**Date: 12 April 2022**

**Velcourt acquires stake in Oakbank as demand for ‘greener’ land management increases**

Velcourt Group Ltd has invested in Oakbank Game & Conservation Ltd and will own 50% of the company. The regenerative farming, habitat and woodland management consultancy and seed company, founded by Directors Ian Gould and Tim Furbank, is described as a very complementary fit by Velcourt’s Executive Chairman, James Townshend.

Mr Townshend said: “Climate change and the threat to biodiversity, the natural environment and agricultural productivity dictate the need for a fresh perspective when it comes to rural land use in the UK. The skills around natural capital and the environment within Oakbank are entirely complementary to Velcourt’s long established track record of profitable farm management and land use and will create synergies with the existing farm management, advisory and livestock side of our business. We very much look forward to working with the Oakbank team in developing our respective businesses to meet the needs and aspirations of our clients.”

Oakbank’s team of 17 staff advises clients across the UK about all things environmental, be it Countryside Stewardship, woodland creation, woodland management, habitat creation, regenerative agriculture or biodiversity net gain. In addition, their seed business and the Oakbank brand is at the forefront of developing mixes for game covers, stewardship, and cover crops for soil health. The Company holds a Royal Warrant of Appointment to Her Majesty The Queen as a Conservation Seed Supplier and Tim Furbank is on the judging panel for the prestigious Purdey Awards.

Ian Gould said: “When we started talking to Velcourt I felt that I could apply their mission to our own business, they believe in independence, efficiency and sound economic decision making. We have a history of working with individual Velcourt farm managers and they are clearly very good at what they do, and they deliver results. Their team also understands that farming has to change to produce economic food with as light a touch as possible, and that anything that farmers and land managers do has to deliver ‘good’ farming and to pay. Velcourt will give our team the scale and the scope to show what can be done in achieving this as farming wrestles with reducing its environmental footprint.”

Ian Gould has become increasingly involved in regenerative agriculture and has a keen interest in how plants can be used to solve problems with soils and agricultural pests, plus the potential for carbon capture. Ian’s interest in cover and companion crops has taken him to the USA, France and Holland, where he has developed a wide network and earned a very credible reputation in his field of expertise.

Velcourt Ltd manages 58,000 ha for a variety of clients on different arrangements across the UK. The business turnover is £29.2m and it employs 120 people. Velcourt, which was founded in 1967, is a cross-sector farming company that provides working capital and shares in the business risk as well as farm management services, agronomy, and livestock advice. In addition, Velcourt undertakes highly regarded, and applied, research and development to underpin its advice and farm management systems. People are the central pivot for the business and recruitment standards are rigorous and aim to produce the best agricultural practitioners in the industry through its unique management training scheme.

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**Notes to Editors**

**About Oakbank Game & Conservation Ltd**

Oakbank Game & Conservation Ltd was founded in 2004 by Tim Furbank and Ian Gould. The regenerative farming, habitat and woodland management consultancy and seed company. Is based in Ellington in Cambridgeshire and operates nationwide in the UK. Oakbank employs 17 staff and holds the Royal Warrant as Conservation Seed Supplier to Her Majesty the Queen. Oakbank works with many external organisations, including LEAF; GWCT; CLA; RSPB; The Country Food Trust; The Princes Countryside Fund and The Nature Friendly Farming Network. Oakbank is committed to developing our staff so they can perform their roles to the best of their ability.  Many hold qualifications such as the BASIS BETA Conservation Management Award. Oakbank runs a number of Farmer Clusters and Facilitated Groups to encourage knowledge transfer and peer to peer learning

**About Velcourt**

Velcourt Group Ltd is a farming company based in the UK that manages, invests in, and advises on farms throughout the UK; and has worked across Europe. Formed in1967 Velcourt is retained by landowners, tenants, working farmers and institutional investors. Velcourt manages approx. 58,000 ha in the UK on a wide range of farming agreements and funds rural businesses to provide the best physical and financial result, consistent with the clients’ objectives. Practices employed meet the stringent requirements of today’s consumer in terms of the environment, animal welfare and food safety. It is a cross sector farming company managing a wide range of farms and businesses in the arable, dairy and horticulture industry with a multi-skilled team of 56 farm managers and 8 specialist advisors.

Velcourt’s focus is on the delivery of long term improved physical and financial performance through:

* commitment to the development and use of best practice
* training and development of all employees
* a rigorous approach to risk management
* robust financial reporting systems
* attention to detail at every level of the business
* an overall objective of achieving excellence in all areas
* investment in R&D, new technology and farming systems
* a drive to improve the underlying land asset by enhancing productivity and biodiversity

Although Velcourt established itself in the UK, the company’s farming and farm management activities have extended to Europe. Its experience in terms of enterprise management includes all temperate crops, fruit, vegetables, and a range of livestock enterprises. Velcourt is unique in having a dedicated Research and Development department where applied research is carried out on behalf of all the major agrochemical and fertiliser manufacturers, seed breeders, DEFRA, AHDB and a number or public and collaborative research initiatives.