

**SAGS Annual Conference
21st June 2008 Dunblane**

Report from Nairn

1. Introduction: I am Chairman of Nairn Allotment Society and Treasurer/Councillor of Nairn Suburban Community Council.

At last years Scottish Community Councils AGM in Holyrood, Aileen Campbell and Robin Harper spoke on the Panel about the new Planning Procedures and the role that Community Councils will play in influencing developers to include community facilities (e.g. allotments) where there is a demand.

2. Nairn Allotment Society: After a long period of determined negotiation, we have succeeded in reaching our legal agreement with Highland Council to take over all devolved management of our Nairn Sandown Allotment Area on a five year renewable lease. The remainder of this 90 acre common good land, all of it farm land, is the subject of a current planning application by a private developer for housing, business park and a wetland/parkland.

3. Rental: Our rental has been set by the District Valuer, as an independent artiter at £500 per annum (fixed for each of the five years) We have 18 plots each 12 square poles (360 square yards) and we have subdivided four of them.

4. Water Rates: We have 2 stand pipes and now pay water rates separately. The provided is 'Business Stream' (for Scottish Water) and they handle all the large business users including the Councils. Hence we are paying business water rates of £274 (2x£127 /standpipe/trough) per annum and we cannot afford it. I have been in contact with 'Business Stream' and they suggest that there are criteria for non-business and non-domestic users such as Allotment Societies for total exemption from water rates. I am following this up.

5. Statutory Records: We maintain the statutory tenants list and the waiting list. Presently there are 23 on the waiting list and we update them annually on progress in allocating plots and their position on the list.

6. Search for additional plots: In common with many more cities, towns, villages and societies we need more plots. There are several large housing developments planned between Inverness and Nairn. Through Community Councils we can speak to all the main housing developers at the consultation stage of the outline planning applications.

There are also opportunities to rent land from the churches - glebe land. The District Forest Managers of Forestry Commission Scotland are keen to co-operate with Communities for projects such as allotments Within their estate they have a significant number of small holdings on accessible good land. Fort Williams Lochaber Forest District is an example of collaboration.

7. Integration of Local Community Groups: In our allotment area we have allocated one plot to the health and happiness group for adults with learning difficulties. This was BBC1's Beechgrove Gardens Community garden project in the

summer of 2007. Part of the funding for this project led to provision of a compost toilet.

A second area has been allocated to Nairn Academy for their Rural Skills Module students. They have designed their section, grown on bedding plants, developed horticultural skills and planted up vegetables and flowering plants.

A third group Junior World playgroup take part in sowing seeds, planting, weeding and harvesting crops.

A fourth group Rosebank primary School have set up an eco-school garden in the school property and through our Allotment Society receive lectures and practical help with their science course.

8. Shows and Trophies: A number of our plot-holders are keen on showing vegetables, fruit and flowers. To promote allotments our local Nairnshire Agricultural Show Committee created a new Allotment Section and donated a trophy and prizes. Plot-holders can also enter all 'open' sections.

Additionally the previous Nairn Provost donated a trophy for the best allotment to be judged annually.\

Plot-holders also enter local flower/horticultural shows. There is a keen spirit of competitiveness amongst plot-holders.

9. Liaison with and news from other groups: We are constantly being contacted by other budding allotment groups and individuals. Alness now has a new Allotment Site and Group with over 26 plots. They have worked with Highland Council and utilised several funding sources.

Keen groups in the making are looking for sites in Inverness, Aviemore, Grantown - on-Spey, Forres and Elgin. They have formally notified their Councils. Beauly in Rossshire has a long-standing allotment site on Lovat estate land.

Our 'movement' is growing and it is vocal. SAGS has an important co-ordinating role to play.

Dick Youngson
June 2008