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'IoS' campaign buries plan to close allotments

Outcry forces PM to promise new rights to land.
Jane Merrick and Martin Hickman report



A resounding success was achieved by *The Independent on Sunday's* Dig for Victory campaign yesterday, when ministers promised that people would have new rights to land for allotments.

The move followed widespread concern, highlighted by a paper and raised at Prime Minister's Questions last week, that the Government is planning to remove the 103-year-old protection for allotments, raising the possibility that councils would sell off plots by the thousands.

The IoS received dozens of letters from plot holders – including a veteran of the Second World War Dig for Victory movement – calling on ministers to rethink the review of “unnecessary burdens” on local councils. The list includes the obligation to provide allotments where there is demand.

Our Dig for Victory campaign forced David Cameron to pledge in the House of Commons that allotments would

be protected. Referring to the campaign, Mr Cameron said: “It is a great movement, and it has my full support.”

The latest public figures to join the campaign include Trudie Styler, the film producer, and actor Richard

...ers, who starred in the grow-your-own TV comedy *The Good Life*.

Styler has created a range of “ready-to-cook meals”, called Lake House Table, to counteract the rise of fast food and has opened vegetable plots in the grounds of her Jacobean mansion to two schools. “It’s important we have access to soil. I understand the need for housing, but we can’t give up on nature – or on ourselves.”

After we revealed the plans, the Government said it would protect allotments, but admitted that section 23 of the 1908 Allotments Act, which gives people a right to demand plots, was on a list of red tape to be reviewed – fuelling campaigners’ concerns.

But ministers yesterday announced new powers for communities to open more allotments. The response suggests that they fear another backlash like the one sparked by the plan to sell off the nation’s forests.

Greg Clark, the planning minister, said the Localism Bill would give planning decisions to residents to ask for more land for allotments. People will be able to set out the exact locations of sites. Once a neighbourhood plan had been independently assessed and passed by a local referendum,

a council will be obliged to adopt the plan.

Mr Clark said: “More people want to grow their own vegetables but sites are becoming unnecessarily difficult to come by. We need to stop this decline.”

Donna McDaid, of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, said: “It is great news that people can help ensure allotments remain available for years to come.”

Additional reporting by Indigo Axford and Kunal Dutta



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WHAT OUR READERS SAID

“ Mr Cameron, Mr Clegg ...
Come after the allotments at
your peril. This family will
defend dad's right to
exercise, socialise and put
veg on the table ...
**HANDS OFF DAD'S
ALLOTMENT NOW!** ”



It's important we have
access to soil. I understand
the need for housing for people
too, but we can't give up on
nature - or on ourselves

TRUDIE STYLER
Film producer



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“Tens of thousands of allotments have already been lost to development and many more are blighted by the threat of re-development.
I urge Eric Pickles the Communities Secretary, to rethink the proposal and for the public to put their names down for an allotment space immediately!”

“I had an allotment when I was a student and I grew up with home-grown veg, so I understand their importance. They give people great pleasure and they are right to be up in arms”
GRETA SCACCHI
Actress

“It's appalling that the Government would plan to do this. In the end the whole of London will be under flats. Having an allotment is marvellous. I know a number of people who have them - it's the joy of their lives”
RICHARD BRIERS
Actor



“It would be a rotten decision, like selling playing fields. Ministers should learn from that - don't do it! Future generations will curse them - you can't get them back once they're gone”
SARAH BEENY
TV presenter

“Allotments are the way forward, especially as not everyone is lucky enough to have a garden. It would be a massive oversight by the Government - it has plenty of other things to worry about”
ALDO ZILLI
Chef