

Quotations on allotments in the debate on November 12th

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The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-5173, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the Central Scotland Green Network.

Hugh O'Donnell (Liberal Democrat)

We also need to find a way in which to counter the somewhat difficult situations in which local groups almost always find themselves when they take forward environmental plans. For example, I have had representations from a group in Bothwell, which is in the region that I represent. It has identified a derelict piece of land for which it proposes local allotments, a market garden and other improvements to the environment. Unfortunately, the planning regulations are such that sportsScotland has objected, because part of the ground on which the group intends to develop that green element was used—some 20 years ago, I think—as a football field. As a statutorily notified organisation, sportsScotland has registered an objection, which has brought the whole community's efforts on the project to a grinding halt.

Elaine Smith (Labour)

I am running out of time, but I want to make a particular point. In Havana city in Cuba, the community has been allowed to take over pieces of derelict land—as happens with allotments—on which an organoponics system is used to grow food. Perhaps ministers will consider that approach.

Robin Harper (Green)

Elaine Smith referred to the environment's advantages for mental health. There are excellent examples of how mental health can be improved and assisted, as at the gardens in the Royal Edinburgh hospital and at Redhall walled garden. There is also the work that one or two of our prisons are doing in engaging prisoners in work in gardens and allotments before their release. I say to the Government that Suntrap garden in Edinburgh in particular, which is still open—just—deserves extra funding.

Karen Gillon (Labour)

Boosting opportunities for leisure and recreation does not have to cost the earth, and it can be an investment in protecting our precious Scottish biodiversity for the present and the future. A recent Dutch study highlighted the link between outdoor, or green, living and improved mental health. The potential to build town and village cohesion through the creation of green space in community growing gardens or spaces for play makes sense to me. In previous decades, the Clyde valley was home to many tomato growers and orchards, but that has changed. However, the community is keen to bring back some of that growing potential to the Clyde valley through community orchards and other growing potential. I ask the ministers to provide written advice as to how that can be supported for the communities who are involved.

Nanette Milne (Conservative)

I have a bee in my bonnet about allotment gardening, which I see as having a significant contribution to make to a green network. To quote the allotments regeneration initiative, they provide "a sustainable source of healthy local food, as well as exercise and education for local communities, and an important biodiversity habitat for native flora and fauna. They provide green lungs in built-up areas and access to publicly owned land."

Currently, there are over 200 allotment sites throughout Scotland, around 70 per cent of which are owned by local authorities. They equate to 6,300 plots in all, which falls well short of satisfying demand for them. The waiting list throughout Scotland is about 3,000, with 600 people in Glasgow

and 1,000 people in Edinburgh waiting to become plot holders. I would like to see those waiting lists disappear and I am pleased that the minister is committed to doing something about that, as she told me in response to a recent question. There is a good opportunity for the green network to bring together local authorities, health boards and other landowners to examine the potential for developing allotments in their areas, which would greatly benefit their communities.

I grew up on vegetables that were grown on my father's plot and I would like to see many more people benefiting from the fresh produce that I learned to grow and like as a child and the knowledge that I gained about nature and the joys of gardening, which have stayed with me throughout my life. I am pleased, in that context, to note that Annabel Goldie championed that cause recently when she visited the Reidhaven allotments in Glasgow North East and commended the gardeners there on setting a good example to us all. I hope that their example will indeed be followed throughout the central Scotland green network area and well beyond it.

Sarah Boyack (Labour)

Elaine Smith was right to point to the need for a gender analysis. Statistics show that women have less time and money available to them, so access to green networks, which they can visit and take their kids to, is absolutely crucial. Local access is hugely important. The gender analysis will also show that the issue of personal safety is key and has to be plugged in. I know from talking to people when I walk and cycle that one of the things that puts them off accessing green spaces is lack of certainty about their personal safety.

As ever, Robin Harper spoke eloquently about the need to make environmental justice a practical reality. He is absolutely right. Like Chris Harvie, he also spoke eloquently about the legacy of Patrick Geddes. Patrick Geddes was a polymath; he not only talked about town planning, industrialisation and philosophy but managed to tie it all together in a way that was relevant to his generation. We need to do the same.

The growing support for allotments, which Robin Harper and Nanette Milne talked about, is crucial. There is a real opportunity for us to do something practical that brings alive the climate change agenda and addresses the fact that many families in Scotland cannot afford to buy high-quality fruit and vegetables. The local shop around the corner cannot supply fruit and vegetables at cost, so families have to travel longer and longer distances to centralised supermarkets. Supermarkets have many benefits, such as in cost, but they are not necessarily accessible to everybody and, increasingly, people need cars to get to such retail opportunities.