

Glasgow

Tom McCabe MSP  
Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform  
Scottish Executive

Dear Mr McCabe

I was disappointed in your reply to Susan Deacon's question on 14th December. I would like to draw your attention to the Response from the Scottish Executive to the Recommendations of the Local Government Committee Inquiry into Allotments 2003<sup>1</sup> that state inter alia:

- *The Executive recognises the importance of allotment facilities to those people who do not possess or have access to land for cultivation or recreation and the benefits they bring to families and individuals in Scotland. There are a number of links to policies which the Executive is actively pursuing: involvement with the community; exercise and healthy diet and improving the environment.*
- *the Executive will consider the Committee's recommendation as part of the review of NPPG 11. Any such review of policy will of course be subject to consultation with all interested parties.*
- *The Executive notes the helpful recommendations made by the Committee in relation to the development of best practice guidelines. It also recognises that there is concern about the continuing provisions and management of allotments and therefore agrees with the Committee's view that best practice guidelines should be developed by 2005. It also agrees with the recommendation that the guidelines should take account of the varying levels of demand for allotments across Scotland.*  
*...The Executive therefore sees its role in the development of guidance as one of supporting COSLA in its work with local authorities.*

The new SPP11 draft guidelines for Physical Activity and Open Space<sup>2</sup> have just been published. Paragraph 6 states '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 learn and contribute to the local biodiversity'. As can be seen from the responses to the consultation, plot-holders were pleased with this statement and hope the Executive will support it in the final document.

The COSLA guidelines were sent to the Scottish Executive in June 2006 with a request for endorsement and promulgation to the Local Councils. The allotments community is still awaiting a response.

You say '*We are however taking forward a number of initiatives in areas such as sustainable development, biodiversity, health and physical activity, community involvement and planning for greenspace and open spaces which may involve and support these activities.*'

Since allotments and plot-holders implicitly make a strong contribution to all these initiatives, should not the Executive support them explicitly, recognize their worth and increase the opportunity for local people and communities to participate and contribute to all the above areas through allotments and community gardens?

I look forward to your response

Yours sincerely  
Judy Wilkinson

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/historic/x-1g/reports-03/lgr03-allotments-01.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/historic/x-1g/reports-03/lgr03-allotments-01.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/18036/DraftScotPlanPolSPP11>

# SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

## Finance and Central Services Department

Local Governance and Licensing Division

Victoria Quay

Eclinburgh EH6 6QQ

Telephone: 01 31 -244 7041

Fax: 0131-244 TOZO

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

Ms Judy Wilkinson

Glasgow

Your ref:

Our ref: 200710008071OR

27 February 2007

Dear Ms Wilkinson

Thank you for your letter of 1 February to the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform which has been passed to this division for reply.

You refer in your letter to three particular elements of the Executive's response to the Local Government Committee's recommendations following its inquiry into allotments and I think it would be helpful to respond to these in turn.

The response to Susan Deacon's question makes it clear that, whilst the Scottish Executive has no direct role in supporting gardening and horticultural activities, there are a number of initiatives being taken forward in various areas which may involve and support these activities. In terms of greenspace, Scotland's local authorities spend about £143 million per year on the development and management of parks and open spaces and a significant proportion of this sum is funded by the Executive through the local government finance settlement. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) will also have made over £7 million available for greenspace action over the period 2002-07 through support to the Greenspace for communities initiative, the "Transforming Your Space" programme and other initiatives. In December, Rhona Brankin announced the award of grants totalling just under £800,000 for a number of greenspace projects to be undertaken by voluntary organisations in the current financial year. These will assist a range of projects to create, improve and enhance greenspace across Scotland and also work to assess the state of our greenspace. This funding is in addition to the £1.4 million awarded for such projects since 2002.

SNH continues to co-ordinate the activities of the Garden for Life Forum, through direct involvement and funding to the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens for Forum administration. Active membership of the Forum includes all the main Scottish organisations that have an interest in gardening and horticultural activities, including allotments. SNH is also funding the Federation's work in Scotland to support community gardens and allotments and is involved with several research projects relating to biodiversity in urban gardens and the role of horticulture in supporting biodiversity.

As part of its sustainable development policy, the Executive has provided Sustainable Action Grants to projects encouraging local food production which included the aim of developing community gardens and allotments. Examples of such grants are those to Forth Valley Food Links over the period 2002-05 and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens over the period 2005-08.

You mention the revised planning guidelines SPP11 which recognise that areas for horticulture can be of great value to the local community and offer benefits for the environment and local biodiversity, physical activity and healthy eating. I understand from colleagues in Planning Division that it is hoped that the finalised document will be published later in the Spring following the analysis of the responses made to the consultation on the draft guidelines.

In terms of the best practice guidelines, the content of these has been agreed with COSLA and I understand from speaking to COSLA this week that they plan to issue the guidance shortly. The exact distribution is still to be settled but, as a minimum, it will go to local authorities for publication on their websites and will also be published on the Scottish Executive website.

In overall terms of the promotion of allotments, the Executive's position remains that stated during the Committee's inquiry and in the response to the final report. This is essentially a local matter and the issues involved in the provision and management of allotments will vary from area to area. For this

reason local authorities are best placed to assess the needs of their communities and develop policy on allotment provision and management administer as they best see fit.

I hope that this will give you an update on the current position and that you will find this information of help.

Yours sincerely  
Heather Aitken

---

Glasgow

March 12<sup>th</sup> 2007

Tom McCabe MSP  
Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform  
Scottish Executive  
Your reference 2007/008071OR

Dear Mr McCabe

Thank you for the response to my letter of 1<sup>st</sup> February from Heather Aitken.

**I would like to correct some inaccuracies and clarify some points in your letter:**

1. *Active membership of the Forum includes all the main Scottish organisations that have an interest in gardening and horticultural activities, including allotments*

The Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society is the representative body for allotments in Scotland. It has representatives on a number of outside bodies, one of which is Garden for Life. 4L. Garden for Life is concerned with promoting sustainable gardening and biodiversity, not campaigning for the opportunity to garden nor promote the COSLA guideline.

2. *'SNH is also funding the Federation's work in Scotland to support community gardens and allotments'*

The Federation supports community gardens in Scotland, the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society is the organization representing allotments in Scotland. We work closely together on areas of mutual interest. SNH is funding the Federations work with community gardens.

3. *the Executive has provided Sustainable Action Grants to projects encouraging local food production which included the aim of developing community gardens and allotments.*

Grants for local food production are to community gardens, not for supporting local allotment sites. In particular the grants to Forth Valley Food Links and the Federation were not in support of allotments.

4. *In terms of the best practice guidelines, the content of these has been agreed with COSLA*

COSLA was requested by the Scottish Executive to produce best practice guidelines. This document was completed in June 2006 and sent to the Executive for endorsement and promotion. The Executive took six months to respond and then declined to publish it or promote it apart on the web site.

**I should be pleased if you would answer the following questions:**

1. *This is essentially a local matter and the issues involved in the provision and management of allotments will vary from area to area. For this reason local authorities are best placed to assess the needs of their communities and develop policy on allotment provision and management administer as they best see fit.*

Surely the Scottish Executive should ensure that the local authorities fulfill their obligations under the Allotment Acts.? How is this obligation fulfilled?.

2. Scotland's local authorities spend about £143 million per year on the development and management of parks and open spaces and a significant proportion of this sum is funded by the Executive through the local government finance settlement.

What percentage of the funding to the local authorities is spent on allotments?

3. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) will also have made over £7 million available for greenspace action over the period 2002-07 through support to the Greenspace for communities initiative, the "Transforming Your Space" programme and other initiatives. In December, Rhona Brankin announced the award of grants totaling just under £800,000 for a number of greenspace projects to be undertaken by voluntary organisations in the current financial year.

What percentage of this funding has been spent on allotments? Has any money been spent directly by the Executive on funding for or support of allotments?

My understanding is that, at the present time, the Scottish Executive does not have a mechanism in place to co-ordinate, interface with or receive feedback from the overall gardening sector – that is gardeners, both professional and amateur, the horticultural trade industry together with conservation groups, the tourist industry and community, education and health bodies that recognize the importance of gardens to their interests. I wonder if there are plans within the Scottish Executive to improve this situation?

I look forward to your reply

Yours sincerely  
Judy Wilkinson

---

From: Finance and Central Services Department  
Local Governance and Licensing Division  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk> [heather.aitken@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:heather.aitken@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007

Dear Ms Wilkinson

Thank you for your letter of 12 March to Mr McCabe.

You mention that there were a number of inaccuracies in my earlier letter. The purpose of including the detail on wider greenspace projects, sustainable action grants and the work being done by Scottish Natural Heritage was to provide background information in response to the question tabled by Susan Deacon and give a fuller picture of what the Executive is doing in terms of work that might involve or support gardening and horticultural activities. It was not intended to suggest that all these activities and organisations supported the use or promotion of allotments and I am sorry if you felt that this was the case.

In terms of your comment about the COSLA best practice guidelines, we were contacted by COSLA last year to review this guidance and consider whether we would wish to become involved in publication of the guidance. Due to other work priorities, I fully agree that we took longer than necessary to confirm the content of the guidelines and the way forward on publication. However, as the use of the Scottish Executive website is a major and standard means of publication, I have to disagree that the use of the website to disseminate the guidelines can be seen in any way as declining to become involved in their promotion. As was made clear in the Executive's response to the

Local Government Committee's recommendations, the Executive does not regard itself as having the major role in promoting allotments as these are essentially a local matter and its role is rather one of supporting COSLA in its work with local authorities on the best practice guidelines.

In response to your specific questions, legislation obliges local authorities to provide allotments if there is a proven need and place statutory duties on them in respect of a number of matters to do with the management of allotment sites. The Executive does not monitor compliance with these obligations and duties and, as distinct corporate bodies whose powers and duties are separate from the Scottish Executive, local authorities are responsible for ensuring that they act lawfully in managing their day to day business and setting priorities for expenditure in relation to the needs of their particular area.

You ask for further information on the percentage of funding allocated to allotments under the various programmes I mentioned in my earlier letter. Information received from colleagues is set out in the annex to this letter. No information is held on the level of spending on allotments by local authorities as part of their annual expenditure on developing and managing parks and open spaces.

I can confirm that the Executive does not have a mechanism in place to co-ordinate, interface with or receive feedback from the overall gardening sector and understand from speaking to colleagues that there are no current plans along these lines.

Yours sincerely  
Heather Aitken  
Local Democracy Team