

Scottish Liberal Democrats election challenge response

By James Parry, Head of Policy & Research

Thank you for contacting me about the future of Scotland's mountains, and enclosing your briefing "A Sustainable Future for Scotland's Mountains". It was very useful to read about your thinking in these areas.

I am delighted to say that the Scottish Liberal Democrats share your aims and ambitions for a sustainable future for Scotland's mountains. Indeed, as Liberal Democrats, we recognise the importance of acting as trustees of the world and our society and know that we must pass on a sustainable legacy that will benefit future generations. Protecting the environment and delivering for rural communities is at the heart of our party's plans to make Scotland the best again and you will see many of the ideas of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland reflected in our manifesto.

We know that Scotland's mountains and mountain communities are irreplaceable and a cherished cultural and economic asset. We know that effective management will deliver real benefits to local communities, driving economic growth and prosperity, and can deliver real health and well-being benefits to people.

In particular Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to establishing new national parks, or landscape partnership areas, learning from Scotland's first two national parks and bringing the benefits of improved management, conservation and tourism to wider parts of the country. We will support community involvement in the management of these areas.

We recognise the need to do more to support rural communities through means such as extending access to super-fast broadband and mobile phone coverage to every home and business – not just those that are easiest to reach.

Elsewhere, we will safeguard Scotland's access rights and use the power of the Scottish government to do more to get people to benefit from outdoor recreation and the wellbeing of enjoying activities that mountains can provide, such as hillwalking, climbing and mountaineering.

We will continue the general planning review of Scottish planning policy and practice to ensure a system of development planning that supports priorities including environmental protection and community engagement.

In doing all of this, we will act to enhance our mountain landscapes

As I mentioned, many of these ideas, and others, are reflected in the Liberal Democrat manifesto which has now been published and is available on our website at www.scotlibdems.org.uk. I do hope you will take a moment to look at our ideas.