



MODERN SCOT

Distinctly Scottish



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ENVIRONMENT | 9 July 2026

The Forth's Lost Oyster Beds Are Being Brought Back to Life

Read online: <https://modern.scot/the-forths-lost-oyster-beds-are-being-brought-back-to-life/>



The Firth of Forth once held one of Scotland's great natural food systems. Long before modern conservation language, before "blue carbon" and biodiversity targets, the estuary supported extensive native oyster beds. Oysters from the Forth were eaten locally, traded widely and embedded in the working life of the water. A 2023 historical account by Maorach Beag describes the Firth of Forth's oyster beds as stretching along more than 25 kilometres of the southern shoreline and covering more than 166 square kilometres, making them among the most

commercially important in Scotland from the medieval period onward.

That world did not survive. Overfishing, dredging, pollution and industrial pressure stripped oyster beds from much of Britain's coast. In the Forth, the loss was not only commercial. It removed a living habitat from the estuary.

Now, more than a century after European flat oysters disappeared from the area, they are being returned.

Restoration Forth, a partnership led by the Marine Conservation Society, WWF, Heriot-Watt University and Balanced Horizon, has been working with local communities. The project began in 2022 and aims to reintroduce 60,000 European flat oysters and restore seagrass meadows to the estuary.

By 2026, the project had passed that original oyster target. Heriot-Watt University reported in March that the restoration effort had doubled its target, with hundreds of volunteers helping to clean and deploy oysters and monitoring showing that the animals are thriving in their new home.

This is big achievement. Native oyster restoration is slow, practical work. Behind it are volunteers, scientists, permissions, monitoring, disease checks, cleaning sessions, deployment days, site selection and the patience required to rebuild something that was lost over generations.

A native oyster reef is not just a collection of shellfish, it is a habitat. Oysters filter water. Their shells create structure on the seabed. That structure can shelter other marine life. In sufficient numbers, oysters help build the conditions for a more complex estuary. Seagrass does related work in another form: creating nursery habitat, stabilising sediment, supporting biodiversity and storing carbon.

Reintroducing oysters is not the same as restoring the full ecological function of a lost reef. A functioning habitat needs survival, reproduction, suitable seabed conditions and protection from the pressures that removed it in the first place. The early signs are encouraging.

The same is true of seagrass. Across Britain, seagrass meadows have been damaged by pollution, coastal development, disease and disturbance. They are now increasingly recognised as important coastal habitats, but planting them is only part of the task. Water quality, sediment conditions and long-term protection will

decide whether restored meadows persist..

The project deserves attention because it shows nature recovery being attempted in a practical, accountable way: organisations working together, communities taking part, and scientists monitoring whether the work is actually succeeding.

Scotland needs more of that.

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TRANSPORT | 9 July 2026

Island Livestock Resilience Cannot Stop at the Farm Gate

Read online: <https://modern.scot/island-livestock-resilience-cannot-stop-at-the-farm-gate/>



On Islay, farm resilience is a daily concern.

It is the feed that has to be secured before weather or ferry disruption closes a window. It is the fertiliser that has to arrive when grass needs it. It is the lambs and cattle that must move when the market, the ferry and animal welfare all allow. A mainland farm can be delayed. An island farm can be reshaped by delay.

That is the wider issue behind the upcoming Argyllshire Monitor Farm summer meeting at Craigens Farm, Gruinart, on Thursday 16 July. The afternoon will focus

on feed resources, reseeding plans and the lessons learned by the Archibald family over four years as Monitor Farmers. It is an ongoing conversation about how much control an island livestock business can build into its own system when so much beyond the gate depends on ferries, public infrastructure, input costs and government delivery.



Craigens Farm is not a demonstration plot on the edge of the mainland. It is a 2,000-hectare tenanted farm on the west coast of Islay, run by Craig and Petra Archibald, Craig's father and the family. Monitor Farm Scotland says the farm carries 220 suckler cows, 200 stores, 1,000 ewes and between 1,000 and 1,200 lambs, producing Angus and Charolais yearling calves for the store market and fat lambs.

SAC Consulting ruminant nutritionist Lorna Shaw will lead a discussion on feed resources and requirements through the farming calendar, including pinch points,

likely challenges and opportunities within the system. Pat Lambert and Mhairi Dawson of Watson Seeds will discuss reseeding and grass varieties suited to different farms, before the Archibald family reflects on what has changed at Craigens over four years as Monitor Farmers.

For an island livestock farm, grass is a form of insurance. Good grass can reduce dependence on bought-in feed. Better reseeding can strengthen forage supply. Better feed planning can help carry animals through difficult points in the year. Those are practical farm tools, but they also show the limit of what farms can do alone.

Scotland's island farmers have long lived with distance. The modern problem is that distance now sits inside longer supply chains and tighter timing. Feed, fertiliser, fuel, veterinary access, livestock haulage, abattoir routes, auction dates and market weights all depend on transport working when it is needed. On an island, the ferry is part of the farm business.

NFU Scotland warned in March 2026 that ferry disruption was placing immediate pressure on island farmers and crofters, with livestock movements delayed and vital supplies such as feed and fertiliser at risk of not arriving when needed. NFU Scotland Vice-President Duncan Macalister said reliable ferry services were “not a luxury” but essential infrastructure underpinning day-to-day business, adding that disruption raised serious animal welfare concerns.

Farmers can be told to become more resilient, and many are doing exactly that. They can plan feed more carefully, reseed fields, measure performance, use data better, alter stocking decisions and strengthen the farm system. But they cannot make a ferry arrive. They cannot repair an ageing vessel. They cannot move livestock through a cancelled sailing by force of good management.

The Scottish Government has recognised island connectivity as a central issue. The National Islands Plan says ferry services, aviation and fixed links are lifelines for islanders and island economies, supporting access to public services, supplies, jobs and markets. Transport Scotland’s Islands Connectivity Plan is intended to set out how ferry services, supported by other transport modes, will be delivered and strengthened over the long term.

There has also been continuing public investment and planning around vessels and ports. But island communities have lived for years with the difference between policy commitment and practical reliability. Audit Scotland reported in 2022 that the project to deliver two new dual-fuel ferries for the Clyde and Hebrides had been “fraught with problems and delays” for more than six years. That report became part of a wider public argument about ferry procurement, ageing vessels, cost overruns and the consequences felt most directly by island communities.

For island agriculture, those consequences can delay animals moving off island at the right time, interrupt essential deliveries and increase costs. When that happens during lambing, spring growth, store sales or winter-feed planning, the pressure lands on farms that already operate with limited room for error.

The Scottish Government has also set out a Rural Support Plan for 2026 to 2031, describing it as a five-year framework for certainty, investment and preparation, with continued support for active farmers and crofters. The Future Farming Investment Scheme offers upfront capital funding for eligible on-farm and croft investments aimed at business efficiency, environmental improvement, emissions reduction and climate-change mitigation.

Capital investment, advisory support and longer-term payment certainty can help farms adapt. But they do not remove the basic island question: how much resilience can a farm build for itself when public infrastructure remains uncertain?

Farm-level planning should not be used as a substitute for public responsibility. When government says island communities must be resilient, does it mean shared resilience, or does it mean island businesses carrying more of the burden themselves?

At Craighs, the answer is likely to be practical rather than political. The Argyllshire Monitor Farm summer meeting, “Forward planning for future resilience in island livestock systems,” takes place at Craighs Farm, Gruinart, Isle of Islay, on Thursday 16 July, from 1pm to 5pm.

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Transport Scotland — Islands Connectivity

Plan<https://www.transport.gov.scot/public-transport/ferries/islands-connectivity-plan/>

Scottish Government / Rural Payments — Rural Support Plan

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Rural Payments — Future Farming Investment

Scheme<https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/all-schemes/ffis/>

COMMUNITY | 9 July 2026

The Galloway Festival Growing in the Shadow of James Clerk Maxwell

Read online: <https://modern.scot/the-galloway-festival-growing-in-the-shadow-of-james-clerk-maxwell/>



Glenlair is better known for science than for summer festivals.

The estate near Castle Douglas is associated with James Clerk Maxwell, the Scottish physicist whose work helped explain electricity, magnetism and light. Maxwell moved to Glenlair soon after his birth in 1831 and lived there until his death in 1879.

That history gives the place a long reach. But Glenlair is not only a name from Scottish science. It is also a working rural place, and one part of it has been given a new use.

Glenlair Steading, whose stone walls date back to 1840, was restored in 2023 as the home of Demijohn, the liquid deli founded by Angus and Frances Ferguson in Edinburgh in 2004 and now based on their family farm in south west Scotland. This summer, the steading will become the setting for Glenlair Festival, a small food, drink and music festival now in its third year. This year's event has already broken its record for early ticket sales, with visitors expected from around the UK.

The festival began as a way to mark Demijohn's 20th year in business. It proved popular, in a space that is naturally beautiful and acoustically strong, with room for a few hundred people. That small scale is part of its character.

Demijohn sells artisan liqueurs, spirits, oils and vinegars in refillable glass bottles, with a range of more than 70 products developed over more than two decades with small producers. Local ingredients are used where possible, including elderflower picked on Glenlair Farm.

The food offer is fabulously regional. This year's line-up includes Ethical Dairy Cheese from Gatehouse of Fleet, Galloway Scottish Pasta from New Galloway, Blackthorn Salt from Ayrshire, Glen Urr Ice Cream from Haugh of Urr, Five Kingdoms Brewery from the Isle of Whithorn and Steilhead Cider from Moniaive. Chef Murray McDavid, formerly of Gather Restaurant and Swally n' Scran, is bringing Bossman, his Middle Eastern street food venture, with handmade shawarma wraps, fresh salads and house-made sauces.

Taken together, it is a small map of the food economy around Dumfries and Galloway and the wider south west: dairy, pasta, salt, ice cream, brewing, cider, liqueurs and street food. A festival like this gives those businesses more than a stall. It gives them a room, an audience and a reason for people to travel.

The music has a similar function. Glenlair Festival works with Up Yer Airts, part of Arts D&G, to support emerging young musicians and give them access to wider audiences. Musicians are chosen over many months, with guidance and support from the local charity.

Dumfries-born Ella Campbell is used as one example of what that stage can do. She first played Glenlair

Feastival in 2025, aged 17, and now has a following of more than 23,000 fans. Returning performers this year include Palliro and The Aberlady Sessions, while new names include 8 Days from Peebles, singer-songwriter Rose Benson and the newly formed local band SÀL TONN.

SÀL TONN also gives the event one of its strongest local notes. Its lead singer, Liam Russell, is from Old Bridge of Urr, only a few miles from Glenlair Steading. He describes the band's music as being "shaped by movement and place, stretches near the sea, time on the road, and the quiet that follows."

Glenlair Feastival 2026 takes place on Saturday 15 August 2026. Doors open at 10am, with live music from noon. Overnight camping is available for up to two nights, starting at £10 for a pitch. Tickets start at £20 for adults, with concessions for children accompanied by an adult.

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Up Yer Airts <https://www.upyerairts.com/>

ECONOMY | 8 July 2026

Aberdeen's Oldest Bartender-Owned Spirits Brand Launches Vermouth

Read online: <https://modern.scot/aberdeens-oldest-bartender-owned-spirits-brand-launches-vermouth/>



Aberdeen is not usually the first Scottish city people associate with spirits. Its modern image is more often built around granite and oil. Yet the city has a deeper drinks history than many might expect.

In 2019, University of Aberdeen researchers identified a 1505 record in the city's Burgh Records referring to a still for making "aquavite", a Latin term meaning "water of life" and a Middle Scots term associated with whisky. The university said the find may be the earliest known reference to a still for making aquavite

in Scotland. That does not make Aberdeen the settled birthplace of Scotch whisky, but it does show that the north east has a place in Scotland's long distilling story.

The House of Botanicals sits at the modern end of that line: not reviving old whisky myth, but making contemporary cocktail ingredients in a city whose drinks history is more interesting than its reputation suggests.

The Aberdeen business, established in 2009 by Adam Elan-Elmegirab and now run with Steffie Elan-Elmegirab, is considered to be the UK's oldest bartender-owned spirits brand. Adam began his drinks career as a bartender toward the end of 2001, then spent the next decade working across bars in Aberdeen. The potential to grow cocktail culture in his home city eventually outweighed possible moves to Edinburgh, London or New Orleans.

The House of Botanicals has now released Sfizi Extra Dry Vermouth under its Italian-inspired Pietro Nicola aperitivi and digestivo range. Made in Aberdeen by fortifying Italian white wine and aromatising it with wormwood, citrus peel, herbs, flowers, seeds and spices, Sfizi adds a Scottish-made dry vermouth to a portfolio already built around gin, bitters and cocktail ingredients.

There is confidence in that choice. Scotland has enough gin. It has whisky in abundance. What it has less of is a visible culture of the smaller, sharper things that make a drink work: bitters, vermouths, aperitivi, digestivi, liqueurs and the carefully judged ingredients that sit between the bottle and the glass.

Those are bartender's products. They are made for balance. A vermouth can disappear into a Martini if it is poor, or hold the drink together if it is good. Bitters are measured in drops, but can decide the whole character of a glass.

That is where The House of Botanicals has found its place. Its business is built on bar knowledge, flavour, service and the understanding that a drink is a structure. Gin may be the frame. Bitters may be the hinge. But vermouth may be the line that gives the whole thing poise.

Sfizi, pronounced "sfeet-zee", takes its name from an Italian word that translates as "whimsical, delicious

or satisfying a craving.” The Pietro Nicola range itself is named after Dora Pietro Nicola Casella, the founder’s grandmother, and draws on family roots that include Scottish, Italian and Libyan influence. The result is a Scottish-made product born through the routes by which flavour, family and culture travel.

The vermouth is bottled at 18% ABV. The nose is white flower, lemon zest, crisp apple and a gentle sage-like quality. On the palate it is bright citrus, chamomile tea, elderflower, honey, apple, woody coriander seed and a subtle hint of rose, with a crisp, long and herbaceous finish. It has been made for a particular sort of drinking: the aperitivo hour, the Dry Martini, the Vermouth and Soda, the Cardinale and the Pompier.

For Aberdeen, the city’s economic image has long been dominated by heavy industries and hard infrastructure: oil, shipping, engineering, offshore work, university research and the practical labour of a port city. But cities also need smaller makers, places of taste, design and craft, businesses that give a street or railway arch another kind of life.

The House of Botanicals is based in the heart of Aberdeen. It is independent, family-owned, and positioned as an alternative to a traditional distillery.

The Sfizi label was designed in-house by Steffie Elan-Elmegirab, while the main graphic was illustrated by Abi Read, who previously worked on illustrations for Dr. Adam’s Book of Bitters. The bottle, cap and label are fully recyclable, in keeping with the company’s low-waste approach running through its daily operations.

The wider Pietro Nicola range already includes Pescaro, a peach aperitivo, and Caffè Margaux, a coffee amaro, alongside Cioccolato, a cacao butter liqueur, and Limoncello made with Amalfi lemon. Sfizi now gives that range its dry vermouth: the cleaner, more Martini-facing member of the family.

Scotland’s drinks economy has widened considerably in the past decade and a half. The gin boom showed how quickly smaller producers could create new Scottish drinks identities using botanicals, local stories and more flexible production. The stronger businesses are usually those that know what they are for.

The House of Botanicals appears to know. The company’s own release places the launch against a wider revival of vermouth, aperitivo culture and lower-alcohol serves. Recent market estimates place the global vermouth market at roughly £8.5bn to £10.8bn annually, with several forecasts expecting continued growth into the 2030s as cocktail culture, aperitivo drinking and lower-alcohol serves remain in favour.

There is a fine Scottish achievement here. The House of Botanicals has taken the knowledge of the bar and turned it into a manufacturing business. It has done so in Aberdeen, one of the less expected places in Scotland’s modern drinks story, during a period when the city has had to absorb the strain of economic change and look again at what kind of work, craft and enterprise can carry it forward.

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Report<https://www.researchandmarkets.com/report/vermouth>

HERITAGE AND ARTS | 7 July 2026

Platforms, Piers and Quiet Crossings: A Dreamier Way Through Scotland's Summer

Read online: <https://modern.scot/platforms-piers-and-quiet-crossings-a-dreamier-way-through-scotlands-summer/>



Scotland's summer is not only made of the biggest stages and the busiest streets. Some of its best days begin at a station, a harbour wall, a lighthouse path or the edge of a quay, where the pace is slower and the journey feels part of the pleasure.

If you like steam, model railways, coastal towns, rowing regattas, whale watches and days out that sit slightly apart from the main tourist route, July and August offer a quieter kind of collection. This is a summer of platforms, piers, crossings and places where people gather for trains, boats, water and

movement.

In East Lothian, the Leuchie Lighthouse Trail runs from 1 July to 21 August in North Berwick. The trail features fifteen lighthouse sculptures placed around the town to mark Leuchie's 15th anniversary as an independent charity. It is not a transport event in the strict sense, but it belongs to the same family of summer pleasures: coast, route, light, place and the invitation to keep moving. Trails like this turn a town into a sequence of stops rather than a single destination.

Leuchie Lighthouse Trail <https://wildinart.co.uk/events/leuchie-lighthouse-trail/>

For those who prefer their nostalgia indoors and on tables, the Musselburgh Toy, Train and Sci-Fi Fair takes place on 11 July at Musselburgh Sports Centre. The event brings together vintage, retro and new toys, models and collectables, with model trains, boats, ships, slot cars, tin plate, comics and film memorabilia among the stalls. These fairs are part collecting, part memory and part engineering in miniature.

Musselburgh Toy, Train and Sci-Fi Fair <https://northerntoyfairs.com/>

A more adventurous west-coast option arrives with the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Silurian Research Expedition from Tobermory, running from 12 to 18 July. This is the marine version of the railway dream: a purposeful journey, a vessel with a route, and the sense that the passage itself matters as much as arrival. The expedition turns the Hebrides into a working landscape of watching, recording and travelling.

Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Silurian Research Expedition — Tobermory July
<https://www.hwtdt.org/silurian-timetable/hwdt08-2026>

A week later, Fife offers another event for the rail-minded. Cupar Model Rail 2026 takes place on 18 and 19 July, organised by Cupar and District Model Railway Club. Model railway exhibitions are among Scotland's quieter gatherings. They are miniature worlds built from patience, memory, engineering and local enthusiasm. Some visitors come for the layouts, others for the craft, and many for the pleasure of seeing whole

landscapes made carefully in small form.

Cupar Model Rail 2026 <https://railwaymodels.uk/event-cupar-model-rail-2026-07-18>

The end of July brings National Whale and Dolphin Watch, running from 25 July to 2 August around the UK coast. In Scotland, that turns beaches, headlands, coves and harbour edges into watching posts. It is citizen science, but it is also one of the simplest summer ideas: stand still, look outward, and record what passes through Scottish waters.

National Whale and Dolphin Watch <https://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/nwdw/>

For those who like rowing rather than watching, Scotland's coastal rowing calendar has several summer regattas with strong local character. The Ullapool Coastal Rowing Club Regatta takes place on 10 July, with youth races listed for the evening. The Golspie Rowing Club Regatta follows on 25 July at Golspie Pier and the Seafront Centre. Cromarty Community Rowing Club Regatta takes place on 22 and 23 August.

These are not glossy spectacles. Their value is more local than that. They are community-made days in which sea, boat, town and weather still matter.

Ullapool Coastal Rowing Club Regatta

<https://scottishcoastalrowing.org/2026events/ullapool-coastal-rowing-club-regatta/>

Golspie Rowing Club Regatta <https://scottishcoastalrowing.org/2026events/golspie-rowing-club-regatta/>

Cromarty Community Rowing Club Regatta

<https://scottishcoastalrowing.org/2026events/cromarty-community-rowing-club-regatta/>

In Falkirk, the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway Steam Gala runs on 8 and 9 August. If your idea of a good day involves old carriages, steam, railway heritage and the particular atmosphere that only preserved lines can offer, this is one of the clearest picks of the summer. A railway gala says that some forms of travel were too satisfying to vanish completely.

Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway Steam Gala 2026 <https://www.bkrailway.co.uk/>

On the Clyde, the Largs Regatta Festival runs from 21 to 30 August. It is for people who like harbours busy with purpose: sails, boats, racing, masts, water and a town facing seaward for the week. It is a reminder that Scottish summer is not only inland and festival-based. Some of it still belongs to marinas, clubs and the changing light on coastal water.

Largs Regatta Festival

<https://www.yachthavens.com/largs-yacht-haven/explore/events/largs-regatta-festival>

The Highlands get their own miniature railway moment with the Inverness and District Model Railway Exhibition on 22 and 23 August at the Leonardo Hotel in Inverness. The event includes model railway layouts, traders, second-hand railway equipment and railway literature. If Cupar offers one rail weekend in July, Inverness answers in August. These exhibitions have a quiet seriousness that suits them: careful craft, familiar routes reimaged, and the survival of patient hobbies in a hurried age.

Inverness and District Model Railway Exhibition 2026

<https://railwaymodels.uk/event-inverness-and-district-model-railway-exhibition-2026-08-22>

To end August well, Fife offers Anstruther Harbour Festival and Muster from 28 to 30 August. Harbour festivals are often among the best ways to feel a place properly. Boats, food, music, arts and crafts, people

by the water, and a town using its own setting rather than borrowing someone else's idea of a visitor attraction. Anstruther suits this especially well. It already has the harbour; the festival gives it a reason to gather itself.

Anstruther Harbour Festival and Muster <https://www.anstrutherharbourfestival.org/>

For those who want a more open-ended sea journey rather than a fixed event date, there are also season-long boat experiences still running through summer. Sea Life Mull runs whale-watching tours from Tobermory from April to October, with the chance of seeing minke whales, basking sharks, common dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, harbour porpoises, seals, white-tailed eagles and seabirds. Sealife Adventures also runs wildlife and whale-watching boat trips and cruises on the west coast of Scotland near Oban, overlooking the Isle of Mull.

These are less "event day" than summer possibility, but they belong in the same collection of Scottish routes by water.

Sea Life Mull <https://sealifemull.co.uk/>

Sealife Adventures <https://sealife-adventures.com/choose-trip/>

Taken together, these events offer a different map of Scotland. Not the loudest one, and not the one built only from the largest names. This one is stitched together by steam galas, harbour festivals, rowing clubs, model railways, lighthouse trails and boat journeys. It is a summer for people who like routes as much as destinations, and who understand that some of the best days out begin with the sense that you are quietly on your way.

As ever, check directly with organisers before travelling, especially where weather, sea conditions, ticket availability or event changes may affect the day.

ECONOMY | 7 July 2026

Waste Glass and New Homes: The Dumfries Firm Testing Scotland's Housing Economy

Read online: <https://modern.scot/waste-glass-and-new-homes-the-dumfries-firm-testing-scotland-housing-economy/>



Waste Glass and New Homes: The Dumfries Firm Testing Scotland's Housing Economy

A Dumfries-based construction business has secured more than £5m in funding to scale a building system that turns waste glass into structural panels for homes and other buildings.

VASO Global says the funding will support manufacturing at a new 60,000 sq ft site in Dumfries and create up to 70 jobs over five years. The company's technology uses recycled glass to make high-performance structural composite panels for modular construction.

The funding package includes £1.4m seed investment from PXN Ventures, £621,000 from Scottish Enterprise, a £2m loan approved by Innovate UK Loans Limited, and £800,000 from Eco Group, which is expected to act as delivery partner for initial VASO Global build projects. VASO by Eco previously secured £330,000 from South of Scotland Enterprise to support commercial rollout of the recycled-glass building technology.

Eddie Black, VASO Global Co-Founder and Managing Director, said: "We want to thank all those who have seen the potential in our technology. The latest investment from PXN Ventures and Scottish Enterprise, along with all our other funders, accelerates our journey to deliver a product which can genuinely reshape how homes are delivered - cleaner, faster and with far less waste.

"We would like to also thank Professor Sean Smith at the University of Edinburgh for his reports and expert support, funded by the UKRI Centre for Net Zero High Density Buildings, which has helped underpin VASO's plans and products to reach this stage of our development."

The company says it combines digital design, integrated manufacture and semi-autonomous construction to provide affordable, thermally efficient, low-carbon homes that can be built more quickly than conventional housing.

Scotland needs more homes. It also needs stronger manufacturing outside the Central Belt, better use of waste materials, faster construction methods and business growth that produces skilled local employment.

VASO's model speaks directly to those pressures.

The latest Scottish Government housing figures show why the claim will attract attention. Across all sectors, Scotland completed 17,268 new homes in 2025-26, down 10% on the previous year. Starts fell 4% to 14,955. Private-sector completions were down 8%, while social-sector completions fell 16%. Scotland has declared a housing emergency, but delivery remains below what the country needs.

Dumfries and Galloway also has a direct stake. The Scottish Government's 2025-26 housing statistics show Dumfries and Galloway among the local authority areas with the lowest private-sector completion rates, at 15 or fewer homes built per 10,000 population. A construction manufacturing site in Dumfries therefore carries local significance as well as national policy interest.

VASO's backers say the company can help reduce construction time. PXN Ventures said the company expects to cut construction time from 33 weeks to 10 weeks on an upcoming project in Scotland.

Tom Croy, PXN Ventures Investment Director, said: "At PXN we back companies solving real problems, and the UK's housing shortage is about as real as they get, which is why we're proud to back Eddie and the team as they scale a genuinely sustainable way to build not just houses but other essential buildings. On top of supporting local jobs and opportunities, VASO Global's recycled composite panels enable builders to build far faster than traditional methods, with the company expecting to cut construction time from 33 weeks to 10 on an upcoming project in Scotland."

The potential is clear. A factory-based system could reduce some of the delays, weather exposure and on-site labour pressures that affect conventional construction. Recycled-glass panels may also support lower-waste building methods and give a South of Scotland business a role in a national supply chain.

Public funding also brings a public-interest test. Scottish Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise have put money behind the business because it is being presented as an innovative company with growth potential. Innovate UK has approved a loan. The return should be assessed through jobs, private investment, manufacturing capability, export potential and completed projects, rather than the announcement figure alone.

Derek Shaw, Scottish Enterprise Director of Entrepreneurship and Investment, said: "Our investment support is focused on helping Scotland's most innovative and ambitious companies to grow and scale, creating impactful economic change in regions across Scotland. VASO Global is a fantastic example of this, with its manufacturing approach having the potential to transform how low-carbon homes are delivered at pace and scale, while creating job opportunities and strengthening the South of Scotland's manufacturing capability."

Scott O'Brien, Innovate UK Chief Investment Officer, said: "When Innovate UK launched its Prospectus in March 2025, its ambition was to foster future industry giants with the ambition to scale through their cutting-edge technologies.

"VASO delivers advanced materials that support clean energy goals and sustainable housing. Innovate UK's £2m innovation loan will deliver the technical and commercial maturity that will accelerate their growth."

Professor Russel Griggs, SOSE Chair, said: "SOSE is committed to supporting innovation and tackling our foundational challenges, including housing. Supporting the early commercialisation and production of VASO's technology allows us to do both. To unlock the South of Scotland's full economic potential, we need to address these challenges. The region is innovative and a significant untapped source of future growth."

Up to 70 jobs over five years would be meaningful in Dumfries, particularly if the roles include skilled

manufacturing, technical, design, quality-control and apprenticeship opportunities. The next question is whether those jobs are created, filled locally where possible, and sustained beyond the first phase of funding.

Gary Robertson, Eco Group Opportunity Strategist, said: “Sustainable, affordable housing is not just a social good—it is the foundation of economic resilience. Providing thermally efficient, healthy homes supports a stable workforce, improves productivity, reduces public costs, and unlocks long-term, inclusive growth.

“The South of Scotland isn’t always the first area on people’s minds when it comes to world-first innovation and manufacturing methods. But we have some brilliant organisations and business minds in this region, and this investment will help provide valuable skills, training and job opportunities to help boost the region’s economy.”

If the system proves viable, it may be most useful where Scotland’s housing emergency is hardest to solve: rural areas, brownfield sites, small community-led schemes, affordable housing projects and places where conventional building costs make delivery difficult.

One proposed use has already been identified. VASO by Eco has been proposed for a new affordable housing project at Closeburn, north of Dumfries, involving Nith Valley Leaf Trust, South of Scotland Community Housing and VASO by Eco. The scheme has been described as a potential early use of the recycled-glass system for homes intended for young people from the area and older residents seeking warmer, lower-cost homes at affordable rents.

If the technology can help build affordable homes in a rural community, reduce running costs and support local manufacturing, it would be a genuine contribution.

VASO Global has also made two senior appointments to its board. Graham McDonald has joined the company as chairman. Douglas Morrison, Deputy CEO of Built Environment - Smarter Transformation, has joined VASO Global in a non-remunerated Strategic Advisor role. BE-ST’s stated mission is to accelerate Scotland’s transition to a zero-carbon built environment and construction sector.

Shelter Scotland has warned that Scotland is not building enough affordable homes. Following the latest figures, it said 6,832 affordable homes were built in the last year, 15% below the 8,000-home target, and cautioned that the country remains off track for the 110,000 affordable homes target by 2032. The Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland has also pointed to the need for 15,693 social and affordable homes each year over five years to meet current housing need.

Against that scale, one company cannot solve the housing emergency, but it can make a difference and that makes it worth watching closely.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 7 July 2026

Estimated 579,814 Scots Waiting While Ministers Claim NHS Progress

Read online: <https://modern.scot/estimated-579814-scots-waiting-while-ministers-claim-nhs-progress/>



Scotland's NHS waiting lists are falling in some areas, but the latest official figures still show an estimated 579,814 people on at least one planned-care waiting list.

That is around one in ten people in Scotland.

The figures, published by Public Health Scotland on 30 June 2026, cover new outpatient appointments, inpatient treatment and day-case treatment up to 31 May. They show real improvement from the worst of the backlog, especially for some long outpatient waits,

but they also show a health service still far from meeting its own standards.

The Scottish Government has presented the latest data as evidence of a year of progress. Health Secretary Angela Constance said the figures showed sustained improvement, pointing to a 12.9% annual fall in the new outpatient waiting list, a continued reduction in outpatient waits of more than a year, and cancer-treatment performance that has improved against some historic comparisons.

Those claims are supported by parts of the data, but they do not describe the whole position.

At 31 May 2026, an estimated 450,947 people were waiting for a new outpatient appointment. The total number of ongoing outpatient waits stood at 496,098, up 1.3% from the end of April, marking the second consecutive monthly increase. Public Health Scotland also reported 14,571 outpatient waits of more than 52 weeks, including 1,073 waits of more than two years.

The national standard is that 95% of new outpatients should wait no longer than 12 weeks from referral to being seen. In May, 63.5% of completed outpatient waits met that standard, down from 65.5% in April.

The inpatient and day-case figures show a similar pattern: some improvement against last year, limited progress month to month, and performance still well short of the formal guarantee.

Public Health Scotland reported 22,336 inpatient and day-case admissions during May 2026. Of these, 56% were completed within 12 weeks of treatment being agreed. The Treatment Time Guarantee says eligible patients should wait no longer than 12 weeks for inpatient or day-case treatment after the decision to treat.

At 31 May, there were 156,366 ongoing waits for inpatient or day-case treatment. That was down 0.3% from April and 2.1% lower than the same point last year. Long waits moved in the wrong direction. There were 17,267 waits over 52 weeks, up 55 from the end of April, ending a sustained period of monthly reductions. Of these, 2,268 had exceeded two years.

The government is entitled to point to reductions in the backlog where they exist. Public Health Scotland's

figures show outpatient waiting lists are smaller than they were a year ago, and the number of waits over one year has fallen substantially from earlier peaks. The public is also entitled to notice that the official standards are still being missed by wide margins.

The cancer figures add further caution. Public Health Scotland's latest quarterly cancer waiting-times release, also published on 30 June, showed that 72.2% of eligible patients started treatment within 62 days of urgent suspicion of cancer referral in the quarter ending 31 March 2026. The standard is 95%. No NHS board met it.

The 31-day cancer standard came closer to being met. Public Health Scotland reported that 94.5% of eligible patients started treatment within 31 days of decision to treat, against a 95% standard. Eleven of 15 NHS boards met that measure.

These figures show where ministerial statements can become misleading if they are read without the underlying data. A service can improve and still fail its standards. A list can fall and still leave hundreds of thousands of people waiting. A long-wait category can shrink while the system remains unable to deliver timely treatment for many patients.

There is also a technical issue in the way waiting-time data is now reported. Public Health Scotland moved to monthly publication and revised waiting-time guidance after changes issued by the Scottish Government in December 2023. The Office for Statistics Regulation said the statistics remain accredited official statistics and noted that monthly publication gives the public and policymakers more timely information.

Audit Scotland has warned that the revised rules also affect how waits are calculated. Its NHS in Scotland 2025 report said the updated guidance can reset a wait to zero days where clinically appropriate, or if a patient cancels or fails to attend an agreed appointment. Audit Scotland noted that the length of waits under the new guidance may be marginally shorter for some patients because of administrative adjustments rather than because patients are being seen more quickly.

The more difficult concern is whether the health service has enough capacity to keep reducing waits while meeting rising demand. Audit Scotland reported that cancer referrals had increased compared with pre-pandemic levels. For the year to June 2025, referrals on the 62-day cancer pathway were 18.1% higher than in the year to June 2019. Referrals on the 31-day pathway were 8.7% higher.

BMA Scotland has made a similar argument from the workforce side. In April, it called for long-term reform, a clearer plan for shifting more care closer to home, better measures of NHS performance and an evidence-based workforce plan. The organisation warned that short-term measures would not be enough to put the NHS on a sustainable footing.

The Scottish Government's own March 2026 progress report acknowledged the pressure. It said activity had increased and long waits had fallen in 2025-26, while also recognising rising demand, demographic change, winter pressures and financial constraints.

The public needs a clear account of what is improving, what is stalled, and what remains unsafe or unacceptable.

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POLICY AND GOVERNMENT | 7 July 2026

House Rich, Cash Poor: The Risk Inside Scotland's Mansion Tax

Read online: <https://modern.scot/house-rich-cash-poor-the-risk-inside-scotlands-mansion-tax/>



The Scottish Government has opened consultation on two new council tax bands for homes valued above £1 million, setting up a debate over property wealth, local government funding and the long-delayed reform of Scotland's council tax system.

The proposal would create Band I for homes valued at more than £1 million and up to £2 million, and Band J for homes valued above £2 million. The new bands would take effect from 1 April 2028, subject to legislation in

the Scottish Parliament.

The consultation, published on 6 July 2026, runs until 24 August 2026. It asks for views on illustrative rates rather than final charges. On current estimates, Band I homes would pay around £720 more each year than the present average Band H charge, while Band J homes would pay around £3,600 more. Based on 2026-27 average Scottish council tax charges, that would produce an estimated annual bill of about £4,770 for Band I and £7,650 for Band J.

The policy is being described as a “mansion tax”, although legally it would operate inside the existing council tax system. Council tax in Scotland is paid by occupiers, not owners. The Scottish proposal differs from the UK Government's planned high-value council tax surcharge in England, which applies from £2 million and is designed as a charge on owners.

The Scottish Government says the new bands are intended to make the highest-value homes contribute more to local services. It estimates that fewer than 1% of Scottish homes would be affected, around 15,000 properties in total. Its consultation estimates there may be between 12,680 and 16,740 homes in Band I and between 760 and 1,070 homes in Band J.

The revenue expected from the change is modest. Current estimates suggest the measure would raise between £12m and £16m a year across Scotland. The money would be retained by local government, although the distribution of revenue between councils is still to be agreed with COSLA.

The case for change is straightforward. Scotland's council tax system still uses property values from 1 April 1991 for Bands A to H. The highest current band, Band H, covers all properties that were worth more than £212,000 in 1991. A home now worth £700,000 and one now worth several million pounds may therefore sit in the same council tax band.

Scottish Assessors state that current council tax bands are based on the assessor's opinion of open-market value at 1 April 1991. They do not place an exact current value on every home. The existing structure has eight bands, from A to H. Band H begins at a 1991 value of more than £212,000.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has repeatedly described council tax as regressive by property value. In Scotland, a Band H property pays 3.675 times the tax of a Band A property, even though Band H properties

were worth at least 7.85 times Band A properties in 1991, and may be worth far more today. The IFS has also warned that a targeted mansion tax may be a useful step only if it leads to wider reform. If it becomes the final answer, it leaves most of the old system untouched.

That is the central weakness of the Scottish proposal. It updates the valuation basis for homes above £1 million, but keeps the 1991 valuation basis for everyone else. A household in an ordinary home will not be revalued. A household in a high-value home will be assessed against 1 April 2026 values. Scotland would therefore have a hybrid system: current values at the top, 1991 values beneath.

Supporters will argue that this is a practical way to address the most visible unfairness without causing disruption for millions of households. Critics will argue that it creates an uneven system and avoids the harder political work of full council tax reform.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has welcomed the move as a positive step, but has said it cannot be the limit of Scotland's ambition. JRF argues that the council tax system remains outdated and regressive, and that successive Scottish administrations have preserved the status quo despite earlier promises of reform.

ICAS has also raised a process concern. It noted that the mansion tax was announced while a wider consultation on the future of council tax was still open. In its view, announcing a targeted change before hearing feedback on broader reform risked weakening the transparency of the engagement process.

Property-market concerns also need to be treated seriously. Scottish Conservative finance spokesman Craig Hoy has argued that the tax could deter buyers, damage the housing market and affect asset-rich but income-poor people, including older residents living in long-held family homes on modest pensions. The Scottish Government recognises that issue in the consultation, which refers to possible phased increases, deferral arrangements and changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme. Those protections have not yet been decided.

The strongest objection is that the proposal may raise little money while adding another layer to an already complicated system. Revenue of £12m to £16m a year is small in the context of Scottish local government finance. The consultation states that council tax is expected to raise around £3.5bn net revenue for local government in 2026-27. The new bands would therefore make only a limited contribution to council budgets.

The geographic impact will also be uneven. Registers of Scotland reported that there were 392 residential sales over £1 million in Scotland in 2025-26, with more than half in the City of Edinburgh. East Renfrewshire had the highest median house sale price among local authorities at £305,200, while Inverclyde had the lowest at £123,000. The areas most affected by the new bands are likely to include Edinburgh, East Lothian, Glasgow, East Renfrewshire, parts of Fife, Highland, Argyll and Bute, and other places with concentrations of high-value homes.

The Scottish Greens support stronger property taxation and have long argued for replacing council tax with a more progressive property tax. Green MSP Lorna Slater has said the mansion tax would raise funds for schools, libraries and other local services while responding to Scotland's housing emergency.

The policy therefore sits between two criticisms. To some opponents, it goes too far by targeting a small number of households and risking unintended effects in the property market. To some reformers, it does not go far enough because it leaves the basic council tax system in place.

Both views can contain truth. A £1 million home represents significant property wealth. Scotland's top-end property tax burden has been low when measured against current values. At the same time, property value is not the same as income, and a fair system needs credible protections for households that cannot meet

sharply higher annual bills without selling or deferring payment.

The proposal is best understood as a political and technical test. If ministers use it as the first stage of wider council tax reform, it may help correct an obvious imbalance at the top of the system. If it becomes a substitute for wider reform, Scotland will still be left with a council tax structure based largely on property values from 1991.

The consultation now gives ministers, councils, assessors, homeowners and tax experts until 24 August to test the detail: how valuations will be carried out, how appeals will work, how low-income occupiers in high-value homes will be protected, how much the system will cost to administer, and whether the new bands will lead to wider reform or close the door on it.

For Scotland, the mansion tax is not the whole argument. It is a small measure inside a much larger unresolved question: whether local taxation should continue to depend on a property map drawn more than three decades ago.

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ENERGY | 7 July 2026

Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone Faces Questions Over Power, Land and Community Benefit Claims

Read online: <https://modern.scot/lanarkshire-ai-growth-zone-faces-questions-over-power-land-and-community-benefit-claims/>



Scotland's first AI Growth Zone is now facing serious questions over whether its public claims on renewable power, land use, jobs and community benefit can be matched by deliverable plans.

The Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone was announced by the UK Government on 29 January 2026. It was presented as a major economic project for North Lanarkshire, delivered by DataVita around its Airdrie data centre site and in partnership with CoreWeave, the US-based

AI cloud company. The UK Government said the project would support more than 3,400 jobs, bring £8.2bn in private investment and include additional support for the local community.

DataVita's own project material describes the scheme as Scotland's first official AI Growth Zone. It says the development will include 500MW of data centre capacity, more than 1GW of private-wire renewable energy generation and an AI Innovation Park. It also says the project represents more than £8.2bn of investment and will deliver more than £543m in community benefits over 15 years.

Those claims matter because they are not peripheral to the project. They are the public case for it. The development is being sold not simply as a large data centre campus, but as a green industrial project that can bring long-term local value without placing unacceptable pressure on Scotland's electricity system, land or communities.

That case is now under scrutiny.

A Guardian investigation published on 6 July 2026 reported that documents obtained through Freedom of Information requests and public-record analysis raise doubts about the project's ability to meet the renewable-power claims made around it. The investigation reported that while the project had been promoted as using up to 1GW of new energy infrastructure, internal correspondence acknowledged power provision as a problem. The UK Government told the Guardian that the Lanarkshire complex would connect to the grid, while saying its needs would still be met overwhelmingly with renewables.

A data centre supplied by dedicated, directly connected renewable generation is not the same public proposition as a data centre relying on a grid connection in a system already under pressure. The UK Government's own guidance for AI Growth Zone applicants required sites to demonstrate access to at least 500MW of power capacity by 2030, either through a secured grid connection or a credible behind-the-meter solution supported by detailed technical documentation.

DataVita says it has developed private-wire energy parks. Its website states that more than 1,000 acres of renewable generation will be directly connected to its data centres, and that the first energy parks are expected to be operational in the first quarter of 2028. The same page says the grid would provide resilient

backup when renewables are not available.

DataVita's environmental page goes further, saying the development will be powered 100% by its own renewables, with near-zero water consumption, no fossil fuel and more than 1GW of renewables. It describes a planned energy mix of 800MW wind, more than 400MW solar and 2,400MWh of battery storage.

The concern is whether these plans have reached the stage where they can fairly be treated as deliverable public infrastructure rather than promotional ambition. The Guardian reported that DataVita currently operates much smaller data centres in Glasgow and Chapelhall, drawing roughly 25MW from the grid, and that the scale of renewable generation described would require far more land than is currently evident in public planning material. DataVita told the Guardian that delivery of its energy commitments was subject to final commercial agreements, planning, grid and consenting processes.

AI data centres require electricity, substations, cooling systems, road access, security, fibre connectivity and, if they are to be supplied by dedicated renewable generation, substantial associated energy infrastructure. DataVita says its energy parks would cover more than 1,000 acres. The Guardian reported analysis suggesting that the renewable-power claims could require far more land than that, depending on the mix of wind and solar generation.

North Lanarkshire Council welcomed the announcement in January, describing it as an opportunity to put North Lanarkshire on the UK map as a host for one of the largest investments in the future data and digital economy. The council also said the proposals would be subject to the full statutory planning process and that stakeholders would be consulted before any final planning decision.

Public confidence will depend on whether residents, councillors, planning authorities and Scottish ministers are given a clear account of what is actually proposed, what land is required, what grid connection is needed, what renewable infrastructure will be built, and what happens if the renewable infrastructure is delayed, reduced or refused.

The community-benefit claim also needs careful handling. DataVita says the project will create a £543m community investment fund over 15 years of operation. Its own website says the fund would be calculated at £50,000 per MW of data centre capacity per year and £15,000 per MW of renewable energy per year, with more than £36m per year at full operation.

That is not the same as saying £543m is already available. The Guardian reported that the money is not currently in the fund and would instead be expected to come from DataVita revenues if those revenues are generated.

A revenue-dependent future fund is not equivalent to a guaranteed fund held for the community at the point of approval. If public bodies continue to refer to the community benefit figure, they should state clearly whether the money is committed, secured, conditional, projected or dependent on future commercial performance.

The UK Government said the project would bring more than 3,400 jobs over the coming years, including 50 apprenticeships. DataVita says those jobs would span construction, operations, the wider supply chain, renewable energy, engineering and AI.

For a project of this scale, the relevant question is not only how many jobs are counted. It is how many are permanent, how many are local, how many are construction-phase roles, how many are indirect or induced jobs, how many require skills already present in North Lanarkshire, and how many will remain after the site is built. Those details should be published in a form that allows public testing.

The wider context is that Scotland is now being positioned as a major location for data centres. The Scottish Government's 2021 Green Datacentres and Digital Connectivity plan sought to position Scotland as a leading zero-carbon, cost-competitive green data hosting location. It highlighted renewable energy, fibre connectivity, economic growth and Scotland's potential to host data centres from edge facilities to hyperscale sites.

That policy direction has now run into harder questions. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre noted in June 2026 that hyperscale data centre proposals have become a major planning issue faster than Scottish planning policy has developed. It also noted that there is no agreed definition of a "green data centre", and that large data centres labelled as green can still make significant demands on land, water and energy.

Water is one area where the evidence needs balance. Scottish Water said in June that Scotland's 13 operating data centres currently use about 97 cubic metres of water a day, around 0.006% of the 1.6 to 1.8 billion litres supplied daily to homes and businesses. It also said most existing data centres use closed-loop cooling systems, requiring minimal top-ups after the initial fill.

That does not remove all concern. It does show that current water use by existing Scottish data centres is small. The more important issue is cumulative future demand if multiple hyperscale sites proceed, especially where water, power, planning and land-use decisions are being made site by site rather than through a single national framework.

The electricity issue is larger and more immediate. The UK Government has acknowledged that grid connection delays are the single biggest blocker for AI Growth Zones. Its March 2026 consultation said around 140 data centres were in the transmission queue, representing about 50GW of capacity, and that the queue was far beyond current projections for future sector growth.

The UK Government is therefore proposing mechanisms to prioritise strategic demand projects, including AI Growth Zones, for grid capacity. That may help selected projects. It also raises a public-interest question: if large AI data centres are moved ahead in the queue, which other projects wait longer, and who pays for the network reinforcement required?

The Lanarkshire proposal should not be rejected simply because it is large, or because artificial intelligence is controversial. Data infrastructure is now part of modern economic life. Scotland has genuine advantages in cool climate, renewable generation, engineering skill and digital ambition. There may be a legitimate case for hosting more data centres in Scotland.

But that case must be made with complete public honesty. The Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone should now be judged on verified planning documents, secured power arrangements, land control, grid status, enforceable community benefit, environmental assessment and a clear jobs breakdown. Public bodies should not continue using headline figures unless they can explain exactly what those figures mean.

The most serious risk is that Scotland accepts a new form of industrial development on the basis of claims that are not yet proven, while local communities are asked to carry the land, infrastructure and planning consequences.

If Lanarkshire is to become Scotland's first AI Growth Zone, the next stage must be evidence, not promotion.

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Mrs Gunn and the Secret Pink Toolbox

Read online: <https://modern.scot/mrs-gunn-and-the-secret-pink-toolbox/>



I was sitting in the front room on Sunday evening, enjoying the breeze after an unusually warm weekend. I had a book in my hand, one cat settled at my feet and another curled in my lap. The curtains moved gently, the house was quiet, and I had almost reached that rare domestic state in which nothing needed wiped, folded, moved, signed, soaked, charged or explained.

Then Mr Gunn crossed the hall carrying my blow dryer.

There are moments in a marriage when one must decide whether to speak at once or allow the evidence

to develop. I chose the latter, because a husband walking past a doorway with a woman's blow dryer in his hand is not an accident. It is a confession in transit.

He had the slow, careful walk of a man transporting evidence.

"Mr Gunn," I said.

He stopped, but only with his feet. The rest of him continued to hope.

"Yes?"

"Are you carrying my blow dryer?"

There was a pause.

"No."

This was disappointing.

"You are standing in the hall with my blow dryer in your hand."

He looked down.

"So I am."

"What are you doing with it?"

"I was only borrowing it."

"Were you going to tell me?"

"I was going to return it."

"That is not the same thing."

He considered this, as men do when confronted with a moral distinction.

“It’s for a practical purpose,” he said.

“There was a wee leak under the cabinet,” he said. “I’ve fixed the pipe, but the wood’s damp. This is ideal.”

Ideal.

A blow dryer is ideal for drying hair. It is not ideal for drying the underside of a cabinet, though Mr Gunn said this with the confidence of a man unveiling a national infrastructure plan.

I followed him to where the cupboard door was open, a towel lay on the floor, and my blow dryer was being aimed into the darkness as if we were rescuing miners.

“Just five minutes,” he said.

This is not the first time one of my belongings has been promoted into hard labour. Years ago, my pink measuring cups disappeared. Not the plain ones. Not the spare ones. The nice pink ones. The ones with the comfortable handles and the cheerful little shape that made baking feel joyful.

For weeks I looked for them. I looked in the drawers, the cupboards, the dishwasher, the pantry, and finally the shed, which is where household items go when they have been kidnapped.

At last, Mr Gunn confessed.

I required a chair.

They had been, apparently, the perfect size for mixing the right amount of cement.

He had meant to rinse them, naturally. Unfortunately, he forgot, and the cement, having no respect for good intentions, had gone ahead and set.

When he tried to remove it, he broke them.

Since then he has bought replacements, each one more offensive than the last. One set was the wrong shade of pink. One had dreadful handles. One was too modern, by which I mean it looked as though it had been designed by someone who had never measured flour or loved a grandmother.

Mr Gunn cannot understand this.

“A measuring cup is a measuring cup,” he says.

This from a man who owns thirty-seven screwdrivers and claims each one has a distinct purpose.

When we were first married, Mr Gunn had moved into our house first. There was a bed, and a kettle.

When I arrived, I moved into a tool shed with curtains. There were also toolboxes, tool rolls, tool bags, tool trays, and several loose arrangements of metal things that looked as if they had been removed from a submarine during wartime. He had spanners in sizes that could only be useful if one were repairing a bridge. He had clamps, files, levels, drills, bits for drills, boxes for bits for drills, and a thing with a handle that I was told not to touch in the same tone usually reserved for unexploded ordnance.

I had brought pictures, books, a vase, music boxes from childhood, a wind chime, a set of nested mixing bowls, a glass blue bird, and several items whose only duty was to make a room look nice.

Mr Gunn would pick one up and ask, “What does this do?”

“It sits there,” I would say.

“But what is it for?”

“It is for looking nice.”

This troubled him deeply. To Mr Gunn, an object must cut, tighten, scrape, drill, measure, fasten, heat, sand, or emit a noise suggestive of male achievement. If it does none of these things, he suspects it of moral weakness.

And yet now, after all these years of his tool empire growing, he has begun complaining about my kitchen tools.

“Do we need all these?” he asks, standing before a drawer with the innocence of a man who has forgotten he owns seven hammers.

“Yes,” I say.

“What does this one do?”

“That is a pastry brush.”

“And this?”

“A citrus zester.”

“And this?”

“That is for taking the stones out of cherries.”

“How often do we take stones out of cherries?”

“As often as I choose.”

He sighs, as though the kitchen drawer is a public spending scandal. But he does not see the order of it. Kitchen tools are not clutter. They are the difference between making do and making something properly. A good whisk, a proper peeler, a measuring spoon that fits the jar, a spatula with the right edge... these things matter. The right tool in a kitchen is no less noble than the right tool in a shed. It is simply cleaner and less likely to require a tetanus injection.

Still, I have learned discretion.

In a small box, tucked safely where no man would ever look because it is labelled “gift ribbon,” I keep my own wee set of pink tools. A hammer. A screwdriver. A tape measure. A little packet of picture hooks. A spirit level so small and pretty it would make Mr Gunn question the future of civilisation.

But these are for emergencies.

By emergencies, I mean occasions when a new piece of artwork enters the house and must be hung before Mr Gunn notices that another object with no practical function has been granted wall space.

I do not trouble him with this. Marriage requires kindness. Also timing.

If I ask him to hang a picture, there will be a consultation. He will stand back. He will measure. He will ask whether we need another picture. He will say the wall is fine as it is. He will mention plaster. He will fetch a

pencil, then a different pencil, then a level, then a drill, then say he needs a rawlplug, and by the time the picture is hung, I will have lost the will to live.

So I use my pink tools.

Quietly.

The picture goes up. The room improves. Mr Gunn passes through two days later and says, "Was that always there?"

"Yes," I say.

This is not, strictly speaking, a lie. It was always there in my mind, which is where most successful decorating begins.

Back in the kitchen, Mr Gunn switched off my blow dryer and looked very pleased with himself.

"There," he said. "Dry as a bone."

I took it from him and inspected the nozzle.

"It has not touched anything dirty," he said.

"Your definition of dirty and mine have never shared a parish," I replied.

He smiled, because he knew he was forgiven, though not acquitted. That is marriage: a long system of suspended sentences, with tea.

Later, when the house was quiet again and the evening breeze had returned to the sitting room, I looked at the wall where my newest little picture hangs. Mr Gunn has not noticed it yet. Or perhaps he has, and is wisely pretending not to. Either way, it hangs perfectly level. It has no function. It cuts nothing, tightens nothing, measures nothing, heats nothing, scrapes nothing, drills nothing, and cannot be used to mix cement.

It merely makes the room better.

And really, if that is not a purpose, I should like to know what is.

Modern Scot - Distinctly Scottish

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