

PE1433/E



RSPB Scotland
2 Lochside View
Edinburgh Park
Edinburgh
EH12 9DH

Dear Clerk to the Petitions Committee,

PETITION PE1433

Thank you for your letter of 28 June 2012, inviting comments on the above petition. RSPB Scotland supports, in principle, the concept of local or community food production. This is consistent with the principles of sustainable development that underpin all our work, and which have been adopted by all four UK Administrations, including the Scottish Government.

These principles include the concept of “living within environmental limits” which means that all food production, whether community based or commercial, should take place without adverse impacts on the environment, and especially biodiversity. This was recommended by the far-reaching Foresight report „*The Future of Food and Farming: Challenges and choices for global sustainability*”¹. The report recommended that food production must be increased, but that this must be done sustainably and not at the expense of biodiversity. This approach informs our policy advocacy in relation to agriculture generally² and should also be applied to community food production. Thus, we would support any use of public or private land for community food production, subject to such production being consistent with biodiversity conservation. Indeed, with better support for agri-environment schemes³, all food production in Scotland could be managed to be more beneficial to biodiversity.

In relation to RSPB Scotland’s own land, our nature reserves are acquired because they are of the highest biodiversity value, and we are obliged to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of this biodiversity interest in order to meet our charitable objectives. We also manage considerable areas which are notified as SSSIs by Scottish Natural Heritage, and thus we have a legal obligation to manage these areas in accordance with the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. This will often preclude land uses which are incompatible with the maintenance of species and habitats for which the sites

¹ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/food-and-farming/11-546-future-of-food-and-farming-report.pdf>

² <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/whyfarming/scotland/index.aspx>

³ http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Finance_debate_tcm9-312024.pdf

are designated. The Scottish Government has targets to ensure that SSSI features are in favourable condition⁴.

However, although the opportunities are necessarily constrained, we do want to see initiatives encouraged such as those that form the subject of the petition.

In 2010, we engaged in a discussion with the Scottish Government, led by the then Minister for Environment Roseanna Cunningham MSP, about community engagement on food production. I attach, for your information, a paper we produced for the Minister at the time, as part of these discussions. I understand that similar contributions were made by the National Trust for Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

As we extend our work and increase our activities close to urban areas, we believe that more opportunities for community initiatives, including the provision of allotments, will arise. Following discussions with Scottish Government, we identified one such area close to our Baron's Haugh Nature Reserve in Motherwell. We approached North Lanarkshire Council to arrange discussions on how to take forward this idea. Currently, lack of resources and staff to fulfil this project have meant it has had to be put on hold, but we are working with local volunteers and continue to have aspirations to set up this kind of project. We are also part of the Clyde and Avon Valley Landscape Partnership (led by South Lanarkshire Council) that is developing projects to rejuvenate community orchards and fruit growing in this area.

Please get in touch if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Harrison
Parliamentary Officer

Enc: Paper to Roseanna Cunningham MSP, 2010 "Opportunities for community food growing on land owned or managed by RSPB Scotland."

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/naturesites>

Opportunities for community food growing on land owned or managed by RSPB Scotland

Background

RSPB Scotland owns or manages 69,000 hectares of land in Scotland at 79 nature reserves. In line with our charitable purposes, this land is managed (as required by our charity regulator) primarily for nature conservation, with facilities for public enjoyment of wildlife and environmental education. This makes the provision of allotments for community purposes more complicated than for private and public landowners.

We are however extremely mindful of working closely with local communities in the areas where we own and manage land. All of our nature reserves have a management plan, which is reviewed every 5 years. At the review period, we produce draft documentation to indicate our future objectives for site management. This information is advertised in the local communities surrounding our site; the draft management plan is placed in local libraries for community engagement; and we often hold additional open days at the sites for local interests so they can see what we are planning. We invite public comments as part of this process and try to incorporate legitimate points into our future site management planning as best we can.

We work within the Scottish Outdoors Access Code and our sites are open for the public to enjoy. We provide appropriate facilities for visitors of all ages and abilities to enjoy wildlife. We carry our environmental education work at 13 nature reserves across Scotland and hosted 8513 schoolchildren in 2009.

Working with local food producers

Our land is actively managed, creating local employment for contractors and other local businesses. Many of our sites require grazing by domestic livestock to create the right habitat conditions for breeding and wintering birds and other wildlife. Cattle and sheep are the main grazing animals involved, however in some cases some more exotic grazing animals (for example Konic ponies) may be deployed as circumstances require. Whilst we do have our own livestock at a couple of sites, the more usual approach involves us working with local graziers either through farm partnerships or annual grazing lets. Across Scotland, we work with 57 farmers and let out 6259 hectares of grazing. Elsewhere, many of our landholdings are, in fact, leases or management agreements with landowners, farmers or crofters – for example, Balranald, North Uist is a partnership between ourselves, several crofters and local grazing committees.

In north and west Scotland, we let out 669 hectares of land at Birsay Moors on Orkney; 922 hectares of grazing land are let on the Isle of Coll, Argyll; 249 hectares of crofting land are let to 5 individuals at Abernethy near Nethybridge;

and 2250 ha are let in farm partnerships at Forsinard near Thurso. This pattern is similar across the rest of Scotland. In a good number of instances, we are working with grazing partners in fragile communities, including island situations, and we are mindful of the need to maintain healthy local farm businesses as an integral part of the local economy.

Whilst not strictly food production, we do have two community tree nurseries on our sites, at Barclye Farm, Wood of Cree, Galloway and Baron's Haugh, near Motherwell, Lanarkshire. Trees grown on our nature reserves in these locations are used by local communities as part of their development of community woodland schemes. These initiatives have emerged following approaches to us by local communities and we have helped them achieve their objectives. We are also engaged in several situations where we are working with local communities to develop renewable energy schemes on our land to mutual benefit.

Future opportunities for community food growing

As we extend our work and increase our activities close to urban areas, we believe that more opportunities for community initiatives, including the provision of allotments, will arise. Following this recent approach on this subject by Scottish Government, we have already identified one such area close to our Baron's Haugh Nature Reserve in Motherwell. We have approached North Lanarkshire Council to arrange discussions on how to take forward this idea. We are also part of the Clyde and Avon Valley Landscape Partnership (led by South Lanarkshire Council) that is developing projects to rejuvenate community orchards and fruit growing in this area.

RSPB Scotland

November 2010