

WIRRAL COUNCIL

**ALLOTMENTS PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY
&
IMPROVEMENT PLANS
2015-2020**

**FINAL VERSION
NOVEMBER 1st 2015**

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1. Introduction:

- 1.1. A review of Wirral Council's Allotment Processes took place in 2014 which identified a number of key issues. This strategy and associated improvement plans aim to provide clarity to all parties involved with allotments, including Councillors, Council Officers, Wirral's Allotment Site Secretaries, current and prospective plot holders and neighbours. It also links to, and is supported by Wirral's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, 2014-2024.
- 1.2. This Allotments Strategy is a joint agreement between Wirral Council, Wirral's Allotment Site Secretaries, the Allotment Tenants / Plot Holders and Allotment Site Societies all working together with a joint aim of providing clear strategic guidelines for the management, administration, promotion, development and funding of allotments across the Wirral Council Authority area. It aims to raise the profile of allotments and to optimise their use for existing and potential tenants, to suit the needs of all sections of the community, by welcoming and encouraging those from all age groups, backgrounds and mobility abilities.
- 1.3. As of 1st November 2015; there are 45 Wirral Council Allotment sites, of which five are self-managed allotment sites on council land. Some sites have provision for half plots and some have facilities adapted for use by people with disabilities. Some sites have community plots, school plots or animal plots. A further self-managed allotment community food growing area is being created at Bentinck Street, Birkenhead. This will mean that a total of 46 sites are covered by this strategy.
- 1.4. Within the Wirral Peninsula, there are a number of allotments on private land however Wirral Council is not involved at those sites and they are not covered by this strategy.
- 1.5. Wirral Council has prepared this document using national good practice guidance developed as part of the Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI) and in accordance with the recommendations on developing an allotment strategy provided by the Local Government Association's 'Growing in the Community, 2nd edition', available at:

<http://ari.farmgarden.org.uk/resources/growing-in-the-community-mainmenu-150>
- 1.6. To help achieve the objectives and actions set out in this strategy an annual review of progress will be carried out each November/December; this will be carried out with input from site secretaries, Wirral allotment societies and plot holders. The summary report of the annual review will be provided to these key stakeholders and other interested parties.

2. Wirral Council's Allotment Management Policy

2.1. This **Allotment Management Policy Statement** 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. This commitment is reinforced within Wirral's 2020 vision: Wirral has an attractive and sustainable environment where good life and an excellent quality of life is enjoyed by everyone who lives here. Working to reduce levels of inequality, particularly in relation to health, remains of paramount importance to this Council. We want all of our residents to have a good quality of life and live healthy lifestyles in clean and safe environments.

2.3. We recognise our responsibilities under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, whereby Local Authorities are required to provide a "sufficient number of allotments, and shall let such allotments to persons resident in the borough, district or parish and desiring to take the same" ref: section 23(1) of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908. We commit to managing the borough's allotments, and seek if possible to increase the number of useable allotments where required, in accordance with the following legislation, guidance and strategies:

- Allotments Acts 1908, 1925, 1950
- A Place to Grow (2010) and Growing in the Community, 2nd Edition, 2009
- Wirral Council Corporate Plan 2014-2016

2.4. To achieve our allotment commitments, we apply Wirral Council's Values and Behaviours in all aspects of our work:

- We treat everyone with respect and dignity
- We are accountable and take responsibility for our actions and decisions
- We communicate and are open and honest in what we do
- We seek innovative & creative solutions
- We work effectively together to make the most of our resources
- We proactively look for ways to improve
- We fully utilise the skills, talents and assets of our partners, communities and organisation
- We take decisions and deliver
- We learn from and share knowledge with others
- We deliver with energy, pace and quality
- We are risk aware, not risk averse
- We have pride in our place and our people, striving to be the best we can be for Wirral.

3. History and Legislation:

- 3.1. The history of allotments dates back many hundreds of years, with evidence going back to Anglo-Saxon times. The system we recognise today has its roots in the Nineteenth Century, when land was given over to the labouring poor for the provision of food growing, mainly due to the rapid industrialisation of the country coupled with the absence of a welfare state.
- 3.2. In 1908 the Small Holdings and Allotments Act came into force, placing a duty on local authorities to provide sufficient allotments according to demand, but this did not gather pace until the end of the First World War when land was made available, primarily as a way of assisting returning service men under the Land Settlement Facilities Act 1919.
- 3.3. The rights of allotment holders were further strengthened through the Allotments Acts of 1922, but the most important change can be found in the Allotments Act of 1925 which established statutory allotments that local authorities could not sell off or convert without Ministerial consent, known as Section 8 Orders. This 1925 Act also required town-planning authorities to give special consideration to allotments when preparing their town planning, which as a consequence is now relevant to the Council's Unitary Development Plan and Local Development Framework.
- 3.4. Wirral Council has a statutory duty to provide allotments, which it recognises as an important asset. Within the complex network of legislation relating to allotment administration, governed by statute and case law, it is essential that as the allotment authority, the Council is aware of its duties and observes precedents that have been set. This is reflected in the proposals and action plans contained within this strategy. Further legislation created over the years affecting allotments is as follows:
 - 3.4.1 Small Holding and Allotment Act 1925: This made a number of improvements to the law mostly concerning small holdings.
 - 3.4.2 Allotment Act 1950: This strengthened the requirements on Councils to provide allotment gardens. Provisions relating to rents were also affected. This act included issues relating to notices to quit and compensation.
 - 3.4.3 Town and Country Planning Act 1971 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 have had considerable influence on the forward planning of allotments and are relevant to the Council's Unitary Development Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework as mentioned above.
 - 3.4.4 The Local Government Planning & Land Act 1980 and the Local Government & Planning (Amendment) Act 1981: This is all part of the consolidated planning legislation, which has further influences the forward planning of authorities.

- 3.5. The list of legislation is collectively known as the 'Allotment Acts' and will be referred to as such in this strategy.
- 3.6. Plots are traditionally measured in rods an old Anglo-Saxon measurement, so called because it was the length of the rod used to control a team of eight oxen. Traditionally, a plot is approximately 10 rods or 250sq m in size or 10m x 25m. A half plot is approximately 5 rods or 125sq m in size. Wirral Allotments however, have always varied in size from site to site, and often plot to plot.
- 3.7. Allotments were subject to an extensive inquiry in 1998 by the House of Commons – Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee. The Select Committee's Report 'The Future of Allotments' was the first major government study of allotments and leisure gardens since Professor Thorpe's inquiry in 1969 and resulted in a number of conclusions and recommendations, all contained within the report.
- 3.8. Allotment sites are designated as statutory or temporary. Statutory sites are directly protected by the Allotment Acts but temporary sites are not. Statutory sites are those that have been acquired by the Council for the purpose of being allotment gardens whilst temporary sites have been acquired for other purposes and are used as allotments in the interim. Case law indicates that allotment sites that have been in existence for more than thirty years are deemed to be statutory, unless they were expressly created as a temporary facility.
- 3.9. Wirral owns three temporary allotment sites: Landican, Plymyard and Earlsden. The remaining 43 of the allotment sites owned by Wirral Council are deemed to be statutory as they have been in existence for more than thirty years or have been established more recently as statutory allotment sites.

4. International and National Context:

- 4.1. Allotment gardening is a pursuit that provides wide ranging benefits to local communities and the environment and can make a positive change to the quality of people's lives. In addition to the advantages of producing good quality, local, low cost, fresh food gardeners gain the benefits of healthy exercise that is active, socially inclusive and reflects the ideals of sustainability and well-being.
- 4.2. Across the country, allotments are available to all sections of the community including the old, young, disabled and people from ethnic communities. Allotments are a unique and valuable aspect of the local area contributing to the quality of the urban built environment and a range of local leisure provision. They also provide opportunities for wildlife and can contribute to the retention of traditional skills. Gardening is the single biggest leisure activity undertaken by the public in recent years with an increasing amount of attention has been shown to allotment gardening.
- 4.3. There is an International/European wide organisation which works to promote the benefits of allotment and leisure gardening: www.jardins-familiaux.org. At a national level, the National Allotment Society (NSALG) seeks to support allotment gardening throughout the UK. From 2002 to 2012 a nationwide Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI) programme, funded by government and a range of organisations, helped promote allotment gardening, provided guidance on a range of key allotment related issues, such as non-cultivation and waiting lists, and helped to halt and reverse the previous national decline in allotments (see website for further information: ari.farmgarden.org.uk). The resources developed by the Allotments Regeneration Initiative are scheduled to be available from their archived website until late in 2015. Those interested in benefitting from the advice and good practice captured by the Allotments Regeneration Initiative are encouraged to make use of these resources while they are available. Advice and information is also available from the National Allotment Society website: www.nsalg.org.uk.
- 4.4. 'Growing in the Community' 2nd Ed, (2009) and 'A Place to Grow' (2010), both produced by the Local Government Association, provide guidance for Local Authorities on a range of allotment issues. Good practice guidance has been taken into account in the development of Wirral's Allotment Strategy and updated procedures, as set out in the appendices.

5. Wirral Context:

- 5.1. In Wirral, Allotment gardening has formed an important part of many local people's lives for generations. They played a key role during the war years and have continued to make a significant contribution within neighbourhoods and more widely. The distribution of Wirral's allotments reflects the history of allotment gardening provision, with more sites in the historically more built up areas to the east of the peninsula. Today, 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. Wirral has a proud and independent tradition of allotment gardening. The important role of Site Secretary is carried out by allotment plot holders as volunteers, who in return for their services do not pay the annual fee for their plot. Each site secretary will play an integral role in assisting with the effective running of Wirral's allotment sites. In addition to the self-managed sites, a number of Wirral's allotment sites also have their own allotment site society, which helps plot holder members and can also assist the council in the overall care of the allotment site.
- 5.2. The annual Wirral Allotments Competition plays an important role in promoting good allotment gardening. The Wirral Flower and Vegetable Show, which is run by its own voluntary committee, many of whom are active allotment plot holders, also provides opportunities to promote allotment gardening.
- 5.3. The Wirral Allotment Society (formerly known as the Wirral Federation of Allotment Societies), is associated to the National Allotment Society, and helps promote allotment gardening in Wirral (see www.wirralallotmentsociety.org.uk).
- 5.4. This strategy also has links to and supports Wirral's Climate Change Strategy and Wirral Public Health Strategy.

6. Wirral Allotments: The Future, Objectives, Realistic Aims and Aspirations:

6.1. The overall future 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, thus ensuring all sites are welcoming and accessible to all.

6.2. To achieve this objective, the following short and longer term aims have been selected. These aims have been selected to be realistic and achievable assuming all aforementioned and relevant parties work together in a reasonable and coherent manner.

6.3. Any new rules and regulations implemented will not be retrospectively enforced on historical situations (for example individuals have multiple tenancies will not be expected to relinquish any of their plots). However they will still have to adhere to those that apply, and any other previous rules and regulations which are still applicable.

6.4. **Immediate and short term aims:** Years 1 and 2 (2015-2017)

- Implement the use of a new Allotment Computer system and keep it up to date, include all relevant allotment documentation.
- Revise (and regularly update) the allotment pages of Wirral's website, to provide appropriate information for plot holders and people interested in taking on an allotment.
- Update the sectional maps of each site, with a site map and a diagrammatical sketch plan of each site, on a regular basis.
- Implement effective administration and maintenance of allotment sites in line with this strategy and the procedures set out in the appendices.
- Create a 5 year allotment site improvement plan for each non self-managed site with input from the site secretary, plot holders, the site's allotment society (where one exists), neighbours and other interested parties. Prioritising the sites needing most attention (e.g. Sumner Road, St James, Lansdowne Place, Carrodus, Bedford Road).
- Introduce use of secure keys that cannot have copies cut to stop dumping and reduce vandalism.
- Provide updated information regarding waiting lists for each site on a regular basis, including providing a copy to the Wirral Allotment Society, so that this information can assist people considering applying for an allotment.
- Carry out piloting of a range of cost effective methods of bringing unusable plots back into productive use, evaluate the pilots with input from the site in question's site secretary (and site society if one exists) and then select the most suitable methods for further use on an ongoing basis, in order to reduce the waiting lists,

6.5. **Longer term aims:** 1 – 5 years. (2015-2020)

- Encourage the role of the site secretaries, site societies and allotment tenant participation in the care of allotment sites.
- Highlight the role that allotments play in developing a more sustainable environment, encouraging biodiversity and conservation.
- Develop a health agenda for allotments focussing on improving the health of the borough.
- Support groups to develop areas of potential new allotment provision where appropriate.
- Implement the allotment site improvement plans in partnership.
- Encouraging sites to ensure that the provision of allotments can be continued into the future in a cost effective and financially sustainable manner, for example applying for external funding for site improvements, thereby allowing more improvements to be made.
- Improve directional signing to the main access point of each site.
- Review and develop a charging structure that reflects the size of plots and available facilities to ensure a fairer charging system for plots.
- Acquire further software modules to further enhance the new system and ensure a much more effective and efficient handling of all allotments data.

6.6. **Other Aspirations:** to be actioned when suitable opportunities arise/funding becomes available:

- Introduce climate change resilience projects to improve one or more allotment sites.

7. List of Appendices

7.1. Useful Information for Wirral Allotment Plot Holders

7.2. A Guide to the Allotments Processes: How it All Works

7.3. The Tenancy Agreement

7.4. The Site Secretaries Agreement