GLENLIVET ESTATE - An uncertain future?

Following the recommendations of the Smith Commission, the Bill now before Westminster includes proposals for the devolution of the management of the Crown Estate’s economic assets in Scotland. In Scotland, the Crown Estate manages five rural estates, mineral and salmon fishing rights, about half of the coastal foreshore and almost all of the seabed. Of particular interest to us all is the future of the Glenlivet Estate.

Some four or five years ago when the issue of devolving the Scottish assets of the Crown Estate was first mooted, there was a suggestion that the assets should be passed to the local authorities within whose catchment areas the assets fell. However, Richard Lochhead, our MSP who is also Rural Affairs Secretary, has recently been reported as stating the following with reference to the devolution of the management of the Crown Estate’s Scottish based assets:

“Once we have achieved devolution, we will consult on permanent arrangements for managing Crown Estate assets in Scotland. I believe there is a strong desire to see the principle of devolution extended further, with the transfer of powers from Holyrood to local communities.”

This statement is in line with the Scottish Government’s policy of encouraging community land ownership and indeed in conjunction with the BIG Lottery Fund they have set up the Scottish Land Fund to assist with such initiatives. But the Glenlivet Estate is already owned by the public sector and as such the Scottish Land Fund may not be required, as no private landowner needs to be compensated. Indeed previous proposals for the Glenlivet Estate relate to a transfer of management rather than ownership.

Obviously the most affected by any change will be the tenant farming community. In March, around 73 farmers from the two Crown Estates in Moray attended a meeting with Richard Lochhead in Rothes. It is understood that farming representatives from the 5 Crown rural estates have also provided information to the Rural Affairs Committee of the Scottish Parliament. Local farmers have also met with Mr Lochhead at least four times and have been in contact with farmers on the other rural estates in Scotland.

The farmers contacted by THISTLEdown considered that at this early stage, more information is required before any comment can be made. But tenant farmers are not the only people who have a vested interest in the management of the Glenlivet Estate. They do have a major interest, but so do many other members of the community and in particular those who have a business dependent on the Estate’s reputation and facilities.

The National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) was approached by THISTLEdown for their views and they confirmed that they have engaged with the debate on further devolution for Scotland throughout the Smith Commission and take a keen interest in the Scotland Bill which is currently passing through the UK Parliament.

Continued on page 28
GLENLIVET ESTATE - An uncertain future? Continued from front page:

Clare Slipper, Parliamentary Officer of NFUS said "We are supportive in principle of the proposal to devolve management of Crown Estate assets and revenues to the Scottish Government, but advise caution that this must not lead to any disruption to the current, good relationship that our farming members who are currently tenants of the rural Crown Estates currently enjoy with their landlords."

The NFUS went on to say "Generally, our members consider that the Crown Estate has been a good landlord, and would hope that the current management arrangements would continue post-devolution. We are concerned by the proposals of some groups to hand over management responsibility to local authorities or possibly Forestry Commission Scotland, which we consider could be damaging to continuity of investment and development on these rural estates. NFUS has discussed these concerns with members of the Scottish Parliament’s Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, and is reassured by MSPs’ general support of this position. We will continue to closely monitor the passage of the Scotland Bill and will engage with the Scottish Government once the time comes for management decisions to be made."

Glenlivet Councillor Fiona Murdoch’s view is that creating discussion in the communities affected is vital. “Moray Council councillors are to be briefed about the options regarding the Crown Estate in the near future,” said Cllr Murdoch. “Feedback I am receiving from the communities of Glenlivet and Tomintoul is that they do not want to see any change.”

“However, I very much doubt that things will stay the same. The Scottish Government is pushing for greater community empowerment and that to me means they will want the Crown Estates managed closer to home. Both communities need to start thinking about the best way forward for them – I don’t predict much support in Glenlivet and Tomintoul for the idea of them being run by the local authority.”

This is an important issue for our community. Any changes to the structure of Glenlivet Estate ahead of us could result in major changes in the strategy currently being pursued by the Glenlivet Estate and in particular the financial objectives. THISTLEdownd would like to encourage discussion on this topic and in particular receive letters and views for publication in future editions or on our new Facebook page - An uncertain future for Glenlivet Estate? Posts on this page will be included for consideration for printing in our December issue, please state if you wish to remain anonymous.

NOTES:
The full NFUS Briefing Paper is available on the THISTLEdownd website www.glenlivetnews.org.uk

The Scottish Parliament’s Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee examined the issue, including taking evidence from farming representatives from Glenlivet, and the Committee subsequently wrote to Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead. The Committee’s letter can be found online at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/20150625_Convenor_CS_Crown_Estate.pdf

A little of the history…..

By Brian Fowler

A little of the history of the estate perhaps brings into focus the current situation and illustrates that what is proposed is nothing new. In 1937 the Glenlivet and Fochabers Estates were purchased from the estate of the Duke of Gordon and Richmond by The Crown Estate to enable death duties to be met. The purchase was spurred on by the government’s concern over the socio-economic situation in the north east of Scotland following the depression of the 1920s. Subsequently a small parcel of the estate including Gordon Castle was sold back.

The Glenlivet Estate has never been seen by the Crown Estate as an investment in the same way as is its major activity of property investment and development portfolio. Over the years, on many occasions the future of Glenlivet Estate has been up for debate.

In 1987 a secondee from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) was introduced to assist with putting the Glenlivet Estate on to a more viable footing and to show other landowners in Scotland how such a land holding could be managed successfully with full consideration for the environment and its biodiversity.
A particularly important paper that should be considered in proposing the transfer of management of the Glenlivet Estate down to a local level is the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee report: *The Crown Estate in Scotland, the Seventh Report 2010-2012*. This report is critical of the management of the Scottish Estate as regards Scottish and local interests, repeating the recommendation of subsidiarity - the organizing principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. In the past, members of the community and in particular farmers have, together with The Crown Estate, contributed significantly to the Glenlivet Estate.

Richard Lochhead and the Scottish Government have committed to providing coastal and island communities with 100% of the net revenue from marine activities out to 12 nautical miles. There has been no indication of what they would propose should happen to the net revenue of the rural estates, albeit they propose the management of these estates should be devolved. Subsidiarity of management has been recommended and Richard Lochhead has indicated he believes there is a strong desire to see the principle of devolution extended further, with the transfer of powers from Holyrood to local communities.

This is a most important issue for us all and I hope the above enables people to consider the facts and that this will lead to an open debate within the community.

You can comment on any of these issues by contacting THISTLEdown - thistledown.editorialteam@gmail.com or posting on Facebook page ‘An uncertain future for Glenlivet Estate?’ Letters send to address on page 2.

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**TOMINTOUL AND GLENLIVET DEVELOPMENT TRUST**

There are a few new faces at Tomintoul and Glenlivet Development Trust; Fiona Durno and Mike Terry join the board with a wealth of experience and local knowledge in events and finance. Fiona and Mike will be leading in these important areas and we look forward to working closely with them both in the coming months. Fiona replaces Katie Taylor who is stepping down from the board after over a years’ service and we'd like to take this opportunity to thank Katie for all her hard work and support!

The Development Trust also welcomes a new Local Development Officer; Oliver Giles has taken over from Lindsay Robertson who is leaving the trust to establish her own photography business. Lindsay has been the driving force behind the trust since it started in 2012 and her enthusiasm and commitment to the role will be sorely missed.

Oli joins the trust from Huntly and District Development Trust where he managed a green and active travel project and brings a wealth of experience in community led project management. He has been busy getting up to speed on the Trust’s projects and meeting key stakeholders.

In other staff news, Marion McDonald, Landscape Partnership Officer, has moved into her new office in the Visitor Information Centre. As the Heritage Lottery Fund project gathers momentum towards final submission, Marion will be holding drop-in sessions every Tuesday afternoon; so if you'd like to get involved or simply know more about the project pop in and say hello. (See page 11).

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