head of the mounting criticism of inaction on land-related issues and was generally seen as a kicking into touch device prior to the referendum.

The rather puzzling choice of Dr Alison Elliot, a former Kirk moderator with no hinterland in the subject, to chair the Review Group didn't inspire confidence. Last May, an interim report notable only for its monumental blandness was greeted with universal dismissal. At that point, two of the three Review Group members resigned and the Scottish Government realised that it had a significant political own-goal in the making. The personnel was revamped, notably through the introduction of Lew Scott as a group member and Robin Callander as an advisor.

As a result, a final report has been achieved which bears absolutely no resemblance to the interim report, other than the presence of Dr Elliot who presumably agrees as much with the one as with the other. Whether they wanted it or not, the current Government now has a programme of action on its hands and, with it, a moral and political obligation to pick its low-hanging fruit without further delay.

Recommendations in the report which commented themselves to come sense and early action made the reform of Scotland’s compulsory purchase legislation with a public right of pre-emption: “a more integrated and ambitious” programme of land acquisition. The Scottish Government in that frame work to promote the continued growth of land-based employment and a more “solution-focused and less rak-averse” approach to EU state aid rules; the acquisition of land in the National Housing Corporation charged with acquiring sufficient land to meet house-building needs.

The important point to remember about all these is that they could have been done years ago, if the political will had existed. Instead, the ubiquitous mantra of “we don’t have the powers” has played its role. By that logic, the same is equally true of the proposed abolition of the District Salmon Fishery Boards, to be replaced by accountable bodies representing diverse interests, and the long-promised introduction of a Land Use Strategy. Equally, the farmers have never needed consultation, let alone one that delivers and empowers them. That is the truth that has now been laid bare and inescapable for this and future governments.

The recent report by the Scottish Affairs Committee of the House of Commons recommended the need for a proper Land Register as the essential building block for reform. That new report emphasises the need to identify small landowner-occupiers (SLOAs) and a small-land related progress towards that objective. The Scottish Affairs Committee also stressed the need for beneficial as well as nominal ownership to be revealed and, in all respects, the two reports are entirely complementary and should be treated as a single entity.

The interventionist nature of the Review Group proposals is confirmed by the observation that implementation of a Land Use Strategy process “will lead to reflection in the current approach to capacity building in rural landowners’ ownership and usage of their land.” This group recommends that the Government ensures that the necessary mechanisms are put in place for the successful implementation of the Land Use Strategy process outlined in the proposed report.

This proposal, if acted upon, strikes at the heart of the problem: many of the landowners are too small to be significant in their own right. The small landowner-occupiers (SLOAs) are, in effect, the communities in miniature. This proposal, if achieved, will help small communities to become more self-reliant and to better manage their lands.

The process of converting the existing doctor’s house in Tarbert into a “Health Hub” started this week.

The new health hub, which is expected to be open for business in March 2015, will increase dental provision in Harris with two dental surgeries to be established, one of which will be used as a training facility. There will also be an additional multi-purpose clinical area for visiting services, such as physiotherapy and podiatry, and there are plans for additional office space for community nursing teams.

The local GP practice, which is attached to the doctor’s house, will be renovated as part of the project so that the building becomes one multi-purpose, clinical hub. The house has been empty for a number of years. To enable the health board to provide additional services from the building, significant renovation was required to meet modern clinical standards.

The GP practice will remain open as usual on site, and temporary pedestrian access to the building will be established. The practice will temporarily relocate for a three-month period later this year, to enable additional work to take place.