



Report to Cabinet

Subject: Allotment Strategy for the Borough of Gedling

Date: 5th May 2005

Author: Councillor Wendy Golland – Leisure Portfolio Holder

1. Purpose of the Report

To adopt the Allotment Strategy for the Borough of Gedling.

2. Background

Allotments came into being with the Enclosure Act of 1845 with the general understanding that they are small pieces of land let out for cultivation. Although being in existence for over 150 years, allotments are still seen as an important asset to communities in the 21st Century.

The summarised benefits of allotments are identified as being:

- § Facilities for the enjoyment of gardening
- § Growing of fresh vegetables in a sustainable way
- § Health benefits through exercise and social interaction
- § Green spaces where local biodiversity can flourish
- § Alternatives to reduced size of gardens in response to higher density development
- § Positive contribution to community, socio-economic and environmental well being through recreational benefits.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide allotments, however, there is not statutory requirement for the amount of allotment space that a Council should make available.

In 1998 a select committee of the Development for the Environment, Transport & Regional Affairs published a report called "The Future for Allotments" supporting the practice of developing a share of the responsibility for managing allotment sites to local allotment societies. Gedling Borough Council has been proactive on this initiative and has at present five agreements with allotment associations.

The Allotment Strategy reviewed Gedling Borough Council's allotment service with the intention of providing a well-managed service offering high quality allotments throughout the Borough in the most cost effective manner over the

next 5 years whilst also taking note of factors, which could impact on allotments beyond this time period.

Integral within the review was the need: -

1. To ensure that the strategic aims of this strategy compliment and support the overall aims of the Council and link to national initiatives.
2. To consider the most effective way of providing an allotment service for gardeners in our community through the following themes:
 - § How the allotments are managed and administered
 - § How the allotments are funded
 - § To ensure that there is an adequate stock of allotments to meet the present and future needs of the community
 - § To ensure the benefits of allotment gardening are promoted to all sections of the community:
 - § Opportunity for social interaction across cultural, economic and gender barriers
 - § Encourages physical exercise
 - § The production of low cost, environmentally friendly food
 - § The community working together
 - § Encourages sustainability

The key aim of the Strategy is to encourage allotment gardening in the Borough.

The Strategy sets out to address four key themes: -

- i To ensure sufficient stock of allotments at a suitable standard, to meet the present and future needs of the community.
- ii To ensure the benefits of allotment gardening are promoted to all sections of the community.
- iii To ensure the allotments are managed and administered in the most efficient way.
- iv To ensure that resources match the needs of the service.

The Action Plan is shown at Appendix 1.

Resources and Management Scrutiny Committee have examined the Allotment Strategy document and its Action Plan as requested by the Leisure Portfolio Holder.

At it's meeting on 14th March 2005 a report on the Allotment Strategy was presented by Councillors M and A Dunkin. Scrutiny agreed that the report be submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure with a copy for Direct Services.

A copy of the report is shown at Appendix 2.

A letter dated 11th April 2005 to Councillors M and A Dunkin from the Leisure Resources Officer clarified issues raised in the report.

A copy of the letter is shown at Appendix 3.

3. Proposal

To adopt the Allotment Strategy for the Borough of Gedling and the Action Plan, instructing the Leisure Department to ensure its delivery and promotion.

A full copy of the Strategy can be obtained from the Leisure Services Department.

4. Resource Implications

Funding sources to be explored in order to fund the Action Plan.

The Council has an approved Capital Budget of £20,000 to be utilised as match funding by the Associations when applying to funding sources.

5. Recommendation

To adopt the Allotment Strategy for the Borough of Gedling 2004-2009.

7. Wards Affected

'All Wards'

Key Theme 1

Ensuring sufficient stock of allotments at a suitable standard, to meet the present and future needs of the community

1. To regularly monitor the level of occupancy and the level of cultivation at each of the allotment sites.
2. For Gedling Borough Council to be aware of the potential shortfall of 1 hectare of allotment land in areas for which it is responsible. However, it should be noted that there is not an unreasonable waiting list at any of the Council owned sites.
3. To increase allotment provision to reflect the proposed additional 8,000 houses to be built in Gedling before 2011.
4. To agree the allotment provision of 15 plots per thousand households in the urban areas of Gedling Borough subject to there being sufficient demand. For the rural parishes.
5. To reflect this requirement in the Gedling Local Plan.
6. To re-assess the procedures for leisure provision from section 106 agreements to ensure that the above can be met from developers contributions.
7. To ensure the proper procedures have been pursued in the event of any allotment sites becoming surplus to requirement
8. To work towards all allotment sites meet the standards indicated in appendix 4 taking the steps in Key theme 4 below to ensure finance is available

Key theme 2

To ensure the benefits of allotment gardening are promoted to all sections of the community

1. The production of advice leaflets covering all aspects of gardening on allotments eg. How to get a garden, Clearing an overgrown plot, What to grow, Basic skills, Composting etc.
2. To provide notice boards on each allotment site.
3. A poster campaign advertising the benefits of allotments focused on Doctors' surgeries, libraries, leisure centres, health food shops etc,
4. Set up a web site specifically for allotments covering all aspects of allotment gardening and linked to complimentary sites.
5. To work in partnership with others to broaden the appeal of allotments.
6. Working with Allotment Associations to offer advice sessions to encourage new gardeners.
7. Adapt plot sizes to suit different needs. Besides smaller plots, raised plots could help those with mobility problems. Larger plots may encourage groups such as schools, youth clubs, groups with disabilities (Rethink).
8. To appoint site stewards on Council run sites to ensure that the allotment is being run properly and also to report any maintenance needs or comments from gardeners.
8. For Gedling Borough Council to maintain sponsoring horticultural competition for gardeners.
10. Set up mechanisms for effectively communicating with gardeners on all the Council's allotment sites.
11. That a pricing Policy is in place which does not discourage the economically disadvantaged from renting plots.
12. For the Council to work with Allotment Associations and gardeners on directly managed sites to encourage sustainable gardening and good environmental practices through:
 - a) Cultivated allotment plots offer the opportunity to use environmentally sensitive methods of gardening through the minimum use of chemicals and recycling through composting.
 - b) To encourage good environmental practice including organic alternatives to fertilizers and recycling through composting.
 - c) To offer advice and encourage the opportunities that arise for improved wildlife habitats in uncultivated sections of allotments and hedgerows.

Key theme 3

That the allotments are managed and administered in the most effective way

1. To actively encourage the Allotment Associations presently managing their sites to continue.
2. For the Council to have a formal procedure to annually review the administration of its allotment stock managed by Allotment Associations. This should include: occupancy levels, cultivation levels, waiting lists and a financial statement for the previous 12 months.
3. To obtain regular and up to date information on occupancy levels and cultivation levels at Council managed allotment sites.
4. To ensure that all sites encourage high levels of cultivation and have a policy or procedure for dealing with gardeners who rent plots but do not cultivate them.
5. To approach the Allotment Associations with a view to them undertaking the administration duties at the remaining three sites.
6. To review allotment charges in comparison with similar provision elsewhere.
7. To set clear guidelines for the Council staff that are responsible for Council allotments.
8. To review every 5 years the licence between the Allotment Associations and the Council to ensure that it still meets the needs of both parties.

Key theme 4

That the resources match the needs of the service

1. That a revenue budget is prepared for each year to show the actual cost of operating each site.
2. To produce a 5-year costed maintenance and capital plan for the Council's allotment stock.
3. To consider the opportunities of external funding to offset against the costs highlighted in point 2. Working with the Allotment Associations as necessary, with a grant scheme to supply match funding for bids made by the Associations.
4. To receive a regular update from the DSD on the costs incurred in maintaining allotment sites.
5. For the Council to review every 5 years the process and principles by which the rent charges are arrived at.
6. For the Council to approve a policy for the disposal of any funds raised in the event of allotment land being disposed of and the element that will be reinvested in the remaining allotment stock.

Report to Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Allotment Strategy for the Borough of Gedling

Date: 14th March 2005

Authors: Cllrs. M and A Dunkin

Background

Allotments came into being with the Enclosure Act of 1845 with the general understanding that they are small pieces of land let out for cultivation. Although being in existence for over 150 years, allotments are still seen as an important asset to communities in the 21st century.

- The summarised benefits of allotments are identified as being:
- Facilities for the enjoyment of gardening
- Growing of fresh vegetables in a sustainable way
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- Alternatives to reduce size of gardens in response to higher density development
- Positive contribution to community, socio-economic and environmental well being through recreational benefits.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide allotments, however, there is not statutory requirement for the amount of allotment space that a Council should make available.

The above is a direct quote from Councillor Wendy Gollands' report to Scrutiny.

In addition to this report the following items should be considered:

Environment strategy and local agenda 21

Strategically placed allotments enable people to walk or cycle to the sites, reducing the need to use a car. We should at all times try to encourage people to use public transport, walk or cycle, in preference to use of cars.

Factors to be considered for the future provision of a high quality allotment service in Gedling

The designation of an allotment office to support the Parks Development Officer would be an excellent move towards improving the quality of allotments. The report suggests a formal visit to all allotments twice a year to meet representatives from the associations, discuss occupancy levels, cultivations levels and assess general matters of site condition and maintenance; this. However, we feel that this would not be a high enough frequency to maintain the desired quality.

The strategy recommends that new gardeners should be encouraged by the tidying of vacant plots before they are let. If this were to be the case, would there be a charge for this service and if so who would be recharged? It is also important to note that it is felt the ploughing of a vacant plot is not sufficient an incentive for new gardeners to take a plot. Ploughing will only make the plot look presentable, as it digs in the weeds and the weed roots. The new gardener may find that the work involved in maintaining the weed free garden is prohibitive and they may therefore be deterred from keeping the plot for the second and subsequent years. This only leads to a vicious circle of letting and vacancy of plots. During the Scrutiny Meeting Councillor J Spencer suggested that the problem of the weeds and couch grass returning so soon after the ploughing of the vacant plots could be because the ploughing is not deep enough. However, it should be considered that ploughing alone to clear a heavily weeded plot may be insufficient. When considering alternative approaches to this problem we must be mindful that many allotment gardeners grow organically.

Many of the allotment associations try to encourage the letting of new plots by giving the first year rent free for overgrown plots. Considering that the average annual rent for a plot in Gedling is £22.50 per year and less for concessions this may be an enticement but the work involved in maintaining a plot that has been overgrown for some time is the off-putting element.

Many allotment sites are now including adaptations for gardeners with disabilities. The suggestions of raised beds, wider paths and smaller plot sizes are good but the roads within the allotments should be maintained in a condition that allows for wheelchair use.

There has been a suggestion that the allotment associations within Gedling may meet informally to discuss matters of mutual interest within the site and stewards from the Council should also attend. This would be a good forum for discussions between the sites.

There is an annual allotment competition but again the incentive to enter this is low, ie the only prize is for the best kept allotment. Greater imagination in the prizes would be desirable, for example best in first year, best disabled, best in age group, best improved since last year, etc.

It was also noted in the report that concerns were expressed by all the associations at the lack of communication between the Council and the individual associations. This related to day-to-day correspondence not being answered, through to a lack of feedback and transparency on the annual maintenance renovation process. This could be addressed by the provision of an Allotment Officer and again more regular contact and inspections.

The report suggested that the allotment associations meet informally to discuss matters of mutual interest along with the Allotment Officer and site stewards from the Council. This should be encouraged and should be take place biannually along with the attendance of Allotment Federation meetings.

Allotment provision

The sites the Council is responsible for are Arnold, Carlton, Gedling and Netherfield. The proposal to possibly close and sell off the Rookery Gardens site should be looked into and discouraged.

It was not possible to confirm in the report whether there are any allotments in Newstead. This should be investigated.

The Parish Councils at Calverton, Burton Joyce and Woodborough have their own allotments which are managed independently. They should be invited to join the local Federation.

Future demand for allotments in Gedling Borough

The Planning Department has included in their projections the need for an additional 3.01 hectares of land for allotments throughout the Borough. It should be questioned where this land might be found in urban areas and, given the potential difficulties, the possible closure on the Rockery Gardens site should be carefully considered.

Outcomes from the Scrutiny Committee meeting :

Copies of this report to :

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Your Ref:
Date: 21 May 2013

Dear Councillor Dunkin

Allotment Strategy for the Borough of Gedling

Thank you for forwarding a copy of your Scrutiny Report regarding the Allotment Strategy for the Borough of Gedling.

I am writing to clarify some of the issues you have raised.

1. The Leisure Services Department undertook a staffing review in 2004 involving a reallocation and re-designation of staffing resources. As part of this review, the Assistant Development Officer was designated the responsibility for allotments in support of the Parks Administrative and Development Officer. This post will enhance communication links between the Associations and the Council.
2. The Assistant Development Officer is available to meet with the Allotment Associations on their request. The role of the Assistant Development Officer is to support the Allotment Associations in their work, make appropriate requests to the Councils Capital Programme and ensure Licence conditions are maintained. The day-to-day management of Allotment Association sites is the responsibility of the appropriate Association.
3. The Strategy examines ways of encouraging the take up of vacant plots. At present the Council currently clears vacant plots by use of a weed-killer and ploughing as appropriate prior to the plot being covered in black polythene. The polythene is removed once the plot has been re-let.

The Allotment Associations have responsibility for the re-letting of vacant plots on their sites. The method by which they choose to clear an overgrown plot is left to their discretion.

4. The Assistant Development Officer will meet with the Allotment Associations prior to the preparation of the Council's Capital Programme in order to work up funding requests. A path improvement is an example of such a project. The Council has approved a Capital budget of £20,000 to be utilised as match funding by the Associations when applying to funding sources.
5. The Assistant Development Officer is happy to discuss the format of the Allotment Competition with the Allotment Associations. Increase in the scope of the competition would be dependent upon an increase in the available budget.
6. The Assistant Development Officer will periodically review the demand for allotment plots. Proposals regarding the need for extra sites or closure of existing sites will be made based on demand trends. It is important that any new sites are in easy reach of under provided for communities. This provision maybe possible through Section 106 Agreements.
7. The Assistant Development Officer will raise the issue of encouraging users to use forms of transport other than the car for travelling to and from their plot with the Allotment Associations.

I trust this has clarified issues you have raised in the report. If you require any further information regarding the allotments please contact Amanda Rhodes, Assistant Development Officer, on (0115) 901 3713.

Yours sincerely

Mr Andy Bowers
Leisure Resources Officer

cc. Cllr Wendy Golland
Janet Brothwell
Tracey Lack
Keith Tansley