmission lines, pylons and substations required for the expansion of the electricity grid. The proposed Kintore–Tealing transmission line alone generated thousands of objections and has become the subject of a public inquiry. Elsewhere, proposed hyperscale data centres have produced substantial local opposition over their demands for land, electricity and water, their environmental effects and the extent to which the economic benefits promised by developers will remain in the communities expected to accommodate them.

These disputes sit alongside older arguments over farming, forestry, housing and access to land, and newer competition from wind farms, solar developments, battery storage, carbon projects, peatland restoration

and biodiversity schemes.

The underlying issue is no longer simply what Scotland's land should be used for.

It is who gets to decide.

A landowner may see an investment opportunity. A developer may see a grid connection, a data centre or an energy project. Government may see infrastructure essential to national economic or climate policy. A farmer may see productive agricultural land. A nearby community may see its landscape, housing market, roads and quality of life being altered by decisions from which it receives comparatively little lasting control.

Those interests are increasingly meeting on the same acres.

Scotland enters that competition with one of the world's more concentrated patterns of land ownership, meaning that ownership itself carries considerable influence over who can participate in decisions and who can benefit when the economic purpose of land changes.

The structure is old.

The pressures upon it are new.

And increasingly, the argument is not simply about who owns Scotland's land.

It is about who gets to determine what Scotland's land is for.

Government: Scotland repeatedly redesigned the machinery

The institutions through which Scotland governs itself have been reconstructed almost as dramatically as its economy.

The pre-1975 system of counties, counties of cities, burghs and districts was replaced by regional and district authorities. In 1996 that two-tier mainland system was itself replaced by the 32 unitary local authorities that remain today. Health and social care subsequently acquired joint integration structures, while national agencies have repeatedly been created, merged and reorganised.

Yet organisational reform has proved easier to announce than finality.

In 2026 Scotland is again pursuing a substantial programme of public-service reform. The strategy adopted in 2025 aimed to reduce annualised Scottish Government and public-body corporate costs by £1 billion over five years. The 2026 Spending Review then set out £1.5 billion in cumulative recurring savings over its three-year period, including workforce, corporate-function and wider service reforms. Parliamentary scrutiny has questioned the deliverability of aspects of the programme.

This is not merely an argument about efficiency.

Population ageing, workforce availability, health demand, social-care demand and constrained public finances change the amount and type of public provision Scotland can sustain. The institutional map is being asked to solve a resource problem.

Scotland has spent decades altering the structures through which public services are delivered.

The underlying question is whether changing structures can materially improve services when the constraint is increasingly one of labour, money and demand.

Power: devolution answered one question and created another

The constitutional transformation since 1945 is beyond dispute.

Scotland entered the post-war period without its own devolved legislature. Scottish domestic administration operated largely through the Scottish Office and UK Parliament.

The first major post-war attempt at legislative devolution reached a referendum in 1979. The proposal received 52 per cent of votes cast, but the Scotland Act required support from at least 40 per cent of the entire registered electorate. The Yes vote represented approximately 33 per cent of the electorate, so the scheme did not proceed.

Eighteen years later the result was markedly different. In the 1997 referendum, 74.3 per cent of those voting supported the creation of a Scottish Parliament and 63.5 per cent supported tax-varying powers. The Parliament was established under the Scotland Act 1998 and first elected in 1999. Subsequent legislation extended devolved fiscal and welfare powers.

That settled a substantial historical question.

Scotland would again possess its own legislature, making laws over significant areas of domestic life.

It did not settle where ultimate political power lies.

The argument moved, and in 2014 it returned to the existence of the Union itself.

On 18 September that year, Scotland held its first referendum on independence. The result was decisive but hardly terminal: 55.3 per cent voted No and 44.7 per cent voted Yes, on an extraordinary turnout of 84.6 per cent. More than 1.6 million people voted for Scotland to become an independent state.

Two years later came a constitutional rupture that the 2014 settlement had not anticipated. Scotland voted by 62 per cent to 38 per cent to remain in the European Union, with Remain winning in every Scottish local authority area. The United Kingdom as a whole voted to leave. Scotland therefore left the European Union despite a clear majority of Scottish voters having chosen the opposite course.

That raised a question devolution had never resolved. How much power does Scotland actually possess when Scottish electoral choices conflict with decisions made at United Kingdom level?

The Scottish Parliament exercises substantial authority over health, education, justice, housing, local government, planning and other areas of domestic policy. But the constitution, foreign affairs, defence, immigration and significant parts of taxation, economic regulation and energy policy remain reserved to Westminster. The Scottish Parliament can therefore make many of the laws governing everyday life in Scotland while lacking final authority over some of the decisions capable of changing the country's economic and constitutional direction.

Scotland is locked in an ongoing independence debate.

The referendum of 2014 did not make independence disappear as a political proposition. More than a decade later, Scotland remains remarkably close to divided in half. Polls move in either direction, sometimes placing independence below 50 per cent and sometimes above it, but neither side has established a permanent commanding lead. In August 2026, the latest Find Out Now poll put support for independence at 52 per cent and opposition at 48 per cent.

The political institutions reflect that persistence.

The SNP has governed Scotland since 2007 and in May 2026 won a fifth consecutive term in office. It did not secure an overall majority of its own, winning 58 of Holyrood's 129 seats, but the Scottish Greens won 15. Together the parties elected on explicitly pro-independence platforms produced another pro-independence majority in the Scottish Parliament.

The new Scottish Government did not quietly put the constitutional question away.

On 26 May 2026, at the beginning of the new parliamentary session, First Minister John Swinney put the constitutional question formally before Holyrood. His motion called upon the UK Government to make a Section 30 order under the Scotland Act 1998, transferring to the Scottish Parliament the legal power required to hold another referendum on independence.

Swinney told Parliament: “Today, we are calling for a section 30 order to be made to transfer the powers to hold the independence referendum.”

He argued that Scotland had returned the largest number of pro-independence MSPs ever elected to the Scottish Parliament and that, if the United Kingdom was genuinely a voluntary union, its institutions could not indefinitely prevent Scotland from determining whether it wished to remain within it.

The motion passed by 72 votes to 55, with no abstentions.

Swinney then took the demand beyond Holyrood.

He made clear that he would personally request the transfer of referendum powers from the UK Prime Minister. When Swinney subsequently met Prime Minister Andy Burnham on 23 July 2026, he brought Scotland's demand for another independence vote directly into the relationship between the two governments.

The answer was no.

According to Downing Street's own account of the meeting, the Prime Minister stated at the outset that another referendum on Scottish independence was “off limits.”

But by 2026 the independence argument was no longer confined to exchanges between Holyrood and Westminster.

Nor was it confined to the SNP.

Scotland has developed a substantial extra-parliamentary independence movement, with its own campaigns, marches, constitutional arguments, declarations and proposed routes to statehood. That movement has become more important as the possibility of another referendum authorised by Westminster has receded.

There is precedent for Scots putting their constitutional position into writing themselves. During the 2014 campaign, Yes Scotland invited people to sign its Yes Declaration, a public statement supporting an independent Scotland. By August 2014 the campaign said that more than one million people had signed it — an extraordinary mobilisation in a country of little more than five million people.

The referendum result did not extinguish that tradition.

In more recent years, independence campaigners have produced new declarations asserting what they regard as the sovereignty of the Scottish people. The Edinburgh Proclamation, promoted by Salvo and Liberation

Scotland, declares a right of the people of Scotland to the ownership of Scotland and control of its destiny and calls for a peaceful Scottish national movement to assert that claim. Those are the constitutional claims of the campaigners, rather than an established statement of UK law, but their existence illustrates how far parts of the independence movement have travelled beyond simply waiting for Westminster to authorise another referendum.

In July 2026, Scottish author and poet Bobby Motherwell wrote A Declaration for an Independent Scotland. Published amid renewed constitutional debate and around the 250th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence, Motherwell deliberately placed popular sovereignty rather than party politics at the centre of the argument. His declaration states that “every nation possesses the right to determine its own future through the free and democratic will of its people.”

It carried no legal force, but that is precisely why it is revealing. Scotland's independence movement is no longer expressed only through parliamentary motions, manifestos and referendum campaigns. Writers, campaigners and ordinary citizens are increasingly producing their own declarations asserting that sovereignty ultimately belongs to the Scottish people. Motherwell's intervention belongs to a much older Scottish tradition in which political argument and literature have repeatedly occupied the same page.

Other activists have pursued an international route. Liberation Scotland and associated campaigners have sought to take arguments concerning Scottish self-determination to the United Nations, advancing the controversial case that Scotland should be considered within the international decolonisation framework. That argument is disputed and has not been accepted by the United Nations as Scotland's legal status, but the campaign itself is evidence of a movement searching for alternatives after the domestic constitutional route narrowed.

And another possibility, once largely confined to the margins of Scottish constitutional politics, is now being discussed openly: unilateral declaration of independence, or UDI.

UDI would mean Scotland declaring itself independent without first obtaining Westminster's agreement to another referendum or to the termination of the Union. It is not the policy being pursued by First Minister John Swinney, whose strategy remains based upon securing Scotland's right to hold another democratic referendum. Nor is UDI supported by a majority of Scots. But it can no longer be dismissed.

Polling published in August 2026 found 34 per cent of Scots supporting a unilateral declaration by the Scottish Government, 43 per cent opposed and almost a quarter undecided. Among younger Scots support was greater. The numbers are quite different from general support for independence, which continues to hover around half of the electorate, but they demonstrate that the argument over how Scotland might become independent is itself moving into public politics.

The UK Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that the Scottish Parliament does not have competence to legislate for an independence referendum without Westminster's consent because the Union and the UK Parliament are reserved matters. That judgment closed the particular legislative route placed before the Court.

It did not make the political argument disappear and the question is no longer simply whether Scotland should be independent. It is increasingly how Scotland could become independent if Westminster continues to refuse another referendum.

For the Scottish Government, the answer remains democratic pressure for an agreed vote.

The deeper pattern is not policy failure

Viewed separately, these subjects appear to belong to different departments.

Housing is housing. Transport is transport. Health is health.

After 81 years, the separation becomes difficult to sustain.

A housing shortage prevents an employer from recruiting. Weak employment encourages migration away. Population loss makes a bus service less viable. The loss of transport makes employment harder to reach. Low income affects housing, diet and health. Poor health constrains employment and increases public expenditure.

Educational attainment improves opportunity, but opportunity is of limited local value if the corresponding jobs exist somewhere else.

Land determines whether housing, industry or energy infrastructure can be built. Energy development can generate electricity without necessarily generating the maximum domestic industrial value. An ageing population increases demand for healthcare and social care while changing the workforce available to provide them.

These are not ten unrelated Scottish problems, they are interacting systems.

Scotland has repeatedly demonstrated that public policy can solve large first-order problems. It built homes on an extraordinary scale, created universal healthcare, widened education, electrified and connected remote communities, replaced much of an industrial economy after its principal industries contracted, reversed sustained national net emigration and established political institutions that did not exist in 1945.

The difficulty is that solving the first-order problem often revealed a second-order one.

Building housing did not permanently settle affordability or distribution. Universal access to healthcare did not equalise health. Mass education did not equalise opportunity. National population growth did not prevent local decline. Renewable generation did not settle who captures industrial value. Better transport did not ensure resilient access everywhere. Devolution did not end disagreement over where power should reside.

The post-war settlement was extraordinarily effective at expanding capacity.

Modern Scotland is increasingly tested by distribution.

What Scotland actually fixed

An 81-year audit can become intellectually dishonest in two opposite directions.

The first is nostalgia: the idea that post-war Scotland possessed a lost capacity for public action that modern government has somehow forgotten.

The second is presentism: judging previous generations against contemporary expectations while treating every surviving problem as evidence that nothing worked.

Neither survives the evidence.

Scotland's physical and institutional transformation since 1945 is immense.

Millions of people have lived in better housing because of it. Healthcare ceased to depend predominantly upon personal means. Educational opportunity widened. Infrastructure overcame forms of geographical isolation

once accepted as inevitable. The industrial economy diversified. Population decline reversed. Scotland reacquired national legislative institutions.

Some of the deepest inequalities nevertheless proved resistant because they were never contained within a single institution.

A health service can treat illness; it cannot alone equalise income, housing and environment. A school can educate a child; it cannot by itself equalise the resources of the households from which children arrive. A road can connect a community; it cannot compel businesses or families to remain there. A wind farm can produce electricity; it cannot determine where its capital, ownership or manufacturing value resides. A parliament can legislate; it cannot remove legitimate disagreement about the constitutional level at which decisions should be taken.

That is the central finding of Scotland's post-war history.

Not that government failed.

Not that progress was illusory.

But that many of the easiest problems to identify were symptoms of relationships much harder to change.

The unfinished business

When George Buchanan stood in the Commons in October 1945 and described housing as Scotland's greatest social need, his task was reconstruction.

Modern Scotland inherited much of what that generation built.

The problem is no longer simply whether Scotland possesses houses, universities, hospitals, roads, energy resources, productive businesses or institutions of government.

It is whether people can obtain the home they need; whether opportunity survives outside the most successful places; whether longer lives are healthy lives; whether prosperity reaches households with someone already working; whether communities can retain enough people to remain communities; whether new industries retain enough value within Scotland; whether public services can absorb demographic change; and whether political responsibility is located clearly enough for governments to be judged for the decisions they actually control.

That is a harder form of politics than reconstruction because there is rarely a single object to build and declare complete.

The post-war generation confronted visible scarcity.

Scotland in 2026 confronts something subtler: a country of considerably greater wealth, capability and institutional power in which access to those advantages remains uneven.

Eighty-one years of evidence does not show a Scotland standing still. It shows something more consequential: Scotland rebuilt itself; now it must decide who the rebuilding was for.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 17 August 2026

Britain Will Keep Brazilian Meat Market Open as EU Restrictions Begin

Read online: <https://modern.scot/britain-will-keep-brazilian-meat-market-open-as-eu-restrictions-begin/>



Scottish farming and meat organisations are pressing the UK Government to tighten controls on Brazilian beef and poultry before new European Union antimicrobial rules take effect on 3 September. Great Britain, unlike the EU and Northern Ireland, currently intends to keep Brazilian imports moving while it carries out its own assessment.

Scotland's principal red-meat organisations have asked UK ministers to prevent Britain becoming an alternative destination for Brazilian animal products

that could lose access to the European Union next month.

The Scottish Red Meat Resilience Group has written to Environment Secretary Dame Angela Eagle and Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds asking the UK Government to mirror the EU approach unless Brazil can provide verified and auditable guarantees that meat entering Britain has been produced to equivalent antimicrobial standards.

The group brings together Quality Meat Scotland, NFU Scotland, the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers, the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland, NSA Scotland, the Scottish Beef Association, Scottish Craft Butchers, the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs, the Scottish Crofting Federation and the Pig Industry Leadership Group.

The immediate concern is not an outbreak of animal disease or evidence that Brazilian meat currently on British shelves is unsafe. It is a regulatory divergence opening on 3 September 2026, when new EU conditions on antimicrobial use in imported animal products take effect.

Under the EU rules, animals or products imported from third countries must not have been produced using antimicrobial medicines to promote growth or increase yield, or using certain antimicrobials reserved for treating serious infections in humans. Exporting countries must be able to provide evidence, traceability and official guarantees that those requirements have been met.

Brazil is currently authorised for several categories, but the European Commission said in its June implementing regulation that it had not received information guaranteeing that Brazil had put the necessary measures in place to comply by the September deadline. The Commission therefore ordered Brazil's approvals for bovine, equine, poultry, aquaculture, honey and casings to be removed from the relevant list from 3 September.

The EU decision is not a finding that all Brazilian beef or poultry contains antibiotic residues. It concerns Brazil's ability to prove, across the production chain, that EU-bound animals have been raised under the required antimicrobial restrictions.

Brazil is attempting to resolve that problem. Its Agriculture Ministry changed export controls in July so establishments supplying the EU must maintain auditable evidence, trace animals and materials and demonstrate that individual batches meet European requirements. Brazil is seeking to prevent the suspension taking effect.

Great Britain is taking a different route

The position in Great Britain is already clearer than the Scottish industry's letter might suggest.

Information circulated by Defra and the Animal and Plant Health Agency and subsequently published by the British Retail Consortium says Great Britain will not introduce new Brazilian import restrictions on 3 September as a consequence of the EU decision. Instead, Britain is carrying out its own technical assessment of Brazil's antimicrobial assurance arrangements.

The assessment is expected to take about six months. Existing import arrangements are to remain in force during that period, meaning qualifying Brazilian products can continue entering Great Britain provided they satisfy existing British import requirements. Northern Ireland is in a different position because the relevant EU veterinary medicine rules apply there.

That creates the possibility of an unusual internal UK position from September: Brazilian products affected by the EU decision could remain eligible for entry into Great Britain while being unable to enter Northern Ireland under the corresponding rules.

The British position is notable because the production practice at the centre of the dispute is already prohibited domestically. The UK has banned the use of antibiotics as growth promoters since 2006, and government guidance says antibiotics in feed may be used to treat sick animals under veterinary prescription rather than to accelerate growth.

The argument being made by Scotland's meat sector is therefore about equivalence: whether overseas producers supplying the British market should have to demonstrate the same sort of production restrictions imposed on farmers operating here.

The diversion risk is measurable

There is also evidence behind the industry's concern that Britain could become an alternative destination if Brazilian access to the much larger EU market is interrupted.

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board analysis based on HMRC and Eurostat data shows the EU imported 83,273 tonnes of fresh and frozen Brazilian beef in 2025, compared with 11,866 tonnes imported by the UK. A year earlier the figures were 58,899 tonnes for the EU and 4,997 tonnes for the UK. British imports in that category therefore more than doubled between 2024 and 2025.

By the end of April this year, the UK had already imported another 4,521 tonnes, while EU imports had reached 35,424 tonnes.

Those figures also help put the diversion risk in proportion. Redirecting just one-tenth of the Brazilian fresh and frozen beef that entered the EU last year would amount to roughly 8,300 tonnes — around 70 per cent of the UK's entire Brazilian fresh and frozen beef imports in 2025.

AHDB does not predict that all, or even most, EU-bound meat would come to Britain. Brazil has markets in China, the Middle East, South-East Asia and the United States. But it concludes that even a relatively small

diversion could materially increase competition in the much smaller British import market.

There are commercial reasons Britain could attract some of it. AHDB found that UK and EU tariffs on commonly traded Brazilian beef outside preferential quotas are broadly comparable, and established British importer relationships already exist. China, normally by far the largest destination for Brazilian beef, also has safeguard arrangements that can limit how much additional product it absorbs.

Poultry adds another dimension. British Agriculture Bureau analysis says the UK imported about 88,700 tonnes of poultry meat from Brazil in 2025, out of roughly 700,000 tonnes of total poultry imports. Brazil also supplies the EU with around 211,000 tonnes of chicken a year, leaving another substantial trade flow potentially looking for alternative destinations if the restriction takes effect for any length of time.

There is one apparent discrepancy in figures circulating around the issue. NFU Scotland cites 23,000 tonnes of Brazilian beef entering the UK in 2024, equivalent to 8 per cent of beef imports, while AHDB's HMRC series records 4,997 tonnes that year. The AHDB figure covers specifically fresh and frozen beef; the wider NFU figure uses a broader definition of Brazilian beef imports. The figures should therefore not be treated as measuring precisely the same products.

Scotland has fewer beef cows than a decade ago

The warning comes at a sensitive point for Scotland's cattle industry.

The Scottish Agricultural Census recorded 373,000 breeding beef cows in 2025, down from 436,800 in 2015, a decline of 15 per cent in a decade. The herd was also 7.4 per cent below its five-year average.

At the same time, high cattle prices have pushed the economic value of Scottish red meat sharply upwards. Quality Meat Scotland estimates beef, lamb and pork farming, processing and associated supply chains generated more than £4.2 billion of output and £1.3 billion of gross value added in 2025, supporting around 40,000 jobs. Prime cattle prices averaged about £6.60 per kilogram deadweight, 30.3 per cent higher than the previous year.

That combination of fewer cattle and higher prices helps explain why producers are particularly alert to a sudden increase in lower-priced imported supply.

NFU Scotland is also concerned about where imported meat ultimately appears. It argues that country-of-origin visibility is considerably weaker in wholesale and out-of-home food than in supermarket retail, making it harder for consumers to distinguish between domestic and imported meat. The organisation is seeking wider country-of-origin labelling alongside restrictions based on equivalent production standards.

UK monitoring already singles out Brazilian products

There is another piece of official evidence worth noting.

The UK Government's 2026/27 National Monitoring Plan for imported food, which applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, specifically identifies Brazilian corned beef for targeted monitoring of certain veterinary medicine residues. Brazilian salted and marinated chicken is also named among poultry products for high-priority testing for veterinary medicine residues and microbiological hazards.

That does not mean those products have failed UK safety tests. A monitoring priority is not evidence of contamination. It does, however, show that Brazilian meat already features explicitly in the government's risk-based surveillance programme.

Nor do European inspections present a simple picture of deficient Brazilian controls. A separate European Commission audit conducted in Brazil in 2024 found that its residue-control plans and handling of non-compliant results were largely consistent with EU principles, and said the laboratory network's results could generally be relied upon. But the same audit identified shortcomings, including ineffective arrangements for guaranteeing that cattle supplying beef to the EU had never received oestradiol 17 β , a separate hormonal issue from the antimicrobial rules now driving the September decision.

That audit is not the basis of next month's antimicrobial restriction, but it demonstrates why the dispute is more accurately described as one over assurance, traceability and equivalence than as evidence that Brazilian meat as a whole is unsafe.

Brazil still has time to satisfy the European Commission and regain or preserve access. If it does not, however, Great Britain is currently set to remain open to Brazilian products while the EU and Northern Ireland apply the new conditions.

For Scotland's beef sector, the unresolved question is therefore no longer simply what the EU will do on 3 September. It is what happens to the meat that would otherwise have gone there, and whether a British farmer required to meet one set of antimicrobial standards will find himself competing with imports for which the UK Government has not yet completed the equivalent assessment.

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ENVIRONMENT | 17 August 2026

NatureScot Challenges Wind-Farm Bird Model as Scotland's Own Records Show 71 Raptor Deaths

Read online: <https://modern.scot/naturescot-challenges-wind-farm-bird-model-as-scotlands-own-records-show-71-raptor-deaths/>



A study part-funded by NatureScot models substantial long-term effects from wind-turbine collisions on hen harriers and golden eagles in the Flow Country. The agency disputes the scale of the predicted losses, while acknowledging that Scotland does not hold a comprehensive national record of birds killed by turbines.

NatureScot has challenged the findings of a scientific study it helped fund which models potentially substantial long-term effects from wind farms on protected bird populations in northern Scotland.

The research examines the cumulative effects of wind-turbine collisions and displacement on birds associated with the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area and the wider Natural Heritage Zone 5, which includes much of the Flow Country.

Its most striking projection concerns the hen harrier.

Under the study's collision assumptions, the hen harrier population associated with the Special Protection Area would, after 30 years, be only 44% of the size of an equivalent population modelled without wind-turbine collision mortality. Across the wider Natural Heritage Zone, the equivalent figure was 74%.

NatureScot says those projections overstate the actual risk.

The disagreement comes as NatureScot's own records show at least 71 birds of prey were reported killed by collisions with onshore wind turbines in Scotland between 2014 and 2024.

Those records include four hen harriers, seven golden eagles and nine white-tailed eagles.

But NatureScot says the 71 deaths are not a complete Scottish total. Reports are submitted voluntarily and the agency explicitly states that it does not hold a comprehensive record of bird collisions with wind turbines. Offshore deaths are even more difficult to establish because birds that collide with turbines at sea may never be recovered.

The gap between modelled risk and recorded mortality is now at the centre of a considerably larger question about how Scotland measures the environmental consequences of expanding wind generation.

What the Flow Country study found

NatureScot Research Report 1350 was produced by Lucy Mitchell and Elizabeth Masden of the Environmental Research Institute and part-funded by NatureScot, Highland Council and the RSPB.

The researchers examined four species considered vulnerable to turbine collisions: hen harrier, golden eagle, red-throated diver and black-throated diver.

They also considered displacement effects on golden eagle, golden plover, dunlin and greenshank.

Rather than attempting simply to count dead birds, the researchers constructed population models to estimate what repeated additional mortality could mean over the expected life of wind developments.

For hen harriers in the Special Protection Area, the model reduced the population growth rate from 1.11 to 0.94 once estimated cumulative turbine-collision mortality was added.

After 30 years, the modelled affected population was 44% of the equivalent population without that collision effect.

The researchers also considered what could happen if a breeding male were killed. Female hen harriers undertake incubation and depend heavily upon males to provide food during incubation and the early nestling period. The loss of a male can therefore affect more than the individual bird if a nest subsequently fails.

Under that additional productivity scenario, the modelled population was 65% of the equivalent unaffected population after 30 years.

Golden eagles also showed a long-term difference.

For the Special Protection Area population, the modelled population exposed to cumulative collision mortality was 88% of the equivalent unimpacted population after 30 years. Across Natural Heritage Zone 5, it was 75%.

These are projections, not counts of birds which have already been killed.

The calculations depend on assumptions about population size, survival, productivity and expected collision rates. The researchers themselves identify uncertainty in some of those inputs.

NatureScot disputes the scale of the collision risk

NatureScot took the unusual step of publishing its own position statement alongside the research.

For hen harriers, the agency says there is “very little evidence gathered to date” of birds colliding with turbines.

It also says the collision estimates used by the researchers did not account for mitigation already required at some individual wind farms.

At Hollandmey, Slickly, Strathy North and Strathy South, for example, measures have been attached to developments with the intention of reducing habitat suitability or otherwise limiting predicted effects on hen harriers.

NatureScot also points to limited demographic information for the species, which reduces confidence in predicted survival rates.

Its conclusion is that actual residual collision risk is below the level which would cause the hen harrier population to decline at either Special Protection Area or Natural Heritage Zone scale.

The agency also believes the model overstates collision risk for golden eagles.

In their case, NatureScot argues that displacement is the greater concern because satellite-tracking evidence indicates that eagles tend to avoid wind farms.

That means a turbine does not have to kill an eagle to affect it. A development can alter the amount or quality of habitat available to a territory if birds avoid areas they previously used.

Scotland has recorded 71 raptor deaths, but says the figure is incomplete

The assertion that collision evidence is limited becomes more complicated when placed alongside NatureScot's own mortality records.

In response to a freedom of information request, the agency disclosed 71 reported raptor deaths caused by collisions with onshore wind turbines over the decade to 2024.

The records include hen harriers, golden and white-tailed eagles, ospreys, red kites, buzzards, kestrels, peregrines, sparrowhawks, barn owls, a goshawk and a merlin.

Four of the recorded fatalities were hen harriers.

The number supports NatureScot's position that reported hen harrier collisions have been uncommon. It does not establish that four were the only hen harriers killed.

NatureScot's collision reporting system relies upon information sent voluntarily to an email address established in 2013.

The agency said directly in its response that it could not provide an accurate national figure because its records were not comprehensive.

That limitation is particularly relevant when assessing cumulative risk.

Scotland is attempting to estimate what repeated mortality may mean for bird populations over several decades without having a complete retrospective dataset showing how many birds have already collided with turbines.

There is no reliable worldwide death total

International research confirms that turbine collisions kill birds, but there is no scientifically reliable global total.

Carcass surveys require researchers to correct for bodies removed by scavengers, birds missed by search teams and casualties falling outside the area being searched. Monitoring standards vary between wind farms and countries, while obtaining comparable data from offshore developments is considerably more difficult.

Studies therefore report rates and modelled estimates rather than a worldwide count.

One large Canadian study examined carcass-search data from 43 wind farms and corrected the findings for scavenger removal, searcher efficiency and carcasses falling outside the search area.

It estimated an average of 8.2 birds killed per turbine per year.

The figure varied sharply between individual developments, from zero to 26.9 birds per turbine annually.

Applied to Canada's 2,955 installed turbines at the end of 2011, the researchers estimated approximately

23,300 bird deaths a year, with a 95% confidence interval of 20,000 to 28,300.

The variation between wind farms is as significant as the average. Geography, habitat, migration routes, the species present and turbine design can all influence collision rates.

It would therefore be misleading simply to multiply Canada's historic average by the number of turbines in Scotland and present the result as a Scottish mortality estimate.

North American research estimated hundreds of thousands of deaths

A separate peer-reviewed analysis examined 116 studies at 71 wind-energy facilities in the United States and Canada.

Researchers recorded 4,975 bird fatalities in the studies they examined. Small passerines accounted for 62.5% of the recovered birds, while diurnal raptors accounted for 7.8%.

After adjusting and extrapolating the results to installed wind capacity at the time, the researchers estimated approximately 214,000 to 368,000 bird deaths annually from turbine collisions across the United States and Canada.

Another major US analysis cited within that work produced a central estimate of about 234,000 deaths a year, within a range of 140,000 to 328,000.

Those figures date from an earlier period of North American wind deployment and should not be treated as a current 2026 mortality estimate.

They do, however, show why a simple headline total can obscure the conservation issue.

In the North American analysis, the estimated annual collision loss for individual small-passerine species was less than one-tenth of 1% of each species' continental population.

A similar number of deaths among a small population of long-lived, slowly reproducing raptors can have a very different effect.

That is precisely why the Flow Country report concentrates on population consequences rather than simply asking how many birds might collide with turbines.

Some collision risks can be reduced

Research also suggests that turbine design and mitigation can alter mortality.

A study at the Smøla wind farm in Norway tested whether making turbine blades more visible could reduce collisions.

Researchers painted one of the three rotor blades black on four turbines and compared mortality with neighbouring turbines. They reported a reduction of more than 70% in annual bird fatalities at the treated turbines.

The experiment involved only four treated turbines and its authors called for replication elsewhere before the finding could be applied broadly.

It nevertheless demonstrated that turbine-related mortality is not necessarily fixed.

NatureScot is now proposing further work of its own, including reviewing collision-avoidance assumptions, using post-construction monitoring and exploring collaborative monitoring between wind farms in northern Scotland.

Wind development around the Flow Country

The research was commissioned because individual planning applications do not necessarily reveal what happens when many developments occupy the same landscape.

The turbine dataset used by the researchers was last updated in December 2022.

At that point, Natural Heritage Zone 5 contained 256 constructed turbines, with another 126 approved, 82 under construction and 123 in planning.

Of the 256 already constructed, 205 were within five kilometres of what was then the proposed World Heritage Site.

Those numbers are historical inputs to the study and are not a count of the current number of turbines in the area in 2026.

The Flow Country was subsequently inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2024. It covers 187,026 hectares of Caithness and Sutherland and is recognised for its blanket-bog ecosystem.

UNESCO specifically identifies wind turbines as a potential threat, both because of their supporting infrastructure and because of possible effects on birds which form part of the ecosystem for which the site was designated.

Its list of potential pressures also includes forestry, drainage, intensive agriculture, burning, deer management and climate change.

The new research does not conclude that wind farms cannot be developed around the Flow Country.

Nor does it demonstrate that hen harriers or golden eagles will decline by the percentages produced by its models.

It reveals a more difficult problem.

The study produces potentially serious population effects from cumulative turbine collisions. NatureScot believes those estimates are too high. Its own records confirm that protected raptors have been killed by turbines, while simultaneously showing that Scotland has no complete national record of how often that happens.

International studies show why neither side of that argument can be reduced to a single number. Collision rates can vary from virtually none at one wind farm to many times the average at another, and the ecological consequence depends heavily upon which species are being lost.

For the Flow Country, that leaves the central question unresolved.

Scotland knows turbines have killed hen harriers and eagles. It knows the number recorded is incomplete. It also has a scientific model suggesting cumulative losses could eventually alter some populations... and a national nature agency which believes that model overstates the danger.

The next test will be whether Scotland can gather enough real-world monitoring data to determine which is

closer to the truth.

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ECONOMY | 17 August 2026

Bluetongue Reaches Four Scottish Premises as Vaccine Evidence Sharpens the Questions Ahead

Read online: <https://modern.scot/bluetongue-reaches-four-scottish-premises-as-vaccine-evidence-sharpens-the-questions-ahead/>



Five animals on four premises in Dumfries and Galloway have now been affected by BTV-3. As investigators establish whether Scotland is dealing with isolated infections or local transmission, European field research offers a more complicated picture of vaccination.

Scotland's first confirmed encounter with bluetongue serotype 3 is no longer the story of a single infected sheep.

By the end of this weekend, BTV-3 had been confirmed

on four premises in Dumfries and Galloway, involving five animals. The first Scottish detection was made in a sheep on 8 August. Further investigations by the Animal and Plant Health Agency subsequently found the virus on three nearby premises, with later official updates recording infections involving both sheep and cattle.

There is still no bluetongue disease control zone in Scotland. APHA is investigating whether the findings represent a small cluster of isolated cases or evidence that the virus is circulating more widely. That distinction now carries much of the weight of the Scottish response.

Beyond Scotland, the disease is moving quickly.

The official UK tally, updated on 16 August and covering confirmed cases to midnight on 15 August, stood at 447 premises: 430 in England, 13 in Wales and four in Scotland. Another 2,003 potential cases were under investigation after reports of suspicious clinical signs. England and Wales are already covered by country-wide restricted zones.

Five Scottish animals are therefore a small number within a much larger British outbreak. They are nevertheless occurring on the other side of a boundary Scotland has spent considerable effort trying to defend.

Movement controls introduced for the active midge season require susceptible animals coming into Scotland from restricted parts of the UK to meet specific conditions. Those controls are presently expected to remain in their current form until at least 9 September, when falling temperatures are expected gradually to reduce the risk of transmission by the biting midges that carry the virus.

Bluetongue is not spread between livestock in the manner of an ordinary contagious respiratory infection. Its principal vehicle is considerably smaller.

Certain species of *Culicoides* biting midge acquire the virus while feeding on an infected animal. An infected midge can then transmit it to another susceptible animal when it feeds again. Temperature, rainfall, wind, topography and the density of neighbouring livestock holdings can all affect how efficiently that process occurs. Midges capable of transmitting bluetongue are found across Great Britain.

The disease affects sheep, cattle, goats and other ruminants. It does not infect people and does not make meat or milk unsafe to eat. Its consequences lie instead in animal welfare, mortality, fertility, production and the restrictions required to prevent infected animals or vectors carrying the virus further.

Sheep generally show the most conspicuous disease. Signs can include fever, lameness, breathing difficulties, discharge from the eyes or nose, sores in the mouth, swelling of the head and tongue, abortion and death. Cattle may show considerably less obvious illness while still becoming infected; signs can include lethargy, fever, nasal lesions, reduced appetite, abortion and a fall in milk production.

Research carried out at the Pirbright Institute before the 2024 transmission season helps explain why apparently modest clinical signs cannot be taken as a complete measure of transmission risk. In an experimental study involving British sheep infected with the emerging BTV-3 strain, researchers recorded mild to moderate disease but were able to isolate infectious virus from sheep blood for as long as 28 days after infection. The animals showed varying combinations of fever, lameness, haemorrhagic diarrhoea and behavioural changes.

Cattle present a different problem. They can carry the virus while showing few visible signs, giving infected midges the opportunity to acquire it. Work from the Netherlands has also found prolonged PCR detection of BTV-3 RNA in cattle after infection, although a positive PCR result detects viral genetic material and should not automatically be interpreted as proof that an animal remains infectious throughout that entire period.

Three BTV-3 vaccines — Bluevac-3, BULTAVO 3 and Syvazul BTV 3 — now have marketing authorisations for use in Great Britain. Their authorised claims are not identical.

For cattle, Bluevac-3 and Syvazul are authorised to reduce viraemia. BULTAVO 3 is authorised to prevent viraemia and clinical signs. For sheep, the authorised claims also vary between reducing and preventing particular effects of the disease.

Scotland's current movement rules make a practical distinction between those products.

Cattle coming from a bluetongue restricted zone into Scotland that have completed a course of Bultavo-3, with at least 21 days having elapsed after completion of the primary course and the required booster given where applicable, can be exempt from the otherwise required pre-movement test. Cattle vaccinated with Bluevac or Syvazul still require a PCR test within seven days of movement, as do unvaccinated cattle.

It becomes particularly interesting beside a peer-reviewed field study published last year examining how those same three vaccines performed during the Dutch BTV-3 epidemic.

Researchers led by Reinard Everts collected data from 1,114 Dutch dairy cattle herds following the extraordinary spread of BTV-3 in the Netherlands. Of those herds, 518 had completed a two-dose vaccination programme and another 29 had received a single dose. The researchers used PCR results from an early-warning system as an indicator of viraemia and the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines as an indirect measure of clinical illness.

The results were not uniform.

Within the subset of herds included in the PCR analysis, 173 unvaccinated herds were tested and 165 were positive, about 95 per cent. Among Bluevac-vaccinated herds that were tested, 69 of 72 were positive. Among Syvazul herds, 27 of 30 were positive.

Among Bultavo-vaccinated herds, 33 of 90 tested positive, 37 per cent.

In the researchers' statistical model, fully vaccinated Bultavo herds had substantially lower odds of testing positive than unvaccinated herds. The difference was statistically significant. Bluevac and Syvazul did not show a statistically significant reduction in the probability of a positive result against the unvaccinated reference group in that analysis.

This was an observational field study, not a randomised vaccine trial. Herds were not selected for testing at random, and the groups differed markedly in how frequently farmers submitted animals for testing. The authors themselves identified possible confounding arising from farmer behaviour, geographical exposure, timing of vaccination and other factors.

They explicitly warn that the findings are not proof that Bluevac or Syvazul provided no protection.

The second part of the research produced another notable difference.

Across 1,085 herds for which medicine data were analysed, use of anti-inflammatory drugs increased during the 2024 BTV-3 season compared with the same period in 2023. The increase was significantly smaller in Bultavo-vaccinated herds than in unvaccinated herds. Bluevac and Syvazul herds recorded larger increases, but again the authors caution against treating medicine use as a direct, uncontaminated measurement of vaccine performance. Farmers who vaccinated may have behaved differently, recognised disease differently or treated animals more readily.

Having considered those limitations, the researchers nevertheless concluded that there appeared to be substantial differences between the products under the conditions studied and that Bultavo performed better in preventing positive test outcomes and clinical disease requiring anti-inflammatory treatment. The authors reported receiving no financial support for the research and declared no commercial or financial conflict of interest.

There is a boundary which should not be crossed in applying those findings to Scotland.

The Dutch work examined dairy cattle exposed during the 2024 BTV3/NET2023 outbreak. It did not study Scottish cattle in 2026, it did not study the five animals currently reported in Dumfries and Galloway, and it cannot establish retrospectively whether any particular vaccination programme would have prevented the Scottish detections.

Nor has the Scottish Government said that its movement policy was based on this particular study.

What can properly be said is that the field evidence and Scotland's existing movement rules point in a similar direction: BTV-3 vaccination cannot sensibly be discussed as though three differently authorised products necessarily provide identical epidemiological protection.

That becomes more relevant if Scotland's infections extend beyond the four premises now known.

The Scottish Government presently describes vaccination as the best way of protecting animals from the worst effects of the disease and advises livestock keepers to discuss it with their private vet. Use of BTV-3 vaccine must also be officially recorded.

Vaccination, however, has two related purposes that are easily blurred. One is protecting an individual animal against severe disease. The other is reducing viraemia sufficiently to make it less likely that a midge feeding on that animal will acquire the virus and continue the transmission chain.

A vaccine can perform strongly against one outcome without necessarily eliminating the other.

That is why the question now facing Scotland is larger than whether the five known animals recover.

APHA must establish how the animals became infected, whether the four Dumfries and Galloway premises are epidemiologically connected and whether infected midges are already transmitting BTV-3 among Scottish livestock.

The calendar offers some assistance, but not immediately. The Scottish Government regards 1 June to 9 September as this year's principal control period, when temperatures are generally sufficient for midge transmission. Midges themselves can remain active across a longer period, depending on conditions.

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ENERGY | 17 August 2026

Two Scottish Hydro Schemes Fall Below Ofgem Financial Test as Regulator Weighs Consumer Risk

Read online: <https://modern.scot/two-scottish-hydro-schemes-fall-below-ofgem-financial-test-as-regulator-weighs-consumer-risk/>



Glenmuckloch and Loch na Cathrach remain outside Ofgem's proposed long-duration electricity storage portfolio after the regulator assessed both below a financial threshold that was not fixed before the assessment began.

Two major Scottish pumped-storage hydro projects have been left outside Ofgem's proposed support scheme after the regulator concluded they presented a greater risk of relying on payments ultimately supported through consumers' energy bills.

The consultation on Ofgem's first Long Duration Electricity Storage, or LDES, awards closed on 14 August, with final decisions expected later this autumn.

Detailed assessment papers show Glenmuckloch Pumped Storage Hydro and Loch na Cathrach both passed Ofgem's strategic deliverability assessment with Green ratings, but fell below its financial threshold.

Ofgem ranked Glenmuckloch 23rd in its economic assessment, with a score of 64.06. Loch na Cathrach ranked immediately behind it in 24th place with 63.73.

The regulator said both projects had a "higher potential reliance on floor support".

Under the LDES cap-and-floor system, projects are guaranteed a minimum revenue level. If revenue falls below that floor, consumers make up the difference through charges on energy bills. If revenue exceeds the upper cap, the surplus is returned to consumers through reductions in network charges.

The financial assessment is therefore intended to test both project viability and the potential level of consumer support which could be required.

Financial assessment changed the position

Ofgem's detailed tables reveal a distinction which is less apparent from the headline list of successful and unsuccessful schemes.

For both Glenmuckloch and Loch na Cathrach, the column headed "Submitted FA Score" records the projects as above the financial threshold.

Ofgem's "Assessed FA Score" puts both below it.

The regulator also states that the financial threshold itself was not predetermined.

During its assessment, Ofgem identified projects scoring below 0.60 as having a comparatively higher downside risk. It said the threshold was established after examining the distribution of financial scores and

was then applied consistently across projects.

Ofgem described it as a proxy for materially elevated risk of projects relying on the revenue floor rather than as an automatic pass-or-fail rule. Strategic benefits could still justify supporting a scheme with a weaker financial score.

The consultation which ended on Friday specifically invited representations on the methodology and evidence used by Ofgem. The regulator says it will consider whether responses identify errors, inconsistencies or other issues requiring correction or further analysis before final awards are made.

For Glenmuckloch and Loch na Cathrach, no such exception has provisionally been made.

Ofgem said Glenmuckloch's lower economic performance and failure to meet the financial threshold did not provide sufficient grounds for its inclusion.

Its conclusion on Loch na Cathrach was substantially the same.

Both received a Green deliverability rating, and Ofgem recorded no material concerns in their strategic assessments. The Green classification relates to the regulator's assessment of the projects' ability to deliver; it is not an environmental rating.

Ofgem assessed Glenmuckloch at 182MW with 9.1 hours of storage and Loch na Cathrach at 500MW with eight hours, with both listed for possible operation from 2030.

North Scotland dominates provisional storage capacity

The two omissions sit alongside an unusually strong Scottish presence among the projects Ofgem does propose to support.

Ofgem's provisional Window 1 portfolio contains 16 projects with 7,645MW of total capacity.

Modern Scot analysis of Ofgem's project table finds that seven projects classified by the regulator as North Scotland account for 5,100MW — about 67% of the entire proposed British portfolio.

They are Loch Kemp Storage at 660MW, Coire Glas at 1,440MW, Earba at 1,800MW, Field Netherton and Field New Deer at 400MW each, and Field Rigifa and Field Fyrish at 200MW each.

The first three are pumped-storage hydro schemes. The other four are long-duration lithium-ion battery projects.

Loch Kemp ranked first in Ofgem's economic assessment, Coire Glas second and Earba fourth. All three were above the regulator's financial threshold and received Green deliverability ratings.

That gives the northern Scottish electricity system a central place in the first round of a scheme intended to store renewable electricity when generation is abundant and release it when the system needs it.

Long-duration storage is being developed partly to allow a power system with large amounts of variable wind generation to move electricity across time rather than relying solely on generation matching demand at the moment it is produced.

Ofgem says LDES can contribute to system reliability, lower system costs and the integration of renewable generation.

Awards are not yet final

The 7,645MW portfolio is deliberately close to the upper end of the capacity range Ofgem was advised to support.

The regulator says that provides room for some projects to fall away because of financing, construction or other difficulties without leaving Britain with too little storage capacity.

It also acknowledges that the optimum quantity and mix of storage cannot yet be determined precisely.

Final Window 1 awards are due in autumn 2026.

Successful projects will then face milestones covering matters including grid connections, finance, final investment decisions, construction, commissioning and commercial operation. Ofgem says it will be able to revoke cap-and-floor agreements where projects fail to make sufficient progress.

Until that final decision, Glenmuckloch and Loch na Cathrach remain outside the proposed portfolio rather than finally rejected.

The consultation has now closed with Ofgem facing a particularly clear Scottish question: whether its reassessment of the two hydro projects correctly identifies a greater risk to consumers, and whether that risk outweighs projects it otherwise regards as deliverable.

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HERITAGE AND ARTS | 17 August 2026

Mackintosh's Hill House Moves Towards New 'Breathable' Exterior After 120 Years of Damp

Read online: <https://modern.scot/mackintoshs-hill-house-moves-towards-new-breathable-exterior-after-120-years-of-damp/>



The National Trust for Scotland is commissioning a detailed survey of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Hill House as it prepares to replace the building's failed cement exterior and remove its protective Box by 2028.

The National Trust for Scotland has begun another stage of work to tackle the chronic damp which has affected Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Hill House in Helensburgh since shortly after it was built.

A contract notice published on 14 August seeks an archaeological consultant to carry out a detailed Standing Building Survey of the Category A-listed house before a future conservation and repair programme.

The Trust says that programme will include a new roughcast exterior being developed to replace the Portland-cement coating which has contributed to more than a century of water problems.

The survey is intended to record and improve understanding of the building before repairs which may involve alterations. Tenders close on 7 September and the survey contract is scheduled to run from 12 September until 30 November. Quality will account for 75% of the tender assessment and price 25%.

Cement exterior to be replaced

The Hill House was designed by Mackintosh between 1902 and 1904 for Glasgow publisher Walter Blackie.

Mackintosh and his wife, artist and designer Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, also designed much of its interior, including furniture, fittings and decorative work. Historic Environment Scotland describes it as the most complete and finest example of Mackintosh's domestic architecture.

Its exterior proved less successful.

Mackintosh used Portland-cement roughcast to produce the plain, largely unornamented walls he wanted. The material was regarded as innovative at the time, but water began penetrating the building within years of its completion.

Historic Environment Scotland says the problems resulted largely from inadequate weathering details at walls and window sills, together with reliance on the cement harl.

Unlike more traditional breathable lime finishes, the Portland-cement covering contributed to moisture becoming trapped within the walls.

The National Trust for Scotland, which has owned the house since 1982, eventually concluded that repeatedly

repairing the existing render would not provide a long-term answer.

It said earlier this year that expert analysis had established that complete replacement of the Portland-cement render was the only tenable option. Work to remove it is now under way.

The Trust is working with specialists to develop a replacement surface which will preserve Mackintosh's intended appearance while allowing moisture to escape rather than remain trapped inside the structure.

House has been drying inside protective Box

The Hill House has been protected since 2019 by the Hill House Box, a large steel structure covered in chainmail mesh.

It reduces the amount of rain reaching the building while allowing air to circulate around it, enabling saturated walls to dry gradually.

Tests carried out beneath sections of roughcast found that the walls were steadily drying and regaining strength inside the protected environment. Specialists removed the cement coating at six locations and examined sandstone, brickwork and other parts of the original construction.

Samples, including material believed to be part of Mackintosh's original roughcast, were analysed by researchers at the University of Dundee.

More recent removal work has also exposed previously unknown details in the structure, including an unused entrance and a window opening.

The newly commissioned building survey will create a formal record of the house as that work continues and will inform the design of the permanent repairs.

Box expected to go in 2028

The conservation work forms part of the National Trust for Scotland's wider Mackintosh Illuminated project, covering the Hill House and the Mackintosh Tearooms in Glasgow.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has provided £1.1m in development support towards the project, which was described when announced as the first stage towards a possible wider £7.3m award.

The Trust says it currently has planning permission for the Hill House Box to remain until 2028 and intends the building to be sufficiently repaired that the structure will no longer be required after that point.

The new roughcast has not yet been finally specified, and the contract advertised this month is for the archaeological survey rather than installation of the replacement exterior.

The work now under way is intended to establish precisely what survives beneath Mackintosh's cement coating before a new one is put in its place.

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ECONOMY | 17 August 2026

Nearly One in Four Larger Manufacturers in Scotland Reports Impact From US Tariffs

Read online: <https://modern.scot/nearly-one-in-four-larger-manufacturers-in-scotland-reports-impact-from-us-tariffs/>



New Scottish Government estimates show US tariff effects remain concentrated among manufacturers and goods exporters, while the American tariff regime itself changed during the period covered by the latest survey.

Nearly one in four larger manufacturing businesses with a presence in Scotland reported being affected by US tariffs during the latest Scottish Government business survey.

The estimate for manufacturing was 24.5%, compared

with 9.9% across all businesses covered by the survey. Manufacturing recorded the highest affected share of any sector included in the published results.

The figures come from Wave 161 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey, which ran from 20 July to 2 August 2026 and asked businesses what effect, if any, United States tariffs had had on them during the previous month.

There is an important qualification to the figures. The Scottish Government's weighted estimates cover businesses with 10 or more employees and a presence in Scotland. They do not include Scotland's large population of micro and very small businesses.

A business is counted as having a Scottish presence if it operates a site such as an office, factory or shop in Scotland, even if its headquarters are elsewhere. The Scottish Government excluded businesses with fewer than 10 employees because there were not enough Scottish responses in that group to construct suitable weighted estimates.

The survey is also voluntary. Of 10,034 businesses responding across the UK in Wave 161, 1,200 had a presence in Scotland. Once businesses with fewer than 10 employees were removed, the Scottish base consisted of 1,107 responding businesses. The results were then weighted to produce estimates for the wider population of businesses meeting those criteria.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing, electricity and gas supply, financial and insurance activities and the public sector are among the areas excluded from the underlying BICS coverage.

For that reason, the 24.5% manufacturing figure should not be reported as though almost one quarter of every manufacturer operating in Scotland has been individually counted. It is a weighted estimate for the larger-business population covered by the survey.

Exporters report much greater exposure

The difference becomes particularly clear among businesses that actually sell goods abroad.

An estimated 23.9% of businesses which had exported goods during the previous 12 months said US tariffs had affected them during the preceding month.

Among all businesses covered by the Scottish estimates, the corresponding figure was 9.9%.

For goods exporters, 14% reported experiencing additional costs, making that the most commonly reported tariff effect.

At the same time, 54.8% of goods exporters said they had experienced no impact.

The survey does not put a monetary value on those effects. It cannot show whether a company reporting additional costs absorbed £5,000 or £5m, whether those costs reduced margins, were reflected in prices, or led customers to buy less.

It also does not measure the tariff bill paid at the US border by Scottish-origin goods. It measures what businesses themselves reported experiencing.

The pattern has persisted

The latest figures are not the first indication that manufacturing is carrying a disproportionate share of Scotland's exposure to US trade measures.

A comparable Scottish Government survey covering 18 to 31 August 2025 found that 23.1% of manufacturing businesses had been affected by US tariffs. At that point, 11.2% of all businesses covered by the estimates reported an impact.

Among goods exporters, the 2025 estimate was 22.9%, with 14.1% reporting additional costs.

The point estimates have therefore moved from 23.1% to 24.5% for manufacturing and from 22.9% to 23.9% for goods exporters between those two survey periods.

Those movements should not be treated automatically as statistically significant increases. What the two sets of results demonstrate more safely is that the concentration of reported tariff effects in manufacturing and goods exporting has persisted across separate survey periods.

That exposure reflects the structure of Scotland's trade with the United States.

United States is Scotland's second-largest goods market

The US was Scotland's second-largest international market for goods in 2025, accounting for exports worth £4.3bn, or 18% of Scotland's total international goods exports.

Only the European Union, taken collectively, accounted for a larger share.

Engineering and advanced manufacturing alone accounted for £2.04bn of Scottish goods exports to the United States in the year to June 2025, excluding oil and gas.

Scottish Government analysis found that exports to the US from that sector had increased by 70% between 2021 and 2025.

That level of trade helps explain why the national business figure and the manufacturing figure can look so

different. A domestic service business may have little direct exposure to US import duties, while a manufacturer selling physical products into the American market can encounter them as part of its ordinary trading environment.

The effect is not uniform even within manufacturing because the United States does not currently impose one identical tariff on every product arriving from Britain.

The tariff system changed during the survey

That distinction is particularly relevant to the latest Scottish data because the American tariff regime changed while Wave 161 was being conducted.

The broad additional duties imposed under the US International Emergency Economic Powers Act were ended by a White House order on 20 February 2026. Other tariffs imposed under separate legal powers were unaffected.

The White House then introduced a separate temporary 10% import surcharge under Section 122 of US trade law, taking effect on 24 February.

That surcharge contained a substantial list of exemptions, including pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical ingredients, certain aerospace goods, some vehicles and vehicle parts, energy products and other specified goods. It was scheduled to remain in force for 150 days, through 24 July 2026, unless altered earlier or extended by Congress.

On that same date, 24 July, another US measure came into effect.

The Office of the United States Trade Representative imposed new Section 301 duties following investigations into the failure of 60 economies to prohibit or effectively restrict imports produced using forced labour.

The United Kingdom was placed among a group subject to an additional 10% Section 301 tariff, with exemptions for specified products.

The timing means businesses answering the Scottish survey were describing their experience across a period in which one temporary tariff mechanism was reaching its scheduled end and another was beginning.

The latest 9.9% and 24.5% figures cannot therefore be attributed to a single unchanged 10% tariff applying in precisely the same way throughout the month.

Scotch whisky is among the exemptions

The new Section 301 regime also contains an exemption particularly relevant to Scotland.

The official US tariff schedule specifically exempts goods from the United Kingdom classified under code 2208.30.30 — Irish and Scotch whiskies — from the new additional duty.

A range of medical equipment is also included in the UK exemption list.

That makes it unsafe to describe current US tariff exposure simply in terms of a universal levy on Scottish exports.

Different Scottish industries can face materially different conditions depending on the product involved, its customs classification, whether another US tariff regime applies and whether it falls within an exemption.

For manufacturers, that can make the trading environment more complicated even when a particular product escapes one additional duty. A company may produce several product lines, use components from different countries or sell through customers whose own costs have changed.

The BICS results capture businesses' assessment of the overall effect on them; they do not identify the customs codes responsible for each response.

A large market with a concentrated risk

The Scottish Government is simultaneously trying to expand Scottish sales in the United States.

Its 2026 export strategy identifies the US as a priority destination for engineering and advanced manufacturing, supported by the £2.04bn already being sold into that market.

That creates a straightforward commercial tension. The United States remains one of Scotland's largest and most valuable export destinations, while access to it has become subject to a more active and rapidly changing use of tariff policy.

The latest survey suggests that this is still not being experienced equally across the Scottish economy.

More than half of goods exporters covered by the survey reported no tariff effect. The majority of businesses overall did not report one either.

But among larger manufacturers, the affected share was 24.5%.

For companies in that group, the question at the US border increasingly depends not merely upon what they make and what it costs, but upon the tariff authority currently in force, the customs classification attached to the product and whether Washington has placed it inside or outside an exemption.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 17 August 2026

NHS Scotland Seeks Provider for £9m Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Service

Read online: <https://modern.scot/nhs-scotland-seeks-provider-for-9m-online-cognitive-behavioural-therapy-service/>



NHS Scotland is seeking a provider for a national online cognitive behavioural therapy service under a contract worth up to £9m. The existing service has already required additional funding because of rising demand.

NHS Scotland has opened a procurement process for a national online cognitive behavioural therapy service, with the contract estimated to be worth £9m over as long as five years.

The service is not a new treatment programme.

Internet-enabled cognitive behavioural therapy, known as ieCBT, is already provided nationally in Scotland and allows patients to receive live therapy at home through written online conversations with a qualified therapist.

The new tender was published on 14 August by Public Services Delivery Scotland.

It seeks a provider to continue giving patients access to NICE-recommended forms of CBT for common mental health problems, particularly where people face barriers to traditional services.

The initial contract would run for 36 months, with two possible 12-month extensions.

The £9m figure is the estimated value across the maximum five-year period and does not represent an annual cost.

Why NHS Scotland is buying the service

Documents from the existing contract provide a clearer explanation of why NHS Scotland is continuing and potentially expanding the service.

Ieso Digital Health was awarded the current national ieCBT contract in November 2023.

The original contract was formally valued at £3.5m, covering an initial two years with the possibility of a further 12-month extension.

In January this year, NHS Scotland published a formal modification to that contract after demand for the service increased.

The formal procurement figures show the contract value increasing from £3.5m to £4.4m.

NHS Scotland said the increase was necessary because more patients across Scotland were using the service.

It also said ieCBT was playing a significant role in reducing long waits for psychological services.

The modification notice contains a numerical inconsistency in its explanatory text, which refers to £3.6m increasing to £4.5m. The formal contract-value fields in the same notice state £3.5m increasing to £4.4m. Those formal figures are used here.

The new procurement is considerably larger, although a direct comparison requires care.

The current contract covers up to three years. The new £9m procurement could operate for five years if both extensions are used.

It is therefore not evidence by itself that NHS Scotland intends to double annual spending on the service.

What the procurement history does show is that the existing contract required additional money because demand exceeded the level originally anticipated.

Who uses online CBT in Scotland

CBT is one of several forms of psychological therapy used by NHS Scotland.

It is based on the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour and is intended to help people recognise and change patterns that may contribute to psychological distress.

Scottish Government guidance describes CBT as a structured and time-limited form of psychotherapy which is widely used for depression and anxiety as well as other psychological disorders.

Different versions of CBT are used for different conditions.

Scotland's national guide to psychological therapies identifies CBT-based treatments for conditions including depression, generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, substance use and chronic pain.

That does not mean everyone with one of those conditions will receive CBT.

Clinical treatment depends on the individual, the condition, its severity and the available evidence for different forms of therapy.

The specific national internet-enabled CBT service covered by the current contract is more narrowly defined.

Scottish Government guidance identifies Ieso as the current provider and says the service is available to people aged 16 and over.

The guidance lists uses including anxiety, depression, OCD and phobias. A related ieCBT pathway also includes stress and single-incident PTSD.

Patients use a computer, tablet or mobile phone at an agreed appointment time.

The therapist and patient then communicate in real time through typed messages rather than video or spoken conversation.

Unlike some computerised CBT programmes, where patients work largely through modules themselves, this form of ieCBT involves direct contact with a therapist.

Referral is through a mental health clinician rather than the service simply being opened anonymously by anyone online.

CBT is not mandatory for ordinary NHS patients

There is no general requirement for people receiving NHS mental health care in Scotland to undergo CBT.

Scottish Government guidance on psychological therapies says people should be offered evidence-based treatment appropriate to their needs and, where possible and clinically appropriate, should have access to different ways of receiving treatment, including digital, group and in-person services.

There are separate provisions in Scottish mental health law allowing compulsory treatment in restricted circumstances.

The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 allows compulsory treatment for some people where statutory conditions are met.

The legal definition of medical treatment under the Act includes psychological intervention.

That does not make CBT routinely compulsory.

Scottish Government guidance states that most people using mental health services receive treatment without being subject to a compulsory order or certificate, and that compulsory treatment is permitted only under strict circumstances.

The £9m ieCBT procurement is therefore a service NHS Scotland is making available as part of psychological care, not a programme people across Scotland are required to undertake.

Waiting times remain below the national standard

The expansion of digital psychological treatment is taking place while NHS Scotland continues to miss its national waiting-time standard for psychological therapies.

The Scottish Government standard is that 90% of people referred for psychological therapy should begin treatment within 18 weeks.

The latest Public Health Scotland statistics, covering the quarter ending March 2026, show 79.4% started treatment within 18 weeks.

A total of 19,285 people began psychological therapy during the quarter, while 31,179 people were referred.

Half of those who did begin treatment started within three weeks.

The figures cover psychological therapies generally and should not be treated as statistics for ieCBT alone.

They do, however, provide the wider context for NHS Scotland's statement that the online service is being used to help reduce longer psychology waiting times.

Digital treatment across every health board

Digital CBT is now well established within Scotland's mental health system.

Scottish Government guidance says computerised CBT has been available across all territorial NHS boards since 2018.

It lists 35 CBT-based digital treatments, covering mental health, wellbeing and some long-term physical

health conditions.

Examples include programmes addressing depression, anxiety, panic, OCD, insomnia, social anxiety and phobias.

There are also CBT-based programmes designed to help people experiencing psychological difficulties alongside conditions including chronic pain, diabetes, coronary heart disease and rheumatoid arthritis.

Digital services vary considerably in how they operate.

Some allow people to work through structured material independently.

Others provide regular support.

The ieCBT service covered by the £9m procurement involves a therapist working directly with the patient through live written communication.

The Scottish Government has specifically identified the ability of ieCBT to overcome geographical barriers.

That is particularly relevant in a health system covering remote, rural and island communities as well as Scotland's major cities.

It can also provide an alternative for patients who find travelling to regular appointments difficult or who encounter other barriers to conventional psychological services.

The new tender does not state how many patients are expected to use the service during the next contract.

It also does not provide a projected cost per patient.

Quality will account for 85% of the assessment of bids, with price accounting for 15%.

Companies must meet information-security requirements including ISO 27001 and provide evidence of relevant experience.

The tender closes at 17:00 on 14 September 2026.

The procurement documents describe the purpose simply as continuing a national service.

The history of the existing contract provides the reason behind that continuation: NHS Scotland has already had to increase its spending because more people used the service than originally anticipated, while the wider psychological therapy system continues to fall short of Scotland's 18-week access standard.

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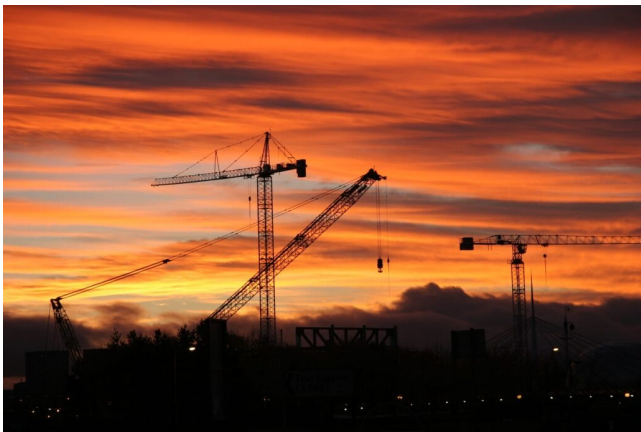
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INFRASTRUCTURE | 17 August 2026

Nearly £1bn of Glasgow Building Work Passes Through Service Missing National Response Targets

Read online: <https://modern.scot/nearly-1bn-of-glasgow-building-work-passes-through-service-missing-national-response-targets/>



Glasgow's building standards service handled warrant applications representing £983 million of construction during 2025–26, but remained below national targets for two of the principal measures governing how quickly applications are dealt with. The council says persistent vacancies and staff turnover are part of the problem.

Almost £1 billion of proposed building work passed through Glasgow's building warrant system last year while the council service responsible for checking it

continued to fall short of national response-time targets.

Figures being presented to Glasgow City Council's Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee on Tuesday show that the Building Standards service received 2,744 building warrant applications during 2025–26.

Those applications represented work valued at £983 million.

During the same financial year, the service issued 3,898 Completion Certificate Acceptances, the formal stage through which completed building work is accepted within Scotland's building standards system.

The council is careful to say that those figures are not themselves measures of performance. They illustrate the volume and economic value of construction activity being handled by the service.

The performance figures that follow are rather less comfortable.

Scottish local authorities are measured against a national target requiring 95 per cent of first responses to building warrant applications to be issued within 20 working days.

Glasgow achieved between 81 and 88 per cent during the four quarters of 2025–26.

Its performance was rated Amber during the first quarter and Red during the remaining three quarters. Under the performance system used during the year, performance of 85 per cent or above fell within the Amber range, while anything below that threshold was Red.

A second target requires 90 per cent of building warrants and amendments to be issued within ten working days once the verifier has received all satisfactory information needed to decide the application.

Glasgow achieved between 73 and 79 per cent.

It remained Red against that measure throughout the year.

The distinction between the two targets is worth making. The first measures how quickly an applicant receives an initial response. The second begins only after the council has all of the satisfactory information it requires. In other words, the latter is intended to measure the council's processing time once an application is effectively ready for determination, rather than delays caused by applicants supplying incomplete material.

The council describes 2025–26 as another “very challenging” year from a performance perspective and says the service has had limited success filling existing vacancies alongside normal staff turnover. It adds that recruitment difficulty is part of a wider national problem rather than one confined to Glasgow.

Following the Grenfell Tower fire and wider concerns about construction quality, building control throughout Scotland has been moving towards greater scrutiny rather than less. Glasgow's report specifically identifies high-risk buildings — including high-rise residential and commercial developments, schools, hospitals and care homes — as an increasing focus for the service.

As Scotland's largest city, Glasgow says it receives a greater proportion of applications involving developments of that kind.

It is also beginning to receive building warrant enquiries and applications for new tall buildings whose height can take them beyond limits contained within existing fire-safety guidance. Scottish Ministers have introduced enhanced compliance-plan guidance for inspections of high-risk developments ahead of planned legislative changes in 2027.

The result is a service being asked simultaneously to process a large construction economy, recruit scarce professional staff and perform increasingly detailed verification of some of the most technically demanding buildings in Scotland.

Under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003, Scotland's 32 local authorities are appointed by Scottish Ministers as verifiers for their respective areas. Their building standards teams independently check proposed work against building regulations before granting warrants and assess compliance before accepting completion certificates.

Glasgow's current appointment as a verifier runs from May 2023 until April 2029, and continued appointment requires authorities to operate within a performance framework set by Scottish Ministers.

The city's Building Standards and Public Safety service also carries responsibilities beyond processing warrants. These include dangerous buildings, reports of unauthorised work, safety at sports grounds and work connected with temporary raised structures, liquor licensing and public entertainment licensing.

Glasgow says eight of the ten key performance outcomes and associated targets against which it was assessed were being met.

Fee income covered the cost of verification. At least 75 per cent of key processes were being handled electronically. The required customer charter and performance information were being published, while responses to Scottish Government verifier-performance enquiries were meeting their target.

The council also reports an annual customer satisfaction score of 8.6, above a national average of 8.2.

Even there, however, officers add an appropriate warning: the customer satisfaction result is based on a small number of returns and therefore needs to be treated cautiously.

There is also a small inconsistency within the committee report itself. It states that eight of ten assessed outcomes and associated targets are being met, which would leave two outstanding. The following section refers to “the remaining three criteria” but then lists only the two response-time measures. The figures provided in the report therefore support two identified areas of below-target performance rather than three.

The national response to capacity problems has already begun to affect what applicants pay.

Scottish Ministers introduced the first of a planned three years of building warrant fee increases in April 2024. A further increase followed in April 2025. The Scottish Government said the additional income was intended to allow verifiers to invest in staffing and strengthen building standards services.

For Glasgow, an exercise examining the workforce required to undertake the intended level of verification inspection identified the need for approximately 9.5 additional posts.

The council says it began recruiting for those additional positions during 2025. The exercise is intended not simply to increase immediate capacity but to address the age profile of the workforce and succession planning as experienced staff leave the profession.

The council reports that 80 per cent of its verification staff have completed the first stage of Scotland’s developing Professional Competency Framework, with all staff expected to complete it by the end of the year. A separate peer-review stage is also under way.

Sources

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TRANSPORT | 17 August 2026

ScotRail's £83.8m Retail Contract Comes Into View After Troubled App Launch

Read online: <https://modern.scot/scotrails-83-8m-retail-contract-comes-into-view-after-troubled-app-launch/>



The scale of the deal behind ScotRail's new ticketing system is now public: £83.763 million for technology spanning the website, app, ticket machines, on-train sales and ticket offices. The award notice records one final tender.

A difficult morning with a railway app can look like a relatively contained technology problem. A contract notice published on Friday places ScotRail's recent ticketing difficulties on a rather larger canvas.

ScotRail Trains Limited has formally disclosed that

SilverRail Technologies was awarded its new retail systems contract at a total value of £83,763,400 excluding VAT. The contract was concluded on 29 May and the award notice published on 14 August. It covers considerably more than the mobile application passengers encountered for the first time last month.

The agreement encompasses ScotRail's website and app, new ticket vending machines and the central ticket issuing system behind them. It also covers systems for mobile ticket sales on trains and ticket-office sales, together with implementation, continuing support and maintenance. The notice says 53 per cent of the contract is likely to be subcontracted, principally for the manufacture, supply and maintenance of ticket vending machines and for equipment and software used in on-train and ticket-office sales.

The number attached to the contract needs care. £83.763 million is the value stated in the award notice; it should not be read as £83.763 million already paid to SilverRail. The original procurement envisaged an initial four-year term with as many as five further one-year extensions, giving the arrangement the potential to extend over nine years. Technical expertise carried 70 per cent of the original evaluation weighting and price 30 per cent.

There is another figure in Friday's notice which warrants attention. ScotRail records one tender received, from SilverRail. The process launched in 2024 was structured so that between two and five suppliers could be selected from the initial qualification stage and taken forward. The final award notice tells us that one tender was received at the award stage; it does not explain in the published material how the field narrowed to one.

A competitive procurement can end with a single final tender for perfectly legitimate reasons. What the record establishes is simpler: a public contract worth nearly £84 million was ultimately awarded following receipt of one tender, and the published notice does not provide the history necessary to explain that outcome.

Passengers had their first direct encounter with part of the new system on 30 July, when ScotRail switched its app and website booking engine. ScotRail's own terms identify SilverRail as the provider behind the new booking service.

The launch did not proceed cleanly. Passengers reported failures involving account access, journey searches, stations, railcards and ticket purchasing. ScotRail apologised and permitted customers experiencing difficulties to continue using the previous app while technical teams worked with the supplier. Subsequent complaints continued beyond launch day.

ScotRail's 2024 procurement notice expressly said that a number of key performance indicators would be attached to the final contract. Those KPIs were to be detailed later in the tender process and are not set out in the award notice now available publicly.

TEA WITH GUNNS | 17 August 2026

Nobody Move: He's Calling Edinburgh

Read online: <https://modern.scot/nobody-move-hes-calling-edinburgh/>



There is a particular sort of patience required on a Highland single-track road in August. Mr Gunn possesses it, although I should say there are limits.

We were on our way to the ironmonger, a perfectly

ordinary journey which should have taken perhaps twenty minutes, when we came round a bend and found a motorhome directly in front of us, with what appeared to be most of western Europe parked behind it.

It was not one of the modest little campervans you occasionally see tucked neatly beside a loch, but a tremendous white vehicle with bicycles on the back, curtains at the windows and enough equipment attached to its roof to communicate with Norway.

Mr Gunn stopped.

The motorhome stopped.

There was a passing place perhaps fifteen yards behind it.

Unfortunately, there was also a car about six feet behind its bicycle rack.

And behind that car was another car.

And another.

And another.

The motorhome had apparently been travelling at such a stately pace that it had collected traffic for some considerable distance. Looking past it, through the gaps and around the bend, I could see perhaps thirty vehicles stretched along the road.

Mr Gunn turned off our engine.

I knew immediately this was going to take some time.

The gentleman driving the motorhome looked perfectly equipped for the Highlands. He had one of those expensive waterproof jackets with numerous technical zips and a collar apparently designed to withstand conditions on Everest. His wife had a matching one. Between them, I suspect they could have survived three nights on the Cairngorm plateau without assistance.

What neither of them appeared to have prepared for was the possibility that thirty other people might follow them down a single-track road.

Mr Gunn pointed towards the passing place.

The gentleman looked in his mirror.

Then he looked in the other mirror.

Then he adjusted the first mirror.

Then he turned around and looked through the motorhome itself, although given the curtains, cupboards, bicycles and what appeared to be half a fitted kitchen between him and the rear window, I cannot imagine this revealed very much.

He looked back at us.

Then he pointed behind himself.

Mr Gunn looked at me.

I looked at Mr Gunn.

The difficulty was now apparent.

It was not simply that the motorhome needed to reverse fifteen yards. Thirty vehicles needed to reverse sufficiently for the motorhome to reverse fifteen yards.

There is an etiquette to single-track roads which becomes second nature if you live with them. You use the passing places. You do not park in them. You let faster traffic by. If the passing place is immediately behind you and the other vehicle would otherwise have to reverse half a mile, you reverse.

Nobody needs to hold a conference about it.

Unfortunately, we now required something approaching traffic management.

Mr Gunn put the handbrake on.

This was not an act of aggression. It was simply recognition that we were no longer participating in road transport and had entered a different phase of the day.

Presently a tractor arrived behind us.

The tractor belonged to a farmer we know, who stopped, assessed the situation and appeared unsurprised by any of it.

He climbed down from his cab and came to Mr Gunn's window.

“Passing place behind him?”

“Aye.”

“How far?”

“About fifteen yards.”

The farmer looked at the motorhome.

Then he looked beyond the motorhome at the procession disappearing around the bend.

“How many?”

“Thirty, maybe.”

The farmer looked back at Mr Gunn.

“Aye.”

That concluded the discussion.

A few minutes later, the post van arrived behind the tractor.

This transformed matters.

A motorhome facing a car and a tractor is an inconvenience. A motorhome facing a car, a tractor, thirty vehicles and His Majesty's mail begins to resemble an infrastructure problem.

The postie got out.

And as the closest thing we had to an official representative of the state, he naturally took charge.

He surveyed the road.

“Does he not reverse?”

“He can't,” I said. “There's half of Europe behind him.”

The postie walked forward, spoke briefly to the motorhome driver and then disappeared past the side of the vehicle.

A few moments later we could see him progressing down the queue, explaining the situation one car at a time.

The solution was actually quite simple.

Everybody moved backwards.

Not very far. Twenty yards would probably do it. The last car would reverse first, then the next, then the next, until enough space reached the front of the queue for the motorhome to enter the passing place.

It was essentially an accordion.

On a road like this, two ordinary cars can often squeeze past one another if both drivers are willing to put a tyre into the ditch and proceed with a little faith. The motorhome, unfortunately, was considerably beyond the reach of that particular arrangement.

Unfortunately, one section of the accordion was broken.

Word travelled back up the line.

There was a problem.

The postie reappeared.

“One of them says his car won't go into reverse.”

The farmer stared at him.

“What?”

“Won't go into reverse.”

This was sufficiently interesting that the farmer walked down to investigate.

Mr Gunn remained in the driver's seat.

I got out.

By the time I reached the scene, several other people had done the same.

The vehicle in question was a rented Volkswagen Golf driven by an American gentleman who was now looking deeply betrayed.

“It won't go into reverse,” he explained.

The postie looked at the car.

The farmer looked at the car.

Several other men looked at the car.

The Golf, for its part, gave no outward indication that it had abandoned one-sixth of its gearbox somewhere north of Inverness.

The American demonstrated.

First gear.

Second gear.

Neutral.

No reverse.

“I've tried everything.”

Someone asked whether it was a rental.

“Yes. We rented it from Edinburgh.”

This apparently settled matters in his mind because he then produced his telephone and announced that he was going to call the rental company.

In Edinburgh.

From a Highland single-track road.

With approximately thirty vehicles waiting behind him, a motorhome waiting in front of him, and the Royal Mail now stationary.

Nobody quite knew what Edinburgh was expected to do.

Nevertheless, he telephoned.

We waited.

He pressed buttons.

We waited.

He put it on speaker. We all listened to recorded music.

At some point during this, the farmer looked back towards his tractor.

“I can tow it out the way.”

The telephone came down slightly.

“No, no. They'll tell me what to do.”

The farmer considered this.

“I can tell you what to do.”

A few more drivers had now left their cars and wandered over.

By my count there were approximately twelve men standing around the Volkswagen, which is enough to field a shinty team and, judging by the discussion taking place, possibly manage one as well.

Everyone had a theory.

Clutch.

Gear linkage.

Electronic lock.

Handbrake.

Engine off.

Engine on.

Try first and then reverse.

Try second and then reverse.

One gentleman crouched beside the driver's door for reasons known only to himself.

The American remained on hold.

Eventually, one of the men said the thing that perhaps should have been said fifteen minutes earlier.

“Can I have a look?”

The American surrendered the driver's seat.

The man climbed in, pressed the clutch, put his hand on the gear lever and stopped.

“Ah.”

We all looked at him.

He pressed the gear lever down.

Then he moved it left and forward.

The reversing lights came on.

There was silence.

The American looked through the open door.

“What did you do?”

“You push the gearstick down first.”

The American stared at it.

“You push it down?”

“Aye.”

He tried it himself.

Down.

Left.

Forward.

Reverse.

The Golf moved backwards.

There are moments when a crowd disperses gradually and moments when twelve men realise simultaneously that their work here is done.

The shinty team dissolved.

The postie resumed command of the road.

And then, slowly, wonderfully, western Europe began to reverse.

A German estate moved back.

A small French hatchback followed it.

Then another car.

Then another.

The Volkswagen Golf, now in full possession of all its gears, retreated with particular enthusiasm.

The movement travelled along the queue like a message.

Twenty yards here.

Fifteen there.

Another ten.

Cars edged into gateways. People leaned from windows and waved one another backwards. The postie stood in the middle of it directing vehicles with an authority I suspect was never formally included in his job description.

Eventually the space reached the front.

The motorhome driver's wife got out.

She was very pleasant.

“I am so sorry,” she said.

Nobody laughed.

This is one of the things I like about Highland people. There are moments when mockery would be very easy, but practicality generally arrives first.

The farmer walked down to the motorhome.

“I’ll guide you back,” he said.

The gentleman lowered his window.

There followed several minutes of careful instruction.

“Straight back.”

The motorhome moved approximately six inches.

“Keep coming.”

Another six inches.

“Plenty of room.”

The driver stopped.

“You’ve plenty.”

He moved again.

The postie leaned against the motorhome for a moment and took a deep breath.

I began wondering whether the ironmonger closed for lunch.

Eventually, through a combination of wing mirrors, hand signals and moral support from considerably more adults than had expected to spend their morning supervising road manoeuvres, the great white machine began its journey towards the passing place.

It went slowly.

Very slowly.

I have seen houses moved faster.

But it went. Mr. Gunn turned on the engine and adjusted his seat belt.

When at last all five tonnes of the motorhome were safely inside the passing place, the farmer raised one hand, the universal signal meaning that's you.

We drove forward.

As we passed, the motorhome driver gave us an apologetic wave.

Mr Gunn returned it.

Then came the rest of Europe.

There were now thirty-nine cars behind him. I counted.

Every car had one entire side in the ditch, just two tyres down in the grass, while the other side remained on the road and hoped for the best.

Having moved to the back seat, I now rolled down my window to observe more closely.

At the generous points, we had perhaps twelve inches between us.

At the less generous points, two.

One gentleman had folded in his mirror in and was now leaning away from the window, which maybe he thought helped.

Another was staring straight ahead with the expression of a man who wished he were anywhere else.

A third gave Mr Gunn a solemn nod normally associated with military evacuations.

Nobody spoke. Nobody accelerated. Vehicles simply edged past one another at walking pace.

By car thirty-nine, I felt we had personally escorted most of western Europe through Sutherland.

The tractor followed us.

And the post van.

And after that, somewhere behind us, people resumed their travels.

I felt a little sorry for the motorhome driver. Driving something the size of a bungalow along roads largely designed when the principal traffic had four legs cannot be especially relaxing. There are stretches where the verge disappears, the ditch looks deep enough to lose a Labrador and the passing place you require always seems to be behind you rather than ahead.

Most visitors manage perfectly well.

Mr Gunn said very little for the rest of the journey. We reached the ironmonger considerably later than intended. We were almost there before I mentioned the American.

“Do you think the rental company might have done anything?”

Mr Gunn considered this.

“Didn't need to.”

“No.”

He drove on for another few seconds.

“The farmer had a chain.”

Modern Scot - Distinctly Scottish

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