

Parliamentary Questions 3rd Sept 2009

Derelict Land (Urban Areas)

2. Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment provides to local authorities to allow local residents to make use of unused derelict lands in urban areas for the purpose of community growing projects, gardens and orchards. (S3O-7631)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): Our national food and drink policy supports the development of allotments and grow-your-own-food projects. We want to encourage people to work together legally to take advantage of the opportunities that unused derelict lands present for community growing projects. We will produce practical advice and guidance that will encourage public bodies, communities and individuals to work together.

Bill Kidd: Is the minister aware of the case in north Kelvin meadow in the west of Glasgow where local residents have grassed over, and planted flowers on, a long-derelict site to beautify and enhance their community but have found themselves evicted from the area by Glasgow City Council although there is no immediate plan to develop the ground?

Roseanna Cunningham: Given the extent of the media coverage, I guess that few people will be unaware of the current situation in Glasgow—and, indeed, of the advent of guerrilla gardeners throughout the country.

The Government is working, alongside various public bodies, to examine potential further provision of allotments and community gardens. We know that there is great unmet demand for both. Ultimately, local authorities are responsible for deciding on priorities for their land. However, we hope that Glasgow City Council, which is the decision-making body in the north Kelvin meadow case, would have regard to the work that the national health service is doing to support a number of projects on health board land and, similarly, Scottish Natural Heritage's support for such initiatives.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I am glad to hear the minister's support for community gardens and other such projects. Does she acknowledge that, in many communities, the problems of derelict buildings and sites are real issues for local people? Will she press, with her fellow ministers, for councils to be given additional powers to deal with the irresponsible landowners who simply abandon sites in towns and villages, and encourage those sites to be brought back into the good use about which we have heard?

Roseanna Cunningham: I suspect that that issue is a little beyond my remit, as it is a local authority responsibility. I hope that all members will join us in having discussions about the future of such derelict land and point to the examples in which good progress has been made, such as on some otherwise unused health board land that has now been turned over to such projects. It often helps to point to examples.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): My question might sit better on the back of Jim Tolson's later question.

In view of the fact that demand for allotment land increasingly outstrips supply, will the minister consider organising an allotments summit that would bring together all the local authorities, the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society and other interested parties to draw up a strategic plan to develop additional allotment space throughout the country?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are aware that some 3,000 people are on a nationwide allotments waiting list and that 70 per cent of the currently allocated allotments are owned by local authorities. That leaves 30 per cent that are not, so there is also capacity to grow—that is a bit of a pun, of course—the numbers of allotments outwith local authority land.

Nanette Milne will be happy to know that an allotments summit is under active consideration at the moment. We are aware of the enormous pressure on allotments and that we will have to try to find some way to resolve it.