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Scottish Allotments Newsletter

Membership

New category of membership created for 'fledgling' allotment groups.

Recently groups of seeking land for allotments have formed in all parts of the country. Groups frequently approach the SAGS committee for advice. Committee members, try to help and liaise, at the very least putting groups in touch with each other so that experiences can be shared. Up till now members of groups have joined SAGS as individuals but there has been no mechanism to allow the groups as a whole to join. It seems appropriate that these groups should be able to join the Society. This would formalise their status and relationship with SAGS.

Our current three categories of membership are: a Federation (city groups of sites at £75.00 per annum), a Site (one site at £1.00 per plot p.a.), and an Individual (one person at £5.00 p.a.). We are adding a new category to be called **Developing Group**, at a cost of £10.00 per annum. When a site has been acquired and operating, then, at the next year, the membership would be as a Site.

The Society's membership year runs from 1st April until 31st March, and reminders to re-join go out in March each year. The SAGS Treasurer emails or posts a reminder to a known contact at this time. A membership form is attached, and they can also be downloaded from the web site at:
<http://www.sags.org.uk/JoinSags.php>



Roseanna Cunningham, Environment Minister greeted by Dr Judy Wilkinson as she arrives at the 2009 SAGS conference

SAGS conference builds on past success

This year the annual conference, held in June will be a two day event. The usual popular Saturday meeting where plot-holders get together with local authority officers and representatives of organizations supporting allotments will take place as usual on June 19th. The theme this year is 'Sustainable Gardening for Allotments'. Jim Tolson MSP, Shirley Anne Somerville MSP and Pam Whittle Chair of Greenspace Scotland will give keynote speeches. As always it will be held in the Victoria Halls in Dunblane, free to all ploholders, (donations for lunch) and with the usual mix of reports and workshops. This meeting will be followed by the AGM.

The new departure is to hold a one day event on the preceding Friday (18th). Glasgow City Council will be host this year The focus is to bring senior public sector officers, thinking about initiatives in allotments and community cultivation together with people who are already involved with such projects. The theme is 'Allotments in Housing and Health – using community cultivation to fight inequality, tackle deprivation and save money'. There will be presentations from Councils, Health Boards and COSLA followed by facilitated discussions with expert witnesses from local groups.

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Allotments in politics ...

This year allotments have often been on the Scottish Parliament agenda at Holyrood featuring in written and oral parliamentary questions. The highlight (from the allotment point of view!) was the debate on December 17 lead by Jim Tolson MSP (LD). The motion congratulated SAGS and recognised the valuable contribution of gardening to good physical, social and environmental health.

A large group of SAGS members attended. See Page 4 for an account of one member's epic journey to Holyrood through the December

We are sorry to report that Geoff Stokes, general secretary of NSALG died Monday March 1st after a heart attack. He had been general secretary for over 20 years and will be much missed

Edinburgh

Edinburgh Allotment Strategy 2

The draft of "Cultivating Communities: A Growing Challenge 2010 - 2015", the new allotments strategy for the City of Edinburgh, is out for consultation from stakeholders and neighbourhoods.

The waiting list for allotments in Edinburgh has continued to grow and has reached an all time high of 2152 for just 1233 Council owned plots. A strategic approach is required to address this unprecedented demand and to ensure that the benefits of allotment gardening are properly recognised and available to all.

In the strategy, seven key objectives have been identified:

- Ensure adequate provision of allotments
- Encourage other forms of gardening

- Provide high quality allotments
- Ensure good administration
- Ensure environmentally sustainable allotments
- Develop and sustain partnership working
- Secure resources

By mid-summer the consultation will be complete and the strategy will then become the Council policy

Royal Edinburgh Community Gardens

In October NHS Lothian proposed to use hospital land at the Royal Edinburgh as "growing plots". The philosophy is the community garden, which differs from the notion of private allotments. Community gardens feature allocated growing plots for individuals, or groups, for vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers but may also have common areas of cultivation for the amenity of the

whole group.

Community gardens aim to address health inequalities through ensuring that everybody is welcomed and can become involved. The promotion of mental and physical health, and building inclusive communities, are core aspects of the approach. Environmental sustainability is also central, through the production of locally grown food and the use of techniques such as composting.

Matters have moved apace, the Cyrenians have been approved as the main contractor, volunteers have started clearing overgrown land, groups and individuals have applied for growing plots and community gardens. In spring the first seeds will be planted.

NHS Lothian are looking at their other properties to see if they can "grow" on the project at the Royal Ed.

Glasgow

St Mungo Cup prizewinning plot 2009



might constitute a sustainable site - words like biodiversity, organic, peat free, pond and community involvement spring to mind. However many sites and plot-holders may not always recognise themselves as gardening sustainably, even though they are: - just recycling pots is a good start.

It is difficult to get the right balance between rewarding effort and innovation, and providing encouragement. The judging criteria therefore look at three broad areas - Earthcare, Peoplecare and Fairshare. Notes give examples and general guidance, but the interpretation can be wide and varied.

GAF is also very fortunate to have the support of the Incorporation of Gardeners of Glasgow, who it is hoped, will sponsor a 'new-plot-holder' prize. This prize is to reward the hard work put into new plots, often by people with little gardening experience, and to encourage new-plot-holders to "have a go". The judging criteria will take into account the initial condition of the plot, good gardening and innovation. Individual associations judge their best

new-comer & put them forward for final judging. The prize will be useful to the gardener in their continued career as an allotment holder, in fact 1st, 2nd & 3rd prizes of gardening vouchers will be given as well as a framed photo of the 1st prizewinner receiving their award.

These two new prizes will complement the St Mungo's Cup, given by GCC, which has a long history in the city of rewarding the very best in allotment growing along traditional lines. The new trophies aim to reward the range of skills that reflect the variety of allotment gardening styles in Glasgow today.

In 2009 the Glasgow Allotments Forum was approached by a donor offering to sponsor a trophy for a sustainable allotment site. The aim of the prize would be to reward those sites already managing their allotments in a sustainable manner and to enthuse and encourage others. The new trophy is a locally made artisan ceramic piece mounted on wood with room for all winners to add their own plaque over time.

In some ways it is easy to identify what



Demonstration at GAF summer event 2009

Borders & Dumfries & Galloway

In the South of Scotland, Climate Challenge Funded Community Powerdown Officers are helping local people to find land and establish allotments. Creating more opportunities to grow and source local food is one of the key deliverables of the Community Powerdown project.

As well as organising foraging events, in Langholm, Annette Meehan is working with an established allotments group to try to secure suitable land for growing. Meanwhile, in Walkerburn, Derek Russell is working with the community to establish an allotment site on a challenging plot of land. The Community Powerdown project is giving an additional boost to the efforts

of local people to reclaim their allotments. If you would like to find out more about the project, go to www.communitypowerdown.org.uk.

In Annan, the NHS Safe and Healthy Action Project is one of the lucky few to have an allotment in the town. Encouraged by the success of their existing allotment, and concerned by the difficulty they are having in getting a second allotment on the same site, the Team have put local groups actively seeking allotments in contact with SAGS and with some of the local agencies - the NHS, local housing associations, and other key agencies. The aim is to find creative ways to unblock land for allotments and to make allotments happen throughout the area. Group meetings have been very positive, with lots of opportunities

identified. If you would like to find out more about the group, please contact SAGS.

Dumfries and Galloway Council are starting to develop an allotments policy at the same time as conducting an audit of Council land holdings. They will not be allocating any Council land for allotments until both these processes are complete. This has delivered a 'double whammy' to the hopes of allotment groups wishing to source land for growing quickly.

Contact Jane Gray, SAGS representative for the South of Scotland, on jane@letslivelocal.co.uk, if you want to know more about any of these initiatives, or if you would like to discuss your allotment project.

Aberdeen

Aberdeen allotment holders are currently having problems with our local authority (LA), which has increased allotment rents considerably, and performed other actions that we consider oppressive. After many years of (more or less benign) neglect, Aberdeen has developed an allotment management policy with associated targets and costs. To help cover these costs rentals have been raised from below the national average (but with little or no support provided) to well above it in a matter of two years (a rise of 152% in the last year alone).

Not unnaturally Aberdeen allotment holders, who are used to fending for themselves, are up in arms, and are fighting back. We have enlisted the help of our local MSP Dr. Nannette Milne who has tabled a number of parliamentary questions for answer by John Swinney, Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, with a view to clarifying the law on allotment management.

As a result of this activity the Aberdeen group believe we have a good case that all these rent increases are actually illegal, and in fact that most LA

allotment management in Scotland has been illegal for many years. We base this on the requirement in the law for a local authority to consult Scottish Ministers when establishing regulations for allotment management, and the fact that John Swinney has stated in the Scottish Parliament that no LA has ever carried out such a consultation.

We say that no one questions the legal position as long as the LA is behaving in a fair and reasonable manner. We hope that Aberdeen will admit that it has got things wrong, and start over in a spirit of cooperation.

Compost and P

We should all know how to produce good compost, good mix of green and brown waste, no sticks unless they have been through the shredder, regular turning and aeration, addition of accelerators, a spade full of earth, limestone, and urine.

Reading an N.T.S newsletter I was intrigued by an article on "outdoor peeing"!!! The N.T.S male team workers were using straw bales to

relieve the call of nature and the straw added to the compost heaps. The article went on to say that peeing on the compost activates and accelerates the compost process and saves water. What was not mentioned was the energy saved.

The water used to flush your toilet is treated to drinking water quality, using energy. The waste-water has to be treated at the sewerage works before being put back into rivers or the sea,

again saving energy. So save your "p", pour it on your compost heap, and pride yourself that for each non-flush you have saved one lot of water, two lots of energy, and made the best quickest compost ever

To learn about compost making and get a cheap compost bin visit

<http://www.wasteawarescotland.org.uk/html/compost.asp>

Nourishing Scotland with Local Food

The past year has seen an explosion of interest in local food, as agendas around the issues of climate change, health, community resilience, allotments, gardening and organics have collided into a fertile movement for grassroots change.

In October 2009, different strands of this 'bottom up' approach got together to work to create a vision for future food in Scotland. Community representatives from across Scotland met in Dunbar to talk about their experience of local food, what was needed to develop a local food agenda and to share ideas and expertise. From this meeting, Nourish - the Scottish Sustainable Food Network - was born.

A 'statement of intent' now known as *the Declaration of Dunbar* came out of the meeting. It tries to capture the enthusiasm and energy of the event for moving forward together. The declaration states:

"We are working towards a sustainable Scotland in which, in every region we produce more of what we eat and eat more of what we produce. We believe a more localised food system would be better for the environment, health, community and economy of our country. We are building a movement to create a food system that is:

- *Locally based with shorter supply chains*
- *Promotes and respects seasonality*
- *Resilient*
- *Fair and accessible to all*

- *Creates and maintains a sustainable livelihood for producers*

These steps are essential in order to ensure a fairer more equitable food system appropriate for a low carbon economy."

The meeting agreed to set up an online social network to help people exchange ideas and information. As I write, the follow up February meeting is one week away, and the organisers are looking forward to seeing how the network develops. It is open to everyone with an interest in local and sustainable food - which, surely, is everyone with an allotment - to join up and get stuck in! If you would like to join the social networking site or to add your name to the mailing list, contact me at jane@letslivelocal.co.uk.

Frankie goes to Holyrood

Frank Taylor from Aberdeen wishes he'd taken the train to the Dec 17 allotments debate.

Having encouraged all local MSP's to sign up to Jim Tolson's debate and knowing that one was to mention the difficulties we have here in Aberdeen, I persuaded my better half to take the day off work and to come down to Holyrood with me to hear the debate. We left home shortly after 8.00am. Even including a stop in Dundee, we made really good time reaching the Forth Road Bridge by 10.30am.

That is when our problems started. The traffic from the bridge across the city to Holyrood was absolutely horrendous. The roads were very icy which didn't help. The rest of the journey took nearly two hours and we arrived at Holyrood with minutes to spare. As luck would have it, Jean and I both managed to set off the scanner alarms. My problem was my sat nav in my jacket pocket, Jean doesn't know yet how she set off the machine and she was searched, so we were a few minutes late in getting to the



public gallery.

I was disappointed that so few MSP's turned up for the debate but it was very encouraging to hear those who spoke do so in such a positive manner. It was a shock to realise that only 4 minutes were allowed to each MSP who spoke.

After the debate and the photos, Nanette Milne MSP treated Jean and I to coffee and arranged a tour of the parliament building for us. .

Then we had another experience of Edinburgh's Traffic. My original intention had been to take the train. Getting to Aberdeen train station would have been difficult but with hindsight, I wished I had put up with any difficulties in Aberdeen and let the train take the strain.

RATS

Leptospirosis and Weill's Disease can be passed to humans by rat urine, and, if not correctly diagnosed and treated, can be fatal. Up to 30% of rats carry the bacteria. Rats urinate constantly as they move about a plot, basic garden hygiene is essential. Always wash vegetables, including herbs, brought from the allotment. Wash hands in hot soapy water and dry. When children are playing in water outside, they should not put their hands into their mouths before washing thoroughly. Open cuts or grazes should be covered with a waterproof dressing before working, and, if they occur when working - wash immediately with strong disinfectant to stop infection. The most likely place for rats to visit is your compost heap. **Do not stop composting**, but heed the advice about what to put in the heap. Discourage rats by lining bins with a sturdy small gauge wire mesh, by laying on a concrete slab base, and, by turning the compost regularly. Use a worm bin for kitchen waste where rats are a problem. Make a note of where a rat or rats have been seen and report to your Local Authority Pest Control Department, they will deal with the problem, do not try it yourself.

Urban myth: the last recorded death from this was five years ago, a golfer who kissed his ball after sinking a very long putt.

Grow Your Own Working Group

In December 2009 we were delighted when Jared Stewart from the Scottish Government Food and Drink policy sector set up a 'Grow Your Own' working group.

The remit of the group is to consider how the recommendations from *Recipe for Success - Scotland's National Food and Drink Policy* that are relevant to community cultivation can be implemented:

(i) Ensure that allotments and 'grow your own' projects are strategically supported.

(ii) Produce practical advice and best practice guide lines that will appeal to individuals, community groups and public bodies, to help them develop local 'grow

your own' initiatives.

This group will be of short duration and disbanded by October 2010 with all initiatives and projects completed within the next twelve months. The hoped for outcomes are support for community cultivation initiatives by public sector and private land owners (including housing associations) with land made available so everyone in Scotland has the opportunity to grow their own vegetables, fruit and flowers on a sustainable basis. To achieve all this in twelve months will certainly present a challenging target.

SAGS have recommended that to achieve this objective there should be

- National Strategy for Community Cultivation
- Clarification and Interpretation of the current legal position of allotments in Scotland

- Review of local authority provision and plans for allotments, community gardens and orchards. This would identify good practice
- Audit of new groups in community cultivation and review of barriers and problems
- Design templates and exemplars for allotments, community gardens and orchards
- Guidelines for public and private landowners who wish to engage with GYO group wanting to lease or own their own sites, including template leases and successful case studies
- Exemplar community cultivation sites at the SG offices at Victoria Quay in Edinburgh.

Judy, Jenny, Peter and Helen are SAGS representatives on the working group. - We wish them luck.

SAGS at Gardening Scotland June 2010

SAGS has a stand at Gardening Scotland in the Living Garden Area along with a host of other environmental organisations who are our partners in Scottish Natural Heritage's Garden for Life Forum. The show will be at the Ingliston Show Ground, Edinburgh from Friday June 4th to Sunday June 6th.

This year is the UN International Year of Biodiversity so the display area in the Living Garden will be celebrating the complex web of interactions which is so important to the planet's natural life support system. Allotments are wonderful habitats for wildlife, from the tiny organisms which convert waste into compost to the bees which pollinate our crops.

Please come along and see us. Tell us about what is going on down your allotments. If you have any questions, we hope to be able to help.

Tickets cost £15 on Friday and £13 on Saturday or Sunday, but there is a



SAGS stand at Gardening Scotland 2009

special reduced price of only £6 for those visiting the Show on the Friday between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m .

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) supports, promotes and represents community-managed farms, gardens, allotments and other green spaces in the UK, and we're delighted to be contributing to SAGS' fantastic new look newsletter! The FCFCG opened its Scottish office at Gorgie City Farm in Edinburgh in 2005, and our membership has increased dramatically since then (from 17 to 65) showing just how popular community cultivation is at the moment.

We've been working closely with SAGS since then, most recently on implementing the Scottish Government's Food and Drink Policy and promoting the health, environmental and social benefits of community cultivation to senior public sector managers at a national event in Glasgow this June. As SAGS and the FCFCG are structured differently (SAGS is volunteer run and very policy orientated, while FCFCG staff focus on providing practical support to community groups), we complement each other's work well.

The FCFCG's practical support to community groups includes advice (online, in person or on the phone), training (see our website, www.farmgarden.org.uk/scotland for details of upcoming training on 'Linking with local and national strategies and policies' and 'Community engagement'), regional networking meetings and publications (we are currently working with SAGS and the Allotments Regeneration Initiative to produce 'Allotments: A Scottish Plotholders' Guide'). We also host a very popular annual National Networking Event at Battleby every year, which is well attended by allotment folk (this year's date is Oct 8th), and we will be working with the Commonwealth Orchard in 2010 to support community gardens who want to 'branch out' into community orchards. So, there is a lot going on!

Do get in touch if there's anything you

think we might be able to help you with, from volunteer policies to composting or site design, or governance to insurance to leases. We'd love to hear from you!

Helen, Naomi, Vicki and the FCFCG fieldworkers.

0131 623 7058

Scotland@farmgarden.org.uk

More Resources
The Allotment Regeneration Initiative has two mentors in Scotland. Mentors can offer advice on the regeneration of allotment sites, setting up allotment associations and applying for funding.

The mentor for the South and West of Scotland :

Ian Welsh

Tel. 0845 223 5443

iwelsh.ari@googlemail.com

The mentor for the North and East of Scotland:

Ronald Cant

Tel. 0845 313 8471

ronaldcant.ari@googlemail.com

For details of other services provided by ARI see

<http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/>

Scottish Education and Action for Development (SEAD) has a comprehensive list of agencies that can be applied to for the funds required for allotment development and improvement.

See <http://www.sead.org.uk/>

The Climate Challenge Fund supports community led action to reduce carbon emissions. Some allotment sites have already applied successfully to this fund to get resources to carry out specific projects. See <http://www.infoscotland.com/gogreener/61.html>

About SAGS

We offer a forum through which plottolders can work together to make sure that allotment sites will flourish in Scotland in the next millennium.

In particular we plan to:

- work together to lobby Members of the Scottish Parliament for improved and increased allotment provision in Scotland.
- maintain contact with the Parliament so that we can represent gardeners interests during the consultative stages of legislation which may affect Sites.

SAGS provides an opportunity to:

- share experiences to resist the takeover of Allotment Sites when these are threatened by building or other developments
- find examples from other sites on the best terms of let or lease when these are being negotiated for a Site.
- act as a forum for the exchange of information on Site Management experience giving advice on good practice in forming and operating a Site Management Committee, and preparing a suitable Constitution and formulating a missive-of-let.

Contact SAGS on:

secretary@sags.org.uk

treasurer@sags.org.uk

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