

Scottish Parliament election 2026: Manifesto comparison for builders



This guide compares the main parties' manifesto commitments for the Scottish Parliament election against the priorities of the Federation of Master Builders (FMB).



ABOUT THIS GUIDE:

Small and medium-sized builders play a vital role in delivering new homes, improving existing housing, and supporting local economies.

The policies set out in party manifestos will directly shape the environment in which builders operate, from skills and training to planning, procurement, and standards.



WHAT THE GUIDE COVERS:

We focus on five key areas identified by the FMB:



Skills & Training



Standards & licensing



Retrofit & energy efficiency



Planning & housebuilding



Public sector procurement



WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS:

Builders are facing a range of challenges, including:

- Shortages in skilled trades
- Inconsistent standards across the industry affecting trust and quality
- Growing demand for retrofit
- Barriers for SMEs accessing work
- Delays in the planning system

In this guide, we set out how FMB proposes to address these challenges, alongside what each party is proposing, highlighting where policies align with FMB priorities and where gaps remain.

Skills & training



WHAT THE FMB IS CALLING FOR:

- ✓ A targeted construction skills strategy to address workforce shortages
- ✓ Increased funding for apprenticeships in the trades
- ✓ Stronger links between industry, colleges and training providers
- ✓ Action to address long-term labour shortages

SUMMARY:

Across all manifestos, there is a clear focus on skills, apprenticeships, and workforce development.

However, these approaches are generally set out at a broad level, with limited detail on how they apply specifically to the construction sector or address trade shortages.

HOW THE PARTIES COMPARE:

SNP

- ✓ Increase apprenticeships to 150,000
- ✓ Support graduate apprenticeships
- ✓ Wants to develop skills for nationwide economic growth
- ✗ No construction-specific skills strategy
- ✗ No targeted action on trade shortages

Scottish Conservatives

- ✓ Propose a major lifelong skills programme focused on reskilling
- ✓ Wants to develop skills for nationwide economic growth
- ✗ No construction-specific skills strategy
- ✗ No plan to address trade shortages

Scottish Labour

- ✓ Commit to expanding apprenticeships, including 9,000 new places
- ✓ Align training with employer demand
- ✓ Introduce structures connecting employers and training
- ✗ No construction-specific skills strategy
- ✗ Limited focus on trade shortages



- ✓ Train workers for green jobs, including construction work like retrofit
- ✓ Regional skills hubs linking colleges, employers and unions
- ✓ Improve apprenticeship standards
- ✗ No construction-specific skills strategy
- ✗ No targeted action on trade shortages

Scottish Liberal Democrats

- ✓ National skills strategy covering sectors including construction
- ✓ Work with employers to shape training and apprenticeships
- ✓ Expand apprenticeships and vocational routes
- ✗ No targeted policy specifically focused on SME construction training needs
- ✗ No targeted action on trade shortages



- ✓ Promote routes into trades and technical education
- ✓ Focus on apprenticeships linked to industry
- ✓ Direct more people into vocational training
- ✗ No dedicated plan for construction skills
- ✗ No targeted action on specific trade shortages



Shortage of skilled workers is one of the biggest barriers facing the construction sector. Without a strong pipeline of trained workers, builders cannot meet demand for new homes or deliver retrofit at scale.

Standards & licensing



WHAT THE FMB IS CALLING FOR:

- ✓ A licensing scheme for builders to ensure competence
- ✓ Consistent standards to improve quality and safety
- ✓ Stronger consumer protections
- ✓ Effective enforcement of standards

SUMMARY:

Overall, there is limited focus on construction standards and regulation. While some parties reference regulation more broadly, there is little detail on how this applies to construction.

There is no clear commitment to builder licensing, and some parties prioritise reducing regulation rather than introducing new standards.

HOW THE PARTIES COMPARE:

SNP

- ✓ Reference regulation in areas such as planning
- ✓ Emphasise quality outcomes in housing
- ✗ No builder licensing scheme
- ✗ No response to risks from unregulated building work
- ✗ Focus on broad regulation rather than construction standards



- Focus on reducing regulation and red tape
- Aim to remove barriers affecting business
- ✗ No builder licensing scheme
- ✗ No response to risks from unregulated building work
- ✗ Focus on reducing regulation rather than introducing standards



- ✓ Support standards and regulation in other sectors
- ✓ Emphasise quality and accountability
- ✗ No builder licensing scheme
- ✗ No response to risks from unregulated building work
- ✗ Standards approach not applied to construction



- ✓ Support stronger regulation and enforcement
- ✓ Emphasise accountability across industry
- ✓ Include standards within training and apprenticeships
- ✗ No builder licensing scheme
- ✗ No response to risks from unregulated building work
- ✗ Regulation not translated into construction-specific standards



- ✓ Support national standards across sectors
- ✓ Promote fair work and standards in contracts
- ✗ No builder licensing scheme
- ✗ No response to risks from unregulated building work
- ✗ No construction-specific standards framework



- Focus on reducing regulation and bureaucracy
- Propose wider reform to reduce oversight
- ✗ No builder licensing scheme
- ✗ No construction competence or safety standards
- ✗ No response to unregulated building work



Inconsistent standards across the construction sector are a major challenge, affecting quality, safety, and consumer confidence. Without clear regulation and accountability, reputable builders can be undercut by poor-quality work, damaging trust in the industry.

Retrofit & energy efficiency



WHAT THE FMB IS CALLING FOR:

- ✓ A clear national retrofit strategy
- ✓ Targets for upgrading existing homes
- ✓ Long-term funding (e.g. grants and loans)
- ✓ A defined role for SME builders in delivery

SUMMARY:

Many parties focus on energy efficiency and reducing emissions, though approaches differ, with some placing less emphasis on net zero and retrofit.

There is limited detail across manifestos on how retrofit will be delivered in practice.

HOW THE PARTIES COMPARE:

SNP

- ✓ Strong focus on reducing emissions through climate policy
- ✓ Link this to improving housing quality and energy efficiency
- ✓ Propose legislative action through the Heat in Buildings Bill
- ✗ No clear national retrofit targets
- ✗ Limited detail on funding for retrofit
- ✗ No clear role for SME builders in delivery

Scottish Conservatives

- Focus on energy policy in terms of affordability
- Propose support for household energy costs
- ✗ No retrofit or insulation programme
- ✗ No energy efficiency strategy for existing homes
- ✗ No link between construction and retrofit delivery

Scottish Labour

- ✓ Support energy efficiency improvements in homes (e.g. funding for older households)
- ✓ Link housing upgrades to reducing energy costs
- ✓ Include wider energy transition and infrastructure investment
- ✗ No comprehensive national retrofit strategy
- ✗ No explicit role for SME builders in delivery



- ✓ Strong support for large-scale retrofit and energy efficiency
- ✓ Set clear policy direction for decarbonising buildings
- ✓ Commit to financial and practical support for households
- ✓ Link retrofit to job creation
- ✗ Limited detail on specific delivery targets
- ✗ No explicit focus on SME builders in delivery

Scottish Liberal Democrats

- ✓ Strong support for energy efficiency and home insulation
- ✓ Propose large-scale retrofit-style programmes
- ✓ Link retrofit to jobs and construction activity
- ✗ No detailed retrofit targets or delivery framework
- ✗ Limited focus on SME builders delivering retrofit



- ✓ Link construction to energy and infrastructure development
- ✓ Propose workforce plans linked to energy sector skills
- ✗ No commitment to retrofit existing homes
- ✗ No energy efficiency or insulation programmes
- ✗ Reject key net zero policies driving retrofit demand



Improving the energy efficiency of existing homes is key to reducing emissions and energy costs. For builders, retrofit represents a major area of future work, but delivering it at scale requires clear policy direction, funding, and a skilled workforce.

Planning & housebuilding



WHAT THE FMB IS CALLING FOR:

- ✓ A simpler and more efficient planning system
- ✓ Increased housing supply across all tenures
- ✓ Improved access to land for SME housebuilders
- ✓ Greater support for small builders to deliver new homes

SUMMARY:

Increasing housing supply is a key focus across manifestos, supported by planning reform and delivery targets.

However, there is limited detail on how SME builders will be supported to contribute to delivery, particularly in relation to access to land.

HOW THE PARTIES COMPARE:

SNP

- ✓ Target to deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032
- ✓ Focus on planning reform to support housing delivery
- ✓ Investment in affordable housing
- ✗ No clear support for SME housebuilders
- ✗ No action on access to land for small builders

Scottish Conservatives

- ✓ Focus on speeding up planning decisions
- ✓ Propose reducing delays in the planning system
- ✗ No housing supply target
- ✗ No support for SME builders or access to land

Scottish Labour

- ✓ Target to build 125,000 new homes
- ✓ Reform planning to speed up development
- ✓ Increase affordable housing supply
- ✗ Limited focus on SME builders
- ✗ No clear action on access to land



- ✓ Target to build 250,000 homes over 10 years
- ✓ Strong focus on affordable and social housing
- ✓ Planning reform linked to sustainability
- ✗ Limited focus on SME builders
- ✗ No clear action on access to land

Scottish Liberal Democrats

- ✓ Target to build 25,000 homes per year
- ✓ Focus on planning reform to increase supply
- ✓ Emphasis on local housing delivery
- ✗ Limited focus on SME builders
- ✗ No clear action on access to land



- ✓ Support increasing housing supply
- ✓ Focus on simplifying planning processes
- ✗ No clear housing target
- ✗ No support for SME builders or access to land



Delivering more homes depends on an effective planning system. Delays, complexity, and limited access to land can restrict development and limit the role of SME builders in meeting housing demand.

Public sector procurement



WHAT THE FMB IS CALLING FOR:

- ✓ Simpler and more accessible procurement processes
- ✓ Reduced barriers for SMEs bidding for contracts
- ✓ Fair and transparent selection criteria
- ✓ Greater opportunities for local builders

SUMMARY:

Public sector procurement is recognised as an important tool for delivering wider economic and social outcomes, with several parties linking it to fair work, local economies, or sustainability.

However, there is little detail on reducing barriers or improving access for SMEs within the construction sector.

HOW THE PARTIES COMPARE:

SNP

- ✓ Commitment to community wealth building and local economies
- ✓ Support for fair work and public sector standards
- ✗ No clear plan to improve SME access to contracts
- ✗ No specific procurement reform for small builders



- ✓ Support fair work and ethical procurement
- ✓ Link procurement to environmental and social goals
- ✗ No clear plan to improve SME access to contracts
- ✗ No focus on small builders in procurement



- ✓ Recognise barriers in accessing public sector contracts
- ✓ Propose simplifying procurement processes
- ✗ Limited detail on how SMEs will be supported
- ✗ No specific measures for small builders



- ✓ Recognise challenges SMEs face in accessing contracts
- ✓ Support simplifying procurement processes
- ✗ Limited detail on implementation
- ✗ No construction-specific procurement measures



- ✓ Focus on fair work and public sector standards
- ✓ Emphasis on using public spending to support jobs
- ✗ No clear plan to improve SME access to contracts
- ✗ No specific procurement reform for small builders



- ✓ Focus on reducing bureaucracy and simplifying processes
- ✗ No clear procurement policy
- ✗ No focus on SME access to public contracts



Public sector contracts are a major source of work, but can be difficult for small builders to access.

Complex processes and requirements can limit SME participation, reducing competition and opportunities across the sector.