



Allotments in Scotland

Guidance Notes for Scottish Councils

Prepared by COSLA with the support of City of Edinburgh Council

FOREWORD

"Allotments are increasingly popular. Indeed a recent survey suggests 5500 plots within nearly 250 allotment sites across Scotland. I believe that councils should build on this, and, by so doing, promote and support sustainability and healthy living. For too long allotments have fallen into disuse or have been permanently lost to developers, and I

hope that this document will help councils consider how protecting and promoting allotments can benefit their communities for years to come.

"Much hard work has been done to produce what I hope readers will agree is a useful guidance note. This work began in response to a petition, following which the Local Government Committee of the Scottish Parliament took evidence from a range of parties in 2000 and 2001 and produced a report in 2003 making a number of recommendations, including the publication of best practice guidelines by COSLA, in conjunction with the then Scottish Executive. It has been a long task involving consultation with many different people, and I hope that the results are worth waiting for.



"I am delighted that COSLA's Regeneration and Sustainable Development Executive Group endorsed this guidance and asked that it be distributed to all councils. I trust that it will complement the excellent guidance already prepared by a number of councils.

"On behalf of that Group, I would record my particular thanks to Keith Logie (City of Edinburgh Council), Hannah Reeve (formerly of COSLA), and also the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, for their work in preparing the guidance."

Councillor Alison Hay, COSLA Regeneration and Sustainable Development Spokesperson

Contents

The Value of Allotments	3
Environmental Benefits	3
Social Benefits	4
Community Benefits	!
The Role of Councils and Practical Advice Legislative Background	6
Provision and Management of Sites	6
Protection and Promotion of Sites	8
Case Studies	9
Useful Contacts, References and Documents	12

THE VALUE OF ALLOTMENTS

Allotments - defined as a collection of rented plots of lands usually for the growing of fruit and vegetables - were traditionally established to enable families to grow their own food to supplement their diets. Unsurprisingly, allotment provision significantly expanded during and between the two World Wars and up to the 1950s.

After a period of decline, allotments are now increasing in popularity again, with some councils finding that demand is outstripping supply. This growth in popularity can be attributed to an increasing awareness of, and demand for, organic produce and sustainable food sources. Consumers are increasingly concerned with the quality and provenance of the food that they buy, and allotment gardening provides them with the ultimate control over the conditions in which food is grown.

However, the benefits of allotment gardening are not confined to the individual gardener, and councils should be aware that the associated environmental and social effects can extend into the community, potentially supporting a council's efforts towards sustainable development.



Environmental Benefits

Biodiversity

Allotments have a significant role to play in the protection and promotion of biodiversity. Many plants grown in allotments, such as fruit trees and bushes, depend on insects to pollinate them in order for there to be good crops. This, combined with a trend toward organic gardening, means that allotments not only provide the open space needed, but gardening practices often actively encourage biodiversity. This is particularly valuable in built up areas where there may otherwise be an absence of cultivated green space. For further detail, Glasgow City Council has recently published a valuable guide to allotments and biodiversity in association with the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (see reference at back).

Sustainability

Allotments contribute to sustainability in a number of ways. Most obviously, they help promote composting, and can be managed in ways that demonstrate sustainable practices like rainwater collection, and use of green technologies such as toilets that use composting in place of traditional plumbing. They also promote the local production of food, so that transport costs and emissions are reduced - thus contributing towards the commitments made by all 32 Scottish councils under Scotland's Climate Change Declaration and towards emissions' reduction targets set out in the UK Climate Change Bill (similar targets will be included in the upcoming Scottish Climate Change Bill).

Social Benefits

Healthy Living

The economic and social problems facing Scotland as a result of the physical inactivity of the population are well documented, and poor diet contributes further to the ill health of the nation. Allotment gardening provides the opportunity for a year-round healthy lifestyle which is active, socially inclusive and which reflects the ideals of sustainability and well-being. Unlike some other leisure activities, it provides not only exercise which improves cardio-vascular fitness, but also promotes mental health and well-being through connections with nature, and decreased isolation through increased social connections and lifelong learning opportunities. In addition, the fresh fruit and vegetables grown encourage healthy living.



While the demographic of allotment gardens will undoubtedly change with the influx of more, younger, health and environmentally conscious people, allotment gardening continues to be dominated by older people. This is a part of society for whom it is key that they take part in physical activity on a regular basis, and the exercise that allotment gardening provides can help keep our older people active for longer, reducing the chances that they will need to be cared for, which is ultimately a burden that local authorities and other public agencies will have to shoulder.

Clearly, the existence of allotments will impact directly on the health of the individuals involved in the physical gardening of them, and on those whose diets are improved as a result of the produce. In this respect it could be argued that the health improvement benefits are localised. However, it also contributes towards a culture of health and wellbeing, which can help increase others' interest and awareness of healthy living activities.

Social Interaction

For those who tend allotments, sites provide a community of people to interact with. While this benefits everyone on a site, it can be particularly important for individuals who might otherwise be isolated, such as older people, the unemployed, or those with mental ill health.

Combining the social interaction with the therapeutic aspects of gardening, communal gardens and allotments have been used to help asylum seekers integrate into their new environment and communities.

Several allotments locations in Scotland have links with schools and other bodies, further increasing interaction opportunities.

Community Benefits

<u>Useful Green Space</u>

Allotments create good quality, attractive green spaces within cities and towns, providing a habitat for wildlife and a buffer zone for development. They can be part of, or central to, a larger regeneration initiative, contributing to community safety and attracting people out of their houses and into the area. Allotments can also potentially be community assets and encourage social enterprise, with surplus fruit and vegetables being sold in the local community, say as part of a healthy living project or for the benefit of the community itself. There is also the possibility of them being used as part of schemes to encourage older people out of their homes or to educate children in the benefits of gardening.



ROLE OF COUNCILS AND SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

Legislative Background

The powers and obligations vested in a council are to be found in the Allotments (Scotland) Acts of 1892, 1922 and 1950 and the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919.

Councils are required to:

- Consider any representations made by local residents to the effect that a council needs to take action in terms of the Allotments (Scotland) Act 1892.
- Acquire any suitable land that may be available to be let as allotments to local residents where either through representations by the public or through other means a council concludes there is a demand for allotments. Such land may be within or outwith the council's boundary.
- Make the allotment regulations known by such means as it thinks fit, and provide to any local resident, on demand, a free copy of the regulations.
- Keep a register available for public inspection showing the details of (i) the tenancy acreage and rent of each allotment, and (ii) any unlet allotments.
- Provide an annual statement of accounts in respect of the council's allotment provision.

Councils have powers to:

- Acquire land through purchase or lease and to do so by agreement or through compulsory measure.
- Improve the land acquired for allotments. This may be by enclosing the land, draining it, dividing it into allotments, or creating approaches or roads.
- Make regulations as they consider appropriate to regulate the letting of allotments.
 This covers matters such as eligibility, size of allotments, conditions as to how they
 may be cultivated, rent, and period of notice. Such regulations require to be put to
 public consultation and then to Scottish Ministers for confirmation.

Councils should also give consideration to using other legislative tools such as the Power to Advance Well-being as a means to furthering allotment provision.

Provision and management of sites

The role of each council as a provider of allotments may vary considerably.

Some manage and run their allotments centrally. Either a designated allotments officer is responsible for the tasks of maintaining the sites, letting plots, charging rentals and operating waiting lists, or more commonly, council staff from one or more departments share these tasks.

Other councils devolve management to the allotment holders in the form of site associations, and this devolvement can be either partial, or, more-or-less, total. Some operate a mix of centrally run and devolved sites and there are advantages to both approaches.

Centralised running can help to maintain allotments as a priority within a council and may help with securing budgets for investment and repairs. It should also ensure that plotholders can be assured of fair and equitable treatment.

Devolved management tends to encourage plotholders to be more self-sufficient, increases their sense of ownership, and allows them to be creative in seeking funding.



It is unlikely that many councils will have sufficient allotment sites to justify having a full-time allotments officer and, if a council has just one or very few sites, the devolved management approach may be more appropriate. Councils should however seek to ensure that site associations are properly constituted and that the terms of their constitutions ensure a fair, objective and non-discriminatory approach.

Whichever approach to site management is adopted, councils should ensure that an officer is clearly identified as having responsibility for allotments, and is the clear point of contact for any queries about them. This will allow councils to take a consistent approach to any queries, and will enable them to build up a picture of the demand for allotments and the issues that local communities raise in relation to them.

Good Practice:

Councils are encouraged to establish a clear point of contact for all queries relating to allotments. Requests for allotments should be dealt with in a clear and transparent manner.

Not all councils have allotments and, of those that do, demand for plots varies. Generally speaking, there is greater demand for allotments in urban as opposed to rural areas. However, in general, waiting lists for council plots are small or non-existent except in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The problem tends to be more lack of demand rather than insufficient provision.

Councils are expected to keep a record of the sites they own and manage. However, identifying all of the privately owned sites which are presently under cultivation, or which have recently been in operation as allotments, is not essential. In some plans and open space audits, councils have grouped allotments in with other features such as cemeteries. As a result, the overall level of provision is unclear.

Good Practice:

Councils are encouraged to assess accurately the number of plots within their area and the demand for them.

When preparing local plans or open space audits, councils should consider counting allotments separately from other forms of green space.

Protection and promotion of sites

It is accepted that there are inevitable resource and prioritisation issues when a council is providing allotment sites, particularly when creating new sites. Whilst many councils may have parcels of surplus land that could be turned over to cultivation, suitably located land may be of limited availability and the cost of acquisition prohibitive. However, a council might act as enabler by promoting the development of a group of aspirant allotment growers and facilitating their lease of a privately owned or surplus plot of land, which could be wholly managed by the plotholders themselves. This model operates successfully in some council areas.

Councils may also face pressure to sell off council owned sites for development, or to allow private sites to be built on. Particularly in urban areas where allotments may occupy prime locations, such pressure may be hard to resist in the face of potentially significant financial returns. However, councils should take into account the benefits provided by allotments, how well they are being used, and the likely permanent loss of this amenity if development takes place.

There is limited evidence of Scottish councils undertaking allotment gardening promotion campaigns, either to raise its profile or to stimulate demand. In areas where demand is high, it is understandable that councils should not wish to raise expectations which are then unachievable. However, the response of a council to under-use of a sports centre or library would naturally be to undertake promotion of the service, and it seems there is no reason why this should not apply to allotments.

Linking allotment provision explicitly to local community plans and regeneration outcomes could provide one route not only to securing the necessary funding for such promotional activity, but also to raising allotments' profile as a key component of local healthy living and community well-being activities.

Good Practice:

Councils should undertake the promotion of underused sites and take steps to promote allotment gardening as part of sustainability and healthy living initiatives.

Councils must include allotment sites, both private and council owned, in green and open space plans. During the planning applications' process this can help councils determine where there is an established site. Some councils have developed a policy of refusing applications to build on allotment sites unless a new alternative site can be provided.

Good Practice:

An 'early warning scheme' should be established to alert officers with responsibility for allotments as to any planning application that might impact on allotment sites.

CASE STUDIES

Bridgend Allotments, Edinburgh

A new allotment site at Craigmillar Country Park in south-east Edinburgh was opened in March 2006. This site is intended to be a model of good practice in allotment development and operation. Its objectives were laid out in the Edinburgh Allotment Strategy 2002 and it has a steering group representing various stakeholders and areas of expertise. It has a number of features that distinguish it from other sites:

- 60% of the plots have been reserved for allocation to people living locally within the Social Inclusion Partnership areas of south and south-east Edinburgh. As demand is currently low within these areas, an awareness-raising campaign was run to generate interest.
- Plotholders who may be new to gardening will be supported through demonstration areas and advice provided on site by partner organisations.
- The site is the base for an innovative social referral project that will form links with GP
 practices and health organisations in Craigmillar to offer gardening as therapy. This is
 being run in partnership with Lothian NHS Trust. Additionally, the site includes areas
 where raised beds can be custom built for disabled gardeners and there are optional
 half plots.
- Sustainability is key to the design and operation of the site. It features rainwater
 collection systems that will be used to water plots instead of treated mains supply, and
 composting toilets that do not require sewerage connections.
- Biodiversity has been designed as a fundamental objective. Native trees and shrubs are used within the site and also planted externally to screen and protect it.
- The site was constructed and will operate using only organic cultivation techniques.

Dundee City Council

Some sites in Dundee are self managed and have to generate their own income to pay for rent, utilities, improvements, and so on. However, assistance has been provided by the City Council through help with applications for funding and free supply of industrial skips to remove large rubbish. In addition, Dundee City Council promotes gardening by sitting in with the various horticultural societies and allotment associations to help with the organisation of Scotland's biggest annual flower show.



Glasgow City Council

Like Edinburgh, Glasgow has a designated allotments officer who assists in the promotion of allotments and supports the acquisition of additional funds for maintenance of sites. This focus has helped to develop work in the following areas:

Partnership working

Allotment users are encouraged to engage with the Council and other allotment associations through the Glasgow Allotments Forum (GAF), which was set up by the Council with assistance from the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society. The Forum brings together representatives from across Glasgow, enabling learning and support, and the Council is currently developing a strategy for allotments in consultation with GAF. Another partnership project involved Scottish Natural Heritage and resulted in the production of a Biodiversity booklet. An Edinburgh version has now also been published.

There has also been partnership working to provide support for sites affected by contaminated land issues. The Parks Manager convened a committee with the allotments officer, representatives from Parks, Legal Services, Community Health and Environmental Protection Services together with representatives from the affected sites and GAF, to consider the data and recommendations on sites that had been identified at risk.

Strategic Management

Steps are being taken to improve the information Glasgow holds about sites, and the allotments officer is visiting sites and collating maps and information about their size, use and facilities. In addition strategic focus is being given to allotments, with a report on the future development and enhancement for allotments being contained within the Council's Strategic Best Value Review and Implementation Plan for Parks and Open Spaces.

Promotion of Gardening

Glasgow City Council supports various allotments events, large and small. Glasgow also administers and judges the St Mungo prize, which recognises examples of good gardening practice, and supports projects on individual sites, such as forging links with local schools and building an accessible plot.

The Holmlea Gardens group used a Communities Scotland SCARF grant to undertake research looking at how non-users could be encouraged to take up gardening and this resulted in plans for a hybrid allotment/community garden for the wider community.

Barlornock Community Allotments and Barlornock Primary School have created a joint project (BUG), which has been part-funded by Glasgow City Council's Local Action Fund with additional contributions from Strathclyde Police, Kelvin Clyde Greenspace, and donations of equipment from a number of commercial enterprises. The BUG Project has brought environmental science to life and involves the primary school in a project that fosters community pride. So far over 350 children have been involved in the planting of a wide range of vegetables and, through this involvement, have learned how the weather affects food production and a number of other related environmental issues.

Other Good Practice ideas

Other councils have provided support to allotments in a variety of ways:

- While not an allotment, in Aberdeen, Healthy Roots is transforming a derelict allotment site into a community garden for people with physical disabilities and mental health problems.
- **Stirling Council** provided support with constitutional issues during the drafting of site and lease agreements for a refurbished site.

- **Angus Council** worked with plot holders in Arbroath on a scheme which sacrificed some plots but allowed the redevelopment of others.
- East Lothian Council saves on landfill costs and provides useful compost material by delivering all leaves collected in the area to Musselburgh allotments.

Other forms of communal gardening

Allotment sites along traditional lines are not the only option. Other possibilities include growing projects within school grounds – this fits well with curricular educational material and is already in progress in many areas. The "Grounds for Learning Project" is one example of this type of project (http://www.gflscotland.org.uk/).

Another option is to include provision for communal gardening in new housing developments.



Further Information

Below you will find useful contacts and links to further information. Another good source of information is other councils who already have successful allotment schemes. Many have detailed, good quality information on allotment gardening in their area on the council website. Contact the council to find out who manages the scheme and ask them if it is possible to visit them to find out more about what has worked for them and some of the issues they have faced. Seeing how a best practice example works on the ground and having the opportunity to ask specific questions can save time and money for your council and provide more information than any document.

As with any area of government policy, things will change quickly. Council officers and others are advised to keep up to date with developments in relevant Government guidance and legislation as it will not be possible to update this guidance to match the speed of progress in this area.

September 2007

USEFUL CONTACTS

Allotment Regeneration Initiative - http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities – http://www.cosla.gov.uk

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens - http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/

HDRA (Henry Doubleday Research Organisation) - http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/

National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners - http://www.nsalg.org.uk/

Soil Association Scotland - http://www.soilassociationscotland.org/

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society - http://www.sags.org.uk/

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy - http://www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/

Scottish Government - http://www.scotland.gov.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage - http://www.snh.org.uk/

THRIVE (Horticultural therapy) - http://www.thrive.org.uk/

REFERENCES AND USEFUL DOCUMENTS

Scottish Parliament – <u>Local Government Committee 4th Report 2003; Report on Inquiry into Allotments</u>

Scottish Parliament - Allotments; Research Note, November 2000

House of Commons – <u>Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs</u> Fifth Report 1998: The Future for Allotments

Local Government Association - <u>A new future for Allotments – an Advocacy Document for</u> Sustainable Living, October 2000

City of Edinburgh Council - <u>Cultivating Communities - An Allotment Strategy for the City of Edinburgh, 2002</u>

Glasgow City Council - Biodiversity and Allotments - http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/8EB1E19B-2314-476B-82AF-9CA0F96038F7/0/BiodiversityBookwithcover1b.pdf

Holmlea Gardens - http://www.scdc.org.uk/scarf/past-projects/environment-recreation/holmlea-gardens-association/?sess scdc=c50e8462834f7df833ba18a572804e60

DETR, Greater London Authority, LGA and Shell Better Britain Campaign - Growing in the Community – a good practice guide for the management of allotments, 2001

Garden for life: research of support needs for groups undertaking community gardening projects, 2002 (http://www.snh.org.uk/about/initiatives/g4l/)

PICTURES

Courtesy of Hannah Reeve, Ernie Watt, Barbara De La Rue and the City of Edinburgh Council.