



the National Trust
for Scotland
a place for everyone

Public Petitions Committee
C/O Clerk to the Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

8th August 2012

Dear Mr Stewart (Convener),

Productive land for landless Scots to grow their own food

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to petition PE01433 "Productive land for landless Scots to grow their own food."

As Scotland's leading conservation charity, with a membership of over 300,000, the National Trust for Scotland is committed to the maintenance and enjoyment of Scotland's natural and historic heritage for public benefit. In 2011, more than two million people visited our historic properties and more than two million are estimated to have visited our outdoor properties in the same period.

The majority of the Trust's own landholdings are in the rural areas of Scotland, and include a mix of historic properties, gardens, designed landscapes, nature reserves, and moorland and mountains. Our properties also host a number of tenant farmers and more than 13 crofting townships (the Trust has in recent years also created new crofts at Balmacara).

While not all areas of Trust land are turned over to agriculture or horticulture, we would consider that delivering protection for natural and historic features, supporting species and habitats, and encouraging recreation and enjoyment are all valid uses – and indeed the reason why our membership has acquired or been gifted land.

We recognise the benefits visits to outdoor spaces can bring to mental and physical wellbeing and providing access– not just for our members, but for the nation – and it is a core purpose of the Trust.

Making land available to the landless

The Trust acknowledges that it has the potential to open up areas of land for public use and has started to do so, where suitable. For example:

- Pitmedden garden has made allotments available for local people;

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- On Iona, the Trust has made gardening plots available to local people, with two of these plots supplying vegetables for local hotels;
- An area of Trust-owned land in Inverclyde is leased to a project which offers horticultural skills to people with special needs;
- One of our most recent developments in community gardening is at the House of Dun in Angus. An unused section of the walled garden is leased to a group which provides training and support for adults with a range of needs. The group is creating a vegetable garden, orchard and formal gardens and next year will be selling the produce to benefit both the garden project and the House of Dun.

Support for 'grow your own'

The Trust fully supports the Scottish Government's commitment to 'grow your own' initiatives to encourage healthy eating and local food production. Committee members may be aware the Trust has been looking after gardens for over 65 years and we have a huge amount of gardening expertise amongst our staff.

The Trust has been very much involved in promoting horticultural education both formally and on an informal basis. The Trust's pool of expertise is available to local people and interest groups. Garden staff at properties regularly organise garden workshops, plant sale days, and talks and lectures to share this knowledge more widely.

For example, at Priorwood in Melrose, open days are organised to raise awareness of fruit growing generally and of cultivation of older apple varieties.

Providing useful and worthwhile work, or volunteering opportunities

Each year dozens of volunteers help in our gardens. As well as providing valuable help to local Trust staff, volunteers learn more about gardening from staff and in many cases contribute to the pool of gardening knowledge by passing on their own expertise. Volunteering in our gardens is a healthy active pursuit which contributes to the physical wellbeing of those taking part.

We welcome the involvement of individuals and communities in the work of the Trust, wherever possible. Specific initiatives that may be of interest to the committee include:

- The Trust's Centre for Excellence in Heritage Horticulture (CEHH) offers training at key gardens across Scotland;
- Threave Gardens in Dumfriesshire hosts six Craftsman Gardener Award places, with a further place at Kellie Castle;
- Pitmedden and Inverewe gardens both offer apprenticeships in Gardening, and the Trust also organises placements for students from gardening courses run by other colleges;
- In the Borders the gardens at Priorwood and Harmony provide work experience for adults with special needs and this was recently marked by an award to garden staff;
- At other gardens, such as Greenbank Garden near Glasgow and Arduaine Garden in Argyll, the local community is more actively involved in the work and support of the gardens;

Norwegian model of land ownership

The petitioner makes reference to Norway as one possible model for Scotland to learn from in

making land more widely available to individuals and communities. While there is always the opportunity to learn from others, we would observe that the starting conditions are very different – Norway has a population density of only 10 or 11 people per square kilometre, in Scotland it is 66, on average. Population density is highest in Eastern Scotland (111.1 per square km) and South Western Scotland (175.4). The challenge is in connecting these largely urban communities with suitable green spaces within easy travelling distance.

Summary of support

The Trust recognises that it has an opportunity to build upon existing initiatives and on the increasing interest in 'grow your own' to investigate the feasibility of providing more land for food growing projects. As a major land manager we are in the fortunate position that we can look at the spread of our land holdings across Scotland and begin the process of identifying locations where allotments or community gardens may be developed.

Many of our properties are in rural locations where local people are more likely to have gardens and consequently the demand for land is less of an issue. Additionally we would not wish to encourage significant car journeys by developing initiatives at isolated countryside properties. However the Trust does own land in proximity to villages and towns and at these locations we would seek to examine the options for community food growing. In this we would look to the local community for ideas and opportunities for joint working. We would also discuss options with the local authorities. Some local authorities have long waiting lists for allotments and we may be able to help in areas which have the greatest need.

Yours sincerely

Kate Mavor
Chief Executive
The National Trust for Scotland