

Five days to save Rum

Description

THE HERALD
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Why we oppose castle sale

WE would like to respond to NatureScot official Robbie Kernahan's letter (October 19). The Isle of Rum Community Trust is the representative community body and the community landowner of much of the village of Kinloch on Rum since 2010, with the exception of Kinloch Castle, which sits in the heart of the village and is currently owned by NatureScot.

NatureScot is in negotiation with a prospective buyer for the castle which includes several buildings and surrounding land. The community on Rum are very keen to support a positive future for the castle building and to see further investment coming to the island. However, we currently stand opposed to this particular sale going ahead until we have detailed and legally binding agreements in place to protect the community. At present the prospective buyer desires that the principal access route through the village is diverted, for privacy reasons, to the rear of the castle – a long detour that would effectively split the village in two. He also wants to own Rum's off-grid power supply, currently owned by NatureScot.

We feel that NatureScot and its board have ignored the spirit and the letter of the current land reform agenda in Scotland to rid itself of the burden of the castle in any way possible, and that they have chosen to disregard the Scottish Government's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement which guides landowners in their dealings with communities.

Mr Kernahan is correct: Mr Hosking has had direct contact with the Rum community, but as an afterthought. He met representatives in July, for one hour, shortly after the advanced sale proposals were announced to a shocked community by NatureScot. Discussions during that single meeting were not substantive and did not in any way allay community fears that a central portion of the village, and of its infrastructure, was being sold without safeguards in place to protect the community. Subsequent meetings between the community, the seller (NatureScot), and the prospective buyer's agent, leave the community representatives maddened by the lack of flexibility on the prospective buyer's part, and the lack of drive to seek an acceptable compromise on the part of the seller to reach a positive outcome that does not adversely affect the community of today and importantly that of the future. We have asked for a meeting with the board of NatureScot to discuss a positive way forward but have had no reply. We would welcome a constructive meeting as a sign of positive and active engagement.

Ali Morris, chair, Isle of Rum Community Trust.

Urgent representations need to be made to members of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to stop the sale of Kinloch Castle and its grounds to an England based multimillionaire, Jeremy Hosking. The government body, NatureScot, who own most of Rum and manage it as a National Nature Reserve, aim to sell the castle to Mr Hosking on Monday 31 Oct. The sale, as today's

letter in the Herald shows, is opposed by Rum's local community.

It is essential that representations by email or social media are made directly to Lorna Slater MSP, the Minister responsible for NatureScot, MinisterGSCEB@gov.scot and to all other MSPs who care about land reform and the future of local communities. This sale needs to be stopped.

Details of the proposed sale first emerged in a press release by NatureScot last June ([see here](#)). This followed secret negotiations carried out by Nature Scot with the prospective landowner in which the local community and wider interests were kept in the dark. This was a complete breach of Scottish Government policy, as defined by the government's own Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (LRRS), first produced in 2017 and updated in Sept 2022, as well as the protocols for community engagement over prospective land sales as produced by the Scottish Land Commission.



Herald 14th October

Since my opinion piece in the Herald, it appears that the prospective owner visited the island in July and held discussions with local community representatives for just one hour. Today's letter from the Isle of Rum Community Trust makes clear that this July discussion and subsequent meetings with Nature Scot and the owner's representative have been completely unsatisfactory. As yet no discussions have taken place with the wider community, as represented by the thousands of people who visit Rum every year to enjoy nature, Kinloch village and the walking and climbing opportunities along the coast and in the hills.

In June the SNP president, Michael Russell, a former MSP and Scottish Government Environment Minister, severely criticised Nature Scot for its actions and said that no sale should be progressed until legally binding agreements are in place to protect the local community interests ([see here](#)). Nature Scot has failed to respond to those criticisms.

The current minister, Lorna Slater MSP, is also responsible for Scotland's national park system, the development of which is currently out for public consultation. Nature Scot has set a closing date of 30th November for responses ([see here](#)). Rum and the adjacent islands have long been recognised as a potential "Small Isles National Park", incorporating both the land and seas in this part of the Inner Hebrides. Rum would have a key part to play in such a national park, with Kinloch village and its central core, Kinloch Castle and grounds, being the only feasible area for development of the visitor infrastructure and management facilities that such a national park would require.

It would be incredible if in 2022 the Scottish Government were to ignore all the requirements of its own land reform policies, as expressed in the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement and associated protocols, by approving this sale of Kinloch Castle and grounds. Even worse, they would be compromising the future opportunities that Rum might have through national park status. Scottish land reform would have become a joke in the hands of Lorna Slater, a Green Party MSP and the Government Minister who is ultimately responsible for this situation on Rum.

Please write to Ms Slater MinisterGSCEB@gov.scot and other MSPs before 31 Oct to stop this sale and to ask the minister to visit Rum as soon as possible. She needs to find out exactly why the local community and others are despairing of the actions of Nature Scot and to explore an alternative vision for the future based on community aspirations and not the private desires of a multimillionaire based in England.

Category

1. National Parks

Tags

1. conservation
2. Local communities
3. Nature Scot
4. Scottish Government

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