

PROGRAMME



Scotland Rural Conference

*Unlocking land, powering change:
Rural Scotland at a crossroads*





Type of event
Face to face



CPD Hours
5.5 Formal

Book your place today

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The Scotland Rural Conference 2025 returns at a pivotal time for Scotland's rural surveying professionals. As policy, environmental strategy, and economic pressures evolve, this year's agenda focuses on the tools and insights needed to lead through change. With sessions spanning rural housing, land use, taxation, valuation, wildfire resilience, and regenerative practice, the programme provides a powerful mix of CPD learning and real-world relevance—tailored specifically to the Scottish context.

We open with a keynote on Scotland's rural housing strategy, followed by a timely session on rural crime and operational risks impacting landowners and agents across the country. From there, we explore the future of land decision-making with Doug McNeil, Managing Director at Eolas Insight, who will introduce emerging economic modelling and digital mapping tools designed in collaboration with NatureScot.

The afternoon features a technical tax update from Saffery, practical insights into regenerative agriculture from FAS Scotland, and a Red Book and valuation refresher from RICS's regulatory team. Delegates will also hear from David Stewart at the Scottish Land Commission, who will unpack the structural and policy challenges of unlocking land for rural housing, and explore possible planning system solutions.

With a sharper focus on Scottish-specific policy, economic and climate priorities, and contributions from government, professional bodies, and technical specialists, this is the essential CPD event for rural practitioners in 2025. Whether you're advising clients, managing estates, or shaping policy, you'll leave better informed, better connected, and ready to tackle what's next.

RICS Scotland Rural Conference 2025

Date: Thursday 2 October 2025

Location: Perth Racecourse, Perth

Theme: *Unlocking Land, Powering Change: Rural Scotland at a Crossroads*

08.30	Registration and networking
09.30	Chair's opening remarks John Hillis , Managing Director, Blackhall & Powis
09.40	Keynote: Scotland's rural housing future – vision, policy and action Scotland faces urgent housing challenges in rural and remote communities, from depopulation to affordability and development viability. This keynote will outline the Scottish Government's evolving strategy for rural housing—exploring how land use, planning, and investment will need to adapt to meet future needs. With an emphasis on cross-sector collaboration and long-term sustainability, the session will highlight both the current policy direction and the government's vision for enabling thriving rural communities across Scotland. Video Stream Scottish Government Representative
10.00	Rural Scotland under pressure Scotland's rural economy is navigating intense policy change as new agricultural and rural support frameworks take shape. This session will cut through the noise with a clear briefing on the key Scottish policy developments - especially the structure and delivery of future support - and what they mean in practice for farm and estate businesses across Scotland. Expect actionable takeaways on timelines, eligibility, compliance and business planning, with brief signposts to wider operational pressures. Jonathan Hall , Director of Policy, NFU Scotland

10.40	Refreshment break and networking
11.10	Modern mapping and economic modelling tools for natural capital This session explores how automated, web-based mapping technologies are reshaping the way land professionals assess and advise on natural capital and ecosystem services. Doug McNeil, Managing Director at Eolas Insight, will introduce the Natural Capital Tool developed in partnership with NatureScot—designed to support more accessible, scalable, nature positive and cost-efficient land-use decision-making. Drawing on his geospatial and technology background, Doug will also reflect on the wider shift from traditional GIS consultancy to customisable, tech-enabled tools, highlighting how this evolution can support more efficient rural land management and economic modelling. The session will include an opportunity for delegates to provide feedback on how such tools might meet their own professional needs. Douglas McNeil, Managing Director, Eolas Insight
11.50	Muirburn licensing: Managing wildfire risk and policy tensions Controlled burning has long been used to manage moorland, yet new licensing requirements and the rise in uncontrolled wildfires have sparked debate. This session explores the new regulatory context, ecological consequences, and practical realities for agents advising estates and landowners. Professor Robin Pakeman, Plant Ecologist, James Hutton Institute
12.30	Lionheart Update
12.40	Networking Lunch
13.30	Tax update: Land-based tax & budget changes Join Saffery for a concise briefing on the latest tax developments affecting rural businesses and landowners, including:

	• Major changes to IHT relief from April 2026 – new £1m cap on APR/BPR • Key takeaways from the <i>Charlotte MacDonald v HMRC</i> case on sideways loss relief • Updates on Making Tax Digital for Income Tax and Self-Assessment A practical session to help you stay compliant and ahead of the curve. Kris Young, Senior Tax Manager, Saffery Caroline Forbes, Senior Tax Manager, Saffery
14.00	Regenerative agriculture: Models for resilience and impact This session explores case studies from across Scotland where regenerative practices are improving soil health, and boosting biodiversity, building resilience, and driving business value supported by SAC Consulting's hands-on work with land managers and tenants. David Ross, Principal Agricultural Consultant, SAC Consulting
14: 40	Refreshment break and networking
15:10	Valuation and Red Book update: What rural surveyors need to know This technical CPD session will provide a valuable update on Red Book changes and their implications for rural practice. With valuation under renewed scrutiny and land uses diversifying, Neil will highlight common compliance challenges and offer practical guidance for delivering robust, professional valuations across varied rural asset classes. Neil Gladwin, Professional Support & Assurance Technical Specialist in Valuation, RICS
15.50	Unprecedented growth, uncertain homes: Unlocking the Highlands and Islands' potential • Economic forecasts for the Highlands & Islands

	• The Housing Crunch • Community-led housing innovation • Policy, planning & investment • Looking ahead: Balancing growth and liveability Morven Fancey, Head of Housing, Skills & Population, Highlands and Islands Enterprise
16:25	Chair's closing remarks John Hillis, Managing Director, Blackhall & Powis
16.40	End of conference

Delivering confidence

We are RICS. Everything we do is designed to effect positive change in the built and natural environments. Through our respected global standards, leading professional progression and our trusted data and insight, we promote and enforce the highest professional standards in the development and management of land, real estate, construction and infrastructure. Our work with others provides a foundation for confident markets, pioneers better places to live and work and is a force for positive social impact.

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