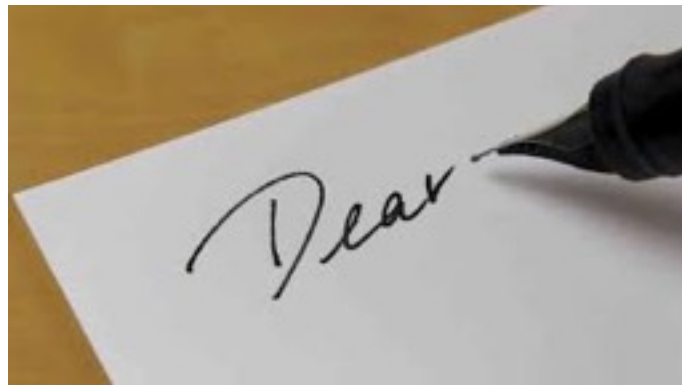


JOIN THE CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT THE CITY OF EDINBURGH'S PROPOSAL TO INCREASE ALLOTMENT RENTS



**The City of Edinburgh Council
are proposing to increase their
income from allotments by
£150,000.**

The details are contained on page 81 of the Council's Budget Proposals. You can read them [here](#).

Alternatively, the text is on FEDAGA's [News Page](#) (scroll down to find it).



THE HISTORY:

Allotments were created for the poor following the Enclosures Acts which steadily stripped common land from ordinary people. The Enclosures started in England in 1604 and accelerated in the 19th century. In response to this the Allotments Acts from 1892 placed a duty on Local Authorities to provide land for the growing of food according to demand.

The City of Edinburgh Council has a statutory duty to provide allotment land. Today it provides 1,429 plots, a number which is rising partly due to the practice of halving existing plots and partly because provision is being increased. There are 2,730 people on the waiting list.

In recent years the Council has worked in partnership with FEDAGA to improve the level of service to allotment holders and to increase the allotment estate. It is still a Cinderella service - and will probably always remain so - but the standards we enjoy would be the envy of many citizens elsewhere. In Aberdeen, for example, allotments have no fences, water supplies or even an allotment officer. All allotments in Dundee are entirely run by volunteers.

Allotments in Edinburgh are not subsidised. The money generated is mostly used to provide services to allotment holders and maintain the infrastructure. If the proposal goes through, the extra £150,000 will be used elsewhere.

Can the Council use allotments as a source of income? It's highly questionable. They must be affordable and available to all sections of society. If allotments become a source of profit they exclude the very people they were created to help. The proposal is against the ethos of allotment provision and will be detrimental to efforts to promote social inclusion, good health and sustainability.



THE ANNOUNCEMENT:

Despite working on two successive 5-year Allotment Strategy Programmes, known as Cultivating Communities, from 2005 to 2015 the partnership FEDAGA has worked hard to create failed to stop the Council from throwing a bomb at the allotment community.

Plotolders and Council officials read in the pages of the Evening News of the intention to raise an additional £150,000 from the allotment “service”, on top of the present £80,355 income.

A senior Council official told FEDAGA that he “had been instructed to not not consult on this or any other savings proposal until elected members had contributed to the discussion”. He apologised that allotment holders had to find out through the media.



THE FIGURES:

£80,355 is generated from 1429 plotholders.

326 plotholders pay £100 for full plots.

396 plotholders pay £50 for half plots.

407 plotholders pay £50 for full plots on 50% concession.

300 plotholders pay £25 for half plots on 50% concession.

To raise the additional £150,000 each plot/half plot will suffer an increase of £105.

If you're on a concession and rent a half plot you will have to pay £130 every year. That's more than a 500% increase. Would it be considered fair to raise parking charges or bus fares by over 500%? Those on concessions with a full plot would face a rise of over 300%.

Those without concessions are not so badly affected. A full plot would attract a rise from £100 to £205; just over 200%. A half plot would rise from £50 to £155; over 300%. So, those with the least face a 500% rise, while those with the most suffer to the tune of 200%.

However, if 50% concessions for the disabled, elderly and benefits recipients are retained the rent for a full plot could rise to £300.

Whichever way the cake is divided the proposal is unfair, unreasonable and unequal.

In comparison to the amounts to be generated elsewhere, allotment holders are being targeted disproportionately. Extra parking charges will raise an extra £750,000. Savings on sports and leisure will bring in £500,000. Care home rises will generate £147,000. Closure of public toilets will create £300,000. £250,000 from libraries. £200,000 from reducing supported bus services. All these services affect a massively greater number of people than the small number of citizens who look after an allotment plot. None are welcome. All should be opposed. But the allotment service is clearly being singled out. Why?



THE JUSTIFICATION:

The Budget proposal hopes to make savings of £28.5m. Hugh Dunn, the Head of Finance says that the exercise is to “improve services”. However, if enacted there will be few ploholders able to afford £300 a year for their plot. Perhaps the Council thinks that with a waiting list so large that there are 2 very patient people waiting on average 9 years for every plot, then they can employ market forces and ramp up the income. More likely, much loved allotments will fall into disuse and be sold to builders. Another tidy profit for the Council! Or the 17th Century Enclosures on repeat.



THE COMPARISONS:

Glasgow charges £35 (concessions £25) and the average charge in England is around £60 (from £40 in Liverpool to £80 in Birmingham). It's difficult to get comprehensive and up-to-date figures, but across the UK, Edinburgh is at the top of the pile for expensive allotments already. Most other councils subsidise their allotments.



THE OBJECTION:

It's illegal. The Allotments Acts clearly state the Council's statutory obligation to provide allotments at a fair rent where there is a demand. The huge waiting list demonstrates there is a demand in spite of the high prices.

Elsewhere, councils that have attempted to raise allotment charges by similar amounts have been over-ruled in court. Increases must be in line with those applied to other recreational amenities provided by the council. The Consumer Contract Regulations 1999 prevent a landlord from imposing an arbitrary rent increase.

In addition to all this, the proposal comes during a period of sustained goodwill which has greatly benefited the Council. It is debatable whether the allotment holders of Edinburgh have enjoyed reciprocal benefits.



THE CAMPAIGN:

When one considers the above it might be tempting to think “it could never happen”.

Indeed, the proposal may just be an ill-judged piece of kite flying to see what the Council might get away with. But the only way to ensure that the proposal is withdrawn will be for every allotment holder to engage in the campaign. FEDAGA will be meeting councillors and officials. This will count for very little if it is not backed up by each and every member. The most effective method is to personally engage with your local councillor. Try to meet with them at their surgery. Failing that, write to them. Letters are much more effective than e-mails. Remember that each ward has 3 or 4 councillors, so try to engage them all.

There's a style letter that can be used, below. However, the most effective communication is in your own words.

You could also get in touch with your Community Council and ask them to support the campaign.

The “engagement process” runs until 19th December. Final decisions will be made in February 2015.

What if the Council decides to go ahead?

A judicial review would be a very expensive option. A rent strike may be laudable, but in breach of the law. Quarterly payments are provided for in the Allotment Acts. It would inconvenience the Council no end if we were to make our payments on a quarterly basis. And they would not have access to the money in advance. But it would be best to avoid these consequences and nip this nonsense in the bud now.

[Your Councillors](#)

[Your Community Councils](#)



STYLE LETTER:

Dear Councillor,

I write to protest against the City of Edinburgh Council's proposal to increase allotment charges, as detailed in the Budget Proposals for 2015-16.

It is the Council's intention to generate an additional £150,000 annual income from the allotment plot-holders over and above the current amount of £80,355. In some cases this may result in a 500% rise. None of this additional income will be spent on improving allotments.

The rent charged for an allotment plot has increased from £60 to £100 per year over the last 5 years. This has allowed the Council to make their allotment estate fully self-funding. The mechanism for this increase was agreed between the Council and the allotment community's representative body, the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations.

The agreement was for a rent escalator which reached £100 this year, to be followed by a 5 year period during which the rent would be held. In 2020 the rent would be varied in line with the rate of inflation over the previous 5 years.

This agreement, reached in 2009 between FEDAGA (acting on behalf of the plot holders of Edinburgh) and the City of Edinburgh Council, constitutes a legally binding contract. By enacting the provisions of the contract, the Council is obliged to hold the rent as it currently stands until 2020.

Aside from the proposed breaking of contract by the Council, the Allotments Acts (Scotland) 1892, 1922 and 1950 state a "fair rent" is to be charged for an allotment garden. The proposed charges will take the cost of renting an allotment in Edinburgh to a figure approaching 10 times the national average. Such a proposal is clearly grossly unfair, and therefore subject to legal challenge.

I call upon you to remove the provision relating to allotments from the 2015-16 Budget Proposals.

Yours...

FEDAGA's Annual General Meeting will be held at 7.15pm on Tuesday 21st October at the Southside Community Centre.

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