



To: Executive Councillor for Arts & Recreation
Report by: Head of Streets & Open Spaces
Relevant scrutiny committee: Community Services Scrutiny Committee 14/10/2010

Cambridge Allotments – A Management Policy Key Decision

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Cambridge Allotments – A Management Policy (Management Policy) was previously considered at Community Services Scrutiny Committee on the 12th March 2010.
- 1.2 The Management Policy highlights the value and role of those allotments managed by the Council in contributing to corporate Medium Term Objectives and the guiding principles of the Cambridge Environmental Framework.¹ It provides the Council with a strategic approach to the management of its allotment assets.
- 1.3 Allotments are an important asset to the City of Cambridge, providing a wide range of benefits to local communities and the environment. They are valuable green sustainable open spaces, which benefit wildlife and provide recreational activity that offers healthy exercise, and social contact at a low cost. They are also readily accessible to those members of the community who find themselves socially or economically disadvantaged.
- 1.4 Background research for this Management Policy identifies key national, regional as well as local influences and gives clarity on the complexities of managing allotments. By understanding these key requirements, the Council will prioritise service needs, improvements and investments by allocating available resources.
- 1.5 A Review of Allotment Provision (Review of Allotments) was completed this year by the City Council and Ashley Godfrey Associates, and was used to inform this Management Policy.

¹ Cambridge Environmental Framework
<http://intranet.ccc.local/suscity/policies/Cambridge%20Environmental%20Framework.pdf>

- 1.6 The Review of Allotment Provision, has given the City Council a clear, and up to date, picture of the city's allotments, looking not only at how much space it has have, but also at what the City Council needs to do now, and in the future, to safeguard and improve allotment provision as the City grows.
- 1.7 Consultation was approved by the Executive Councillor to determine the degree of support for the Management Policy; recommendations and objectives. This report details the feedback from respondents, and provides evidence of a broad support for the recommendations and objectives contained within the Management Policy.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to: -

- a) Approve the Management Policy and its recommendations;
- b) Instruct Officers to develop an action plan to deliver the Management Policy's objectives, with a priority focused on addressing supply and demand;
- c) Instruct Officers to develop further the Allotment Management Procedures; and
- d) Approve the allocations policy for new provision in major growth sites.

3. Background

- 3.1 Community Services Committee approved a report on the 12th March 2010 Cambridge Allotments – A Management Policy which set out what Cambridge City Council wants to achieve from its allotment provision in the City. It considered future needs and detailed how this would be achieved and the resources that will be required to implement the recommendations and objectives.
- 3.2 The Management Policy was approved for consultation; and Officers were instructed to obtain feedback on the recommendations and objectives contained within it.
- 3.3 Allotments and allotment gardening feature in several other Cambridge City Council strategies and plans including the Parks Asset Management Plan 2010-2014, the Open Space and Recreation Strategy and the Cambridge Local Plan 2006.
- 3.4 There are over 1,300 allotment plots in Cambridge, on 23 different sites, throughout the city. Overall, around one in twelve plots are uncultivated at the moment. The waiting lists for allotments add up to a total of over 500 names.

- 3.5 Even though we know that some people are on the list for more than one site, there is clearly an unmet demand for plots.
- 3.6 The City Council owns 22 allotment sites, and manages eight of these directly; allotment associations manage the remainder.
- 3.7 The City Council has reduced the size of its standard plots so as to make more space available for people, and to try and reduce the waiting list; this policy has been quite effective, and most of the associations have also done this.
- 3.8 The City Council is responsible for regulation on its own sites, whilst allotment societies manage their sites under an agreement with the Council.
- 3.9 Site quality varies quite widely. Some sites have good water supply, but some others do not. Some have high cultivation levels, but a few have derelict plots. Just over half of all plots have a shed, but this also varies widely from one site to another. Larger sites may have communal sheds and some sell gardening supplies.
- 3.10 Most sites have little or no provision for disabled people. People with disabilities would have problems getting into some sites, and also getting around sites once inside them.
- 3.11 Partnership working between the City Council and Allotment Associations, sharing responsibilities through devolved management, has contributed significantly to increasing the level of participation in allotment gardening throughout the City and to the delivery of the wider benefits that the City Council regards as important. Local communities have an important stake in the future for allotments, ensuring they managed efficiently and effectively
- 3.12 The aim is to create management policies that will maximise the use allotments and the contributions they can make.

4. Consultation Feedback and Findings

- 4.1 A questionnaire including a summary of the Management Policy was sent to stakeholders on the 1st September. The questionnaire was made more widely available on the City Council website as a downloadable form and as an online version. A display with questionnaires was present at the Town and Country Show held on Parkers Piece on the 18th & 19th September. The consultation closed on the 24th September.

- 4.2 The Council consulted on the following: -
- the need to meet both current and future demand;
 - improvements to the quality of provision;
 - improvements to the management and administration of allotment sites;
 - safe and secure allotment sites;
 - sustainable practices;
 - promotion of allotments; and
 - an allocation policy for allotments on growth sites.

4.3 A total of 85 responses were received of which 8 were from organisations. The number of responses is low compared to an earlier consultation associated with the Review of Allotments where 60% of the 1600 plot holders questioned replied. This low response is considered to be a reflection that the Management Policy correctly interpreted the findings from the earlier Review of Allotments. Consultation has shown that the Management Policy is supported.

4.4 Demand

Evidence from the Review of Allotments suggested; waiting lists are long, and are growing, and new housing will only increase demand (while also reducing the available land for new allotments).

Consultation results would support the following actions: -

That the Council: -

- Protects existing sites from development;
- Looks at underused open space to see if it is suitable for turning into new allotments; and
- Actively looks for new allotment sites.

The City Council can maximise the use of existing allotment sites, by

- Speeding up the re-allocation of unused or abandoned plots

There is some but limited support for reducing the plot size for new plots, from the traditional 10 rod plot to 5 rods for instance.

4.5 Quality

The Review of Allotments and consultation have provided helpful feedback on allotment quality, detailing that poorly maintained sites, with unused or unkempt plots, are not only unsightly but increase dereliction and encourage vandalism.

It is also important that allotments are accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.

The Consultation has shown that it is important to ensure sites are both welcoming and accessible by: -

- Making entrances welcoming, with good signs and notice boards, and keeping them clear of rubbish (94% of respondents agree)
- Improving access into sites, and within sites (80% of respondents agree)
- Working with allotment groups and tenants to clear up unsightly and neglected areas (96% of respondents agree)
- Improving maintenance of sheds, fences and other boundaries (94% of respondents agree)
- Improving water supplies (86% of respondents agree)
- Providing communal composting facilities (79% agree), and
- Encouraging the removal of non-compostable waste (99% of respondents agree)

There was however opposition to making improvements for safe and secure parking.

4.5.1 Consultees believe that it will be helpful to have a quality standard for our allotments, which will help everyone to know what's expected, and will mean that we can be held to account when sites fall below this standard. (74% of respondents agree). However, the point is also made that this should not be a tick-box exercise to promote homogeneity, but rather a minimum acceptable standard that allows a diverse and varied use of sites within defined quality boundaries.

4.6 Management

The consultation has shown that the City Council should ensure that it provides the best possible service for tenants, within the limits of our budgets. Our management service should be at least as good as other local authorities with allotment teams. It is recommended that: -

New procedures are introduced that: -

- make it clear what is required of allotment tenants (86% of respondents agree);
- improve rent collection and the application of concessions (67% of respondents agree);
- manage waiting lists and reallocate vacant plots more efficiently (88% of respondents agree); and
- deal with enforcement of rules and take action when things go wrong (86% of respondents agree).

Evidence from the consultation would support the view that the City Council can make more progress if officers work more closely with tenants by: -

- Improving communication and consultation with allotment associations and with individual tenants;
- Have a regular forum where officers' and associations' can meet to discuss issues;
- Offering to delegate site management, under a formal agreement, to allotment associations where possible;
- Creating more opportunities for tenants and associations to get involved in site management, and in the way we run the service generally;
- Providing a new tenancy agreement, and make this easy to understand, so that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities.

4.7 Allocations Policy for new provision Growth Sites

Consultees considered a new policy for allocating plots on sites derived from housing growth areas. It is recommended that this would give priority, for up to 8 years, to residents of the development, and if demand exceeds supply, we can reduce the size of plots to try and give everyone who wants an allotment some space. If there is vacant space, we may allocate it to residents of other areas on a temporary basis, which will allow us to prioritise local residents in these areas for the first eight years. The allocations policy is detailed at Appendix A.

There is support for the principle of giving priority to local people in new housing areas, but respondents are less enthusiastic about reduced plot sizes, and especially about temporary allocations to others – though neither of these approaches attracts outright opposition, views are more guarded.

4.8 Safety and security

One major concern raised during the research for this Management Policy was safety and security of sites. Consultation has shown support for the following:-

- Carrying out a safety and security check on each site every year;
- Liaising with police and community safety staff to alert them to problems on sites;
- Keeping sites free from dog fouling, and ensuring dogs are kept under control;
- Providing guidance to tenants on the keeping of livestock, to make clear what livestock are permitted on site, and what standards of care are expected; and

- Promoting best practice in health and safety on all the sites.

4.9 Sustainability

The Review of Allotments highlighted an obligation to ensure that what we do today does not harm the environment or waste natural resources. It's especially important that allotments provide examples of good practice in this area, so it is recommended that the City Council: -

- Encourage natural methods of pest control, and “green manures”;
- Encourage organic gardening to protect the soil;
- Reduce the need for mains water by encouraging rainwater collection and storage; and
- Promote better ways of dealing with organic waste, and recycling or reusing other waste.

4.10 Promotion

There are researched and documented benefits of working an allotment include better diets, more exercise, social opportunities, and a better understanding of nature, and allotments also provide open space and space for wildlife to thrive. It is recommended to: -

- Promote and advertise the benefits of allotments more widely;
- Provide information on methods of gardening, to help people make more of their allotments; and
- Promote “garden sharing”, where people are encouraged to offer parts of their own gardens to growers (this would help people who can't manage their gardens, for instance).

4.11 Priority Areas

Respondents to the consultation were asked to detail two aims of the Management Policy that would make the biggest positive difference. The following table details the responses.

Managing and meeting demand	82%
Improving sustainability	32%
Improving our management and enforcement procedures	26%
Improve site quality	24%
Improving safety and security	16%
Promoting the benefits of allotment gardening more widely	8%

4.12 Conclusions

There is broad consensus and support for the Management Policy. The main priority for the Management Policy should be to consider solutions to overcome supply and demand issues.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial Implications

The provision of allotments and monies towards allotments is only formally required in the urban extensions. It would not be permissible in terms of the parameters of the existing policy documents and the Planning Circular 05/05 Planning Obligations for monies for informal open space to be used to support allotment provision or improvement within the City.

A review of the funding criteria for Environmental Improvements is being considered by the Executive Councillor for Climate Change and Growth.

The Management Policy considered funding at paragraph 6.9 onwards

5.2 Staffing Implications

None currently identified

5.3 Equal Opportunities Implications

A stage one equality impact assessment is being undertaken, and results will be reported at Committee. Access issues at some sites have already been noted and the policy seeks to address this issue.

5.4 Environmental Implications

Allotments make a contribution to sustainability by promoting and facilitating composting, and can be managed in ways that demonstrate sustainable practices such as rain water collection, the use of green technologies e.g. composting toilets, and the reuse, recycling or reclamation of waste products

5.5 Community Safety Implications

None

6. Background papers

These following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Brief for the Review of Allotment Provision
- Review of Allotment Provision by Ashley Godfrey Associates, January 2010

- Report by Phil Back Associates on the Management Policy Consultation 2010
- Allotments Guide Supplement – Local Government Association 3rd March 2010
- Cambridge Allotments – A Management Policy

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Allocations Policy for New Provision

8. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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