



Stronger Communities: Allotments

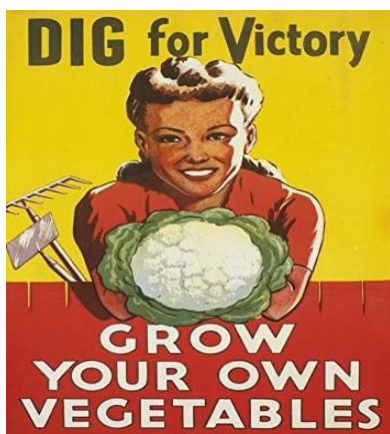
Introduction

The Foundation has published several papers on how to build stronger communities, highlighting both [social](#) and [economic](#) benefits. Our April 2025 paper covered local authority [sport and culture](#) services, including green spaces, and last month's [briefing](#) made a case for preventative spending.

Allotments are gardens detached from houses and leased to individuals to grow vegetables, fruit and flowers. They are an essential community facility and have made the news recently, following a UK government [decision](#) to allow the sale of land at eight allotment sites in England since the general election. A spokesman said that councils should only sell off allotments "where it is clearly necessary and offers value for money". In this briefing, we look at allotment policy in Scotland.

History and legislation

Garden allotments first [started](#) to become popular in Edinburgh during the 19th century (Allotments (Scotland) Act 1892), when land was given to people experiencing poverty to allow them to grow food. After the First World War, priority was given to returning service men and women who had been involved in agricultural work during the war. During WW2, allotments came into their own, with the need to increase food production within the UK through the *Dig For Victory* campaign.



The Allotments (Scotland) Act 1922 (strengthened in 1950) made [statutory provision](#) for allotments and provided some protection and compensation for allotment holders. This Act was replaced by the provisions of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 ([Part 9](#)), which sets out how individuals can apply for an allotment, and the duty

of local authorities to provide allotments and maintain a list and create regulations for the management of them. Councils may not dispose of allotment sites without the consent of Scottish Ministers (s.117). No consents have been given.

The Scottish Government has [published](#) statutory guidance that reminds councils that they must provide sufficient allotments to keep the waiting list at no more than half of the authority's current number of allotments, and ensure that a person entered on the waiting list does not remain on it for a continuous period of more than 5 years. Every local authority must have a food-growing strategy, reviewed every 5 years. The Glasgow Allotments Forum publishes a [handy guide](#).

The National (UK) Allotments Society [argues](#) that Scottish legislation is 'more modern and offer additional protections', on statutory duties, plot sizes, rents and basic services. 'The Scottish approach aims to encourage community involvement, wellbeing, and food growing as a public good.'

Benefits of allotments

A University of Sheffield [study](#) showed that people who grow their own food consume 70% more fruit and vegetables than the average person – an impressive health outcome in a nation struggling with obesity and poor diets. They also waste 95% less food, making home growing a powerful tool for both health and sustainability.

There are also significant health benefits. [Studies](#) show that older allotment growers are fitter than their peers, while spending time in community gardens is linked to better mental health and lower stress. All [reported](#) positive effects of gardening as a mental health intervention for service users, including reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety.

They are also great for the environment. A [study](#) of four UK cities found that allotments host more pollinators such as bees and hoverflies (and more species) than any other type of urban land, including nature reserves. Ecologists at the University of Sussex have [worked](#) with allotment holders to make their allotments richer ecosystems.

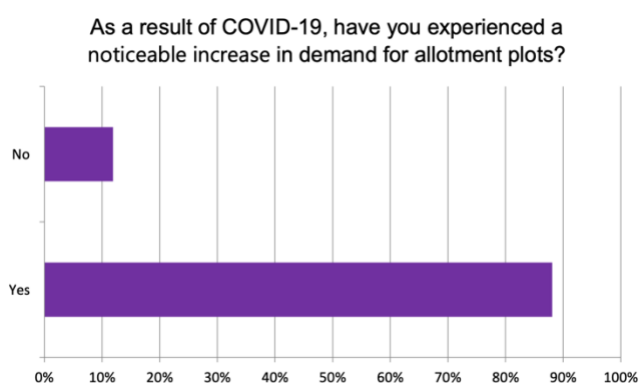
They also bring economic benefits to communities. A [study](#) showed that despite limited use of pesticides, each allotment was able to grow an average of £550 worth of produce between March and October. The UK imports approximately £8bn of fruit and vegetables each year, with Brexit creating additional food security problems. In Brighton, a study put the value of allotments at £1.1 million annually.

Scotland aims to be a Good Food Nation. The Scottish Allotments and Garden Society (SAGS) shows how allotments can contribute to that aim in their [policy guide](#), *Plan to Grow Food*. They argue that planners should take an integrated approach to food growing rather than categorising it simply as a leisure use.

Provision in Scotland

Despite stronger legislation in Scotland, there are still many challenges in implementing it. While there are statutory obligations to provide space for allotments where demand is demonstrated, there remains an evident shortage of allotments, with Scotland's four main cities alone having 4,600 people on waiting lists. There are 211 allotment sites in Scotland with at least 6,300 plots. 66% of respondents reported an average wait of over 18 months.

While data is limited, academic [studies](#) highlight a 65% decline in UK allotment land from its peak to 2016. The latest APSE [survey](#) (includes Scotland) indicates a slight increase in the number and size of plots, but still well below demand. Scottish councils report that they are working with community groups to expand provision.



Action

A survey analysis of Scottish local planning authorities' local development plan policies highlights that allotments receive little attention in plan policy making. SAGS claim that some planning authorities don't refer to allotments at all in their development plans, although most refer to allotments and other food growing spaces as part of wider open space plan policies. Allotments or other food-growing spaces need to be

incorporated into new developments or other spaces within existing communities, which would significantly benefit the supply of food-growing sites, and provide an essential community space.

National planning policies have a modest reference to allotments, mainly limited to the statutory requirements. It is clear from local authority waiting lists that demand for allotments has substantially grown in the last ten years, and there is a need for planning to respond.

We are struggling to meet the existing statutory duties, which is only a minimum provision. Brownfield sites and public parks could be used for growing food and flowers. Examples of this can be found at Inverleith Park in Edinburgh and Queens Park in Glasgow.

There are many positive examples in Europe of countries with stronger national allotments and garden legislation. In Poland, the Family Allotment Gardens Act, garden colonies in Slovakia, and Denmark's allotment legislation make it very difficult to remove facilities.

Allotment policy should be seen as part of the broader movement to build stronger communities by empowering local people. Fulfilling the promise that devolution would also bring a return to genuine [local democracy](#).

Conclusion

The Greenspace [survey](#) suggests that around one allotment plot is required for every 37 people, which is equivalent to 2.7% of the population. This means allotment provision needs to be increased by around 10-fold in Scotland. This won't happen without stronger statutory provision and planning action.

Ecologist, Dr Beth Nicholls, sums up the case for allotments, "In a world of increasing urbanisation, producing food in and around cities has the potential to improve both nutritional and health outcomes, alleviate poverty and simultaneously provide habitat for wildlife and create sustainable cities."

Jimmy Reid Foundation

The Jimmy Reid Foundation is a think tank which brings together different voices from across Scotland to make the case for economic, environmental, political and social equity and justice in Scotland and further afield.

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