

Integrated Upland Land Use and Sustainable Development on Glenlivet Estate

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Abstract:

This paper provides a summary of the Glenlivet Estate Development Project, an initiative taken by a landowner - The Crown Estate - to promote sustainable economic investment and development, progressive land management practices and community and environmental improvements, on a large Highland estate. A wide range of diverse, varied and innovative projects have formed part of this initiative which has provided significant benefits to the local community and the natural environment, while demonstrating the advantages to be gained from a holistic and integrated approach to land management, within a given land unit.



Introduction

The Glenlivet Estate is large upland estate covering an area of around 23,000 hectares at the edge of the Cairngorm Mountains in the northeast of Scotland.

Glenlivet Estate is a carefully managed mix of farming forestry, sporting, tourism and conservation, which represents a working example of, integrated rural land use. The close interaction of traditional and new activities, the special character of the estate, its size, location and integrated style of management, make the estate an example of land management practice that has won widespread recognition.

Land Use on the Estate

Farming

Despite its upland character, the land is relatively productive and Glenlivet has supported a farming community for a long time. In several places there are signs of field systems, settlements and standing stones dating back to the Bronze Age over 3000 years ago.



Farming is still the major industry on the estate, although the need to remain viable now means there are fewer larger more efficient farms. The farms are leased mostly to family businesses and livestock is the main product, with an emphasis on cattle breeding and rearing of a quality that is highly regarded. The total area held on agricultural leases extends to approximately 14,570 hectares, (around 63% of the total land area on the estate) although land used for agricultural purposes is very much greater due to the influence of a number of 'common' grazings. Farm sizes range from 60 hectares to 1,100 hectares with the average farm size being about 350 ha in total, of which about 70 ha is arable. The typical stock carried is 50-80 breeding cows and 450-550 ewes although there are quite wide variations both in numbers and type of stock carried. Rental values also vary greatly depending on the size of farms, stocking capacity and levels of fixed equipment.

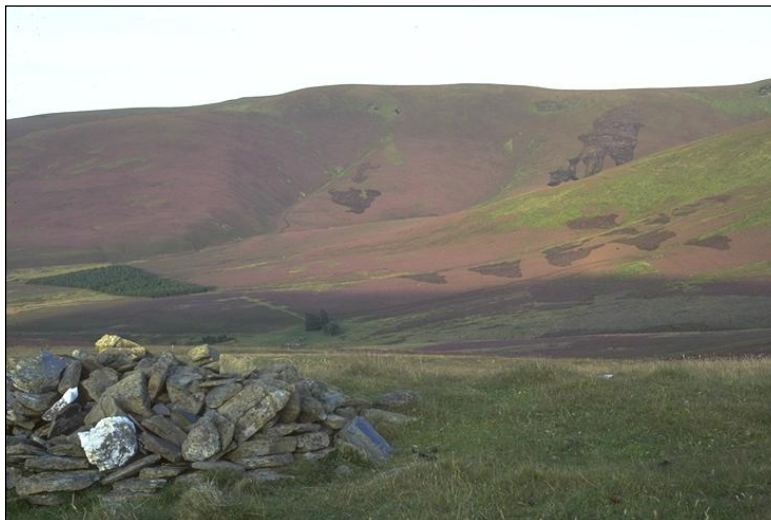
The Crown Estate has a policy of maintaining a long-term relationship with its tenants, though the number of tenancies has declined considerably over the past century. Even in recent times changing social and economic conditions have caused a reduction from over 90 separate farms in the early 1970's to around 30 today. This follows a long period of decline in the number of farm units on the estate over the last century - a decline that has been similar to many other parts of the Highlands. Derelict cottages and sheilings give an impression of the much larger community the area once supported. Remaining tenants continue to face a challenging future in the current climate of agricultural change.

Since the late 1970's to the present, the policy of The Crown Estate has been to amalgamate farms as tenancies have fallen vacant, thus ensuring that remaining units remained viable and allowing more effective investment in new buildings, particularly in livestock housing. The objective has been to create core farming units capable of supporting a farming family. This approach has been complemented by an investment programme in fixed equipment to assist with

the modernisation of farm units. These have been critical elements in maintaining the economic viability of these upland units during this period.

The farms in the lower acreage range still struggle to support one family but the amalgamation programme has led to the development of large well-equipped agricultural units that enjoy a good balance of arable to hill ground. Not all units have been enlarged and amalgamated and there are good examples of smaller units meeting specialist or niche markets which provide an alternative route to economic sustainability. Glenlivet Estate lies within the Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) area and farmers and other businesses can receive additional financial support benefits from both EU and UK government support schemes. The estate is included in the area formerly designated as the Cairngorms Straths Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) and is now part of the Cairngorm National Park. Under various agri-environment schemes special payments are made available to farmers for carrying out certain activities which encourage the management and development of wildlife habitats on their farms. While the financial benefits although small in comparison with overall farm turnover, they can be significant and the benefits to the environment are important. While The Crown Estate is reluctant to become prescriptive in relation to agricultural tenant's farming practices, it actively encourages farmers to get involved in these projects and over 80% of the farms on the estate have now prepared conservation plans. It is likely that participation in environmental schemes will increase in the future, as agricultural reforms are introduced and additional financial support is delivered through Land Management Contracts (LMC's) under the reformed EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) . This is set to result in noticeable improvements to the landscape and wildlife habitats on the estate in years to come.

Sporting Activities



Traditionally managed for sporting purposes, the heather covered hills on the estate support populations of red grouse, together with other characteristic moorland plants and animals. Red and roe deer are present in relatively large numbers, both on the moorlands and in forested areas, and the clear waters of the rivers Avon and Livet support good populations of trout and salmon.

In common with the farming interests the sporting rights on the estate are let, principally on a single sporting lease to a tenant who operates the shooting privately. This main sporting lease includes two major grouse moors, roe deer stalking, limited red deer stalking, rough shooting, and a salmon beat on the River Avon together with two large shooting lodges and a number of other

smaller properties used to house gamekeeper staff. The other fishings are let to local angling/community associations and local hotels.

Rent from sporting leases provides a significant proportion of estate income as well as creating a significant employment for gamekeepers, fishing ghillies and other staff. Major improvements in the grouse moor management have been achieved in recent years mainly through a programme of predator control (principally foxes and crows) and muirburn. A more intensive programme of deer control and management is currently being planned following changes in the main lease arrangements and the development of a revised deer management plan.

The Crown Estate has also worked in partnership with the Cairngorms Partnership and now the Cairngorms National Park Authority to establish a moorland demonstration project on Glenlivet. This project aims to promote good moorland management and provide interpretation about the value of moorlands for the visiting public.

Forestry



Afforestation in the 1950's and 60's resulted in the establishment of 3,300 ha of pine and spruce woods that dissect the countryside. Originally planted by the Forestry Commission and planned in close consultation with the farming tenants, the woods provide well-needed shelter for adjoining farmland.

Repurchased by The Crown Estate during the 1980s the woodlands are now managed in hand by The Crown Estate and a long-term programme of, thinning, clearing and replanting is in progress. Windblown areas and poor quality stands are gradually being cleared and replaced with more productive conifers, mixed with a high percentage of native broadleaves, thereby improving the structural diversity of the forest. The aim is to produce a continuous crop of timber for the future, providing revenue for the estate and long term employment in the area, while maintaining and improving the benefits for shelter, diversity for wildlife and facilities for recreation.

While beef and lamb remains the bedrock for farmers' fortunes, timber income has declined in recent years. Despite this a range of multiple use objectives have been achieved through careful cost control and the adoption of innovative management techniques. Long-term forest plans have been developed in consultation with community interests, farmers and public agencies and the management of all The Crown Estate forests including Glenlivet are independently audited and

certified under the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) which ensures forest management meets internationally recognized criteria for sustainability as laid down by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).



Semi Natural Woodland Management

Surviving stands of semi-natural woods add significantly to the natural heritage of the area and are very important in the landscape. Woods like this support a rich and varied mix of plants and animals, but historically they have suffered a severe decline over the years as grazing animals prevent regeneration. Steps have been taken to manage, protect and extend these areas of birchwood, through a pioneering farm based management scheme introduced by the estate in the late 1980's. By excluding stock, selectively felling trees to reduce shading and scarifying the ground in certain areas, natural regeneration of these woodlands is being encouraged and farmers are able to supplement their income from the sale of timber. Farmers are also encouraged to take advantage of grants available through agri-environment schemes to carry out woodland conservation management schemes on their farms.

Other Economic Activities

While the countryside is a working landscape of farms and forests, the village of Tomintoul, the largest settlement on the estate owes much of its livelihood to visitors and as a shopping and service centre for the local population. Fishing and shooting parties once filled the two main hotels, but in general, the area has remained isolated, away from the main visitor routes, being a place people have tended to pass through or use a base for day trips elsewhere.



Whisky production adds a further dimension to the economy of the area and visitor centres at local distilleries, which operate independently from the estate, attract around 70,000 people a year, many of whom are following the Malt Whisky Trail - a tourist trail which passes through the estate. Downhill skiing at the Lecht helps extend the winter tourist season, but for much of the year, particularly during the months before and after the short summer season, resident visitor numbers and the level of turnover in tourist related businesses remains low.

The Glenlivet Estate Development Project – a summary of the main elements and some of the consequences of the project

The Crown Estate embarked on this project in the late 1980's principally because of concerns about the future of upland farming and the need to ensure that this remote Highland estate could continue to support a settled and prosperous community. Given this broad aim the project has no single target, and indeed the project continues and will go on in the foreseeable future. An enormous range of individual projects has been undertaken since the start of the initiative.

Background

Following a prolonged period of decline in the number of farm tenancies on the Glenlivet Estate The Crown Estate became concerned about the long term prospects of the economy of the area, the changing nature of traditional rural industries, and the associated population decline. The balance of economic activity was changing, and pressure on rural incomes was such that a positive approach was required to secure the long-term future of the community.

Glenlivet is a very attractive but remote part of the Highlands and is well placed to absorb much of the recreational pressure associated with the internationally important Cairngorm Mountains. The area has considerable potential for providing access for a range of countryside recreational activities and promoting the development of sustainable tourism.

Project Aims

These can be summarised as follows:

- To implement a long-term forest restructuring and investment programme which maximises commercial, environmental and recreational benefits.
- To promote projects which enhance the semi natural woodland resource on the estate.

- To undertake a farm rationalisation programme (as appropriate) which focuses on the creation of economically viable family sized farms and which actively pursues investment, diversification and agri -environment scheme opportunities.
- To maximise the use of estate land and building resources for suitable alternative land based activities.
- To promote community involvement and development.
- To develop a range of facilities for visitors to the estate by improving access to existing paths and trails, and creating additional opportunities that allow people to explore and enjoy the countryside.
- To ensure that public access is carefully developed and managed without causing adverse environmental impact and important natural heritage features are safeguarded and extended.
- To ensure that access facilities are successfully integrated with the traditional areas of activity namely farming, forestry and field sports.
- To encourage responsible use of the countryside for recreational purposes by promoting a better understanding, knowledge and awareness of the environment and the land uses operating within the estate.
- To create new opportunities for the development of a range of quality accommodation types on the estate, run by farm tenants and other members of the community.
- To undertake monitoring and evaluative studies to assist management decisions and provide feedback on the progress of the project.

In essence The Crown Estate set out to stimulate economic activity and access opportunities within the estate, to bring more visitors to the area, encourage them to stay longer and to return more frequently, while protecting and developing the estate's commercial resources and its rich natural and cultural heritage. In short the aim was to put Glenlivet on the map in economic, tourism marketing and sustainable management terms.



Funding, Management, Agency and Community Partnerships

On a day to day basis the Glenlivet Estate is managed on behalf of The Crown Estate by a firm of national Chartered Surveyors, Smiths Gore. The Crown Estate meets all of the expenses incurred in employing this firm. Throughout this initiative, a management committee has overseen the project. The Crown Estate has acted both as a facilitator and by direct funding of projects. During the initial phase a project officer (funded by The Crown Estate), was seconded from the then Highlands and Islands Development Board for three years. Subsequently, many of his areas of operation have been taken up by the now established estate ranger service, (funded jointly by The Crown Estate and Scottish Natural Heritage).

In terms of management of visitors the principal source of funds has been The Crown Estate with support from Moray Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission, Leader II and the local authority.

Other partnerships have been developed with Grampian Region Education Department, Moray Council Education Department, and nearby universities and colleges. The two local community associations and local businesses have also worked in partnership with the estate over a number of activities. The Scottish Conservation Projects Trust/ BTCV and Army Royal Engineers (MACC tasks) have also been employed to carry out a number of environmental improvement projects on the estate.

Consequences and Effects of the Development Project

The development of visitor facilities and promotion of the estate is now having an increasing effect on existing businesses and the opportunities for new ones to start up. The effects of this are already apparent in the greater numbers of visitors who now come to this remote area, where even small increases in economic activity can have significant effects on the well being of the community.

Facilities and Services

The following facilities and services have been established as a result of the initiative:

- A well organised, professional ranger service.
- Over 100 miles of waymarked walking and mountain biking trails, including nature trails, forest hides, community footpaths and all abilities trails.
- Car parks, picnic sites and viewpoints have been provided at trailheads and roadside lay-bys
- 25 roadside information boards/panels and interpretive panels provided at places of interest
- An estate information centre and an unmanned information point.
- An extensive free range of high quality visitor information leaflets.
- A range of educational services and resources for schools colleges and universities are provided. The ranger service deals with around 30-40 group visits per year (including primary schools, secondary schools, universities and special interest groups).

The following community partnership projects have been completed:

- Tomintoul and Glenlivet Highland Holidays – A local tourism marketing association set up by the estate in collaboration with tourism businesses in the area.
- A community exhibition developed by the ranger service and the Moray Museums Service in partnership with the local community. This now forms the principle display in the Tomintoul Museum.
- Production of an audio guide to the area: “A Driving Guided Tour of Glenlivet”

- External information panels and free leaflet about Tomintoul village has been produced.
- A local community footpaths initiative has been completed which aims to provide well-surfaced walks around all the principle settlements on the estate
- An all-ability trail has been provided for disabled people.
- An adventure playground has been constructed for visitors and the local community.



Cultural and Social Benefits

- New community led initiatives and partnership projects (see above) that have arisen since the start of the project and community involvement in certain aspects of estate management.
- Maintenance of employment levels within tourist related enterprises and creation of opportunities for farm diversification.
- Increased awareness of local facilities and usage of trails among local population and visitors.
- New economic activities and inward investment in facilities and services are providing benefits for the whole community.
- Increased investment in tourist/visitor related activities/businesses from public and private sources
- More positive attitudes have developed towards tourism development, access and recreation among local community. Recreational access provides health benefits and improved 'quality of life'

Benefits to the Built Heritage

- The construction / restoration of new and existing footbridges to improve visitor access
- Restoration projects on ancient monuments / sites of historical interest have been undertaken, including conservation works on a 14th Century Castle.
- Estate farmhouse modernisation and farm building investment projects.



Benefits to the Natural Environment

- Careful development and promotion of access to areas that have the capacity to absorb recreational use has avoided adverse environmental impacts and minimised disturbance to other land uses.
- Promoting a better understanding, knowledge and awareness of the countryside, has encouraged responsible use for recreational purposes.
- Practical conservation work and environmental projects have produced direct ecological benefits.
- The estate has also developed a pioneering farm based birch woodland management scheme, has a number of forest conservation management projects underway and over 80% of estate farms are involved in agri environmental schemes.
- A long-term programme of forest thinning and restructuring has greatly improved the productive potential of the commercial woodlands and significantly increased woodland diversity providing a range of environmental and recreational benefits.

Environmental Communication and Education

- A variety of educational activities/services have been developed for visiting groups. Approx. 1000 pupils/students now visit the estate each year of which around 20% are on residential trips, providing direct economic benefits to proprietors of local accommodation.
- “An educational pack has been produced which includes a CD-ROM, VHS Video and Teachers Pack. (“Glenlivet Estate a case study in sustainable land use”). It is now a recommended case study for Higher Geography and has been distributed to educational institutions throughout Scotland.
- The estate information centre provides an extensive range of educational material for visitors.
- Local school children have been involved in a variety of projects relating to the natural heritage of the area.
- Students from local colleges and universities have been directly involved in carrying out monitoring, evaluation and research projects.



Innovation

- Countryside information services have been developed including the audio guide to the estate.
- Innovative woodland management practices have been developed such as the birch woodland management scheme, brash fencing development, on site forestry chipping experiments and wood fuel research projects.
- Many of the partnership projects were initially developed at a time when the partnership approach was not widely adopted, particularly the community based partnerships.

Leadership

The approach taken by The Crown Estate has demonstrated a well-recognised example of integrated land use. The Development Project however is not seen as a blueprint. It is a response to particular land use issues at Glenlivet, which has greatly strengthened the estate's position during a time of economic uncertainty and land use change.

Visitor Numbers

The number of people utilising facilities on the estate before the start of the project was extremely low. Visitor numbers have increased over the last 10-12 years and surveys of business activity have demonstrated that booking levels in self-catering and bed and breakfast accommodation have increased significantly. For self-catering accommodation bookings have risen from an average of 12 weeks per year per cottage in 1990 to about 18/19 weeks in 2000. Tourism has since suffered as a consequence of economic downturns and problems associated with the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

Several visitor surveys have been carried out since the start of the project. These have provided information that has helped with the planning and development of promotional and marketing activities and the tourist and recreational facilities in the area.

Sustainability

This has been demonstrated by:

- The long-term strategic approach
- Partnership working
- Careful stewardship through the adoption of a dynamic, reactive and flexible approach that is

able to adjust and change if circumstances required.

- Constant monitoring and evaluation of projects through the management committee and survey work.
- The adoption of progressive and innovative land-use management practices in association with academic institutions
- The minimisation of land use conflicts through communication, consultation and practical management intervention.
- Maintaining momentum through continued investment and project activities.
- A community focused approach
- Meeting the criteria of internationally recognised land management standards such as the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)
- Development of sustainability indicators for land use on the estate

The regular meetings of the management committee have enabled the direction of the project and its priorities to be reviewed as necessary. The project has also relied on the careful introduction of new ideas and developments that has avoided later regrets.

The Crown Estate has been careful to ensure that any new developments do not detract from the special character of the local area, as there is always the possibility that by encouraging a tourist based economy, this character might be devalued. However, this has certainly not been the experience. The community continues to depend mainly on its agricultural base and while visitor numbers have increased, there is a long way to go before the pressure of visitors is likely to exceed the 'capacity' of the environment to support recreational use. Many businesses and services still depend on there being a continuing growth in the number of people coming to the area, particularly outside the main summer and winter seasons.

Comments on the Development Project

The Glenlivet Estate project illustrates an approach that has been taken by a landowner to ensure the long-term future of an estate and its community in a remote upland area. While in many ways the estate is unique, elements of the approach taken in Glenlivet, particularly the large scale integration of sustainable land management practices and the development of a broader, more adaptable economic base, demonstrate a course of action that could be adopted to support many other rural communities.

But what elements of this approach can be applied to other areas and what of the future for the estate and its community.

A key part of The Crown Estate's initiative was first a clear and public commitment to encouraging development on the estate, and second backing this up with resources to provide advice and support for new ventures. Maintaining a flexible and reactive response to changing ideas and circumstances while providing a facilitator to focus ideas and catalyze new developments were also vital elements in the approach.

It is also vital for the success of a venture like this that it has the support and cooperation of the community it is intended to aid. Promoting community involvement and fostering a sense of common interest and purpose were also essential to the success of the project. This sense of community involvement can be strengthened by appropriate communications such as the newsletters circulated to all the households in Glenlivet and by taking a locally based approach in terms of labour, tourism products and visitor services.



The availability of capital funding or 'pump priming' through development aid schemes has also been essential to the success of individual enterprises. This is particularly for farm tenants where a lack of investment capital is so often a barrier to the development of diversified enterprises. Investment capital has been provided both by The Crown Estate through investment in buildings and by accessing finance from various rural development schemes.

The development and marketing of the area's tourism assets has been fundamental to the approach, but so too has the attention given to providing high quality infrastructure and countryside information, which is continually being developed to cater for ever more sophisticated and demanding visitor expectations.

Monitoring and evaluating progress through the use of periodic reviews, business surveys, student projects and visitor surveys has provided a means to modify and adjust the management approach. In land management terms, the adoption of sustainable, progressive and forward thinking management practices has been well recognised as being vital to the long term health of the land and its ecological diversity. These practices need to be constantly reviewed in the light of changing attitudes, economic circumstances and improved knowledge and understanding of environmental systems.

The Future

The Crown Estate has had considerable success in laying foundations for the future development of a range of economic activities and other facilities and services on Glenlivet. But many of the issues that prompted the estate to embark upon the Development Project are still highly relevant, if not more acute. The longer-term future for the economy and community of the area is still uncertain. There are also many challenges presented by the requirement to maintain an effective balance between a multiple range of sometimes competing land management activities. In addition, the need to demonstrate higher standards of environmental management and to improve biodiversity, while realising the potential of the land/estate resources (within sustainable limits) to support viable economic business activities, presents a number of other challenges for the future management of the estate and its countryside.

The long term policy therefore aims to ensure that land uses within Glenlivet are managed in a fully integrated sustainable fashion, such that environmental considerations are balanced with the

need to maintain long term economic stability in the area. The estate hopes to achieve this policy by continuing to adopt a flexible, reactive and forward thinking management strategy, which incorporates the following general aims:

- Maintaining the economic base of the agricultural sector and to continue to promote and develop appropriate forms of farm/business diversification, investment and support for farm tenants. This may involve further restructuring of farm units according to economic and social requirements.
- Working closely with farm tenants over the development of environmental management schemes on farms.
- Continuing to encourage appropriate forms of inward investment.
- Continuing to ensure that all forest management activities are carried out according to a high standard of silvicultural management and in a way that maximises the multiple benefits that woodlands provide.
- Developing ways of improving the management and promoting the extension of native woodlands on the estate.
- Promoting high standards of game and moorland management among estate sporting tenants.
- Placing an emphasis on continuing to work closely with the local community.
- Working to support local enterprises and local employment while promoting the development of economic generating activities and events which utilise estate assets/resources in a sustainable fashion and which are sympathetic to the character of the countryside.
- Developing projects which benefit the natural heritage of the area, promote biodiversity and where possible are innovative in character, demonstrating good examples of land use management.
- Working to integrate the estate ranger service and other management activities more effectively with other activities in the wider Cairngorms National Park.
- Further developing educational opportunities within the estate and increasing the numbers of visitors and student groups coming to the area.
- Increasing the numbers of tourists and visitors that come to the area, particularly during the quiet months of the year, and increasing the number of events/activities that make use of the recreational infrastructure on the estate
- Promoting the development of new recreational facilities and services but with an emphasis on improving the quality of the existing recreational infrastructure and countryside information. Making these services more accessible to a wider range of people and developing innovative activities and new interpretive services based on the present network of paths, trails and other facilities.

What we hope the Glenlivet example demonstrates, is that given the right approach there are many advantages to be gained from a holistic and integrated approach to land management, within a given land unit. Through this initiative, The Crown Estate has attempted to secure the long-term viability of the estate by taking steps to ensure that the local economy is as broadly

based as possible. Visitors and tourists, non-agricultural enterprises, diversified farm businesses, new rural industries and the local community are now very much part of the future of Glenlivet. By avoiding reliance on only a few sectors of activity, such as farming, the estate and community is now in a better position to adapt to changing circumstances.



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