

## Dear friends of Sanctuaries for Humanity,

Greetings in this new year, 2025, blessing and best wishes for all!



Loch Vernacher

The exciting news at the beginning of this year, is that Sanctuaries for Humanity Ltd., finally has a bank account – a procedure that, surprisingly took over six weeks. It is the most significant of the final steps we needed to complete to be able to make our submission to the Charities Commission to establish ourselves as a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee. People have asked if the Charities Commission step is necessary. The answer is clearly yes, if we want to benefit from access to grants, relief from stamp duty when buying a property, and tax advantages – all things that will make running the project less costly and thus more realistic.

Another important step was setting up the [www.sanctuariesforhumanity.org](http://www.sanctuariesforhumanity.org) website where people can get an overview and subscribe to our letters to friends of the project. This site will grow to include news and a space for networking with other projects sharing the SfH values and intentions.

But, back tracking to November last year, Irwan, Andrew, Annabella and I were able to meet in Scotland to look at a number of properties. Previously, Irwan and I had visited half a dozen or so, that we were able to cross off the list, but that left some impressive ones for when Andrew and Annabella arrived. It is certainly lovely to visit some of these homes and estates, to speak with agents, establish a relationship with them and learn about the market, and to refine our understanding of what we need. And, because it

is fun to do, I'll share some impressions and pictures and why, ultimately, we couldn't follow up on any the properties at this time. It certainly was interesting how many of them had plenty going for them, but there was always one key aspect that would make it extremely difficult for them to fulfil for our needs.

The current owners of **Broomhill**, a delightful and enthusiastic couple originally from Holland, had read our intention statement and checked out our website. They felt their property could serve exceptionally well as a sanctuary space. Truly, the work they had done on the house reflected their love of detail and craftsmanship, and the tour ended in a gorgeous hall, which could be used immediately for all sorts of inspiring activities. There were also outbuildings, which could be repurposed, and even neighbouring properties centred around holiday lets, which could prove useful. The house was set on 25 acres of Scots pine forest, which would have been perfect except for the crucial fact that, wherever I wandered to, I was unable to find a spot completely free of traffic noise – however distant. Considering that this was November and that summer traffic would be much worse – the house was on one of the main roads heading into the Cairngorms National Park –, we had to regretfully cross it off our list.



Broomhill hall

**Aquahorthies House** was beautifully set in a quiet countryside landscape, but conveniently accessible to Aberdeen airport. The property covers 155 acres, including woodlands, parklands, fields, two small lakes with islands, a barn converted into a 3 bedroom house, an enormous, modern barn, an old steading (traditional stone Scottish farmhouse) with

plenty of possibilities for conversions, a walled garden and a manor house, which was originally built as a seminary and is currently a family home. The contents of the house resembled a museum, with paintings and artifacts from around the world, as well as countless framed histories of the property, from newspaper cuttings, to old photos and personal letters. It was all rather overwhelming, and hard to imagine what the interior would look like once emptied of all the 'exhibits'.



Aquahorthies House

Barn conversion



So what was the downside? Unfortunately, the main manor house was an A-listed building, which in the UK means a whole lot of problems. To change its current status from single family use to multiple use would require all kinds of features that would be impossible to apply. Just one example: for multiple use there need to be two interior staircases from the ground to the top floor (which the house didn't have) – otherwise you would need an exterior fire escape, which would be totally unacceptable on an A-listed building. Sadly, another crossed off the list.



Lake with boathouse, Aquahorthies

**Invertrossachs Country House** is located with waterside frontage on a loch – Loch Venacher – west of Sterling and within the Trossachs and Loch Lomond National Park.



View from Invertrossachs Country House

As the owner shared with us, it had an amusing history: the newer house was built on the site of Drunkie Lodge – named accordingly because of its proximity to Loch Drunkie. Apparently, Queen Victoria frequently visited the lodge, so it was decided that the name was not appropriate and needed to be changed. Thus it became Invertrossachs Country House. The original building burned to the ground, though one

fireplace mantle was salvaged and included in the new house. To its right, however, is an enormous tree, purportedly planted by the queen.



Tree purportedly planted by Queen Victoria

Anecdotes aside, the house was beautiful, with spacious rooms on two floors surrounding a large staircase flood-lit from above through a skylight. Furthermore there was an annex with four apartments (from three bedrooms to one) and a studio. Wonderful opportunities for hosting visitors there. The garden cascaded (pretty literally) down to the waterfront, with a mass of wild rhododendrons (considered a pest because of their invasive nature) in need of some serious pruning and landscaping. So what was the issue in this case? The house was sitting on just 13 acres, much of which was very steep and of limited use.



You may think that 13 acres isn't that small, but when it is hemmed in by other properties that may, or may not, one day come up for sale, it presents a different perspective. If it were 13 acres bordered by open, national park countryside, it could be workable, but this was not the case.

**Carphin House** (above: view from the house) was a similar story, with a lovely house currently used as an events location, including large bedrooms, plentiful, spacious bathrooms, and newly refurbished kitchen, sitting at the top of a quiet valley south of Dundee, across the River Tay. However, once again, limited acreage, surrounded by farms and other properties.

If we want to envision a Sanctuaries for Humanity location where we can grow and expand as needed, and where outdoor activities – from gardening to long-distance hiking and everything in between – have plenty of space, alongside gathering and meeting rooms, the sacred space building we envision, sufficient accommodation, etc., etc., then we simply have to opt for more acreage.

Of course, there is also the fact that, despite the many delightful aspects of all the properties, we didn't yet find the one where we could all feel unanimously – yes, this is it!

Love to you all!

[osanna@sanctuariesforhumanity.org](mailto:osanna@sanctuariesforhumanity.org)