



A sustainable Scotland, **a United Kingdom**

bettertogether 

About Better Together

“We believe a brighter, better future for Scotland is best achieved by working together with our friends and family in the rest of the UK.”

Better Together is the pro-UK, grassroots campaign working to keep Scotland a **strong and proud** part of the United Kingdom in the referendum on Scotland's future on 18 September 2014.

We are supported by **thousands of activists** the length and breadth of the country.

We love Scotland and want the very best for Scotland. We are proud of all our country has achieved and even more ambitious for Scotland's future. **We are patriotic Scots, but we are proud to be British too.**

As part of the United Kingdom, we can have the **best of both worlds**; significant decision making powers here in Scotland together with the strength, stability and security being part of the UK offers.

When times are tough, we believe it is best to **pull together** and work with **our closest neighbours**, not give up and separate ourselves off.

As part of a bigger country it means we can **pool our resources** and **spread the risks** we face across the broader shoulders of the United Kingdom.

We believe that we have more in common with our closest neighbours than divides us and that the Scottish instinct towards **solidarity** and **unity** is stronger than the appeals of division and conflict.

As part of the United Kingdom, Scotland is not only at the **top table** on the world stage but we have real **clout** and **influence** too.

By **working together** we are better placed to unlock the talents of all our people; create **more opportunities** and achieve far greater things than we ever could apart.

We believe a **brighter, better future** for Scotland is best achieved by **working together** with our friends and family in the rest of the UK.

For more information on the Better Together campaign please visit:
www.bettertogether.net

Introduction

“There will continue to be debates over how Scotland can become more sustainable in future, but the challenges we face demand political will, not separation.”

Scottish Environment LINK's Referendum Challenge is an important contribution to the debate on Scotland's future and we welcome the opportunity to respond.

On the 18 September 2014, we will make the single most important decision our country has faced in over 300 years. We face a choice between two very different paths: continuing the success of devolution within the United Kingdom or ending devolution and separating from our friends, family and neighbours in the rest of the UK.

The debate about Scotland's future affords us an exciting opportunity to discuss how we build a better Scotland and the kind of nation we want to be in the future.

Achieving the aspirations outlined in Scottish Environment LINK's Referendum Challenge demand multiple and complex solutions. Be it tackling climate change, loss of biodiversity or resource depletion; we believe the answers to these global challenges do not lie in the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK, but in the decisions of governments, Parliaments and people, what they value and how they deliver. Governments and political parties can adopt policies which safeguard or damage the environment, be it devolved or separate.

We believe that the best way to protect our environment and deliver a greener, more sustainable Scotland is by working together,

in partnership, at every level. We believe power should be exercised where it can best deliver. For example, in tackling climate change there is a role for international treaties, the EU, the UK, the Scottish Parliament, local government, and individual action.

Scotland currently benefits from the best of both worlds: a devolved settlement with powers and responsibility shared between the UK and Scottish Parliament, together with a strong influence in Europe. Since devolution, Scotland has demonstrated that this is a responsive and flexible arrangement. For example, powers have developed around marine planning to best respond to the challenges we face in Scotland and throughout the UK. We believe that the best way to take on the challenges we face in future is through the flexibility and partnership of the devolution, not separation.

The Scottish Parliament, regardless of which parties are in power, has shown itself to have a commitment to Scotland's environment. We can always do more, and there will continue to be debates over how Scotland can become more sustainable in future, but the challenges we face demand political will, not separation.

In short, we believe the challenge of delivering a greener, more sustainable future is best tackled by working together in partnership at every level - not just here in Scotland - but globally - to deliver a greener, more suitable future for all.

ONE

We want to live in a Scotland where we measure the success of our society intelligently



Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, is a strong, proud and successful country.

While performance is often measured purely in economic terms, the success of our country cannot be measured in pounds and pence alone.

As well as more traditional methods, such as GDP, we have a series of measures which recognise our longer term environmental and social progress.

For example, Oxfam Scotland's Humankind Index (HKI) provides one measure of Scotland's prosperity that goes beyond purely financial and economic values. The HKI aims to measure what makes a good life by including factors including social relations, health, skills, and physical environment. HKI and other measurements are available and have been pursued internationally with varied success.

Oxfam Scotland's HKI work is attracting international attention and we can be proud that this leadership is being displayed in Scotland today. This in itself is evidence that separation is no requirement for the application of new, challenging metrics that measure the broad health and happiness of our nation.

The proof of success of such innovations will always be the political change they help to deliver. It is up to the devolved Scottish Government to decide how much importance should be applied to these metrics and up to the Scottish people to assess whether their government is meeting its commitments.

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A devolved Scotland within the United Kingdom can continue to lead the way in improving how we measure the success of our country, including our progress towards greater sustainable development and economic growth.

TWO

We want to live in a Scotland where education reconciles economic, social and environmental issues

Scotland is a friendly, welcoming, outward-looking nation. In an increasingly interconnected and globalised world, many of our young people consider themselves to be 'citizens of the world'.

Engaging young people in issues of global economic, social and environmental responsibility and being part of something bigger, sits naturally alongside remaining part of the UK. In equipping our young people to be good global citizens we should focus on looking out beyond borders, not throwing up new ones.

All levels of our education and lifelong learning system have an important role to play in equipping our future generations with the skills, knowledge, values and experience they need to ensure our country has an ever more positive impact on our environment.

Education policy is already devolved to the Scottish Parliament, which means action can – and is – being taken right now in Scotland to achieve this. The Eco-Schools programme, for example, is already successfully engaging young people in environmental, sustainability and global citizenship issues.

It is important that we continue to explore new ideas and debate what more we can be done to engage people of all ages in these important issues.

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THREE

We want to live in a Scotland where we are successfully tackling climate change, and using a precautionary approach to all development



The fact that the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the Climate Change (Scotland) Act in 2009, setting world-leading climate change targets, is not only a great source of pride here in Scotland but has driven up the ambition of other countries around the world. However, such legislation is meaningless unless it is backed by real action.

The challenge we face now is to make meaningful progress on those targets. Unfortunately, Scotland did not meet its target on carbon emission for the second consecutive year. It is the responsibility of government – regardless of constitutional arrangements or which party is in power – to get progress back on track.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), which seeks to ensure that the environmental effects of major development proposals are fully investigated, understood and taken into account before planning decisions are made, clearly have an important role to play. However, in order to be effective political will is required to ensure EIAs are rigorously applied.

More could be done right now to tackle climate change. For instance, powers over housing and transport are already devolved and stronger progress could be made on these now if the Scottish Government wished; our current constitutional set-up does not present barriers to progress in these important areas.

Scotland has immense renewable energy potential and the best way of unlocking that potential is through the economies of scale that come with a single, shared, British energy market.

In line with Scotland's population, Scottish consumers contribute around one tenth of the cost of the green energy subsidy. However, because of Scotland's immense potential and disproportionate number of renewable energy projects that are based here in Scotland, we receive around one third of total British investment.

Scotland and the rest of Great Britain both benefit hugely from spreading the cost of investing in green energy across the country's 26 million households. It means not only do we benefit from this significant investment and all the green jobs this brings to Scotland, but everybody across Great Britain benefits from cheaper energy bills, a more secure energy supply, as well as helping the whole of our country reduce its carbon emissions.

The nationalists assert that Britain's successful single energy market would continue after separation. However, if Scotland became independent it would be for the UK Government of the day to determine its own energy policies and in particular where it procures its energy from. There is nothing that would require England and Wales to buy energy from Scotland. The rest of the UK could simply opt to buy cheaper sources of energy from elsewhere – such as nuclear from France. The fact is, post-independence such commercial considerations would be just as important for the UK.

Finally, given land use planning decisions and the principles underlying them are already devolved to the Scottish Parliament whether a precautionary approach to development is adopted is a question of policy and political will, not constitutional change.

FOUR

We want to live in a Scotland where our natural and built environment benefits people's health



The Scottish Association for Mental Health has argued:

“The natural world is critically important to our health, wellbeing and economic prosperity. In particular, the natural environment can be used to great effect to improve Scotland's mental health.”

By working together we can ensure that our built environment promotes good health amongst the people of Scotland. Scotland is not held back in its ability to do so because of our constitutional set-up - we already have control over planning and building standards. The important question is how these powers are best calibrated.

Indeed, progress is being made right now. The Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) programme, for example, in its first six years has created 1,400 hectares of new woodland and helped more than 610,000 people gain access to their local woodland.

As for our built environment, modern, sympathetic developments with integrated green spaces and clean air are possible within Scotland, when our government, local authorities and local communities promote and support new ways of living.

“Modern, sympathetic developments with integrated green spaces and clean air are possible within Scotland.”

FIVE

We want to live in a Scotland where the uses of our land, seas and air are integrated and sustainable



Ensuring the sustainable use of our land, seas and air demand coordinated local, national and international action.

Scotland's diverse countryside and landscapes are important for their environmental value, but important for the positive contribution they made to the economic, cultural and social wellbeing of our country. With powers over the environment, agriculture and forest already devolved, it is political will that is required to use these powers in innovative ways here in Scotland to protect and enhance the ecosystem we share with all other forms of life.

Air pollution can damage our health, accumulate in our food chain and impact on species diversity and on our land and marine life. It is for this reason that air quality, specifically air pollution, has to be tackled at every level. It is a challenge which necessitates not only action by the EU, the UK Government, the Scottish Government and our Local Authorities but individual action and international agreement too.

The Scottish Parliament is able to take steps to protect and safeguard our marine biodiversity through Marine Protected Areas (MPA). The sustainability of marine and coastal wildlife and ecosystems should be at the heart of any MPA proposals whilst ensuring that economic benefits to coastal communities, through tourism for example, can be maximised. The Scottish Government currently has the powers to ensure that MPAs are developed through extensive and genuine consultation with stakeholders and that boundaries are based on the best possible scientific evidence. The Scottish Government also has the powers to ensure that these areas are regularly reviewed

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to realise the full benefits of MPAs. Scottish Environment LINK has previously called for MPAs to be an ecologically coherent network incorporating the principles of replications, representativeness, connectivity and viability; the powers currently held by the Scottish Parliament could achieve this.

SIX

We want to live in a Scotland where we protect and enhance our ecosystems and all the species in them



Biodiversity is the building block of our ecosystems and something that we must treasure and take action to protect, not just here in Scotland but throughout the world.

Globally we are all faced with the challenge of halting the unprecedented decline of our biodiversity.

With thousands of species at risk from extinction, the scale of the global challenge we face could not be clearer. However, we cannot face up to that challenge alone. Progress can only be achieved if concerted action is taken by countries around the world.

It is by working together, as part of the United Kingdom with an influential voice in Europe and the world, that we are best able to tackle the loss of biodiversity.

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SEVEN

We want to live in a Scotland where decisions are taken as close to people as possible



Since devolution in 1999, the Scottish Parliament has helped in moving decision making closer to the people of Scotland. Our Parliament is recognised as transparent, open and accessible to the people of Scotland.

Through the introduction of legislation on issues such as land reform, our Parliament has taken opportunities to increase local decision making and empowered local communities. However, not all policy decisions taken by Holyrood have shifted power closer to the people of Scotland. It would therefore be false to claim that simply devolving further powers would automatically result in greater power in local communities. Again, this is an issue about political will - not constitutional change.

We believe the debate about Scotland's future should be driven by where power can be best exercised to deliver for the people of Scotland - not a power grab from the UK Parliament to the Scottish Parliament. Power should not simply be transferred from one place to another for the sake of it, but should be based on a rational, evidence-based case of where power can make the greatest difference. For instance, are there powers currently held by the Scottish Parliament that could be better deployed and lead to better outcomes for Scots if devolved to local authorities or devolved even further down our local communities?

Devolution means we can have the best of both worlds: significant powers here in Scotland, while also benefiting from the strength, security and influence being part of the UK brings. We now face two paths: continuing the success of

devolution within the United Kingdom or ending devolution and separating from the rest of the UK for good.

With so many of the challenges we face being global in nature, much domestic legislation - particularly on environmental issues - comes from European directives. The influence and clout Scotland benefits from as part of the UK - one of the largest EU member states - is therefore crucial in this regard.

Another benefit of devolution is its flexibility and its ability to adapt and evolve over time. Devolution has allowed all three of the pro-UK Better Together parties to come together to pass significant further powers to the Scottish Parliament - and all without the need for a referendum. The Scotland Act (2012) represents the biggest transfer of financial power to Scotland in more than 300 years, including significant further tax and borrowing powers.

Finally, it is important to note that voting to reject independence does not mean rejecting further change. By voting to keep our United Kingdom together, we open up the opportunity to further develop and enhance devolution. Indeed, all three pro-UK Better Together parties have all made clear that they support further devolution and intend to (or have already) set out detailed plans on their proposals. That is healthy for our democracy and once again highlights how devolution can be responsive to our needs.

EIGHT

We want to live in a Scotland where we value and nurture our landscape and cultural heritage



Scotland has unparalleled natural and cultural heritage. By conserving our landscapes, ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources and promoting economic and social development we can ensure future generations of Scots, visitors from the rest of the UK and around the globe can continue to enjoy our stunning landscapes.

Our attachment to our iconic landscapes, so important to our identity, has not been lessened by being part of the United Kingdom. No one would sensibly claim that the passion we feel for our cultural heritage would either further flourish or be lessened by the outcome of the referendum in September 2014.

With natural and built heritage; the environment; agriculture, forestry and fishing; tourism and planning all areas of devolved responsibility, real progress can be made now to nurture our natural heritage. A prime example of such action is the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. The cultural strategy pursued by the Scottish Government is another.

Once again, this is an area where progress is dependent on political will not constitutional change.

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NINE

We want to live in a Scotland where openness and public participation are central features of our governance



The Scottish Parliament is recognised internationally as a modern Parliament which is participative, transparent, and inclusive.

The right of access to information is a key tool in empowering people – be it individuals, organisations or the media – to hold our public bodies to account.

Freedom of information legislation has undoubtedly helped increase transparency in the administration of public services in Scotland. First introduced back in 2002, freedom of information is now rightly considered an essential part of a modern, open democracy. We can be proud that, when introduced, the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act was more demanding than the UK legislation. The 2013 Freedom of Information (Amendment) (Scotland) Act – which strengthens provisions of the earlier legislation – highlights again our ability to take action to enhance and develop laws in important devolved areas such as this.

However, we are concerned that the application of the Act is not being taken seriously enough by the Scottish Government. Extracting information has become increasingly challenging in recent years, demonstrated by the increase in appeals relating to the Scottish Government increasing to 28% in 2011/12, from 15% the previous year. The SNP Government has also been involved in a number of high profile court cases to suppress the release of information – most notably in relation to a separate Scotland's membership of the EU.

“Devolution means we can and should continue to consider new ways of engaging with the public and take action to ensure our parliament and public services remain as open and transparent as possible.”

Openness and public participation in our democracy is an issue that requires political will to drive action, not constitutional change. Devolution means we can and should continue to consider new ways of engaging with the public and take action to ensure our parliament and public services remain as open and transparent as possible.

TEN

We want to live in a Scotland where we learn from, and play our part in, the rest of the world



While Scotland sets its own targets and policies on carbon emissions and renewables, action to tackle an issue as profound as climate change demands global action. Our historic climate change legislation explicitly recognises the need for action on an international basis, not just as a collective end of lowering global emissions but also as a collective means of achieving this. In a globalised economy only carefully balanced incentives and market structuring will prevent negligent carbon policies resulting in profitable rewards for some states. Scotland's carbon targets are therefore contingent on EU targets. Within the UK, Scotland can yield soft power of moral leadership and match it with the political clout at the EU table.

Being part of a strong and powerful United Kingdom means that we not only have a seat at the top table in Europe, but we have the influence and clout to make a difference and promote our ideas on how to protect and improve the environment. The size, strength and stability of the UK is a huge advantage on the EU stage and is yet another positive reason why Scotland is better together as part of the United Kingdom. The last thing we should be doing is weakening our voice or creating instability and uncertainty.

Many of the examples in the above sections have come directly from EU or UK initiatives or legislation, while others have been developed in Scotland and then replicated in the rest of the UK or on an international level. We believe that as part of the United Kingdom, Scotland has been and will continue to punch above its weight. The ability to shape the United Kingdom as well as Scotland can have profound effects on

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more than just those within our own borders
- inspiring action all around the world.

As WWF have pointed out, both the UK Climate Change Act 2008 and the Scottish Climate Change Act 2009 have attracted attention from other countries looking to learn from and build on our experience, including Mexico (which last year introduced its own comprehensive national climate legislation), Australia, Denmark and China. We want to see both Scotland and the UK continue to play this crucially important role.



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