



**WIRRAL COUNCIL**

**ALLOTMENTS PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY  
&  
IMPROVEMENT PLANS  
2021-2026**

**Wirral Council - Neighbourhoods Directorate**

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# **1. Introduction:**

1.1. This strategy and associated improvement plans aim to continue the progress of the Allotments Partnership Strategy 2015-2020 and 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 takes into account the challenges faced following the COVID19 pandemic and the plans for recovery. It also links to, and is supported by, Wirral's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, 2014-2024.

1.2. In October 2020, the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee established a Subgroup which met to address a number of considerations. One of the key areas was to establish a Working Group, which has now met on a number of occasions to take forward the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee Subgroup, listed as follows, for the allotment service:

- Establish a cross-committee working group, in consultation with internal and external stakeholders including Wirral Allotment Society and Wirral Site Secretaries group.
- That the Wirral Site Secretary Agreement 2015 be amended to allow for increased autonomy and delegated decision-making relating to site management.
- Recategorize rental fees for new and existing plots.
- Increase existing provision of accessible plots across Wirral by 2025.
- Increase allotment provision across the Borough by 1000 plots by 2025.

The Subgroup felt that the establishment of the Working Group would be the appropriate forum for taking working issues forward and other than feedback to the Scrutiny Committee in general, the Working Group will now be the forum for meeting. The make-up of the Working Group will be flexible to reflect any issues being addressed at a particular meeting, with representatives of the allotment community being at the heart of this.

1.3. 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.

1.4. As of July 2021; there are 46 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. St James Allotment Site is currently being run by Wirral Environmental Network as a community nursery. A further self-managed allotment community food growing area has been created by Wirral Change at Bentinck Street, Birkenhead. It has faced challenges, compounded by COVID19, with cultivating and tenanting the site and the Council allotment team will work with Wirral Change to support its future development.

This will mean that a total of 46 sites are covered by this strategy.

1.5. There are a number of allotments on private land within the Wirral Peninsula, however, Wirral Council is not involved in either the maintenance or management of those sites and they are not covered by this strategy.

1.6. 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:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/growing-community-second-edition>

1.7. To help achieve the objectives and actions set out in this strategy a review of progress will be carried out in 2023 with input from site secretaries, Wirral allotment societies and plot holders. The summary report of the 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 draft 2025 Council Plan. In Wirral we want all our residents to have a good quality of life, ensuring levels of inequality are reduced. Good health and wellbeing is key to this, including promoting active lifestyles, working with partners to improve positive mental health and supporting more people with disabilities to live independent lives. It is also important to take care of the environment in which we live, protecting biodiversity and encouraging an increase in natural havens, ensuring its sustainability for the future.

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 and 1950;
- A Place to Grow (2010) and Growing in the Community, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2009;
- Wirral Council Plan 2025.

This strategy will also take into account any additional or updated legislation, guidance and strategies.

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

We are customer focused:

- We listen to our customers and acknowledge what they tell us. We let them know we have heard them and take action.
- We are flexible, open, honest, and respectful with our residents and customers, and always look for ways to make it easier for them to do business with us.
- We view things from the customer's perspective and focus on what we can do to give them the best possible service.

We are accountable:

- We are leaders and take personal responsibility for our work. We act with integrity to be the best we can be.
- We take ownership and solve problems. If we don't know the answer, we don't stop until we have found the solution.
- We take pride in doing what we say we are going to do. We are trusted by our colleagues, Members and residents to do a great job.

We are professional:

- We treat everyone with respect. This includes our colleagues, residents and Members. We are courteous, punctual and communicate effectively to get the best results
- We provide a professional service that people in Wirral are proud of. We know how our role makes a difference and lead by example.
- We are positive, honest and value the contributions of others. We build positive and trusting relationships to work together to deliver the best possible service for colleagues, Members and residents.
- We acknowledge when we are asked something and answer quickly and clearly. We are clear about how we will provide the best possible service

We are ambitious:

- We aim high in everything we do. We do what we can and learn from experience to get the best for our colleagues, Members and residents.
- We will challenge, as well as support, each other to try new things and improve what we do. We continually look for better ways of doing things for our colleagues, Members and residents.
- We have high standards and expectations for ourselves, colleagues, Members and residents. We celebrate when we do well and recognise the achievements of others.

### **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 Earlston. 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. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a trend in growing your own food. At the start of lockdown in March 2020, empty shelves in supermarkets caused many people to recognise the UK's reliance on importing food. A report by the Institute for Sustainable Food at the University of Sheffield ("Grow your own food security? The hidden potential of urban horticulture") shows more people are starting or wanting to start to grow their own food. This is partly due to people spending more time at home, but the evidence also suggests this is a response to an increased awareness of the UK's reliance on the global food system. Urban horticulture will become an integral part of the recovery phase.
- 4.4. Additionally, it has been recognised the importance of allotment gardening for mental health and well-being. A study by Dr Carly Wood and researchers at the Universities of Westminster and Essex, found that even a small amount of participation in allotment gardening can have significant benefits on health, resulting in improvements in both self-esteem and mood, via reductions in tension, depression, anger, and confusion. The study also found that the allotment gardeners had significantly lower BMI than those who did not participate in gardening. 68% of the non-gardening group were overweight or obese, compared with just 47% of the gardeners. The authors concluded that allotment gardening "could contribute to a greener and healthier economy focused on the prevention of ill-health. This preventative approach could result in substantial savings to the UK economy, particularly in the treatment of health conditions such as mental illness, obesity, cardiovascular disease and loneliness".
- 4.5. There is an International/European wide organisation which works to promote the benefits of allotment and leisure gardening: [www.jardins-familiaux.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.nsalg.org.uk).

- 4.6. '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. This has been clearly shown during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the Borough has seen a greater interest in allotment gardening, with applications for plots growing extensively during 2020 and early 2021. 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 will restart in 2022, organised by its own voluntary committee. This competition has played an important role in promoting good 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](http://www.wirralallotmentsociety.org.uk)).

5.4. This strategy also has links to and supports:

- Wirral Council's Cool2 Climate Change Strategy to tackle the climate change emergency. This strategy looks at ensuring we make wiser decisions to avoid adding to pollution indirectly. Food production, consumption and waste have a large impact on the climate. By encouraging more residents to take up allotment gardening, we will be encouraging sustainable food growth on a local scale.

More information about the strategy can be found here: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/about-council/climate-change-and-sustainability/consultation-new-cool-2-climate-change-strategy>

- 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 (2021-2022)

- Tender for an Allotment Computer system in 2022 when the contract for Colony is up for renewal, following Council procurement rules, and keep it up to date, including all relevant allotment documentation.
- To research the use of technology, such as 'Plot-Box' to provide accurate mapping of all allotment sites, including sizes of plots. If financially viable, tender for system to provide to scale site maps across all Council allotment sites.
- Review and update the allotment site improvement plans for each non self-managed site by 2022. This should include a section on 'access for all' where sites available near entrances should have appropriate access put in.
- Improve the signage to the main access points of each allotment site as required.
- After the success of the combi-lock trial at Fairview, Church Road, St Georges Way and Ilford Avenue allotment sites, roll out a programme of lock replacement across every participating site, alongside a communication schedule with site secretaries.
- Work with Wirral Change to support the development of Bentinck Street community food growing area and assist with finding long-term tenants.
- Amend the Wirral Site Secretary Agreement 2015, and if necessary individual Allotment Site Action Plans, to allow for increased autonomy and delegated

decision-making relating to site management; specifically relating to the issue of Plot Improvement Notices to expedite the Termination of Agreement process as much as possible so that the plot can be re-let quickly.

- Establish a working group, in consultation with internal and external stakeholders including Wirral Allotment Society, Wirral Site Secretaries group, and allotment plot holders in order to prioritise the increased provision of allotment plots and inform the updated Wirral Allotment Partnership Strategy.
- Research and consultation should be undertaken to look at current rental fees and, where reasonable, potential increases to non-concessionary rents for new plots with improved facilities and according to plot size - with the agreement that any additional income raised from rent payments be reinvested into increased allotment provision across the Borough.

#### 6.5. **Longer term aims:** 1 – 5 years. (2021-2026)

- After successful pilot schemes at Bebington Road, Shakeshaft, Sumner Road and Harris Allotments, continue to offer open days to people on waiting lists to see plots considered unusable.
- Locate suitable locations to develop environmental havens or 'rewilding areas' for insects and fauna, such as wildlife ponds and pollinator corridors, focussing on unlettable plots that do not receive any tenant interest during open days.
- Roll out the use of sufficient stopcocks across all water systems to ensure sections can be isolated in the result of a water burst. Additionally, monitor water usage across all sites on an annual basis and research whether other councils charge separately for water usage.
- Look for opportunities to develop partnerships with the NHS, Wirral Public Health and appropriate charitable organisations such as Wirral Mind and Wirral Food Bank to develop a health agenda for allotments focussing on improving the health of the borough.
- Encourage those sites who have been successful with applying for external funding for site improvements to educate and provide guidance to those unsure on how to proceed, allowing sites to learn from each other.
- Explore all opportunities to improve infrastructure and create raised beds to make allotment gardening more accessible for those with disabilities or mobility problems, increasing the existing provision of accessible plots across the Wirral by 2025. This includes engagement with organisations such as Wirral Evolutions to seek out vacant space and further utilisation of existing sites to increase the number of accessible plots.
- Increase allotment provision across the Borough by 1000 plots by 2025 through:
  - improved engagement with Planning Officers to ensure that Wirral's Local Plan protects existing allotment sites and actively encourages developers to provide opportunities for allotments and community food growing spaces

- within all major new developments.
- any Council-owned land and that managed by registered providers and local partners appropriate for allotment gardening, is identified and brought into use.
  - Section 106 agreements identified as suitable for allotment site creation or expansion are recognised and acted on.
  - a review of allotment plot sizes and creation of half plots and raised beds where possible.
  - Continue to pursue capital investment opportunities to support increased allotment provision.

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

- Work with the Cool2 Strategy team to assess suitable climate change resilience projects to improve one or more allotment sites, including:
  - Having 10 organic, chemical free allotment sites by 2025.
  - Continuing with and further promoting the environmentally friendly plot competition continuing.
  - Using allotment sites to help educate residents on environmentally friendly garden ideas, e.g. planting bee pollinators.
  - Using unlettable plots as havens for wildlife.
- Discuss with stakeholders and the new established working group the option of self-managed sites.
- Proposal to liaise with the Feeding Birkenhead Group regarding surplus fruit and vegetables produced by allotments, to be provided to Feeding Birkenhead.

## **7. List of Appendices**

- Useful Information for Wirral Allotment Plot Holders
- A Guide to the Allotments Processes: How it All Works
- The Tenancy Agreement
- The Site Secretaries Agreement

### **References**

'A case control study of health and well-being benefits of allotment gardening'; Carly J. Wood, Jules Pretty, Murray Griffin; Journal of Public Health; doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdv146

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