

## **Scotland's land reform: A journey still unfinished**

Ailsa Raeburn

Scotland's land reform journey is far from over. After over 20 years of debate and legislation, it should surely be much further on than where it is now.

As Chair of Community Land Scotland, I am clear that community ownership is one of the most impactful outcomes of Scotland's land reform journey, but also clear that it should not be the only one. Scotland, with its long history of creativity and innovation in the use of all of its resources, be that land, sea, human, natural capital or financial, should be making much more progress than it is now. As a society and nation, we should all be focussed on making the assets of Scotland work much much better for its people and its nature.

For too long we have seen land, the basis of so much power and wealth in our country, hoarded by a very few individuals. The impact this has had on the depopulation of Scotland's rural communities and on our nature and biodiversity, placing us so low in the world rankings, can no longer be denied. For a long time, we all thought that so few having control of so much was normal and unchangeable. The very fabric of society and our economy would collapse should those in control be asked politely to share just a bit of their land-based wealth!

However, what Scotland's land reform journey has done is to give us all clear evidence that this does not in fact happen. The modern world does not collapse. Indeed, land reform results in better outcomes for more people. On Gigha, community ownership enables the community to build their own houses to both retain their young people and ensure their elderly have safe places to live. On Lewis, the community led Point and Sandwick wind farm returns 34 times more income to local people than equivalent private developments. In Viewpark in Lanarkshire, locals saved an important historic green space from being subsumed into more industrial development and are now protecting a critical local nature reserve and creating opportunities for young people to play and explore.

These are all examples of people coming together, on an equal footing, and working together to create more than the sum of the parts for their local communities. Giving people power through owning and controlling the local land and buildings that are important to that community creates a wonderful alchemy that builds and builds. It also allows us to start thinking what a rewired and restructured economy and society could look like. Where wealth and opportunity is shared much more fairly. Where young people have access to housing and jobs in the areas they grew up.

Where the profits from land ownership are shared more fairly and used to build stronger local communities, not offshored to faceless corporations or shareholders. Where everyone knows who owns what locally. Where you can only claim subsidies and grants paid for by the Scottish taxpayer if you actually pay taxes in Scotland. Where local people make decisions in an open and democratic way about what happens to land and buildings, the use of which have a significant impact upon them and their communities. And where the total amount of land and assets that any one person or corporation can own, is limited, to make sure there is enough for everyone who needs it. Not just for ownership by communities but for people wanting to buy their first home, small businesses wanting to expand in their local area and create stronger local economies, new entrant farmers or crofters looking for their first start or housing associations wanting to rebuild the supply of affordable houses across all of Scotland. Delivering on these ambitions will demonstrate how land reform has delivered for our country.

Scotland's land reform journey so far has indeed been innovative and groundbreaking but also timid, with its impacts only piecemeal and limited. There is so much further we need to go on this journey to make sure Scotland works much better for its people and nature.