

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR LEISURE, SPORT AND CULTURE

2 NOVEMBER 2015

SUBJECT:	PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE WIRRAL ALLOTMENTS PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY & IMPROVEMENT PLANS 2015-2020
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL WARDS
REPORT OF:	MARK SMITH, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT AND REGULATION
KEY DECISION?	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet Member approval to adopt and implement the Parks and Countryside Wirral Allotments Partnership Strategy and Improvement Plans 2015-2020 appended to this report.
- 1.2 Allotment gardening has an important role to play throughout the borough, helping people 'grow their own', take part in healthy pastimes and share allotment related advice and support. Allotments also contribute to environmental sustainability. Wirral has a proud and independent tradition of allotment gardening.
- 1.3 The overall objective of Wirral Allotments Partnership Strategy is to help create and maintain a high standard of allotment provision for the benefit of Wirral residents by improving the infrastructure, facilities, security and quality of allotment sites and ensuring optimum use is made of existing allotment provision through reducing the number of vacant and 'unusable' plots. This will be achieved by effective partnership working between the Council's Parks, Allotments and Countryside Team, allotment site secretaries, allotment site societies and individual plot holders, ensuring all sites are welcoming and accessible to all.
- 1.4 Through this strategy, the Parks, Allotments and Countryside team intends to provide clarity to all parties involved with allotments including Wirral's allotment site secretaries, current and prospective plot holders, neighbours to allotment sites, Councillors and Council officers.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The strategy sets out Wirral Council's commitment to providing allotments which help achieve the following important aims:

- Enhance people’s health and wellbeing
- Contribute to nature conservation and the sustainability of the environment
- Help increase people’s pride in the places where they live
- Achieve objectives in a cost effective manner

2.2 A prior lack of modernisation in computer systems used to administer and manage allotments has resulted in poor waiting list management, and a slow transfer of plots to new tenants, leading to a rise in the number of plots classed as unlettable. This is now being addressed.

2.3 A primary objective of the strategy and associated documents is to improve the overall administration and management of allotments. The significant matter of how the Council manages the issue of Dirty Plot Notices will be improved; this will ensure that persistent non-compliance with tenancy agreements can be dealt with in a more constructive and timely manner.

2.4 Wirral’s Parks and Countryside team has recently undergone a restructure, which reflects the Council’s plan of area-based working. This includes the transfer of site responsibility for allotments to locally based team leaders who will have a key role in implementing this strategy, in partnership with members of Wirral’s allotments community.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

3.1 If the Wirral Allotments Partnership Strategy & Improvement Plans for 2015-2020 are not adopted and implemented, then the risk is that an opportunity will be lost to rationalise and improve allotment administration and management on the Wirral in a transparent, strategic and structured way. This may harm the relationship between the Council and allotments stakeholders.

3.2 The Council would miss an opportunity to improve the management of allotments waiting lists and plot allocation. The new strategy gives clear procedures and focused future direction for the management of allotments across Wirral.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 To not implement the strategy.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 The following consultation and engagement has informed the development of the Wirral Allotment Strategy:

- Public consultation on the draft strategy was undertaken from 17 June to 25 July 2015. The strategy (along with all relevant documentation), with feedback forms was available on the Council’s website, paper copies were available in Council One Stop Shops and Libraries.

- The draft strategy and associated documents were also distributed to allotment site secretaries and Wirral Allotment Societies via meetings, email and post.

5.2 **Appendix 6** provides a summary of the consultation feedback and actions taken as a result of the feedback. Overall, feedback was positive, with consultees acknowledging and appreciating the work that has gone into the strategy. Feedback comments have been taken into account in the **final version of the strategy and associated documents (see appendices 1 - 5)**. In particular, the feedback has resulted in some additional information being added to the Tenancy Agreement and Site Secretary Agreement to aid consistency and clarity.

5.3 The proposed strategy limits new applicants to only having one allotment plot, due to the strong demand for plots outstripping the number of available plots. However, the strategy does not seek to retrospectively introduce this limit to existing tenants who have multiple plots because they took on the additional plots in good faith when in the past the Council offered multiple plots when there was a low demand for allotments plots. This previous policy helped ensure that plots did not remain unlet at a time of lower demand. It would be a retrograde step to remove the multiple plots from tenants who took them on, unless plots are not being actively cultivated. Actions set out in the strategy will free up unmanaged plots and create a supply of lettable plots for people on the waiting lists.

5.4 The development of the strategy has taken into account suggestions received from allotment site secretaries, allotment societies and other stakeholders.

6.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

6.1 None.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

7.1 The strategy encourages active involvement of voluntary community groups involved in allotments, such as allotment site societies.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

8.1 The strategy will help to focus resources effectively. The revenue budget for allotments expenditure is £88.4k per annum.

8.2 The strategy also highlights that costs will be able to be recovered from former tenants when plots are left in an unacceptable condition, reducing the likelihood of plots subsequently becoming unlettable.

8.3 Replacement and modernisation of the IT allotment administration system will improve efficiency and effectiveness of staff and increased income will be achieved as vacated plots will be able to be reallocated more quickly.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Provision of allotments is a statutory requirement.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review is attached

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014/eias-regeneration-envir>

11.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The use of allotments has been shown to reduce an individual's carbon footprint; as growing your own food reduces the need for supermarket trips and therefore reduces fuel use and packaging waste. By improving allotment sites and increasing the number of usable plots, the number of people able to reduce their carbon footprint will increase, thus benefiting the environment.

12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 Allotment infrastructure improvements will help to increase their positive use and allotment holder safety.

13.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet Member is requested to approve the Wirral Allotments Partnership Strategy and Improvement Plans 2015-2020.

14.0 REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

14.1 To provide clear strategic direction for the future management of allotments and to provide clarity to all parties involved with allotments, including Councillors, Council Officers, Wirral's allotment site secretaries, allotment organisations and societies, current and prospective plot-holders and neighbours.

14.2 Allotment Site secretaries have welcomed and been very supportive of the work to produce the new strategy and the fact that it brings clarity of procedures and direction.

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APPENDICES

**Appendix 1: Wirral Allotments Partnership Strategy & Improvement Plans
2015- 2020**

Appendix 2: Useful Allotment Information

Appendix 3: A Guide to the Allotment Processes

Appendix 4: Tenancy Agreement

Appendix 5: Site Secretary Agreement

Appendix 6: Feedback Summary

BACKGROUND PAPERS/REFERENCE MATERIAL

BRIEFING NOTES HISTORY

Briefing Note	Date
-	

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
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