

The

Govanhill Gazette



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Free

It's a rubbish situation - so what do we do about it?

Pioneering study aims to discover the truth behind an issue that's blighting a community

At South Seeds, we've been wondering why there is so much fly-tipping in Govanhill, especially down the back lanes. So we were very excited when Zero Waste Scotland gave us some money to find out, writes Sue Reid Sexton.

We decided to do this by looking at one block with a lane, the one we know best, where we built a community garden (see the back page). Over the growing season we had seen rubbish lying around for weeks near the community garden. We wanted to check out how rubbish gets there and how it leaves and what are the factors which influence this. Obviously the best thing to do was to ask everyone involved what they thought, and in January 2015 that's exactly what we did.

The block is bounded by Victoria Road, Dixon Avenue, Westmoreland Street and Allison Street. On Allison Street there are low buildings housing businesses and through a locked gate you can see the lane. The rest of the block is made up of tenements, all of which are three storeys high. On Victoria Road the ground floors are all shops and there is also a pub on the corner of Westmoreland Street and



Dixon Avenue.

We spoke to 60 residents and shopkeepers, and interviewed people from cleansing, environmental health and all the other agencies which might be able to shine a light on this messy problem.

Then we checked the size and layout of the bins and took note of doors and gates that didn't work because these are the practical things residents are dealing with every day.

We talked to people about their

experiences of the lane, about what they understood about waste collection in this area, what they thought of the lane and whether they had ideas about why there is so much waste in it. What you hold in your hand is the result of all this.

Reduce, reuse, recycle ... or use it, chuck it, tip it - we're all consumers, and we all produce waste. Then what?

We bring stuff into our house, use it, drink it or eat it. Almost everything arrives in packaging of some kind which we then need to throw away. At some point we throw away the item itself too, usually when it's worn out, broken or outlived its usefulness. Or we eat the contents and chuck the rest.

Then comes the tricky part. Putting aside how to recycle, here's what to

do next.

All small household rubbish including from the kitchen should be put into plastic bags, preferably black bin bags, and then into the green wheelie bins in your backcourt.

All the flats in this lane have access to their back courts and in the back courts there are bin shelters. The bins should be put into the shelters. The shelters should

be kept clean and tidy in order to avoid rats. The bins should be able to shut over completely.

No rubbish should ever be left sticking out the bins or on the ground. Extra slabs have been provided outside the shelter for blue recycling bins.

The collection day in our lane is Wednesday. Most people in our survey didn't know that, but they don't need to

know it as long as the rubbish is in the right place.

Almost everyone we asked knew how the system works, yet most of the bin areas showed that these procedures were not being fully followed.

For an uplift of larger 'one off' items: put items on the slabs by bin shelters and report by calling 0141 287 9700 or at www.glasgow.gov.uk/recycling.



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Hussain and Maliha Momand

Hussain Momand is an electro-mechanical engineer specialising in drilling, oil and modern industrial greenhouses. He and his wife Maliha have lived in their flat for three years. A friend suggested they come here to seek work when Hussain lost his job in the Netherlands because of the recession. Hussain would like to move again as he hasn't found work here, but his wife and

two children like it. They have been in the UK for five years so it feels like home.

But Hussain is embarrassed to bring friends home, especially in the evening when there are people smoking hash in the close. There are signs it is used as a toilet occasionally too, usually by people from a nearby pub. Last year he found someone sleeping there. The front close

door has no handle on the outside so it can't be closed properly when you leave. He is sad to be bringing up his children in this environment.

In the Netherlands, there was a system of house management that Hussain thinks is good. Each block has a housemaster who oversees everything to do with the building - a bit like the French system

where every village has a *mairie* who knows everyone and everything going on.

Hussain's English is very good. He reads a lot of books on politics, technology and history. He also volunteers for the British Heart Foundation. We suggested he become a neighbourhood improvement volunteer (see page 4) to help clean up the area, and he liked that idea a lot.

Mr D

'Imagine the despair at seeing all your good work wrecked so quickly by other people'

Mr D has been in the UK for 16 years and has lived in his current flat with his wife and two little boys for eight months. He will move house as soon as he is able. His close is one of the worst in the block. When our interviewer first visited, the back court was full of old furniture, carpets, bottles and burst bags of rubbish. There was an area which was thick with discarded babies' nappies. It was a complete health hazard.

Because Mr D seemed so nervous about talking to me, I didn't believe him at first when he said he'd cleaned up the back court only two weeks previously. But as he began to relax, I saw that he was telling me the truth. (This was later confirmed by neighbours opposite who had seen him hard at work.) You can imagine his despair at seeing the backcourt wrecked so quickly. He also said he'd moved the bins outside the shelter to make it easier for people to use them, but this had made no difference. We gave him numbers to phone about getting the mess sorted.

The next day our interviewer came down the lane to get some photos of the mess and was amazed and delighted to find that it had all gone, or nearly. There was still some broken glass which would have made it unsafe for Mr D's boys to



play there. Later that day we passed him in the street. "Thank you," he said, grinning from ear to ear. "I didn't phone anyone," I said. "I thought you had."

Another of his neighbours passed and gave us a cheery wave.

We were impressed with how quickly the council had moved. But this was before we understood the system

ourselves. What had actually happened was people from other closes had complained about the mess, Environmental Health had been called, and a statutory order placed on the owners and landlords in that close. The timing was pure coincidence.

This was four weeks ago at the time of writing and so far the level of mess has not returned.



'I've lived here for more than 70 years'

Nan has probably lived in this block longer than anyone else, certainly for more than 70 years. She moved to Govanhill when she was five and to her current home when she was 12. Apart from a short period elsewhere, she has been there ever since. She says the area used to be quite well off and that the gap on Westmoreland Street which is now a temporary garden used to be the Hampden 'picture house' or cinema.

Five-year-old Nan went to Cuthbertson Primary School, except the teachers were very strict and everyone had to call it James Neilson Cuthbertson School, which was its proper name. She's seen a few changes since then but can also tell you lots about the history of the area, especially the stories behind the names of some of the streets.

Nan has been trying to get the back courts and the lane cleared up for nine years. She has attended lots of meetings, telephoned and written to councillors, and called the community relations officer whenever she sees fly-tipping. She was particularly proud of her back court garden which she looked after for years and used to have lots of beautiful roses.

Mr X: private landlord

There is no social housing around the lane. Of our study, about 40% were owner occupiers and 60% renting from private landlords. One resident said her landlord was 'great' and had completely redecorated for her, so she was staying. But private landlords vary greatly. We were unable to speak to a landlord in our block, but did find one in a neighbouring street. His story shows how hard being a landlord can be.

Mr X showed us photos of his flat after his tenants had left. All the windows had been broken over the time they had been there, including the glass panel on the front door. The white top of the cooker was so filthy it was black. All the radiators had been pulled off the wall with extensive water damage as a result. His tenants had not used the bins for their rubbish preferring instead to simply eject unwanted items out the window. As a result, the back court frequently became unsanitary and the subject of several statutory orders to clean it. The cleaning

was done by the council cleansing on several occasions and the owners were billed. Mr X paid these charges for a few months and tried to persuade his tenants to use the bins. This made no difference. He then refused to pay the council for the clean-ups and was taken to court and fined for non-payment.

Mr X's tenants spoke little English. He gave his tenants notice to quit and says he followed all the legal requirements. But as eviction drew near they said they had not understood they were being evicted, despite interpreters being involved. His eviction was ruled

unlawful. This happened three times in eight months during which he received no rent. They finally left when they realised he had noticed their gas had been tampered with and the supply was not running through the meter.

Mr X said he had been powerless to maintain his property or his backcourt and had been penalised on their behalf, as if he had some control over what they did. He says the close door is also broken and that he has tried to fix it several times. He does most of the repairs himself.

Antisocial behaviour is blighting our lives and our neighbourhood, say residents

Rotten to the core?

Rees Gallacher has lived in her flat for 27 years. She's been trying to get something done about the lane for the last seven and first went to a local councillor about five years ago.

Early last December she bought a new sofa and phoned the council about getting the old one lifted, and also told them about some fly-tipping in the lane. She was told the fly-tipping would be removed within a week and that she should put her old sofa next to the bin shelter. The sofa would take longer, up to two weeks. In the middle of January she bought another new sofa and took another old one down to the bins. She did not phone the council to tell them it was there because she had already arranged a meeting with Councillor Siddique and Gordon Smith of the Hub to discuss why the first sofa had not been moved. To date, both sofas are still in the garden along with various other items which other people have added.

In December, Rees had asked for waste collection leaflets in different languages for her to give to her neighbours. These arrived two months later after several requests. She has also requested stats on arrests for fly-tipping in the area and other important issues, but has so far not been able to get any. She says she can't bear going into her garden any more so her partner takes the rubbish down or she takes her waste elsewhere. She has in the past removed bulk items from the garden and the lane using her trailer, until it was stolen, and then her car.

One day last year, some kids went into the bin shelter and removed all the bins. They then used it as a toilet. Rees says she counted 43 pieces of excrement. The same kids came back with some old carpet which they laid down over their excrement. They collected furniture, a fridge and a lamp from the fly-tipping in the lane and decorated their new playhouse. Rees phoned the council for help, fully expecting there to be some concern for the health of these children at minimum. The council told her she had to tidy it up herself or they would charge her for doing it for her. Rees donned three pairs of gloves: surgical, garden and



workman's gloves. She put on an old white paper overall she had worn when working as a visitor in Glenochil Prison, and got to work. She cleared the shelter and garden, including the rubbish which her neighbours were dumping beside the bins because they couldn't get into the shelter. This was a considerable task as the council had not cleared any rubbish in the meantime as it was not in the right place.

Rees is understandably upset. She is frustrated by the lack of communication from the council, the lack of convictions for the criminal activity she sees in her close, her garden and the lane. She now has a video camera trained on her back garden at all times and misses the lovely garden she once tended but which is now wrecked.

● Our interviewer was mystified as to why Rees's sofa had not been moved.

When she phoned Polmadie they said they had only received one phone call about the bulk uplift, the day before. That morning they got an email about it from the Hub too. We spoke to Rees again. She said when she phoned 287 9700 the day before the worker there confirmed that her call in December had been logged. However, she was also told she would have to sort the giant accumulated pile of waste which has accumulated since then herself as it now constituted a health hazard to the bin workers. Rees pointed out that surely it was a health hazard for her too and that she was older and less fit than most of the bin men. This seemed to make no difference. She also said a couple of years ago there had been a similar situation. On that occasion, some previous occupants had finally given up and moved their bulk waste into the lane. The items were moved soon after.

Ms Z: 'too many people don't accept the law'

Ms Z is from Slovakia. Usually she lives with her son but her parents are staying just now because her father is unwell. She has been in the UK for 10 years and in our block for two and a half years. She likes it here because she has a job and will stay because her son was born here.

She is worried about the lane because it is dirty and the stones are too big so it is dangerous for kids and elderly people. She has seen rats in her garden and while our interviewer was there, her father came in from the backcourt very upset because he had just seen rubbish land in the garden from above and didn't know what to do. She says some of her neighbours are not putting their rubbish in the bins properly and sometimes even just toss it out the window. She has spoken to them about this but they don't want to listen. She thinks the council do a good job and the problem is too many people don't accept the law.

Mr G and Mrs. G

Mr G and his wife have lived in their flat for over 30 years. Until recently Mr G worked for Land and Environmental Services (LES) as a supervisor for refuse collection, so he knows how difficult the job can be. Our lane was named after him by some of the LES workers who worked with him.

But Mr G says the system has changed since he worked there. There used to be one team working Monday to Friday with overtime if there was some special reason. Now there are two teams working shifts to cover the whole week but with no overtime. He knows the bulk collection has changed too and wasn't clear how, but knows at least to call the council.

Regarding the success of the current refuse collection he told us 'The system is falling down on its knees.' And that people are often off sick with the strain of it. Like so many others, he just wants the lane to be kept tidy, but this must be all the harder for someone who used to clean it.

Bin lorry driver Andy

Andy (not his real name) is a bin lorry driver. He has been in his job for 15 years. He works 12-hour shifts from 6.30am to 6.30pm, four days on and four days off. The bin men call our lane Bookie's Lane after Ladbroke's, which is at the entrance. He's been working on this lane for about five years and says it has been much worse in the last three or four. In fact, it's the

worst in the area. There used to be the odd bit of bulk left, but now it is excessive. He has no idea where it is all coming from, or where all the extra waste in the bins comes from either, but he suspects there may be a problem with overcrowding. More people in a house means more rubbish and perhaps one bin per house is no longer enough.

But he's noticed people are not filling the bins and sometimes don't go to the bins at the back once the front ones are full. He sometimes leaves the bins out of

the shelter to make it easier for people to put the rubbish in. He even leaves the lids off occasionally, but this causes another problem: rainwater, making the bins much heavier to move. When a hole in the bottom was suggested he said this would attract vermin. We suggested removing the top of the bin shelter but he said this would also allow rain into the bins.

Of course, rats are a natural part of his job and he sees plenty of them. They can climb walls and wreck buildings by chewing through pipes and cables. One of the

biggest problems Andy encounters is access to the lane. There are often cars parked across the entrance. His team tries to come early in the morning before most of the shops in Allison Street are open, but often he has to go away and keep coming back until it's free. He'd like clear 'no parking' signs in place to prevent this. Andy says the worst part of the job is tidying the sets (shelters) and that this is a never-ending and thankless job.

He thinks what is needed is education and better communication.

Environmental health

Sarah is the area's environmental health officer (EHO). Her job is to deal with environmental health issues that arise, as they arise. She covers just Govanhill and says no other EHO deals with such a small area, yet she is extremely busy. Her job is part of Land and Environmental Services (LES) along with cleansing, roads, parks etc within the special Housing Intervention Support Team for Govanhill.

Her job would make most people's stomachs turn. Much of it is about following up reports of housing disrepair and waste - in other words fly-tipping. But reporting pests such as bedbugs, cockroaches and rats is a major part too, although these things are dealt with directly by Glasgow City Council's (GCC) pest control team, which is part of public health.

In a typical day Sarah begins her morning picking up complaints from various sources such as other GCC departments or the public. She visits new troublespots or revisits existing ones to check on progress, especially if notices have been served and the time allowed has expired. In the afternoon she does the paperwork, makes calls and



writes up notices. She also has to track down all the owners of properties using Land Registration or Landlord Registration. Then she passes it all to the administration section for typing up.

She says the best thing about her job is helping people. 'You can make a huge difference in people's lives,' she says. She also likes the variety and talking to the public. She finds it hardest when she can't help, for instance when there is not enough evidence to pin fly-tipping on the culprit and she has to serve a notice on everybody. She also really hates searching bags of rubbish to find evidence.

She thinks there should be a proactive programme of education about waste such as there was in one of the schools last year, but that it should be widened to the general public. She can be contacted on 0141 287 6627.

Clean Glasgow

If there is a particular hotspot for rubbish, Clean Glasgow might be able to help. Elaine Sheerin is the Clean Glasgow officer for the Govanhill area and she is keen to tackle fly-tipping and litter in the area by supporting the community to get involved.

With the team's help you could become a neighbourhood improvement volunteer (NIV). You'll be given your own special PIN number which you can quote when you phone in. This gives your complaint some level of priority so that the really bad locations are dealt with swiftly. They can also help you organise community clean-ups by assessing any risks and providing equipment such as safety gloves, litter grabbers and high-viz vests. They will provide binbags and arrange for collected litter to be picked up, and can organise skips. If you're concerned about safety have a chat with them and they might be able to provide insurance.

Working in partnership with Glasgow City Council, your help could be vital, but it is best done with friends.

Elaine has worked with schools, Scouts, businesses, churches and groups of neighbours.

Our interviewer identified within this block several people who were already trying to bring about change, and many others who wanted to but felt discouraged and alone. Clean Glasgow could help that. Staff aim to respond quickly to requests for support, as little as two weeks from first contact to doing the actual clean-up, but a longer run-in time is better. There is no one-size-fits-all. Instead a miniature action plan is made according to what you want to achieve.

Clean Glasgow's helpline is 0300 343 7027 or you can call them on 0141 276 7400, and there is a free-to-download app called My Glasgow for reporting directly from your smart phone, if out and about.

How folk who live in Govanhill feel about the area

In their own words

'The bin men do a good job scooping up this disgusting state. It's sad'

'Thirty years ago you could hardly get a house in this area. Now you can't get rid of it'

'Landlords are a problem because they don't pay for communal repairs. They have no communal responsibility. They dump stuff when they're putting tenants out. There are illegal evictions'

'What do I do with my rubbish? This is the way it goes. It was ever thus. My mother before me'

'Come in and I'll tell you how I'm becoming a racist'

'I parked my car in Westmoreland Street. As I turned the corner to go back to my car I saw a full bin bag being tossed from a window on to my car. I shouted up but they just ignored me. There were other witnesses and I told the police but nothing was done'

'I'd like to be able to play in the garden and the lane'

'They're just doing what we were told to do. We were told to leave it in the street. Then we were told to leave it in the lane'

'They should have the same bulk uplift day every week so everyone would know when to put things out. This is what they do in my country'

'There should be an art project of some kind, something to make people feel better about the lane. Maybe we could paint the lane blue'

'Are there lights? Lights might stop the fly-tipping'

'There should be stickers on doors in more languages. There isn't enough information'

'The council, the police and everyone, they know who it is but they don't act'

'We're staying because we can't be bothered moving and because of the garden, and because of our investment in the community'

'I'd like to see a camera on the lane to catch the dealers'

'Sometimes the bins aren't collected even when the bin lorry is in the lane. I think the bin men may be angry'

'Maybe we could get together as neighbours and clean the lane'

'My garden was lovely, full of trees and bushes. Now it's just mud. The kids pulled everything up'

'It's a sad area now. I'd like to leave. I'd stay if it was cleaned'

'We saw about 20 or 30 ten-year-olds pulling stuff out of the bins and smashing bottles. These kids are out of control'

Govanhill Hub

If you're not sure where to find help about dumping or antisocial behaviour - or almost anything to do with living in Govanhill - get in touch with the Hub. All the important services you need are based there. It is like a one-stop shop for all your practical needs or concerns about the neighbourhood, including having interpreters who speak Romanian, Slovakian and Czech.

You can ask for help with private landlords, fly-tipping, immigration issues, troublesome neighbours, crime, schools, bedbugs, finding health services and much more. Sometimes a problem needs help from more than just one agency, so people from lots of different organisations are based there - including cleansing, community police, environmental health and community relations.

The Hub is on the third floor of Samaritan House in Coplaw Street, in the same building as Govanhill Housing Association and the welfare team. The best way to get in touch is to phone them. You might get an answering machine with a message in English, Slovakian and Romanian. Do leave a message. Gordon Smith is the

person in charge of running the Hub, and says it gives people living in Govanhill many of the services they need right on their doorstep. The phone number is 0141 424 5909.

However, be aware that there is no specific confidentiality policy in the Hub. Staff who are part of it work by the rules of their various organisations. This means that information is shared freely during the twice weekly meetings. Most residents we spoke to had not heard of the Hub or were confused about where it is and what its role is. One resident said she had trouble finding the number and that even reception at Samaritan House, where the Hub has its office, could not tell her. There is nothing outside or in the reception of Samaritan House to indicate that it is there or what it does. Additionally, there are no statistics kept about complaints to the Hub, so there is no way of knowing how many complaints have been received about our back lane. For this reason you may prefer to contact the central GCC phone line on 0141 287 2000 or LES on 0141 287 9700 or, for instance, go direct to Public Health on 0300 343 7027.

Govanhill Community Development Trust

David Zabięga is the sustainable communities coordinator at Govanhill Community Development Trust (GCDT), which is linked to Govanhill Housing Association.

GCDT initiates and develops projects which address social, economic and environmental issues, and David believes that community engagement is key to any lasting change. GCDT offers one-to-one support in setting up groups and projects, and has rooms available for meetings. So if you want to set up a residents' group, for instance, talk to David and he will help you do this and arrange a meeting in Samaritan House.

He says there is a lack of a sense of ownership which probably comes from so many people arriving and leaving. If you know you're only going to be there a short time it's difficult to feel involved in local issues or have any commitment to caring for a place. He says many people are even unclear about legal ownership of areas. For

example, lots of people were surprised to learn the back lane is owned by the owners of the flats. Others might be surprised to learn that all occupiers are responsible for the cleanliness of the close and stairs.

David was also the person involved in the refurbishment of the back courts in 2012, including the provision of the large gate at the entrance to the lane. Our block was one of a small number which didn't get the full refurbishment that happened between 1974 and 1999. He says the back courts which did benefit from that have fewer problems with waste in the wrong places. He thinks the bin shelters in our lane are not big enough for the bins, don't encourage proper use and that this could be helped if the roofs of the shelters were removed. But the difficulty is that if the tops were removed the walls might collapse because they are not strong enough. He can be contacted on 0141 636 3665.

A real mixed bag: rats, rubbish roaches, heroism and hope ...

When I started this project I thought it would be a straightforward case of both residents and the council not doing what they're supposed to do, maybe a wee stand-off between them, a bit of extra rubbish lying about, and nothing too serious. I thought there would be obvious culprits and simple solutions. What I saw was something far more complicated. And far more dangerous.

I saw cockroaches and bedbugs, a giant rat hole, unused medication, rotting food, discarded mattresses and electrical goods, broken glass, dumped kitchen oil, scores of dirty nappies, furniture and broken toys, a discarded popcorn machine ... I heard stories of despair, frustration, fear and fury.

But I also heard tales of heroism, as one man single-handedly cleaned the devastation from his back court, and several others who said they had done the same, or had cleared the lane, or who wanted to. The gang of kids many people had spotted wrecking the lane were often the same kids who meticulously cleared it up at the start of South Seeds' community gardening session.

I was struck time and again by the lack of communication. Either communication systems didn't exist or they didn't work. Additionally, around this block there are six households who said they wanted a community clean-up. These and others have been contacting the cleansing, the police, councillors and suchlike on a regular basis, with varying degrees of success. Most of these people don't know one another, but wouldn't it be great if they did?

Partly as a result of limited communication, there was a high level of ignorance about services and how to use them. For instance, only half of those interviewed properly understood the bulk uplift arrangements, a further third knew a part of them. Six people said the bulk uplift information they had from the council didn't match mine. People were often surprised to learn the limits of the council's responsibility, for example that they are not responsible for closes.

What people don't know is how hard



Land and Environmental Services work to match their systems to the need, or that there are more cleansing services in Govanhill than in any other part of Glasgow, including Environmental Health. An ex-cleansing worker who lives in the block said: "The system can't cope any more. It's falling on its knees."

I also continued my long-standing love affair with tenements. These beautiful

buildings afford high-density spacious housing, often with individual layouts, large bright windows, fancy wrought-iron banisters on wide stairs and other intricate details. Each close is a small community in itself. Within closes and within the block, tenants are vulnerable to one another and can each play a part, along with the services, for better or worse.

Sue Reid Sexton

'I was struck time and again by the lack of communication. Either communication systems didn't exist, or didn't work'

The cleansing: land and environmental services

Gerry McAvennie has been depot manager for Polmadie Land and Environmental Services (LES) for five years. He knows the job from the ground up because he started as a basic-grade bin man 25 years ago. His patch is the whole of the south of Glasgow for some services but he also has sole

responsibility for the specific area including and around Govanhill. He says there are more LES resources going into Govanhill than anywhere else in the city.

Residents may have noticed an improvement around the level of fly-tipping in the area. A 'rapid response team' (RRT) was introduced as an experiment to deal with the fly-tipping in the streets. A small caged lorry tours the area picking up dumped items. The idea is to boost local morale by keeping the streets clear. So far

it seems to be working. It is not yet known whether there is either more or less rubbish being dumped as a result, but there are certainly fewer complaints. However, this initiative is not without its problems. For instance, clearing piles of goods more often may even encourage people to fly-tip in the streets instead of putting items at the bins and phoning the council. Additionally, any evidence of who has dumped it can be lost before environmental health officers can find it and act to prosecute.

As part of this initiative, there are at present also four patrol sweepers with trolley bins and brushes who work on the streets from Monday to Friday. They do not tour the lane.

There are no records of how many complaints have been made about rubbish in the lane, but the RRT tries to come the day before the bin uplift day to make sure the bin lorry can get down to empty the bins. However, sometimes the fly-tipping happens so frequently that more has



Govanhill landlords have environmental responsibilities, along with their tenants

‘What’s fit and proper?’

We include this section because landlords, as owners of property, have a responsibility for upkeep of their buildings and consideration for neighbours, just like owner-occupiers.

This means making sure their building is not a health hazard for anyone, including the occupier. They also have to take action against antisocial behaviour on their property. In legal terms they have to be ‘fit and proper persons’. These things are written into the law.

There is a landlord in Govanhill who has had all his properties taken from him because he was found to be not ‘a fit and proper person’. But there are ways of getting round sanctions, such as properties being registered in the names of family members or others, and we therefore can’t help being sceptical about the current legal provision for the control of rogue landlords.

The Private Landlord Registration Unit is run by the Scottish Government and is there to register landlords as fit and proper. In effect, although landlords are

required to register and can be fined if they don’t, no actual checks about their fitness or properness are done unless there is a complaint. The main thing the registration scheme does is keep a publically available register of landlords online.

Brian Carroll is the principal officer of the Glasgow City Council’s housing intervention and support team. It is Brian’s team who report your complaints to the Private Rented Housing Panel - not the Private Landlord Registration Unit. The website for this other very helpful crew, the PRHP, is at www.prhpscotland.gov.uk, and is actually very useful and accessible, with information for tenants and landlords about rights and responsibilities and so on. They can be contacted on 0141 242 0142.

But they’re not the Private Landlord Registration Unit. We went to the actual Private Landlord Registration Unit website at www.landlordregistrationscotland.gov.uk.

Unfortunately we found it difficult to use. We searched for a particular property and then again for a certain landlord, but found the information was out of date. It simply didn’t seem to work for users. There was no phone number on the website for when you have problems.

So, if you think a landlord is doing anything he or she shouldn’t, we suggest you contact Brian’s housing intervention and support team on 0141 276 7799. Landlords can be refused registration if Brian thinks anything in their registration form is not true, or if they are doing anything which makes them ‘unfit’ and presumably improper. He will also pass information to police if anyone lets a property without being registered. If you’re finding this whole section a little confusing, that’s because it is. Just remember, there are laws to protect you as a tenant and as a neighbour, and this is a good place to start if you are having trouble with any private landlord. Be persistent. The information and the legal structure are all there.

arrived before the big lorry has been, especially if the uplift is delayed by someone parking across the lane entrance.

Keys to the lane and all the gates are kept in the lorry, with spares at the depot. There is also a checklist kept in the lorry with details of difficulties about access, for instance, and any other special requirements. There are two teams of bin lorry workers in rotating shifts.

Gerry seems to know his area well and

to care about his job and the people who work on the streets. He is aware of the language and cultural differences among the people who live there. He has a sympathetic, all-inclusive attitude to everyone and the quiet wisdom of someone who has seen it all.

He says the lane is a hotspot for waste and bedbugs, which he thinks is partly due to local residents going to other areas and bringing items back to sort through which they then dump. He thinks the current

systems for waste should work but that a lot of the difficulties arise because residents are not following the procedures.

However, he is not passing judgment when he says this because he knows that this is not always easy or possible.

Gerry cares about his workers too and knows it is a tough job with little thanks, and always yet more rubbish. The motto which he advises them to keep is ‘Don’t look back’.

Security could prove to be the key factor in preventing dumping

There are 16 closes in the block around the lane. The largest close has 11 flats and the smallest only six, which add up to 121 flats in total.

Since the arrival of the large gate at the end of the lane, there seems to have been a drop in general antisocial behaviour, excluding littering and fly-tipping. Over the period of this survey the main gate was found unlocked only twice. We did hear three reports of child prostitution and several

‘Despite the lane gates, there are still reports of suspected drug dealing’

incidents of drug dealing near the entrance, but these appear to have been before the gate arrived. However, there are still reports of suspected drug dealing in two closes. People are seen entering these closes from the lane and leaving after a very short time.

All closes have front and back doors and a gate to the lane. The securest closes were two with extra inner doors with locks at the top of the stairs, which lead down to the backcourts. Closes with front or back doors which were broken or unlocked reported more trouble with rubbish, antisocial behaviour and non-residents coming and going to the lane.

Over the course of the study, two front doors appeared to have been vandalised to allow easier access, making three unsecured front doors in total. However, other front doors had no handle on the outside which meant they couldn’t be pulled shut when we left. In total six front doors were open, five of which were damaged.

Only half the back doors were locked. At least three were damaged and one had no lock at all. An unsecured back door gives a way through to the front door and out to the street. This means the front door can be left unlocked too.

Only half of backcourt gates were locked, although one of those padlocks was spotted on a kitchen table on an earlier visit. This means locks were missing on eight gates. Andy the bin lorry driver says when new locks are put on they tend to go missing quite quickly. One of the complaints I heard often was that few residents had keys to their gates. The truth is that the same key opens the big gate and all the garden gates, making all closes dependant on one another’s honesty.

Tight security was a key factor in the most untroubled closes. If all doors and gates in the block were locked there would be no way into the back for bin raking or dumping.



Clockwise, from above: the entrance to the lane from Allison Street; raised beds in the community garden and a selection of produce; the local MSP, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, joins residents in a clear-up of the lane and its surroundings

On the up: what we've achieved doon the lane by working together

Doon the Lane Community Garden

Isn't it amazing that right in the heart of Govanhill and just off busy bustling Allison Street there's a fantastic community garden? Tucked behind the shops, you'd never know this lovely green space was there. It is the shape of a triangle and in the summer it has nine raised beds and three half-barrel tubs overflowing with fruit, vegetables and flowers. This makes it a beautiful haven for butterflies, birds and humans too.

But it didn't used to be like that. In 2013 it was a neglected piece of waste ground full of building debris, 200 empty vodka bottles, burst rubbish bags and an abandoned pram. Govanhill Community Development Trust were concerned about this hazardous unsightly mess and asked South Seeds to look into ways to make better use of the land.

Robin Ashton, South Seeds' community engagement officer, aka gardener extraordinaire, spent two weeks knocking on doors and talking to local people. Then he organised a consultation meeting and lots of people came. Finally a date was set to start work.

The first thing that had to be done was



Before: fly-tipped waste on the site of the community garden. Robin Ashton on his way to lead a gardening session after the site's successful clean-up in 2013

clearing the rubbish. Then a fence was erected to keep the area safe. Then the gardening began. Of course, the rubbish still comes back. Sometimes people even chuck things over the fence into the garden, but most of the time it's a lovely place to be.

So many people came at first there was almost not enough room for them. Gradually over the weeks the numbers

lowered until it was mainly local Eastern European kids who were coming. They were a bit wild but also very enthusiastic. Every week the first thing they did was clean the litter all down the lane using safety gloves and litter pickers to do the job. This took at least 30 minutes every time. Then they got down to the planting and later the harvesting. Crops included courgettes, potatoes, kale, strawberries,



'It would be great if people of all ages and backgrounds come along when the sessions start'

peas, salad leaves, and herbs including rosemary, thyme and mint.

"It would be great if people of all ages and backgrounds came this year, the gardening sessions start up again in early April," says Robin. South Seeds is also negotiating to make the triangle behind Desi's and Meet 'n' Eat into a community garden too. Look out for leaflets and posters in the spring or just come down if you see South Seeds there.

We are also hoping to put on a summer festival in the lane this year or next, perhaps with stalls, a barbecue and music. But it's your lane. So any suggestions and offers of help would be very welcome.

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South Seeds is a community-led organisation based in the south of Glasgow. We work in partnership with residents and local groups to help improve the look and feel of the Southside. We provide gardening opportunities, help residents reduce energy bills and tackle waste issues