



Foreword

by Lord Seafield

Working together must be the sensible way to approach a number of the issues facing rural Scotland. Joint resolution and representation across industry sectors, as is happening with the Tenant Farming Forum (TFF), is a sound approach provided that all those involved abide by the rules.

This could apply equally to the Moorland Forum which now has a new Chairman in Lord Lindsay, and has sharpened its remit to tackle a programme of key issues relating to management of our Uplands, and to bring forward pertinent and workable solutions.

Membership of the Moorland Forum is extensive. For a body that requires to be incisive, it may yet be unwieldy and therefore success in its delivery of solutions may be difficult. Likewise, the Access Forum. There is a danger that achieving consensus across the whole membership is beyond the bounds of possibility; they can easily be labelled as talking shops, saying much but in reality achieving very little.

TFF is a sharper, more focused body. Under the guidance of Chairman Professor Jeff Maxwell, the TFF is addressing the challenge of promoting a healthy tenanted farming sector in Scotland as well as the barriers facing new entrants into farming, and has just delivered its comprehensive report to Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead MSP.

TFF membership extends across landowner organisations (the Scottish Estates Business Group and Scottish Rural Property and Business Association), to others including NFU Scotland, the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs.

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Bin Hill Land Rover Tours

In May, Seafield Estate ran five Land Rover Tours over two weekends from the Estate Office in Cullen to the top of Bin Hill (standing at 1,050 ft). Local people who had not been able to visit the hill's summit and appreciate the views from it for some time were the focus of these outings.

The tours also stopped at a number of other interesting historical and natural landmarks on the way to and from the summit, including one of the largest Sitka spruce trees in the UK, the old curling pond, Fulford Reservoir and the Bronze Age burial cairns. Visitors were also shown the architecture of the Home Farm buildings and the feat of engineering that is Cullen Main Drain.

The trips were a real success - 33 people took advantage of the chance to see these prominent local landmarks, and enjoyed seeing views and revisiting places that they had not been able to for some time. There was very positive feedback from all those involved.

TFF has made headway with recommendations to reinvigorate the tenanted farming sector, a vital component of Scotland's agricultural industry, that are fair to both landlords and their tenants. There is an indisputable shortage of land coming forward through the tenanted sector, despite new letting arrangements under the 2003 Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act. But the genie of the right to buy and retrospective legislation remain major concerns for owners who might consider letting land.

This appraisal may seem negative, but TFF has made considerable progress. How much better is it for Government to have one industry body framing proposals that have been discussed, considered in detail and agreed, than several disparate industry organisations all shouting from the sidelines and pulling in different directions to benefit their own constituents?

Aviemore Walking Festival 2007

The Estate organised a special guided walk as a part of the Aviemore Walking Festival that ran from 12 to 20 May 2007. 22 walkers, a cross section of local people and visitors (some from Germany and Hungary), took part in the walk that went from the highest point on Kinveachy to Sluggan Bridge, a distance of 8 kilometres. The weather was far from ideal - in fact it was unseasonably cold and snowy. The walk was led by Frank Law, Sporting Manager.



Similarly, we have seen all relevant land owner and land management organisations signing up together to combat the scourge of wildlife crime, and that same pan-industry forum making successful representation to Michael Russell, Environment Minister, on the importance of the use of snares in the countryside.

Working together is undoubtedly good for rural Scotland and its future. As a part of that fabric we strongly support those organisations that sit on these Forums and represent our views.

We believe, and I am sure our Scottish Government will concur with this, that consensus achieved by this mechanism is the best way forward. To quote Sir Winston Churchill: To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war.

Bob Furniss, Forestry Director, retires after 33 years



Bob Furniss retired as Forestry Director of Seafield and Strathspey Estates at the end of March 2007 after 33 years.

A Yorkshireman from Barnsley, Bob trained at Newton Rigg College, Penrith, Cumbria, and started out on a forestry career with Buccleuch Estates in Dumfriesshire while still a student. His first full-time forestry job was on the Duke of Bedford's Woburn Estate.

Bob moved to Seafield Estates as Assistant Forester in April 1974, but was promoted to the Head Forester's post some 18 months later. His responsibilities initially extended solely over the Cullen woodlands and plantations, but in 1985 this was extended to include the Estate's forestry interests in Strathspey where he took over from Basil Dunlop.

Currently the Estate has around 3,100 hectares (7,600 acres) of commercial woodland at Cullen. When Bob joined the Estate there was less than this, but subsequent management and policy decisions saw greater investment in trees with farmland formerly used for barley taken out of production. While much of the timber grown at Cullen is Sitka spruce destined for the construction industry, native broadleaf and mixed woodland species have always been viewed as an important part of the Estate's woodland management.

In Strathspey, some 5,000 hectares (12,300 acres) are currently forested, predominantly by native Scots pine. The Estate's woodland area in Strathspey has reduced over the past ten years with a number of plantations, such as the Anagach Woods on the edge of Grantown on Spey, being sold.

Bob says that during his time with the Estate, forestry management became increasingly complex:

There are now far greater levels of consultation - with increased legislation, accountability, certification and regulation. The forestry grant scheme was much less complicated than it is now, and another major change has been the move away from direct to indirect labour, with all the Estate's forestry work now contracted out. Plus the fact that there are now machines that can knock out up to 200 tonnes of timber every day all year round which we didn't have in the early days!

It used to be very labour intensive for us, using staff for harvesting and extraction, and at the sawmill. That has all changed.

What has not changed however is the fact that the public still don't really see forestry as a business. They see woodland as part of the landscape, somewhere to go - but they don't see it as a crop, they don't appreciate that much of it is there to be felled, and they don't like seeing lorry loads of timber.

Bob has overseen many more changes in the way the Estates run their forestry business, including the certification of all the Seafield and Strathspey woodland under UKWAS - the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.

His retirement has brought a move to Fife where he has joined Scotsraig Golf Club, the 13th oldest golf club in the world. Bob said before he retired that he had ambitions to learn to cook, and we expect that anything to do with cricket - true of any Yorkshireman - will remain high on his list of interests.

Everyone at Seafield and Strathspey Estates wishes him well for a long and happy retirement.

BBC Springwatch comes to Strathspey

Parts of BBC's Springwatch programme, screened in May and June, features the Estate. In March, new nesting boxes for crested tits were put up, and cameras installed both inside and outside. A BBC crew also spent two nights and mornings filming a capercaillie lek resulting in some fantastic footage - with remote mikes picking up the birds' interesting and unusual 'song' as they were displaying. Springwatch has also been eager to capture footage of a Scottish wildcat in the wild. Be sure to tune in!

Kinveachy Open Day 2007

The Estate held an open Day on Kinveachy on 30 May last year to provide neighbouring estates, the Monadhliath Deer Management Group, and other interested organisations with an update on its deer management plan. The visit was attended by around 20 guests, as well as representatives from the Deer Commission, SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland.

Bill Barclay, Ploughing Champion

Bill Barclay of Whiteknowes Farm, who won the Scottish Ploughing Championship using conventional equipment in 1976 at Balboughty, Scone, has made a comeback and won the Central Banffshire Vintage Ploughing annual ploughing match using a vintage plough from 1957. He entered nine competitions, winning eight of them and coming second in one - 'A bad day,' he says.

Bill has been ploughing for 56 years, since he was 13 years old, and over the years has competed in competitions all over the world including Europe, New Zealand and North America - even though he is scared of flying! He has also been a coach for Scottish competitors taking part in the World Ploughing Championships.

He farms, with his son Graham, over 1500 acres including the two tenanted units of Whiteknowes and Ardicow in Deskford, near Cullen. The business comprises over 250 suckler cows and 450 ewes as well as approximately 1000 acres of cereals, mainly winter wheat and winter barley which are used or sold for feed, and spring barley which is sold for malting.



Photo: The Banffshire Advertiser

The day's itinerary included a visit to the new Kinveachy deer larder, presentations by John McKenzie of SNH, Graham MacBryer of FCS and Iain Hope of DCS, with the opportunity for questions. In the afternoon, the programme was repeated for representatives from Carrbridge and Boat of Garten Community Councils.

Boyndie turbine path opened

A new footpath leading to the Boyndie wind farm was opened in February. More than 500 metres in length, the path runs from the Boyndie visitor centre up to the seven giant turbines that stand on the former RAF aerodrome site. From there, walkers are able to join the bomb road, one of the original access roads around the former RAF base which is on Seafield Estate ground.

Much of the work on the path, including building benches and planting trees, was carried out by volunteers from the Boyndie Day Centre working alongside contractor Jamie Forbes. The footpath initiative was set in motion by Whitehills and District Community Council, with funding coming from Falck Renewables, Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Whitehills District Community Council and the Wind Farm Community fund.

Information about the wind farm is displayed on an interpretation panel beside the new path, and the history of the airfield is explained at the Boyndie Visitor Centre.

Cullen Home Farm Clock

The Home Farm clock at Cullen House has been ticking along for nearly 200 years, dating back to when the farm buildings were completed in 1816 – the year after the Battle of Waterloo! All four faces continue to run like clockwork, and the bell still rings the hour.

The clock has been maintained by Willie Reid of the Farm staff. He has been giving it its weekly wind, and quite literally keeping this familiar and prominent feature up to speed, for 20 years.



Kinveachy

Woodland visits

Three visits to Kinveachy took place in 2007 with various groups taking the opportunity to view and discuss woodland regeneration issues.

The May visit was an open-day for members of the Monadhliath Deer Management Group and the local community to be updated on the progress of the Kinveachy Project by Estate staff and the Steering Group partners, and to discuss matters of mutual interest (see separate article in this News Review for a more detailed report).

In September, the Woodland Officers from Forestry Commission Scotland (Highland Conservancy) visited, with the Capercaillie Project Officer, representatives of the other agencies participating in the Kinveachy Steering Group (Scottish Natural Heritage, Deer Commission for Scotland) and a specialist from Forest Research.

The group looked at three different approaches for encouraging regeneration on the site, and at the history and structure of the woodland with an update on current research on seedling establishment and the factors affecting seedling recruitment.

This was followed in December by a visit of around 30 delegates who were attending the Forest Research Workshop on Natural Regeneration in Native Pinewoods at nearby Glenmore Lodge. This visit gave participants an opportunity to look at some of the

long-established, enclosed regeneration plots along the River Dulnain and to discuss site and stand conditions which affect regeneration, building on the latest research information which had been presented at an indoor morning session.



Photo courtesy of Forest Research.

Seedling Monitoring

As part of the woodland regeneration project at Kinveachy, annual surveys have taken place to monitor the condition of 263 individual seedlings that are spread throughout the site. The project set out a challenging objective of attaining 75% positive annual growth in these seedlings after three years.

The third annual survey took place in May 2007, and 75.8% of the measured seedlings showed an increase in height. This achievement is primarily as a result of the commitment and hard work of the estate staff concerned in reducing deer numbers in line with planned targets.

To supplement the survey information in future years, 48 sample plots have been added and it is hoped that these will assist in balancing the survey results from the individually marked trees.

Sandy Cruickshank's Clay Pigeon Shoot

Since 1984, Sandy Cruickshank, Head Keeper on the Seafield Estate, has held an annual clay pigeon shooting competition on his own range on the Estate that has so far raised about £50,000 for local charities.

Every April, some 60 keen shots from all over Britain are invited to take part in this event, which also includes an auction, and which has raised money for good causes including cancer research, multiple sclerosis, Guide Dogs for the Blind, and for handicapped children. Only one year has been missed since 1984 – that was 2001 due to restrictions because of the foot and mouth outbreak.

This year, the clay pigeon shoot raised £2,600 for Brighter Horizons, a charity which was started in 2005 that aims to help local disadvantaged children and children in care.

Every year, about £2,500 to £3,000 is raised by the competition to help these charities from entrants' sponsorship and the auction.

Clay pigeon shooting involves launching clay targets, simulating wild game in flight from a machine called a trap – a less expensive option for those who like game shooting, and good practice during the closed season.



Is it a ptarmigan? Is it a red grouse?

While ptarmigan are usually only found above 3,000 ft, and the highest parts of the Strathspey Estate only reach 2,400 ft, they can be blown down or take shelter at lower levels in severe weather.

Last year, a covey of grouse was spotted, with seven young, three of which were light grey rather than brown, and these strangely coloured grouse were seen on several more occasions. One of the birds was shot during a driven shoot, and it was subsequently passed for analysis to Dr Robert Moss at the Institute of Hydrology and Ecology where it was discovered that the bird was in fact a ptarmigan/red grouse hybrid. This process has been known to happen in captivity but, apparently, this is the first time that such a phenomenon has been proven by DNA testing to have taken place in the wild.

Ranunculus weed in the River Spey

Despite the efforts of Strathspey Estate and other proprietors to control the spread of Ranunculus weed in the River Spey, the infestation continues. The weed, which is believed to have first entered the river from a garden pond, has detrimental effects on pearl mussels and juvenile salmonids as sediment collects behind its fronds and covers over spawning gravel and pearl mussel beds. The Estate has previously undertaken a programme of pulling and collecting the weed, and had previously used the control chemical Diquat under license also. However, that license has now expired. The Spey Fishery Board, with other organisations, is currently working with the Pesticides and Safety Directorate to identify an alternative chemical for use to control this invasive weed.



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:

Sandy Lewis, *Chief Executive*; Andrew Norval, *Property Director*; Will Anderson, *Forestry Director*, Seafield Estate Office, Cullen, Buckie, Banffshire AB56 4UW. T: 01542 840777 F: 01542 841413 E: mail@seafield-estate.co.uk W: www.seafield-estate.co.uk

Frank Law, *Sporting Manager*, Strathspey Estate Office, Old Spey Bridge Road, Grantown-on-Spey, PH26 3NQ. T: 01479 872529 F: 01479 873452 E: mail@strathspey-estate.co.uk W: www.strathspey-estate.co.uk

Estate Bus Trips - Cullen

Last June, the Estate ran two bus trips at Cullen for members of the public to show them a modern working estate and the benefits it provides for the local community.

The 20 people who booked places on the tour were taken by minibus to see forestry harvesting, where Will Anderson, Forestry Director, explained how this is carried out. They also were shown a sporting display, the new grain store at Bogtown, and the wind farm at Boyndie Airfield.

The trip was well received, and a valuable exercise for both the Estate and public, and an opportunity to demonstrate how the Estate contributes positively to the local community, by providing income, jobs and investment in initiatives that can benefit everyone in the area.



Bogtown Farm Grain Store

In July last year, the extension of our existing grain store at Bogtown Farm, Portsoy was completed, adding a further 720 square metres capacity.



This new facility can store an additional 3,000 tonnes of wheat, bringing total storage capacity at Bogtown and the Home Farm, Cullen to 10,300 tonnes. It will add further efficiencies to the business and provide the necessary infrastructure for continued expansion of the farm's production in the future, taking full advantage of strengthening grain prices.

The improvements to the grain store also create a better and safer working environment for staff, as it is fully compliant with the latest health and safety regulations.

Lone Working on the Estates

The nature and variety of work on Seafield and Strathspey Estates is such that lone working is, at times, unavoidable. Furthermore, much of this work is done outside normal office hours. In order to reduce the chances of lone workers being unable to inform their colleagues in the event of an incident while out alone, additional measures have been put in place to ensure their safety.

The Estates have always had a system to cover lone working, and have supplied radios for those working alone to keep in contact, and to use in case of emergency, but these have relied on someone being available to respond. With the new system, the existing mobile network has been used to ensure that those working alone are guaranteed to be able to contact someone in times of emergency, or that other staff will be alerted if they do not report back in.

Lone workers are now trained to use, where appropriate, the mobile network, to alert a central office manned by Argyll Communications, telling them where he or she is going, and for how long. If, after that time has elapsed, they have not informed the office that they are back safely, a pre-arranged procedure is initiated. The lone worker also has a button he or she can press, should they find themselves in an emergency situation and require assistance.

While there is some cost involved for linking these individuals up to the network, this is far outweighed by the benefits to the lone workers, their colleagues and families. These gamekeepers, stalkers and river ghillies now have a robust support system while they are working alone meaning that, should there be an emergency, they can be traced and helped as quickly as possible. This is not only good for peace of mind, but makes working on the Estate safer than before.

Deer counts in blizzards



The Estate's deer management plan demands deer counts in all weathers!