

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – A PLAN TO GROW MORE FOOD

Introduction

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In the fifth in a series of Think Pieces Steven Tolson sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 and a plan to grow more food. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be a Good Food Nation.

Food matters, not just to maintain life, it shapes the way we live, and how we connect with the land. The Scottish Government wants to make good food a national objective recognising the link between good food and good health.

Getting access to good food should include building on our excellent tradition of growing one's own food. Much of that tradition is rooted in improving the health and welfare but the nutritional benefit of growing fresh food is only one of a range of benefits that can help to strengthen and sustain our communities. However, identifying suitable land remains a challenge.

Having the right land in the right place is a matter for planners. Planners help to allocate, support and manage resource allocations. More than ever, planners are custodians of public interest needing to understand community requirements and help put these into action by delivering great places to live. All of this is consistent with Community Empowerment principles where communities take greater control of public interest decision making and actions for their own place and services.

Food growing is a public benefit but 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' activity, in other words 'free time'. However, those engaged in food growing, particularly those in education, health and social prescription initiatives, know that food growing goes well beyond people spending free time. Food is an integral aspect of any society being able to function well and it wouldn't be too difficult for the Scottish Government to adopt the Welsh Assembly's land use approach by regarding food growing as an 'agricultural' use.

The Community empowerment legislation provides statutory obligations for local food growing but this needs suitable land to be identified and acquired. Planners using their statutory powers can significantly help this process by proactively promoting food growing and identifying land as part of good place production.

At the moment, other than referencing allotments as part of wider open space allocation, planning authorities tend to wait for demand to be demonstrated. The legislation is geared towards individuals coming forward but most, particularly in

cities, simply sign on to a waiting list and wait for years. The emergence of 'Local Place Plans' will motivate communities to collectively come forward with specific demands for food growing spaces and planners will be under pressure to positively respond.

However, planning for the future should be about proactively assessing and promoting food growing rather than reacting to others. One way of providing more land is being applied in Aberdeenshire and East Lothian where planning policy requires food growing spaces to be incorporated into new 'major' developments. Such policy action significantly benefits the supply of food growing sites and provides an instant community component for a new place. While many 'major' developments are on the edge or outside settlements, the same principle should arise on major urban regeneration sites. Hopefully other local planning authorities will follow Aberdeenshire and East Lothian's lead on what is a relatively straight forward method of increasing food growing opportunities.

Such issues are promoted in a recent report 'Plan to Grow' published by the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society <http://www.sags.org.uk/Publications.php>. This report and executive summary argue the importance of allotments in place making and planning for people. The guide highlights good practice case studies and policies illustrating how successful delivery is attained and how benefits have been accrued.

Planning has a significant role to enable Scotland to be a 'Good Food Nation'. Those engaged in food growing are now looking to local planning authorities to be persuaded that growing food is an essential component for good health, education and sustainable place practice. For Scotland to be a 'Good Food Nation', food growing can no longer be referred to as a minority leisure activity, but an important public and national interest activity.

Biography

Steven Tolson is a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and past Chair of the RICS in Scotland.

In addition to his professional work, he has held academic teaching and examining posts at a number of Scottish Universities and is a regular writer on a range of community place making matters.