

Preservation of Cumbernauld Allotments

A tale with a happy ending

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In early 1997, North Lanarkshire Council decided to sell Cumbernauld House and included the land on which the allotments lay as a 'sweetener' to the deal. No notification was made to the Allotment Holders at this point and we only heard about this by rumour.

After a discussion with the other Allotment Holders it was agreed that all Allotment Holders should speak to their local Councillor and to object strongly to the complete absence of consultation with the Allotment Holder and the sale of the Allotment land. Enough of the Councillors (although not all) were prepared to lobby the Council on our behalf and persuaded the Council Officers to call a meeting with Allotment Holders. At this meeting the Council Officers confirmed that the Allotment land was to be included in the sale of Cumbernauld House. They also advised us that the Council would not negotiate with 20+ individuals and that we would have to form an Association to take matters further. They also asked for two Allotment Holders to be appointed as temporary spokespersons for the group and Tom Birkmyre and myself were appointed. They also offered to try to identify land which could be used to relocate the Allotments at the Councils expense.

Tom and I then drew up an initial Constitution for the Association and called an inaugural meeting where the Cumbernauld Allotments Association was unanimously formed. A copy of the Constitution and the Minutes of the Meeting were sent to the Council who advised us that, whereas the Constitution was sufficient to set up the Association, we should appoint a Lawyer to represent the Association and to draw up a legal Constitution for the Association for which the Council would pay as part of the relocation of the Allotments.

The Officers of the Association had a meeting with the Council Officials who advised us that the firm who were buying Cumbernauld House would only require an area of about one third of the Allotment area and that the Council would open up an area at the rear of the Allotments and other areas at the sides to lay out new Allotments to bring the number of Allotments to 20. At this meeting I asked the Council if the Association could get a long term lease of the Allotments area (We had only annual leases before this) and I was told 2 to 3 years was the most that they would offer. However the director of the firm buying the house said that if his company was giving such a lease it would be for 20 years. Some weeks later our Lawyer contacted me to say that the Council had offered us a 20 year lease.

Our main problem from then on was the lack of urgency from Council Departments. We had several meetings with Officials where dates and timetables were given for the work laying out the new Allotments but nothing was being done. We visited our local MP to ask her to try to get things moving but the work never started. After the Scottish Parliament was formed we had to contact the local MSP with more delay but the MSP managed to speed up the start of the work. We now have 22 Allotments filled and a waiting list of 10.

I hope that you will find some information in the above which will help any site which has problems with a Local Council