

Levack at Large
Project Scotland – February 2012

As 2012 gets under way, please allow me belatedly to share with you 12 New Year resolutions I would like to see honoured over the next 12 months of this Olympic Year.

Scottish Government - The first resolution must be to deliver one single standard pre-qualification questionnaire. Much joy and celebration can be expected throughout the land of builders, architects and surveyors if the First Minister were to honour us with that as a late Christmas present.

The Scottish Parliament Resolution number two is for the Scottish Parliament to assume some real teeth in holding the Scottish Government to account – including Parliamentary Committees with the powers and resolve to subject Government policies to robust scrutiny.

Scottish Government Resolution three – that the Scottish Government takes even bolder action to really get the Scottish construction industry building in 2012 and the years ahead. Let me give credit where it's due, the Scottish Government has recognised the importance of infrastructure investment and capital expenditure. But there's always scope to do better.

Edinburgh Council Resolution four is for me to be able to jump on a tram to take me along Princess Street. Now that the Scottish Government has parachuted in Transport Scotland, let us hope that the citizens and businesses of Edinburgh do not have to wait too long to see some tangible progress.

The UK Government Resolution five: 5% VAT on repair, maintenance and improvement works would go a long way to allowing home owners the opportunity of upgrading their existing homes. Particularly when any new mortgage lending is as scarce on the ground as industrial training placements for our young students.

The banking industry Resolution six: This year, let's see six bankers lending to good solid businesses. Increased competition and real lending to businesses that should be supported to get through this recession is something we'd all like to see.

Local councils Resolution seven – to bring an end to the merry dance many contractors are often led in the public sector version of 'strip the willow', aka the spurious and convoluted public sector procurement process.

Employers: An 8 ball pool table for the canteen would keep the brickies busy through another harsh mid-winter, while we wait the promised 'snow dump' of work from the Scottish Futures Trust this year.

UK Government Resolution nine - let's end the waiting game for the Green Deal to start. It's probably too much to hope that the UK Government will do a late U-turn on the proposal to slash the feed-in

tariff. In Scotland, how about a comprehensive national retrofit programme, rather than the sticking plaster approach to date?

Local councils Resolution ten - let's see ten fewer tenderers on the latest public sector tender list for the community centre in your town. Seventeen tenderers for a £3.5m project - you are having a laugh!

Scottish Futures Trust Resolution 11 – can the SFT deliver us 11 real “shovel ready” projects this year? The suggestion that SFT has saved some £240m of net future benefit, should have been a 1st April release. Future benefit is all well and good, but not if it is at the expense of thousands of jobs, apprentice places and businesses. Well that will be at least two fewer people sending me a Christmas card in 2012....

Local councils The twelfth and final resolution for 2012 is to cut the number of local authorities in Scotland to a round dozen. Let's not tinker at the edges. If we want to get Scotland's public sector working efficiently and effectively we must do something with the 32 local authorities and 34 planning authorities. Otherwise, we will never get public spending under control and any degree of consistency in public sector policy. In a country with a population of just 5 million, let's get it sorted. Dare I say it, that will have a far greater impact on Scotland's economic performance than independence.

With the pandas newly arrived in Edinburgh, we should remember that, according to the Chinese Zodiac, 2012 is the Year of the Dragon, which began on January 23. The Dragon is the fifth sign of the Chinese Zodiac. The Dragon is a creature of myth and legend. In ancient China, the celestial Dragon represents an emperor and power. Today, it is the ultimate auspicious symbol signifying success and happiness. May the celestial Tartan Dragon bring great good luck to everyone in Scotland's construction industry this coming year.