

Terms of Reference – Allotments Working Party

Background:

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee on Thursday, 20th January 2022 approved the Wirral Allotment Partnership Strategy (2021-26). The Wirral Allotment Partnership Strategy seeks to address the recommendations from the all-party Allotments Subgroup of the committee which concluded in October 2020. One of the key recommendations being to improve communication. To achieve this, it was agreed to set up a Working Party which would look at a number of issues and give Council Officers feedback to help develop draft documents on particular issues which could then be taken out to wider consultation. Feedback would then be used to develop final guidance and policies on those issues discussed.

The Allotment Subgroup identified a number of Recommendations that could be addressed by an Allotments Working Party, once established, to assist in updating guidance and policy and, where appropriate, supporting documents.

The recommendations from the Allotment Subgroup were: -

Recommendation 1: Establish a cross-party and cross-committee working group, in consultation with internal and external stakeholders including Wirral Allotment Society and Wirral Site Secretaries group.

In order to prioritise the increased provision of allotment plots and inform the updated Wirral Allotment Partnership Strategy, a working group should be created with membership comprised of Members of the Council from across policy and service committees, departmental officers, external stakeholders and local partners.

Recommendation 2: That the Wirral Site Secretary Agreement 2015 be amended to allow for increased autonomy and delegated decision-making relating to site management.

The existing Site Secretary Agreement, and if necessary individual Allotment Site Action Plans, should be revised as soon as practicable to provide enhanced authority for site secretaries; 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.

Recommendation 3: Re-categorise rental fees for new and existing plots.

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.

Recommendation 4: Increase existing provision of accessible plots across Wirral by 2025.

Explore all opportunities to improve infrastructure and create raised beds to make allotment gardening more accessible for those with disabilities or mobility problems, including 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.

Recommendation 5: Increase allotment provision across the Borough by 1000 plots by 2025.

This recommendation should be achieved by; 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. In addition, the Panel endorses the current review of allotment plot sizes and encourages the creation of half plots and raised beds where possible, as well as championing the continued pursuit of capital investment opportunities to support increased allotment provision.

Membership of Working Group

To enable the Group to undertake business in an effective manner, it was agreed that the Working Group would consist of:-

- Chair of the Wirral Allotments Site Secretaries
- A member of the Northwest Allotments Association
- 5 Site Secretaries or site representative (tenant) (selection is by invitation of expressions of interest from all Site Secretaries. Where there are more than 5 interested individuals, then selection will be by simple ballot amongst all Site Secretaries).
- As appropriate, any other persons who bring knowledge or expertise on a particular topic.

The Working Group will be supported by the following Council Officers: -

- Strategic Manager - Parks and Countryside
- Assistant Senior Manager, Parks and Countryside
- One Area Manager, Parks and Countryside
- Parks Support Administrator

Frequency of Meeting

The Working Group will meet on a monthly basis and more frequently if needed, to take forward the business of the Working Group. Meetings can be facilitated either on-line via the appropriate on-line portal, or face to face.

Once the Working Group has worked through all the Recommendations and they have come to conclusion, if appropriate, the Working Group can continue if it is felt that this mechanism continues to positively support the ongoing development of Allotments throughout Wirral.