

Richard Clare
Sheffield Organic Food Initiative
C/o 41b Burns Road
S6 3GL

1st August 2006

Dear Mary,

I am writing to enquire about your progress in investigating the complaints I made earlier this year and to inform you of further problems.

As you will recall, we last talked after you phoned me to try to resolve the issues arising after the illegal eviction and destruction of fruit trees on an allotment rented by John Mortimer, a trustee of SOFI charity. Mr Mortimer does not want to pursue a private legal action for criminal damage, but has expressed that he would be willing to be reinstated as rightful tenant. This allotment has now been left vacant and derelict for 8 months. Two mature Walnut trees which were cut down have now re-grown. I would like you to consider reinstating the displaced tenant as a means of resolving this situation.

Our last phone-call ended when I mentioned that I had been threatened with physical violence by the relevant officer. You seemed more concerned by this than by the original complaint about the destruction of trees. I was left with the impression that you intended to investigate this matter, but have heard nothing further.

I have had to stay silent about this, because I was phoned at 4.20pm on 16th April by the line manager, Mike Taylor, who informed me that if I continued to talk about the

orchard allotment issue, I would be “evicted from all the allotments in Sheffield”. This response seemed disproportionate , but in the absence of any complaints procedure in this department, I decided to keep quiet although the issue is obviously not yet concluded.

I wish now to inform you of further developments, where established council policy has either been disregarded or directly contradicted.

In March I applied for a small Healthy Living grant of £500 to support an Allotments Access project, intended to introduce new participants to allotment culture and introduce them to good organic food-growing practice. There were no other applications for allotments and this bid was turned down because the new License has not been ratified, because the new tenancy has not been accepted. I have been running groups and volunteering opportunities on allotments for more than ten years, and have proceeded to run a group this year, funded by the charity without the support of the grant or any hope of collaborating with the Council department

On the 15th July 2006, I was told that the Council’s Scrutiny Board would be considering Self-management of allotments at its meeting on 20th July. I requested a copy of the papers for this meeting from Jason Deitsch and was surprised to find that information about the community sector’s activities had been completely omitted. I was also amazed to hear that Kim McMaster, Chair of the Federation, had not been informed by the Allotments Officer about this review.

As a public duty, I submitted the following to the committee:

Submission to Scrutiny Board 20 / 7 / 06

Item 7 3.45 – 4.30 pm

Allotments:

Devolution of Management & Community Development

Would it be possible to draw members attention to the existence of the charitable and community sector on allotments. The Council has a record of working with, supporting and co-operating with these initiatives.

There are many and varied projects whose activities are based on allotments in Sheffield. These projects provide social and therapeutic horticulture. Some also deliver courses in horticulture.

These projects employ more than a dozen workers.

They have a combined turnover in six figures.

(Details available from Smartwork study for Sheffield Community Economic Development Unit - December 2005)

Also, there is a fully self-managed allotment site in Sheffield at Infield Lane, which could provide a model for other sites.

Unfortunately, the Allotments Officer subsequently found out that I had submitted this information, which has resulted in him pursuing the following retribution against me. On Monday 31st July, a nice young man called Patrick approached me on an allotment I have tenanted for 18 years to tell me that he had been told that this was the only allotment available on the site and that he had been told by the council that he was the new tenant. This action was directly and causally linked to my submission of information to the Scrutiny Board. I have reported these events to the Scrutiny Board.

It also shows complete disregard for the proper legal process of eviction and makes a mockery of the waiting lists (reportedly 40 people on this site).

I'm sure that if you enquire, you will be told that this is just an administrative error, but you can understand the message that is being sent. John Martin is on record as expressing his jealousy of funding going into the community sector and suggested that the Greenfingers group in Burngreave should buy their own site instead of using allotments.

I know that you are aware of my commitment to the community sector in Sheffield for more than 15 years and my ongoing connections to many horticultural therapy groups based on Sheffield's allotments. I have worked closely with the Allotments department, co-ordinating the Healthy Gardening Grants scheme and raised £ 8000 funding for allotments from Joint Finance in 2001.

I hope that you will be impartial in your consideration of these matters, since I know that I have been grossly misrepresented and not had any kind of fair hearing.

I am dedicated to this sector because I have experienced and provided high quality care and educational services to the people of Sheffield.

I would like to extend an invitation to you to visit the allotments that SOFI has been using for more than ten years to experience some of the joy which has helped us gain public funding and win national awards for our work.

Yours Sincerely,