



Newsletter

June 2016: 3 Months To The Show



THE FEDERATION OF
EDINBURGH AND DISTRICT
ALLOTMENTS AND
GARDENS ASSOCIATIONS

THE 2016
EDINBURGH
ALLOTMENT
SHOW

Saturday 3rd September

Free Admission

Register your entries - 9am to Noon

Open to public - 2 to 4pm

City of Edinburgh Methodist Church, Nicolson Square

For full details including Entry Form go to -

www.fedaga.org.uk/annual-show

In Praise Of... The Allotment Officer

Our Council Allotment Officer has a thankless task. To most people it seems impossibly Sisyphean. How many other council officials have to deal directly with nearly 1500 service users and manage 29 separate sites all on their own? That he appears each morning to attempt to keep the wheels of the allotment service turning is a minor miracle for which we all should be grateful.

Over the years FEDAGA has been portrayed by some as a fierce critic. Perhaps that is inevitable as they have to represent their members, and often there is a dispute to be settled. There are many instances of jobs not being done properly or even at all. (I'm thinking tree pruning at Midmar - paid for two years ago and still not done.) Maybe that's just what you get when dealing with a large bureaucracy. But FEDAGA has always tried to work with the Powers That Be in an attempt to arrive at the best solution for Edinburgh's allotment holders. It's not always gone to plan, though...



An under utilised plot

The prime bone of contention has always been the number of poorly tended plots that are allowed to mangle. Recently, to test their belief that as many as 10% of plots are sub-standard, some FEDAGA representatives accompanied Ian, our Allotment Officer, on a tour of four southside sites: Midmar, West Mains, Lady Road and Bridgend. One of those on the visit reported that, in general, the sites were in good shape: "Ian knew where the dodgy plots were and was able to decide on a suitable course of action that was sympathetic to the tenant of the allotment. I remain amazed at his knowledge of whose plot is this, whose is that. I think we arrived at a ball-park figure of between 3 and 4% of plots that needed some sort of communication to the tenant regarding its condition and when it would be properly 'under cultivation'. I certainly got the impression that Ian already understands the circumstances of a great number of struggling plotheholders. He acts with humility rather than simply seeing a problem plot and sending out a letter which could cause offence. On reflection, I think the figure of questionable plots is nearer 6%.



The plot gains structure

"It was noted that the official 'Termination and Appeals Procedure' is not always strictly adhered to. Ian sends an 'early warning' e-mail to those who appear to be struggling. When the procedure was drawn up

e-mails were not in general usage. This allows him to ask if the allotment holder really wants to keep the plot before starting the official process. When a fresh procedure is drawn up perhaps this should be incorporated.

"Allotment plots are very scarce, so people hang onto them regardless of their circumstances. It was apparent that quite a few have deteriorated over the years. We discussed whether a process could be established where the letters being sent could offer a return to the top of the waiting list should the plot be freed up. This might be an ideal method of stopping the 'blocking' we see at present where a plot is poorly maintained in the hope that in future the tenant will find more time. Instead, why not offer a plot when they want it on condition that they give up the one they have now?"



A thing of beauty

However, another member of the visiting party said "It seems to me that the Allotment Service operates a policy of trying to 'nudge' errant plot holders out of the gate. I believe the service should also deploy a policy of a firmer 'shove' where appropriate, as in the case where a plot holder is a serial offender (receiving emails and letters regularly) where there is no 'personal' reason for the state of the plot. Nor do I believe that personal difficulties should be 'a get out of jail free card' for total

inactivity. Here the possibility of the plot holder giving up the plot but moving to the top of the waiting list could be useful."

For each instance of sympathetic treatment encouraging a plotholder facing some sort of personal crisis that prevents him or her properly tending their plot there are always other cases that show people 'working the system'. Increasingly, the Allotment Officer's decision is taken out of his hands and Council bureaucracy is called in. Lawyers and senior managers are involved and the process stumbles to a halt. The wind-blown weed seeds spread across the well-tended plots and hard-working plotholders get frustrated.

Perhaps we should temper our frustration at delays in service provision, budget cuts and the apparent toleration of seedy and weedy plots and think a bit about the massive and growing task that is the responsibility of one man. And what we could do to help.

"Aloysius Ormsby-Gore".

Strimmer Solution?



Grass cutting seems to be a problem on many sites (*see previous article*). There's a lot of long grass about to seed all over the place. How do we get plotholders to cut the grass paths? At Inverleith this is mainly taken care of by the army of rabbits. Maybe they are useful, after all. Should FEDAGA liaise with a strimmer company to get a volume discount for members? Put your thoughts [here](#).

Rent Rise Response



FEDAGA has recently been asked why we're not calling in the lawyers to challenge a 6.5% increase in allotment rent. It might be useful to read the Secretary's reply:

The feeling at FEDAGA is that to seriously consider court action we must be totally sure of our case and not risk our members' funds by embarking on a risky venture. Plus, we don't see evidence of a strong feeling against the proposals among the members. Sadly, the 2009 agreement we were working on - and assumed the Council was committed to - was not a legally enforceable document.

It is always open to plotters to contact their councillors about any facet of Council service provision - and we frequently urge them to do so. This is usually the most effective way of persuading the Council to change course. There was a lot of behind the scenes contact with senior councillors last time before the outrageous 2015 rent hike was put to bed. So, no - FEDAGA will not be going to court.

As part of the research we did last year we established that a "fair rent" would be in the region of £95 to £105 for a full plot. We doubt there is a strong case to be made on those grounds.

The 6.5% figure can be contested. It is unclear why recent invoices did not include the Site Association and FEDAGA subscriptions (£1 and £1.50 respectively). The bill for a full plot was £100. The total on the invoice should have been £102.50 (including the subs). The subscriptions were paid to FEDAGA and the associations out of the rent money. The official cost of the rent is £100 this year and will be £104 next year.

FEDAGA will continue to press the case for fair treatment of allotment holders. The fact that other "leisure pursuit" services enjoy an element of subsidy will be used to argue that allotments should not be singled out to be treated as a "cash cow" for the Council.

We will also argue for a 5 year plan so that plotters know where they stand and can plan ahead. Currently, the Council is going from year to year. The draft Allotment Strategy document omits mention of future rent levels. At the very least we will argue that there is absolutely no justification for anything above the level of inflation.

In conclusion, I'd urge you to contact all your local councillors to ensure that they are aware of the situation regarding increased allotment rents and can persuade them to vote against implementation of any future above inflation increases.

Scottish Allotment Conference



This year's Annual Scottish Allotments Conference and Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) AGM will be held in the Victoria Halls, Dunblane on Saturday 18th June. The conference will be introduced by SAGS President, Ian Welsh. He will talk about the Society's activities this past year.

There will be speakers from the newly elected Scottish Parliament to update us on progress with the guidance and secondary legislation associated with the Community Empowerment Act.

Allotment Association Committees will find themselves with greater powers to manage their site in accordance with the wishes of their plot holders. However with power comes responsibility and the possibility of risk. Speakers with practical experience will explain how plot holders' wishes can be ascertained and suggest legal ways to protect committee members from liabilities.

After lunch speakers will focus on practical issues - the protection of butterflies, how to enthuse kids about allotment growing and how to source and grow exciting and delicious potatoes.

More information and registration documents [here](#).

Conclusive Proof Gardening Is Good For You



The National Gardens Scheme commissioned The King's Fund to write an independent report on the benefits of gardens and gardening on health. The report has three aims: to bring together the wide range of literature on gardens and wellbeing; to demonstrate how gardening interventions have an important place in the health and care system and to place 'gardens and health' within the current strategic health policy context. The report includes a 'menu' of recommendations that aims to encourage the NHS, government departments, national bodies, local government, health and wellbeing boards and clinical commissioning groups to make more of the diverse health benefits of gardening in support of their priorities. Click [here](#) to read the report.



16 community gardens across the city will open their gates to celebrate 'The Edinburgh Power of Food Festival'. This is an excellent opportunity to check out your local garden, have a nosey in a new one or see as many as possible by booking on the Sustrans bike tour. For a programme of events click [here](#). For more info about the Festival click [here](#).

The Edible Garden Project Tells You What To Do In June

For those seeking inspiration and guidance, click [here](#).

Kings Seeds Site Rebates

FEDAGA has just had confirmation from Kings they will be crediting our account with £461.48 in respect of the 10% rebate we have negotiated. This is a really impressive total. Back in 2013 we got £362.76, in 2014 we were down at £314.55 so last year was a real bounce back. Sites get this money back on a pro rata basis. The more you order, the more your site benefits. And that's after the whopping 45% discount you pocket each time you place an order.

For more information about the Kings Seeds Scheme click [here](#). You must be a registered plotholder to gain access.

The Top Ten Allotment Sites participating in the scheme, with the rebates they will receive this year, are listed below. The FEDAGA Treasurer will issue a single cheque to each site combining these figures, rebates for participation in the Seed Potato/Onion Set Scheme and Site Association fees as soon as is possible. (The hold-up is the traditional delay in receiving the due money from the Council.)

1. Midmar - £58.62
2. Inverleith - £53.81
3. West Mains - £34.37
4. Bridgend - £25.67
5. Pilrig Park - £24.90
6. Saughton Mains - £24.11
7. Lady Road - £23.95
8. Restalrig - £23.71
9. Leith Links - £23.17
10. Carrick Knowe - £21.84

West Mains Open Day



It's always lovely and sunny when West Mains has it's Open Day!

Annual Site Open Day, Sunday 7th August, 1-4pm.

Put this date in your diary and go along to enjoy the produce stall, afternoon teas, children's craft activities and the popular veggie curry lunches. Last year West Mains made over £500 to plough back into benefits for plot-holders such as the skip and free compost. Does your site have an Open Day? It's a great way to share your site with friends and neighbours as well as swell your coffers and/or raise money for charity.

Allotment Photo Appeal

The Council is currently preparing the third Allotment Strategy Policy Document. They are looking for good allotment photos to illustrate it with. Do you have any good pictures you'd be happy to share? Please get in touch with FEDAGA (click [here](#)) and we'll pass them on.

GQT Garden Party @ RBGE

Click [here](#) to buy tickets for the Gardeners' Question Time Garden Party at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh on Saturday 9th July and have the chance of meeting up with and asking questions of GQT's Bob Flowerdew, Bunny Guinness, Matthew Wilson, Pippa Greenwood, Anne Swithinbank, Matthew Biggs and Chairmen Eric Robson and Peter Gibbs. Also in attendance, the Beechgrove Garden's Jim McColl. Not to be missed!

If you're visiting the "Botanics" any time soon be sure to inspect the veg growing techniques on display in the Demonstration Garden. There's a fine crop of tatties coming along by the Botanic Cottage.

A Solution To Dealing With That Glut Of Allotment Produce

Featured in **BBC** **the guardian** **THE SUNDAY TIMES**

Have surplus from your allotment? Share it on OLIO

OLIO is a free app which connects neighbours with each other to share their surplus food. Share your bounty, and your neighbours will thank you! :)

Grew too many tomatoes?

Have too much lettuce to eat?

Want to sell your pickled veg?

Going on holiday and won't have time to eat your produce?

OLIO The Food Sharing Revolution

DOWNLOAD FOR FREE



Watch the video [here](#) - More info and download the app [here](#).