

Six Steps towards a Sustainable Scotland

The LINK Manifesto for the 2016 Holyrood Elections



Executive Summary

Scottish Environment LINK wants political parties to put sustainable development at the heart of their manifestos by taking Six Steps, taken from the [Shared Principles](#)¹, towards sustainable development in Scotland at the Holyrood 2016 elections.

Scotland has many environmental opportunities and challenges and we hope that political parties will work with LINK's members to identify many commitments under each of the Six Steps. To support this process, we have identified an important commitment that parties could make under each 'Step'. We urge all parties to consider including these headline policies in their manifestos.

LINK's individual member organisations will also be working on their own manifesto policy ideas, and many of them are willing to be contacted for further assistance and ideas. See list at end of each 'Step'.

Step 1 – Sustainable Development at the heart of public policy

Scotland should ensure that the National Performance Framework is firmly based on the Shared Principles of Sustainability, agreed by the UK and Devolved Governments. We want the political parties to make a commitment to putting sustainable development at the core of their manifestos and programmes for government – and at the very top of their hierarchy of strategies within government.

Step 2 – Achieving a Sustainable Economy

Scotland should commit to implementing an urgent programme of investment in the infrastructure which is needed to ensure that emissions targets are met - and to build an economy which is environmentally sustainable and socially just.

Step 3 – Using Sound Science Responsibly

Scotland should commit to a fully-resourced marine monitoring strategy, that uses sound science to ensure the effective management and implementation of Scotland's developing Marine Protected Areas network and emerging marine planning system. Scientific evidence-based decision-making and compliance should be at the core of this strategy, to enable Scotland to comply with its legal requirement to have all its seas achieve a Good Environmental Status by 2020.

Step 4 – Promoting Good Governance

Scotland should fully commit itself to the establishment of a 'civic forum' – a space around Parliament and Government where all parts of the Scottish policy community can openly and freely discuss and debate the political issues before and in parallel with the formal branches of government who will continue to take the decisions on public policy.

Step 5 – Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society

Scotland should fully commit itself to the passage of an Ending Environmental Poverty Act – recognising that people and all nature exist within a single living space, and that the health of all species within that space is irrevocably linked.

Step 6 – Living Within Environmental Limits

Scotland should fully commit itself to the setting and achievement of serious targets to halt the loss of biodiversity – and set firm and ambitious targets to both retaining and improving the numbers and health of species in our land, sea and air.

¹ The Shared Principles for Sustainable Development were agreed by the governments of the UK and its devolved administrations.

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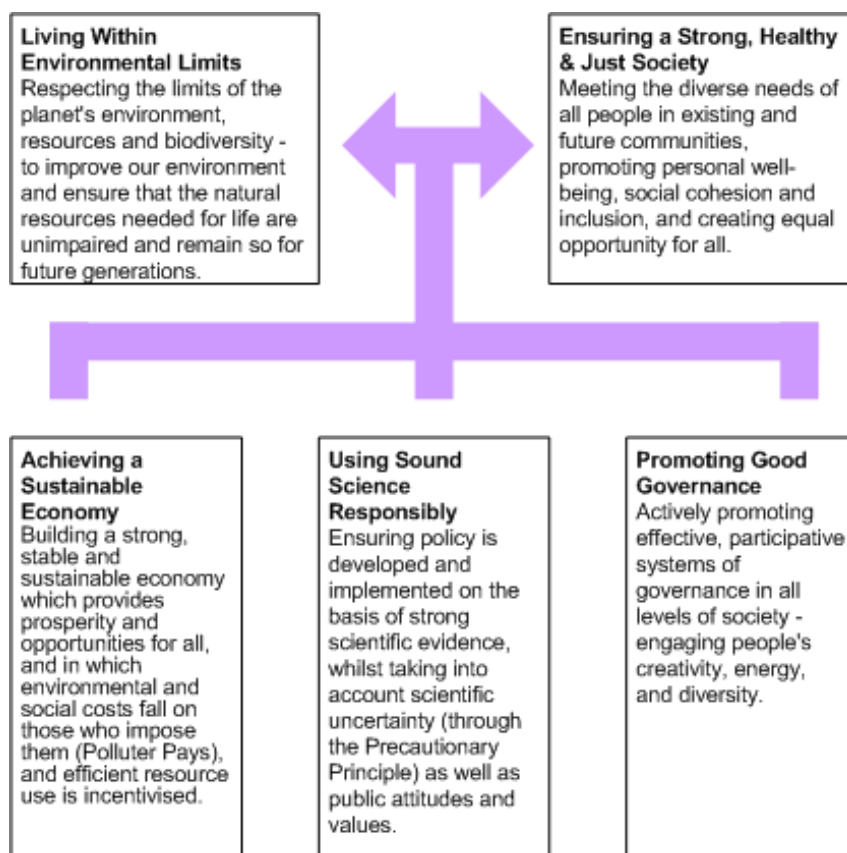
Guiding principles for sustainable development

Across the world, political parties say they are committed to “sustainable development” – but the term has been abused and manipulated to mean almost anything that the user wishes. In LINK we want to see this abuse ended and a return to the true, radical meaning that was originally envisaged by the Brundtland Commission. We support the use of the Shared Principles below – agreed by the governments of the UK and its devolved administrations.

“The government’s refreshed vision for sustainable development builds on the principles that underpinned the UK’s 2005 sustainable development strategy, by recognising the needs of the economy, society and the natural environment, alongside the use of good governance and sound science.

The following set of shared principles forms the basis for sustainable development in the UK and devolved administrations. Sustainable policy must respect all five of these principles, though some policies, while underpinned by all five, will place more emphasis on certain principles than others.

Sustainable development recognises that the economy, society and the environment are interconnected, with the economy being one of the means to societal wellbeing and both being enveloped by the environment which underpins our life support systems. The government has initiated a series of growth reviews to put the UK on a path to a strong, sustainable and balanced growth. Long term economic success relies on protecting and enhancing the environmental resources that underpin it, and paying due regard to social needs.”²



² Guiding principles for sustainable development:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/323193/Guiding_principles_for_SD.pdf

LINK notes that these Shared Principles closely reflect international law in this area and are acknowledged in treaties and laws at the:

- United Nations;
- European Union;
- United Kingdom; and
- Scottish levels of governance and legislation.

LINK notes that these Shared Principles remain acknowledged by:

- The UK Government;
- The Northern Ireland Executive;
- The Welsh Government; and
- The Scottish Government.

LINK notes that these Shared Principles have been acknowledged by political parties within the UK and the devolved administrations including:

- The Conservative Party;
- The Labour Party;
- The Liberal Democrats;
- The Scottish National Party; and
- Other political parties across the UK.

This manifesto (as it develops) will give LINK's view as to the most important measures required to deliver these principles in Scotland over the next four years – together with information on members who can develop the ideas.

Step 1 – Sustainable Development at the heart of public policy

The Shared Principle

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The direction of travel

Climate change and concern about other issues such as mass extinctions and pollution are already driving aspirations for a more sustainable Scotland. But there are many issues that also need our urgent attention – biodiversity loss, resource usage, carbon footprints, land use and marine planning amongst them.

In LINK we want to see all of these issues dealt with holistically and comprehensively across government – because we won't achieve sustainability if we deal with them in separate silos. This is why we supported the development of a strategy for sustainable development within Scotland and it is why we supported the introduction of the National Performance Framework (NPF) in 2007 - and support subsequent work on the NPF.

We have been contributing to the cross-party discussions on improving the NPF in recent months, and wrestling with the continued over-dominance of economic measurements of “success” within it. If our development as a country is to be successful, we believe it must be sustainable, and this requires a balance of social, economic, political and environmental metrics.

LINK “ask” for the next term

Scotland should ensure that the National Performance Framework is firmly based on the Shared Principles of Sustainability, agreed by the UK and Devolved Governments. We want the political parties to make a commitment to putting sustainable development at the core of their manifestos and programmes for government – and at the very top of their hierarchy of strategies within government.

We want the NPF to be able to tell us whether we are making progress towards sustainable development – or not.

LINK members offering assistance and further ideas

There are many ideas and policies which political parties could pursue in the area of this shared principle of sustainability. The following members of LINK are committed to offering assistance in the development of the idea given above and/or providing ideas which could supplement or complement this proposal.

- **Friends of the Earth Scotland**
- **Marine Conservation Society**
- **Nourish Scotland**
- **Plantlife**
- **RSPB Scotland**
- **Scottish Wildlife Trust**
- **Woodland Trust Scotland**

Step 2 – Achieving a Sustainable Economy

The Shared Principle

“Building a strong, stable and sustainable economy which provides prosperity and opportunities for all, and in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (Polluter Pays) and efficient resource use is incentivised.”

The direction of travel

Economic growth has had primacy over all other areas of policy in Scotland and the UK for at least the last thirty years – but we have too rarely paused to look at the consequences for society and the environment. Lip service has been paid to sustainable development but this has far too often included a misunderstanding of the idea – and sometimes the facile use of the concept to describe and pursue pure economic growth which might be “sustained”. Progress towards true sustainability has been made, but it has been slow as we continue to pursue a fundamentally exploitative course.

At all levels of government – international, European, UK, Scottish and local – we need to see improvements built into creating stability and sustainability; urgent action is needed here in Scotland to take the steps required.

LINK “ask” for the next term

Scotland should commit to implementing an urgent programme of investment in the infrastructure which is needed to ensure that emissions targets are met - and to build an economy which is environmentally sustainable and socially just.

This should involve implementing the Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP) programme under the Climate Change Act – covering *inter alia* domestic energy efficiency, re-forestation, peatland/wetland restoration and installation of solar panels on public properties. It should accelerate the development of plans for decarbonisation of public transport, Combined Heat and Power and energy storage. In addition, the Scottish Government should prepare plans for the implementation of circular economy measures including creating additional re-use and recycling capacities.

To do this it will be necessary to fill the investment gap between the funding needed and what is currently available. This should be done through the re-prioritisation of existing capital expenditure; the responsible use of Scottish Government’s new borrowing powers; and the promotion of investments in local sustainable economy projects by pension funds.

Above all, we believe the economy should be as circular as possible and viewed as a means to wellbeing and linked to the outcomes in the NPF.

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- **Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland**
- **Butterfly Conservation Scotland**
- **Friends of the Earth Scotland**
- **Marine Conservation Society**
- **Nourish Scotland**
- **RSPB Scotland**
- **Scottish Wild Land Group**
- **Scottish Wildlife Trust**
- **Soil Association Scotland**
- **WWF Scotland**

Step 3 – Using Sound Science Responsibly

The Shared Principle

“Ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the Precautionary Principle), as well as public attitudes and values.”

The direction of travel

The record of the Scottish Parliament and Government since 1999 has been a growing one of evidence-based policy making – but the scientific evidence has often counted for less than that presented for shorter term economic and social interests. As in the case of energy and climate change policy, this has meant failing to meet sustainability targets.

Scotland has a strong record of being in the scientific vanguard in academic research, but there are still serious problems where emerging developments have been hampered by insufficient scientific evidence, perceived or real, despite reforms to the way our scientific requirements and research programmes are prioritised.

Policy must be based on sound evidence, while taking scientific uncertainty into account through a precautionary approach. Current implementation of Scotland’s marine legislation is an example of an area where scientific evidence and robust monitoring of the environment is crucial for underpinning and assessing the success of implemented management measures.

LINK “ask” for the next term

Scotland should commit to a fully-resourced marine monitoring strategy, that uses sound science to ensure the effective management and implementation of Scotland’s developing Marine Protected Areas network and emerging marine planning system. Scientific evidence-based decision-making and compliance should be at the core of this strategy, to enable Scotland to comply with its legal requirement to have all its seas achieve a Good Environmental Status by 2020.

In 2010, the passing of the Marine (Scotland) Act made it a legal requirement that the health of all Scotland’s seas is protected, and where appropriate, enhanced. If Scotland’s seas are to meet Good Environmental Status by 2020, Scotland’s Marine Atlas makes clear that ecosystem enhancement is urgently required. Since then, the Scottish Government has designated 30 Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and published a National Marine Plan. The next step will be to ensure that sound science is used effectively as a basis for an ecosystem approach to the implementation of the National Marine Plan and for ensuring compliance with management measures in the new MPA network. This will mean the marine environment is protected and recovering, and that its potential for renewable energy, food production, carbon storage and resilience to climate change impacts are all realised.

LINK members offering assistance and further ideas

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- **Butterfly Conservation Scotland**
- **Friends of the Earth Scotland**
- **Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust**
- **Marine Conservation Society**
- **RSPB Scotland**
- **Scottish Wild Land Group**
- **Scottish Wildlife Trust**
- **Woodland Trust Scotland**
- **WWF Scotland**

Step 4 – Promoting Good Governance

The Shared Principle

“Actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society – engaging people’s creativity, energy and diversity.”

The direction of travel

In [Governance Matters](#), LINK published a full review of Scottish governance arrangements and concluded that much remains to be done in improving the methods and processes of our government if it is to become truly participative. Amongst other things, we require further improvements to the way Parliament scrutinises the conduct of Government; better arrangements for access to environmental justice; and a breaking down of the departmentalisation of government into distinct policy silos.

The Scottish Parliament and Government were based on the admirable principles of the all-party/no party Consultative Steering Group – and public engagement and participation were central to those ideas. Since 1999 though, we have heard little discussion of our overall performance in the arena of governance. This is a serious omission in our view – and it is an area we need to return to in pursuit of sustainability.

Prominent amongst the needs identified by LINK is the removal of the barriers to participation in debate and decision making by the full policy community. Major improvements in participative governance are required if we are to make the huge adjustments required as we move towards sustainability.

LINK “ask” for the next term

Scotland should fully commit itself to the establishment of a ‘civic forum’ – a space around Parliament and Government where all parts of the Scottish policy community can openly and freely discuss and debate the political issues before and in parallel with the formal branches of government who will continue to take the decisions on public policy.

Such a civic space should be:

- constituted to ensure that it is genuinely independent of manipulation by central government;
- freely accessible by any part of the Scottish policy community that wishes to participate so that the full spectrum of expertise could be part of the process of creating legislation and public policy;
- organised and funded on a basis that guarantees it against any funding threat to its existence or operation; and
- recognised as a crucial part of Scottish governance, with consideration given to its statutory underpinning.

LINK members offering assistance and further ideas

There are many ideas and policies which political parties could pursue in the area of this shared principle of sustainability. The following members of LINK are committed to offering assistance in the development of the idea given above and/or providing ideas which could supplement or complement this proposal.

- **Friends of the Earth Scotland**
- **Marine Conservation Society**
- **RSPB Scotland**
- **Scottish Wildlife Trust**
- **Woodland Trust Scotland**

Step 5 – Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society

The Shared Principle

“Meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all.”

The direction of travel

LINK members have been working hard to get ourselves out of a purely environmental silo - and to highlight our view that social justice and environmental justice are irrevocably linked. Our poorest people far too often live in the worst environmental conditions and we are working for the needed connections to be made between health, wealth, opportunity and the environment around us.

We believe that environmental poverty needs to be tackled as an inherent part of the assault on economic and social poverty.

Scotland has been making progress towards understanding the vital need for the growth in the areas of active travel, green space, education for sustainability, green belts and diet. Much remains to be done, however, to deliver this shared principle, and reap the benefits of sustainability.

LINK “ask” for the next term

Scotland should fully commit itself to the passage of an Ending Environmental Poverty Act – recognising that people and all nature exist within a single living space, and that the health of all species within that space is irrevocably linked.

The Act should address the issues of:

- people’s rights to live in contact with nature, including green spaces and access to land, sea and air;
- the vital importance of education about nature, including its role in our nutrition, physical and mental health; and
- the relationships between people’s health and wellbeing and the condition of our physical environment.

LINK members offering assistance and further ideas

There are many ideas and policies which political parties could pursue in the area of this shared principle of sustainability. The following members of LINK are committed to offering assistance in the development of the idea given above and/or providing ideas which could supplement or complement this proposal.

- **Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland**
- **Butterfly Conservation Scotland**
- **Friends of the Earth Scotland**
- **Marine Conservation Society**
- **Nourish Scotland**
- **Ramblers Scotland**
- **RSPB Scotland**
- **Scottish Wild Land Group**
- **Scottish Wildlife Trust**
- **Soil Association Scotland**
- **WWF Scotland**

Step 6 – Living Within Environmental Limits

The Shared Principle

“Respecting the limits of the planet’s environment, resources and biodiversity – to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations.”

The direction of travel

Scotland has made strides in the direction of delivering this principle. Legislation and action for tackling climate change has been put in place, although there are significant gaps in our approach, and the ambitious targets set are not being achieved. Efforts to clean up our rivers and sustain our seas are works in progress. Resource use and waste policy require further major nudges forward.

But in all these, and many other policy areas, we need to keep up the momentum for change and improvement if we are to be serious about respecting environmental limits. This requires one serious deficiency in Scottish governance to be addressed. The growing tendency to abandon targets in environmental public policy strategies must be reversed.

One of the most important areas to act is halting the loss of biodiversity within Scotland – where our efforts have been half-hearted at best, and we are failing to achieve international targets and, at the same time, watering down our own targets.

LINK “ask” for the next term

Scotland should fully commit itself to the setting and achievement of serious targets to halt the loss of biodiversity – and set firm and ambitious targets to both retaining and improving the numbers and health of species in our land, sea and air.

The targets should be set to integrate public policy for:

- threatened species;
- species for re-introduction; and
- invasive non-native species.

LINK members offering assistance and further ideas

There are many ideas and policies which political parties could pursue in the area of this shared principle of sustainability. The following members of LINK are committed to offering assistance in the development of the idea given above and/or providing ideas which could supplement or complement this proposal.

- **Amphibian and Reptile Conservation**
- **Buglife**
- **Butterfly Conservation Scotland**
- **Friends of the Earth Scotland**
- **Froglife**
- **Marine Conservation Society**
- **Plantlife**
- **RSPB Scotland**
- **Scottish Wild Land Group**
- **Scottish Wildlife Trust**
- **Soil Association Scotland**
- **Woodland Trust Scotland**
- **WWF Scotland**

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's environment organisations facilitating and enabling informed debate, information-sharing, discussion and joint action. Our 36 member organisations have cumulatively over 500,000 individual members, and represent a range of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

LINK assists communication between member bodies, government and its agencies and other sectors within civic society. Acting at local, national and international levels, LINK aims to ensure that the environment is fully recognised in the development of policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

For enquiries on this document please contact:
Daphne Vlastari, LINK Advocacy Officer
on 0131 225 4345 or daphne@scotlink.org



www.scotlink.org

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