# Deer invasion in Mallaig highlights clash between community safety and billionaire estate ownership



Concerns are mounting in Mallaig, a coastal village in Inverness-shire, over the growing presence of deer from Sir Cameron Mackintosh’s Nevis Estate. Locals have reported that deer have ventured into the children's play area, raising fears for the safety and health of families. Residents claim that inappropriate feeding practices are contributing to this encroachment, a sentiment echoed by Andrew Aitchison, the estate's factor, who noted, "It’s incredibly difficult to discourage" such behaviour.

The issue has sparked significant alarm among community members, with minutes from a recent Mallaig Community Council meeting indicating a strong desire for action. The council expressed concerns about the deer being increasingly drawn to residential areas, with some villagers reporting frightening encounters with stags. This situation underscores a broader dilemma faced by rural communities in the Highlands, where the balance between wildlife and residential life is precariously tilted.

Additionally, the culling programme previously implemented by the Scottish wildlife agency NatureScot may not have sufficiently mitigated the problem, prompting the community to reach out once again to both the estate and NatureScot. Local estimates suggest that around 40 deer now regularly roam Mallaig, a stark contrast to the 300 reported to be on the estate itself.

The growing tension surrounding deer and their proximity to human habitats mirrors wider debates about land ownership and the influence of affluent individuals in Scotland. Recent public opposition has arisen against developments that compound these challenges. Just last month, residents in Loch Tay launched a petition against the Discovery Land Company’s plans to create an exclusive community for the ultra-rich, highlighting fears that such projects could erode local values and ecological sustainability. This initiative gathered over 154,400 signatures, showcasing significant resistance to developments perceived as catering solely to billionaires.

These developments are occurring against a backdrop of increasing scrutiny regarding the ownership of Highland estates by wealthy individuals—often leading to secretive sales that complicate local governance and rural economic development, as highlighted by recent reports from the Scottish Land Commission. The dominance of billionaire landowners has prompted calls for radical reforms, including a new Land Reform Act aimed at ensuring land purchases support public interest and sustainable development goals.

The situation in Mallaig is emblematic of this broader tension. As communities grapple with the implications of wealthy individuals owning expansive estates, the landscape is becoming a battleground for local interests versus billionaire ambitions. This is not an isolated phenomenon; the recent cessation of hunting rights by the new owner of Abergeldie Estate near Balmoral and the ongoing debates about environmental stewardship only deepen the narrative that Scotland's rural spaces are increasingly being shaped by affluent absentee owners.

As the villagers of Mallaig wait for a resolution, their plight serves as a reminder of the delicate interplay between wildlife management, community safety, and the impact of concentrated wealth on Scotland's countryside. The outcome of this particular conflict will likely reverberate through similar discussions across the Highlands, as Scotland seeks to balance the interests of its residents with the realities imposed by its burgeoning class of super-rich landowners.

### Reference Map:

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14732635/Deer-billionaires-estate-invading-Highland-village-claim-locals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/10/03/ruler-dubai-accused-attempting-intimidate-scottish-neighbours/> - In October 2019, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, faced accusations from Scottish neighbors over plans to build a hunting lodge on his 63,000-acre estate in Wester Ross. Residents expressed concerns that the development would negatively impact the local community and the area's natural beauty. One neighbor described the repeated attempts to gain planning permission as 'intimidation,' suggesting a strategy to force them to move and allow the landowner to build as desired. The proposed lodge, named Ptarmigan, was intended for exclusive use by the owner and guests, with minimal increase in car movements anticipated.
3. <https://www.businessinsider.com/scottish-villagers-protest-against-private-community-for-billionaires-2023-9> - In September 2023, residents of Loch Tay, Scotland, initiated a petition titled 'Protect Loch Tay' against the development of a private community for billionaires by Discovery Land Company. The petition, which garnered over 154,400 signatures, criticized the developers for creating exclusive gated communities for the super-rich, arguing that such developments were not representative of Scotland's values. Discovery Land Company specializes in luxury properties and members-only amenities, with developments in the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean, and Portugal. Local residents expressed concerns about the economic and environmental impacts of the proposed development.
4. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/scottish-politics/2680549/land-reform-call-to-ban-billionaires-from-buying-up-scottish-estates/> - Community Land Scotland (CLS) proposed radical land reform measures to prevent billionaires from purchasing Scottish estates. The manifesto called for a new Land Reform Act that would empower ministers to assess significant land purchases based on a 'public interest test.' Sales could be blocked if they did not support sustainable development goals, and landowners failing to meet these standards could be compelled to relinquish part or all of their holdings. The proposal aimed to address concerns over large-scale land ownership by the super-rich and its impact on rural communities and the environment.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/12/majority-of-sales-of-highland-estates-conducted-in-secret-scotland> - A report revealed that a majority of Highland estates in Scotland were sold privately in 2021, with nearly half acquired by absentee owners seeking rural land for environmental reasons. The Scottish Land Commission expressed concerns that these 'off-market' sales hindered efforts to diversify land ownership and promote rural economic development. The trend indicated a growing demand from corporations, charities, and wealthy individuals for prime Highland estates, potentially leading to increased land prices and reduced opportunities for local communities to purchase land.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/royal-family/2023/09/12/royals-150-year-old-access-to-hunt-near-balmoral-is-stopped//> - In September 2023, the Royal family's 175-year-old right to hunt on the Abergeldie Estate near Balmoral was terminated by new owner Alastair Storey. Storey plans to transform the estate into private accommodation and hunting lodges, effectively ending the Royal family's sporting rights lease established by Prince Albert in 1852. Planning documents filed with Aberdeenshire council disclosed that the historic hunting deal had ceased, and the estate would be actively managed by the new owner.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/scotland/billionaires-scotland-playground-donald-trump-ed-sheeran/> - In September 2023, an article highlighted the increasing investment of American billionaires in Scotland's Highlands, including developments by Donald Trump and singer Ed Sheeran. These luxury properties, such as the Taymouth Castle development, have sparked controversy among local residents. Over 150,000 people signed a petition against the Taymouth Castle plans, expressing concerns that such developments could lead to the exclusion of local communities and the commercialization of Scotland's natural beauty.