



Plan to Grow

A Planning Guide for Allotments

Introduction

Scotland wants to be a Good Food Nation and Scottish Government is endeavouring to put this into reality.

“A great deal of work is already happening now to make a real and positive difference to the lives of the people of Scotland: helping to improve their access to, and understanding of, the benefits of healthy local foods; ensuring sustainability of our wonderful food industry; and looking to grow Scotland’s reputation as a Good Food Nation....”

Good Food Nation Proposals for Legislation, Scottish Government, 2018

Food matters as an essential component to maintaining life and the way we choose to live. If we are serious about food we should recognise how it connects with the land. Connections are important and being a nation that prides itself on equality, Scotland recognises that people should have access to good food and nourishment for their individual and collective well-being. Scottish Government has committed itself to making good food an important national objective recognising the link between good food and good health.

Getting access to good food is not just about having good produce on supermarket shelves but also to build on the excellent tradition of having the opportunity to grow one’s own food. Much of that tradition has its roots in improving the health and welfare of people who couldn’t afford to buy fresh food. However, the nutritional benefit of growing fresh food is only one of a range of benefits that include sociability and knowledge sharing of food growing that can help strengthen communities.

Such benefits are undeniable but there are challenges to becoming a ‘Good Food Nation’, principally, obtaining sufficient land to form new allotments and other growing spaces as demand continues to rise. This demand comes from a diverse range of locations where people are collectively searching for a patch of ground in cities, suburbs or more remote rural places.

Having the right land in the right place is a matter for planners whose role it is to act in the public interest by understanding what communities need, help support and manage resource allocations and assist in delivering great places to live. All this fits with the principles of The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 that provides local communities with the power and responsibilities to take greater control of decision making and actions around their own place and services. The



Chapelton of Elsick Allotments, Aberdeenshire

ownership of ground is a fundamental aspect of taking greater control and decision making on how to use land for local public benefit.

One can see across the whole of Scotland how food growing acts as a public benefit. However, it is surprisingly omitted by Planners as a land use within the Use Class Order. Evidence suggests that Planners regard food growing as a 'leisure' use, which according to the Oxford Dictionary is 'time when one is not working or occupied; free time'. However, those engaged in food growing, particularly those that are engaged in education, health and social prescription initiatives, know that food growing has attributes well beyond spending one's free time. Food represents an integral aspect of any society and labelling food growing as some form of 'leisure' activity misses the essential point that food growing is an important way of allowing people to live and function well.

The community empowerment legislation recognises the importance of local food growing but getting this transferred into reality requires the planners to help by having policies that identify land and assist communities in making good productive places. An analysis of Scottish Planning at both national and local level suggests that there isn't much attention given to food growing in plan policy making. Some local 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. To become a food growing nation the profile



and commitment needs to be greater than appearing in a column of an open space matrix appended to a local development plan. That said, some planning authorities such as Aberdeenshire and East Lothian are establishing some good food growing policy practice and hopefully such a commitment will become the wider norm.

While there are statutory obligations to provide space for allotments where demand is demonstrated, there remains a clear shortage of allotments with Scotland's four main cities alone having 4,600 people on waiting lists. This shortage of growing spaces requires all those engaged in land management to consider ways and means of providing more land for food growing. Such provision should not be overly complicated and it is certainly possible for allotments or other food growing spaces to be incorporated into new developments or other sites within our existing settlements to act as an essential component of good community place making.

If we are to promote Scotland as a 'Good Food Nation', the provision of land for food growing should go well beyond a statutory duty which is essentially a minimum provision. With Scottish Government committing itself to being a 'Good Food Nation' then planners will be part of the delivery vehicle for such action. This means having a food growing commitment within Scottish Planning Policy and the National Planning Framework. Historically the perception may be that growing food is a minority activity and generally struggles to get the

profile of other land use activities. For this reason planners need to be persuaded that food growing is important for lots of people and this should be recognised in place making and wider policy deliberations.

Dean Gallery Allotments, Edinburgh



Planning is for the 'Common Good'

The function of Spatial Planning is to act in the public interest as the public custodian of land management. Planners are also instrumental in orchestrating good places by synthesizing and balancing societal interests. Good planning includes an understanding of what communities require and operates within a co-operative environment working with all stakeholders to create policy, facilitate local opportunities, and, most importantly, deliver things for the common good.

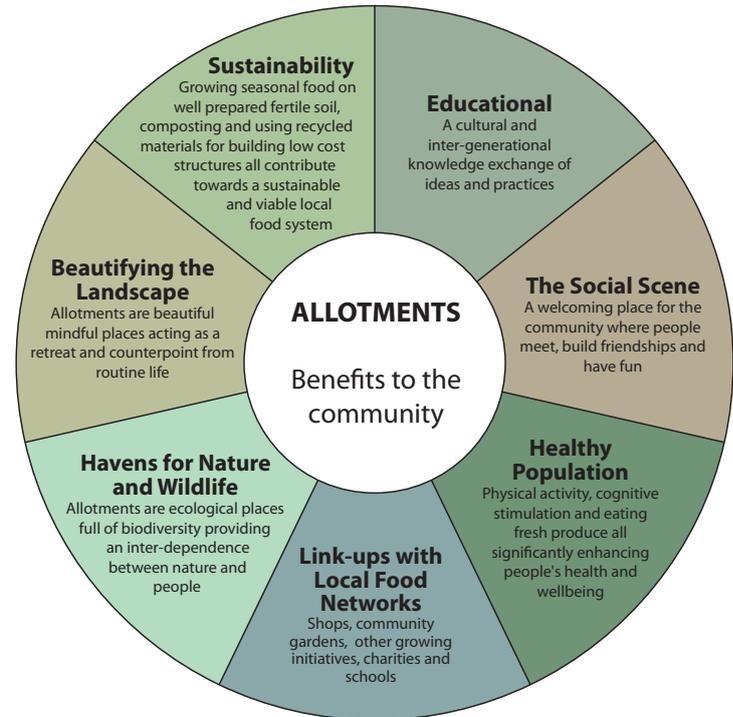
Allotments and other community growing spaces are important to people and their communities representing a proven part of the common good. Planning pioneers and visionaries frequently promoted the importance of the inter-dependency between people and nature. However, we are now increasingly living in an urban world that is becoming more detached from nature thereby prejudicing our ability to live well. The planning challenge is that while we pursue our economic objectives, this has to be balanced by improving our connections and maintenance of the natural world for our own wellbeing and ecological benefit.





Exercising Community Capability by being Empowered

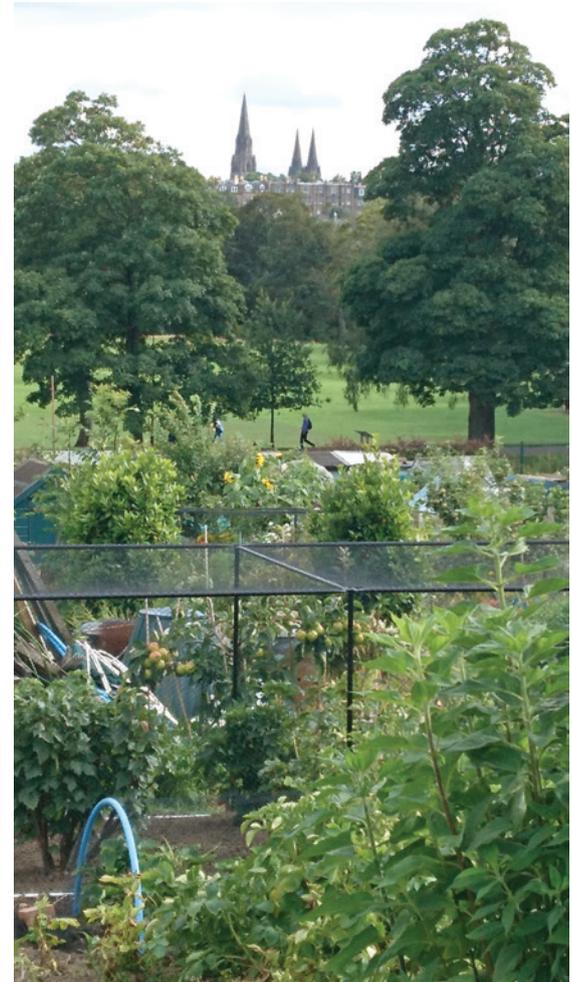
Part of living well for an increasing number of people is by cultivating land that brings people and nature together to make healthy and happy places. The capability of local people to shape and determine their own lives has been given a boost from Scottish Government's ground changing community empowerment legislation which has shifted some powers to a local level allowing people to become more in control of their own functioning. Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides new allotment undertakings which will bring a greater emphasis on allocating land for food growing.





Greater Links between Local Place Making Proposals to Statutory Planning

Planning and community empowerment are mutually inclusive. To exercise such empowerment, planners will play an important part in connecting their place making agenda with communities by engaging and helping address community and societal interests. Planners will be able to call upon community actioned Local Place Plans and merge what the community wants into their statutory Local Development Plans and implementation strategies. The increasing interest of food growing clearly demonstrates that this is what many communities want. However, effective engagement can't purely rely on local volunteering effort but will require sufficient support to enable communities to function well through capacity building and allocating appropriate resource.



Inverleith Allotments

Food Growing Space is a Primary Use and not a sub-ordinate of 'Open Space'

Traditionally, food growing has played a low order role in planning policy. Allotments are generally recognised as statutory obligations but invariably planning policies rank food growing as a sub-heading of open space policies. However, with empowered communities and an increasing demand for food growing space, a greater commitment is required to include such spaces as part of wider development proposals and become an integral part of place making. Food growing is not just a leisure activity but has far wider beneficial impacts on social cohesion and people's health and wellbeing. Planners are becoming more aware of the wider value of growing spaces such as the policies in Aberdeenshire and East Lothian that require such space to be included in new 'major' developments.

Allotments at the Royal Botanic Garden,
Edinburgh



Is Food Growing Horticulture or a Leisure Activity?

Notwithstanding statutory responsibilities to provide land for allotments, the planning profession has had some difficulty in deciding whether food growing use is horticulture or a leisure activity. The technical debate around allotments as a 'use class' is a grey area for planners in Scotland that needs to be resolved. A simple solution can be found in Wales where the National Assembly for Wales has an 'Allotment Provision in Wales, 2010', that very clearly states the following:

"Planning Permission is not required for the development of allotments, since cultivation of an allotment amounts to agricultural use for the purposes of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the use of land for the purposes of agriculture does not amount to development of the land for the purposes of that Act."

Such a simple approach provides a clear precise planning definition for food growing that could be readily adopted in Scotland. Food growing is in demand whether this is as a result of a fundamental need or for health, wellbeing, social interaction and sustainable benefit. It is important that these functionings along with their significant wider community

benefit are recognised rather than being generally categorised as a leisure activity that takes place in 'open space'.

Shared polytunnel at Hamiltonhill Allotments, Glasgow

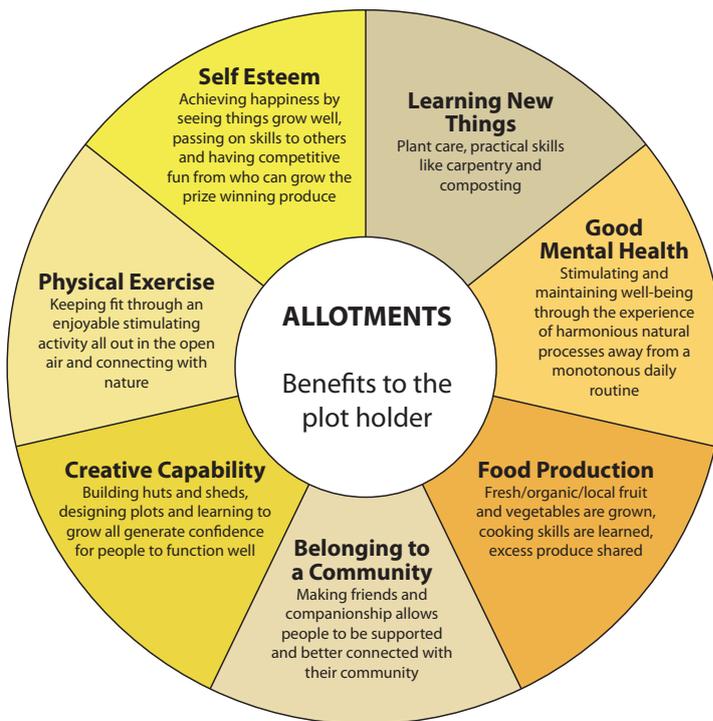




Inverleith Allotments

Why Food Growing Space in Allotments and Community Gardens is Important

The call for more space for food growing should not be seen as an individual activity. Food growing should be recognised as part of an inter-dependent 'whole approach' to sustain our places as differing forces change our social, economic and physical fabric. Allotments are havens for education, training and development, they are healthy places improving people's welfare and importantly they are sociable happy places.



The following are some of the beneficial reasons for growing food -

Wellbeing: a place to be healthy

Food growing in quiet, green spaces allows people to connect with nature, be creative, productive and active. There are many examples of food growing being a mindful activity that has demonstrated significant benefits for those with physical and mental conditions. One such example is Bridgend Growing Communities which was established in 2006 as a community health and gardening project of four food growing plots within the Bridgend Farm in Edinburgh. This partnership project between the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian was supported by funding from the Big Lottery and strong enthusiastic commitment from volunteers has established a series of food growing programmes that have made a significant contribution towards improving health and social inclusion. As well as providing excellent health and social benefits for people, these projects help to transform vacant and derelict sites and represent a good example of community led regeneration.

A Glasgow example of doing great things for transforming people's lives is at the Wellhouse Allotment supported by Connect Community Trust. The Trust highlights the purpose of food growing with their following statement "To raise the self-esteem, health and pride of all residents

of Wellhouse, Provanhall and surrounding areas in the East End of Glasgow".

The evidence is clear that a well operated allotment site generates an inclusive and sociable environment. A modern allotment is well embedded within its community and comprises of a range of friends and family. Most sites have communal plots with schools, and self-help groups providing outdoor learning opportunities within a safe therapeutic space suitable for people of all ages including those struggling with a range of health and social issues.



Polytunnel at Braehead Community Garden

Inclusive cohesive places to bring people together to interact and co-operate

Allotments and other food growing spaces create communities of a type and scale that encourages interaction having similar characteristics to that of a small village or a community street from a bygone age. Isolation is recognised as an increasing problem but allotments and community gardens provide an excellent shared practical focus that engenders conversations and friendships. This can be achieved in both established areas and for new development. By bringing together new residents to operate a new growing space provides an opportunity to provide immediate sociability and interaction within a new settlement thereby rapidly enhancing its ability to function as a successful place. Such experiences have been achieved in a range of community gardens established on vacant ground as well as new build development such as the new large scale planned community at Chapelton in Aberdeenshire.



Wellhouse Allotments, Glasgow

Cultural and Knowledge Exchange

Over the last 50 years the food on our dinner plates has significantly changed so why wouldn't changing habits be any different on our growing plots? Research shows how many people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds have brought different ideas and practices to food growing by the introduction of different plant varieties and production techniques. Such knowledge exchange is part of a wider educational and development experience of what can grow and what one can eat. For example, at Hamiltonhill Allotments in north Glasgow a number of plot holders are from Eastern Europe and Asia and these

cultivators have brought different approaches and produce to complement traditional practices.

Changing practices from in-coming cultivators is just one part of the allotment dynamic. Growing food is a lifelong learning experience by combining knowledge development, honing growing skills and just simply getting experience from finding out what grows. A heartening fact is that allotments are great places for inter-generational exchange and experience. Invariably a mature plot holder will enthusiastically pass on the benefit of their wisdom and growing experience to all those wishing to learn their craft.

Therefore, allotments are great places of learning which can open up undiscovered avenues for young people. A good example of young people participating in allotments can be found in Glasgow's Westhorn Allotment in Dal-marnock where a successful project was introduced for children to have their own allotment under the supervision and tutelage of some senior plot holders.

This social enterprising venture was not just about growing things but undertook a range of stimulating activities that enabled children to discover their own talents in a creative learning outdoor environment. This inter-generational initiative gave local children a positive focus for their school holidays and certainly provided a great opportunity for them to find their own capabilities. Of equal importance

was that the children's' enthusiasm also brought great levels of satisfaction and enjoyment to older people who were able to pass on their lifetime of skills and experience to younger people.

In a modern fast world where digital highways transmit information at a click of a button there is little time to think and contemplate. Allotments are great places full of people valuing the benefit of thought and preparation that acts as an antidote and counterpoint to the fast action of contemporary life. While the stereotypical plot holder might have been seen as a retired person, often male, many allotment societies report a much wider spectrum of interest from all representatives of society.



Trinley Brae Allotments, Glasgow

Food growing in a new build project accelerates community social inclusion

Chapelton, Aberdeenshire

The new master planned community at Chapelton is being developed by the land owner. The project is over 810 hectares and will include 4,000 dwellings within seven separate neighbourhoods, schools, public amenities, retail, open space and other facilities.

As part of the open space structure, ground has been provided for food growing with planned allotments and community gardens distributed throughout the development. These spaces are relatively small in scale deliberately situated so they are easily accessed by residents.

The provision of community gardens will allow newly arriving residents to quickly meet and integrate with other new residents as well as being used by schools. These growing spaces act as a venue for community events and a place of retreat and refuge for residents and wildlife.

Food growing areas are being subdivided into individual and communal garden areas with some 0.6 hectares being

provided within 800 metres of every dwelling within the planned settlement. The growing areas will be enclosed, serviced and have storage facilities and some car parking provision. Within the whole project there will be twelve food growing areas on some 6.5 hectares. Enclosure boundaries will be by way of maintained hedges providing a suitable edge between housing and the cultivated areas.

This project is an excellent example of how a landowning developer has taken an investment approach to delivering a place. The recognition that a good place needs places for things to grow is well demonstrated by the formation of a number of food growing spaces within the planned development. The bringing together of residents to operate the allotment provides an opportunity to enhance sociability and interaction within a new settlement thereby rapidly enhancing its ability to function as a sociable and successful place.



Sustainable – Allotments are full of Green Practice

Plot holders in allotments and community gardens always have a strong commitment to sustainable practices. Plot holders are fully aware of the importance of improving local bio-diversity, expanding organic food production and recycling/upcycling. Wildlife areas with ponds and native plants are prevalent on many allotments and bee keeping has become increasingly popular. Food growing is adapting to different approaches and methods including community orchards, fruit planting and even forest garden allotments for foraging have become increasingly popular.

Allotments have a long history of conserving urban greenspace and have made a significant contribution towards living in low carbon places. Growing spaces can be great places of beauty that act as important natural counterpoints to urban sprawl which has increasingly brought a negative impact on our eco-system.



Green water harvesting at
Braehead Community Garden



Comrie Community Orchard at
Cultybraggan Camp

A mixed food and flower bed generating wider bio-diversity and influencing natural inter-dependence

Allotments are Empowered Places full of Co-operative Behaviour

Allotments and other growing spaces are vital components of good quality places and should form an essential part of our urban greenspace. But growing spaces don't suddenly happen without assistance which is why it is really important for local planning authorities to embrace and accommodate such elements within their policies and land allocations. The creation of growing spaces cannot happen purely by the intervention of the State apparatus and process. Local community champions and supporters and public organisations need to collectively utilise community empowerment powers to enable local allotment organisations to connect and co-operate with wider community initiatives.

An example of an empowered community can be found at Braehead in Stirling where Stirling Council owned a strip of land adjacent to the railway which was taken over by the local community and transformed into a thriving community garden. This exemplar partnership between the Council and the local community demonstrates how a relatively redundant piece of Council ground can be utilised with modest investment into a spirited thriving community activity.

The Braehead Community Garden is an excellent example of co-operative working which allows the community to be empowered, take control over the land and bring about much higher levels of community interaction, improved health and sustainable use of the ground.





Braehead Community Garden
Tool Shed Sharing

Demonstrating Demand and Bringing Forward More Food Growing Land

Evidence shows that there is an under supply of land for food growing. However, specific demand in any given area may be difficult to assess and it would be wrong for planners to avoid addressing food growing if demand in a locality cannot be demonstrated. For example, it would be difficult within a green field new housing proposal to demonstrate demand but as the new build Chapelton development has demonstrated if something is promoted then demand can be stimulated and champions will do the rest.

Evidence shows that there is an under supply of land for food growing. However, obtaining greater clarity on the level of demand will require an investment commitment on data collection as current resources are limited. In a number of cases, temporary use of land for food growing purposes has been promoted which can be positive, however, food growing requires investment which requires sufficient time to achieve sustainable and beneficial productive benefits including bringing people together and forming greater community cohesion.



Three Specific Areas where Planners can Assist in Providing more Land

If food growing in Scotland is to flourish then more land is required. Land has to be allocated in the right place so that it is readily accessible and convenient. The legislation provides a minimum provision by way of demonstrating demand but this is only the start for new provision. Demonstrating demand relies on some people being proactive and not everyone can be aware of regulations and process. For this reason there has to be an element of pro-action through plan, promotion and enablement. Planners are best positioned to undertake such tasks and the following three propositions are put forward to achieve more land for food growing purposes:

Chapelton Allotments

1. Food Growing Spaces within New Housing Developments

In major development proposals there should be land permanently provided for growing purposes. This is essentially what is happening in such places as Aberdeenshire and East Lothian and this should be embraced across all local planning authorities in Scotland. To make this effective National Planning Policy should reflect on the Welsh policy which makes it clear that food growing is much more than a leisure use. Allocating food growing areas as part of major developments provides an important contribution to good place making by encouraging healthy social activity that ascribes significant community benefit.



2. Reorganising and Utilising Public Land

While significant areas of public land have been sold, there remain large tracts of public land that could be used for growing purposes. Such land could include transferring land in public parks for community growing or allotments, it could also include incidental public open grassed areas that serve little purpose, have high grass cutting and other maintenance liabilities and provide little contribution to bio-diversity. Such public assets could remain within public ownership but could be operated by community food growing groups under a lease arrangement that was sufficiently long enough to allow groups to properly invest and sustain their operations and production. Some Councils are already providing land for community groups such as the Braehead Community Garden in Stirling which highlights how quickly a parcel of publicly owned ground can be transformed into not just a community garden but a vibrant hub for community integration.



Mansewood Allotments,
Glasgow

3. Making use of Vacant and Derelict Land

There remain large tracts of vacant and derelict land in Scotland. National initiatives are being promoted such as the Green Infrastructure Fund managed by Scottish Natural Heritage and other proposals involving the Scottish Land Commission working with the Scottish Environmental Agency. Some proposals that are being brought forward include community food growing spaces but many of the spaces will require significant levels of public investment to resolve poor ground quality. As in the call for food growing as part of a major new developments, equally this should apply to regeneration proposals on vacant and derelict land with the assistance of financial investment from public authorities and agencies. Such regeneration proposals incorporating food growing may be promoted through the use of master planning frameworks as part of a proposed 'planning zone' where planners act as place promoters and action makers.





Dean Gallery Allotments,
Edinburgh

Conclusion

From our research it is clear that community food growing action is making useful contributions towards Scottish Government's targets on health, food security and climate change. The proven social and health benefits demonstrate that food growing should be part of 'social prescribing' and attract funding sources to enable new sites to support wider health, regeneration and social objectives. Food growing is a healthy way of life which is also good for our planet. It is a beneficial activity that goes well beyond a person's leisure time.

Further reading + Information

Following the preparation of a draft of this document, three workshops for planners, allotment officers and food growing groups were held in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow to discuss research findings. The workshops were organised and led by PAS. Feedback from delegates highlighted good support for the recommendations and delegates welcomed the opportunity of working co-operatively to enable more food growing areas to be delivered in Scotland.

- The detailed version of this report is available here:
www.sags.org.uk/docs/GG3PlanToGrow.pdf

ORGANISATIONS / ALLOTMENTS INFORMATION

- National - Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS)
www.sags.org.uk / secretary@sags.org.uk
- Planning Aid Scotland
www.pas.org.uk
- Edinburgh - Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Association (FEDAGA)
www.fedaga.org.uk / committee@fedaga.org.uk

- Glasgow - Glasgow Allotments Forum (GAF)
www.glasgowallotments.org
- Dundee Federation of Allotments and Gardens Holders
www.dundeeoutdoors.com/content/federation-allotment-and-garden-holders
- Community Land Advisory Service Scotland
sc.communitylandadvice.org.uk

LEGISLATION and LOCAL PLANS

- Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Guidance on Food Growing Strategy
- Guidance on Part 9
- Land Reform Act 2016
- Local Development Plans

LAND IDENTIFICATION

- Grow Your Own Working Group:
www.growyourownsotland.info
- Mapping for Open Space - specific local authorities such as Glasgow - www.arcgis.com

- Greenspace Scotland (www.greenspacescotland.org.uk)
- Maps - CSGN (www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org)

DESIGN for ALLOTMENTS

- Scotland Allotment Design Guide
www.sags.org.uk/docs

OTHER BOOKS and DOCUMENTS

- Integrating Food into Urban Planning 2018, Ed Cabannes & Marocchino
www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press and www.fao.org/publications
- Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe 2016, Ed Simon Bell et al.
Routledge
- 'Raising Spirits' Jenny Mollison et al. - Centre for Confidence and Well-being, 2015
- 'A Hut of One's Own', Emily Chappell - Head of Zeus, 2017



Cultybraggan Allotments

Author: Steven Tolson
 Contributors: Members of the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS), Judy Wilkinson. Planning Aid Scotland (PAS)
 Design and Illustration: Emily Chappell
 Photo credits: Steven Tolson

Front cover and back photographs:
 Inverleith Allotments



THE
NATIONAL
LOTTERY

AWARDS
FOR ALL
SCOTLAND



Scottish Allotments
& Gardens Society