

Report on the present state of allotments provision in Glasgow and the implementation of the Allotment Inquiry recommendations:

Our experience in answering this question relates to:

- The publication of Glasgow's Food Growing Strategy Action Plan Report and the Allotments Report both published in March 2023;
- Participation in the Food Growers' Forum which was set up in June 2021 under the Action Plan*.
- A survey conducted by GAF re: services to sites which was returned by 15 of the GCC's 22 allotment sites.
- A short-term working group set up by GAF to explore issues relating to the establishment of a central waiting list.
- A case study from The People's Plot

* The remit of the Forum was to monitor and assist in the implementation of the Food Growing Strategy. Membership was by open invitation to all allotment associations, community gardens, and organisations involved in the Glasgow's Community Food Network

• Increase leadership/oversight from Scottish Government, including data collection

Barriers to data collection and analysis:

- a) The lack of a definition of the lower size limit for an allotment (i.e. what distinguishes an allotment plot from a raised bed) means that reports to the Council list numbers of plots where a high proportion of those plots are of at most 4/5 square metres in extent which is insufficient for an allotment garden and not what individuals sign up for when they join an allotment waiting list.
- b) The lack of a central waiting list in order to assess demand according to the measure adopted by the 2015 Act. (Reports used data known to be inaccurate)
- c) Inaccuracies concerning what is and what is not a local authority allotment site by the definition of the Act i.e. private sites listed as a GCC sites. (e.g. Sir John Stirling Maxwell) .
- d) The listing of community gardens, which offer small raised beds to members as allotment sites e.g. Greyfriars Gardens and Centurion Way.
- e) Assigning numbers of plots to some sites which the Associations feel are significantly over what they actually have e.g. Mansewood 109 - Chair says they have 68, Beechwood 52 plots - Secretary says they have 39.
- f) Use of inaccurate data in a way that conveys a narrative of greater progress in the provision of new allotments than is in fact the case. (For instance 11 out of 32 entries in a table giving the data specified by the Act in the Allotment Report for Glasgow are inaccurate. The total number of plots on GCC leased sites, given as 1657, is thus a significant overestimate of what is actually available.
- g) No reporting of what progress is being made in getting access to land for growing projects.
- h) No evaluation of processes for access to land, joining a waiting list, or securing a land lease on VDL is touched upon although would-be allotmenters are recommended on the Council's website to band together and use the asset transfer process to establish a lease.

• Create national partnership forum

We are not aware of any reports on the proceedings/outcomes of the Tri-partite group or any proposals for a National Partnership Forum.

• Better monitoring and management of waiting lists by local authorities

GCC has twice asked Associations on GCC sites to provide data on an Excel spreadsheet listing: *title; forename; surname; address; postcode; email address; phone 1; phone 2; date applied and notes*. Not all sites have replied. The waiting lists held by allotment associations are of very variable quality – some are seldom reviewed or updated.

An app to support a centralised waiting list has been promised since 2019 but has not been produced as yet nor are officers able to tell us when it will be produced.

As far as we know there has been no involvement of allotment associations in any discussion of how a central waiting list might operate other than the short-term working group convened by GAF on this topic in 2022.

The requirement: *“The local authority must give written notice to a person who made a request under subsection (1) confirming receipt of the request before the expiry of the period of 14 days beginning with the date on which the request is received by the authority.”* Is a complete dead letter at the minute.

• **Closer working relationship between local officers and planning departments**

Glasgow’s Neighbourhoods, Regeneration and Sustainability Department deals with both Food Growing and Planning and therefore this linkage is intra-departmental rather than interdepartmental. In Glasgow it also involves an “arms-length” organisation called People Make Glasgow Communities which is linked to NRS.

The detailed case study (over 3 years) that we have from The People’s Plot, a group trying to procure land for an allotment site, shows that there are considerable problems of basic communication within the local authority. The process for identifying and seeking permission to use/lease a site is divided across different silos in NRS which do not appear to communicate well with each other as exemplified by inaccuracies in relation to basic data about sites e.g. sites listed as vacant but already in use etc. For this group getting accurate and timeous information from the various different groups of officers and agencies and attempting to clarify the process for making an application has been tortuous and frustrating.

The website support for groups seeking land for allotments is extremely difficult to navigate e.g. a Story Board map has been produced that is overly complex and poorly explained (It was not, so far as we know, designed with any involvement of likely end users.)_The information for individuals seeking a plot is just a contact list for existing sites. There is no information about the duty of the local authority to provide plots for individuals or any time scale or proposals for new sites. No links to planning and new developments.

There are opportunities for new plots in the public realm but the experience at Gartnavel Royal Hospital which has 9 ‘open beds’, has just created 9 more and has the land for many more is that there has been no collaboration between the Council and the Health Board.

• **Funding to sustain existing growing projects**

The Let’s Grow Together Fund (£50k per annum) has been used to distribute grants of up to 5K to applicants on two occasions. In the first year 14 grants were made 3 of which were for the restoration of three community allotment plots (one at Lambhill, 1 at Pollokshaws, Growing 21, and 1 at South Western allotments, the other successful applications were all for raised beds or planters. No support was given to an allotment association.

The Let’s Grow Together Fund is listed in the food growing strategy action plan as assisting the development of new growing projects but in fact successful (and unsuccessful) applications have been almost exclusively made by previously established community gardens or on community plots on established allotment sites.

A recent GAF survey covering 15 of the 22 allotment associations based on GCC sites indicated a generally poor level of support from the authority and a particular concern with the lack of communication. Requests

and queries raised by Association Committee seldom received any response. Respondents felt that support to allotments had declined markedly in the last decade or so.

• **Local authorities meeting requirements for preparing Food Growing Strategies**

Glasgow has published a Food Growing Strategy and in 2021 it produced a Food Growing Strategy Action Plan listing 16 actions. There has been progress in supporting and extending some community gardens. The new allotment site at Drumchapel and extensions at Mansewood and Croftburn have added to the number of half plots available for people wanting allotments.

However, progress in bringing new land into cultivation, other than by direct involvement of the authority in setting up a project, has not progressed. An FOI has established that there is not enough funding available for the Authority to be able to meet the demand for allotments by being directly involved in the practicalities of setting up sites. (capacity roughly 1 site of 36 half plots every 2/3 years)

Progress in getting access to land for growing purposes by actors other than the authority seems to have been negligible. Current mechanisms under the 2015 Act for asset transfer are not working – even largish projects like the one for the use of Ruchill golf course are as enmeshed in bureaucracy and muddle between official agents as is the case with the small group cited above under bullet point 4.

Ruchill Golf course is an area of 46 acres for which People Make Glasgow Communities are considering applications. It is a beautiful site with no history of industrialisation and would be ideal for an urban farm, allotment, orchards etc. However, the development of the plan has been left to a very small group of grant funded organisations whose staff (on temporary contracts) are expected to consult, design and make a business plan. There has been no input to support this complex process from the Council

• **Allotments/food growing is being represented in wider strategies**

Apart from the Food Growing Strategy, Glasgow Food Plan and the land for allotments shown in the Open Space maps, we have found no evidence of allotments being represented in wider Council strategies other than the occasional sentence or referral to the Food Growing Strategy. .

In planning applications land for allotments and growing is in the ‘demand led’ category rather than ‘publicly useable spaces’ (e.g. play parks, amenity spaces and communal private gardens). It is difficult to see how demand for allotments could be shown in new developments where people have not yet bought their homes and where the demography of the neighbourhood will undergo significant changes.

The Glasgow Strategic Plan simply commits to “*Deliver the Food Growing Strategy and increase the number of allotments and community growing spaces across the city*”. But no numbers or timescale.

Recommendations

Improving the Accuracy and Effectiveness of Reporting

The Scottish Government has an option to review the Act and, for example, add to the allotment Report 121 (r) *such other information as may be prescribed*.

- (i) Widen requirements Allotment Report to report on the ‘reasonable steps’ that have been taken as recommended in Guidance. Include information about areas of land for allotments in local development and place plans.
- (ii) Minimum size allotments to clarify distinction between a plot that would satisfy the purpose of the act to provide a patch of land that is of sufficient size to grow vegetable, fruit and flowers. Amend 109 (3) *The person making the request must, if the area of the allotment sought is less than 250 square metres, specify the area in the request. Only areas requested larger than 25 square metres are considered as a request for, or an offer of, an allotment.*

- (iii) Clarify difference between organisations wanting land under the Asset transfer section and those persons (individuals) who just want a plot on an allotment site that it is the duty of the local authority to provide.
- (iv) 111 (2) *The list may be established and maintained by the local authority in such form as the authority thinks fit* - Consult with allotment associations and other relevant groups to provide a clear, transparent way of establishing and maintaining the waiting lists.
- (v) Clarify that allotments reports should be published on the authority's website in a place which is clearly devoted to food growing matters not tucked away in committee papers. In addition notification should be sent to all plot-holders and those on waiting lists saying when and where the report is available.
- (vi) Transparency with reports of cross department meetings to be easily available to the public.
- (vii) Systems analysis of what information is needed at what level - at the moment all information is contained on digi-maps but these are not easily accessible or usable by the general public.
- (viii) Clarification of process including consultations on allotments rules and regulations, and how these can be carried out in a participative manner.

Creating a national partnership forum

Top priority should be given to the sharing of good practice among local authorities and local associations. If regional bodies such as FEDAGA and GAF were supported in regions across Scotland then there would be a sound base of for the sharing of information and skills for the benefit of local communities. The use of a variety of models for providing access to land for growing including allotments in urban areas. More creativity about how community growing models become part of the public realm in urban settings once again.

Better monitoring and management of waiting lists by local authorities

To monitor and encourage demand, application to the waiting lists must be based on transparent, participative information. There should be good Council websites with links to and input from community councils and anchor organisations.

Local Development and Place Plans

The Guidance states: *local authorities have powers under section 70 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (the 1973 Act") to acquire land (by agreement) for the purposes of the benefit, improvement or development of their areas³. Section 73 of the 1973 Act enables a local authority to appropriate, for the purpose of any functions, land already vested in them for the purpose of any other function.*

Any Local Development Plans should highlight this option and consider whether it is suitable or if remediation is required.

Allotments and growing spaces should be central to decisions on planning applications as a matter of course and not 'demand led'.

Funding to sustain existing growing projects

- * Agreement is needed between local authority and allotment associations on responsibilities and support. The Survey showed that associations undertake the immediate management but need support for capital works such as paths and disabled access should come within the Council budget.
- * Transparency on where allotment rents are spent in Allotment Report
- * The local authority Budget statements about funding for allotments should include equivalent contributions from allotment association members.

Local authorities meeting requirements for preparing Food Growing Strategies

Once prepared it is the actions, evaluation and monitoring that is essential. FGS should be followed up with an action plan and then yearly report to the relevant Council committee again with public notification. (5 years in legislation). Local authorities cannot meet the requirements for Food Growing without adequate funding. Growing must be given the same priority in health and place policies with cross organisational co-operation as happens with Sports.

Allotments/food growing being represented in wider strategies

The Guidance section 3.7 on reasonable steps to meet demand

Officers responsible for allotments should consult with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders when carrying out their analysis of demand for the local authority area. Such stakeholders should include, as appropriate, the following: planners, community development and health improvers, senior elected members, senior managers from relevant public services, members of the business community and the third sector, allotment associations, local grow-your-own groups and community gardens.

The membership and reports of these consultations and monitoring forums should be on website.

Jenny Reeves Chair Glasgow Allotments Forum

Judy Wilkinson Member Glasgow Allotments Forum