

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**30TH JANUARY 2020**

REPORT TITLE	<i>Allotment Provision in the Borough</i>
REPORT OF	<i>Colin Clayton Assistant Director for Community Services</i>

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides a note on current provision of council allotments in the borough, the number of available plots, information about current waiting lists, areas of particular pressure and shortfalls, and outlines the actions being considered to increase availability of allotments in order to decrease length of time people have to wait to take up an opportunity to participate allotment gardening.

The current Council's Joint Partnership Allotments Strategy and Improvement Plan runs from 2015 – 2020 and sets out several actions to be processed by this time, the progress against actions is summarised in this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

Members of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee are requested to note the content of this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

There is an extensive demand for allotments across the borough, unfortunately we have had to close some of the waiting lists where the number of waiting applicants is considered too high. The waiting lists are closed when the waiting list exceeds 100 people. At this present time there are insufficient allotment plots to meet the current demand.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The option to continue to operate at the current level was considered. However, given the significant unmet demand for allotments and given the potential benefits for our resident's this option is not being recommended.

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

See Appendix 1 for locations of plots.

See Appendix 2 for number of plots.

See Appendix 3 for summary of progress: 2015-2020 5-year Joint Partnership Allotments strategy.

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.

We do encourage sites to become self-managed, however we have found there not to be much interest to do so, we have had several new site secretaries that have been very proactive and a great assistance to the allotment community, we also inform site secretaries and societies if they were to go self-managed we would be delighted to help in any way we can.

Wirral Council's commitment to providing allotments which help achieve the following important aims set out in the allotment strategy:

- 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

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 our residents to have a good quality of life and live healthy lifestyles in clean and safe environments.

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.

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.

Allotment gardening is beneficial for mental health and wellbeing. Studies have found that the mental health benefits of gardening are extensive, not only can regular gardening reduce mental health problems like depression and anxiety, but it can also reduce stress and combat high blood pressure, as well as improving overall physical fitness.

We have in the past received public health funding to create allotment sites such as The Warrens (Thingwall Allotments), Leasowe Allotments and Bentwick Street, The Warrens (Thingwall Allotments) and Leasowe allotments has been successful and we are currently seeking partners for the Bentwick Street site project.

Further public health funding for new allotment sites will be explored again where appropriate, as allotment gardening benefits mental health, wellbeing and social inclusion.

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 also 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 plays an integral role in assisting with the effective running of Wirral's allotment sites. In addition to the self-managed sites, several 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.

The overall objective of the Wirral Allotments Partnership Strategy 2015-2020 is to help create and maintain a high standard of allotment provision for the benefit of Wirral residents.

This is done 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.

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

See appendix 3 for a summary of progress against these aims.

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.

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.

Many of these aims we have achieved and still strive to achieve by 2020, the Colony computer system we now have is very effective and has improved the administration of the allotments, Improvement plans have been created, this year Sumner Road and Shakeshaft a once derelict site is now fully tenanted.

A pilot scheme at Bebington Road was carried out and unlettable plots were brought back into action, there is contact correspondence with site secretaries and societies regarding waiting lists, We have created a bi-monthly newsletter which has highlighted the role that allotments play in developing a more sustainable environment, encouraging biodiversity and conservation. Also, the guidance and information packs we send out to plot holders provides information on composting, beekeeping, organic and non-organic methods and many other ways in which they can be more sustainable and biodiverse.

We are now working on putting together another allotment partnership strategy and improvement plans, all site secretaries and societies will be contacted to arrange a working group to set new short and long term aims for the next five years.

As of November 21st 2019, there were 1248 applicants with a total number of 2053 applications (as customers can apply for two allotment sites).

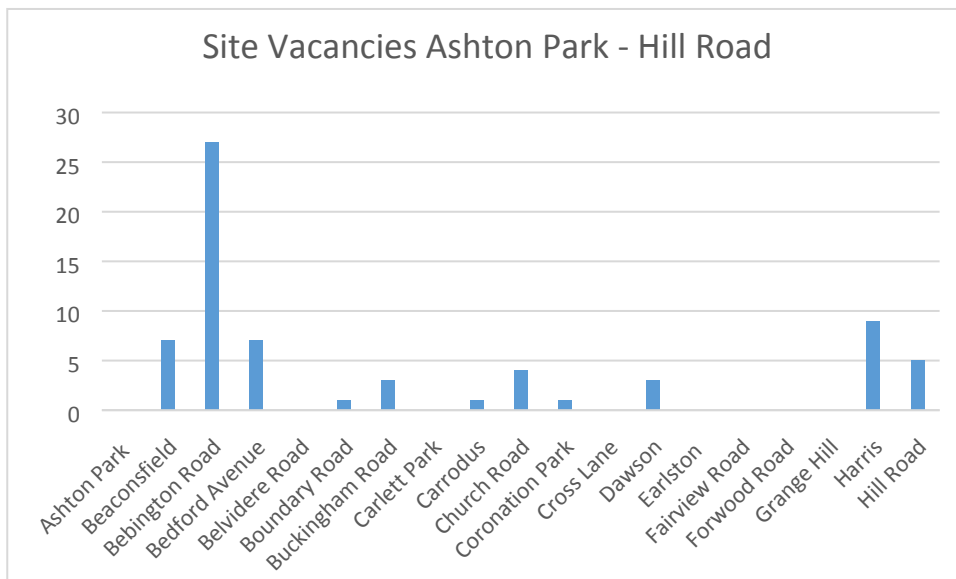
The largest number on the waiting list are in the Wallasey area, closely followed by the Wirral West area, this is largely the West Kirby and Newton area which have huge waiting lists.

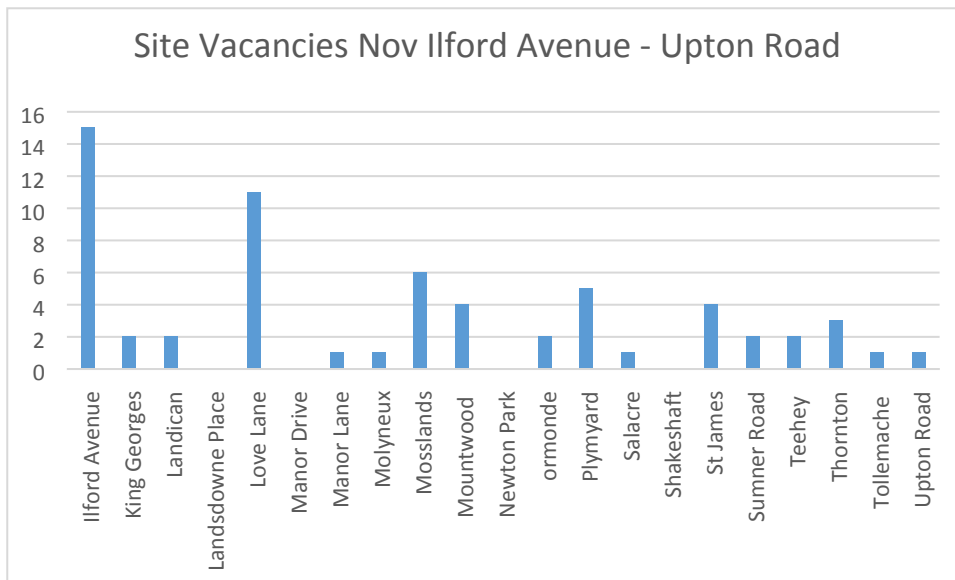
Numbers of Applications on waiting lists by Areas

Birkenhead	494
Wallasey	861
Wirral South	105
Wirral West	593
Amount of Applications	2053

This shows that we do need more allotment plots in the Wallasey area and West Kirby area as they have the highest waiting lists, Birkenhead area is also high however we have 20 sites in this area. Currently we have 108 Vacant plots, with the most being at the following sites:

- Bebington Road- 27 – Birkenhead Area
- Ilford Avenue – 15 - Wallasey
- Love Lane -11 – Wallasey
- Harris- 9 - Birkenhead
- Beaconsfield – 7 – Wirral South





We have 1763 available plots on the Wirral, and we have 1659 that are tenanted, we have worked hard to make sure all vacant plots have been taken, we will continue to engage with allotment site secretaries to ensure full capacity.

45 plots are unlettable, these areas are being looked at to see if any of the land could be used for an allotment plot as part of our work to increase numbers of useable allotments and decrease times on waiting lists.

We have identified the following locations where we could create new plots:

- Cross Lane 20+ new plots,
- Dawson Allotments 50+ Plots
- Mosslands 20+ plots
- Love Lane possibly, needs to be looked at further.

It may take 12 to 18 months before additional plots are lettable, as land needs to be assessed and appropriately planned and fencing erected on some of the sites. We are working alongside site secretaries to identify any other suitable land that can be used for allotments, and any wasteland that could be transformed into allotment plots.

Overgrown unlettable plots are being brought back into action, Plots need to be cleared of rubbish and debris, marked accordingly and fencing supplied where it is not already applied. We are also creating quarter sized plots and half plots on some sites, when plots become available.

We are seeking to improve allotment sites in Birkenhead, where a lot are overgrown or run down, we struggle to keep tenants on these sites, and we aim to use funds from the allotments budget to improve them overtime.

2.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital bids for increasing allotment provision are likely to be required.

3.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Works undertaken are monitored and follow the Council's procedures applicable to the works undertaken and management of the sites in question.

- Health and Safety Act
- Management of Health and Safety Act
- Planning constraints if Known
- Removal of hazardous substances
- Tenancy agreement and administration

4.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

- Possible increase in number or size of some allotment sites, subject to capitol bids, section 106 agreements or grant aid funding.
- Increased administration duties for secretaries and council administration

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

If insufficient increase in allotment provision is made, there may be an increase in complaints from customers on waiting lists.

6.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

The allotments strategy working group and site secretaries were involved in the creation of the 2015-2020 allotment strategy. Progress is reviewed at site secretary meetings and with the Wirral Allotment Society.

7.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Form to be completed

8.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

Allotments provide an important opportunity for local cultivation of food and associated learning and can thus play a useful role in our local response to the climate emergency. Through the Cool 2 strategy residents will be encouraged to grow their own food and the Council will facilitate this through the provision of allotment sites and access to advice and support.

Changing to a lower energy intensity diet, e.g. consumption of local and seasonal food, is recognised as a way to limit our climate impacts as set out in the new climate strategy for Wirral, Cool 2 <https://wirralenvironmentalnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Cool2WirralClimateStrategyByCoolWirralPartnershipPDF.pdf>.

Allotments provide an important opportunity for composting, compost not only helps the allotments to grow and flourish, it also contributes to a cleaner environment, it reduces the need for bonfires, cuts down on waste going to landfill and also is less need for manufactured and packaged products.

Wirral Council actively promotes composting and offer free “Get Composting!” workshops to beginners as well as a range of subsidised compost bins and food caddies. Visit www.wirral.gov.uk/composting for more information.

Allotments enable plots to house bees, Beekeeping will not only lead to healthy and vibrant plants, it will ensure that bees continue to play their critical role in our ecosystem, Bee keeping can be a very positive activity, helping with pollination and providing honey. All plot holders are encouraged to grow suitable plants to support pollinators and exercise restraint in the use of pesticides.

Pollinators like bees play a key role in one out of every three bites of food we eat. Without them, many plants we rely on for food would die off, Bees are responsible for the production of many seeds, nuts, berries and fruit, which serve as a vital food source for wild animals.

Bees play a part in every aspect of the ecosystem, they support the growth of trees, flowers, and other plants, which serve as food and shelters for creatures large and small, Bees contribute to complex, interconnected ecosystems that allow a diverse number of different species to co-exist.

Increasing the provision of allotments, bee keeping, and composting is recognized as a way to contribute to a cleaner environment.

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APPENDICES

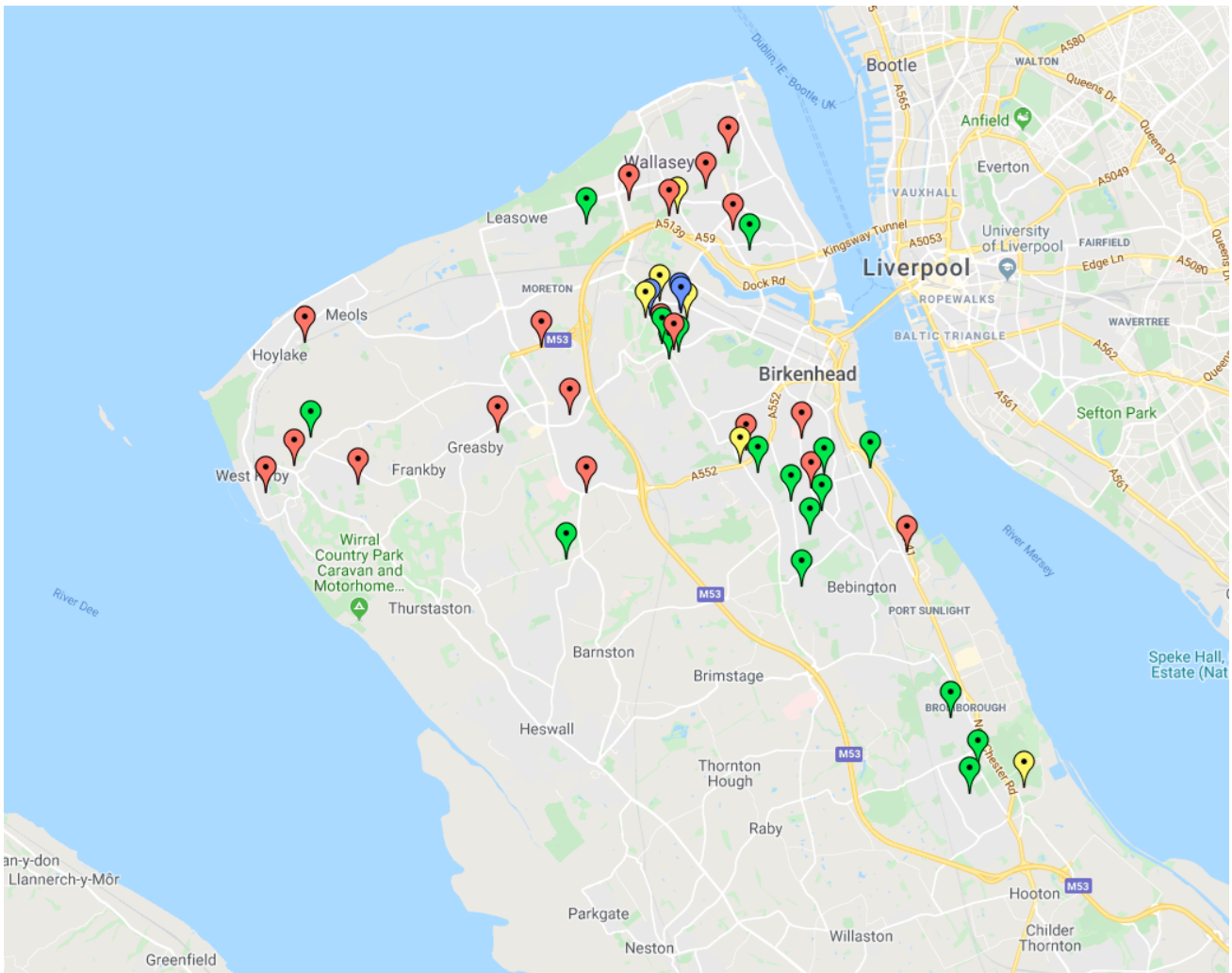
Appendix 1

SITE	ADDRESS	ENTRANCE
Ashton Park	Westbourne Road, West Kirby	By 83 Westbourne Road
Beaconsfield Road	Beaconsfield Road, New Ferry	In Mayfields South
Bebington Road	Bebington Road, Bebington	By 186 Bebington Road
Bedford Avenue	Bedford Avenue, Tranmere	By 69 Bebington Road
Belvidere Road	Belvidere Road, Wallasey	By 48 Belvidere Road
Boundary Road	Boundary Road, Bidston	Opposite Flaybrick Cemetery
Buckingham Road	Buckingham Road, Wallasey	By 11 Buckingham Road
Carlett Park	St David Road, Eastham	By 33 St. David's Road
Carrodus	Hoylake Road, Bidston	By 77 Hoylake Road
Church Road	Church Road, Tranmere	Corner of Church Rd/Elm Rd
Coronation Park	Greasby Road, Greasby	In Coronation Park
Cross Lane	Cross Lane, Wallasey	Cross Lane
Dawson	Kings Lane, Bebington	By 89 Kings Lane
Earlston	Earlston Road, Wallasey	In Earlston Gardens
Fairview Road	Fairview Road, Oxtan	By 47 Storeton Road
Forwood Road	Forwood Road, Bromborough	Forwood Road
Grange Hill	Grange Old Road, West Kirby	On Grange Hill
Harris	Prenton Road West, Prenton	By 59 Prenton Road West
Hill Road	Hill Road, Bidston	Opposite 12 Hill Road
Ilford Avenue	Ilford Avenue, Poulton	By 31 Ilford Avenue
King George's Way	Boundary Road, Bidston	Opposite 32 Boundary Road
Landican	Woodchurch Road, Woodchurch	By Arrowe Park traffic lights
Lansdowne Place	Lansdowne Place, Bidston	By 1 Lansdowne Place
Love Lane	Love Lane, Liscard	By Central Park bowling greens
Manor Drive	Manor Drive, Upton	By motorway flyover
Manor Lane	Manor Lane, Rock Ferry	By 23 Bedford Road
Molyneux	Moore Avenue, Rock Ferry	By 9 Moore Avenue
Mosslands	Mosslands Drive, Wallasey	By 160 Mosslands Drive

Mountwood	Borough Road, Prenton	By 970 Borough Road
Newton Park	Newton Park Road, West Kirby	By 39 Newton Park Road
Ormonde	Storeton Road, Prenton	By Traffic lights by Corfe Stone
Plymyard	Bridle Road, Bromborough	By Plymyard Cemetery
Salacre	Salacre Lane, Upton	By St. Mary's churchyard
Shaftesbury	Mendip Close, Prenton	By 2 Mendip Close
Shakeshaft	Observatory Road, Bidston	Bidston by 43 Observatory Road
St James	Tollemache Road, Bidston	By 192 Tollemache Road
Sumner Road	Sumner Road, Bidston	By 41 Sumner Road
Teehey Lane	Teehey Lane, Bebington	By 259 Teehey Lane
Thornton	Vyner Road North, Bidston	Vyner Road North
Tollemache	Tollemache Road, Bidston	By 27 Tollemache Road
Upton Road	Hill Road, Bidston	By 34 Hill Road

Self-managed sites:

- Sandringham Avenue
- Gilroy Road
- Wingate
- Leasowe Allotments
- Thingwall Allotments (The Warrens)



Appendix 2

List of Allotments

Site	No of Plots	No Lettable	No Unlettable
Ashton Park	10	10	0
Beaconsfield	27	27	0
Bebington	263	253	10
Bedford Avenue	13	13	0
Belvidere Road	20	20	0
Boundary Road	43	43	0
Buckingham Road	49	49	0
Carlett Park	38	38	0

Carrodus	36	35	1
Church Road	21	21	0
Coronation Park	58	58	0
Cross Lane	30	30	0
Dawson	76	76	0
Earlston	12	12	0
Fairview Road	31	31	0
Forwood Road	35	35	0
Grange Hill	23	23	0
Harris	174	157	17
Hill Road	51	51	0
Iford Avenue	84	84	0
King Georges Way	18	18	0
Landican	26	26	0
Lansdowne Place	5	5	0
Love Lane	100	95	5
Manor Drive	18	18	0
Manor Lane	10	10	0
Molyneux	19	18	1
Mosslands Drive	48	45	3
Mountwood	25	25	0
Newton Park	62	62	0
Ormonde	44	39	5
Plymyard	111	109	2
Salacre	43	43	0
Shaftsbury	2	2	0
Shakeshaft	11	10	1
St James	5	5	0
Sumner Road	13	13	0
Teehey Lane	71	71	0
Thornton	34	34	0
Tollemache	36	36	0
Upton Road	18	18	0
Total	1813	1763	45

Appendix 3

Short term aims of the Allotment Strategy

Five-year aim	Comments
Implement the use of a new Allotment Computer system and keep it up to date, include all relevant allotment documentation.	This has been completed, Colony has now been installed as the new allotment computer system.

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.	The allotments pages are regularly updated, the Wirral allotment society are notified of numbers on waiting lists.
Update the sectional maps of each site, with a site map and a diagrammatical sketch plan of each site, on a regular basis	This is still an ongoing process, all sites have been renumbered and some sites have new site maps.
Implement effective administration and maintenance of allotment sites in line with this strategy and the procedures set out in the appendices.	This is completed on a daily basis; the colony system has helped implement effective administration as it is a lot more advanced than the previous system.
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).	Team Leaders have created improvement plans for each of their sites, prioritising sites where works needs carrying out and those that need attention.
Introduce use of secure keys that cannot have copies cut to stop dumping and reduce vandalism.	We have introduced a combi lock trial, where tenants are given the combination and it is changed when new influx of tenants, it has been successful on sites to avoid dumping and vandalism and reduces money spent on keys.
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.	This is done regularly, lists are sent to site secretaries, this is to provide them with all their tenants details, waiting lists and vacant plots, the Wirral allotment Society is also provided with waiting lists and vacant plots.
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.	We carried out several pilot schemes on Bebington Road and Harris Allotments, people on the waiting list were invited to an open day to see plots that were considered unusable. This was a successful scheme with many plots being brought back into use. Also, Shakeshaft and Sumner Road, these were derelict and run-down sites they were brought back into use and are now fully tenanted.

Long term aims of the allotment strategy

Five-year aim	Comments
Encourage the role of the site secretaries, site societies and allotment tenant participation in the care of allotment sites	We hold regular allotment site secretary meetings alongside team leaders, this is to address any concerns and encourage their participation in the care of allotment sites.

Highlight the role that allotments play in developing a more sustainable environment, encouraging biodiversity and conservation	We have created a bimonthly newsletter which has highlighted 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.	This was created as part of the Allotment Strategy.
Support groups to develop areas of potential new allotment provision where appropriate	We have been working alongside allotment groups, actions have been taken for the creation of new allotment sites and we have identified a few locations where more plots could be created.
Implement the allotment site improvement plans in partnership.	This is being implemented on sites in partnership with site secretaries.
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.	This is encouraged to all site secretaries and associations, many sites have applied for external funding to pay for site improvements, also some sites have created water saving resources to help reduce the amount we spend on water each year.
Improve directional signing to the main access point of each site.	Most of the allotment sites have had new signage to the main access point.
Review and develop a charging structure that reflects the size of plots and available facilities to ensure a fairer charging system for plots.	Size of plots are being looked at and measured accordingly to make sure people are being charged the right amount, this is still an ongoing process.
Acquire further software modules to further enhance the new system and ensure a much more effective and efficient handling of all allotments data.	Invoicing software has been updated, which has ensured invoicing is processed on time and any issues can be easily addressed.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date