

growing in the community

second edition

ministerial foreword by Communities and Local Government (CLG)

Baroness Kay Andrews OBE, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Allotments play a unique role in our community and have done so for many years. Indeed, they are so important that they have enjoyed special protection in law for a century. The first Allotments Act, which created a duty on local authorities to provide allotments, was passed in 1908. A century later, although there are fewer allotments for many different reasons, they are no less important to the people and the whole community who get so much pleasure and benefit from them.

In recent years, the government has strengthened the protections around allotments within the wider planning framework, and within a wider policy of enhancing and protecting urban green spaces. So far, fewer plots are now lost annually than a decade ago. That reflects our belief that allotments not only promote good health through exercise, hard work and healthy eating, but they bring the community together across the generations and cultures, to share advice, experience, and a passion for gardening and growing good things.

Everyone benefits from allotments and we are conscious that there is rising demand, as well as many different pressures on space in our communities.

That is why we are committed to working ever more closely with allotment organisations and local authorities to support allotments, and to make sure that everyone understands what they must do to maintain and enhance them, ensuring that they will be there for future generations to enjoy.

I very much welcome the revision of this very comprehensive and inspiring good practice guide, which will help allotment officers and allotment holders alike to get the best out of their allotments.

foreword by the Local Government Association (LGA)

Cllr Paul Bettison, chairman, LGA environment board

Allotments have a vital role in connecting people to the process of food production, enabling them to grow fresh, cheap food, whilst reducing food miles. They help to improve the environment, support new plant development and preserve rare and unique varieties. At the same time they provide opportunities to be active, meet other people, and share knowledge, information and food.

The many benefits of allotments are now widely recognised and this revised guide coincides with a resurgence of interest in and enthusiasm and policy support for allotment provision at a local and central government level.

There are challenges facing allotment officers and societies, which are explored in this guide. However, public and political recognition, support and recent innovative practice all point to a more positive situation for allotments.

The LGA recognises the good work done by officers and societies and is very pleased to commend this guide as a valuable resource and inspiration for all those involved with allotments.

acknowledgements

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The authors wish to thank the voluntary mentors of the Allotments Regeneration Initiative and the many local government and allotment association officers who so kindly shared the experiences and examples of good practice which have been included in this guide. We are also grateful for the additional input from central and local government advisors.

executive summary

- 1 The second edition of this guide was commissioned by the LGA in September 2006, and substantially updates the original which was published in June 2001. The preparation of the guide has been managed by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.
- 2 The objective of the guide is to assist those who are responsible for managing allotments, either within local authorities or under schemes for devolved management, to work efficiently and effectively by emulating examples of good practice.
- 3 The guide will also help other stakeholders in allotments, including local authority officers in other departments, support organisations, allotment associations and individual ploholders, to understand the opportunities which allotments present for achieving multiple and inter-related benefits, and the advantages of working together to attain common goals.
- 4 The guide acknowledges the widespread renaissance in allotment gardening that has taken place since the first edition was published, including demands for new sites in some areas and growing waiting lists in others.
- 5 The guide is based upon extensive research into current good practice in the management of allotments in England and Wales. This has drawn in particular on documentary evidence, information from the internet, correspondence with allotment officers in leading-edge authorities and allotment associations, and the shared experience of the Allotment Regeneration Initiative's Mentor Network.
- 6 While the guide makes no claim to document every example of good practice in allotment management in England and Wales, it does uncover a wealth of innovative and successful ideas, which can be widely imitated.
- 7 The guide is organised in three parts: the plot, the tools, and the seeds, dealing with objectives, strategies, and practical methods respectively. Each part is illustrated with examples and case studies of good practice.
- 8 The 'plot' sets out the exciting opportunities and challenges that allotments now provide to councils and local communities, and maps out a course for getting the most out of allotments.
- 9 The 'tools' identifies allotments as a key resource in achieving a wide range of local authority agendas, including wellbeing, health promotion, cohesive communities and quality green space. It also identifies some of the key partners with whom allotment managers should be working, for mutual benefit.
- 10 A model is presented for an allotments strategy that links in with other areas of local authority work and offers a fully reasoned and resourced path to achieving good practice. Key elements of the allotments strategy include: promotion; resourcing; devolved management; effective administration; monitoring performance; and the achievement of best value.
- 11 The 'seeds' is a compendium of practical means to achieve good practice in allotments management, including: ideas for promoting allotments to convert latent demand into real users; setting rents and raising capital resources; supporting devolved management; communicating effectively with other stakeholders; provision of facilities; management of tenancies; and measures to cope with hazards and nuisances before they arise.
- 12 The guide concludes with a practical summary of key aspects of allotments law and signposts to further information.



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preface to the second edition

fresh shoots

The first edition of this guide, published in 2001, fulfilled the recommendation of the 1998 Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry into The Future for Allotments, that good practice guidance be prepared for the management of allotments. Since 2001 there have been some significant developments in the allotments movement and in world of allotment management, and these have been reflected in the updated guide.

The last few years have seen a real revival in 'growing your own', in line with current thinking on healthy eating, organic food and exercise. This has been reflected in the demand for allotments in many localities, with reports of lower vacancy rates and lengthening waiting lists. The impact is most obvious in London and the south east, where pressure on gardening space is greatest. The growth in public interest in allotments has been picked up by the media, highlighting the many positive messages about the value of allotments to local communities.

The allotments revival is not confined to London or the south east, but can be observed in cities, towns and villages around the UK. Public pressure is leading to the creation of new sites in areas of under-provision, a turn of events that commands a new section in this guide. It is also reflected in the sale of vegetable seeds – up 31 per cent over the past five years, according to the Horticultural Trades Association (Amateur Gardening, 5 May 2007), and in the fast expanding bookshelf on everything to do with allotments. Over 30 titles have been published on allotments since 2001 (with more on the way), more than had been produced over the preceding five decades and consuming some 5,400 pages between them. Allotments have their own glossy commercial magazine Kitchen Garden, and now a film has been produced on allotments based in Liverpool called, inevitably, Grow Your Own.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) is responsible for national policy on allotments, and recognises the unique role of allotments as places which bring all sections of the community together and provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce and promote health and wellbeing. The government's aim is to ensure that allotments are well managed, and are only disposed of where there is no demand for them and established criteria are met.

The central message of Growing in the community, that allotment managers should take a strategic approach to the management of their allotments through formal allotment strategies, has been taken up by many local authorities. In 2001 there were only a few examples of leading-edge local authorities. By the time of the CLG's Survey of Allotments, Community Gardens and City Farms in 2006, some 30 per cent of local authorities had an

allotments strategy or policy in place. Many of these have drawn heavily both on the guide and earlier good practice exemplars, but also introducing innovative ideas of their own. Further progress in the development of allotment strategies is being driven by planning policy guidance that requires a strategic approach to all types of public green space. It is to be hoped that the revisions incorporated into the second edition of this guide will help speed this process along.

Allotments have acquired a new champion, the Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI), formed in 2002 as a partnership between the voluntary and community sector, government and a leading charitable foundation. ARI is dedicated to promoting good practice in allotment management (as captured in the first edition of this guide), and embedding it on the ground amongst allotment associations and local authority allotment officers. ARI has attracted over £1m in grants to support good practice, most of it through the generosity of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. ARI has proactively promoted a positive view of allotments, and its network of ARI mentors have provided many of the examples described in this guide. Its detailed factsheets expand further on many of the key issues in allotment management, and we welcome ARI's network co-ordinator as co-author of this second edition of the guide.

There is an increasing amount of wider institutional support for allotments. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, the representative body for ploholders and associations, has created a charity, the National Allotment Gardens Trust, dedicated to the promotion of the benefits of allotment gardening. Other charitable bodies with a stake in gardening issues have published advice that is cited extensively in this edition, and Natural England is also keen to advance the cause of allotments, both for their benefits to people's health and wellbeing and for the very diverse wildlife they can support.

We welcome these developments, and hope that this second edition of the guide will help to underpin continuing progress towards a better future for allotments – and for the communities that derive so much benefit and enjoyment from them.

part 1 the plot: creating a new future for allotments

This guide has been written to help allotment managers achieve better things for and through allotment gardens. The primary audience is the local authority allotments officer, but sometimes this function is devolved to volunteers in allotments associations. This guide is for all of you. We place the allotments manager at centre stage: ambitions for the service; colleagues and customers to get along with; constraints on time and finances to overcome; and important duties to perform on a day-to-day basis.

We advocate ambition, without which good practice cannot be achieved, an ambition that encompasses allotment sites which are fully tenanted, well appointed and well managed, open to all, valued in many ways by the local authority and the communities it serves, and with a secure future.

For some the achievement of this ambition will be a challenge, but the examples in this guide show that it can be done, even from the least promising of starts. For others, good practice is an established fact, with ambition tempered by lack of space to accommodate new gardeners. This guide aims to share the lessons of success, and to build on success to ensure that it is sustained in an ever-changing environment.

As an allotments manager you work with many colleagues, including planners, finance officers, environment inspectors, social workers, leisure managers, and many more. This guide will also help them to understand the allotments service better and promote partnership working.

Allotment gardens provide multiple benefits, both to gardeners and to the wider community. But promoting these benefits isn't just your job: others wish to see healthy, active and cohesive communities and quality service delivery. Your colleagues are an important resource at your disposal, and you can work with them to help achieve their agendas, as well as your own, more effectively.

Your customers are the public, ploholders – present and future, and they all deserve a quality service. For current ploholders this means efficient day-to-day management, including a rapid and effective response to inquiries and competent management of files and accounts. Get these things right, and the ploholders will look after the land as they have always done. But the ploholders are a resource too: their handiwork is the best advertisement there could be for allotment gardening. Working in partnership with their representatives and associations (perhaps sharing responsibilities through devolved management) can help

you to deliver the wider benefits of allotments. Existing ploholders have an important stake in the future for allotments, and this guide has been written with their interests in mind, to demonstrate the benefits on offer to them through constructive engagement with other stakeholders.

A secure future also depends on the cultivation of an interest in allotment gardening beyond the current generation of ploholders: this guide looks for innovative ways to promote allotments to all sections of every community. Allotments face an uncertain future if there is no demand for them, but demand will remain latent and unrealised without effective promotion.

Allotments face a very challenging funding situation. Rents are often too low to cover even administrative costs, but raising them substantially can provoke resistance and undermine the aim of working together with ploholders towards a common goal. Capital for repairs and improvements is always scarce, and sources of funding limited. This guide faces up to the problem of resources by addressing the issue of a sustainable financial base for an allotment service. It identifies arguments for a higher priority in the allocation of capital resources (particularly through joint working to achieve multiple benefits), and points to sources of external funding which innovative authorities and associations have tapped into. It advocates a greater role for devolved management, as a route to cost reduction and the achievement of 'best value' in service delivery.

In the next section of the guide, we focus on a central pillar of good practice, the 'allotments strategy', which explains to others what you want to achieve for the allotments you manage and how you plan to secure the resources to make this possible. But we first place your work in its broader context, and explain some of the other agendas with which you need to engage, often presented as strategy documents by colleagues in other departments, and through which you can more easily achieve your own goals. We then explore in detail the components of a good allotments strategy by showing you where you need to go for guidance. These include a variety of organisations dedicated to supporting allotments (such as the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners and the Allotments Regeneration Initiative) or promoting the benefits which allotments can help to achieve (eg Thrive, Garden Organic and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens).

We have liberally illustrated the guide with examples drawn from the many leading-edge local authorities, successful allotment associations and proud allotment holders, without whose assistance the preparation and revision of this guide would not have been possible. It is a pleasure to share their knowledge and experiences with you, for the common purpose of securing a new future for allotments.

What is good practice?

- A clear commitment to a high-quality allotment service.
- A vision encompassing the provision of allotment sites with good facilities and plots in sufficient numbers to satisfy all newcomers.
- Effective and inclusive policies to promote the use of allotment gardens to the whole community.
- A financial strategy to enable the achievement of other aspects of good practice.
- Commitment to working with other stakeholders in the allotment service to achieve wider objectives for the community.
- A spirit of innovation.
- Efficient procedures for managing the allotment service on a day-to-day basis.

What is an allotment?

The Allotment Act of 1922 defines the term 'allotment garden' as:

"an allotment not exceeding forty poles¹ in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family".

This description remains important because it defines the permitted use of an allotment plot. Provided it is used mainly for growing vegetables or fruit part of the plot can be used for growing flowers, as a leisure area or for keeping small livestock, and surplus produce can be shared with others.

Section 8 of the Allotments Act of 1925 gives protection to land acquired specifically for use as allotments, so-called statutory allotment sites, by the requirement for consent of the secretary of state in the event of sale or disposal. However, land which was originally acquired for other purposes and which has been used for allotments in the interim (temporary allotments) is not protected in this way.

Some temporary sites have been used as allotments for many years and the Future for Allotments inquiry report recommended that land which has been in continuous use as allotments for over 30 years should be designated as 'statutory' if possible. Although the law has not been changed there is no legal obstacle to the voluntary redesignation of temporary allotment sites as statutory.

Private allotment sites have the same legal status as temporary allotments: plots originally provided for employees of the railways are a well-known example.

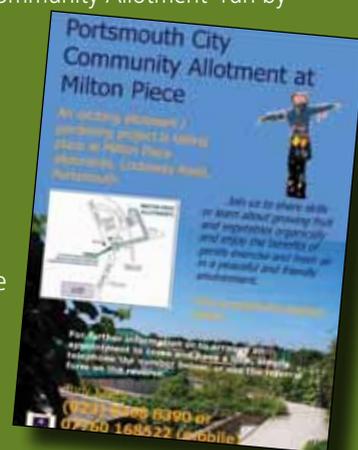
'Leisure gardens' and 'community gardens' are not recognised in allotments law but both make important contributions to urban green space, and some allotment sites function as leisure gardens or community gardens as well. The term 'community allotment' is sometimes applied to conventional allotment sites to broaden their appeal, but also to individual plots that are worked in common. These require administrative arrangements that ensure compliance with allotments law, while offering support (through infrastructure and/or tutoring) to persons who are not (or not yet) in a position to take on a plot of their own, such as people with a wide range of disabilities, people from socially excluded groups, participants in 'green gyms' and novice gardeners.

¹ 40 poles is equivalent to 1,210 square yards or 1,012 square metres (1 pole = 30.25 square yards; the terms 'rod', 'pole' and 'perch' are interchangeable)

Allotments and community allotments

The 'Portsmouth City Community Allotment' run by the city council's health improvement and development service is an example of a well organised project occupying 4½ plots within a conventional allotment site, and catering to a wide range of client groups who would not otherwise have ready access to gardening on allotments. The project has good wheelchair access, storage facilities and two polytunnels. Participation in the project has enabled some clients to take on allotment garden plots of their own.

(www.hids.org.uk/community/allotment.htm)



part 2 the tools: strategic thinking and exemplars of good practice

2.1 allotments in the bigger picture: working with others to improve the plot

To secure a better future for the allotments, your task as an allotments manager is to think strategically, and plan to reach that goal. We recommend items to include in that strategy in the next section, and develop each in detail in part 3 of this guide. First, however, you should consider how the promotion of allotments interacts with what others are trying to achieve, within the local authority and beyond, and how working in partnership with them could be the best way forward. You are encouraged to see allotments as part of a bigger picture. Realising this wider context is important, because working in partnerships may prove more effective in promoting allotments than working in isolation. In the next few sections we explore how allotments relate to some of today's more significant agendas in local government.

allotments and wellbeing

The Local Government Act (2000) placed a duty on local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas, through the creation of 'community strategies'. These reflect local circumstances and locally-expressed needs and aspirations, thereby contributing to the achievement of sustainable development both locally and more widely across the UK. These strategies establish a long-term vision for an area, whilst action plans identify shorter-term priorities and activities that will secure the long-term goals.

Central to community strategies is the principle of forming partnerships and of involving the wider community in the consultation and decision-making processes.

The inclusion of environmental wellbeing and the notion of sustainability provides a natural link with 'Local Agenda 21', and in many areas the non-statutory Local Agenda 21 (LA21) process has effectively been subsumed within the community strategy. The first edition of this guide highlighted the potential of LA21 as a means to encourage partnerships between allotment associations and local authorities to achieve a range of social and environmental gains, based on a number of successful experiences at a very local level. The development of community strategies, however, has involved the formation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and their delivery arm, Local Area Agreements (LAAs), constituted on a broader scale. These link local authorities with other key organisations in their areas, and prioritise the major concerns expressed through comprehensive local surveys. In this bigger picture, allotments have sometimes been undervalued as strategic assets.

Allotments can and do improve the wellbeing of communities, and close inspection of community strategies reveals many opportunities for the achievement of strategic priorities through allotment gardening, and in ways that engage with communities at a very local level. Allotments provide a source of fresh food, healthy outdoor exercise and social interaction, and can benefit all groups in society. By providing a link to nature, allotment gardening addresses all three aspects of wellbeing – social, economic and environmental.

The local government act does not authorise local authorities to raise revenue specifically for the promotion of wellbeing, so projects that do not involve great cost have an inherent attraction. Much can be achieved through allotment gardening without great expenditure. The wealth and diversity of skills associated with allotments can be harnessed for the wellbeing for the whole community. This is particularly important in areas of neighbourhood renewal and regeneration, where projects centred on the local allotments can promote the revitalisation of social activity and a rekindling of an inclusive community spirit.

food, health and exercise

The significance of food (and dietary choices) for the health of individuals and families has been a growing concern, particularly in the context of increasing child and adult obesity. The Department of Health's Choosing Health (2005) (www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/Organisationpolicy/Modernisation/Choosinghealth/index.htm) has provided the context for co-operation between government and the voluntary sectors in supporting improvements to diet, within which the importance of allotments as a source of healthy local food is recognised. The LGA's Greening communities campaign also recognises the importance of locally-produced fresh food for improving access to a better diet and better health. (www.lga.gov.uk/ProjectHome.asp?lsection=59&ccat=1132).

Support for healthy eating, along with the environmental benefits of locally-produced food, is also an important component of a growing number of food strategies produced through co-operation between the NHS, local government and other interested parties. The mayor of London's London Food Strategy, Healthy and Sustainable Food for London (2006) (www.lga.gov.uk/upload/pdf/LDA_Food_strategy.pdf), is one example which identifies a specific role for local food production on allotments. Other good examples include Brighton and Hove's Spade

to Spoon (www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/downloads/bhcc/sustainability/food_strategy/SpadeToSpoon-WEB_FINAL_SEPT06.pdf), which makes a strong cross-reference to other aspects of wellbeing, and the London Borough of Ealing's Food Matters (www.ealing.gov.uk/services/council/strategies_and_policies/food_matters_strategy/).

The Food for Life Partnership (www.foodforlife.org.uk/) led by the Soil Association has attracted £16.9m in lottery funding to promote healthy food in schools, with an explicit role for Garden Organic to develop growing projects with schools in local spaces, including allotments. When combined with the growing interest in organic food and healthy eating amongst consumers, these agendas (and resources) represent an open invitation for allotment managers to work with health authorities and others to incorporate the benefits of allotments into health action planning. The Food Vision portal (www.foodvision.gov.uk/), developed in partnership between the Local Government Association, LACORS and the Food Standards Agency, provides a convenient point of entry to policy developments and exemplars of good practice in this field – and includes a specific section on allotments.

Allotment gardening has always been recognised as a productive means for achieving healthy exercise in the open air, and for getting and staying physically fit: allotments have an important role to play in promoting preventative health. The LGAs Greening Communities campaign, for example, recognises allotments and 'green gyms' as a way of encouraging a more active population. Allotments are also achieving growing recognition as a resource for people with disabilities. Infrastructure improvements such as raised beds have proved popular in helping access to allotment gardening for people with physical disabilities, and there is also a significant role for allotments in a range of agendas relating to mental health. The more general therapeutic effects that allotment gardeners have always valued are now embedded in the broader health agenda for treating the most common mental health issue depression. They are specifically recognised, for example in Mind's Ecotherapy: The Green Agenda for Mental Health (2007) (www.mind.org.uk/mindweek/report/). Again, the door is open to the allotment manager to work more closely with local NHS primary care trusts to promote healthy living, and with a range of specialist support and advocacy organisations around the agenda for physical and mental health.

Allotments when wellbeing is hard to find

"The Comfrey Project is an allotment-based scheme to promote mental and physical wellbeing amongst refugees and asylum seekers in the west end and east of Newcastle. The project is also suitable for those with anxiety or mild depression or those feeling isolated, lonely or bored. Experience in horticulture is not required. Referrals can be made through GP's, social and support workers: a referral form can be provided by the Comfrey Project."

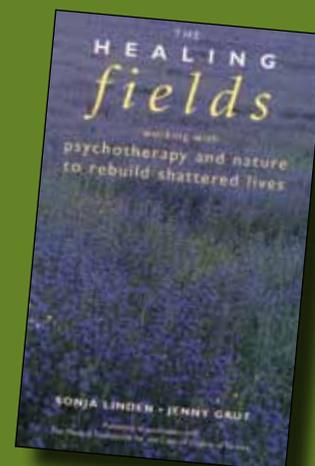


(www.nnt.nhs.uk/ethnic/catagory_detail.asp?EM_ID=8)

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture's 'Natural Growth Project' brings together "psychotherapists, an organic gardener and clients on 30 allotment plots on two sites in London. The role of the ... allotments is not only to provide a place of peace but to offer a space where the client is able to re-enact his or her trauma and start to lay it to rest. The therapist's role is not to co-ordinate activities but rather to reflect on experiences of the client through the contact with nature."

(www.torturecare.org.uk/about_us/20)

In recent years Britain has seen the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers from war zones all around the world. The value of allotment gardening as a therapy for refugees who have been traumatised by past experiences, and in helping them get back onto a secure footing, is recognised in the mayor of London's draft strategy for refugee integration, London Enriched (2007: www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/immigration/docs/ref-int-strategy.pdf). The role of the allotment officer is one of facilitation, working in partnership with other departments in the local authority to help projects get started and secure funding where possible.



leisure, culture and cohesive communities

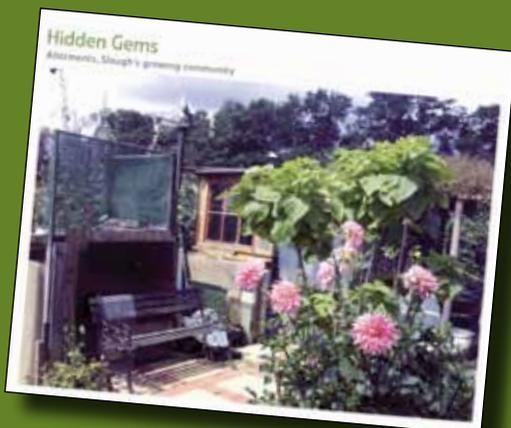
Related to, and increasingly integrated with, community strategies are the cultural plans prepared by local authorities on the basis of guidance provided by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (www.culture.gov.uk). Cultural strategies aim to address the full range of cultural needs and to promote fair access to all. Allotments bring together people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds whose knowledge of gardening can be shared. They are of particular significance to the elderly, who do not otherwise derive much benefit from subsidised sports provision, and value the gentle congeniality of everyday allotment life. The allotment manager should work closely with colleagues in the leisure field, to ensure that the benefits of allotments in promoting community cohesion are recognised and promoted as an integral part of cultural strategies.

Allotment culture can also be celebrated with the public at large, through events such as open days and the activities of artists and photographers in residence. (see box on Slough) Authorities such as Manchester, Bristol and the London Borough of Brent have all chosen to include allotments in their cultural strategies, in recognition of their contribution to community life.

Allotment culture and the arts

Collaboration between the allotments service, individual site associations and the world of the arts has produced some wonderful celebrations of allotment culture in recent years. This trend was started by the Uplands Allotments Association in Handsworth, Birmingham, which hosted an arts and allotments festival in 1998 featuring food, music and poetry from around the world. In 2003 the Seven Kings and Goodmayes Allotment Society in Redbridge sponsored Creation – a celebration by local composer Ewan Parker, which received its world premiere on site at the hands of the Eastbury Concert Band as the highlight of the Society's 75 anniversary open day. And in Slough the arts development team and the parks & allotments team joined forces to produce a colourful album of images from a photographer in residence, Hidden gems: allotments, Slough's growing community (2007), which highlights the benefits of allotments to people from Slough's diverse communities.

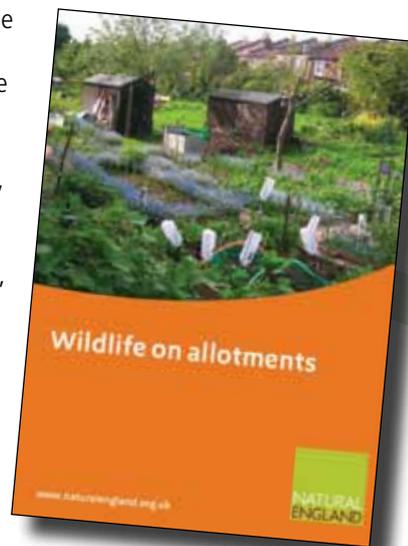
(www.artsinslough.org.uk/default.asp?id=1035&ver=1)



sustaining the environment

The contribution that allotments can make to environmental issues at local to global scales is another important point of linkage to broader policy agendas. In the first edition of this guide the LA21 officer was identified as an important ally of the allotments manager. While the emphasis on non-statutory LA21 strategies has diminished within local government, key areas such as recycling and biodiversity remain of strategic significance, and have been reinforced by the growing international, governmental and popular concern over climate change and its impacts. The opportunities for productive collaboration with council environment departments are therefore as strong as ever.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 imposes a new duty on public authorities to have regard for the conservation of biodiversity. Allotments make a distinctive contribution to local biodiversity, not only where untenanted plots are allowed to revert to nature, but also through being some of the last refuges of spade cultivation in urban areas. They are a natural home for foraging animals and birds, a contribution recognised by Natural England in its recent guidance on Wildlife on Allotments (2007) at www.english-nature.org.uk/Nature_In_The_Garden/. At a higher scale, one of the key factors behind the growing popularity of allotments amongst the young and environmentally conscious is the issue of 'food miles' and the contribution of the world food system to carbon dioxide release and global warming. Growing your own food on an allotment, using wildlife-friendly organic methods and home-made compost, has become a means to take a personal stand on these issues. For example, 'growing your own' on allotments is one of the top ten "easy actions for shopping ethically" in the DEFRA-backed Every Action Counts initiative (www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/), while 'getting an allotment' is now listed as one of "ten ways to buy local" in the Soil Association's East Organic Buy Local campaign (www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/Getinvolved/othercampaigns.html).



green space

In planning terms, allotments are a form of open space which, following the recommendations of the Urban Green Space Taskforce and the publication of Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation (2002) fill a specific category within the classification of green space, along with city farms

growing in the
community
second edition

and community gardens, which should be valued and protected by the planning process. In addition, Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (2006) specifically advises that local authorities should assess the extent to which new housing development provides, or enables access to, community green space, open space and private outdoor areas such as gardens. PPS3 also provides for the retention or re-establishment of the biodiversity within residential environments. The allotments manager and planners should together ensure that allotments are properly recognised as part of their portfolio of open space, alongside parks, playing fields and informal recreation grounds. Ideally, allotments should be covered by specific planning policies: for example, Brighton and Hove City Council (see box) identifies allotments as part of open space provision within its local plan, and there is a specific policy on the protection of allotments.

Urban open space

Planning permission will not be granted for proposals that would result in the loss of areas of public or private open space that are important to people because of their recreational, community, historical, conservation, economic, wildlife, social or amenity value. Enhancements to these areas of open space will be sought and the preservation of character, appearance, layout and features of importance.

The loss of an area of open space important to people will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. For example, where it can be demonstrated that the proposal is of national importance or essential to meet social, environmental and/ or economic needs, which cannot be located elsewhere. Where such exceptional circumstances apply, the planning authority will require alternative appropriate open space provision of a suitable size, type, layout character, appearance and location.

Planning permission for the development of areas of public and private open space that are not considered to be important to people, will only be permitted where the applicant can satisfy the planning authority that:

- there are no alternative open space needs in the area, such as deficiencies in outdoor recreation space, accessible natural greenspace or allotments; or
- the area of open space is not suitable to meet alternative open space needs.

For the purposes of this policy 'open space' does not just relate to parks and gardens: it also includes the beach; areas that provide a valuable feeling of space and/or seating within the urban area; areas of grass important as an informal area of play; recreational areas; allotments; and areas of amenity value that are visible but not necessarily accessible to the public. Indeed they can be large or small, the value of them depends on the individual circumstances and the community.

(from Brighton and Hove Local Plan, 2005, Policy QD20 and Section 3.91)

Vacant or underused allotments may look attractive to planners seeking space for other forms of land use, such as housing, an attraction that may also be shared by the finance department and private developers. This is without doubt the most contentious agenda surrounding allotments, and from the allotment manager's perspective there are a number of pitfalls to avoid, which we will deal with later on under the heading 'disposal of allotments'.

PPG17 requires local authorities to conduct robust local assessments of the need for various forms of open space and to audit current levels of provision against well-defined standards as the basis for new green space strategies which, given the scope of this guidance, have quite naturally subsumed many of the features of leisure strategies as well. Where these processes demonstrate a surplus stock of allotment land they can be problematic for allotment managers and gardeners alike, although the priority afforded to alternative green space uses where these are in deficit, which may actually be complementary to allotment cultivation, is something to be welcomed, since it also preserves the opportunity for allotments to be expanded in times of greater need. Where there are demonstrable shortages of allotments, however, the green space strategy provides the context for those shortages to be addressed.

One other aspect of allotments management is likely to be of interest, both to planners and to leisure services as the department responsible for the management of open spaces. Allotments are inherently cheap to maintain, as much of the maintenance work (the cultivation of plots) is carried out by the plotters themselves. Where there are schemes for devolved management, however, these can also act as models (and proving grounds) for community-based management of other open spaces. This concept is very much in fashion (and explicitly encouraged in government guidance on preparing Green Space Strategies), and is something which the allotments manager may have valuable experience to share. The Community Plan for the London Borough of Bromley (2007-10), for example, specifically mentions "managing allotments" as an example of how communities, clubs and individuals can play an important role in the development of leisure and cultural opportunities within the borough. (www.bromley.gov.uk/council/strategies/long/community_plan_full.htm)

"The intensity of urban living and loss of open spaces strengthens the value of allotment sites as 'being in the country whilst living in a town.' The variety of habitats within an allotment site allows them to develop as vital wildlife habitats, enhancing the biodiversity of an area and adding to 'green corridors'. The fast pace of twenty-first century life leads increasingly to a sense of isolation and loss of community. Allotments allow people to enjoy a sense of being in a strong community, where people get to know each other well, to talk, share ideas and make friends."

(from City of York Allotments Strategy)

the next big thing?

The identification of new issues and revisiting of old ones is an ongoing process that throws up new strategies, initiatives and agendas, some of which impact on allotments in direct or subtle ways. Just as current agendas such as health and wellbeing yield opportunities to work with others to achieve good things through and for allotments so, perhaps, will the next big initiative – for a multifunctional approach to green infrastructure perhaps, or local action on climate change, or support for active retirement. Opportunities like this should not be missed. Be prepared to respond to any approaches from colleagues seeking inputs to their own strategy documents, to ensure that allotments are ‘built in’ to as wide a range of agendas as possible. Be pro-active in seeking opportunities to contribute to the work of others, who may not otherwise have a chance to appreciate the contributions which allotments can make. And keep an eye open for information on new initiatives available from relevant professional bodies and support organisations. Useful sources of information are given in the box below.

The National Society of Allotment and Leisure

Gardeners: the NSALG’s quarterly journal regularly features issues of interest to its local authority members — on new initiatives, but also on many other matters that together make this essential reading. (www.nsalg.org.uk)

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative: ARI provides a comprehensive set of fact sheets relating to the key issues in allotments management – from fundraising to risk assessment, and its free newsletter regularly picks up cases where local associations have taken advantage of new initiatives. (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari).

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens: FCFCG is a key source of information on how the latest initiatives can achieve community development through gardening projects, including allotments. (www.farmgarden.org.uk).

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers: BTCV is one of several organisations engaged in the development and maintenance of green spaces, and its newsletters carry details of relevant initiatives. (www.btcv.org.uk).

Garden Organic: formerly operating under the name Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA), Garden Organic is the key source on all new practical and policy initiatives relating to organic cultivation on allotments and gardens. (www.gardenorganic.org.uk).

2.2 the allotment strategy: mapping the way forward

the need for a strategy

In working together with others to achieve a better future for allotments it is important to maintain strategic direction, a continuing (and evolving) sense of what it is that you wish to achieve, and to be ready to explain exactly what your agenda is to others. This is where the allotments strategy comes in, a clear map of the way forward for the allotments service. Without an effective strategy the process of managing allotments becomes one of merely reacting to events.

the importance of consultation

Preparing an allotments strategy will involve consulting as widely as possible as you put the strategy together, and being prepared both to explain and to listen. You may find some deeply engrained stereotypes about allotments that long predate the current revival of interest in growing your own, and encounter well-reasoned arguments for prioritising other services and uses of land. These need to be understood if they are to be addressed effectively.

In consulting with ploholders and their representatives, also bear in mind that any rationalisation of the allotments portfolio that might follow on from the strategy may create losers as well as winners. Tenants with a strong sense of ownership of individual plots may confront the upheaval associated with relocation. Failure to take into the account from the outset the interests of those who will bear some of the costs of implementing the strategy makes it much more difficult to achieve strategic aims which are otherwise in the public good.

what should the strategy contain?

There will be aspects of the strategy that will be unique to your area. Nevertheless, it makes good sense to take advantage of the achievement of others; leading authorities like Bristol, North East Lincolnshire, Sandwell and York are models to follow:

Bristol: www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/content/Environment-Planning/Parks-and-open-spaces/allotments/allotment-strategy.en

York: www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

North East Lincolnshire: www.nelincs.gov.uk/Leisure/Allotments

Sandwell: www.laws.sandwell.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/leisure-and-culture/parks-countryside-and-allotments/allotments

A good allotments strategy will include:

- an opening statement of commitment to allotment gardening;
- a vision of what the service aspires to achieve, including standards and targets for provision, and an acknowledgement of wider agendas;
- clear plans for achieving the vision, with a particular emphasis on promotion and resourcing, as well as the means to address the problems that may arise during implementation;
- a specified role for devolved management;
- a strategy for enhancing the quality of day-to-day administration of the allotments;
- a timetable for achieving the strategy and procedures for monitoring and reviewing progress;
- a concise summary of the contents, which can be used to promote the strategy to other stakeholders.

a commitment to allotment gardening

The statement of commitment (or 'mission statement') at the beginning of the strategy document is an undertaking by the local authority to deliver a specified standard of service in respect of allotments. It is a very important part of the document because it sets the foundations for what is to follow, and it encourages other parties (including existing allotment holders) to buy into the strategy. It is a point of reference against which the performance of the authority can be tested.

Mission statement, Bristol Allotments Strategy (2007-2012):

"To work towards the vision of a sustainable Bristol through maximising the participation of its citizens in allotment gardening by the improvement of allotment sites and their management, and through the promotion of the benefits and enjoyment of allotments and food growing".

It is intended to continue to work towards providing a service in which people can expect:

- good access, good security, well maintained haulage ways and paths, adequate water provision and freedom from neglected plots;
- opportunities and encouragement to individuals and communities wishing to be involved in the cultivation of allotments;
- efficient and effective allotment administration;
- effective and appropriate allocation of resources;
- fair, open and equitable treatment, and safe tenure;
- opportunities for developing gardening skills;
- encouragement to sites and associations to develop self-management;
- fair charges and rents.

a vision of the future

The vision is where you outline the level of provision of allotment plots and standard of facilities that the local authority hopes to achieve. This is also the place where the links to the wider agendas described in early sections of this guide should be acknowledged. In defining the vision, care should be taken to consider what is achievable within realistic resource constraints and the limits of the law.

Local authorities are duty-bound by the law to provide allotments for their residents if they consider there is a demand², and they should also provide a sufficient number of plots. There are no formal national standards for provision; the level and standard of provision should reflect local demands, which will vary from place to place. Nevertheless, it is important that a target level of provision is set in the allotment strategy, as well as in relevant planning documents, and that the allotment manager and others work towards achieving that target. Provision refers not just to the number of plots, which may vary in size, but also to aspects of quality: the quality of the land (simply making derelict land available to prospective tenants does not amount to the provision of allotments), and the quality of infrastructure. (see part 3 for detailed discussion of good practice in providing facilities on allotment sites).

Standards of provision have usually been specified in terms either of land per 1000 population or plots per 1000 households (see box), and standards adopted by leading edge authorities could until recently be taken as a guide to current good practice. With the publication in 2002 of revised planning policy guidance on open space (PPG17 - see part 2.3), however, and the supply audit and demand assessment requirements embedded in the formulation of green space strategies, local authorities have been obliged to define more robust, defensible standards for allotment provision. These must be robust enough to allow comparison with the provision of other forms of open space, and defensible to enable the planning department to fend off unjustifiable claims on allotment land by developers and others.

The appropriate level of provision depends on demand, but demand is difficult to measure in the absence of adequate promotion of allotments. Simply adding the current supply of plots to the waiting list is not enough, without proper consideration of whether some demand remains 'latent'. In the short term, therefore, it would be wise to specify a level of provision somewhat higher than the current level of use (plus waiting list) in a particular locality. A more accurate picture will emerge after the promotional activities that good practice requires and the development of more sophisticated and inclusive measures of demand.

The issue of standards of provision also arises in the context of the relocation of existing plotholders from a site scheduled for closure, for which see the section 'disposal of allotments' later in this guide.

- In 1969 the Thorpe Report¹ recommended a minimum standard of 0.5 acres per 1000 population.
- In its Unitary Development Plan the London Borough of Waltham Forest states its intention to 'seek to retain an area of land at least equivalent to 0.2 hectares per 1000 population in allotment use' [Waltham Forest, 2006, policy ENV18].
- In its Local Plan [second deposit draft, 2002 policy LT12] the Borough of Dartford adopts a standard of 0.25 hectares per 800 households.
- The National Allotment Survey in 1996 showed an average provision in England by county of 15 plots per 1000 households.

'Plots per household' is a more useful index as plots are often cultivated by more than one person from the same household.

¹ The Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Allotments, Cmnd. 4166, October 1969

clear plans for achieving the vision

The issues of promotion and resourcing are central to effective planning, and will be addressed next. In both cases emulation of good practice established elsewhere can be effective, and allotment managers will find benefit from background research on plans developed by other authorities. Many examples of good practice are readily accessible on the internet, and through direct networking with colleagues in neighbouring councils in allotments officers' forums, several of which have been established with assistance from ARI mentors in recent years (see part 3.5).

active promotion of allotments

Promotion involves a range of activities designed to convert latent demand into realised demand for allotments. These activities, ranging from improvements to advertising and the infrastructure of sites to the inclusion of allotments in community plans and sustainable development initiatives, are covered in detail in part 3 of this guide. Information will clearly play a central part in any promotional strategy, and attention should be paid not only to content (availability, location, quality, rent, facilities) but also to effective delivery of information to the full range of potential users, to overcome risks of exclusion. Good practice requires that the promotional strategy be inclusive of all groups in society, irrespective of economic background and personal characteristics, a condition which should apply to the delivery of any local government service. Allotments, however, also have a distinctive contribution to make to the achievement of 'social inclusion' at local levels, as communities of interest bringing a wide range of people, including people from different gardening traditions and cultures, together for a common purpose. This is yet another way in which allotments can be promoted more successfully in the future through engagement with wider agendas. Social inclusion is also the primary reason why allotments should be promoted – and attempts to accommodate fresh demand accommodated – even in areas with long waiting lists, to ensure that both newcomers and long-standing tenants have the opportunity to benefit from these public green spaces.

² Section 23 of the 1908 Allotments Act (as amended)

“I would rent a plot if I knew something about them”

— this is latent demand.

Attention should also be given to the quality of the product – the allotment garden and associated facilities such as lavatories and security fencing – to ensure that there are no qualitative barriers that deter potential ploholders from exercising their right to garden. It is particularly important that a range of plot sizes be made available, so that people who lack the time, the ability, the desire or the need to cultivate the traditional ‘ten pole plot’ can still be accommodated.

Effective promotion is clearly a defining characteristic of good practice in allotment management, and where it leads to full usage of allotment sites, it will help to ensure that allotments are available for future generations. It is also the case that under current guidelines for the disposal of allotments under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925 (see below), claims that allotments are ripe for disposal because of lack of demand will not be recognised unless adequate steps have already been taken to promote their use.

“I might rent a plot if they weren’t all overgrown and full of rubbish”. “The plots are far too big for us”

this is also latent demand.

What constitutes active promotion?

- creation of awareness in the wider community
- sustained level of promotion and support
- method of measuring success
- ability to respond to lack of success

resourcing allotments

The allotments strategy should also address the issue of how the acquisition, upgrading and management of sites is to be financed on a sustainable basis.

The only regular source of revenue obtained from most allotment sites is rental income. We address the detailed issues surrounding rent-setting in part 3 of this guide. In strategic terms, however, the key issue that the allotments strategy needs to address is whether current expenditures on outlays such as water supply, day-to-day maintenance and administration should be covered from rental income, or whether the running costs of the service should be subsidised. The argument in favour of the self-financing model is that it is more sustainable, provided that the level of rent does not in itself become a deterrent to the use of allotments. The argument in favour of the subsidised model is that allotments are a leisure service like any other, but of particular significance to the retired and to low income groups. One means of reconciling these two models is to target subsidies through rent concessions, which are permitted under allotments law.

As we noted in part 1, allotments can face serious funding problems, partly because they rank low on the agenda within many local authorities, and partly because ploholders often resist even modest increases in rents. Funds for capital improvements can be difficult to obtain, but may be essential if the promotion of allotments is to be effective. This is where engagement with other people’s priorities can be particularly important, to reinforce the case for greater resource allocations from the local authority, and also to access grant funding from outside bodies. The latter may be obtained to enhance the services provided on allotment sites for particular groups such as people with a disability, or to enhance the quality of the allotment site as an open space (examples of external funding sources are given in part 3 of this guide). There is an alternative (or indeed complementary) route to better quality provision and lower running costs however, and that is through schemes for devolved management, an issue taken up in the next section.

One other means of raising capital for allotments is through the reinvestment of funds generated from the rationalisation and disposal of sites. In fact, two exemplary promotion campaigns (in Bristol and Birmingham) have been partly financed in this way. It is clear, however, that this strategy can only work where the inheritance of allotment provision exceeds any conceivable expansion in demand (through changed economic conditions or realisation of latent demand), and where conversion to uses which might generate capital receipts is not prevented by covenants or planning restrictions. The latter are particularly significant in the context of PPG17, which prioritises conversion to other green-space uses where there are local deficits. Statutory allotments cannot be sold off simply because the remaining ploholders want better facilities and a developer hopes to get planning permission for building on redundant land: disposal depends on a demonstrable absence of demand, despite adequate promotion of the facilities on offer.

managing change

We have already noted that rationalisation, disposal and the associated relocation of ploholders can be a painful prospect for those involved, and it is essential to make clear in the strategy what the process of relocation and compensation will involve, including entitlements under the allotment acts. Where rationalisation involves investment in existing or new facilities to accommodate relocated ploholders, it will be helpful to include the views of those affected in the planning of these facilities, as well as those of representative organisations. Particular attention should be paid to the improvements that individuals and associations have made to sites affected by rationalisation beyond the maintenance of individual plots. These may be physical improvements, or aspects of service delivery that exceed the authority’s own standards. It is essential to ensure that as much as possible of the community spirit inherent in allotment gardening is protected and enhanced during the relocation process.

a specified role for devolved management

Devolved management schemes can benefit both local authorities and their allotment gardeners. A reduced burden of administration and maintenance responsibilities not only means savings for the authority, but also a route to engaging with local communities in the management and regeneration of important environmental assets, as part of community strategies and LA21 action plans. This can initiate the process of turning under-utilised sites around, and provide Best Value to service users. It can also redefine the role (and skills required) of the local authority allotments officer.

For ploholders, devolution can bring more responsive management on a day-to-day basis, a sense of pride in any improvements to the site, and opportunities for volunteers to bring their skills and expertise to a new challenge, particularly when they are beyond retirement.

The involvement of allotment ploholders in the management of their site can be broadly categorised as follows:

- **dependence** – neither ploholders nor associations play any practical part in site management, beyond exchange of information, perhaps through a site representative;
- **participation** – ploholders informally accept responsibility for minor maintenance works, and some mechanism may exist (such as an allotments forum) for the views of ploholders or site representatives to be canvassed on capital expenditure and repairs;
- **delegation** – a properly constituted allotment association accepts formal responsibility for a range of duties under licence from the local authority, under financial arrangements that release a proportion of rental income for this purpose. For example, the association may arrange tenancies, collect rents and carry out regular maintenance duties, but leave the local authority to carry out repairs, pay for overheads such as water, and undertake all legal formalities;
- **semi-autonomy** – the allotment association leases the site from the council, arranges tenancy agreements and reinvests revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repair and capital items. The council retains the right to review the lease at periodic intervals and has defined oversight and strategic functions. Associations which have implemented fully accountable schemes for devolved management straddle the boundary between the allotment and community gardening movements.

The greater the degree of self-management, the greater the saving to the council and the greater the degree of responsibility assumed by the allotment ploholders. The appropriate level of devolution, therefore, will depend on the ability and willingness of ploholders and their associations to manage their sites.

The generation of enthusiasm for self-management and of the willingness to carry it out is an important part of an allotments strategy. Many ploholders are more than happy to be dependent on the council and to receive the benefits that this brings. Many also desire better facilities, however, which often cannot be provided without a substantial increase in rent - or an alleviation of part of the financial burden of management through devolution. The process of consultation over devolved management can itself serve as a 'reality check' for ploholders and associations, by revealing the limits to resources of money, time and manpower that the allotment manager can otherwise command.

The report *The Future for Allotments* stated:

"There is little doubt that, when successfully implemented, self management schemes ensure greater control of a site by allotment holders and tend to work to the benefit of the site".

(www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmenvtra/560/56002.htm)

If ploholders are not prepared to take on some of the responsibilities they may eventually see the decline of their site.

"Those sites of low occupancy, where the users are not prepared to look outwards, to help in recruitment and to share their enthusiasm for gardening, must be prepared for the site's demise".

(Memorandum by Kent House Leisure Gardens (AL 67). *The Future for Allotments: Fifth Report of the House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee*. Vol II, Hc560-ii, 1998, pp 39)

As part of the allotments strategy and its implementation you may wish to:

- address the issues of devolved management and ensure that the strategy document reaches ploholders and their associations;
- ensure that each site has a contact (nominated) or representative (elected);
- promote and support the formation of site associations;
- provide information:
 - the Allotment Regeneration Initiative's free, downloadable factsheet *Gardeners in Charge* provides detailed coverage of the key issues from an allotment association's perspective. The National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners has also published a number of leaflets on the formation of site associations and self-management;
 - past research for the LGA also explores many of the issues involved, with a checklist of matters to be included in any devolved management agreement (see: www.btinternet.com/~richard.wiltshire/lga4.htm);
- investigate the level of interest in devolved management and the skills and expertise available to allotment associations amongst their membership;

- provide support for sites which are considering or have accepted devolved management, building capacity wherever possible by offering training, advice and consultation. There is an important opportunity for the representative and support bodies for allotment holders to assist in providing these services;
- put in place a 'rescue strategy', to manage the risks to both the council and the association should devolved management arrangements break down;
- review devolved management agreements on a regular basis, to ensure that they are delivering good value to the service users.

Many ploholders or associations may be wary of devolved management because of the risks involved – real or perceived – but as mentioned above, devolved management exists in a variety of forms. Ploholders should be encouraged to accept a level of devolved management commensurate with their abilities and enthusiasm, both of which should be actively nurtured by the local authority. And where sites are small, or the portfolio is particularly large, it may also be worthwhile to consider promoting and supporting the activities of allotment federations as a unified voice for allotments in the locality, and a key player in the formulation of the strategy and its execution through devolved management.

Prior to 1975 all 52 allotment sites in the London Borough of Bromley were managed directly by the council. However, by 1990 all had taken up self-management either through licences from the council or by leases. The process of transformation was aided by the formation of a federation – the Bromley Allotments and Leisure Gardens Federation – which encouraged former council-controlled sites to consider self-management.

In Newcastle, where allotment sites have traditionally been managed on behalf of the council by allotment associations, the forthcoming allotment strategy for 2007-12 has been jointly formulated by the local authority and the allotments working group, composed of representatives of the local allotment gardening community.

enhancing the quality of day-to-day management

Allotment managers are responsible for a range of day-to-day duties including the issuing and termination of tenancy agreements, collection of rents, monitoring of cultivation quality, management of waiting lists, applications and queries, and administration of contracts and orders for repairs and services. Some will also have experience of the friction that can arise with ploholders when these things go wrong.

An essential part of the allotments strategy, therefore, is to ensure that efficient systems are put in place for budgeting and record keeping, with regular reports issued to satisfy (amongst other things) Best Value requirements. Help is at hand from proprietary 'Allotment Management Systems' which can store all the records required by the allotments manager and issue invoices, plot offers and

other standard letters. Further details of two such systems are given in part 3, both of which have user groups within which you can share information and experiences from managers working for other local authorities, a useful resource in itself.

You can also consider accrediting the allotments service to ISO 9002 standard, a route pioneered by Bristol City Council, or to seek Chartermark status, to which Bristol now aspires. For smaller authorities with very few plots to manage, or associations with devolved management responsibilities, a more traditional record-keeping system may be appropriate, but it is still worthwhile to review the standard of record-keeping and to set targets for responses to enquiries and issuing of paperwork. The Best Value review process provides an opportunity for all local authorities to keep up to date with good practice in this area.

There are opportunities also for sites under devolved management to receive external recognition for the quality of the service they provide (to tenants and also more broadly to the environment and the local community). The most prestigious of these is the Civic Trust's Green Pennant Award for green spaces managed by voluntary and community groups (www.greenflagaward.org.uk/). In 2007 Dorset Road Allotments in Bromley received this award for a fifth consecutive year (www.dorsetroadallotments.org.uk/Awards.htm).

timetables, monitoring and review

By its nature a strategy requires a timetable for action which lists both long-term and short-term objectives: good practice exemplars like Bristol, North East Lincolnshire, Sandwell and York include objectives and target dates for completion. However, allotments do not exist in a static environment and objectives, targets and achievements need to be examined and reviewed on a regular basis so that the strategy remains effective.

"Part of the success of the allotment strategy has come from the strategy being a working document that is at the heart of everything the allotment section does, and from the feeling of achievement that this can bring. The allotment strategy has set targets, which are considered to be challenging yet achievable.

It also intends to be flexible and 'grasp the moment' when an opportunity arises, and ensure that the allotments section constantly strives to introduce new ideas, whether they come from staff, site representatives, community organisations, other local authorities or elsewhere ..."

(from Bristol Allotment Strategy 2007-12)

Best Value

It would be sensible to co-ordinate such a review with the timetable for the Best Value review of the department that houses the service. The overall framework for the Best Value review may well be set for the department as a whole and this will help to ensure that the quality of the service provided for allotment gardeners is at least as good as that offered to the users of other leisure facilities. Best Value also provides an opportunity for direct consultation with plotheolders and associations about the quality of service provision and to identify problems that may require a strategic solution. Viewed from a broader perspective however, and from a cross-cutting rather than subject-specific approach to Best Value, the review process presents the allotments manager with yet another opportunity to make progress by engaging with other departments and other agendas. The possibilities of delivering targets in long-term health promotion and community development at low-cost, through minimal additional investments in the allotments service, should be actively pursued with colleagues with direct responsibilities in these areas.

Comparison of Best Value performance indicators during the benchmarking process presents an opportunity to learn from those authorities that appear to be doing a better job, and to consider whether strategic objectives should be changed as a result. Carefully chosen performance indicators can also provide a useful means of demonstrating progress towards strategic targets. (www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1136106)

The allotment strategy by its very nature is a working document and to maintain its relevance on a year-to-year basis there is a need for the strategy to be incremental in its development. This can be achieved by an annual review to assess the success of short-term targets and their relevance in an ever-changing environment.

Care should also be taken to ensure that the performance indicators used are neither ambiguous nor misleading. Indicators in common use include variants of the following:

- total hectares of allotments administered per 1000 population;
- percentage of allotment plots let;
- length of waiting list/average wait for a plot;
- amount of subsidy per tenant/per resident;
- percentage satisfaction amongst tenants with the service provided;
- percentage of allotment sites under devolved management;
- percentage of allotment sites with designated facilities.

the summary of contents

The allotment strategy needs to be accessible to all stakeholders and whilst the strategy document itself may be detailed and comprehensive it will not be possible for all to read and digest it. A concise summary of the strategy is therefore needed so that the information can be distributed as widely as possible. An exemplar of good practice is provided by Nottingham City Council, which publishes a one page charter summarising the council's policy for allotments. This is a very effective way of communicating policy in a succinct and simple manner, and provides an opportunity for the council to state its commitment to the allotment service. A more detailed example incorporating both strategic thinking and performance standards, is the allotments charter for Solihull (www.solihull.gov.uk/section.asp?catid=2752&docid=325).

2.3 planning policy and allotments law

introduction

Before turning to the finer details of good practice in allotments management presented in part 3 of this guide, it may be helpful to address the provision, protection and disposal of allotment land, in the context of planning policy and allotments law. The allotments manager has an important role to play in influencing the planning process, and should seek to be consulted whenever planning strategies, issues or applications that may impact on allotments are under discussion. The allotment manager is unlikely to have ultimate responsibility for formulating policy or implementing the law in these areas. And yet, the capacity to deliver an effective and high-quality service is critically dependent upon others within the local authority, making decisions that are supportive of the allotment manager's work. Unlike the earlier sections of this guide therefore, this section is provided primarily for the benefit of planners and estate managers within local authorities, and for allotment managers. Since the guide is not in itself aimed at these other parties, it would also be advisable for the allotments manager to bring this section to their attention, along with any information regarding the implications of changes to the planning system or any modernisation of allotments law.

allotments and planning policy

Planning policy presents opportunities (in itself and in combination with other policies) to ensure an adequate supply of land for allotments and to protect those sites that already exist. To what extent those opportunities should be exploited however, depends ultimately on a realistic appraisal of current and future demand for allotment gardens. Where disposal of allotment sites appears to be justified, planning policy can also be used to regulate the subsequent use of the land. On the negative side, the planning system can be exploited by developers to undermine the health of an allotment site, through sequential planning applications that can cause a demoralising planning blight.

planning policy guidance and strategies

Allotments are primarily affected by two pieces of planning guidance, Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 3 (housing), which was revised in 2006, and Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 17 (sport, open space and recreation), published in 2002, both of which incorporate recommendations from the 1998 parliamentary select committee inquiry into The Future for Allotments.

Annex B to PPS 3 explicitly excludes allotments and associated buildings from the definition of 'previously-developed land', onto which the ongoing search for suitable new sites for housing is concentrated.

Explicit coverage of allotments in PPG 17 is somewhat less than the parliamentary select committee had advocated, but annex 3 does include allotments (along with city farms and community gardens) as a specific category in the typology of open space.

PPG 17 places an obligation on local authorities to undertake robust assessments of need for open spaces of different kinds, combined with audits of existing provision, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative attributes such as access. According to the CLG's Survey of Allotments, Community Gardens and City Farms, by 2006 almost two thirds of responding local authorities had already or were about to complete their open space audits. The audits and assessments of need then feed into the establishment of local standards for provision of open space, and the preparation of strategies that prioritise adjustments between different categories of open space, to ensure that local standards are met before surplus land is released for development.

PPG 17 has in turn facilitated the preparation of green space strategies, as required within the CLG's Cleaner Safer Greener Communities agenda (www.cleanersafergreener.gov.uk), which are in turn components of the community strategy (see part 2.1). Open space or green space strategies are thus key documents for locating allotments within the local planning system.

assessment of need

PPG 17 is underpinned by extensive guidance to local authorities on how to assess the need for open space, including allotments, in the document *Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG 17 (2002)* (www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1144068). While the reference to allotments in this guidance is helpful (see box), it should be noted that waiting lists should not be treated as the only indicator of unmet demand, as they only capture unmet demand that has been expressed. In some areas the closure of waiting lists as a response to heavy demand may lead to systematic underassessment of local need. Expressed demand will also be conditional on the extent to which allotments have been actively promoted to all sections of the community, and will remain latent if they are not. There is at present no generally accepted procedure for assessing the gap between current use levels and waiting lists and the potential additional need for allotments if actively promoted.

The demand for allotments may also be spatially localised within the local authority area, and may be out of step with the pattern of provision – an imbalance that may not be apparent from aggregate figures. Access to allotments should therefore also be taken into account in defining standards: the ANGSt standard developed by Natural England for access to natural green space is a useful guideline (www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/526.pdf).

“The need for allotments, community gardens and urban farms is likely to rise with the growth of interest in organic farming and as a result of rising housing densities and the consequential reduction in the size of many gardens. The number of allotments required in any area is a function of demand and therefore it will be appropriate to use a demand-led methodology, based on local authority records. It is obviously desirable for local authorities not only to provide and rent allotments, but also to keep a waiting list as this helps to identify the level of unmet demand and its spatial distribution. Accordingly there is likely to be a need for a population-based provision standard, coupled with an accessibility standard or distance threshold.”

(from DTLR (now CLG): Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17 (2002) annex A - open space typology]

new developments

Higher baselines for allotment provision may be needed for new housing developments than local authority records might suggest. Given rising residential densities, which preclude provision of much private garden space, it is important to ensure provision of land for allotments or community gardens as an alternative. Standards adopted in major areas of strategic development provide a guide. The Dartford local plan (second deposit draft, 2002, policy LT12) for example adopts a standard of 0.25 ha per 800 households for major new developments in the Thames Gateway. Planning permission can be made conditional upon the provision of space for allotments under Section 106 agreements, provided there is no alternative provision in the locality.

new allotments

In addition to sites in new developments, and replacement sites for ploholders displaced by closures, the increasing popularity of allotment gardening in recent years has led to growing pressures for the provision of new sites. This is happening in rural areas, where some parishes and towns have no provision at all, as well as in major urban areas such as Sheffield and in designated growth points for future urban expansion. The Allotments Acts (see appendix 2) make provision both for local demand to be properly expressed and taken account of, and for land to be acquired for the purpose of providing allotments. The design criteria for new sites are the same as those for replacement sites (discussed below), and in addition to the detailed advice given in part 3, the National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners should be contacted, as the main provider of good advice.

New allotments for Leominster

New allotments were officially opened in Leominster in 2006 by Monty Don. In the 1980s land previously set aside for allotments in the town had been sold off due to lack of demand. In recent years demand has grown again and the six statutory electors came forward to request that the town council provided them with allotments within walking distance of the centre of the town. The waiting list grew to over 50 interested residents in 2004. After a long and difficult search, the town council acquired 2.5 acres of grazing land on a 21 year lease. The site was prepared by a local contractor and a water connection established. A portaloo and six refillable water troughs were installed and the site was divided into plots – some full size (about 250 square metres) and some half size (about 120 square metres).

(taken from the Allotments Regeneration Initiative Newsletter, Winter 2006).

Where new allotments are proposed, it can also be prudent to bear in mind the potential for future conversion of use in specifying the location of such provision. Paragraph 9.6.14 of the Dartford local plan (2002), for example, specifies that new sites “should normally be provided on the edges of local parks, open space or playing fields to provide informal public surveillance and flexibility in case demand should change in the future”. Where such a policy is adopted, however, there is also a need for adequate policies (outside the planning machinery if necessary) to protect plots from theft and vandalism.

New Mills: new plots!

There had been no allotments in New Mills, Derbyshire for over 40 years. An advert placed by New Mills Town Council in 2000 enabled local people who were interested in setting up an allotment site to meet, form an allotment association and, in partnership with the council, identify suitable land that could be developed. A lengthy process of local consultation followed. By the end of 2004, planning permission had been granted on a piece of wasteland owned by the council, and work began on the new site. In just one year the New Mills Allotment and Gardening Society had transformed 4000 square metres of land into a new allotment site with over 30 plots. The site was fenced and cleared by April 2005 and mains water was connected just in time for a dry July. An access road was constructed and land drains were laid in September on part of the site that would otherwise be waterlogged and unsuitable for cultivation. Funds for this project were raised from the Healthy Living Network and Derbyshire Community Foundation, as well as from the town council. Plans for the site include a pond and wildlife area, improved access, a lavatory and wheelchair accessible raised beds.

(taken from the Allotments Regeneration Initiative Newsletter, Summer 2006).



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safeguarding allotment land

The best safeguard for an existing allotment site is for the plots to be fully tenanted and well looked after, with the site delivering the full range of benefits to the local community. This makes it much easier for planners (and ploholders) to make a case for the retention of the allotments. The active promotion of allotments and the conversion of latent demand into new tenancies, two of the key components of the allotments strategy, are therefore also an essential underpinning to the safeguarding of allotment land within the planning system.

Many existing local planning policies (including unitary development plans) are openly supportive of existing allotment sites, although this support is usually qualified by a presumption in favour of conversion to other uses where adequate demand can be anticipated to fill all the available plots. Policy L7 from The London Borough of Bromley's Unitary Development Plan (2005) is typical:

The council will safeguard existing land used as allotments. Development proposals resulting in the loss of allotments may be considered where:

- 1 there is evidence of long-term insufficient demand for continued use of land as allotments; and
- 2 suitable land is made available, either by retention or relocation, for allotments that are in use.

When allotment land is found to be redundant, planning policy can also have an important impact upon the end use. Policies 3.62 and 3.62A in Birmingham's UDP (2005) are particularly supportive of allotments in this regard:

Allotments provide a much needed facility especially in areas where private gardens are limited, and they will continue to be protected. There is uneven provision of allotments across the city. Redressing this inequality is important, and every effort will be made to encourage the provision of new allotments in areas of deficiency, where the opportunity arises.

Planning permission will not be granted for the redevelopment of allotments simply because the allotments have fallen out of use and become derelict. Where it can be demonstrated that the demand for allotments has fallen, consideration will be given to alternative uses for surplus allotments. Such uses will be alternative recreational, nature conservation or horticultural uses... If in exceptional circumstances planning permission is granted for other forms of development on part of the site this will be subject to the provision of an appropriate, equivalent, long-term recreational community benefit.

Both cultivated and unused allotments make an important contribution to the range of green space in urban areas. Where such space is deemed to be in inadequate supply within the green space strategy, a presumption can be made in favour of alternative open space uses, particularly those which keep open the possibility of reconversion to allotment use should demand subsequently increase.

Section 4.8.1 of the Epsom and Ewell local plan (2000), for example, makes this linkage clear:

Where the council is unable to promote a sufficient level of allotment use to secure proper management of a particular site, alternative uses may be considered under the criteria of policy OSR1 and OSR2, but the council will seek alternative recreational uses which can be reversed in the case of future demand.

While planning policy (combined with the provisions of the allotments acts) are the most significant means for safeguarding allotments, unique attributes of specific sites may provide alternative routes to security. The St Anne's allotments in Nottingham, for example, enjoy Grade Two* heritage status on account of their unusual brick-built sheds, which date from the early nineteenth century and come complete with fireplaces. One site on the Isle of Wight has been made into a Site of Special Scientific Interest on account of the presence of a rare wild plant (the Martins Ramping Fumitory).

other uses for former allotments

If there is a genuine surplus of allotment land and those prospective tenants who desire allotments have access to good quality allotment plots then it is not unreasonable to put that land to other uses. Ideally it should be possible to return the land to use as allotments if demand exists at some time in the future.

Consideration should therefore be given first to alternative green, community-oriented uses, such as community gardens (an option included in allotment leases in Cambridge), community orchards, such as that on the Horfield site in Bristol (www.voscur.org/members/profiles/horfieldorganic) and the Frieze Hill Community Orchard in Taunton, which has also been designated a local nature reserve (www.communityorchard.org.uk/), or community nature reserves such as that at Blondin Park in Ealing (www.london.gov.uk/wildweb/PublicSiteViewFull.do?pictureno=1&siteid=7643). These alternatives can serve a complementary role when integrated into an underused site, assisting in the regeneration of the remaining plots by making the site as a whole more attractive.

A few vacant plots can also be of benefit to an otherwise successful site, when kept mown for use as a picnic area, with tables, a barbecue and maybe play equipment for children. This can make a site more family-friendly and encourage a more co-operative spirit. A shaded spot or a plot that is difficult to rent might be set aside for a small memorial garden, where past ploholders can be remembered and their contribution to life on the allotments quietly celebrated.

Where there is genuine uncertainty about whether additional demand for allotments will materialise in the near future, it may be appropriate simply to apply a low level of maintenance, such as an occasional trim to ensure that scrub does not develop. The land can then be returned to cultivation easily if and when new tenants materialise. Organic methods of weed control should also be considered (see organic allotments in part 3).

The law also allows for up to five acres of allotment land to be cultivated as a garden or farm or partly as a garden, partly as a farm without the secretary of state's consent under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925. Section 8 consent is not required for uses that come within the wider definition of allotments in the Section 1 Allotments Act 1925, meaning "an allotment garden as defined by the Allotments Act 1922, or any parcel of land not more than five acres in extent cultivated as a garden or farm, or partly as a garden and partly as a farm".

The Bulwell Hall community garden, Nottingham

This was created from a derelict allotment site which was causing problems to local residents through vandalism and fly-tipping.



A piece of waste land was transformed into an amenity for the local community. Although it is no longer an allotment site the garden produces fruit and vegetables using organic methods which are sold on the site and delivered to other residents who are unable to visit the garden. The garden has evolved into an award-winning project managed by NECTA Ltd, a social enterprise providing a range of construction and land-based training and services which have helped local people back into employment. (www.necta.org.uk).

Another common use of former allotment land is for horticultural therapy projects supported by NHS primary care trusts. The Grange Park community garden in Preston, for example, aims to provide a range of activities to improve the wellbeing of people suffering from mental health problems. Activities include horticulture workshops and ICT training sessions, writing CVs and other job search skills.

(www.preston.gov.uk/news/News.asp?id= SX9452-A78072A4)

disposal of allotments

In as much as approval for the disposal of statutory allotment land under Section 8 of the Allotments Act (1925) depends in part upon evidence of adequate promotion of allotments, the explicit recognition of demand in planning policy is good practice. It makes clear

to both gardeners and would-be developers that plots which are maintained in full use are likely to enjoy strong protection under the planning system.

Allotment authorities are already obliged to consult ploholders before applying for Section 8 approvals. While there is no requirement for allotment (or planning) authorities to advise individual ploholders of planning applications which might affect their tenancies and sites, there is a strong case for ensuring adequate publicity for such applications, so that ploholders are not inadvertently excluded from the consultation process.

Disposal criteria for statutory allotments

Statutory allotments are protected via Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925 which requires that local authorities seek the secretary of state's consent, via the relevant government office, for disposal or appropriation to another use.

Consent cannot be given unless the secretary of state is satisfied that certain criteria are met. Clarified criteria were issued to local authorities in February 2002. Consent is not given unless the secretary of state is satisfied that:

- the allotment in question is not necessary and is surplus to requirement;
- adequate provision will be made for displaced plot holders, or that such provision is not necessary or is impracticable;
- the number of people on the waiting list has been effectively taken into account;
- the authority has actively promoted and publicised the availability of allotment sites and has consulted the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners;
- the implications of disposal for other relevant policies, in particular development plan policies, have been taken into account.

sale for development

Sale for development is the last resort for allotment land if there is no actual demand (revealed or latent) and no additional need for open space. It should in this case be a means of consolidating the allotments portfolio and improving it with any revenue that is generated. The existence of a willing developer is not a valid reason for disposal of a statutory allotment under Section 8, and consent for disposal does not create a presumption in favour of development for housing or commercial use.

revenue from the sale of allotment land

Section 32 of the Smallholdings and Allotments Act, 1908 requires that any revenue obtained from the sale or exchange of statutory allotment land be spent on discharging debts associated with the acquisition of allotment land, in acquiring new land for use as allotments or on improving the existing stock of allotments. Only the surplus may be used for other purposes.

In the past, revenue from the sale of allotment land has been seen as a 'windfall' by some authorities and not spent on acquiring or improving allotment sites. Good practice should ensure that revenue from any disposals is put to the use that the legislation originally intended.

replacement sites

If the authority wishes to sell statutory allotment land, and existing ploholders would be displaced by that action, then 'adequate provision' must be made for them, a requirement of Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925, and local planning policy should take account of this (as in the example from Bromley given earlier).

A cavalier approach to the identification of alternative sites is ill-advised, not least because of the risk that contaminated land might inadvertently be brought into use. It is good practice from the standpoint of prudence therefore, as well as clarity of governance, to specify the criteria that will be employed to identify relocation sites at local level within local planning policy. The following exemplary model is taken from Kennet's local plan (2004), policy TR20 (protection of allotments):

Development that would result in the loss of allotments or land last used as allotments, as defined on the inset maps, will not be permitted unless replacement allotments are provided. In order to be acceptable to the local planning authority the replacement allotments will:

- be comparable in terms of size, accessibility and convenience;
- have a soil quality and condition comparable or superior to that of the existing allotments; and
- avoid detrimental impact on landscape character and landscape features.

Further clarification might also be provided. For example, a statement that replacement sites should not normally be more than three quarters of a mile from the centre of demand (unless the ploholders are willing to travel further) would match the current official requirement (as stated in paragraph 22 of the government's Response to the future for allotments inquiry report).

As already noted in the previous section of this guide, allotment law provides the legal basis for applying part of the proceeds from the disposal of allotment land to the upgrading of replacement sites, a useful aid to realising conditions such as those set out in the Kennet policy (above).

Longbarrow Allotments on the move ...

In 1998 the secretary of state gave consent under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925 for the disposal of Longbarrow Allotments in Bournemouth. The ploholders were relocated by the borough council from Jewell Road to Throop Road, with the replacement site opening in 1999. There are 130 plots on the new site, made up of half, three-quarter and full-size plots, as well as a concrete road and an extensive water supply

system running to almost every other plot. There are also communal facilities for the ploholders, including a shop, meeting room, lavatory facilities (including disabled) and parking areas. The allotment association manages the site under a devolved management agreement: the committee sets the rents, organises special events, orders stock for the shop and enforces the site rules and regulations. The site has an open day during National Allotments Week with free entry, guided tours, stalls selling plant, books and produce, and a barbeque. In 2007 Longbarrow Allotments won 2nd prize in the nationwide NAGTrust/ Kitchen Garden "best allotment site" competition.

(www.longbarrow.co.uk)

Relocation to another site provides an ideal opportunity to start afresh with improved facilities, security and layout. The design of the site should be carried out in consultation with the ploholders and their association, and with relevant national and regional organisations, especially the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. Where practicable the replacement site should be available and prepared before final disposal of the old site.

There is always likely to be opposition to moving site, and consultation should be handled sympathetically and efficiently. It can take many years for a new site to become established and mature and for some of the more elderly ploholders whose memories are tied to their old plot the effort may seem too great. Assistance with relocation should be given and the provision of smaller plots should be considered.

Meeting expectations

- It is important that when commitments and promises are made regarding the provision of new allotment sites they are honoured by the authority both in terms of facilities and time scale. News that an authority has reneged on its promises travels fast and lingers long, and such action will only serve to arouse the suspicion and mistrust of ploholders in any future dealings.
- Any offers of replacement sites, facilities and compensation should be stated clearly in a document sent to the association and its members.
- Consultations should be carried out with all of the stakeholders affected by the move and this process should not be drawn out, otherwise there is a danger of causing 'blight'.
- Compensation should be fair and should recognise that it can take many years to turn a plot into a desired state of cultivation.
- It is also good practice that any improvements to the facilities on the site to be replaced which ploholders and their associations may have made over the years, particularly those made with the encouragement of the local authority, are recognised, and to ensure that equivalent provision is made on the new site.

part 3 the seeds: practical aspects of allotment management



introduction

In part 3 we present detailed advice and exemplars of good practice in allotment management. Each section supports the arguments developed in part 2, but each can also be treated as a practical source of reference, to be dipped into as required. We anticipate that the arguments developed in parts 1 and 2 of this guide will continue to stand the test of time. New ideas for the more effective promotion and use of allotments are always coming to light, however, along with better exemplars of current good practice, and the allotment manager should be prepared to pick and mix ideas to suit local circumstances. To employ a gardening metaphor, part 3 is a mixture: cabbage seeds – ideas that will remain viable for years to come, parsnip seeds – which need to be replaced each season, and weed seeds – ideas applied inappropriately or in the wrong place.

In using part 3 of this guide, therefore, the reader should be prepared to:

- seek advice from the sources of expertise which are signposted;
- ask other allotment managers what their experiences have been;
- follow up examples which have been highlighted more recently in the gardening press, in newsletters issued by allotment support organisations, and on the internet;
- consider how appropriate the advice and examples might be in the light of local circumstances;
- use your own informed judgement to select advice and adapt examples to fit your portfolio's needs.

And to conclude the gardening metaphor, as you plant these seeds and grow your own, look out for the exceptional plant that does well and pass the seed on to others. You have a role to play not just in implementing good practice, but in creating it and spreading it around. If something works, it is good practice to share the secret!

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3.1 allotments, wellbeing and sustainability

allotments for all

Allotment gardening provides an opportunity for people of all backgrounds to participate in a leisure activity that is both healthy and productive.

An increasing number of families have been taking up allotment gardening. Children are fascinated by watching plants and flowers grow and by the wildlife on the allotment which is a place to learn about nature with their parents in an informal setting. Other children participate in allotment gardening through their schools (see Allotments and education). The allotment is a place for families to socialise and for children and adults to make friends. Women, too, are taking up allotment gardening in increasing numbers: in Bristol, 34 per cent of ploholders are women.



The Allotments Regeneration Initiative has published a free downloadable factsheet *Plotting the future* which examines various aspects of involving children and families in allotment gardening. (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)

Allotments have always been popular with older people, and their significance has been recognised by leading charities for the elderly, which support projects designed to keep older gardeners digging and encourage intergenerational links.

Their promotion has also been specifically recognised by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the LGA as an activity through which Local Area Agreements can support increased independent living for the elderly.

(www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Briefing/Our_Work/Environment/LAA.pdf)

Growing concern in Coventry

Age Concern (www.ageconcern.org.uk) runs a project for older people at Sherbourne Valley Allotments in Coventry. The site was chosen for ease of access (it is close to the city centre and on a bus route). It occupies four plots rescued from dereliction by the probation service, who also do maintenance work at weekends, including keeping grass and wood chip paths in good order so that wheelchair users can continue to enjoy a natural feel around the site. The project has its own lavatories in a cabin donated by the council, and a polytunnel that allows people to garden under shelter in inclement weather. The project has regular open days which attract people who have just retired and are thinking about taking on a

plot but aren't sure if they can manage one. If they can, then they are encouraged to take plots of their own on sites throughout Coventry. Meanwhile, older ploholders who are finding it difficult to keep their gardens in good order are encouraged to visit the project with their site secretaries to explore the possibility of swapping their plots for a place on the project, where they can enjoy a more supportive environment but otherwise carry on gardening. This works well: many ex-ploholders find they prefer the project because they make new friends with whom they have much in common. Participants in the project also have an opportunity to pass on their skills: a local school makes visits every few months, establishing a welcome link between two different generations of gardeners.

(Information supplied by the Allotments Regeneration Initiative)

Allotments also present particular opportunities for ethnic minority groups to share their gardening cultures with other ploholders and (through open days) with the public at large. They have added significantly to the diversity of crops and gardening techniques that can be found on Britain's allotments. In Birmingham the diversity of food cultures has been more broadly celebrated through the Changing Taste of Food project organised by the allotments liaison officer, which traces the impact of people of Caribbean origin on both food and food growing in the city. (There are multiple entries on this project at www.birmingham.gov.uk/). The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens has produced a good practice document on multi-ethnic involvement at community gardens and farms, *Chillies and Roses* (2007), that includes many ideas for relevance to allotments as well (www.farmgarden.org.uk).



Allotments have also been used in many other ways to promote social inclusion – for groups ranging from disaffected youths and people with substance misuse issues to estranged fathers:

The Milton Keynes Christian Foundation runs an allotment project working with disengaged 15 to 25 year-olds. Some have been expelled from school and are in need of alternative provision, some are homeless, some have left school with little or no qualifications and are looking for another route into further education or training. Participants get involved in all the necessary jobs related to running a successful market garden, and there are also opportunities for training in literacy and numeracy. The project regularly participates in the local farmers market, and supplies produce to the café and catering project that the same charity runs. (www.mkchristianfoundation.co.uk/)

Making inroads into substance misuse

In 2004 Inroads (an organisation providing services for people with substance misuse issues) took on the tenancy of a plot on the Pontcanna A allotment site in Cardiff. The Inroads Street Drugs Project Go! allotment has been planted with fruit trees which should provide the project with apples for many years to come, as well as vegetables to supply an in-house 'alternative therapy' juice bar and local food co-operatives. The project's supporters include the Salvation Army, Voluntary Action Cardiff, BTCV and MIND. (www.inroads-dp.co.uk/)

Dads Dig is a project on allotments in Blackburn that helps estranged fathers and their children spend time together and share an enjoyable outdoor experience whilst learning about how things grow. Dads Dig was started by the Diocese of Blackburn, but project staff are now incorporated into the Children's Centre run by social services. Participants self-refer and word of mouth has proved to be the most successful form of promotion. Dads Dig is one of the many successful projects covered in the Allotments Regeneration Initiative's Good Sites Guide. (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)

allotments, education and learning

Allotments have an important role to play in education and learning at all levels. Allotment gardening enables skills to be learned and used — not only horticultural skills but also social and community skills.

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative factsheet *Plotting the future* covers working with schools on allotment gardening projects. (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)

For parents and extended families, cultivating an allotment with their children provides informal opportunities to share a love and knowledge of growing things.

A number of allotment associations have developed gardening projects specifically for pre-school children, in collaboration with organisations such as SureStart or children's services.

A sure start for toddlers at Pilkington allotments

The SureStart Central Link Tots allotment at the Pilkington Allotment Society's site in St Helens was established in 2003. Children are offered an organised programme of learning and play every Tuesday and Saturday, combining planting and growing vegetables in the polytunnel and raised beds with play activities such as Bug Watch, Willy Worm Day, and feeding the ducks in the adjacent brook.

In addition to the local SureStart team, this project involves input from Healthy Eating and 5-A-Day. This is just one of the innovative and successfully-funded schemes which the society has developed in recent years, which are now overseen by a dedicated "partnership committee". Others include use of the new training unit and gardens by the Windle Pilkington House Day Centre and the St Helens Coalition of Disabled People. (Information from Allotments Regeneration Initiative)

Primary schools have also taken plots to show children from all backgrounds where food comes from and how it grows.



Birmingham CC website on Benson Community School and Matthew Boulton Allotments

Allotment managers have an important part to play in enabling schools and educational establishments to share in the benefits of allotment gardening. In the first instance they can provide information and act as a link between the schools and allotment associations, plotholders and voluntary organisations.

There is much information available from organisations such as Garden Organic and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens for the benefit of children and schools. The Growing Schools Project is also a valuable source of information and support for teachers and schools that would like to get involved with gardening on allotments (www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools/).



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Duchy Originals Garden Organic for Schools

The Henry Doubleday Research Association (which now operates under the title Garden Organic) founded its 'Schools Organic Network' in 2000. The project has since been renamed Duchy Originals Garden Organic for Schools, and by mid-2007 the network had engaged with 3,400 schools – or 14 per cent of schools in the country, many of which are involved in growing food on local allotments. The project's website contains a wealth of information to support teachers, and includes a convenient search facility to find out which schools in the area are already "growing their own":

(www.gardenorganic.org.uk/schools_organic_network/map/index.php)

YOE and HELP in Birmingham



Youth Organic Environmental (YOE) a gardening project on the Uplands Allotments in Handsworth, Birmingham, aims to encourage children into gardening, help them to relate to the soil, and understand how to grow vegetables and eat healthily. The project has extensive links to local schools and nearly a thousand children have taken part since it was launched in 2003. Uplands has also hosted the Shades of Black HELP project (Help Enables Learning Positively) since 1999. This operates a model plot on site to encourage children to grow their own food, and donates produce to the elderly at harvest festivals, providing an opportunity for positive interaction between generations.

Training in gardening skills can also be an important feature of allotment promotion; in Bristol this is practised in an innovative partnership with the City of Bristol College. Gardening skills acquired on an allotment site can become the springboard to full-time employment in the horticulture industry.

allotments and good health

Cultivating an allotment is a good way to keep fit and stay healthy, through the exercise and the fresh foods that allotments provide to their gardeners. The unique combination of solace and sociability that they provide is also conducive to good mental health. These benefits are open to all, but are particularly beneficial for older people who are ready for more gentle forms of exercise. They are especially appropriate for people with a high body mass index who may need a gradual route back into a healthier lifestyle.

In a number of areas GPs have been encouraged to advise those in need of more exercise to take an allotment. Another approach has been through the British Trust for Conservation Volunteer's "Green Gym" programme. In this, volunteers who need to get just a little bit more exercise are given the opportunity to do so in a structured and supportive environment: many of these projects are located on allotment sites. (www2.btcv.org.uk/display/greengym).

Lancastrians aim for gardening fitness

Sefton's Green Gym is based on the Queensway allotment site in Waterloo. It offers people of all ages and abilities the chance to learn new skills through growing organic produce, meet new people and improve their health. The Green Gym was set-up through a partnership between the BTCV, Sefton NHS Primary Care Trust and Sefton Borough Council, but its success has allowed it to move on to independent self-management under a committee of volunteers. They have been awarded the title of 'best Green Gym in the north' as part of the BTCV Green Hero awards. Around 25 people regularly attend sessions at the Green Gym which, apart from the health benefits, offers volunteers the chance to turn their new-found skills into a recognised qualification in horticulture.

(Source: abstracted from www.seftonpct.nhs.uk/news_and_publications/)

Gardening for Health ... in Bradford

The Sho Nirbhor project was set up in response to the fact that Asian women are at a particularly high risk of coronary heart disease. The project encourages community participation, physical activity, healthy eating and relaxation, whilst offering relief from isolation and social support for inner city Bangladeshi women in Bradford.

(www.bcep.org.uk/programmes/current/sho_nirbhor.htm)

Gardening for Health ... in Mansfield

Allotment gardening is increasingly being recommended as a suitable form of recreation for those in need of a little more daily exercise and fresh air. In Mansfield, every general practice has signed up to the local GP referral scheme, a joint initiative between the health authority and the borough council, which directs people to allotment gardening, some of whom may never have considered this pastime before.

The benefits to the new gardeners are matched by long-term savings to the NHS - and thus to every tax payer.

(www.mansfield.gov.uk/lei_menu/lei_getactive.htm)

allotments and disability

Allotments can also be of particular value, however, to people with more acute health issues. A survey by Brighton and Hove City Council suggests that around eight per cent of ploholders have a disability. There are probably many more people living with disabilities who could benefit from the outdoor activity and sense of community that allotment gardening provides.

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative has published a free downloadable factsheet *Allotments for All* that examines various ways of improving access to allotment gardening for people with physical and mental disabilities (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari).

Brighton and Hove City Council has identified a number of necessary qualities for allotment sites for those with special needs, as follows:

- accessibility to vehicles (possibly minibus size with modifications for special transport);
- flexible layout;
- variable height beds;
- adjacent to conventional plots;
- flexible and co-operative tenants nearby;
- provision of shelter;
- provision of lavatories;
- accessible paths, tracks and hard areas within and leading to the plots.

There are many examples of allotment sites and plots which have been especially modified and laid out for those with disabilities. The Cheam Park site in the London Borough of Sutton is one. It has eighteen plots surrounded by a sensory garden, in addition to a sheltered area, seating and lavatories. The project was developed in consultation with the voluntary sector and the housing and social services department. The facilities (and in particular the raised beds) have found particular favour with gardeners who live with severe back problems. (www.sutton.gov.uk/leisure/allotments/cheamallotments.htm).

Allotments have also provided support for school children with severe disabilities. For example, a plot has been provided at Springfield Land Allotments in Southend for use by children from Lancaster Special School. The plot includes a shed and lawn area, and the facility has been put together using materials provided by the council and the planning and construction skills of volunteers from the allotments association.

Raised beds at Thingwall Park allotments, Bristol



There are other ways of opening up allotments to people with disabilities which do not necessarily involve special plots. Ideas from research conducted by Brighton and Hove City Council include:

- arrangements for people with disabilities to work with existing volunteer ploholders on established plots;
- provision of help from local volunteer ploholders and organisations for disabled people on standard plots;
- provision of advice from council officers;
- formation of a disabled gardeners group open to those with disabilities and those willing to assist.

Rethinking mental health

The mental health charity Rethink runs a project at Tunnel Allotments in Salisbury for people with a variety of mental health issues. The project maintains two vegetable plots, a wildlife garden, a polytunnel and a shed. Clients are referred by the relevant statutory organisations, but can also refer themselves. The plots are currently used for therapy, but there are plans to introduce horticultural training in future. Clients visit the plots twice a week. (www.rethink.org).

In Newcastle the Clubhouse project took on a derelict plot at Nunsmoor Allotments in 2002, and has since fully restored the plot and installed a shed and 18 foot greenhouse. Clients attend the plot with a member of staff every weekday. Referrals are mainly from community psychiatric nurses, but clients can also self-refer. The project is jointly funded by social services and the local Primary Care Trust.

(www.newcastleclubhouse.co.uk/)

Horticulture has long been used as a therapy in both physical and mental illness and in rehabilitation. It allows skills to be learned and used, which can be appropriated to other aspects of life, it promotes relaxation and communication and improves wellbeing.

There are many groups, both large and small, which are involved in using horticulture as a therapy. The organisation Thrive, for example, is involved with the running of over 900 specialist projects – many involving allotment sites – promoting social and therapeutic gardening and horticulture. It is able to provide information and advice to authorities involved in horticultural therapy projects or considering them, and runs a website that offers useful advice to people who wish to make their own adaptations to disability and carry on gardening. (www.carryongardening.org.uk).



“Supporting access to green space should be routinely considered in care planning and social care assessment processes. For example, people on a care plan might be supported in finding an allotment or getting involved in a local horticultural project, and ‘buddy’ schemes could increase people’s confidence about taking part. The options for green activity should be highlighted by care co-ordinators and in the training and supervision of support workers.” MIND, Ecotherapy (2007), p30

Elder Stubbs

Elder Stubbs is a charity that owns a 12 acre allotment site in Cowley, Oxford and has used this land for community projects. Providing allotment land has been one of its charitable objectives since its founding in 1852.

For many years it has worked in partnership with a local mental health charity, Restore, which now cultivates over two acres of the site and grows fruit, vegetables, flowers and willow; and operates a ‘box scheme’ for local residents.

Other ventures have included:

- the creation of a wood and pond with the support of the Forestry Commission;
- a coppicing project to replace imported bamboo with locally-grown hazel;
- establishing an orchard of 46 different kinds of English apple;
- creating play areas for plotters’ children, and hosting visits from schools and youth groups;
- adopting a flexible approach to plot lettings including lettings as small as one pole;
- encouraging non-traditional activities on site including sculpture on the plots and participating in the annual visual arts festival in Oxfordshire ‘Artweeks’.

Elder Stubbs have a wealth of information and expertise and have received much recognition and many awards for their work.

(www.elderstubbs.org.uk)

allotments as community gardens

Many projects involving one or more allotment plots worked in common, and some sites, organised along more traditional lines, can be described as ‘community gardens’ or ‘community allotments’ where people work together for mutual benefit and to help others. These can be directed at regenerating neighbourhoods and strengthening the bonds in a community, producing food in a sustainable fashion, gardening as physical and mental

health therapies and as recreation and training for people who are socially disadvantaged. Such projects can serve as a route into conventional allotment gardening, and thus have a useful complementary function where there are vacant plots to be filled.

Community gardens have no particular status in law, and care should be taken when setting up a community garden on a statutory allotment site to ensure that the land is used in accordance with the requirements of the Allotment Acts.

Many community gardens feature small tenanted plots, and the absence of a statutory minimum size for an allotment garden means that these can be accommodated, provided that the predominant use is the growing of fruit and vegetables for the plotholder’s own consumption. Surpluses can be donated to projects such as community cafes, with the same caveat, and where individual tenancies exist within the area worked in common, the outcome (if things go well) may be little different from the good neighbourly practices which are common between friends on a more traditional allotment site.

A variety of examples of successful projects based on people gardening together are presented as models of good practice in this guide. In granting permission for the use of allotments in this way, however, allotment managers also need to be aware of the potential risks associated with working in common. Where a tenancy is granted to a project leader acting on behalf of a group, it is essential that all members of the group are made aware that the continuation of the tenancy depends on collective adherence to the terms of the tenancy (and hence the Allotments Acts). Arrangements should also be in place to manage the consequences of the leader’s unexpected departure – or failure of all participants to comply with the tenancy. Problems can also arise when the ambitions of project members begin to exceed what the law permits, and recourse is made to extra-legal arguments (such as sustainability benefits) to provide political justification for what may become illegal use of the land. And when a project makes extensive investments in facilities and infrastructure, arrangements should be in place to ensure that the land can be returned to use for individual tenancies should the project fold, at no cost to the allotments budget.

Where a project seeks to exist on a more commercial basis, or to dispense with the tenancy arrangements required to maintain a site’s statutory status, a different approach may be required. This may involve using the provisions of Section 27 (5) of the 1908 Act³ to take the land out of use on a temporary basis. This is a particularly important matter for a community garden taking on valuable but essentially commercial or social enterprise functions such as providing accredited training or supplying food for sale to low-income communities.

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, the national representative body for community gardening projects, provides information, help and advice: www.farmgarden.org.uk

See also the ARI factsheet Project Allotment, which provides further discussion of the legal position.

Activity at Tatnam



The Tatnam Organic Patch is a community garden project and Local Agenda 21 initiative in Poole, set up on an allotment site that had been derelict for 25 years. It has six objectives:

- a sustainable food supply;
- a resource for biodiversity;
- a resource for health;
- an educational tool;
- a community resource and open space;
- social inclusion.

The project has run successfully for a number of years and has demonstrated the importance of adaptability in keeping things going. It has found, for example, that volunteers are not always available when you most need them. The project has adapted to this by planting crops that make less intensive and specific demands on time (such as fruit trees), and using permaculture methods that require less labour at peak periods,

(www.geocities.com/poole_1a21/tops.htm)

allotments, healthy eating and sustainable food supplies

By definition, an allotment garden is cultivated by the tenant predominantly to produce fruit and vegetables for consumption by his or her own family. For some ploholders gardening is solely a pastime, but for others the allotment still meets its original purpose: a means for people on low incomes to put food on the table

People on low incomes can be found in most communities putting allotments to good use. Organised food initiatives operating in areas of high social and economic deprivation include allotments as an important source of fresh local produce with an important role to play in community regeneration, as well as education in healthy eating (see allotments and education above). Building on past experience with Food Futures schemes, some allotment associations have built bridges with 5-a-Day projects, healthy living initiatives and community dieticians.

Number 49: youth and community allotment

During the earlier 2000's a consultation carried out by Barnardos North East at the Hive Family Resource Centre in Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne and Wear revealed that local people were interested in learning about gardening skills and growing their own food. Funding was obtained through Barnardos NE and URBAN II (European Regional Development Fund) to develop a community allotment project for 13-25 year olds on a plot (number 49) leased from the city council at Seaham Road allotments. In this area of high levels of deprivation, the young people the project works with tend to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and in neither employment, education or training. The project offers a crèche facility based in the nearby Barnardos Hive Project for the benefit of young gardeners with childcare responsibility. The crèche also visits the allotment once a month so that parents and children can learn together about gardening, the environment and healthy eating. Young people aged 15+ can access a Level 1 City and Guilds accredited horticulture skills course delivered by the allotment's staff. The project team continually reinforce the healthy eating and five-a-day messages in their work, by (for example) demonstrating how to cook with a range of fruits and vegetables grown on site.

(Information from Cath Bibby, Youth Allotment Project Manager www.barnardos.org.uk/thehive/microsite_the_hive_faqs.htm)

Allotments for healthy living

A report commissioned by the Manchester Joint Health Unit entitled Allotments for Healthy Living (2006) provides an excellent example of joined-up and evidence-based thinking about the role of allotments in supporting healthy diets. The report covers allotments and community horticulture projects as well as cookery and nutrition skills and training. Recommendations are wide-ranging, and include lavatory facilities on all sites, improved security, a more structured marketing strategy for allotments, and the introduction of a well-marketed GP referral scheme.

(www.foodfutures.info/site/images/stories/a4h1%20allotments%20report.pdf)



In some areas allotment land that is surplus to current requirements has been made available to community food growing projects which have proved successful in attracting grants and garnering support from NHS Primary Care Trusts. Projects like this also stimulate interest in conventional allotment gardening (and thus the demand for plots) amongst groups that might not previously have had either the skills or the confidence to try growing their own.

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Community food growing in Brighton

WHITEHAWK COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECT

The Whitehawk Community Food Project in East Brighton occupies sixteen disused allotment plots. Its main focus is to raise awareness of the many benefits of organic food, including nutritional issues, and to provide access to fresh produce. This involves informal teaching about different vegetables and herbs, together with various cultivation methods and techniques used to overcome the need for chemical fertilisers and pesticides. This training is achieved by encouraging a 'hands on' participation of volunteers who then learn through practical experience. The site has been turned into a productive garden including fruit, vegetable and herb beds, polytunnels, ponds and an orchard area. Fresh seasonal produce is available for free in return for helping out.

(www.thefoodproject.org.uk/)

Supporting better nutrition in SE London

The Downham Nutrition Partnership, a local charity aiming to help and support people to eat better and therefore be healthier in body and mind, has a plot at Kendale Road Allotments in the London Borough of Bromley. Here anyone is welcome to help – and those with more time can take on a plot of their own. The project runs every Wednesday morning, and one Saturday per month for those at school or in work, but people with their own plots can have a key to the site. It is supported by its own gardener and by a nutritionist who works for the partnership. (www.cafamily.org.uk/lewisham/LE0606.pdf)

The gardener, motivated by the promise of cheap and wholesome food contributes nonetheless to sustainable development through the reduction of food miles from allotment produce. The use of organic methods further enhances the inherent sustainability of allotment gardening (see organic allotments overleaf).

The opportunity to share produce grown on allotments with others is an intrinsic part of the culture of allotment gardening. Surplus produce is often given away to neighbours, friends and relatives. Provided that the allotment is used primarily for its intended purpose, the Allotments Acts do not proscribe the wider distribution of surplus allotment produce.

The popularity of farmers markets has raised the issue of whether it is appropriate and legal to sell allotment produce. Again, it is not illegal under the Allotment Acts to sell produce provided that this is not the primary use to which the plot is given over (see sale of produce p58). Otherwise the plot could fall within the definition of an 'agricultural holding' with different conditions of tenure. An appropriate way forward is to encourage the donation of surplus produce for distribution by the allotment association to a local charity or to the general public through a farmers market or equivalent. The proceeds of sales should be invested in non-commercial areas of common benefit such as site improvements and

the promotion of allotments. The presence in a farmers market, if only on an occasional basis, of fresh, organic allotment-grown produce in the hands of the grower is itself a potent advertisement for the benefits of allotment gardening.

allotments and local sustainable development

The integration of allotment gardening into local sustainable development strategies and campaigns such as Local Agenda 21 can enhance the benefits of allotments and strengthen local participation in green activities. By growing their own food, allotment gardeners already make a contribution to local food production and the reduction of food miles, and this benefit can be enhanced through the distribution of surplus crops within local communities. The adoption of organic methods provides the further benefit of production that is sustainable from an ecological standpoint.

Allotments are a repository of fruit and vegetable varieties which are no longer available through commercial channels. They provide forage, shelter and green corridors for birds, reptiles, small mammals and invertebrates, especially in urban areas where wildlife is otherwise scarce or rural areas dominated by intensive agricultural methods.

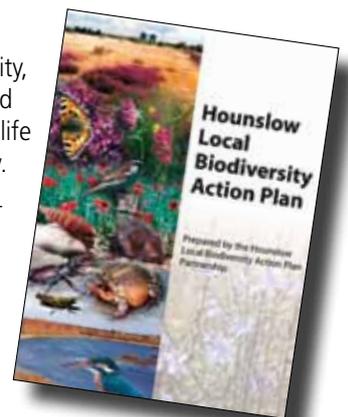
Links built through sustainability initiatives can enhance the role played by allotments in the reuse and recycling of materials that would otherwise go to landfill at public expense. Recycled barrels, discarded guttering and weighted cardboard can help gardeners to get by with less water, while encouragement to use fewer chemicals and compost more green waste as an alternative to the bonfire can help cut pollution of water and air.

While allotment gardeners care passionately for their own small patches of earth, most would probably not see themselves as environmentalists but as ordinary people engaged in a harmless pastime. The incorporation of allotment gardeners into sustainability initiatives is therefore a means for local authorities both to increase participation in and to enhance the popularity of such initiatives.

allotments and biodiversity

Allotments make a distinctive contribution to local biodiversity, highlighted by Natural England in its recent guidance on Wildlife on Allotments (2007) at www.english-nature.org.uk/Nature_In_The_Garden/.

Allotments can make a valuable contribution to conserving and enhancing variety, and in some places (notably on the Isle of Wight)



species have been found that are unique to a single cultivated site. It is important to ensure, therefore, that allotments are included within biodiversity action plans (BAPs) in their own right, and in a manner that is sensitive to the contribution that gardeners make to the day-to-day maintenance of these sites. These plans seek to promote biodiversity through new partnerships between local authorities, allotment associations and local wildlife organisations, and by helping allotment holders to encourage wildlife with bird and bat boxes, ponds, and wildlife-friendly cultivation practices. Good examples include the BAPs for Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire, Hull, and the London Boroughs of Bexley, Hounslow and Sutton.

The biodiversity action plan for the London Borough of Sutton is typical of many in including specific actions for allotments:

- ensure that the open spaces strategy takes account of the wildlife value and potential of allotments;
- ensure that the local development framework has strong policies to protect allotment space against built development, or other change of use leading to loss of wildlife/food sustainability value;
- develop a strategy for wildlife areas in allotments by 2008;
- encourage the use of allotments as areas for wildlife conservation (target two allotment sites per year for wildlife area creation);
- identify the responsibilities of garden and allotment holders under wildlife legislation;
- provide guidance and support to allotment societies applying for funding for conservation projects;
- carry out a survey of uptake of wildlife/environmentally-friendly allotment gardening.

(Full strategy at www.sutton.gov.uk/environment/Biodiversity/)

An allotment site may include some pre-existing natural features such as hedgerows, mature trees, ditches and ponds which merit conservation for their biodiversity value. The allotments strategy could usefully highlight those sites which have significant wildlife interest, and those where the contribution to biodiversity could be developed further.



Even in their choice of crops, allotment gardeners make an important contribution to the maintenance of biodiversity. Garden Organic's Heritage Seed Library helps keep alive strains of edible plants no longer of commercial significance which are nevertheless a vital resource for future plant breeding. Many gardeners save their own seeds, process of selection which itself enhances the gene pool. Events such as 'Seedy Sundays' can help encourage this practice (www.seedy sunday.org).

The act of cultivation encourages a range of wild plants, weeds which are easily controlled but make their own contribution to biodiversity and are increasingly scarce in the open countryside. Bee-keepers need seasonal forage for their insects, and this can be provided by leaving weeds on vacant plots to flower before they are cleared away. Even the bare soil of allotments is important for some declining species, eg some bees and wasps, and wildflower annuals. Freshly turned, manured soil offers a ready food supply for birds.

Uncultivated corners of individual plots and neglected strips along the boundary of a site can also provide a refuge for amphibians and reptiles, invertebrates and small mammals. Vacant plots can be deliberately managed as wildlife meadow, a technique that is particularly appropriate where soil fertility is low. Some allotment groups have obtained funding to develop 'wildlife gardens' which combine biodiversity value with good access, so that the garden can also be used as an educational resource.

A wildlife garden for Roundshaw allotments

Plot holders in Sutton founded the Roundshaw Allotment and Leisure Group in 2004 with the mission to regenerate their site. Their first success came in 2005 when they were awarded £5000 by the National Lottery's Awards for All to establish a wildlife garden and educational project. The garden was formally opened in 2007 by the mayor of Sutton and allotments author Michael Wale. Pupils from the Amy Johnson primary school have been the first to benefit from the scheme, using the allotments to learn about wildlife, biology and garden botany. (www.roundshaw.co.uk/?ac=raalg)



Worcester City Council's Biodiversity Partnership have produced a leaflet to promote the conservation of slow-worms, a protected species often concentrated on allotments, where they can sometimes be found hibernating in compost heaps or under carpets. Slowworms, like hedgehogs and frogs, are the gardener's friend, subsisting largely on a diet of slugs. (www.worcestershire.gov.uk/biodiversity)

organic allotments

Organic gardening practices, which do not use pesticides, artificial fertilisers or peat, also contribute to maximising biodiversity value and preventing indirect negative environmental effects, such as the destruction of rare peat bogs. Allotment authorities should encourage and support the use of organic alternatives to fertilisers and pesticides by providing technical advice and assistance and by forging links with local and national organic gardening groups. The growing popularity of organic produce also suggests that information on organic gardening, biodiversity and measures to protect and enhance habitats should be included in promotional materials for allotments to encourage greater uptake. Garden Organic is again the primary resource for guidance.

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An organic show site could be a useful tool in the promotion of organic cultivation of allotments. The Bath Organic Group have such a site comprising six plots on a previously derelict allotment, and offer community activities and training in organic methods (www.bathorganicgroup.org.uk). Organic gardening can also be encouraged through organised competitions such as the 'Best Organic Gardener' class in the Brighton & Hove Allotments Federation's 'Coronation Bowl' allotment competition (www.bhaf.org.uk).

Growing fertility

The London Borough of Ealing has encouraged its ploholders to consider the use of green manure crops as an alternative to chemical fertilisers by providing free seeds, 70kg of which were given away during the summer of 2007 following a successful pilot programme the previous year. Phacelia and crimson clover were selected, to provide winter cover on heavy, wet clay soils and to encourage gardeners to make an early start on their plots in the spring.

Consideration should also be given to organic methods of weed control on vacant plots, thus avoiding the use of any forms of chemical herbicides. Here's a suggestion from Garden Organic:

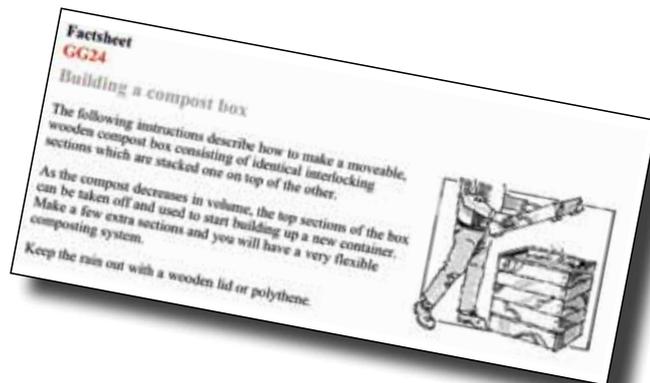
What about ... sowing a long-term fertility building sward on vacant plots? If clover is included, it makes a wonderful forage area for bees, and can be kept 'tidy' as necessary. This mimics what organic farmers do. If the correct mixture is chosen, with long-lived white clover and grass species, and the sward is kept mown at reasonable intervals, it should be possible to keep it going for around five to seven years, storing fertility for the day when the plot is cultivated without allowing it to appear 'derelict'. Although, in practice, derelict plots are often extremely fertile after a 10-year rest, they are also very daunting for a newcomer to take on. Not all sites could do this fertility building, but it would be a great step forward for those that could. Wildflower areas could still be incorporated, but if people regard them as 'weeds', which they might do, a grass/clover ley could act as a buffer zone.

waste management

Allotment gardening generates waste material, the disposal of which requires careful management, but allotment gardening can also make a valuable contribution to the reuse and recycling of wastes, including materials brought in from beyond the allotments and put to new uses. Good practice requires that both the generation and disposal of wastes should be covered by appropriate and holistic strategies that minimise pollution risks and the need for disposal off-site, the latter an important consideration given the environmental and monetary costs of landfill.

Most vegetable wastes produced on allotments can and should be composted and advice should be made available on methods of composting.

Many local authorities, including Birmingham and Bristol, produce excellent information and booklets on composting, and a range of guidance materials on composting and designs for compost bins is also available from Garden Organic.



(from Garden Organic Factsheet GG24 (© Garden Organic) www.gardenorganic.org.uk/factsheets/gg24.php)

The composting process can be hastened by the use of pre-shredded material and authorities should consider providing access to shredders, but care must be taken to ensure proper training in the safe use of the equipment.

Vacant allotments or dedicated bays can also be used by local authorities to compost municipal green wastes: this has been tried in Bristol and Bromley, and is to be expanded under Bristol's latest allotment strategy. In the past much waste from allotments was burnt. Many authorities however have now banned bonfires and some only permit them for the burning of diseased plant material under specified restrictions (see Bonfires). Bonfires must be viewed as a last resort.

Skips can be provided on sites for the removal of non-compostable, non-combustible material (such as glass and metal). Care must be taken to ensure that skips do not become a repository for hazardous wastes such as asbestos and garden chemicals, for which separate waste management regulations apply. Skips must also not become a source of nuisance from odour or vermin, and fly tipping should be guarded against.

It is good practice to encourage ploholders to bring onto site only those items that are of use in allotment gardening, to discourage hoarding, and to invite ploholders to think about how they will dispose of these items before they bring them onto the allotments.

energy and climate change

As noted elsewhere, allotments make a positive contribution to the fight against global warming by reducing food miles (and consequent generation of carbon dioxide) associated with the commercial food system. Recently, however, allotment associations have begun to invest in more sustainable means of meeting their own energy requirements as well, through the installation of wind turbines and photovoltaic panels to generate power for the site hut (see box). Technological change is rapid in this area, and the allotment manager should be on the lookout for new ideas and opportunities – at home and abroad. One site near Dijon in France, for example, has photovoltaic panels on each shed roof; the power generated is used to pump well water into holding tanks (see image opposite). When the tanks are full, excess power is sold to the national power grid – which enhances the financial sustainability of the allotments.

Grow-your-own power on allotments

At the innovative Narborough & Littlethorpe allotments site in Leicestershire, small grants have been obtained from a variety of sources to fund solar panels, which provide hot water to a small kitchen and the wash hand basin in the disabled lavatory. Space heating and lighting for the association's building and workshop is provided by a bio-mass stove burning wood pellets from local coppices and a bio-diesel generator. A photovoltaic panel with it's own built-in security alarm has also been installed at the North Park Avenue Allotments Association's site in Leeds. Wind turbines have been installed on a community meeting space building on allotments in Watford and at Spa Hill allotments in Croydon.

(Information from the Allotments Regeneration Initiative)



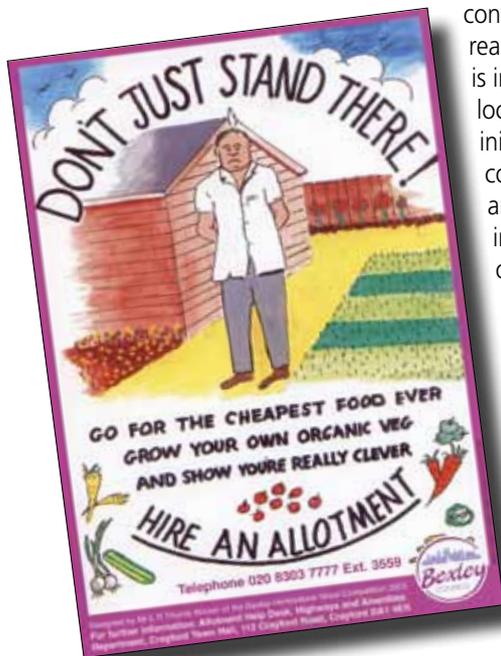
3.2 promotion of allotments

introduction

Good promotion creates demand for allotments and converts latent demand into real demand. Part of promotion is implicit – involvement in local sustainable development initiatives, open days, or collaborations with schools and the health services will inevitably draw the attention of a wider audience to the benefits of allotments.

There are also many different and imaginative examples of explicit promotion, and these all serve to raise awareness of allotment gardening, the existence of plots in the neighbourhood and the procedures for renting a plot. The London

Borough of Bexley ran poster competitions for several years, with the winning entry used to advertise allotments on leaflets as well as on billboards across the borough. Ealing has used humour to similar good effect (see part 3.1). Leicester's allotments have been advertised on the back of a bus, and in 2005 plottolders created an allotment on the pavement in Manchester's city centre, to the delight of passers by.



Show plot in Worcester

The Worcester Allotment Forum has established a permanent show plot in the grounds of a local garden centre. Volunteers are on hand each weekend to chat to customers, explain the benefits of allotments and hand out leaflets on how to get a plot. An annual 'scarecrow festival' is held on the plot, including a live scarecrow and artistic creations, and demonstrations of composting. Funding and other support are provided by the local authority, seed companies and the garden centre itself. (www.worcester.gov.uk/index.php?id=1261)

Potential plottolders need to know that:

- plots exist;
- plots are available;
- plots are affordable;
- plots are located not far from their homes;
- plots are easy to rent;
- help for new tenants is available;
- plots mean good exercise and fresh food.

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative has produced a free, downloadable factsheet on how allotment associations can Promote the Plot, including advice on promotion drives, nurturing new plottolders and working with the media. (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)

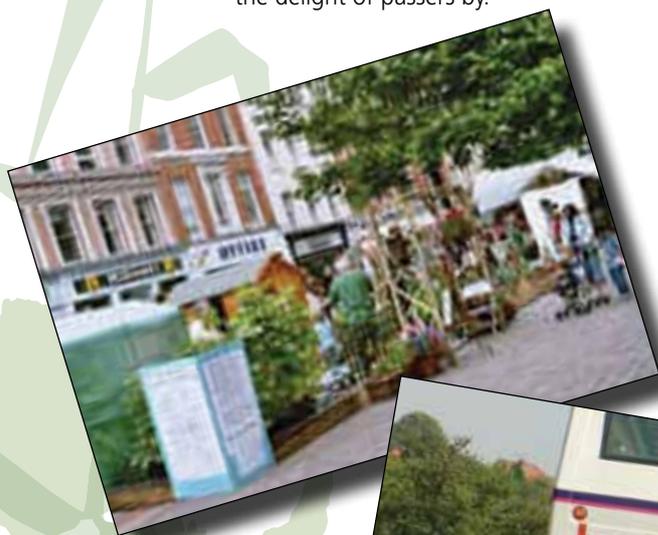
Promoting allotments to children and families

The Beanstalk project, a partnership between Sutton Parks and the Centre for Environmental Initiatives, aims to encourage young children to grow their own food on one of five participating allotment sites and learn more about gardening in a fun and informal way. By becoming a member of the Beanstalk group children can have a small plot of land on an allotment site, receive a free supply of seeds, borrow gardening tools and get advice from local gardeners. Children can also learn how to grow food organically using no artificial fertilisers or pesticides. The project is open to families and to any groups that include children, such as the Brownies, Beavers, Scouts and Guides.

(www.sutton.gov.uk/leisure/childrenleisureguide/beanproj.htm)

clarifying the procedure for obtaining a plot

In most, if not all cases the procedure for obtaining an allotment plot is straightforward, although quite often prospective tenants have to struggle to discover how the process works and who to contact for information. Sometimes this in itself will dissuade them from taking up an allotment tenancy.



The procedure for obtaining a plot can be put very simply on a single page. For example the following are extracts from the standard letter sent by the London Borough of Sutton:

To gain access to an allotment site you will need to call at the environment and leisure help desk in the civic offices, Sutton, to collect a key. You will be asked to pay a deposit of £10.00 which can be refunded on presentation of a valid receipt.

When you have visited an allotment and found a plot you like, please complete the allotment agreement form enclosed and return it to the address shown above. It is important to return the completed form as soon as you can as other people may be viewing the site and the plot will be allocated to the first person who returns their form.

Once your agreement has been received, a letter confirming your tenancy will be sent to you with an invoice for the rent due.

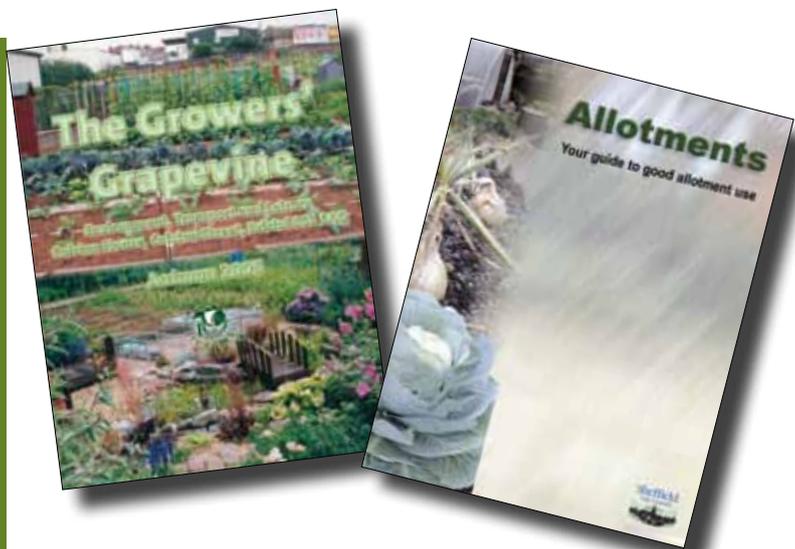
Information is then given about the size of the available plots, the rent to be paid and any concessions.

Ideally, contact details and information on plot availability should be made easily available in council contact centres and on the local authority's website (see part 3.5). At local level, information can be provided on the allotment notice board – which should be visible from outside the site – so that a single telephone enquiry or e-mail will enable the prospective tenant to make an application for a plot.

Leading authorities such as Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham and Sheffield produce excellent allotment packs which contain not only details of how to obtain a plot but also tips and hints on gardening and related topics. Other authorities have produced handbooks that perform a similar function: Great Aycliffe Town Council's Allotment tenants' handbook is a good example (www.greataycliffe.sedgefield.gov.uk/dms/resources/includes/file.php?id=2268), and includes a distinctive allotments charter that specifies the quality of service that gardeners can expect from the authority. The more interesting and readable the information is the more likely the prospective tenant is to pursue a tenancy.

All of the costs involved should be clearly stated and locations of allotment sites provided on a sketch map. Arrangements can be made for site representatives to be on hand to greet prospective gardeners and show them available plots.

Where sites are managed by associations, the contact details of representatives of the association should be readily available and up to date, and this information distributed by the local authority alongside details for directly managed sites.



Bristol City Council issues new ploholders with an allotment tenants pack which contains the tenancy agreement, information on gardening courses and organic gardening, composting leaflets, the Growers Grapevine newsletter, a copy of Kitchen Garden magazine, and even free seeds (when available).

Tenants' packs need not be expensive to prepare. Many information leaflets and booklets are available free of charge and organisers of events will be very willing to have their flyers and event diaries included in the packs. Some national gardening magazines will also supply excess back copies for nothing to council allotment officers.

Some associations have also had success with starter packs. The pack for Greenbank Lane allotments in Liverpool (based on an excellent handbook) was funded with a £1000 grant from the National Lottery.



on-site and other advertising of vacancies

Although many authorities are active in promoting allotments others may neglect this task. 'The Future for Allotments' inquiry report noted that:

'Some authorities pursue an active approach to maintaining vibrant and fully-occupied allotment sites whilst others appear at best lethargic and at worst to be instrumental in encouraging the decline of interest in allotments. Without a positive local approach, it seems likely that much of the demand for allotments will always remain latent.'

growing in the
community
second edition

Allotments need to be actively promoted and the following should be considered:

- a clear and simple procedure for obtaining an allotment;
- a clear indication of vacancies at each site, accessible both centrally and at the site entrance;
- information on plot rent (many prospective tenants will be unaware of how affordable allotments really are);
- contact numbers of either the council allotment manager (or officer in charge of allotment letting) or of the managing association, available at the site and on all publicity documents;
- a strategy for advertising the availability and benefits of allotments, not only through conventional means but also targeted at groups who are currently under-represented in the allotment gardening community;
- a periodic assessment and review of the advertising strategy;
- an awareness of other authorities' advertising initiatives.



This example from Birmingham shows how effective a good marketing strategy can be:

As a response to falling levels of allotment tenancies, Birmingham City Council used part of the monies resulting from the sale of surplus allotment land at Bordesley Green (the Bordesley Green Capital Receipts Fund) to sponsor an annual marketing campaign to generate new tenancies particularly amongst women and ethnic communities. A promotional pack was designed and through the council's marketing and PR section a number of approaches were employed. This included bus and press advertisements, street posters and media events. In 1999 the campaign produced over 120 new tenants and had attracted over 60 new tenancies by early 2000. It is intended to promote sites that have been refurbished in the near future.

Success will be achieved by a sustained effort, (an annual campaign in this example), and not by a one-off event. The example also underlines the need to monitor the effectiveness of any marketing. This can be achieved not only by measuring the number of new tenancies but also by monitoring the number of enquiries. A failure to convert a rush of enquiries into tenancies may require a reassessment of current allotment management or quality.

Consider also:

- providing times when allotment sites are open to the public so that prospective tenants can look around;
- organising an 'allotments fair' early in the year when prospective plotholders can inspect a site, talk to site representatives and take up a vacant and prepared plot on the same day;
- a postcard drop targeted at selected areas - particularly those close to a newly refurbished allotment site;
- working in partnership with voluntary organisations concerned with promoting sustainability and healthy living;
- assisting and promoting courses on allotment cultivation at local colleges;
- organising a competition to design a promotional poster - this could be one of the events at a horticultural show.

open days and National Allotments Week

Many successful associations will confirm that the most successful form of promotion is the simplest: word of mouth. If so, then the second must be the open day. If visitors have an opportunity to experience at first hand the pleasure that individual plotholders derive from their pastime, the taste of fresh vegetables pulled straight from the ground, and the camaraderie between people that turns an allotment site into a living community, then the chances are that they will consider taking on a plot. In recent years associations have been encouraged to open their gates as part of National Allotments Week, which is organised by the National Allotment Gardens Trust (www.NAGTrust.org) each August. In this way, local promotion can be augmented by national publicity, and by the additional credibility that this brings. Open days can also be combined with other annual celebrations, such as Mothers Day or Apple Day, and with promotional events. For example, an exhibition on allotments is held in Southend Library during National Allotments Week, featuring allotment photographs, fresh produce displays, and a free prize draw of allotment books and DVDs. This event is organised through a partnership between the library, Springfield allotments and the council's allotments officer. Allotment gardeners in Bexley have a display stand in the main shopping centre during National Allotment Week that celebrates the value of allotments to families. Children have fun decorating empty egg shells or small flowerpots with faces, then fill them with cotton wool; sprinkling with water and fast-growing salad rape seeds so that they can watch the hair on their allotment 'egg heads' grow.

Goodmayes walk guide

Seven Kings and Goodmayes Allotment Society in Redbridge have included self-guided walks in their open days to encourage a wider appreciation by the public of the social and environmental benefits of allotment gardening.



Selling the plot at Harland Avenue ...

The Bexley Federation of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners started holding open days in 2005, targeting allotment sites with vacant plots. In August 2006 approximately 1500 flyers were delivered by hand to residents surrounding the Harland Avenue site in Sidcup. On the open day itself over 200 people visited the site and the plot holders signed up 36 new tenants, filling most of the vacant plots. Retention has been excellent: a year later all of the recruits bar one were still actively tending their new plots.

Things to do at an open day ...

The programme for the July 2007 open day at Trumpington allotments in Cambridge features:

- Scarecrow competition** - prizes for scary and/or artistic scarecrows. Build your scarecrow on the day or bring him/her/it along. Dress a scarecrow against the clock!
- Produce sale** - lovely fresh vegetables and fruit direct from our plots.
- Childrens trail** - young people of all ages can explore the site following an exciting trail.
- Gardening bring and buy** - bargains for your garden. We would be happy to accept suitable donations: tools, excess (in date) seed, and so on.
- Tombola** - with fabulous prizes.
- Composting** - with Master Composters.
- Beekeeping** - with Cambridgeshire Beekeepers Association.
- School garden project** - Fawcett school now has a garden project.
- Wildlife Trust/Cambridge City Greenways Project** - information about local conservation and in particular 'The Grand Scales of Cambridge' - this year's reptile and amphibians survey.

(www.allotments.net:8080/allotments/Trumpington/openday2007.htm)

promotion across boundaries

In some parts of the country and most notably in London, where the innermost boroughs are exempt from the statutory duty to provide allotments, long waiting lists can be found in one local authority area while vacant plots await tenants in the authority next door. Bringing supply and demand together across boundaries can occur spontaneously when an authority is keen to see vacant plots let; but allotment managers can also work together to facilitate this process. Further sharing of information on vacancies and waiting lists across the capital was one of the key recommendations of the London Assembly's environment committee report on allotments, A Lot to Lose (2006) (www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/environment.jsp). The London Borough of Camden, for example, has been able to bring some relief to applicants who might otherwise wait several years for a plot by encouraging them to apply for plots in Barnet, Haringey and Brent, with the active support of the allotment officers and managers of devolved sites in both boroughs. This is a model of cross-boundary working to ensure that the open space needs of all are met, no matter where they live. However this is achieved, the result is likely to be an infusion of enthusiasm and commitment to allotment gardening through a process of self-selection, given the effort involved on the gardener's part in travelling a greater distance to secure the use of a plot.

promotion and the press

Newspapers and magazines (and not just gardening magazines) carry stories about allotments. These may be descriptions of competitions, human-interest stories or simply comments on lifestyle. Local radio stations can also be a powerful way to communicate information about allotments, with items in otherwise non-gardening programmes being particularly effective in reaching newer or latent users and excluded groups, especially where multiple languages are involved. All of this helps to publicise allotments and allotment gardening to a wider public. The allotment manager should understand how to prepare and distribute press releases and how to cultivate and work with the media.



In larger authorities this will be carried out in co-operation with the press officer but in small ones they may be expected to do the task alone. Specific training in media management skills may therefore be helpful. From topics such as competitions to personal achievements, school projects, health projects, site successes, regeneration, installation of new facilities and many others, each article is an opportunity to advance allotment gardening and to make known the process for obtaining an allotment plot.

growing in the community second edition



Allotment managers should also encourage activities that will help to generate widespread and positive publicity for allotments. Open days and local horticultural shows are good examples, along with participation by plottolders and sites in competitions such as the national best-kept allotments competition run by the National Allotment Gardens Trust and the Royal Horticultural Society's annual Britain in Bloom (www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom/index.asp).

assistance for new tenants

Many local authorities offer some form of incentive or assistance to new tenants. The simplest of these is a concessionary rent offered for the first year of the tenancy for anyone who takes over an overgrown plot. Bristol City Council goes further, and offers half rent for the first two years of a tenancy. There is an argument, however, for offering discounts only in the second year. Experience has shown that in some cases giving a rent reduction in the first year results in plottolders simply not bothering to get going, since they've invested nothing in the plot, which then becomes even more derelict.

Bristol City Council recognises that there is nothing more demoralising to a potential tenant than having to face an uncultivated plot. On the other hand, there is a cost to the council in bringing a plot up to a suitable condition for a tenant to cultivate. This issue can be addressed by using low-impact and low-cost methods of reclaiming and preparing overgrown areas. And where a tenant allows a plot to fall into an uncultivated state, the council believes that the cost of clearing the plot should be recovered, as permitted under the Allotment Acts.

Newcomers to gardening are also likely to benefit from training courses in gardening techniques, offered on site or in collaboration with local colleges. At a more informal level, long-established plottolders are often happy to pass on their knowledge and skills to new gardeners.

Consideration should also be given to making available to new tenants plots smaller than the traditional 10 poles, a particular benefit for those who lack the time or the need to achieve the level of self-sufficiency in fruit and vegetables that the traditional plot presumes. New tenants on small plots who find that allotments are definitely for them can always move up to a larger plot later on. Conversely, reducing the size of the plot for a tenant who is in difficulty or whose circumstances have changed can be a useful way of increasing the retention rate amongst existing plottolders.

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative has published a free downloadable factsheet *Restore the plot* which examines various aspects of restoring derelict plots back to a productive condition. (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)

Basic allotment gardening for beginners

At Preston Lane allotments in Stockton, training in basic gardening skills and plot management is provided to help newcomers to look after their new plots and improve retention rates. The training is delivered through a partnership with Stockton Adult Education, with infrastructure (a recycled classroom, compost toilet and tools) financed with a £3500 grant received from the National Lottery's Awards for All in 2006. A generator was added thanks to support from the Co-operative Community Dividend. Learners have ranged in age from their 20s to their 80s, and most of the training is hands-on using what had been a spare, untenanted plot. The classes have been a huge success, and the allotments now have a long waiting list. (For more information see the NSALG's *Allotment and Leisure Gardener*, Issue 4, 2006)

active promotion

The failure of a local authority to promote its allotments properly entails a degree of risk, since disposal of surplus allotment land requires permission from the secretary of state under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925. One of the secretary of state's criteria is that they are satisfied that "the authority has actively promoted and publicised the availability of allotment sites". Lack of demand cannot be cited if there has been no attempt to convert any latent demand into uptake of tenancies by methods of promotion similar to those described above.

3.3 allotment rents and other sources of funding

fixing of rents

In most cases rent will be the only income derived from an allotment site and expenditures will be manifold. These will include not only site maintenance and repair but also administrative costs and promotion. They cannot be sustained without adequate finance. The level of rent should be set so that, together with other available funds and incomes, there is sufficient funding to meet both present and projected needs of the site or portfolio of sites. Otherwise the quality of sites and facilities will inevitably suffer.

Although allotment rents are generally low, even small rises may provoke fierce criticism and sometimes threats to vacate plots. Many ploholders are unaware of the true costs of providing allotment sites and maintaining facilities and so information outlining those costs may be useful in allaying such criticisms.

In some cases ploholders may be willing to pay for the better facilities and promotion that will ensure that sites remain full. Keeping rents low under these circumstances prevents the development of the site to its true potential. Where raising rents is not a viable option, encouraging ploholders to accept devolved management arrangements would be appropriate to help reduce costs.

When fixing the allotment rent the following factors therefore need to be considered:

- long-term financial sustainability
- the nature, quality and cost of facilities provided (and desired);
- expenditure on promotion and administration;
- the present level of rent and its historic tradition;
- the likely effect of rent levels on plot take-up.

For the sake of comparability the following factors may also be useful:

- the level of allotment rents in surrounding areas;
- the level of agricultural rent in the area;
- charges to users of other outdoor recreational or leisure activities provided by the authority.

In addition, if the strategy is for the self-financing of allotments...

... there is a need for accrual of funds for future capital expenditure or maintenance programmes relating to the allotment sites. This assumes that the allotment site is in a fully maintained condition and does not require any immediate expenditure, and that accrual of funds is for maintenance or replacement work that would be carried out in the normal course of events, such as the eventual renewal of gates or fencing.

rent concessions

Rent concessions are permitted by allotment law and are granted by many councils to retired and unemployed tenants and occasionally to those who have held plots for a long time. Concessions should be considered as a method of promoting allotments to those most in need of the health and economic benefits that may be derived from allotment gardening.

rent collection

Most allotment rents are paid in advance. However, Section 10 of the 1950 Allotments Act states that if the yearly rent exceeds twenty five shillings (£1.25) (7) then it is not permissible to provide for more than one quarter's rent to be payable in advance. Clearly, if this condition were applied it would cause higher costs and inconvenience, so rent is normally paid in advance by agreement between the tenant and the authority. This is set out in the tenancy agreement.

renewal dates

Although in the past the traditional date for renewal of allotment tenancies has been March 25 this date has no legal significance. A renewal date in the autumn provides the allotments manager with details of ploholders who do not intend to renew their tenancies and hence the number and location of vacant plots. This gives ample opportunity for preparation of the plots for new tenants. An autumn renewal date is also likely to be convenient if tenants pay their rents to allotment associations, since allotments are still very active at this time and association secretaries may thus find it easier to contact their members.

other sources of funding

Although rents – and subsidies from council tax revenues – are usually the only regular forms of income for allotments, funding for specific projects or equipment may be found from a number of different sources.

Substantial if sporadic funding may be available from disposals (see part 2.3), which must be applied to securing replacement sites or improving the remaining portfolio. Funding for new sites can be secured through Section 106 agreements with developers: this is how new allotments have been funded at Cambourne in Cambridgeshire (www.cambourneparishcouncil.gov.uk/?q=node/34).

Other types of funding will only be available to associations and will require that general charitable objectives be met. Ancillary benefits from funded projects (such as improvements to access and security) can help improve the site as a whole, however, and enhance the enjoyment of all ploholders, not just the direct beneficiaries of the project itself.

The allotment manager should become familiar with the different and diverse means of funding available and should make use of them when appropriate. They should also be able to help and advise ploholders, allotment associations and groups using allotments of where to seek funding of their own. Frequently, those involved in the voluntary sector are very aware of many of the schemes that provide grants, and good communication between the allotment manager and such groups will be beneficial to all.

It can be a big step for an allotment association to start fundraising. Not only is there much to learn, but there may also need to be significant changes to the way the association is constituted, the standards of both democratic and financial accountability to which it conforms, and the overall quality of governance, particularly if large sums are sought. Funders may require evidence that associations have effective policies in place to cover such issues as equal opportunities and environmental impacts. These are matters on which the allotments manager may advise – or signpost sources of advice and expertise available elsewhere. The network of Allotments Regeneration Initiative Mentors can offer advice and sample documents from volunteers who have been successful in raising funds for their own sites, and have personal knowledge from the inside of the pitfalls which associations should avoid.

Specific and wide-ranging advice on fundraising for allotments is available in the ARI information pack A Guide to Fundraising for Allotment Associations, which is available as a free download from the ARI website at www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari. The pack also includes advice on reducing the need for money through recycling, the use of volunteer labour, and ways of generating additional income (within the limits imposed by the Allotment Acts), such as sales of produce, trading huts, events and social enterprises.

For additional advice on both national and local sources of grant funding, as well as training and practical support in completing applications, the local office of the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) should be the first port of call, particularly when associations are involved which have little previous experience of fundraising: (www.navca.org.uk).

Up-to-date information on grants available to charities and community groups can also be accessed through dedicated funding websites:

GRANTfinder: www.grantfinder.co.uk

FunderFinder: www.funderfinder.org.uk

The following are examples of funding sources that have a track record of approving grants to allotment associations for allotment projects.

Awards for All

Awards for All is a lottery grants programme aimed at local communities throughout the UK. Grants of between £300 and £10,000 are available to support participation in art, sport, heritage and community activities, and projects that promote education, the environment and health in the local community. Applications can be made at any time. The application form is short and simple, and the outcome is given to the applicant within eight weeks. (www.awardsforall.org.uk)

Local grant-making trusts

There are almost 10,000 UK grant-making trusts, the vast majority of which are small and give out a few thousand pounds per grant. By linking up with the local CVS applicants can research which trusts have criteria that suit their funding needs. This usually results in several applications being made for small amounts, but these amounts can add up to a substantial income for a specific project or theme.

B&Q

B&Q's Better Neighbour Grant Scheme provides £50 to £500 (at retail cost) of B&Q materials; for example, pond liners, plants, and peat-free compost or paints labelled low or minimal VOC for redecoration projects. There must be evidence of commitment from the applicants and from the local community to the project. Application is easy: contact is made via B&Q stores. The site of the project must however be within 12 miles of a B&Q store.

support in kind

Some commercial organisations are happy to provide 'support in kind' to worthwhile projects, and many (such as BT) have staff volunteering schemes that can supply willing (and very able) helpers. Approaches to suitable local businesses with well thought-out sponsorship proposals may pay dividends when particular items are required, not least through the positive publicity for allotments in local media that donations can generate. Of course, sometimes materials alone are not enough: extra hands are required too, particularly for regeneration projects. Organisations such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (www.btcv.org.uk) are happy to assist with projects which provide environmental benefits. In some places fruitful approaches have been made to the probation service, which can provide offenders on community service orders with an opportunity to contribute to the wellbeing of allotments through work on construction and maintenance, under appropriate supervision.

Support in kind in Cardiff allotment regeneration

In January 2006 the Cardiff 'Communities First' team joined forces with IBM staff, BTCV volunteers and the Splott Communities First Police to kick-start the Pengam Green Allotments Regeneration Project by clearing away rubbish and brambles from derelict plots. The allotments are located in Cardiff's Splott ward, an area of high social deprivation. The project aims to deliver multiple benefits to the local community, including cheap fresh vegetables in an area of high food poverty and ill health and an opportunity for training and exercise for young and old alike.

([www.archive.cardiff.gov.uk/SPNR/communities_first/Splott/Splott %20Projects/pengam_allotment_clean.htm](http://www.archive.cardiff.gov.uk/SPNR/communities_first/Splott/Splott%20Projects/pengam_allotment_clean.htm))

A win-win approach to young offenders ...

A partnership scheme was set up in 2002 between Manchester City Council's Young Offenders Team (YOT), the Sports Development Unit and Parks and Open Spaces under which young offenders put something back into the community by helping to clear 30 derelict allotment plots over the period of funding. Only plots that actually had tenants lined up waiting to start straight away and that could be cleared in one day were included. This meant that when the young offenders came along the following week they could see that their efforts had not been wasted, but were appreciated and being followed through by the new ploholders. The incentive to take part in the scheme tapped into young people's enthusiasm for sport. When the job was done they were given vouchers that could be traded for training or equipment relating to their sport of choice - to encourage a positive alternative to re-offending. (Information supplied by Jim Canniffe, Manchester SDU)

There is a Young Offenders Team in every local authority area in England and Wales: contact your local YOT Manager to see if a similar scheme might be appropriate in your area. For further information on the Youth Justice System, visit www.yjb.gov.uk.

Hempland Lane allotments in York were looking under-occupied and overgrown in December 2002 when the newly-appointed council allotments officer arranged a meeting with all tenants and helped them to form an association. Members helped clear plots head-high in brambles and advertised the site with posters put up locally. Council grants were obtained to help renovate an ancient railway carriage for use as a shop and to make a car park and to renovate etc. The shop has made a great focus for the site, supplying local people with spare produce as well as selling gardening materials. A grant from People's Places enabled the association to convert two plots into a paved area with raised beds for gardeners with disabilities. Most of the construction was done by the Community Payback teams of North Yorkshire Probation Service, who have plots on site. The allotments have been transformed, and now have a waiting list for new tenants.

(Source: Allotments Regeneration Initiative Newsletter, Winter 2006)

bringing it all together ...

Past experience suggests that the most successful associations have accessed funding and support in kind from a variety of sources, on the principle that small amounts of money or goods can soon add up to a sum that can transform a site. This approach seems to work better than large, one-off applications to highly competitive funding schemes, where allotment associations can be at a disadvantage compared to general environmental, health or education projects that can more easily prove a wider circle of beneficiaries. Applications for small grants (especially to local funders) usually involve less paperwork and reporting, and may require fewer compromises in order to meet the funder's criteria.



3.4 devolved management

The benefits and key issues involved in schemes for devolved management are examined in part 2.2 and in the sources of reference cited there.

The London Borough of Bromley has established a useful precedent by undertaking surveys of the associations which manage its 52 sites, all of which are under fully devolved management. Each survey covers tenancy rates, rents, facilities and other conventional matters, and includes a business plan, which focuses each association's attention on how it might improve the quality of services provided and, where necessary, how those improvements might be resourced. This information has then been fed into decisions about where the local authority's own capital investments in allotment improvements can best be concentrated. Investment decisions are made after discussions between the authority's officers, members and the Bromley Allotment and Leisure Gardens Federation at meetings of the Allotments and Leisure Gardens Consultative Panel.

Achieving the benefits of devolved management depends upon effective consultation with ploholders and associations in formulating the scheme, so that the degree of devolution matches the capacity of the association to deliver the services concerned. Ongoing support is also required from the local authority, and from representative bodies (such as the NSALG), to sustain the enthusiasm and develop the skills of devolved managers, along with periodic review to ensure that all is well.

Supporting devolved management requires skills beyond those of administration and horticulture. Local authority allotment offices must assume the additional role of a 'volunteer co-ordinator' in working with local associations if their work is to be effective. To ensure this, they should seek advice when necessary from sections of the council responsible for community development or additional training and guidance on the management of volunteers. While devolved management brings new challenges for officers, it can also bring rewards and career enhancement when the results of devolved management demonstrate a marked improvement in the quality of the service delivered to local communities. It is also important not to lose track of the fact that associations act as the council's 'agent' under devolved management. Ultimate responsibility for the service still resides with the local authority, which has an obligation to ensure that sites are managed in accordance with key customer service policies such as equal opportunities, and with due regard for financial probity and health and safety issues.

Although special concessions (such as reduced rents) may be available to ploholders who take on particularly onerous tasks on the council or association's behalf, in reality the workload involved for volunteers far exceeds the value of such compensations. Enthusiasm and commitment are essential, therefore, as is the ongoing support of the allotments officer. Sustaining devolved management involves strategies to cope at those times when enthusiasm and commitment subside. Where this is merely a temporary fatigue, the offer of training or a visit to another site to share experiences may prove enough. Where the problem is more serious, however, it may be time to encourage new volunteers to take a higher profile, while honouring the efforts and achievements of the current management team. It may also be necessary to reduce the responsibilities associated with devolved management, by switching to a scheme involving a greater input from the local authority, if only temporarily.

leases

In implementing a scheme for devolved management, it is important to ensure that the allotment association taking on responsibility has an appropriate and democratic constitution (models are available from the NSALG and ARI). The lease (if the arrangement is more than simply a licence) must be properly drafted, properly understood by the lessee, and of a duration that will encourage investment by the association. It should include review mechanisms to ensure that Best Value is being delivered, and provisions for the inspection of records to ensure that duties performed by the association as an agent of the council are properly undertaken and documented.

public liability insurance

The lease should also include a requirement for the association to take out an appropriate scheme of insurance to indemnify the local authority and protect the association, its volunteers and its members as well as third parties on site – with or without permission. Some insurers offer policies specific to the needs of allotment sites and associations; again, representative bodies can offer advice.

The benefits of devolved management: in Bury ...

Diggle Lane is one of 25 allotment sites in Bury, a local authority that acknowledges the benefits of devolved management and is keen for more allotment associations to get involved. The Diggle Lane Allotment Society were reluctant at first, because their site had poor fencing, hazardous paths, and 20 out of the 55 plots were derelict and untenanted. After negotiations, in which the local Allotments Regeneration Initiative Mentor provided advice and support to the society, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council agreed to repair the fencing and paths before the licence to run the site was signed. Under devolved management the society now collect rents, arranges and terminates tenancies, and carries out a range of other management duties. In just two years the site has been transformed: all plots have been filled and the waiting list has grown to over 60. Some plots have been split in half to make it easier for plotters to keep them well cultivated. The society runs plant sales and open days which generate income, it has entered the Bury in Bloom competition, and now has a community shed and a garage to store the horticultural machinery purchased to help keep the site in good order.

(www.bury.gov.uk/LeisureAndCulture/ParksAndRecreation/Allotments/default)

...and Thurrock

In 2002 many of Thurrock's allotments were overgrown, untidy and vulnerable to fly-tipping. But following Thurrock council's decision in 2003 to allow allotment holders to manage their own sites themselves, the allotments have been transformed. Twenty-three associations were formed throughout Thurrock under a steering group, with the council agreeing to invest £200,000 to improve security and facilities across all the sites. Mollands Lane allotment in South Ockendon is one of the sites that has been transformed. Before the scheme, only seven of the 30 allotment plots were occupied. Now all the plots have been taken and there is a waiting list. Like other allotment associations, the Mollands Lane Allotment Society has been able to access funding not available to local authorities, starting with a £180 grant from B&Q's Better Neighbours Grant Scheme to help set up a wildlife garden. The bees from the site's own hive produce Mollands Lane Allotment Society Honey, which can be bought on-site. Thurrock's cabinet member for environment says: "Some of the allotment schemes in Thurrock are nothing short of amazing. They've gone way beyond the idea of just producing fruit, vegetables and flowers; we now have orchard gardens, beehives, wildlife areas and ponds. The self-management of allotments has breathed life back into neglected allotments, making a huge difference to our environment."

(www.thurrock.gov.uk/news/content.php?page=story&ID=1809)

growing in the
community
second edition

3.5 communication and consultation

consulting with ploholders and associations

Effective communication and consultation with allotment associations and individual ploholders (both present and future) is an essential component of good practice. This is particularly the case when an allotments strategy is to be prepared which will chart a new course for the development of the service. For many ploholders allotments are havens of tranquility, places towards which they have a strong sense of ownership. Changes (or rumours of changes) which threaten to disturb that tranquility or other aspects of the established order may not be popular, particularly if they are made without prior consultation, explanation or warning. No single group can reasonably expect to exercise a veto over how a resource for the whole community is used. It is important however to respect the fact that without the continuing enthusiasm of existing ploholders, sometimes in the face of discouraging circumstances, allotments may not have survived as a resource with so much potential for the future. The allotments manager should always try to handle relations with ploholders with the utmost consideration and courtesy, and in accordance with the local authority's policies on customer care.

A consultative framework, such as an Allotments Consultative Panel (as in Bristol and the London Borough of Bromley – usually with representative membership), or an allotments forum (as in Worcester, Swindon and the London Borough of Brent – usually with open membership), enables effective communication between the authority, the ploholders and their associations. Such a body requires a constitution or document defining its terms of reference and its structure. Consultation can also be with federations of allotment associations, which can be a very effective voice for allotment gardeners, in part because of the wider perspective that they can command. The active federations in the Wirral, Manchester and Brighton are all good examples with particularly useful websites:

www.wirralfedallotments.20m.com
www.amas.org.uk
www.bhaf.org.uk

Meetings should be open wherever possible, the press and public permitted to attend, and agendas and minutes of the meetings should be published and made available to those wishing to see them.

Additionally, an annual general meeting will allow the authority to report its performance directly to the ploholders, and provides them with an opportunity to express their views and opinions – something that can also be achieved using regular opinion surveys.

resolving disputes

It is essential to recognise that there are many different groups and individuals who inevitably hold diverse opinions about allotments in general or on what happens on a particular site. There may be long-established ploholders who appear resistant to change; recent tenants and other voluntary groups keen to introduce new facilities and a wider range of activities; local residents with concerns about security or traffic congestion; and different council departments with very different views of allotments. Often these different views only surface when changes, however well-intentioned, are proposed or introduced. Things can then easily descend into conflict around issues, with groups taking positions from which they will not be budged — much pointing of fingers and not enough listening. A breakdown of trust ensues leading to a general 'them and us' culture of conflict and suspicion in which it can be very difficult to achieve anything positive.

Getting the process of communication and consultation right is a skilled and time-consuming business. It is not just the responsibility of the allotments manager, but of everyone concerned to ensure a positive future for allotments. Here are just a few ideas to help you along the road of effective communication:

- identify all the 'stakeholder groups' who might have a view, in advance of any particular issue surfacing;
- try to build trust and rapport with all groups by meeting key individuals on an informal basis outside 'set-piece' meetings;
- provide regular communication to all stakeholders through newsletters (see below), posters and meetings;
- understand the history behind a particular site or issue. Memories can be long and scars slow to heal and this may provide clues in finding new solutions to old problems;
- seek to understand groups' underlying needs and concerns that are likely to be genuine, rather than getting stuck on any particular stated position that may appear unhelpful or antagonistic;
- try to identify and build on shared hopes and needs between stakeholder groups, like 'we all want the land to stay as allotments' or 'we all want somewhere that minimises the nuisance to local residents' rather than the specific issues that divide such as 'we don't want the new car park there';
- focus discussion around issues not personalities;
- if you want to make a change, then design a process to engage all groups at the earliest planning stage, rather than when ideas are set in stone.

At times of major change, or when you are developing an allotments strategy, you could consider employing independent specialists to help design and facilitate a dialogue process. The use of an independent facilitator enables everyone to be part of the process and builds trust as it ensures that the dialogue is genuinely non-partisan.

In situations of open conflict between factions where there appears no prospect of moving forward, independent mediation may be an effective way of trying to resolve disputes in a constructive way.

At individual level, a dispute can arise when a plotholder is judged to be in breach of his or her tenancy agreement or the allotment rules in some particular. As the demand for allotments increases such disputes may well become more frequent, as tenants who are judged to be 'bad' are accused of blocking the way into gardening of others who would do a 'better job' and 'improve the site'. Fifty years ago there was a uniform view of what 'good cultivation' might consist of, but with the development of organic methods, the expression of different gardening cultures from around the world, and the recognition of multiple benefits from allotment gardening, it has become much harder to define the limits of acceptable practice, or to be certain that complaints framed around poor cultivation are not actually masking unacceptable attitudes towards difference and hidden forms of discrimination. Tenancy agreements should spell out the circumstances under which termination is justified. It is essential, however, to have in place a system for independent appeals (such as an appeals panel) to ensure that due process has been followed. Any termination must be based on an interpretation of the tenancy agreement that is informed not only by the Allotments Acts, which are very prescriptive in parts, but also by local codes of customer care. Plotholders must be treated fairly and reasonably and with due regard for their rights under the Human Rights and Disability Discrimination Acts. This responsibility applies equally to allotment associations acting on the local authority's behalf under a devolved management scheme. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens offers a mediation service to its members (www.nsalg.org.uk).

site contacts and representatives

Nominated site contacts and elected site representatives can provide an effective line of communication between the allotment authority and the plotholders. The precise roles that these volunteers perform will depend on the degree of devolved management (if any) of local allotment sites.

The functions and responsibilities of site representatives and contacts need to be clearly stated, and in many cases some form of inducement or payment is given in recognition of their efforts. For example, Bristol City Council offers representatives a 50 per cent discount on plot rent (up to three plots) and a full discount for those representatives who manage plot letting and waiting lists.

The responsibilities of site contacts and representatives may require them to:

- act as a communication link between plotholders and the allotments manager;
- meet new gardeners to show them available plots;
- notify the allotments manager of site problems and maintenance requirements eg security, fence repairs, vandalism, vermin;
- investigate uncultivated plots;
- keep notice boards up to date;
- attend meetings of the representatives forum.

Additionally, depending on the degree of devolved management, they may:

- manage waiting lists, plot letting and inspections;
- collect rents;
- manage the site budget;
- arrange for minor repairs and maintenance to be carried out.

The local authority should ensure that training and/or written guidance is produced for site representatives. Regular communication with site representatives will ensure that potential site issues can be resolved before escalating.

newsletters

Council newsletters such as Bristol's Growers Grapevine are a very useful form of communication between the allotment authority and its plotholders. Similarly, association newsletters help devolved managers to keep in touch with their members. There is rarely a shortage of material for newsletters: details of forthcoming events, advice and information, features and editorials, contact names and telephone numbers of people in authority. Newsletters can also include questionnaires for gathering information regarding current gardening practices or opinions. This information can be used to promote particular aspects, such as organic methods or rainwater collection.

One of the problems associated with newsletters is their distribution. Even if an authority is able to provide a copy to each individual plotholder, it may have to rely on associations to distribute them, unless they can be included with the rental invoice. Many newsletters are pinned up on notice boards, yet their design in terms of size of typeface and headings is not particularly suitable for such display. Particular consideration, therefore, needs to be given to the design of printed newsletters, and to alternative means of communication, including making newsletters available on the internet. The downloadable newsletter of the Association of Manchester Allotment Societies, *The Plot Holder*, is an excellent example (www.amas.org.uk/plot-holder).



the internet



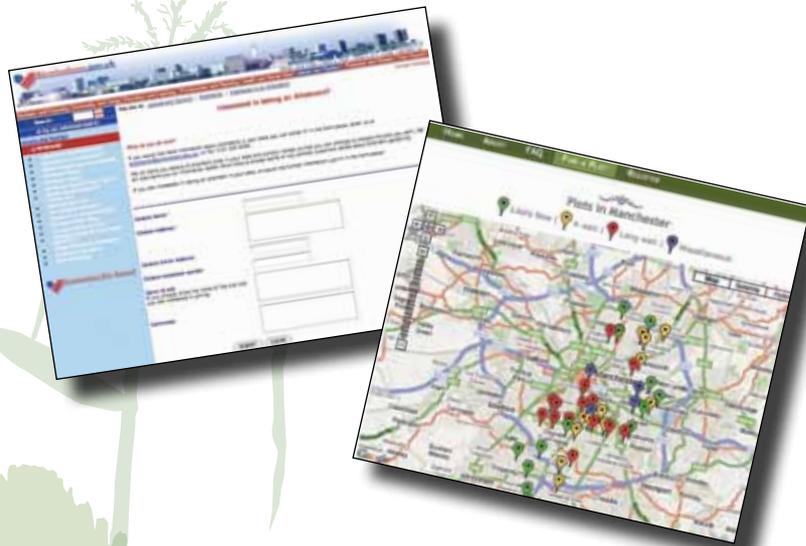
The internet hosts an enormous resource on all matters related to allotment gardening. Search tools afford allotment managers easy access to detailed information relating to allotment promotion and use – though care should be taken to ensure that information obtained through this route is up-to-date.

The internet is also a good way of finding out about good practice demonstrated by other local authorities: a search tool that gives

easy access to the allotment service websites in any area can be found at:
www.local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRRedirect/index.jsp?LGSL=510&LGIL=0

In addition to becoming the medium of choice for distributing information about allotments, including downloads of key documentation, a growing number of authorities also accept on-line applications for plots and advertise vacancies on their website.

When advertising or soliciting feedback on the web or by e-mail it is a good idea to create an obvious e-mail address (such as allotments@council.gov.uk) that is easy to remember, short, and does not change when responsibilities within the service are reassigned.



A growing number of local authorities and federations now use on-line maps to help encourage new applications for plots: these may be simple images that convey nothing more than locations, or complex interactive devices that offer much more information. The map developed by the Association of Manchester Allotment Societies (www.amas.org.uk/manchester_allotments/) includes clickable coloured pins that advise potential applicants about plot availability. Click the pin and the applicant is taken to the contact details for the allotment manager, a detailed street map for reaching the site, and a summary of site features (such as lavatories, trading huts, best times to visit).

Useful websites are also maintained by allotment societies and individual enthusiasts, many of which are accessible through the Allotment and Vegetable Gardening Ring at:

www.q.webring.com/hub?ring=allotmentring

There is also a range of discussion groups and bulletin boards available on the internet that cover allotment issues, including:

The Kitchen Gardens e-mail list: www.groups.yahoo.com/group/kitchengardens

The AllotmentsUK e-mail list: www.groups.yahoo.com/group/AllotmentsUK

The Allotments UK forum:
www.allotments-uk.com/forum

The Allotments4All forum:
www.allotments4all.co.uk/smf/index.php

The Chatting on the Plot forum:
www.chat.allotment.org.uk

The Kitchen Garden Magazine forum:
www.kitchengarden.co.uk/forum/index.php

multilingual communication

Multilingual communication should be provided where there are a number of different languages spoken by ploholders or prospective ploholders. Another approach to multilingual communication is to offer an interpretation service to those unable to speak or read English rather than to attempt to translate existing literature into many different languages. Interpreters could be recruited from within local ethnic communities and organisations and this in itself may help to spread the message if the interpreter is personally involved in growing food.

advertising allotments in Birmingham's community languages



record keeping

Effective communication with plotheolders also depends on efficient record keeping. Modern information technology has made the process of keeping detailed records very much easier. Accurate and well-maintained records provide easily accessible contact details and allow trends to be observed and monitored, offering significant information on the performance of the allotments service. Waiting list statistics are particularly important, given their role in assessing the demand for existing allotments – and in making the case for new ones.

The following list is a suggestion of records that should be kept:

- waiting lists;
- site statistics and inventory;
- tenant information;
- details of site representatives;
- association details and relevant legal documents, eg lease, constitution;
- financial information, including expenditure, rents and arrears;
- complaints, permissions, applications;
- injuries and illnesses (could be a clue to serious underlying problems such as contaminated land);
- maintenance record;
- site and plot inspections (including digital images of problem areas);
- risk assessment.

allotment management systems

There are a number of proprietary allotment management systems available on the market which can store the information listed above and also send out invoices, notices, plot offers and other standard letters. The advantage of these compared with own-produced systems is that they have been developed specifically for allotment management, and have been tried and tested by allotment authorities and shown to be effective and easy to use.

Standardisation of systems between local authorities allows help and advice to be provided easily by the manufacturers and operation and maintenance is not dependent on the presence of a resident information specialist. The use of a standardised system of record-keeping enables consistent indicators of performance to be produced and comparisons made between authorities.

Authorities using these systems are pleased to offer advice and opinions, and further information on two of these systems is given in the box.

Allotment management systems

Colony was developed in Microsoft Access by MCPC Systems and can be used on individual PCs or on a network. Free updates are available and there is an annual user group meeting. At present 55 local authorities use Colony, including Bristol, Leicester, Ashford, Kirklees and Luton.

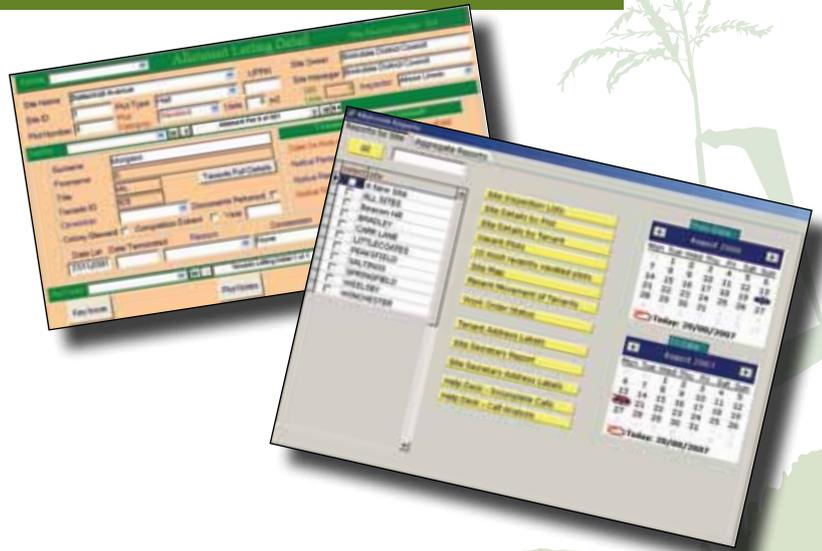
Further details from:
MCPC Systems (UK) LLP
2 Vounog Hill
Penyffordd
Near Chester
Flintshire
CH4 0EZ

Tel: 0845 055 6441
Fax: 0845 055 6442
(www.mcpcsystems.co.uk)

Clear Advantage was developed in SQL Server originally for the London Borough of Sutton and is now used by around 20 other authorities, including Bath and NE Somerset, NE Lincolnshire, Mole Valley, Swindon, Windsor and Maidenhead. It also offers an annual user group meeting and annual updates.

Further details from:
Clear Advantage Ltd.

Tel: 01451 812251
Fax: 01451 812250
(www.clear-advantage.co.uk/allotments.htm)



3.6 provision and management of facilities on allotment sites

introduction

Whilst at one time allotment gardeners were content with a plot of land to cultivate and very little else, there is a growing realisation that the provision of good facilities will help to ensure that the demand for allotments continues to grow – and become more inclusive. Plotolders and their associations should be consulted regarding the type of facilities required. This may vary from site to site and may also depend on the location of the site in the country and local allotment culture. For example plotolders on a very small site may not feel the need for a car park and may even be hostile towards the idea. Where facilities are poor, however, and access difficult, the result may be that some latent demand is not expressed. The needs of under-represented groups should also therefore be taken into account, if not on every site, then at least across the local authority's portfolio.

Whilst maintenance and running costs may be met from revenue, the capital for facilities such as lavatory blocks and trading huts will have to be found elsewhere. However, these need not be elaborate or expensive structures. Potential sources of capital are discussed in part 3.3. There are also opportunities to link the provision of facilities with local sustainable development initiatives, through the use of recycled materials and design features that enable conservation of energy and resources.

site huts and clubhouses

Allotment gardening is a sociable activity and a clubhouse, communal shed or trading hut will serve as a meeting place for the plotolders, for the bulk storage of materials and as a centre for sale or distribution of equipment and seeds. Such a focal point is desirable for the long-term prosperity of a site and for the future popularity of allotments in general.

Again, the building itself need not be new or expensive. In Bromley, Dorset Road allotments (www.dorsetroadallotments.org.uk) have converted a surplus temporary classroom obtained through the local authority into a splendid clubhouse used by plotolders and for community activities. In Dartford plotolders have reassembled as an equipment store a discarded concrete section garage that was heading for landfill. More ambitious projects (see box), can firmly establish a local allotment site as the heart of a local neighbourhood.

A house of straw ...

Wakefield's first straw bale eco-building was officially opened in October 2006 at the annual Agbrigg and Belle Vue Pumpkin Festival. The building is the final part of a three-year, £500,000 environment project to improve the local area, and is located on the regenerated Woodcock Street allotments. The design incorporates recycled and green materials and is super-insulated so that it doesn't need much power to heat and run. The windows are triple glazed to keep as much energy inside the building as possible, the plaster is made from clay dug out for the foundations, plants are grown on the roof and there is a solar panel to provide hot water. The building is already used by groups such as the Wakefield Primary Care Trust which runs a healthy living, Five-A-Day programme there. The Sandal Magna Junior and Infant School are creating a wildlife garden at the back of the eco-building as part of their natural science, biology and geography lessons. The council's family services runs a gardening club for adults with special needs from the eco-building and the Agbrigg and Belle Vue Allotments Group are based on the site. The £90,000 building was developed in partnership with the community association, the Agbrigg and Belle Vue Allotment Group and Wakefield council's Parks and Public Realm and Single Regeneration Budget teams.

(taken from Wakefield Express, 25 October 2006)

Minor maintenance and cleaning should be the responsibility of the plotolders or their association and financial arrangements agreed with the authority should enable such maintenance to be carried out in a satisfactory manner.

lavatory facilities

Many plotolders spend a great deal of time on their allotments and so provision of lavatory facilities will be welcome. This is particularly true where plotolders or user groups with disabilities have no accessible alternative, and on larger sites where the number of users more than justifies a standard of provision comparable to that established for other leisure activities. The cost of connecting a lavatory to main drainage can be considerable, but there are alternatives, including chemical toilets and composting toilets – the latter being preferable from an environmental point of view.



Careful consideration needs to be given to cleaning and maintenance arrangements and handwashing facilities. If not kept in proper order such facilities can rapidly deteriorate to the point when they become a liability rather than an asset.

Consideration also needs to be given to security measures to prevent vandalism. A lock with a key-pad can be a useful alternative to individual keys.

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative has published an authoritative fact sheet, Affordable toilets for allotments, which includes case studies and contact details for major suppliers.

access



A community allotment with excellent access

Access to allotment sites should be safe, secure, and not in itself

prove a barrier against any group of users, such as people with disabilities (as required by the Disability Discrimination Act). Every effort should be made to promote walking and cycling as appropriate means for local people to reach allotment sites, and the provision of secure cycle parking facilities near the entrance to the allotments may also be appropriate.

Although ploholders usually live close to their allotment site, there are times when the journey needs to be made by car or a car is essential because of the circumstances or disability of the ploholder. The provision of adequate parking helps to prevent nuisance or danger from on-road parking or damage to verges or vacant plots if cars are parked there. A small tarmac parking area is desirable but in many cases a designated patch on hard ground may suffice. This should be located as close to the site entrance as possible to minimise the use of haulage ways for motorised access. The presumption should be against the wholesale provision of access by car, as this in itself would undermine the unique tranquility and safety of the allotment site for users of all ages.

water supply

Access to a reliable supply of water is essential for cultivation. There is no minimum standard of provision required of allotment authorities, however, and some sites still rely upon little more than the rainfall draining from shed roofs into water butts (a practice which should nevertheless be encouraged).

Allotment providers should aim to ensure access to a mains tap water supply for every ploholder, with one outlet shared between no more than six to eight plots. Outlets should be situated in a convenient location, bearing in mind the difficulties elderly and disabled gardeners may face in transporting water any distance.

Water is a scarce, valuable and increasingly expensive resource. Whilst the capital costs of providing and maintaining the supply system may come from other sources, the cost of the water itself is often incorporated in full into the rent, particularly where the supply is metered and the costs are known.

Since it is currently impractical to charge individual ploholders according to use, the average cost is usually shared between ploholders on the site. Excessive use and potential abuses of the supply system can be prevented through the tenancy agreement and allotment rules. Most authorities prohibit unattended and overnight use of sprinklers and hosepipes, while others ban the use of hosepipes entirely or only allow people who would otherwise be disadvantaged (such as ploholders with physical disabilities) to use them. The restrictions governing use of the water supply should be clearly stated in the allotment rules, and attention should also be drawn to the need to comply with any restrictions specific to allotments included in hosepipe bans and drought orders in the event of these being imposed.

Many water supply companies now provide printed advice on water conservation in the garden, and much of this advice is relevant to allotment holders. These information leaflets can be included in an allotment tenants pack or distributed with newsletters.

Mulching with loose material (such as straw or compost) is a particularly environmentally-friendly way of reducing moisture loss (and water bills) and this practice should be encouraged. This would be a productive end use for safe, composted municipal green waste, for example.

An information leaflet covering water supply issues on allotments is available from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. This also covers water requirements of different plants — many newcomers to gardening have the mistaken belief that watering is simply a case of indiscriminate soaking.

sheds, greenhouses and polytunnels

A shed on an allotment site serves many purposes. It provides shelter in inclement weather, it may have a small stove for brewing tea or coffee, it is a storage place for tools and clothing or for special equipment for the disabled, and it may even be a place to sit and relax with other ploholders. In short it is almost a necessity.

Ploholders frequently construct their own sheds using discarded or recycled materials, and whilst this is generally a sustainable and laudable practice, some degree of sympathetic regulation may be necessary to prevent the site from appearing too untidy or presenting a hazard.

Authorities are entitled to require permission for erection of sheds within tenancy agreements and to specify details regarding their size, construction and location, but should not impose unreasonable restrictions or specifications. The report of the Allotments Advisory Committee in 1950 recommended that the procedure for application for sheds be made as simple as possible and this is also true today.

In some cases authorities provide sheds for the use of plottolders and charge rent for them. This ensures that they are erected to the specification and standard required by the authority. If rented out in such a way the authority should ensure that they are in good order at commencement of the tenancy. It is important to note that erection of sheds or other small buildings on allotments by a local authority will usually benefit from permitted development rights under Part 12 of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, in which case local authorities would not need to apply for planning permission for them.

Greenhouses and polytunnels may be treated in the same way as sheds but conditions may be imposed to ensure that they do not become dilapidated and present a hazard or nuisance from broken glass or shredded polythene.

paths and haulage ways

Allotment authorities (or allotment associations where there is devolved management) should ensure that main paths on allotment sites are kept clear for access. This includes, in particular, paths that are adjacent to uncultivated or overgrown plots so that they can be quickly returned to cultivation when required.

Responsibility for minor paths should lie with the plottolders themselves and the duties with respect to the maintenance of paths and haulage ways should be made clear within the allotment rules or tenancy agreement.

fences and hedges

Good fences or hedges around the boundaries of the allotment site are important to ensure the protection of the plottolders' crops and property (see site security p63), and these should be kept well maintained. Where boundary features (such as hedges) harbour beneficial wildlife, care should be taken to ensure that maintenance practices are appropriate. Consideration should be given to replacing (or augmenting) hard fencing with hedgerow wherever possible as a green, effective and far cheaper alternative.

Responsibilities for paths should be clearly stated in the tenancy agreement or allotment rules...

Paths within allotments must be kept free from flowering weeds and rank growth must not exceed 150mm (over 6 inches) high. Shared paths between two allotments must be maintained, and kept cut and clipped up to the nearest half width by each adjoining tenant; paths must be kept clear of obstructions at all times. All paths should be wide enough for easy pedestrian access to neighbouring tenants' plots. Where car parking or vehicle access is permitted on an allotment site, the tenant must ensure that all haulage ways have free access for other users.

(Extract from the Brighton and Hove City Council allotment rules www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1125723)

3.7 management of tenancies

uses of an allotment

An allotment garden is defined in the Allotments Act, 1922, as being

“wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family”.

This definition excludes ‘trade or business’ (see sale of produce p.58) and allows restrictions on the keeping of certain livestock (see keeping of livestock p.59). It does not preclude some limited commercial activity in the form of sale of surplus produce, nor does it preclude part of the allotment being used for relaxation and recreation along the lines of continental ‘leisure gardens’.

Indeed, the continental style leisure garden was commended by the Thorpe Report in 1969 as a model for all allotments to emulate. Although this idea never really took hold, there are a number of sites around the country (in Bristol and Birmingham, for example) that were converted to the Thorpe model, with chalets provided and the cultivation of lawns and flowers encouraged.

On occasions there have been disputes between tenants on more traditional sites and local authorities over the cultivation of flowers and other leisure activities. Most authorities, however, are keen to ensure that plots are well kept and cultivated, and do not concern themselves with the detail of the actual plants being grown. The use of part of an allotment for ‘leisure’ activities is usually tolerated, provided that these do not become a source of nuisance nor give cause for concern about returning the plot to an adequate condition should the tenancy end.

In the past, some local authorities have sought to limit the types of produce grown to those which do not take longer than a year to mature. This condition has been imposed because tenancy agreements are for periods of one year and require only a year’s notice. Authorities that impose such a ruling are afraid that any produce which cannot be grown and harvested within that time may increase the liability for compensation in the event of notice being given. An exclusion clause can be included in the tenancy agreement, however, which states compensation will not be paid for crops that take more than one year to mature.

Apart from restrictions on trees there is little useful to be gained from attempting to limit the type of produce grown in this way, when the result may be to limit the diversity of a site (in all senses) and provoke resentment amongst plotholders.

There have however been problems with illegal activities on a small minority of allotment sites, such as the hiding of stolen goods and explosives and the cultivation

of cannabis. The inclusion of a clause in the tenancy agreement that allows for termination of the tenancy in the case of illegal activity should therefore be considered.

Brighton and Hove City Council’s allotment rules define the permitted use of an allotment as follows:

“The allotment is rented to the tenant for the purpose of recreational gardening and/or the cultivation of herb, flower, fruit and vegetable crops. Part of the area may be used for associated purposes eg sheds, compost heaps and a patio. The maximum area for hard landscaping (eg a patio, internal paths) is 20 per cent of the plot area.”

conditions of tenancy

The conditions of tenancy are stated in the tenancy agreement which is signed by the authority and the tenant or the allotment association and the tenant in the case of advanced schemes for devolved management. Each of the parties should receive and retain a copy of the agreement.

The following need to be considered for inclusion in the tenancy agreement:

- **rent, including water charges and rental of sheds or other structures;**
- **collection of rent, including proportionate rent for part of the year and date when rent becomes due;**
- **rent arrears;**
- **prevention of nuisance or annoyance;**
- **prohibition of the use of barbed wire;**
- **prohibition of sub-letting;**
- **determination of tenancy and notices to quit;**
- **compensation;**
- **observance of conditions of lease (if the land is leased by the council from a third party);**
- **prohibition of trade or business;**
- **erection of sheds, greenhouses and other structures;**
- **keeping of livestock including bees;**
- pruning of trees, removal of timber, soil, sand or gravel (or other specified material);
- level of cultivation and cleanliness;
- maintenance of sheds, greenhouses and other structures;
- planting of trees, shrubs or of plants likely to be detrimental to the site;
- upkeep of paths or boundaries between plots;
- management of wastes, including limitations on bringing waste materials on site;
- control of dogs;
- display of plot number;
- use of water;
- use or storage of chemicals;
- drainage;

- conditions relating to the cultivation of other allotments;
- restrictions or specifications on allowable distance between allotment site and home dwelling;
- maintenance of hedges, ditches, paths and boundaries.

Conditions above in **bold type** are items which are specifically covered by legislation and therefore must be included in the agreement.

allotment rules

Although the conditions of tenancy are laid out in the tenancy agreement, this is essentially a legal document. The conditions should be explained and expanded in the allotment rules, preferably in plain and unambiguous English – and in other languages when use of English alone is unlikely to enable all tenants to understand what their rights and responsibilities are. Care should be taken however not to introduce ambiguities that might undermine the legal force of the tenancy agreement. Alternatively, the tenancy agreement can be augmented by a question and answer sheet that addresses the most common areas of misunderstanding. Additional information can be provided in the rules or on separate sheets to cover specific additional issues, for example construction and size of greenhouses and sheds, use of chemicals, bee keeping and construction of ponds.



The allotment rules of the London Borough of Sutton are presented in the *Allotment Gardeners' Guidelines*. These include a brief history of the allotments movement, advice on gardening and a section on organic gardening, location; of allotment sites and background information such as water charges, rules on polytunnels and how allotment rents are fixed. The use of photographs makes this a very readable publication and clearly demonstrates what is possible given sufficient enthusiasm on the part of the allotments manager and those around them.

(An on-line version is available at: www.sutton.gov.uk/leisure/allotments/gardhandbook.htm)

sale of produce

The use of allotments for 'trade' or 'business' is prohibited but the government has acknowledged that some small scale sale of produce is allowable⁴:

"The present legislation already enables some limited commercial activity to take place on allotments, but primary legislation would be required to allow commercial use to be greater than an ancillary use".

This view stems from the definition of the purpose of an allotment garden being a plot that "is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family": any sale of produce should be subsidiary to that purpose.

Some consideration should be given as to the manner in which any surplus produce is sold. Clearly it should be allowable for a plotholder to sell small amounts of fruit or vegetables to his or her friends and neighbours but any overt commercial activity, such as the placing of signs by individual tenants advertising crops for sale, should not be allowed.

Nevertheless, allowing non-plotholders to buy produce enables them to participate in allotments and benefit from them without actually being allotment tenants. Plotholders with surplus produce could be encouraged to donate this to their allotment association, which can then sell it for the purpose of raising funds for the upkeep of the site. The presence of allotment associations at farmers' markets raises the profile of allotment gardening, enables participation and assists promotion⁵, though participation can be difficult to sustain over long periods when using only volunteers. Some associations take the simpler route of providing an 'honesty box' at the front gate, where donations can be left in exchange for surplus vegetables donated by plotholders.

Allotments in Bideford Pannier Market

Marland Allotments Association in Bideford, south Devon, rents a stall at the local 'pannier market', an institution that draws its name from the wicker baskets in which farmers' wives once carried their wares to market, and can trace its roots as far back as the thirteenth century. The stall was secured at a discount from the town council, which runs the market, and is shared with the local Womens' Institute. The stall brings in around £200 per month to association funds. (Information supplied by the Allotments Regeneration Initiative.)

3.8 livestock and bees

keeping of livestock

At one time livestock reared on allotments played an important part in the diet of many ploholders. During the war years people were encouraged to keep pigs on allotment sites, particularly as a communal undertaking. However, with increasing prosperity this activity waned and nowadays the keeping of livestock is greatly reduced and even prohibited by some authorities. The keeping of racing pigeons as a hobby on allotments is well known: there are sites in some parts of northern England almost exclusively devoted to this pastime. In some parts of the country it has also been culturally acceptable in the past to keep horses on allotments, although many councils and the RSPCA do not now recommend this practice because of serious equine welfare concerns.

Recently there has been renewed interest in keeping small animals on allotments and under the right conditions they can enhance the attractiveness of sites and provide interest and enjoyment. The keeping of hens, for example, and associated exchange of eggs with other members, is a distinctive feature of the award-winning Dorset Road Allotments and Leisure Gardens Society in the London Borough of Bromley. (www.dorsetroadallotments.org.uk)

The allotment legislation does not prohibit the keeping of livestock, provided that the plot is mainly used for growing vegetables and fruit for the ploholder and his family, but allotment authorities can impose conditions and restrictions (and prohibitions) as they see fit. These should be clearly stated in the allotment lease or tenancy agreement. The tenant must also be responsible for obeying any restrictions or regulations imposed by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

The 1950 Allotments Act specifically allows for the keeping of rabbits and hens (but not cockerels), provided that they are kept in such a manner so as not to be prejudicial to health or cause a nuisance.

If livestock is kept on allotment sites consideration should be given to:

- DEFRA regulations or restrictions;
- animal welfare* and husbandry;
- specification and construction of shelters, including security of the structure (the 1950 Allotments Act permits the construction of shelters for keeping hens and rabbits);
- storage of animal feed;
- rodents and other vermin;
- noise, smell or other nuisance or annoyance;
- site security.

A free booklet entitled *The Welfare of Animals on Allotments* is available from the RSPCA – as a download on the website or from the RSPCA Farm Animals Department, tel. 0870 7540 203 or e-mail: farm_animals@rspca.org.uk. This covers horses, goats, rabbits, chickens, ducks and other domestic animals, as well as care of wildlife.

* The Animal Welfare Act (2006) makes owners and keepers responsible for ensuring that the welfare needs of their animals are met. (www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/act/index.htm)

Under the Act the five basic welfare needs of animals are: a proper diet, including fresh water; somewhere suitable to live; any need to be housed with or apart from, other animals; allowing animals to express normal behaviour; protection from and treatment of, illness and injury.

The RSPCA's advice on the Animal Welfare Act can be found at www.rspca.org.uk/petcare

bee keeping

Bees are a natural part of the countryside and of every garden and allotment. Whether they are wild bees or from hives, they aid with pollination, increase biodiversity and are of immense value to the farmer and gardener.

The keeping of bees brings pleasure not only to the beekeeper but also to many others, not the least of whom are those fortunate enough to share in the produce. There are many amateur beekeepers in the UK most of whom are members of local associations or organisations. As well as seeking permission from the allotment authority, any ploholder considering keeping bees should first contact his or her local beekeeping association either directly or through the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA), which is the national organisation for beekeepers (see box). The BBKA also provides insurance for its members.

For more information, visit www.bbka.org.uk. Useful advice on keeping bees on allotments can also be found at www.allotments.net:8080/general/bees.htm

Allotment authorities should be able to provide contact details for local beekeeping organisations and they, together with allotment associations, should work in partnership with these organisations to ensure that beekeeping is of benefit to all.

Bee-keeping has occasionally caused problems on allotment sites and should therefore be subject to consent from the authority, and this should be clearly stated in the allotment rules and tenancy agreement. Special conditions may be imposed as for ponds or other installations or structures and not all allotment sites may be suitable for bee keeping. The authority should provide a list of sites where it is permitted.

Bexley Council provides a formal agreement for the keeping of bees on an allotment site which sets out conditions relating to:

- duty of care;
- siting of hives;
- consultation, ie provision of notices indicating that a request to keep bees has been made thus allowing objections to be raised;
- details of stand-by bee-keepers;
- complaints procedures;
- insurance requirements;
- diseases — notification to the National Bee Unit;
- warning notices;
- sale of honey;
- arrangements for review and withdrawal of consent.

3.9 hazards and nuisance

duty of care

In general allotments pose few hazards. However, it is important that even these are minimised, particularly since allotment gardening is promoted as a family activity and young children may be present on the site. Allotment tenants have a duty of care to each other and also to visitors to the allotment, irrespective of whether these are invited visitors or intruders. This duty of care should be stated within the allotment tenancy agreement or the allotment rules, as well as in any lease for devolved management.

Consideration should be given to identification of potential hazards, and appropriate advice supplied where possible, or enquiries directed to an appropriate and responsible authority. Any injuries or illnesses arising from the use of allotments that are reported to the authority should be recorded and investigated and the facts established.

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative has published a free, downloadable information pack, *Health and safety on allotments: a management guide*. This includes factsheets on risk assessments and activities requiring special management, eg ponds, as well as a sample allotments risk assessment form and detailed site hazards checklist. (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)



ponds

Ponds can be of benefit to allotments in a number of ways. They can enhance the appearance of a plot, they can provide a habitat for wildlife and promote biodiversity and they can act as a 'watering hole' attracting a variety of animal life. However, under certain circumstances they could present a danger, particularly to children under three years. Decisions about ponds lie with the organisation managing the site, although the actual landowner could have the final say. Decisions about ponds should be made on a site-by-site basis, taking into account the site's physical layout, level of open access and users. Building a pond on a site with a public right of way raises different issues to one with secure fencing. It is important that conditions and guidelines exist as to the construction and siting of ponds and that these are available to the ploholders. These conditions could include the following:

- requirement for permission to install a pond;
- siting of pond — distance from paths;
- size of the pond;
- arrangements for inspection by site representatives or allotment manager.

water butts

Water butts may also present a hazard to inquisitive toddlers and wildlife and consideration should be given to ensuring that they are covered when not in use.

bonfires

In the past, local authorities have received many complaints regarding bonfires on allotment sites. Site managers should take into consideration the cumulative effect that frequent bonfires (particularly those left to smoulder) on individual plots across an entire site can have on neighbours and other ploholders. The burning of painted timbers, plastics and other non-plant material can also cause soil pollution by heavy metals and other contaminants. Most local authorities now seek to limit bonfires and apply strict conditions if they are permitted, in which case the detailed rules governing them should be clear, explicit, unambiguous and readily available on site.

The options will depend on the authority's environmental policy and strategy and these may include:

- a total ban on bonfires on allotments;
- limited permission for burning diseased plants and dried-out material that will burn without smoke or hazardous residue;
- an additional seasonal constraint on bonfires (for example: only permitted between November and March).

There should be no need for bonfires if skips are provided for disposing of non-compostable wastes and a total ban on bonfires is far easier to police than a selective ban on materials being burned.

The law relating to bonfires

- There is no law against having a bonfire, and there are no set times during which bonfires cannot be lit. Smoke Control Areas only apply to smoke from domestic chimneys.
- Under the Highways (Amendment) Act 1986 the police can prosecute anyone who allows smoke from a fire which they have lit to drift across a road. The maximum penalty for this is £5,000.
- The Environmental Protection Act 1990 prohibits a statutory nuisance being caused by smoke, fumes, gases or odour.
- Whether a statutory nuisance is caused depends on how often the problem occurs, the amount of smoke produced, and how the smoke affects the person complaining. To be a nuisance the smoke or fumes must either be a cause of material harm or must substantially interfere with the enjoyment of land.

herbicides and pesticides

In recent years there has been a growing interest in organic produce and organic gardening, together with an increased awareness of the possible harmful effects of chemical residues. Many gardeners have reduced the amount of chemical pesticides and herbicides that they use in favour of more organic methods, on which organisations such as Garden Organic provide useful advice.

Allotment managers should become familiar with relevant legislation and regulations regarding the use and storage of gardening chemicals, such as the Control of Pesticides Regulations Act (amended) (1997) and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (2002).

Allotment managers and allotment associations can help to reduce the amount of chemicals used and to ensure that when they are used, they are used safely and effectively.

- **Provide information on the safe usage and storage of chemical herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers.** This can be in the form of information leaflets and can be supplemented by talks and seminars.
- **Consider alternatives to spraying vacant plots.** Garden Organic has suggested using a sowing of clover on vacant plots to act as a green manure to build up fertility (see Organic Allotments).
- **Contact Garden Organic.** The organic gardening charity is keen to promote organic methods and to supply information which can be disseminated to ploholders. Some authorities include information about Garden Organic in their allotment packs.
- **Assess the level of use of chemical pesticides and herbicides.** Some authorities include questions about the use of chemicals in occasional allotment surveys. The results are often very encouraging; for example, a survey of ploholders in Brighton and Hove showed that three-quarters of allotment holders did not use any chemical fertilisers and used biological control for pests, and only one in ten used any form of chemical control for pests or diseases.

contaminated land

If there are any grounds to consider that allotment land may be contaminated, including representations made to the authority by ploholders or their associations, the authority must ensure that the land is tested and certified safe by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). If the site is found to be contaminated and remediation is not practicable then adequate provision should be made for relocation of the affected tenants. The same procedures should be followed as in the disposal of land for other purposes under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925. Planning Policy Statement 23 Planning and Pollution Control (2004) is also explicit on the need for special care to be taken when land is to be

allocated to allotments (www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143917).

Further advice on contaminated land is available from Defra www.defra.gov.uk/environment/land/contaminated/index.htm

See also the FCFCG publication Food Growing: How Safe is Your Land? (2002) (www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)

theft and vandalism

One of the main factors influencing the uptake of plots and the subsequent continuation of the tenancy is the fear and reality of theft and vandalism. The authority should therefore ensure that adequate security measures are provided, and that tenants are informed of these measures and instructed in their use.

There should be no need to convert allotment plots into private fortresses – these only present a greater challenge to vandals and spoil the appearance of the site. Ploholders have a duty of care not only to other ploholders but also to intruders. Defensive measures that can cause injury must not be used.

Although in many cases security will be best provided by fences and lockable gates, there will be circumstances in which other methods may be more effective. Consultation should be undertaken with ploholders' associations and advice obtained from local crime and arson prevention officers.

Some responsibility for the prevention of vandalism lies with the tenants themselves, who should report all instances of vandalism to the police and obtain an 'incident number'. The police are more likely to take action if they are aware that a problem exists and that this is of concern to the ploholders and to the wider community.

The recording of reported instances of crime should be considered (see record keeping) since in many cases it is possible that the perceived level of crime is different from the actual level. Statistics can serve to allay the fears of the ploholders or else alert the allotment manager to a situation requiring action.

For additional advice, see the free downloadable ARI Factsheet Safe sites: tackling vandalism and other offences on allotment sites www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

Allotment Watch in North Tyneside



North Tyneside council, Northumbria police, allotment holders, and nearby residents have teamed up to form an Allotment Watch at Wiltshire Drive in Wallsend. Each plot holder

already has their own key to allow them in and out of the allotment site, but North Tyneside council has supplied 500 hawthorn and blackthorn bushes for the site's 95 tenants to plant around the perimeter of the site, making it more difficult for intruders to enter. Allotment holders have posted leaflets to neighbouring homes, informing them that the scheme is in operation and asking them to report any suspicious incidents. North Tyneside Crime and Disorder Reduction and Misuse of Drugs Partnership has funded Allotment Watch signs, and Northumbria police are providing crime prevention advice to allotment holders.

(www.northtyneside.gov.uk/news/newsinfoitem.shtml?p_ID=4167)

site security

Site security appears to be a particular concern for people who are vulnerable, or who frequently work alone on the plot during the day and value the ability to lock the gates and keep trespassers out. Lack of adequate fencing and gates, or other effective security measures, may well deter some people from taking up plots and may also persuade existing ploholders to give up. An alternative strategy is to maintain an 'open site' policy during the daytime to actively encourage visitors to the site. This helps to ensure that ploholders are not isolated and that there are additional eyes maintaining passive surveillance of the site – which can also be useful if ploholders are suddenly taken ill. An 'open site' policy also helps facilitate access for emergency services should they be required. The choice of strategy will depend on the individual site and its location and requires careful consideration.

It is also worth considering supplying a set of keys to the site to park rangers or community wardens, for use in emergencies but also to encourage them to include the allotments in their regular rounds.

A number of local authorities and individual societies have established 'Allotment Watch' schemes (with appropriate signage) as a means to address crime and vandalism.

Typical objectives of such schemes include:

- increasing awareness of the need for crime prevention;
- explanations on how crime can be prevented;
- promoting garden security and other crime reducing measures;
- encouraging gardeners to be vigilant and report suspicious activity;
- giving an overall improvement to the allotment and giving gardeners a sense of pride;
- discouragement of vandalism;
- promoting property-marking of tools and machinery to deter theft and to enable stolen goods to be returned.

Councils can sometimes access additional support for ploholders when working in partnership with the police on allotment watch schemes, such as free shedlocks and property marking kits.

Practical experience with Allotment Watch does suggest that they can lose momentum after a while, so they should be reviewed periodically to ensure that the voluntary support required is sufficient to sustain the scheme. Experience also suggests that such schemes can be a useful complement to, but not necessarily a substitute for, secure fencing.

Informal schemes can also be effective, particularly on small sites. Local residents can be encouraged to keep an informal watch on a site and alert the police in case of damage or trespass. A small, local, postcard drop quoting police phone number and site representative contact details is a successful example from the City of York.

in conclusion: the next step

This guide has been written to encourage and empower allotment managers to think clearly and positively about the opportunities to achieve excellence in the service provided to allotment holders and the broader community. It advocates constructive engagement with a variety of agendas in local government and beyond, and emulation of innovative good practice wherever it may be found.

The guide is not exhaustive in its treatment of current good practice, and new projects and initiatives are emerging all the time. We have therefore appended a list of useful organisations that can help to keep you up-to-date.

The achievement of excellence in managing allotments is based on a partnership between local authorities, support organisations, allotment associations and individual ploholders — the people who ultimately care for the land, and whose attachment to it has ensured that allotments have survived as part of our common heritage. This guide points to new and better ways to promote the full and effective use of plots everywhere, to help ensure a bright future for allotments. The evidence of change in the world of allotments since the first edition of this guide was published shows that a new and positive future is already taking shape. We invite each reader to play their part in driving this process forwards.

appendix 1

useful organisations and contacts

Allotments Regeneration Initiative

www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari
The Greenhouse, Hereford Street,
Bristol BS3 4NA
Tel 0117 923 1800
Email ari@farmgarden.org.uk

British Beekeepers Association

www.bbka.org.uk
National Beekeeping Centre, National
Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh Park,
Warwickshire CV8 2LG
Tel 02476 696679
Email [use form on website]

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers

www.btcv.org.uk
Sedum House, Mallard Way,
Doncaster DN4 8DB
Tel 01302 388 883
Email information@btcv.org.uk

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

www.farmgarden.org.uk/
The Greenhouse, Hereford Street,
Bristol BS3 4NA
Tel 0117 923 1800
Email admin@farmgarden.org.uk

Garden Organic

www.gardenorganic.org.uk
Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry
CV8 3LG
Tel 024 7630 3517
Email enquiry@gardenorganic.org.uk

Green Flag/Green Pennant Awards

www.greenflagaward.org.uk
Green Flag Award Scheme, The Civic
Trust, 5th Floor, Century Buildings, 31
North John Street, Liverpool L2 6RG
Tel 0151 231 6900
Email info@greenflagaward.org.uk

National Allotment Gardens Trust

www.NAGTrust.org
NAGT, PO Box 1448, Marston,
Oxford OX3 3AY
Tel 01752 363379
Email naw@nagtrust.org

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action

The Tower, 2 Furnival Square,
Sheffield S1 4QL
Tel 0114 278 6636
Email navca@navca.org.uk

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd

www.nsalg.org.uk
O'Dell House, Hunters Road, Corby,
Northants NN17 5JE
Tel 01536 266576
Email natsoc@nsalg.org.uk

Natural England

www.naturalengland.org.uk
Northminster House, Peterborough
PE1 1UA
Tel 0845 600 3078
Email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

www.rspca.org.uk
Wilberforce Way, Southwater,
Horsham RH13 7WN
Tel 0870 010 1181
Email enqserv@rspca.org.uk

Thrive

www.carryongardening.org.uk
The Geoffrey Udall Centre, Beech Hill,
Reading RG7 2AT
Tel 0118 988 5688
Email Info@thrive.org.uk

A more detailed list of organisations
that can offer help and support can
be found on the Links page of the
Allotments Regeneration Initiative
website:
www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

appendix 2

a brief review of allotments law

A knowledge of the legislation is essential for the effective management of allotments. The purpose of this section is to act as a brief reference guide and overview. Clayden's brief but informative book, *The Law of Allotments* (footnote 1) is an excellent source of reference. Present allotment law is set out in statutes that were passed in the period from 1908 to 1950.

Statutory and temporary allotment sites

- Statutory sites are those that have been acquired by the authority for the purpose of being allotment gardens whilst temporary sites have been acquired for other purposes and are used as allotments in the interim. Statutory sites are directly protected by the allotments legislation but temporary ones are not.
- In many cases allotments have been in use for many years and the reason for acquisition of the land in the first place has been forgotten. The legal status of the land and its protection in law may therefore be uncertain. It is useful if the status of allotment sites managed by an authority is known.

Provision of allotments

- Authorities are duty bound to provide allotments for residents of their areas under section 23 of the 1908 Act (as amended) if they consider that there is a demand for them.
- In their assessment of demand an authority must take into consideration any representations made to them by six parliamentary electors or council taxpayers resident in the area. They must also provide a sufficient number of plots.

Time to provide

- There is no time limit laid down by the legislation from an authority being aware of a demand for allotments to them being made available for plotters.

Disposal of allotment land and relocation

- If statutory allotment land is considered to be surplus to requirements it may only be sold with the consent of the secretary of state under section 8 of the 1925 Act. If plotters are displaced by that action then adequate provision must be made for them, unless the secretary of state is satisfied that such provision is unnecessary or not reasonably practicable.
- Leasing of allotment land for any other purpose is covered by section 8 of the 1925 Act and requires consent.
- Consent of the secretary of state is still required for erection of any dwellings (but not sheds or greenhouses) by the council on allotment land [section 12 of the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act 1919].

Alternative temporary use of allotment land

- Section 27(5) of the 1908 Act provides for the temporary use of allotment land for other purposes if it cannot be let as allotments. However, if the land is subsequently required for use as allotments the authority must be able to regain possession by giving no more than twelve months notice.

Revenue from the sale of allotment land

- Revenue obtained from the sale or exchange of statutory allotment land must be spent on discharging debts associated with the acquisition of allotment land, acquiring new land for use as allotments, or improving the existing stock of allotments. Only the surplus may be used for other purposes [Section 32 of the 1908 Act].

Use and purpose of an allotment

- Section 22 of the Allotments Act 1922 ("the 1922 Act") defines an "allotment garden" as "an allotment not exceeding forty poles (footnote 2) in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family". This definition clearly precludes the use of an allotment garden for carrying out any trade or business but provided that it is cultivated mainly for growing fruit and vegetables other activities are not prohibited. These could include:
 - use of part of a plot as a 'leisure garden';
 - limited sale of surplus produce;
 - use of part of a plot for keeping livestock.

Use of an allotment as a 'leisure garden'

- There is no legal restraint on using part of the plot as a leisure garden for recreation or for growing flowers or crops that take longer than twelve months to mature.

Sale of produce

- Provided that the allotment is mainly cultivated for production of crops for consumption by the plotter and their family there is no legal constraint on selling surplus produce.
- This is a view endorsed by the government in its response to *The Future for Allotments* report (footnote 3) "The present legislation already enables some limited commercial activity to take place on allotments, but primary legislation would be required to allow commercial use to be greater than an ancillary use".

Livestock

- The keeping of hens and rabbits is permitted by Section 12 of the Allotments Act 1950 (“the 1950 Act”) but not in such a manner as to create a nuisance. The legislation also allows for the construction or erection of shelters for hens and rabbits.

Fixing of rents

- There is no requirement on the authority to exact a “full fair rent”.
- Section 10 of the 1950 Act provides that land let by a council for use as an allotment shall be let at such rent:

“as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land if let for such use on the terms (other than terms as to rent) on which it is in fact let”.

What is meant by “reasonably” has to be construed in the context of the legislation as a whole.

- There is also provision in section 10 of the 1950 Act for payment of reduced rent in special circumstances which might include retired, elderly, unemployed, or disabled tenants or tenants of long standing, or any other circumstance which the authority thinks fit.

Collection of rents

- The renewal date for allotment tenancies has traditionally been 25 March but this date has no legal significance and any convenient date can be used.
- Section 10 of the 1950 Act provides that if the yearly rent exceeds £1.25 then it is not permissible to provide for more than one quarter’s rent to be payable in advance. However, most tenants now enter into an agreement with the allotment authority whereby the rent is paid in advance. This arrangement is convenient to all parties.

Notices to quit

- Under section 1(1)(a) of the 1922 Act, tenancies of allotment gardens can be terminated by giving twelve months’ or more notice to quit. This must expire on or before 6 April, or on or after 29 September in any year, otherwise it will be invalid.
- An authority has power of re-entry after three months’ notice if the land is required for:
“building, mining or any industrial purpose or for roads or sewers necessary in connection with any of these purposes”. [section 1(1)(b) of the 1922 Act]
- Under section 30 of the 1908 Act the authority has the power to determine the tenancy on giving one month’s notice if:
 - the rent is unpaid for 40 days or longer;
 - the plot is not cultivated to the required standard three months after commencement of the tenancy (footnote 4);
 - conditions of the tenancy agreement are breached. These conditions should be stated in the tenancy agreement.
- An allotment authority’s duty of provision is only towards the residents of its district or parish, and the tenancy agreement can be determined on a month’s notice if the tenant becomes resident more than a mile outside the district or parish [section 30(2) of the 1908

Act]. However there is no reason why allotments cannot be provided to non-residents if there is adequate provision for the residents themselves.

Compensation

- An allotment tenant whose tenancy is terminated is entitled to compensation for:
 - crops under cultivation (section 2 of the 1922 Act);
 - manure applied to the land (section 2 of the 1922 Act).
- The value of compensation for crops is based on their value to an incoming tenant but compensation can also be decided by negotiation and agreement between the parties.

Footnotes

- 1 Paul Clayden, The Law of Allotments, Shaw & Sons Ltd, 2002.
- 2 40 poles is equivalent to 1,210 square yards or 1,012 square metres (1 pole = 30 1/4 square yards).
- 3 The government’s response to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs committee’s report, The Future for Allotments, cm 4052, 1998, p3
- 4 The required standard of cultivation for a new plotholder is not prescribed by the 1908 Act but set by the authority. This is usually one quarter cultivation of the plot after three months and three quarters after twelve months.

appendix 3

further reading

Paul Clayden
The Law of Allotments
Fifth Ed. Shaw & Sons, Crayford, 2002

CLG
Allotments: A Plot Holders' Guide
2006
www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/documents/plotholdersguide.pdf

CLG
The Government's Response to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's Report. The Future for Allotments
Cm 4052, 1998
www.communities.gov.uk/archived/general-content/communities/future

David Crouch and Colin Ward
The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture
Five Leaves Press, Nottingham, 1997

Caroline Foley
The Allotment Handbook
New Holland, London, 2004

Clare Foster
Your Allotment
Cassell Illustrated, London, 2007

House of Commons - Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee
The Future for Allotments, Volume 1, Report and Proceedings of the Committee
HC 560-I, London The Stationery Office, 1998
www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmenvtra/560/56002.htm

Natural England
Manifesto for Gardens, People and Nature
2007
www.naturalengland.org.uk/campaigns/breathingplaces/manifesto.htm

Natural England
Wildlife on Allotments
2007
www.english-nature.org.uk/Nature_In_The_Garden

Pauline Pears
Successful Allotments: Green Essentials – Organic Guides
Impact Publishing, Bath, 2007

Richard Wiltshire
Allotments in Local Agenda 21
Discussion paper written for the LGA, 1998
www.btinternet.com/~richard_wiltshire/lga3.htm

Richard Wiltshire
Devolved Management for Allotments Models and Processes
Discussion paper written for the LGA, 1998
www.btinternet.com/~richard_wiltshire/lga4.htm

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Fax 020 7664 3030
Email info@lga.gov.uk
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Although the authors and the publishers made every effort to ensure that the information in this publication was correct at the time of press, it is now several years old and the Local Government Association (LGA) can no longer guarantee its contents are correct and/or up-to-date.

authors

Dr Richard Wiltshire
School of Social Science and Public Policy
Kings College London

Deborah Burn
Network Co-ordinator
Allotments Regeneration Initiative

