

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society
REPORT to the Glasgow Allotments Forum NOVEMBER 2006

Introduction: The question that always seems to arise at GAF meetings is 'why should we join SAGS?'. This report out-lines SAGS activities and contribution to official reports over the past year and the relevance to the allotments movement.

Most plot-holders relate to their own site, several of which are self-managed with strong communities. GAF brings together all the sites in Glasgow, private and Council in a network of mutual interest and support, deals with the Council and organises visits and talks about gardening. SAGS is the overarching body for Scotland, bringing together representatives from the federations in Edinburgh, Dundee, Edinburgh and individual sites and groups.

We believe that everyone should have the right to garden and that allotment gardening enriches the local environment and community. We are continually learning about climate change and environmental degradation – plot-holders grow their own food, reduce the environmental foot-print, and spend much of their time digging and delving. Allotments reduce pollution (less road travel), encourage the birds and butterflies, keep the community healthy with diet and exercise and encourage friendships across the plots. However only a privileged few can participate in these activities – in Glasgow, for some sites it takes 7 years to get a plot and there are 900 people on the waiting list in Edinburgh. Many local authorities do not have sites – for example in Dunoon where it is estimated that 25% of the population do not have access to gardening opportunities, Argyll and Bute Council cannot find land for 35 people who want an allotment.

So what has SAGS done in the last year to address these problems and stir the government and local authorities into action?

WEBSITE: Barbara De La Rue from Kelvinside became web-master in January and has done a fantastic job in re-vamping the site and making it into a forum for spreading information and ideas- please look at the site, send information and join in the blogs. www.sags.org.uk

COSLA GUIDELINES: As a result of the SAGS petition to Parliament in 2001, the Local Government Committee (chaired by Trish Godman) produce a report and the Scottish Executive then asked COSLA to write Guidelines on Allotments for Local Authorities. These were sent to the Scottish Executive for endorsement in July. You can read the draft version on the SAGS website. We need to make sure that all the relevant people in the Local Authorities receive them and are encouraged to implement them.

SPP11 - Scottish Planning Policy for Physical Activity and Open Space: mention planning and people's eyes glaze. However the planning legislation is at the heart of development and regeneration of our cities. We all know that allotments are seen as prime development sites. Therefore it is essential that allotments are recognised and protected in planning guidelines and legislation. SAGS submitted a paper to the working group on SPP11 and are delighted that the introduction contains a definitive statement on the value of allotments 'Areas for horticulture, such as allotments, can be of great value to the local community and offer benefits for the environment. They create an opportunity for local food production, encourage physical activity and healthy eating, offer a place to relax and to learn, and contribute to local biodiversity.'

We need all plot-holders to support this and make sure that it is contained in the final version. Other parts of the document need to be strengthened to protect existing sites and promote the development of allotments throughout Scotland. The deadline for comments is November 3rd so please send in a response either as an individual or from your site association. SAGS response is on the web.

Greenspace Audit- The Scottish Executive requested the Local Authorities carry out an audit of the greenspace in their areas. Unfortunately in planning Advice Note 65 allotments have been categorised with Churchyards and cemeteries as 'other functional greenspace'. Therefore many Local Authorities have disregarded them in their strategies. For example Dundee has not mentioned their flourishing sites. After our representation, SPP11 highlights this problem and suggests in paragraph 23 that 'in many urban areas it may be appropriate to introduce a separate category to include allotments and other plots such as community gardens, city farms and school gardens.' SAGS hopes that plot-holders will support actions to ensure all Local Authorities include allotments as a core part of their greenspace audits and strategies.

National Allotment Audit: SAGS has just been awarded a grant to audit and good practice case studies of allotments in Scotland. This information will enable SAGS to raise awareness of allotments among Local Authorities, contribute to the Greenspace audits and identify existing and extinct sites

across Scotland. This is an enormous task and if you have a little time and are interested in helping please contact secretary@sags.org.uk

Annual Allotments Conference 2006: One of SAGS main functions is to network and over the past few years the Conference has grown in scope and influence. It is free and open to any plot-holder in a member organisation. In the morning there are reports from sites across Scotland and in the afternoon presentations relevant to the allotment movement. This year there were presentations from the Big Lottery Fund (on funding for allotments), COSLA (on guidelines), SNH (on greenspace audits), and Scottish Executive (on SPP11). See www.sags.org.uk for presentations.

Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI): In the past we have built up a close relationship with the ARI with presentations at the respective conferences. Now SAGS is entering into partnership with Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens to seek funding for the continuation and expansion of the work of ARI in Scotland.

SASU: Last year the Society of Friends wound up the fund that had supported the SASU grants. The interest on the investments had fallen to a very low level and the grants were no longer sufficient to support the aims of SASU so, instead SAGS was given ring-fenced funding to support initiatives relevant to the original aims of the fund.

Trophies: SAGS has three trophies that are offered annually for allotment produce. In the last few years these oscillated between Edinburgh and Glasgow but in 2005 they were awarded at the Dundee Flower Show. This year they were awarded at the FEDAGA Flower Show in Edinburgh, In 2007 they will be awarded in Aberdeen and then in 2008 at the Glasgow Show.

Site Support: A representative of SAGS sits on the Edinburgh Allotment Strategy Group and has been involved with the design, construction and implementation of the new sustainable, organic, community site at Bridgend. The regenerated site at Dalmuir has a representative on the committee and is a rich source of inspiration and support. The virtual site at Dunoon has received support and advice from many committee members. Many other sites and groups have been given advice and put in touch with other plot-holders who have experienced similar problems.

Gardenscotland: We are canvassing for a national body in Scotland, **gardenscotland** with a remit to support gardening and gardeners. Its role and powers would be similar to that of **sportscotland**. We believe that gardening presents similar recreational benefits for the individual as Sports, improves the local ecology, encourages healthy eating and in the case of allotments, has great community benefit. Following the description of **sportscotland** we suggest that "Gardenscotland is the national body for gardening development in Scotland. The goal is to see more people participating in gardening and enjoying its benefits. Gardenscotland would involve the whole Scottish population, from primary schoolchildren to the elderly, the unemployed and the ethnic minorities in gardening activities. Gardenscotland would rely upon working in partnership with public, private and voluntary organisations to achieve this goal. As a non-departmental public body it would work closely with the Scottish Executive, advising Scottish Ministers and developing a Scottish Executive policy for the promotion of participatory activities associated with all forms of gardening. It would also play an active role in promoting participation in gardening through a wide range of policies and programmes. Gardenscotland would distribute National Lottery and Exchequer funds for the benefit of gardening. It would make awards to help create links between schools and communities, support areas and groups deprived of gardening opportunities, encourage participation and support all the community of gardeners."

Election Campaign: We need to raise awareness of the benefits of allotment gardening to all candidate in the Scottish Parliament and Council elections May 2007. We are doing this in a variety of ways,

- (i) we have joined the Scottish Environmental Link – grouping of organisations concerned with environmental issues to share information, network and lobby Parliament.
- (ii) we are producing questions for candidates which we hope plot-holders will ask the candidate.
- (iii) we are encouraging plot-holders to attend the political hustings and question candidates on the importance of allotments to the political agenda.

For further information see www.sags.org.uk..