

## **SCPO Briefing Paper 9/5**

### **Briefings from Manifestos - 4**

# **HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS**

## **and FOOD & TRADE**

*This is one of a series of SCPO Briefing Papers in which we are taking the topics identified by the churches as key election issues and summarising the Manifesto commitments on these themes of the parties now represented in Parliament. In the new situation, all of these are significant background to coming policy.*

### **Affordable housing**

- The SNP would expect that a minimum of 25% of all new housing developments would be reserved for affordable housing. Labour said there would be a greater expectation that new property developments would include affordable social housing. The Lib Dems would deliver an additional 9,000 new affordable homes for rent and sale each year - an extra 27,000 homes over the period of the next spending review. The Greens would ensure that local authorities set quotas for affordable housing in new developments.
- The SNP said they would require all public authorities to identify surplus land suitable for house building and encourage local authorities to make greater use of the planning process to ensure that any new build community housing is not sold for less than the valuation placed on it by a District Valuer.
- The SNP said that they would take action to remove the barriers which impede investment in water and sewerage infrastructure where this is necessary.
- The Lib Dems would support more affordable housing through Community Land Trusts, allowing local people to take action for themselves to meet local housing needs.

### **Environmental standards**

- The SNP would consult on proposals to introduce a planning presumption requiring new buildings to include sufficient renewable generation on-site to deliver between 20% and 50% of energy needs. They would also consult on setting a new guideline for energy saving in new buildings with the aim of reducing their energy footprint by 20% - 33%. Labour's aspiration is for carbon free housing by 2016. They would progressively increase the standards of energy efficiency and micro generation that form part of new housing developments by at least 15% by 2011. Labour would introduce a Scottish Standard for Sustainable Homes which would for the first time encourage eco friendly homes; and within the National Planning Framework, allow for greater private sector house building, but with stricter conditions applied for design and environmental standards.
- The Greens would also set binding targets to improve the overall energy efficiency of housing by 40% by 2020. They want to ensure that by 2010, 65,000 homes are built or renovated each year with levels of insulation, passive solar gain and micropower that would achieve zero carbon emissions. They would also apply the 'passive house' standard to ensure that new buildings are zero carbon in use from 2011.
- The Conservatives said that households would be entitled to apply for a grant of up to £4,000, which would help to cover the costs of buying and installing a wind turbine or solar panels. Community projects would be eligible for a grant of up to £100,000.

- The Lib Dems would bring together existing programmes into a new Healthy Green Homes Fund (the Warm Deal, Central Heating Programme, and Scottish Community and Householder Renewable Initiative), to act as a one stop shop for the public on energy issues. This new fund would upgrade at least 40,000 homes every year from 2009. The Greens also want to increase investment in the energy efficiency of housing stock to ensure that no Scottish home falls below NHER 7 (a national home energy rating of good) by 2016.
- The Lib Dems would seek legislative changes so that homeowners who install new microgeneration during the term of the next parliament can benefit from a one-off £200 rebate on local tax bills. Those who also invest in energy efficiency measures would be eligible for a further £100 rebate.

### **First time buyers**

- The SNP would introduce a first time buyers' grant of £2,000 and would create a Scottish Housing Support Fund to provide loans to over 1,000 first time buyers on a shared equity basis. The Fund would become self financing over time by reinvesting the returns on the loans.
- Labour and the Lib Dems said that they would double the newbuild Homestake scheme and extend the open market Homestake to allow people to buy homes on the market. The Greens would consult on the Homestake scheme.
- In addition to existing schemes the Conservatives would create local Affordable Homes Trusts (AHTs), run by trustees independent from the state. Individuals and businesses would be able to make a redeemable investment in the AHTs, with prospective homeowners applying for assistance in owning a home of their choice, in an area of their choice. An initial fund of £100m per year is proposed, one-third of which would be contributed by the Executive and the rest procured from the private sector.

### **Right to Buy**

- The SNP would review the current right to buy policy to make it more responsive to local needs. Labour would maintain right to buy with the exception of areas that have housing pressures or where the houses concerned are especially well suited for older people or people with disabilities. The Lib Dems would amend the current pressurised area status and right to buy laws to give local authorities more flexibility. Under their plans, local authorities would no longer have to apply to Ministers to designate an area as a pressurised area. They also said that they would consider the case for more local autonomy in reducing right to buy discounts. The Greens said they would make right to buy more flexible to take account of housing market circumstances and see no need to extend 'right to buy' to housing association properties.

### **Rural Issues**

- The Conservatives would attempt to ease planning guidelines on rural housing, to offer farmers the option of receiving capital profit by selling some land for housing.
- The Lib Dems would promote the conversion of redundant farm buildings and cottages. They would also pilot "unplugged" houses, using microgeneration, recycling grey water and other environmental technologies to develop houses with reduced dependence on mains infrastructure.

### **Socially rented housing**

- Labour would give socially rented tenants more control over the management of their homes with a Tenants Management Bill and allow more flexible management arrangements including the use of age restrictions for allocation of certain types of property.

- The Conservatives would continue to encourage the transfer of the local authority housing stock to housing associations, but area by area rather than all at once. They would also transfer housing allocation powers to local government so that families can be matched with housing suitable to their needs and that of the community.
- The Lib Dems would consult on the options for introducing a 'right to sell' whereby social housing could be part financed by the sale of a specified number of units in a new build on the open market.
- The Greens would increase provision of social housing through investment in new-build and, if necessary, encourage social landlords to buy on the open market. They support calls for 30,000 new social rented homes in the next three years.
- The Greens believe that decisions on stock transfers should be for tenants, without the inducement of debt-write-off only if transfer goes ahead; instead the Greens would develop investment plans for areas where tenants choose local authority ownership.
- The Greens would give additional funding for the development of small scale, locally accountable housing associations and co-operatives. They would also extend the current 'Wider Role' initiative for housing associations.

### **Miscellaneous**

- The SNP want to transfer those functions of Communities Scotland which can be appropriately delivered locally to local authorities, while retaining a national regulatory and monitoring framework for Registered Social Landlords. The Conservatives also want to abolish Communities Scotland and would instead fund local housing associations directly. The Conservatives also say that the other functions of Communities Scotland can be better delivered either directly by the Executive or by local government.
- Labour said that they would ask local authorities to report on how they address homeless applications and to address the needs of those on housing waiting lists.
- The Lib Dems said that the time is right for a national review of housing policy in order to agree the priorities and the way forward for the next 20 years.

### **FOOD & TRADE**

#### **Food & the Environment**

- Labour would encourage local sourcing, to cut down on unnecessary food miles, and address farming practices that contribute disproportionately to climate change.
- The Lib Dems want to work with retailers to increase information on food miles, allowing consumers to take decisions based on environmental impact. In the longer term they would lobby the EU to change public procurement rules to recognise the importance of reducing food miles.
- The Lib Dems want to regionalise the assessment and distribution of agri-environmental schemes and support programmes. They would ensure that the new Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme compensates crofters and farmers in the Islands and outlying rural areas for the extra costs of transport and haulage. They would continue government support for the wider public benefits of agricultural activity, such as maintaining the landscape and natural heritage and supporting the wider rural economy, up to and beyond 2013.
- To reward farmers for managing the environment, Greens would continue to transfer subsidies from production to sustainable management and stewardship of rural heritage, with modulation at the maximum rate permitted by the EU. The Greens would support farmers who apply sustainable environmental practice at home and abroad.
- The SNP and the Lib Dems support the use and supply of energy crops as bio-fuels.

## **Incentives**

- The SNP, Labour and Conservatives all want to encourage new entrants into farming. The SNP would introduce a £10m new entrants scheme; Labour would focus on the challenges facing the dairy industry; and Conservatives would introduce Starter Unit Pilot Schemes (SUPS), to ensure that new farmers were granted part of the capital required to get going, decreasing over a 5 year period, and that retiring farmers were able to input their expertise.

## **Locally available**

- Labour would develop local food hubs to support local producers and reduce food-related transport; the Conservatives would create a Scottish Public Procurement Unit to work within the current EU rules to promote the use of local food by local people; Lib Dems would work with retailers to promote more use of local produce in stores; and the Greens said they would bring about a food revolution, promoting healthy, local and fairly traded food, which would help suppliers and farmers, create stronger links between rural and urban economies and reduce food miles.
- The Greens also said that they would promote local food networks, with support for small rural abattoirs and other ways to keep food chains as local as possible.

## **Miscellaneous**

- The SNP said they would promote Farmers' Co-operatives to empower primary producers; Conservatives would also incentivise use of co-ops to increase their bargaining power. The Lib Dems would support dairy farmers by seeking to remove restrictions that limit the size of milk co-ops. The Greens would also encourage food and farming co-operatives by pressing for modernisation of regulations.
- The SNP said that they would seek ways to reduce the burden on the farming community and would pilot schemes to get agencies to work together, ensuring single visits to farms to deal with a wider range of regulatory issues.

## **Public Procurement**

- The SNP, Labour, Lib Dems and the Greens all want to maximise the use of locally produced food in public sector contracts, especially in schools and hospitals. The Lib Dems would like to roll out the East Ayrshire school meals pilot to all schools, making fresh food with minimal packaging and specific delivery times a requirement for contracts. The Greens would also like to extend the Food for Life project by legislating to ensure that food procured by the public sector is at least 70% fresh, 50% local and 30% organic. They would set up a Green Food Procurement unit to advise on obtaining local, organic and fairly traded food, goods and services.

## **Supermarkets**

- SNP, Conservatives and Greens all wanted to strengthen the Supermarket Code of Practice. The SNP said that a priority would be to address the power imbalance between big supermarkets and primary producers, and they would consult on replacing the Code with independent regulation to ensure that supermarkets give space to fresh local and seasonal produce.
- The Greens would appoint an independent adjudicator to police the food supply chain to secure a fair deal for farmers. The Greens believe that there should be a statutory rather than a voluntary code of practice for supermarkets.