

# The Inverness Courier

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NEWS



A massive effort is under way to raise £4 million to build a centre for children and young adults with learning disabilities.

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GOING OUT

## New landowner holds out olive branch in dispute over homes at Culloden Battlefield truce hopes

EXCLUSIVE

By Val Sweeney

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A TRUCE may be called in the row over plans for new housing close to Culloden Battlefield after it emerged the controversial site has a new owner.

Inverness businessman David Sutherland has bought Viewhill Farm from Inverness Properties and revealed yesterday he was willing to discuss "any aspect of our farming or development activities" with battlefield owner the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). It is understood options could

include selling the farm to the NTS and Mr Sutherland's Home Farms company leasing it back for agricultural use.

Last year Inverness Properties applied for permission to replace dilapidated barns at Viewhill, 400 yards from the battlefield boundary, with 16 homes. Highland Council refused consent but the decision was overturned on appeal after Historic Scotland raised no objection. The decision is expected to be ratified by Scottish ministers in the next few days.

The move outraged both the NTS and campaigners across the country, who claim the new houses would damage the setting

of the last pitched battle fought on British soil.

Mr Sutherland confirmed last night he bought the 200-acre site in late January and his intention was to use it mainly for farming.

He already keeps cattle at his Oldtown of Leys farm and for the past five years has used pasture land at Viewhill as summer grazing.

He stressed the new homes would be on a part of the farm which could not be seen from the battlefield but kept the door open to a possible compromise.

"Being pragmatic, Home Farms are willing to talk to any interested parties at any time including the

National Trust for Scotland, on any aspect of our farming or development activities," he stated.

In a separate application Mr Sutherland is seeking permission to build a road and a 100 sq ft parking and turning area elsewhere at Viewhill, prompting concerns among campaigners it would be a back door to further development close to the battlefield.

But Mr Sutherland pointed out that planning permission had already been given for an entrance off the road and the application was to take the entrance road further into the field.

"The purpose of this is for a more central agricultural access.

It is absolutely nothing to do with any non-agricultural purpose or development," he said.

Last night an NTS spokesman said the organisation had not been contacted by the new owner.

"Clearly, we would be happy to arrange a meeting and to understand exactly what he is proposing," he commented.

Until then, the trust would not speculate on whether it would be willing to consider a deal to acquire the land.

Mr Sutherland retired as chief executive of Inverness's Tulloch Homes Group two years ago after 31 years with the company.



David Sutherland purchased Viewhill Farm from Inverness Properties earlier this year.