



# News Review

## Foreword

by Lord Seafield

I think we can all agree that legislation should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is working properly. However in the case of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, the review comes much sooner than one may have expected. With regard to expansion of community ownership, there is a view that such activity has been much less than expected and there must be constraints causing that. But, it could just be that community aspirations are already being met without the need for ownership through the establishment of good relationships between communities and local landowners. I would hope that as a modern, forward-thinking estate and a family-owned, land-based business we have built relationships with communities over the years that meet their aspirations without ownership of the actual land being a relevant issue.

Those who own land are in a unique position to deliver social and public benefits – housing, recreation, amenity, jobs and so on – and we do. And this latest land reform review presents us once again with an opportunity to prove this.

The Land Reform Review Group is the independent body established by the Scottish Government last year to “identify how land reform will enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land, which will lead to a greater diversity of land ownership, and ownership types, in Scotland.”

## Land reform is back on the agenda



It is surprising that it wasn't asked specifically to review the effectiveness of the 2003 Act, how it's working, where it's not working, and where it might be able to work better. Provided it is focused on land use outputs rather than ownership considerations I would expect its conclusions to bring a reasonable addition to or modification of the original 2003 Act.

It is already clear that some MSPs will not be satisfied with that. Johann Lamont took the land reform concept to a new level in her speech to the Labour conference this spring. She said that “land reform had stalled under the SNP,” and then declared that “if it is in the public interest, communities will have the right to purchase land, even when the land owner is not a willing seller.” That seems a dramatic extension of compulsory purchase - but full marks to her for laying her cards on the table.

Scotland's large estates, and we are one of those, are of course under scrutiny in this process. But I am confident that the good we do, the services we provide, the ‘public goods’ we deliver, to use the jargon of the day, far outweigh the alternatives, and I hope and believe that the Review Group in its evidence-gathering will recognise and value the existing contribution that we make to society as a whole and the opportunities to build on that positively.

I hope that the review process will be conducted equitably both in an urban and rural context and that we can move to a period of stability in legislation. I hope that the Review Group is moderate and reasonable in its approach so that we can all, no matter how many acres we own or manage, sign up to its proposals with confidence.

CONTACT US – If you have any comment on the content of this news review, or wish to contact Seafield or Strathspey Estates on any relevant issue then you can write, or telephone our offices:

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## Tillynaught Bridge

In November 2009 the north-east experienced one of the worst floods in living memory, with significant damage caused to roads and infrastructure.

One of the most prominent victims was the substantial stone arch bridge at Tillynaught, a strategic vehicular crossing of the Burn of Boyne near Cornhill, which was completely washed away.

Aberdeenshire Council was faced with the challenge of deciding what, if any, replacement should be provided. After several public meetings, it became clear that a vehicular bridge was required not only for general public access but also for local farmers, including several Estate tenants, who had land on both side of the water.

With design, planning approval and funding in place, as well as the acquisition of additional ground from the Estate, work commenced in the summer of 2012 and, despite some

unhelpful weather, the fine new structure was completed in early 2013 and opened to traffic on 13 February.

All concerned are very grateful to the efforts of Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services and McLeods the contractor, for their hard work in bringing the replacement bridge to reality.



## Bogtown Farm's latest expansion

Three new shiny silos mark the spot where the Bogtown Farm grain dryer has been expanded to improve intake and storage capacity. This upgrade is in line with other improvements which have been taking place in the operation, including the use of bigger combine harvesters.

Described as 'the weakest link' the original grain drier was over 30 years old and was struggling to cope with increased demand. The new enlarged facility, which is nearing completion, will increase intake from 60 tonnes to 100 tonnes per hour, catering for the higher volumes now processed by the plant.

Work on the new grain complex started at the end of 2012 and is expected to be finished in July this year – just in time for the harvest. The cost of the project was around £380,000 and the increased storage space and enhanced performance will make the wet weather less of an issue during harvest.



## Heat from Estate resources

Old Cullen, the principal residence on the estate, has benefited from a new biomass heating system which will not only reduce carbon emissions and help the environment, but will also save 70% on heating costs.

The new biomass boiler was commissioned last year to replace an oil heating system, and the new eco-friendly system will be used to heat Old Cullen and a flat nearby. The project, which was carried out by Highland Wood Energy from Fort William, took six months to complete from design to installation.

The highly efficient boiler will use 100 tonnes of wood chips a year which come from Estate timber. It is felled, seasoned and

then a chipper makes enough for a year's use. The chips are then stored in a shed on the Estate and the fuel store attached to the boiler is topped up using Estate labour.

There has been a significant financial outlay, qualifying for support from the Government's Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), and because the chips are home produced on the Estate, the savings in running costs are substantial.

Bruno Berardelli of Highland Wood Energy said: "We believe that the expansion of wood (or biomass) heating will provide significant socio-economic and environmental benefits for the whole country. We are delighted to have worked with Seafeld Estate on this project, and are looking forward to converting more old oil boilers with them in the future."



## Timber Harvesting

Most trees on the Estate are grown with the intention of harvesting them as a crop at some time. The age of cropping can vary, along with the method. Timber production works in harmony with habitat and recreation management and the fellings at Loch Vaa and Boat of Garten are two good examples.

### Loch Vaa

The pine trees at Loch Vaa were planted in the mid 1800s, making them around 150 years old. Normally these would have been harvested around 50 years ago but this stand was left, possibly because it was near a loch and aesthetically pleasing. Part of the stand surrounding the loch is now designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a special Protection Area for its beetles, Slavonian Grebe and Goldeneye duck. Any felling has to take account of these designations and also other species management concerns relating to the Capercaillie.

The stand was showing a tendency to produce young trees, indicating it was time to consider its replacement. The Estate worked with the Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage to maximise timber production in balance with the habitat requirements. It was planned to leave a number of original trees standing to keep the woodland feel and look. These would also produce seeds to regenerate the site naturally, without planting. All the trees to be kept were individually chosen and marked with tape. The timing of the work was planned for December through to March to avoid species disturbance.

Around 2000 tonnes of timber were extracted, with some individual logs weighing 1 tonne each. The timber has been sold for a variety of uses, including house construction. The Estate will retain some for its own joinery use.

During the felling, habitat creation work, involving improving existing and creating new rot holes in cut stumps, was carried out to provide opportunities for colonisation of the site by Pine Hoverfly.

Later in 2013 the ground under the trees will undergo some cultivation to produce conditions suitable for the seed from the remaining trees to germinate and produce the next generation of pine trees.

### Boat of Garten

Because they are slow growing, the plantation pines in Strathspey see short bursts of 'tending', in this case thinning, every ten years or so throughout their productive life. Some thinning was carried out in the southern part of the Boat of Garten woods in 2008 and the northern

section, closer to the village was planned to be thinned in 2012. Because of the high recreational use of the woodlands and the Capercaillie interest, the Estate worked closely with the Boat of Garten Community, Scottish Natural Heritage and Cairngorms National Park Authority to ensure that people were fully aware of the need for the work and its likely effects during operations.

Along the edges of the internal roads more trees were removed to provide opportunities for regeneration of young pine. This regeneration will help screen the centre of the woods to reduce the disturbance of ground nesting birds by recreational users, as well as generally improving the habitat and amenity by introducing another age class of trees into the woods.

Mature pines and trees which had the potential to become features were retained and, where existing bankings already limited visibility into the plantation, trees were kept up to the track edge to avoid creation of an unnatural corridor effect.

In order to carry out the timber harvesting, some maintenance of the forest roads was necessary. This involved the cutting back of some regeneration which had closed in on the paths and the work had the benefit of improving the walking surface on some well used tracks.

Felling started in September 2012 and carried on until February 2013 when a total of 4000 tonnes (160 lorry loads) of timber had been harvested. The operation was quite straightforward with most people following the signs and instructions. On a few occasions the vigilance and skill of the operators prevented accidents when walkers chose to ignore the risks and approached too close to the machinery.

A total of 1500 holly and juniper were planted in some of the cleared sections to provide additional screening and introduce more tree species to the wood to improve habitat. Later in the year cultivation, similar to that planned for Loch Vaa, will be carried out, along with some minor road repairs once the Capercaillie breeding season has ended.



## Baking at Badenspink

An expanding local bakery business has recently featured on national TV after a visit from celebrity chefs Rachel Allen and Theo Randall.

Farmhouse Home Bakes was originally set up almost 20 years ago by Mrs Linda Milne in the kitchen of the farmhouse at Midtown of Badenspink, Cornhill, where her late husband John was an Estate tenant. Their daughter Mrs Nicola Ingram, who had been involved in the family bakery business since leaving school, succeeded to the farm tenancy and, with her husband Keith looking after the farm as well as his own plant hire business, a decision was taken to erect spacious purpose-built bakery premises on the farm. Now the mother and daughter business, renamed Nicola's Home Bakes, is going from strength to strength.

It employs five part time staff and produces over 30 varieties of tray bakes and cakes, from shortbread to fruit loaves, which are sold wholesale to independent retailers throughout the north east from Buckie to Laurencekirk.

It was a customer, the delicatessen in Keith, who alerted the TV chefs, who were filming at the Keith Show, to this local enterprise. Celebrity chefs Rachel and Theo visited the farm and spent an afternoon learning about the family business and its development, and filming the baking skills of Linda and Nicola.



Theo Randall with Linda and Nicola

## Pioneering river restoration project praised

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, visited Seafield Estate in April to see the work that has been done on the Allt Lorgy project, a Spey Catchment Initiative designed to restore riverside habitat and help flood prevention. The project, a partnership between Strathspey Estate, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), the Scottish Government, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Woodlands Trust Scotland and the Spey Fishery Board, is leading the way in protecting highland river environments.



*Tree planting by local schoolchildren*

The Allt Lorgy, which joins the River Dulnain, a tributary of the Spey, had been straightened in the past by way of heavily engineered methods which have posed a threat to salmon and affected the water flow, which has contributed to flooding. This pioneering project has involved removing artificial constraints, lowering embankments, removing boulders and replacing with fallen trees and wood structures, deer-fencing the site and planting trees. What makes this project unique is that the carefully planned works have initiated a process whereby the river will now run its own natural course to re-establish equilibrium, and the ground work has been set so that habitats will thrive.

Paul Wheelhouse said: "This project will allow the river to restore natural habitats, creating a diverse environment and benefiting a range of species. It will also reduce flooding – a problem which has wiped out salmon spawning habitat over the years – helping the angling industry around the Cairngorms National Park."



CNPA Convenor Duncan Bryden said: "The Allt Lorgy restoration is a really interesting project environmentally but also economically when you consider what the angling industry is worth to the Park and indeed well beyond the Park boundary."

Spey Fishery Board Director Roger Knight said: This innovative project will help restore the natural river processes that have hitherto been impeded by mankind. It will also provide additional habitat for spring salmon which spawn in the upper tributaries of the Spey and have been threatened by man's interference with our river systems."

During his visit the Minister, assisted by pupils from Carrbridge primary school, helped with the planting of an additional 4800 native tree species.

## Grampian Kart Club provides breathtaking experience

Fifty years ago, Lord Seafield provided the ground at Boyndie Drome at Banff, where the Grampian Kart Club was born, and which is still on a long lease from the Estate at a nominal rent.

From small beginnings, with basic comforts and a short racing circuit of only 300 metres, the Grampian Kart Club (GKC) has grown and improved considerably over the years. The Club's facilities have gone from a double decker bus with no loo, to a purpose-built clubhouse with toilets, showers, heating, kitchen and a high-tech lap scoring building. Now GKC enjoys a circuit of over 850m in length and the Club's aim is to become the best karting facility in Scotland.



GKC runs two championships from March to October, the main one under the Motor Sports Association (MSA) and the other is the Boyndie Drome Open Challenge, which is a stepping stone to MSA and run to the same standards. Other championships from the National Kart Racing Association and the Association of Scottish Kart Clubs (Super Series) attract drivers from all over Scotland, and in August 2014 GKC will host the prestigious Scottish Championships, which will run over two days.

Peter Chalmers, Property Manager at Seafield Estate, went along to a race day meeting recently and was very impressed by the facilities and the speed of the karts. He said: "I didn't realise that the karts could go so fast, reaching a speed approaching 100mph on the straight, which makes the racing exhilarating for the drivers and thrilling for the spectators. The cafeteria was also first class and the turnout was impressively large.

"The club has invested in a fleet of the highest quality karts in the UK, which are available for hire, providing a thrilling day out for both the public and for corporate events. This is a fantastic amenity for the area, and the committee should be congratulated on their enthusiasm, commitment and success."

## Ron's award

Ron Urquhart, farms manager at Seafield Estate, was recently presented with a special award in recognition of his efforts to boost children's understanding about agriculture and the working countryside.

The chairman of the Royal Northern Countryside Initiative (RNCI), Billy Stewart, paid a surprise visit to Cullen Primary School, where Ron was talking to its P2 class, and presented an unsuspecting Ron with the John Telfer Trophy for outstanding achievement. The trophy is awarded annually to the farmer who makes the most valuable contribution to help the RNCI in its work to 'take the classroom to the countryside'. Ron, who has been regularly advising the class on its Totally Tattie project - which helps children with their numeracy in a hands-on fun way through growing potatoes in class - also helped organise an Open Day at Seafield Estate last year where hundreds of local schoolchildren and their teachers learned about farming, forestry and rural sporting activities. He has also contributed to the 'Scotland's Farming Year' film which helps children understand where food comes from.



*Ron (right) is presented with his trophy by Billy Stewart*

Billy Stewart praised Ron's major contribution in helping children and teachers in the north east to develop a greater understanding of countryside matters. He said: "Ron is a pleasure to work with and nothing is ever too much trouble for him. He has a great link with Cullen School where his visits are very popular with pupils and staff alike."

Ron said he was stunned to receive the award: "I never even knew it existed. I was just doing my usual stint at the school when I saw Bill and thought he was checking up on me, until I saw a big smile on his face. I totally enjoy working with the kids. They are good fun and they are just like wee learning machines."