



Allotments



A report from Overview & Scrutiny





Contents

Preface	3
Summary	4
Summary of Recommendations	6
1 Context – The Importance of Allotments	8
1.1 The Government’s Food Policy Agenda	8
1.2 The Health Benefits	8
1.3 Social Cohesion	9
1.4 Biodiversity, Green Space and Wider Environmental Benefits	9
2 Findings – The Planning Context	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 The Unitary Development Plan (UDP)	11
2.3 Planning obligations	13
3 Findings – Management	14
3.1 Introduction	14
3.2 The Allotments Office	14
3.3 Devolved Management	14
3.4 Devolved Management in Birmingham	15
3.5 Liaison between plot holders and the City Council	16
4 Findings– Finance	20
4.1 Annual Revenue Costs of Running the Service	20
4.2 Rental Income	20
4.3 Capital Costs of Site Maintenance and Improvement	21
4.4 Increasing income from external sources	22
5 Findings – Demand and Supply	23
5.1 Introduction	23
5.2 Demand and Supply	23
5.3 Creating new plots in areas of high demand	24
5.4 Creating new sites	25
Appendix 1: Summary of Evidence and Research	26



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With thanks to Jean Race of Walkers Heath Allotments for taking and lending us the cover photograph.



Preface

By Cllr Roger Harmer

Lead Review Member, Leisure, Sport and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee



I am very pleased to present this Scrutiny Review of Allotments to the City Council. I hope this report will help Members to improve allotment provision in Birmingham.

Birmingham currently has 7,112 allotments in 115 sites. The last few years has seen a marked increase in the demand for allotments across the City. This is due to a number of factors including increased food prices and a desire for self-grown, fresh, organic food. This is leading to a growth in waiting lists in many parts of the City, demonstrating need we believe we should aim to meet, given the broad range of environmental, health and social benefits allotments bring.

Public concern about sustainable food production has been growing for many years. Most recently this was illustrated when the third most frequently mentioned area of environmental concern, in the consultation on the Coalition's programme for government, was food. Members of the public suggested increasing UK food production, ensuring food security and sourcing food locally. Allotments can make a direct contribution to these priorities.

However, allotments are not just about food production. We heard that they bring together people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and they are of particular significance to the elderly.

Many of the Council's policies are still based on an assumption of a decline in demand for allotments. We believe that these need reform, to be fit for purpose in an era of growth. In particular we have recommended that planning policies are revised and that we positively plan to increase plots where communities need them.

But to make this growth sustainable we need to ask more of our ploholders. We acknowledged that they will need to pay higher rents to cover more of the costs of running the service and we also want them to help cut those costs by taking greater responsibility for the management of their sites. We recommend revising the agreements between the Allotment Associations and the City Council to encourage this. We also recommend holding an annual Birmingham Allotment Conference to bring together ideas for improving our allotments.

I would like to thank the Members of the Leisure, Sport and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their support, Sue Griffith of the Scrutiny Office and the officers of the Allotments Office for their research which enabled us to appreciate the importance of allotments and understand our present service. Thanks also go to the ploholders who gave up their time to talk to us and the Birmingham and District Allotments Council and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, who contributed both facts and useful opinions.

Roger Harmer



Summary

In the autumn of 2009, Members of the Leisure, Sport & Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee became aware of articles in the media highlighting the surge in demand for allotments. Local press articles suggested that there were areas of Birmingham that were suffering from a shortage of plots and lengthening waiting lists. At the same time, the government was stating their concerns about the challenges facing the global food supply and the dangers of escalating obesity.

The Committee approved the proforma for the review in September 2009 and research and evidence gathering commenced. The key questions that the Scrutiny Review sought to answer were:

- How to provide more allotment plots in areas with long waiting lists;
- How to encourage the take up of plots in areas of low demand;
- How to enable the Allotments Service (including the Birmingham and District Allotments Council and the Allotments Associations) to be more responsive to plot holders;
- How to maintain allotment sites with declining resources.

Written representations were received from the Birmingham and District Allotments Council and the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum. Plot holders from several sites were invited to the meeting of the Committee in January 2010. The Allotment Service in several of the other core cities were contacted for comparable information.

In May 2010, a Report of Evidence and Research was discussed by an informal meeting of the Committee in order to generate conclusions and recommendations. We decided to include this valuable information as part of the report to City Council – here you will find the evidence and references to support our conclusions and recommendations. Work on the report by the Committee was then put aside due to the need to concentrate on the priority of making suggestions towards the reconfiguration of the library service. The conclusions were worked up into a draft final report which was presented to a further informal meeting of the Committee in July 2010.

This review report sets out the importance of allotments, not only for the production of fresh local food, but also for mental and physical health, social cohesion, biodiversity and wider environmental benefits. It concludes that the planning system could do more to facilitate provision in areas of need across the City. The Allotments Service in the City manages 115 sites and over 7,000 plots with 3.25 (full time equivalent) officers, therefore Members agree that is very important that the Allotment Associations take on as much self management as possible. In order to promote this, it is suggested that the agreements between the Associations and the Council are reviewed and that an annual Birmingham Allotment Conference is convened to provide more training and support.



The Allotments Service is heavily subsidised as the current rent levels do not cover the cost of running the service. Members of the Committee accepted that in the current economic circumstances rents will have to rise. In the past, improvements to sites were financed from selling underused allotment land in a buoyant market – this is no longer so feasible and therefore Associations are encouraged to apply for external funding, with support from the Allotments Conference.

Members thought that, given the benefits of allotments, it is important to seek to increase the number of allotments where there is excess demand. Currently such effort to identify new sites and create additional plots in existing sites, needs to be concentrated in four Constituencies in the City - Hall Green, Ladywood, Selly Oak and Sutton Coldfield and Members suggest that local strategies should be drawn up in these areas.



Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	That the Cabinet Member for Transportation and Regeneration includes in the Core Strategy policies that reflect the increased importance of allotments and the need to protect sites and facilitate provision across the City. The relevant draft policy should be reported back to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee at the consultation stage.	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Regeneration	January 2011
R02	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture ensures that the Allotment Office produces a list annually, by Constituency, of the number of people on waiting lists for allotments to assist with local discussions on planning developments, especially those that give rise to Section 106 opportunities.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	April 2011
R03	That the Chairman of the Planning Committee considers seeking Section 106 contributions for the provision of new allotment plots from larger developments, where these meet the statutory tests. As an initial example, opportunities to develop new allotments as a result of the redevelopment of the former Selly Oak Hospital Site should be actively investigated.	Chairman of the Planning Committee	April 2011
R04	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture draws up revised Agreements with the Associations, within nine months of the publication of this report, to reflect the range of different tasks that Associations take on and to ensure that the levels of remuneration reflect responsibilities.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	July 2011
R05	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture reports back to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee on the extent of disputes between plot holders, the current processes for dealing with them and the possibilities of introducing an arbitration process within six months of the publication of this report.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	April 2011
R06	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture reports back to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee on proposals for significantly increasing the amount of information on the Council's new website on allotments in the City. In particular proposals should include ways of increasing the profile and accessibility of Allotment Associations. A report on progress should be submitted to the Committee within six months of	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	April 2011



	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
	the publication of this report.		
R07	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture draws up a revised Agreement with the Birmingham & District Allotments Association (BDAC), within nine months of the publication of this report. Included in the revised Agreement should be the suggestion that BDAC appoints a Funding Officer onto their Executive Board to provide regular advice to Associations.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	July 2011
R08	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture works with the BDAC to convene a Birmingham Allotment Conference within nine months of the publication of this report.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	July 2011
R09	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture includes in the revised Agreements in Recommendation 4, increased opportunities for Associations to take more responsibility for the maintenance of the communal amenity areas of their sites.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	July 2011
R10	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture reviews allotment rents and draws up proposals to increase them to levels equivalent to those of other Core Cities, over a period of years. The proposals should be drawn up and reported back to the Committee within six months of the publication of this report.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture	April 2011
R11	The Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture ensures that the Birmingham Allotment Conference includes advice to Associations and plot holders on external sources of funding and in particular engages with the Big Lottery Fund.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	April 2011
R12	That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture together with the relevant Constituency Chairmen, produce Action Plans for Hall Green, Ladywood, Selly Oak and Sutton Coldfield to identify measures to address the shortage of plots within a year of the publication of this report. In drawing up the Action Plans opportunities should be explored which, where appropriate, maximise the benefits that allotments can provide.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture. Constituency Chairmen.	October 2011
R13	Progress towards the achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee within six months of the publication of this report. Subsequent reports will be scheduled thereafter.	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture	April 2011



1 Context – The Importance of Allotments

1.1 The Government's Food Policy Agenda

- 1.1.1 The previous Government had become increasingly concerned about the big challenges facing the world's food supply. In recent decades, we in the UK have benefited from a greater choice of food than ever before and food has in general become more affordable over the last thirty years. Over that time, global food production has grown consistently faster than population, but with serious environmental costs.
- 1.1.2 More recently the report *"The Coalition: our programme for government"*¹ states that "The Government believes that we need to protect the environment for future generations, make our economy more environmentally sustainable, and improve our quality of life and well-being. We also believe that much more needs to be done to support the farming industry, protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable food production."
- 1.1.3 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) response to public comments on their section of the Coalition's programme was published on 30 July 2010. It states that "The third most frequently mentioned area was food: members of the public suggested increasing UK food production, ensuring food security and sourcing food locally. The range of issues covered was wide, including reducing meat consumption, understanding of nutrition and land for people to grow their own food. The Government is keen to support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production, while helping to enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life. Other priorities include encouraging people to make sustainable and healthy food choices, and promoting a competitive agriculture sector that frees farmers to farm."²

1.2 The Health Benefits

- 1.2.1 The significance of good diet for the health of individuals and families has been a growing concern, particularly in the context of increasing child and adult obesity. The Department of Health's Choosing Health (2005) has provided the context for co-operation between government and the voluntary sectors in supporting improvements to diet, within which the importance of allotments as a source of healthy local food is recognised.

¹ <http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk>

² Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, July 2010. Defra response to public comments on Coalition Programme. See www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/what/documents/coalition-programme-comments-response.pdf



- 1.2.2 Poor diet is estimated to account for a third of all cases of cancer, and a further third of cases of cardiovascular disease. Obesity has more than doubled in the last 25 years and projections show radical increases in the years ahead with 40% of the population being obese by 2025 and 60% by 2050. Diet-related chronic disease is estimated to cost the NHS £7 billion a year. The health benefits of meeting nutritional guidelines are estimated to reach almost £20 billion a year, and are estimated to prevent 70,000 premature deaths a year.
- 1.2.3 The popularity of 'grow-your-own' has risen significantly over recent years. An estimated 33% of people already grow or intend to grow their own vegetables. Allotments provide more space for vegetables than the average garden and there is help on hand (and often easy access to seeds, spare plants and shared equipment) for the novice vegetable grower. Not only does eating more fresh vegetables and fruit boost health, but the regular exercise in the fresh air helps all ages.

1.3 Social Cohesion

- 1.3.1 Allotments bring together people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds whose knowledge of gardening can be shared. Allotments allow people to enjoy a sense of being in a strong community. The benefits of allotments in promoting community cohesion are increasingly recognised and promoted as an integral part of cultural strategies.
- 1.3.2 Traditionally, allotments have been the preserve of retired men though in the last decade there has been a significant growth in female tenants particularly in the younger age groups. Commonly, allotments were rented by an individual although it may have been worked by family members. Over the last 2-3 years, however, organisations have shown an increased perception of the benefits of allotment gardening in Birmingham and there are now over 45 school, community and health groups occupying 76 plots on 37 different sites. Schools form the greater proportion with 22 separate projects ranging from pre-school to senior students. The incorporation of 'horticulture' as part of the schools curriculum has prompted a rise in uptake.
- 1.3.3 Allotments provide opportunities for organisations and community support groups specialising in mental or physical healthcare. Contact with Allotment Associations, attendance at events and group plots all provide therapeutic social, psychological and physiological benefits that support the City Council's health agenda.

1.4 Biodiversity, Green Space and Wider Environmental Benefits

- 1.4.1 Allotments contribute to environmental sustainability at both local and global scales. Local issues such as biodiversity and recycling (e.g. composting) are significant but they have been re-inforced by the growing international, governmental and popular concern over climate change and its impacts. Once established, an allotment provides the sustainable production of fruit and vegetables. The volume of food produced can meet a significant proportion of an average family's



Allotments

needs for most of the year; in many instances produce will be shared with friends, neighbours and the wider family. This reduces reliance on commercial food supplies and can make a contribution to reducing waste, packaging and food miles. One of the key factors behind the growing popularity of allotments amongst the young and environmentally conscious is the issue of “food miles” and the contribution of the world food system to carbon dioxide release and global warming.

- 1.4.2 Increasing urban densities mean the importance of allotments is strengthened as open space, as nature conservation habitat/green corridors and as ‘country-side in the town’. On the plots themselves, insects and birds are attracted by a wide range of vegetables and flowers, in addition the amenity areas surrounding the plots can be managed to support wildlife.



2 Findings – The Planning Context

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Members were keen to understand the planning context; both in terms of how allotments are protected and how new sites/site improvements might be achieved. They looked at the current legislation both at central and local levels and investigated a case study. Allotments are protected by specific government legislation and their disposal is governed by a robust consents regime.³

2.2 The Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

2.2.1 At the local level Members were referred to the Unitary Development Plan.⁴ Allotments are “open space”, but not “public open space”. Therefore the policies in the UPD designed to protect and enhance “public open space” do not apply to allotments.

2.2.2 The current policy on allotments is:

3.62 Allotments provide a much needed facility especially in areas where private gardens are limited and they will continue to be protected. There is uneven provision of allotments across the City. Redressing this inequality is important, and every effort will be made to encourage the provision of new allotments in areas of deficiency, where the opportunity arises.

3.62A Planning permission will not be granted for the redevelopment of allotments simply because the allotments have fallen out of use and become derelict. Where it can be demonstrated that the demand for allotments has fallen, consideration will be given to alternative uses for surplus allotments. Such uses will be alternative recreational, nature conservation or horticultural uses, subject to the policy set out in paragraph 3.52A. If in exceptional circumstances planning permission is granted for other forms of development on part of the site this will be subject to the provision of an appropriate, equivalent, long-term recreational community benefit.

2.2.3 Members observed that this policy is predicated on the assumption that allotment gardening is in decline and policies concentrate on managing surplus allotment land. In the 1990s, declining

³ To dispose of a statutory allotment a local authority must obtain consent from the Secretary of State under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925.

⁴ UDP - part of the statutory development plan for Birmingham. It contains policies and proposals that guide development and the use of land in Birmingham up to 2011.



Allotments

tenancy figures prompted the review of a number of sites resulting in rationalisation or closure particularly in the south east of the City.

- 2.2.4 Members looked at a Case Study of Harborne Lane Allotment Site where in the late 1990s underused plots were set aside for a relief road to facilitate a major mixed use development. Evidence suggests that the extensive improvements to the remaining allotment site offset the loss of poor quality underused sites in the context of the exceptional circumstances of the major local redevelopment opportunity⁵.
- 2.2.5 It is no longer the case that allotment gardening is in decline and revised policies are needed that encourage the provision of allotments, especially in areas of need across the City.
- 2.2.6 The UPD for Birmingham 2005 looks forward to 2011 and is now being reviewed. The Core Strategy is a major policy review – it will be a city-wide plan which will set out an overall spatial strategy for Birmingham to 2026. In the autumn of 2008 the Council undertook a major consultation exercise on the issues and options and will be consulting on the "Preferred Option" for the Core Strategy towards the end of the year.
- 2.2.7 Members felt strongly that the review of the policy should take into account the importance of allotments, as set out in this report, and the increase in demand for plots.

Recommendation 1:

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation and Regeneration includes in the Core Strategy policies that reflect the increased importance of allotments and the need to protect sites and facilitate extra provision in areas of need across the City. The relevant draft policy should be reported back to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee at the consultation stage.

- 2.2.8 Whilst public open space is discussed in the UDP in terms of standards, for example each ward should have 2 hectares per 1,000 population, no such standards exist for allotments. Members suggest that the level of the waiting list for sites should be taken as an indicator of demand across the city and should be referred to when planning decisions are made.

Recommendation 2:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture ensures that the Allotment Office produce a list annually, by Constituency, of the number of people on waiting lists for allotments to assist with local discussions on planning developments, especially those that give rise to Section 106 opportunities.

⁵ In accordance with the UDP policy set out above.



2.3 Planning obligations

- 2.3.1 Members were keen to find out whether new allotment sites could be provided in areas of need through the Section 106 process. There are planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure the provision of public open space, recreational and other community facilities as part of new developments.⁶
- 2.3.2 However there is doubt that allotments can be included within the desirability of providing 'public open space' as they have restricted access. In all the policy documents, there is no reference to the possibility of providing new allotment sites or improvements to existing allotment sites through Section 106 contributions. In addition, the Section 106 process seeks to meet new needs generated by the development, rather than meeting existing unmet needs in the immediate locality.
- 2.3.3 Members explored the potential within the redevelopment of the former Selly Oak Hospital Site to secure allotments, especially in the light of losses at Harborne Lane. The development brief for the site refers to the need for "a contribution to community and leisure facilities to serve the occupiers of the new houses" and "other improvements and measures". However the priorities for provision of improved community and leisure facilities will be assessed at the time planning applications for the site are submitted.
- 2.3.4 Large developments do give rise to the need to secure improvements to recreational and other community facilities. Therefore provision of new allotment sites, where there is a proven demand, could be considered. Improvements to existing sites could also be considered.
- 2.3.5 The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations came in to force in April 2010. CIL charges will be based on simple formulae which relate the size of the charge to the size and character of the development paying it. The proceeds of the levy will be spent on local and sub-regional infrastructure to support the development of the area. The definition of infrastructure is relatively wide and can include not only parks, but green spaces and recreational facilities.

Recommendation 3:

That the Chairman of the Planning Committee considers seeking Section 106 contributions for the provision of new allotment plots from larger developments, where these meet the statutory tests. As an initial example, opportunities to develop new allotments as a result of the redevelopment of the former Selly Oak Hospital Site should be actively investigated.

⁶ The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Public Open Space in New Residential Developments is designed to fulfil the requirement that Local Plan policies make clear what types of development will give rise to such Section 106 agreements.



3 Findings – Management

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The City Council is legally obliged to provide allotments under the various allotment acts. As an allotment authority, it cannot divest itself of overall responsibility for managing allotment land. In Birmingham that means the Allotments Service manages 637.25 acres of land, divided into 115 sites and over 7,000 plots. In comparison the allotments offices in Bristol (3.6 officers) manage 3,800 plots; Leeds (2 officers) 3,400 plots; and Nottingham (2 officers) 3,300 plots.

3.2 The Allotments Office

3.2.1 The current Allotments Service is provided by 3.25 (time equivalent) officers within the Directorate of Environment & Culture. The Allotments Finance and Records Officer (supported by the Parks Facilities Manager) is responsible for strategy, finance, legal issues, reports and liaison. The Allotments Rent and Records Officer handles records management, tenancy agreements, rental payments and plot enquiries. There is one Allotment Liaison Officer 'out on the patch' carrying out the day to day management of sites and local liaison. In comparison with the other major cities contacted, this is a small office relative to the number of sites and plot holders.

3.3 Devolved Management

3.3.1 The degree to which the responsibility for the land management is delegated from the Council to the Allotment Associations varies across the country. It also varies across Birmingham. Allotments differ in a key respect from most other recreational facilities in that once provided, they are not universally available. Exclusive occupancy is granted to an individual effectively for an indefinite period. Therefore there is a good case for expecting tenants to contribute 'in kind' by being involved in the management of the sites. Where plot holders are actively engaged in managing their sites they can promote the importance of vegetable production, create friendly, socially cohesive communities and develop skills. However volunteer managers can be easy targets for dissatisfied plot holders; capacity depends on the leadership abilities of tenants and the willingness and ability of plot holders to take on voluntary community effort.

3.3.2 The concept of 'co-production' or 'self-sufficiency' is an idea that is currently being researched by local authorities which has the ultimate aim of self-reliant individuals and communities who rely less on public agencies. This theory is gaining popularity because of the need for local government to operate with considerably fewer resources in the years ahead, alongside a drive for greater empowerment of communities. Community based management of green open spaces is



increasingly necessary and desirable. However in order for communities to become more self-sufficient, they need good leaders and strong, well organised groups and supportive networks.

3.4 Devolved Management in Birmingham

3.4.1 Most Associations⁷ operate under a 'Basic Agreement' established decades ago, a small number operate under a 'Self Management Agreement' and in the absence of an Association (or an effective Committee) responsibility falls to Allotment Officers (these are known as Departmental sites). City-wide, there are 115 sites:

- 75 are managed by 65 Allotment Associations under a 'Basic Agreement' including plot lettings, rent collection and enforcement of the allotment rules (and in some cases monitoring of cultivation). Their funds comprise 9% of the rents collected;
- 19 are managed by 15 Associations under a 'Self Management Agreement' which in addition to the above includes day-to-day repairs and horticultural maintenance. Their funds comprise 60% of rent collected;
- 18 are Departmental sites which means that there is little community involvement;
- 2 are closed;
- 1 has recently re-opened and will be managed by an Association in due course.

3.4.2 Some associations have difficulty with the financial and legal processes required of them; some shy away from policing the allotment rules to avoid confrontation. The increased frequency of Secretary changes has led to a loss of management skills. Training is provided each year to new Committees, however it is often not well attended and there is probably a sound argument for making it obligatory. It appears that the existing Agreements are insufficiently strong in this area.

3.4.3 At the extreme, a small number of Associations have had some functions taken away because of poor quality and that is becoming an annual feature. Where the performance of Associations is inconsistent or simply inadequate, this places additional work on Allotment Officers to correct or take over the procedures usually during the key period of rent collection. Nevertheless there are good sites that operate well.

3.4.4 During discussions with the Allotments Office, it was obvious that they felt that the current Agreements needed revising to reflect the range of different tasks that Associations took on and to ensure that the levels of remuneration reflected responsibilities. Commission for carrying out

⁷ Their performance has to be monitored as the local authority has a statutory obligation to provide equal access for all residents to allotment land.



Allotments

functions such as rent collection on behalf of the City has been set at 10% of rent for many years. Associations receive 9%, the Birmingham and District Allotments Council (BDAC) 1%. The higher the rent, the less justifiable this percentage in relation to the work performed or the quality demonstrated. This begs review.

- 3.4.5 Members thought that, on the basis of evidence collected, one important area for clarification in the revised agreements was the way in which maintenance of that part of the site outside the cultivated area (grass areas, paths etc) was carried out and by whom. Another area of concern was the need for Associations to take up training opportunities.

Recommendation 4:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture draws up revised Agreements with the Associations, within nine months of the publication of this report, to reflect the range of different tasks that Associations take on and to ensure that the levels of remuneration reflect responsibilities.

3.5 Liaison between plot holders and the City Council

- 3.5.1 Plot holders are encouraged to liaise with the Allotments Office through their Association⁸, nevertheless individual enquires and problems take up a large proportion of the time of allotment officers, which reduces the ability of the small number of staff to deal with more strategic issues.
- 3.5.2 When disputes arise between plot holders, the Associations often turn for help to the Allotments Office, often through the Allotments Liaison Officer during site visits. Unfortunately there has been a increase in the number of disputes and in the difficulties of implementing the process for terminating tenancies when allotment rules (including levels of cultivation) have been broken. The Allotments Office have to seek legal advice in difficult cases. The Birmingham and District Allotments Council (BDAC) are a voluntary body 'which works to ensure that allotments across the City receive the best service for allotments holders and associations'. The BDAC suggest that a new process is needed to provide arbitration.

⁸ 18 sites do not have an Association



- 3.5.3 Members were concerned to hear of the effect of the increase in disputes on Associations and the Allotments Office and suggest that this is an area for further work to develop processes to enable arbitration.

Recommendation : 5

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture reports back to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee on the extent of disputes between plot holders, the current processes for dealing with them and the possibilities of introducing an arbitration process. within six months of the publication of this report.

3.5.4

It was suggested that the Council's new website could provide considerable information to plot holders and those looking to take on a plot. Bristol Council's website has an interactive map showing sites and links to more detailed information regarding plot availability and contact details for site secretaries⁹. This means that potential tenants can contact Allotment Associations directly. At the present time, our website gives some general information and recommends phoning the Council for more details.

Recommendation : 6

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture reports back to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee on proposals for significantly increasing the amount of information on the Council's new website on allotments in the City. In particular proposals should include ways of increasing the profile and accessibility of Allotment Associations. A report on progress should be submitted to the Committee within six months of the publication of this report.

- 3.5.5 Many plot holders prefer hard copy newsletters posted on sites, although the Allotments Office are keen to email information to Associations. Ward End Gardeners requested the Council's newsletter be produced in a bigger print size.
- 3.5.6 Whilst greater autonomy of allotment societies reduces the day to day work load of local authority officers, it is essential that a mechanism is put in place (and reviewed from time to time) to ensure that allotment societies can communicate effectively with the Council.
- 3.5.7 There is a formal agreement between the City Council and the Birmingham and District Allotments Council (BDAC)¹⁰; they receive a proportion of rent commission, currently 1% (c £700), in recognition of their liaison function in representing Associations. In addition other funds (£1,400) are transferred to the BDAC as part of the current management agreement. All allotment tenants

⁹ See www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/environment-and-planning/parks-and-open-spaces/allotments/

¹⁰ Agreement dated 1st April 2006.



Allotments

are represented by the BDAC¹¹ - there is an Executive Committee of 20 including 3 officers. Committee received written representations from the BDAC.

- 3.5.8 In Manchester, the Association of Manchester Allotment Societies represents the Societies and liaises closely with the Council – it is funded through subscription. The Leeds & District Gardeners Federation gathers individual membership at a pound a year. In Bristol and Nottingham, there are no umbrella forums, although high levels of strong self management.
- 3.5.9 Evidence was also received from the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) which also attracts membership from plot holders. They have particular expertise in supporting grant applications.
- 3.5.10 The Allotments Working Party¹² is a formal forum for policy development which engages not only BDAC and allotments officers, but elected Members. However it appears that the Working Party only attracts one Member (the Chair) and repeats the discussions already held between the BDAC and the Allotments Office. It has been suggested that the name 'Working Party' inadequately reflects the strategic intentions of this group. Members questioned the value of the Working Party and suggested that it should be replaced by a wider forum enabling Associations to meet together and work with officers and Members to develop strategic and practical ideas and opportunities.
- 3.5.11 Whilst Committee appreciated the work carried out by the BDAC and BOSF, and the Allotments Working Party, Members thought that the processes through which allotment societies communicate with the Council need reviewing. Bearing in mind there are over 100 sites in the City,¹³ the need to provide training in attracting funding and to support increased self management, Members thought that additional ways of communicating with allotment holders should be developed.
- 3.5.12 The suggestion is that once a year a day conference of all plot holders be convened. This would enable strategy to be discussed in the morning with City Council Members and officers, followed by workshops on practical topics such as techniques for applying for grants, running an Association and training in key procedures such as rent collection. To start with, it is expected that this conference would need to be organised by the Allotments Office, but the intention is that in the longer term, BDAC would organise it, the current Executive supported by additional Committee Members attracted by the Conference. This Conference would widen and strengthen the dialogue between plot holders and the City Council, support the growth of BDAC and promote the Council's aim of promoting self-reliance and developing communities who rely less on public agencies.

¹¹ Until recently there was an affiliation system resulting in restricted membership.

¹² This is the successor to the Allotments Sub-Committee and meets quarterly chaired by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture.

¹³ and probably over 6,000 different household involved with allotments



Recommendation 7:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture draws up a revised Agreement with the Birmingham & District Allotments Association (BDAC), within nine months of the publication of this report. Included in the revised Agreement should be the suggestion that BDAC appoints a Funding Officer onto their Executive Board to provide regular advice to Associations.

Recommendation 8:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture works with the BDAC to convene a Birmingham Allotment Conference within nine months of the publication of this report.



4 Findings– Finance

4.1 Annual Revenue Costs of Running the Service

- 4.1.1 Allotments enjoy protection from the various Allotment Acts and have always been a heavily subsidised local authority service with rental income falling far short of expenditure. In 2008/09, the Allotments Service in Birmingham cost some £467k with rental income of £75k, giving a subsidy of £392k. The figures for 2009/10 were costs of £450k and rental income of £95k – a subsidy of £355k.
- 4.1.2 The major portion of the revenue costs comprises staffing/administration costs of running the service and the Grounds Maintenance of the sites. Other costs include water (piped to the sites), ground rents, pest control and repairs and maintenance.
- 4.1.3 Members suggested that the costs of the Grounds Maintenance of the sites (those amenity areas not in cultivation, together with hedges, shrub beds etc) could be reduced if Associations took on more responsibility for this work.

Recommendation 9:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture includes in the revised Agreements in Recommendation 4, increased opportunities for Associations to take more responsibility for the maintenance of the communal amenity areas of their sites.

- 4.1.4 This year, this budget has been reduced to £410k through voluntary staff loss and savings achieved by a comprehensive review of Grounds Maintenance. Income is likely to outturn at £95k. Therefore the current comparison of income and service costs for 2010/11 show a subsidy of £315k which is regarded as unsustainable. Whilst Local Authorities are required by the Allotment Acts to provide a level of subsidy to the service, in reality, maintaining support at previous levels can only be achieved by raising income or by attracting external grant funding to Allotment Associations. The reduction of the subsidy is now a pre-requisite and rises in rent are inevitable.

4.2 Rental Income

- 4.2.1 In 2010 the rent per year for a large plot is £39.00, standard £28.00 and small £22.00. Pensioners are granted a 50% reduction in rent – the proportion of pensioners has fallen, but is still 54% of



plot holders. Since 1999, the City's rent for a standard plot has increased by £5.50, or 30% (roughly 3% per annum). During this period, prices have risen by virtually the same amount.

- 4.2.2 Of the rent collected, 10% is retained locally by the Associations (9%) and the BDAC (1%) for management functions.
- 4.2.3 There has been an increase in occupancy due to high demand and plot splitting and therefore higher rental income has been achieved over the last few years, however it is unlikely that this trend will continue much further as occupancy levels are reaching the limit of the current capacity.
- 4.2.4 Other Local Authorities are revising their view of rent rates and introducing substantial rises to reduce the amount of support given. Many of the Core City Councils now apply a standard plot rate of between £40-50, whereas Birmingham's is £28 (gross). In Manchester a full sized allotment costs £50 a year, in Bristol large plots are £53.50. There is clearly an argument to reduce the gap between income and subsidy and a more realistic scale of fees is defensible when set against the services of repairs, horticultural maintenance, water, staff etc that are expected by tenants.
- 4.2.5 Evidence from Court Lane Allotments and Ward End Gardeners suggested that plot holders realise that rents are reasonable compared with other parts of the country. The BDAC would be consulted on any changes to rent levels.
- 4.2.6 Committee Members conclude that an increase in rents to levels comparable with other Core Cities is necessary. They agree that the reduction for pensioners should be retained, but realise that this reduces the income to the Council. They felt that a clear policy for future rent increases was needed, so that there were not excessive jumps in costs that would result in plot holders leaving allotment gardening. They thought that the policy of plot splitting should be continued in order to increase the numbers able to have an allotment and also increase rental income.

Recommendation 10:

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture reviews allotment rents and draws up proposals to increase them to levels equivalent to those of other Core Cities, over a period of years. The proposals should be drawn up and reported back to the Committee within six months of the publication of this report.

4.3 Capital Costs of Site Maintenance and Improvement

- 4.3.1 The infrastructure of many Allotment sites is approaching the end of its life expectancy and requires substantial funding to repair or upgrade facilities
- 4.3.2 In the 1990s, declining tenancy figures prompted the review of a number of sites resulting in rationalisation or closure particularly in the south east of the City. The most significant of these



Allotments

was the reduction of the Bordesley Green site from which the Allotments Service gained capital receipts amounting to c£1.6m. A Capital Receipts Fund was created which provided refurbishment of the host site, other City-wide improvement schemes and a publicity campaign to promote allotment gardening at a time when it was less fashionable.

- 4.3.3 Currently, there are four areas of former allotment land awaiting disposal – Court Lane, Erdington (part), Bulls Head, Stechford (all), Wychbury Road, Bartley Green (part) and Yardley Green Road, Small Heath (part). Disposal might realise capital receipts of c.£2m which would be used for allotment site improvements over the next 3-5 years. However the Council is reluctant to sell land in the current financial climate.
- 4.3.4 Disposal of sites is no longer a satisfactory way of creating funds to improve the service. Increasing occupancy of sites, and at the same time declining land values, have affected the likelihood of sale and income potential.

4.4 Increasing income from external sources

- 4.4.1 With the need for local authorities to operate with considerably fewer resources in the years ahead, it is very important that Associations become more able to attract funding from other sources. A number of Associations have been successful in acquiring grants from various sources (e.g. Awards for All - Big Lottery Fund, Sutton Coldfield Municipal Charities and BBC Breathing Spaces).
- 4.4.2 However applying for grant funding is a skilled process and requires Associations to have volunteers who are able and willing to find out what grants could be available and to understand the application process.
- 4.4.3 BOSF recently held a seminar to demonstrate to their members how to fill in the Awards for All application form. One or two allotment groups were amongst those who attended.
- 4.4.4 To find out more about future opportunities, we investigated the policies of the Big Lottery Fund (BIG). They advised us that they are keen to increase funding awards to Birmingham and they are looking for opportunities to allocate funding on suitable projects. Members felt that encouragement should be given to Associations to apply for funding to Awards for All.

Recommendation: 11

The Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture ensures that the Birmingham Allotment Conference includes advice to Associations and plot holders on external sources of funding and in particular engages with the Big Lottery Fund.



5 Findings – Demand and Supply

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 There has been a national resurgence of interest in allotment gardening. In London and the South East, the demand for plots is so high that organisations such as the National Trust and Royal Parks are setting aside land for allotments and land in private ownership awaiting development is being cultivated. However this trend, reported often in the press, is not matched quite so dramatically in the rest of the country.
- 5.1.2 This increase in demand has been seen in some areas of Birmingham, but not others. The major areas of demand are in the constituencies of Hall Green, Selly Oak and Sutton Coldfield. Historically there has been high demand in Handsworth (Perry Barr Constituency), but there are now vacant plots.
- 5.1.3 The City currently has 115 allotment sites across the city. Since the year 2000 (693.42 acres) there have been losses of 56.92 acres and gains of 0.75 acres. The area in 2010 is therefore 637.25 acres. Distribution is uneven across the City; Perry Barr Constituency has well over a thousand plots, however Ladywood Constituency has less than 20.
- 5.1.4 The quantity of plots fluctuates almost daily according to the scale of plot splitting and presently stands at 7112 of which 6484 (91.2%) are tenanted. Since March 2007 an additional 348 plots have been created through downsizing which largely reflects a demand for smaller plots and measures to address waiting lists. More importantly, tenancy numbers have increased by nearly 1000 in this period reflecting the major demand for allotment gardening across the country. Analysis suggests a marked increase in female tenants and a gradual movement from older to younger gardeners.

5.2 Demand and Supply

- 5.2.1 There were (at May 2010) nearly 833 names on waiting lists for plots; some of these names will be on the waiting list for several sites. The number of vacant plots available in the city is approximately 75% of the unmet demand – they are predominantly in the south east of the City and in Handsworth. The reasons why there is still a waiting list, despite there being vacant plots are:
- The vacant plots may be located away from the areas of demand;
 - they may be on unpopular sites;



Allotments

- they may be too overgrown from lack of previous cultivation for inexperienced new tenants to take on;
- the re-letting process may be slow.

5.2.2 The Committee looked at a case study of Court Lane Allotments, Erdington. They heard evidence from the Association that they had turned around a previously neglected site and had recently won awards for their produce, and had a waiting list. Next to the existing site is unused land, once allotments, but now about to be developed for housing¹⁴. However a combination of delays to the development due to the recession and the increase in demand for plots, meant that the Association were keen to start gardening on the site again.

5.2.3 Members conclude that the overall number of allotment sites in the City is about right, but unfortunately their distribution does not reflect demand. Therefore there is a need to protect existing sites and look for ways of creating new plots in areas of high demand.

5.3 Creating new plots in areas of high demand

5.3.1 The easiest way to do this is to increase the numbers of plots cultivated on existing sites. This can be done by ensuring high occupancy, by plot splitting and by cultivating amenity land within the site.

5.3.2 More people can enjoy vegetable gardening if a plot is cultivated by a group¹⁵, but this could contravene the Allotment Act of 1922 which defines the term 'allotment garden' as "an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family".

5.3.3 Plot splitting is already an active policy.

5.3.4 Some allotment sites do have unused areas, generally former plots, which with suitable horticultural works could be returned to cultivation. Attention is also being focussed towards sites with shrub beds or amenity grass areas that can be converted to plots as well as clearing derelict areas and reinstating former plots. Sites at Moor Green (Moseley), Uffculme (Kings Heath), Aldridge Road (Perry Barr), Forge Farm (Sutton Newhall) and Hazelwell (Stirchley) have been identified for an initial phase of works in Spring 2010 funded from savings on Grounds Maintenance.

¹⁴ All the necessary consents having been obtained some time ago.

¹⁵ Eg school, community project, neighbourhood group.



5.4 Creating new sites

- 5.4.1 The laying out of a typical site of 80 plots including installing fencing, access road, toilets, paths, water supply and clubhouse/storage sheds would cost in the order of £400,000 or £5,000 a plot.
- 5.4.2 Converting land currently in the Leisure Portfolio into allotments would be the simplest option - examples include converting land in parks and other public open spaces. However this would mean taking land out of public use and creating private open space and so legal and planning consents would be required.
- 5.4.3 Converting land held by other Council portfolios such as Housing is being explored – this requires a lease to ensure some security of tenure for plot holders. For example, Allotment Officers are exploring the possibility of using land formerly laid out as garages on Housing land in an area of Sutton Coldfield to provide raised beds for cultivation. GEML (Grow It, Eat It , Move It , Live it) started in April 2009 under the partnership of Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust and Ladywood Constituency. The 'Grow It' element is about looking at a range of unused private and public land sites across the Constituency (green space, communal drying areas, ex garage site etc.) as potential 'community grow sites'.
- 5.4.4 Members conclude that there is insufficient supply of plots in some areas of the City and that this shortage is likely to get worse as the demand for allotments continues to increase.

Recommendation : 12

That the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture together with the relevant Constituency Chairmen, produce Action Plans for Hall Green, Ladywood, Selly Oak, and Sutton Coldfield to identify measures to address the shortage of plots within a year of the publication of this report. In drawing up the Action Plans opportunities should be explored which, where appropriate, maximise the benefits that allotments can provide.

Recommendation: 13

Progress towards the achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee within six months of the publication of this report. Subsequent reports will be scheduled thereafter.



Appendix 1: Summary of Evidence and Research



Contents

1	Introduction	29
2	Sources of Evidence and Information	29
3	Glossary	31
4	Context – The Importance of Allotments	32
4.1	The Government’s Food Policy Agenda	32
4.2	Food and Health	34
4.3	Social Cohesion	36
4.4	Environmental Sustainability and Green Space	37
4.5	Conclusion	38
5	The Planning Context	39
5.1	The Birmingham Unitary Development Plan	39
5.2	Disposal and Development of allotment sites	40
5.3	Provision of new sites/site improvement through Section 106 Agreements	42
6	Management	45
6.1	The Allotments Office	45
6.2	Grounds Maintenance Contractors	46
6.3	Local Management	46
6.4	Models of Devolved Management	47
6.5	Financial Advantages of Devolved Management	47
6.6	Community Development Advantages of Devolved Management	48
6.7	Devolvment Issues	48
6.8	Levels of Devolved Management in Birmingham	49
6.9	Responsibilities of Associations	49
6.10	Performance	50
6.11	Remuneration	50
6.12	Co-production	50
6.13	Birmingham and District Allotments Council	51
6.14	Allotments Working Party	51



Allotments

7	Finance	52
7.1	Annual Revenue Costs	52
7.2	Rental Income	52
7.3	Capital Costs of Site Maintenance and Improvement	54
7.4	Grants in 2010	54
7.5	Big Lottery Funding	56
7.6	Warstock Lane Case Study	57
8	Demand and Supply of Allotments	58
8.1	National Trends and the Policy Response	58
8.2	Demand in Birmingham	59
8.3	Numbers of sites	61
8.4	Losses and gains of sites and parts of sites	62
8.5	Site Occupancy Levels	62
8.6	Protecting existing sites	64
8.7	Ways to increase the number of sites	66
8.8	Numbers of Plots	67
8.9	Ways to increase the number of plots on existing sites.	67
8.10	Ways to increase the number of people enjoy vegetable gardening on existing sites.	68
8.11	Increasing community gardening	69
8.12	Temporary Use of Vacant Land	69
9	Representations from Birmingham & District Allotments Council (BDAC)	70
10	Representations by Plotholders	72
11	Evidence from Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)	75
12	Experiences of other Cities	77
12.1	Introduction	77
12.2	Manchester	77
12.3	Leeds	78
12.4	Bristol	79
12.5	Nottingham	81



1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This report sets out the research and evidence gathering undertaken by the Scrutiny Office at the request of the Leisure, Sport and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee¹⁶ between September 2009 and May 2010. Much of the information on the allotments in Birmingham has been provided by officers of the Allotments Service within the Directorate of Environment and Culture.

2 Sources of Evidence and Information

- 2.1.1 Evidence has been collected from the following sources:

1. Officers from the Birmingham City Council Allotments Office
2. Birmingham and District Allotments Association
3. Court Lane Erdington Allotments Association
4. Ward End Gardeners
5. Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
6. Team Leader, Planning and Regeneration, Birmingham City Council
7. Principal Planning Officer, Planning Strategy, Development Directorate, Birmingham City Council
8. Birmingham Parks Strategy
9. Birmingham Unitary Development Plan
10. Big Lottery Birmingham
11. Manchester City Council Allotments Office
12. Leeds City Council Allotments Office
13. Bristol City Council Allotments Office
14. Nottingham City Council Allotments Office
15. House of Commons, Environmental, Food & Rural Affairs Committee, "Securing Food supplies up to 2050: the challenges faced by the UK". July 2009.
16. "UK Food Security Assessment: Our Approach" Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. August 2009.
17. "Food Matters" Cabinet Office Strategy Unit and "Food Matters: One year on" on progress on the actions identified in the 2008 report.
18. Guardian 5 January 2010.
19. Local Government Association
20. London Enriched (2007: www.london.gov.uk)
21. www.nnt.nhs.uk
22. www.english-nature.org.uk
23. www.everyactioncounts.org.uk
24. www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nfs/Getinvolved/othercampingns.html
25. email through the Scrutiny website dated 20.10.2009
26. Department for Communities and Local Government see www.communities.gov.uk
27. Planning Policy Guidance 3 on Housing
28. Planning Policy Guidance 17
29. www.birmingham.gov.uk/publicopenspace
30. 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks' approved by Cabinet in November

¹⁶ Terms of reference agreed at the O&S Committee 9th September 2009.



Allotments

31. Birmingham Sustainable Community Strategy. Birmingham 2026.
32. Birmingham LAA 2008/11. Working Together for a Better Birmingham.
33. www.bdacallotments.webs.com
34. Can You Dig it? Meeting Community Demand for Allotments by Nick Hope & Victoria Ellis. New Local Government Network.
35. NSALG (2009), Survey Data from 'A Survey of Allotment Waiting Lists in England'. Transition Town West Kirby and National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.
36. LV (2009), 'Brits Rediscover the Good Life', Press Release, Liverpool Victoria, 2 June 2009.
37. Davies, C. (2009), 'Queen turns corner of palace back yard into allotment'. The Observer, 14 June 2009.
38. Osborne, H. (2007), 'Harrods Unveils Rooftop Allotments' The Guardian, 17 April 2007
39. Miller, A (2008), 'Up the Allotments', The Telegraph, 24 May 2008
40. Mulholland, H (2008), 'Boris Johnson unveils plans to create 2012 new vegetable gardens in London', The Guardian, 4 November 2008.
41. Milligan, C. Gatrell, A. and Bingley A. (2004), 'Cultivating Health: Therapeutic Landscapes and Older People in Northern England'. Social Science and Medicine, 2004 pp 1781-1793
42. Allotment group caters for green – fingered boom' by Toni Scotney. Birmingham Post. 27 May 2009.
43. Thorpe Committee of Inquiry into Allotments, 1969 (Cmnd 4166)
44. Growing in the Community second edition. Local Government Association.



3 Glossary

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AWP	Allotments Working Party
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCC	Birmingham City Council
BDAC	Birmingham and District Allotments Council
BIG	Big Lottery Fund
BOSF	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
BPN	Birmingham Parks & Nurseries
CSV	Community Support Volunteer
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
ENTA	Employment Needs Training Agency
FSA	Food Standards Agency
GEML	Grow It, Eat It, Move It, Live It
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NLGN	New Local Government Network
NSALG	National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
POPI	Parks Operational Performance Information
POS	public open space
PPG17	Planning Policy Guidance 17
SM	Self Managed
SoB	Shades of Black
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
UDP	Unitary Development Plan



4 Context – The Importance of Allotments

4.1 The Government's Food Policy Agenda

4.1.1 In recent decades, we in the UK have benefited from a greater choice of food than ever before. Food safety and labelling has improved. Despite recent price rises, food has, in general become more affordable over the last thirty years. Over that time, global food production has grown consistently faster than population, but with serious environmental costs.

4.1.2 However by 2009, the previous Government¹⁷ had become increasingly concerned about the big challenges looming for the World's food supply:

- To feed a growing global population, it is estimated that global food production will have to increase by some 70% compared to 2005-2007 levels by 2050. The world's ability to grow food depends on global resources – such as soil, energy, water, disease control and bio-diversity – so we will need to expand food production within these environmental limits;
- Food contributes around 20% to EU greenhouse gas emissions. If we are to avoid dangerous levels of climate change, we will need to reduce these emissions, along with other sources eg greenhouse gases;
- Climate change will alter what we can grow where, both in Europe and throughout the world. We need to be prepared for and be able to adapt to these changes;
- It is estimated that the health bill arising from obesity could cost the UK taxpayer billions by 2050 if we do nothing. At the same time, 1 billion people in the world do not have enough to eat;
- Food price increases and the recession may be affecting access to a nutritious diet..

4.1.3 The House of Commons Committee¹⁸ suggested that "Consumers will play a vital part in enabling the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to achieve its vision for the UK food system. They will need to be encouraged to think more about the environmental consequences of where and how their food is produced and to be provided with sufficient information to enable them to make responsible choices. Increasing interest in local and home production on the part of some consumers is particularly encouraging in this context, because it is away of reconnecting people with the process of producing the food that they eat. The role of local and home production and of educating children about food, should be included in Defra's vision and strategy for food".

¹⁷ "UK Food Security Assessment: Our Approach" Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. August 2009. "Food Matters" Cabinet Office Strategy Unit and "Food Matters: One year on" on progress on the actions identified in the 2008 report.

¹⁸ See 2



- 4.1.4 The report Food 2030 was published in January 2010. *"Food 2030, the Government's new food strategy"*, was the first of its kind in over 50 years.¹⁹ The introduction to the report states "This new strategy for food has been drawn up following the publication of the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit's report in July 2008. *Food Matters* called for better integration of food policy across Government and highlighted two challenges: climate change and obesity. 2008 also saw food prices rising sharply for the first time in a generation, provoking riots in some parts of the world. In August 2009 we published our assessment of UK food security and set out what we need to do to maintain it. This document brings all of the challenges together for the first time."²⁰
- 4.1.5 About one in three people in the UK grows fruit and vegetables, according to a survey commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Ministers hope the voluntary sector can help build on examples such as that set by the National Trust, which hopes to have established 1,000 allotment plots on restored kitchen gardens, agricultural land and vacant spaces, in its varied property portfolio by 2012.²¹
- 4.1.6 Once established, an allotment provides the sustainable production of fruit and vegetables. The volume of food produced can meet a significant proportion of an average family's needs for most of the year; in many instances produce will be shared with friends, neighbours and the wider family. This reduces reliance on commercial food supplies and can make a contribution to reducing waste, packaging and food miles. The use of allotments to provide Community Food projects that support the infirm or those on low incomes through initiatives like the 'green box' scheme could be a valuable means of providing fresh food, improving health and enhancing communities.²²
- 4.1.7 More recently the report *"The Coalition: our programme for government"*²³ states that "The Government believes that we need to protect the environment for future generations, make our economy more environmentally sustainable, and improve our quality of life and well-being. We also believe that much more needs to be done to support the farming industry, protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable food production."
- 4.1.8 Defra's response to public comments on the section of the Coalition's programme on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was published on 30 July 2010. It states that "The third most frequently mentioned area was food: members of the public suggested increasing UK food production, ensuring food security and sourcing food locally. The range of issues covered was wide, including reducing meat consumption, understanding of nutrition and land for people to grow their own food. The Government is keen to support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production, while helping to enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life."

¹⁹ www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/strategy/

²⁰ www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/pdf/food2030strategy.pdf

²¹ Guardian 5 January 2010

²² Growing in the community: a good practice guide for the management of allotments.

www.lga.gov.uk/lga/publications/publication-display.do?id=336352

²³ <http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk>



Allotments

Other priorities include encouraging people to make sustainable and healthy food choices, and promoting a competitive agriculture sector that frees farmers to farm.”²⁴

4.2 Food and Health

- 4.2.1 The significance of good diet for the health of individuals and families has been a growing concern, particularly in the context of increasing child and adult obesity. The Department of Health's *“Choosing Health (2005)”*²⁵ provided the context for co-operation between government and the voluntary sectors in supporting improvements to diet, within which the importance of allotments as a source of healthy local food is recognised.
- 4.2.2 The report *Food 2030* states that “90% of people claim that healthy eating is important to them and public awareness of the health implications of diet is fairly high. This has been achieved over a number of years, through campaigns by Government (for example 5-A-DAY, Change4Life, the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) salt and saturated fat campaigns), NGOs and the media, with support from the food industry. National nutrition surveys indicate some positive changes in the diet of adults in the UK over the past 15 years, but we are still eating too much salt, saturated fat, and sugar, and not enough fruit and vegetables. Poor diet is estimated to account for a third of all cases of cancer, and a further third of cases of cardiovascular disease. Obesity, which has more than doubled in the last 25 years, increases the risk of developing Type II Diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some types of cancer. Left unchecked, projections show radical increases in the years ahead with 40% of the population being obese by 2025 and 60% by 2050. Diet-related chronic disease is estimated to cost the NHS £7 billion a year, including direct treatment costs, state benefits and loss of earnings. The health benefits of meeting nutritional guidelines are estimated to reach almost £20 billion a year, and are estimated to prevent 70,000 premature deaths a year.”²⁶
- 4.2.3 The report goes on to say that “Rising food prices over the last two years have exerted great pressure on budgets in low income households....Low income families have poorer health than the general population.... The reasons for this are complex, but diet plays a role.... Households need access to affordable, nutritious food to give them food security. The Government's *“UK Food Security Assessment”* shows that physical access to food is not itself a significant problem, nor a significant negative factor in diets. There are however a number of other barriers to accessing healthy food including lack of income, education and skills, which affect low income and other vulnerable groups more acutely. A lot of work is already underway to address these barriers, such as increasing access to fruit and vegetables through the Healthy Start initiative, and small-

²⁴ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, July 2010. Defra response to public comments on Coalition Programme. See www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/what/documents/coalition-programme-comments-response.pdf

²⁵ www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance//Organisationpolicy/Modernisation/Choosinghealth/index.htm

²⁶ www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/pdf/food2030strategy.pdf Page 11



scale local initiatives, including food distribution charities and community food growing initiatives.”²⁷

4.2.4 “The popularity of ‘grow-your-own’ has risen significantly over recent years. An estimated 33% of people already grow or intend to grow their own vegetables. Growing food – at home, in a community garden or allotment – can produce a number of other benefits including better mental and physical health, bringing people together and improved skills.”²⁸

4.2.5 The Local Government Association’s “*Greening Communities*” campaign also recognises the importance of locally produced fresh food for improving access to a better diet and better health.”²⁹

4.2.6 Support for healthy eating, along with the environmental benefits of locally produced food is also an important component of a growing number of food strategies produced through cooperation between the NHS, local councils and other interested parties. Examples include:

- “*Healthy and Sustainable Food for London (2006)*” *London Food Strategy*; ³⁰
- “*Spade to Spoon*” *Brighton & Hove*; ³¹
- “*Food Matters*” *London Borough of Ealing*.³²

4.2.7 The Local Government Association’s report “*Growing in the Community*”³³ set out the importance of allotment gardening to health. It says that allotment gardening has always been recognised as a productive means for achieving healthy exercise in the open air and for getting and staying physically fit: allotments have an important role to play in promoting preventative health. Allotments are also achieving growing recognition as a resource for people with disabilities – infrastructure improvements such as raised beds have proved popular in improving access for those with disabilities. There is a significant role for allotments in a range of agendas relating to mental health. The more general therapeutic effects that allotment gardeners have always valued are now embedded in the broader health agenda for treating the most common mental health issue, depression. In recent years, Britain has seen the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers from war zones all around the world. The value of allotment gardening as a therapy for refugees who have been traumatised by past experiences and in help them get back onto a secure footing is increasingly recognised. Examples include:

- “*London Enriched 2007*”; ³⁴
- “*The Comfrey Project*” *Newcastle*. ³⁵

²⁷ www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/pdf/food2030strategy.pdf Page 13

²⁸ www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/pdf/food2030strategy.pdf Page 15

²⁹ www.lga.gov.uk/ProjectHome.asp?lsection=59&ccat=1132

³⁰ www.lga.gov.uk

³¹ www.brighton-hove.gov.uk

³² www.ealing.gov.uk

³³ *Growing in the community: a good practice guide for the management of allotments.*

www.lga.gov.uk/lga/publications/publication-display.do?id=336352

³⁴ *London Enriched (2007: www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/immigration/docs/ref-int-strategy.pdf)*



4.3 Social Cohesion

- 4.3.1 Allotments bring together people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds whose knowledge of gardening can be shared. They are of particular significance to the elderly who do not otherwise derive much benefit from subsidised sports provision. The fast pace of twenty-first century life leads increasingly to a sense of isolation and loss of community. Allotments allow people to enjoy a sense of being in a strong community, where people get to know each other well, to talk, share ideas and make friends. The benefits of allotments in promoting community cohesion are increasingly recognised and promoted as an integral part of cultural strategies. Allotment culture can be celebrated with the public at large through events such as open days and the activities of artists, musicians and photographers.³⁶
- 4.3.2 Traditionally, allotments have been the preserve of retired men though in the last decade there has been a significant growth in female tenants particularly in the younger age groups. Commonly, allotments were rented by an individual although it may have been worked by family members.
- 4.3.3 In Birmingham, with isolated exceptions, group use has been rare. Over the last 2-3 years, however, organisations have shown an increased perception of the benefits of allotment gardening and there are now over 45 school, community and health groups occupying 76 plots on 37 different sites. Since the Pre-tenancy Application system was introduced in Spring 2007 to monitor projects, 145 groups have made enquiries about allotments.
- 4.3.4 Other projects encompass organisations such as CSV Environment, Youth Organic Environmental, Employment Needs Training Agency, East Youth Offending Team and until recently, National Probation Service. There is a growing emphasis towards using allotments as a medium for training (ENTA provide vocational courses by way of work experience and City College use allotments for training) and as part of the community payback scheme where offenders develop better community responsibilities through growing and providing crops for local communities.³⁷
- 4.3.5 Schools form the greatest proportion of group use of allotments with 22 separate projects ranging from pre-school to senior students. The incorporation of 'horticulture' as part of the schools curriculum has prompted a rise in uptake and it is worth highlighting the Archbishop Ilesley School project (Acocks Green) which aims for the 'Food for Life' gold award. The foundation for school groups in Birmingham remains the Shades of Black (SoB)³⁸ project on the Uplands site, Handsworth (shortly to move to Stechford). SoB was a community support group born out of the Handsworth riots; the school project was established in 1999 by Eunice McGhie-Belgrave MBE and has been a model for student participation for up to 7 schools.³⁹

³⁵ www.nnt.nhs.uk/ethnic/category_detail.asp?EM_ID=8

³⁶ Information from "Growing in the community" see reference above.

³⁷ Information from the Allotments Office.

³⁸ www.sobhelpproject.org.uk

³⁹ Information from the Allotments Office.



- 4.3.6 In Birmingham allotments provide opportunities for organisations and community support groups specialising in mental or physical healthcare. Contact with Allotment Associations, attendance at events, group plots all provide therapeutic social, psychological and physiological benefits that support the City Council's health agenda.
- 4.3.7 Eight health groups covering, amongst others, mental illness, cerebral palsy, industrial therapy and physical disability hold 14 plots. One of these, New Roots⁴⁰, operated by the Director of Adults and Communities has been on the Bordesley Green site for a decade and helps people with learning difficulties. This is a good example of successful integration of a special group with ordinary ploholders. A more recent addition has been the Harborne Day Centre on Tennial Lane Allotments where it is intended to build the first wheelchair accessible plot created by the City Council. Previous efforts to secure funding for a model wheelchair user plot at Bordesley Green failed.⁴¹

4.4 Environmental Sustainability and Green Space

- 4.4.1 Allotments contribute to environmental sustainability at both local and global scales. Local issues such as biodiversity and recycling (e.g. composting) are significant but they have been re-enforced by the growing international, governmental and popular concern over climate change and its impacts.⁴²
- 4.4.2 The distinctive contribution that allotments make to biodiversity is recognised in the legislation:
- *"Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006"*; ⁴³
 - *"Wildlife on Allotments" 2007.* ⁴⁴
- 4.4.3 One of the key factors behind the growing popularity of allotments amongst the young and environmentally conscious is the issue of "food miles" and the contribution of the world food system to carbon dioxide release and global warming. Growing your own food on an allotment, using wildlife friendly organic methods and home made compost has become a means to take a personal stand on these issues. ⁴⁵ Examples include:
- *"Every Actions Counts" Defra backed project promotes growing your own;* ⁴⁶
 - *"Organic Buy Local" Soil Association Campaign.* ⁴⁷

⁴⁰ www.birminghampost.net/life-leisure-birmingham-guide/postfeatures/2009/09/18/new-roots-in-the-community-as-birmingham-suburb-brings-fresh-veg-to-the-streets-65233-24723340/

⁴¹ Information from the Allotments Office

⁴² Information from "Growing in the community"

⁴³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/pdf/ukpga_20060016_en.pdf

⁴⁴ www.english-nature.org.uk/Nature_In_The_Garden/>

⁴⁵ Information from "Growing in the community"

⁴⁶ www.everyactioncounts.org.uk

⁴⁷ www.soilassociation.org.web/sa/saweb.nfs/Getinvolved/othercampingns.html



Allotments

- 4.4.4 Allotments provide important wildlife corridors and habitats and contribute to the City's green space. On the plots themselves, insects and birds are attracted by a wide range of vegetables and flowers, in addition the amenity areas surrounding the plots can be managed to support wildlife. This view has been supported by a member of the public who commented: "I am an allotment plothead in Birmingham. I think that the City Council, Allotment societies and plotheaders should be encouraged to do more to enhance biodiversity on allotment sites through planting trees, building ponds and allowing some long grass areas. The Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan, to which BCC is a signatory, recognises allotments as an important wildlife habitat. We should encourage biodiversity on allotments, not just for environmental reasons, but because it creates a healthier growing environment for food crops."⁴⁸
- 4.4.5 Allotments are a form of open space which should be valued and protected by the planning process. Demand for housing and the emphasis on locating new housing on Brownfield sites within cities may lead to any increase in intensity of urban living. New housing is often built at higher densities than older housing. Increasing urban densities mean the importance of allotments is strengthened, as open space, as nature conservation habitat/green corridors and as 'country-side in the town'.⁴⁹
- 4.4.6 Nationally open space provision is locally assessed within the requirement laid down by Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17).⁵⁰ In Birmingham the assessment has been made in the Parks Strategy.⁵¹
- 4.4.7 Where there are schemes for devolved management, allotments are examples of community based management of local open spaces. This concept is increasingly important, for example: Government guidance in preparing Green Space Strategies and the role of Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)⁵² in encouraging community involvement in managing public open space.

4.5 Conclusion

- 4.5.1 The New Local Government Network (NLGN) publication "*Can You Dig it?*"⁵³ report reminds us that the wide benefits and potential of allotments are rarely fully understood and the impact they have on wider social objectives is too often not reflected in sufficient commitment from partners across a locality. Allotments help many agencies meet their objectives, whether it is the Primary Care Trusts delivering better health outcomes or the Environment Agency achieving its biodiversity priorities. Greater cross-agency buy-in to the allotment agenda in many localities must be secured, suggests the report.

⁴⁸ email through the Birmingham City Council Website dated 20.10.2009

⁴⁹ Information from "Growing in the Community"

⁵⁰ www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyguidance/planningpolicystatements/planningpolicyguidance/ppg17

⁵¹ www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite/parksstrategy?packedargs=website%3D4&rendermode=live

⁵² www.bosf.org.uk

⁵³ Can You Dig it? Meeting Community Demand for Allotments by Nick Hope & Victoria Ellis. New Local Government Network September 2009.



5 The Planning Context

5.1 The Birmingham Unitary Development Plan⁵⁴

- 5.1.1 The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) is part of the statutory development plan for Birmingham. It contains policies and proposals that guide development and the use of land in Birmingham up to 2011. The first UDP was adopted in 1993 and reviewed between 2000 and 2005. The review took the form of changes, or alterations to the adopted plan.
- 5.1.2 Allotments are “open space”, but not “public open space”⁵⁵. Therefore the policies in the UDP designed to protect and enhance “public open space”⁵⁶ do not apply to allotments.

Definitions

For the purposes of the UDP, “open space” is defined as “all open land of recreational or public value, including playing fields, which primarily consists of natural elements such as trees, grass and water. It may or may not have free public access. It may or may not be used or held by the City Council for recreational purposes”.

For the purposes of the UDP, “public open space” is defined as “open space, including playing fields, owned by the City Council or to which there is a public right of access, used by the public primarily for recreation purposes. It does not include private or education playing fields, nor does it include municipal or private golf courses, cemeteries, or open areas within housing estates which substitute for private gardens”.

- 5.1.3 The current policy on allotments⁵⁷ is:

Allotments

Allotments provide a much needed facility especially in areas where private gardens are limited and they will continue to be protected. There is uneven provision of allotments across the City. Redressing this inequality is important, and every effort will be made to encourage the provision of new allotments in areas of deficiency, where the opportunity arises. 3.62A Planning permission will not be granted for the redevelopment of allotments simply because the allotments have fallen out of use and become derelict. Where it can be demonstrated that the demand for allotments has fallen, consideration will be given to alternative uses for surplus allotments. Such uses will be alternative recreational, nature conservation or horticultural uses, subject to the policy set out in paragraph 3.52A. If in exceptional circumstances planning permission is granted for other forms of development on part of the site this will be subject to the provision of an appropriate, equivalent, long-term recreational community benefit.

⁵⁴ Guidance on this section from Principal Planning Officer, Planning Strategy, Development Directorate, Birmingham City Council at meeting with Cllr Harmer 15th March 2010.

⁵⁵ Birmingham UDP Chapter 3, Page 39.

⁵⁶ Birmingham UDP Chapter 3, Page 40.

⁵⁷ Birmingham UDP Chapter 3, Page 43



Allotments

- 5.1.4 The UPD for Birmingham 2005 looks forward to 2011 and we are now at a stage to review this plan. The Core Strategy is a major policy review – it will be a city-wide plan which will set out an overall spatial strategy for Birmingham to 2026. It will replace chapters 2 – 7 of the UDP. The first formal stage in the preparation of the Core Strategy was the preparation of an Issues and Options Paper. A draft version of the plan should be available for consultation in January 2011.
- 5.1.5 Planning strategies prepared over the last 10 years have tended to assume that allotment gardening was in decline and policies concentrated on managing surplus allotment land. This is no longer the case and revised policies are needed that encourage the provision of allotments, especially in areas of need across the City.
- 5.1.6 Whilst public open space (POS) is discussed in the UDP in terms of standards – for example each ward should have 2 hectares per 1,000 population, no such standards exist for allotments.
- 5.1.7 General guidance on open space is provided in national planning policy PPG17 Planning for Open Space Sport and Recreation,⁵⁸ the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy,⁵⁹ as well as the UDP.

5.2 Disposal and Development of allotment sites

- 5.2.1 Allotments are protected by specific government legislation and their disposal is governed by a robust consents regime. To dispose of a statutory allotment a local authority must obtain consent from the Secretary of State under Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925. Requests are made by the local authority to the Government Office for the West Midlands and are considered against robust criteria including that adequate provision has been made for displaced plot holders and the allotments have been actively publicised.
- 5.2.2 In the 1990s, declining tenancy figures in Birmingham prompted the review of a number of sites resulting in rationalisation or closure particularly in the south east of the City. The most significant of these was the reduction of the Bordesley Green site from which the Allotments Service gained capital receipts amounting to c£1.6m. A Capital Receipts Fund was created which provided refurbishment of the host site and other city-wide improvement schemes. A further disposal (the Robins) gave rise to the Flo Pickering Memorial Fund which is now the repository for any future capital receipts.
- 5.2.3 Following the success of the Bordesley Green Fund, in 2001 *“A Strategy for Allotment Provision in Birmingham”* was agreed. This enabled a strategic review of allotment sites with a view to “provide a way forward for allotment provision in terms of addressing surplus capacity, protecting and enhancing existing facilities where they are used and needed, and providing new facilities in areas

⁵⁸ www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyguidance/planningpolicystatements/planningpolicyguidance/ppg17/

⁵⁹ www.wmleadersboard.gov.uk/policy



of under provision".⁶⁰ It recommended disposing of sites with genuine overcapacity to generate income for creating new sites in areas of under provision and improving existing sites.

- 5.2.4 The table on page 38 shows the losses and gains of allotment sites over the last few years.
- 5.2.5 Currently, there are four sites awaiting disposal – Court Lane, Erdington (part), Bulls Head, Stechford (all), Wychbury Road, Bartley Green (part) and Yardley Green Road, Small Heath (part). Declining land values have affected income potential but disposal might realise capital receipts of c.£2m which would be used for allotment site improvements over the next 3-5 years.

Case Study of Harborne Lane Allotments Site

The point of view of the allotment holders⁶¹:

"Harborne Lane Allotments was an episode where a thriving allotment was sacrificed for the wider benefit of Birmingham residents. The proposal to build the Selly Oak relief road was vehemently opposed by the Allotment Association for years as they foresaw the demise of part of their site, the reduction of plots, the potential loss of tenants and the acquisition of a busy road next to the site. This was further exacerbated by the relocation of Sainsbury who were perceived as a beneficiary at the expense of the site - the fact that Sainsbury paid for the site reconstruction made little difference to long standing tenants, particularly those on the Committee, who saw commercial gain over amenity.

In terms of the planning process there was certainly considerable consultation over a long period, however, the Association felt that they had been given a fait accompli and had little influence in the fate of the site. At the time (pre 2004), the site had 123 standard plots but had 50% vacant, though how much of this was due to the impending destruction is hard to say. Following reconstruction, the site was halved (i.e. part of the original site was relaid) and formed of 80 small plots. The settlement negotiated with Sainsbury provided a fully laid out site with fencing, roads, drainage, paths and a high spec steel pavilion comprising meeting room, kitchenette, toilets (including disabled access) and a store room at a cost in the order of £400k. Tenants received 'prepared' plots and a shed and water butt each, plus £1,000 per annum disturbance payment while they were unable to access the site (this lasted for exactly 3 years) and 2 years rent free on resumption.

On the down side, only two thirds of the original tenants returned to the site and had to accept smaller plots. During construction the contractors compacted the soil which (despite the addition of topsoil) made cultivation difficult and created problems through flooding and standing water. The topsoil was of poor quality and underwent considerable stone picking etc to remove bricks etc, even so, ploholders were not happy with the standard of soil they found compared to the well worked and composted soil they had lost.

In terms of facilities, the reconstruction provided superior accommodation, but in terms of cultivation it was a disaster. Nevertheless, the site is now fully let with a waiting list of 14 and almost every plot appears to be well cultivated. Hypothetically, had the relief road not happened, it

⁶⁰ Strategy approved by Executive Committee 20th July 2001.

⁶¹ Email from City Council Allotment Office 18th March 2010.



Allotments

is quite possible that the original site would now be fully let given the more recent rise in demand.

In recognition of local demand throughout Harborne-Selly Oak-Bournville and the lack of allotment sites within walking distance of Harborne Lane, we would certainly support additional provision in the proposed Raddlebarn development and this has already been intimated to planning officers.

The point of view of the planning officer⁶²

In the late 1990s the allotments were much underused and experienced problems of flooding, contamination and security. In 2001, the Local Plan for Selly Oak was adopted including a relief road to reduce pressure on Bristol Road through Selly Oak Centre and to provide access to the new Queen Elizabeth hospital and open up the Birmingham Battery site for a major mixed use development including a new Sainsbury's store. Due to the alignment of the road, a portion of the allotment site was needed. In terms of the UDP planning policy, the loss of the allotment land was justified as "exceptional circumstances" due to the considerable advantages of the development. The rider in the policy that "this will be subject to the provision of an appropriate, equivalent, long-term recreational community benefit" was addressed by the renovation of the remaining plots and the provision of new facilities.

The planning application for the new Sainsbury store generated considerable Section 106 and regeneration benefits for the area, including phase 1 of the relief road and a contribution to phase 2 as well as affordable housing and a variety of environmental improvements. Also included in the Section 106 was in the region of £500,000 of improvements to the reduced allotment site including site reconfiguration, fencing, drainage, paths, clubhouse, sheds etc.

Therefore it is the conclusion of the planning officer that the extensive improvements to the allotment site offset the loss of poor quality, underused plots.

5.3 Provision of new sites/site improvement through Section 106 Agreements

- 5.3.1 Government guidance refers to "Greening the residential environment" and specifically states that "local planning authorities should have clear policies for the protection and creation of open space and playing fields, and new housing developments should incorporate sufficient provision where such spaces are not already adequately provided within easy access of the new housing".⁶³
- 5.3.2 The Birmingham UDP states that: "New residential developments generate a need for public open space and children's play facilities to serve the occupants of the new homes. These will be secured through Section 106 agreements, where appropriate. This will normally be provided within the curtilage of the site but in certain circumstances off-site provision or improvements to existing local facilities, including playing fields, may be more appropriate."⁶⁴

⁶² Conversation with Team Leader, Planning and Regeneration- South 7th April 2010

⁶³ Planning Policy Guidance 3 on Housing

⁶⁴ Birmingham UDP, Chapter 3, Page 41.



- 5.3.3 There are planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990⁶⁵ to secure the provision of public open space, recreational and other community facilities as part of new developments. The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Public Open Space in New Residential Developments is designed to fulfil the requirement that Local Plan policies make clear what types of development will give rise to such Section 106 agreements.
- 5.3.4 The City Council adopted the SPD on 9 July, 2007.⁶⁶ The purpose of the SPD is to provide guidance to developers on where open space and children play contributions will be sought. Decisions on what open space is provided where, as a result of Section 106 agreements, are made with reference to the Constituency Open Space Action Plans. They are part of the Parks Strategy.⁶⁷
- 5.3.5 However there is doubt that allotments can be included within the desirability of providing 'public open space' as they have restricted access and are not included in the formal designation of 'public open space'.
- 5.3.6 In all the policy documents, there is no reference to the possibility of providing new allotment sites or improvements to existing allotment sites through Section 106 contributions.
- 5.3.7 The Section 106 process seeks to meet new needs generated by the development, rather than meeting existing unmet needs in the immediate locality.
- 5.3.8 Large developments do give rise to the need to secure improvements to recreational and other community facilities. Therefore provision of new allotment sites, where there is a proven demand, could be considered. Improvements to existing sites could also be considered.
- 5.3.9 Section 106 funds have been acquired in the last 10 years to support localised site improvements at Lower Tinkers Farm (Northfield), Berwood Farm (Erdington) and Tennial Lane (Quinton).

Case Study of the redevelopment of the former Selly Oak Hospital Site on Raddlebarn Road

There have been anecdotal suggestions that there should be allotment provision secured either within or near the site "to make up for" the loss of plots at the Harborne Lane site.

The point of view of the planning officer⁶⁸

The view of the planning officer is that the issue regarding the allotment site on Harborne Lane has been concluded within the development of that site and there are no unmet obligations. In other words there is no planning policy justification for seeking to make up for the loss of plots at Harborne Lane when considering the development of Selly Oak hospital site.

A number of UDP policies are relevant to the redevelopment of the Selly Oak hospital site. These include the policies on public open space and children's play which state that "New residential developments generate a need for public open space and children's play facilities to serve the occupants of the new homes. These will be secured through Section 106 agreements, where

⁶⁵ See PPG17

⁶⁶ See www.birmingham.gov.uk/publicopenspace

⁶⁷ 'The Future of Birmingham's Parks' which was developed in the early 2000's and approved by Cabinet in November 2006 after extensive public consultation and formal adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

⁶⁸ Conversation with Team Leader, Planning and Regeneration- South 7th April 2010



Allotments

appropriate.” Policies on playing fields are also relevant, and the UDP recognises the need to protect playing field provision, preferably on site.

The expectations for this site are set out in the development brief which is about to be adopted.

The key priorities for Planning Obligations Section 106 include:

- Retention or relocation of existing playing fields and associated facilities with appropriate provision for maintenance;
- Provision of public open space and play facilities on site and contribution to off-site improvements with appropriate provision for maintenance;
- A contribution to **community and leisure facilities** to serve the development (these are to serve the occupiers of the new houses, suggestions include: meeting rooms, library, indoor sport and swimming and adult education)
- Other improvements and measures including affordable housing, improvements to the canal, highway and traffic management works.

There is no mention of allotments in the list of community and leisure facilities or in the list of open space uses. It is however clear that there are a number of priorities for this site and the brief goes on to say that “The priorities for provision of improved community and leisure facilities will be assessed at the time planning applications for the site are submitted.” For example Section 106 contributions to off site improvements could be directed to improving allotment provision in the area if this was considered a priority.

5.3.10 The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations came in to force in April 2010. CIL charges will be based on simple formulae which relate the size of the charge to the size and character of the development paying it. The proceeds of the levy will be spent on local and sub-regional infrastructure to support the development of the area. The definition of infrastructure is relatively wide and can include not only parks, but green spaces and recreational facilities.



6 Management

6.1 The Allotments Office

6.1.1 The City Council is legally obliged to provide allotments under the various allotment acts. As an allotment authority, it cannot divest itself overall responsibility for managing allotment land. In Birmingham that means the Allotments Service manages 637.25 acres of land, divided into 115 sites and over 7,000 plots.

6.1.2 The current Allotments Service is provided by 3.25 officers within the Directorate of Environment & Culture. The Allotments Finance and Records Officer (supported by the Parks Facilities Manager) is responsible for strategy, finance, legal issues, reports and liaison. The Rent and Records Officer handles records management, tenancy agreements, rental payments and plot enquiries. There is one Allotment Liaison Officer 'out on the patch' carrying out the day to day management of sites and local liaison. In comparison with the other major cities contacted, this is a small office relative to the number of sites and plot holders. In comparison the allotments offices in Bristol (3.6 officers) manage 3,800 plots; Leeds (2 officers) 3,400 plots; and Nottingham (2 officers) 3,300 plots. The current staffing is as follows:

- Parks Facilities Manager (25% time)
 - Overall responsibility for the Allotments Service;
 - Strategic development.
- Allotments Finance & Records Officer
 - Financial Management;
 - Strategic planning, policy development;
 - Committee reports;
 - Legal issues;
 - Property management;
 - Publicity and events;
 - Guidance Notes and Newsletters;
 - Liaison with Associations and Allotments Council.
- Allotments Rent & Records Officer
 - Records management – tenancy agreements, rental payments;
 - Plot enquiries, information packs;
 - General enquiries, liaison with Allotment Associations and Allotments Council;



Allotments

- Preparation of Newsletters, graphic design;
- Procurement – requisitioning.
- The Allotment Liaison Officer carries out day to day management of sites and liaison with Associations and individual ploholders. His key responsibilities are:
 - Carry out an annual risk assessment of every site;
 - Discuss and resolve issues raised by Association Secretaries;
 - Identify and order repairs and maintenance;
 - Monitor Grounds Maintenance;
 - Inspect plot cultivation and serve any warnings or eviction notices as required;
 - Arbitrate in any disputes involving ploholders;
 - Enforce the Allotment Rules or any relevant laws applying to allotments;
 - Assist with 'self help' and grant applications.

6.2 Grounds Maintenance Contractors

6.2.1 The Council's appointed service providers; Glendale, Quadron and Birmingham Parks & Nurseries (BPN), carry out programmed Grounds Maintenance of allotment sites. This includes:

- Amenity mowing;
- Path and road spraying;
- Hedge maintenance;
- Brook course clearance.

6.2.2 Vacant plot refurbishment is now undertaken by the contractors at additional cost according to the level and location of vacancies.

6.2.3 Monitoring of Grounds Maintenance work is performed by the Allotment Liaison Officer through the new Parks Operational Performance Information (POPI) system which records assets and works orders.

6.3 Local Management

6.3.1 The City Council is legally obliged to provide allotments under the various allotment acts. As an allotment authority, it cannot divest itself overall responsibility for managing allotment land. In Birmingham that means the Allotments Service manages 637.25 acres of land.

6.3.2 A proportion of the responsibility for managing this land is delegated:

- To the plot holder who cultivates his/her plot;



- To the site allotment societies.

6.3.3 The degree to which the responsibility for the land management is delegated from the Council to the allotment societies varies across the country; it also varies across Birmingham.

6.3.4 Devolved Management has strong support from Parliament and the Government. Much of the following is drawn from a brief to the Local Government Association.⁶⁹ This paper sets out the advantages and disadvantages of devolved management and discusses models, processes and safe guards.

6.4 Models of Devolved Management

6.4.1 The advantages of Devolved Management are economic, resulting in reduced costs for local authorities and social, resulting in community development.

6.4.2 The briefing paper referred to earlier⁷⁰ refers to five different models of devolution according to the extent of duties to be devolved.

- Dependence: the local authority manages the site with neither the plot holder or societies playing any practical role;
- Participation: plot holders accept responsibility for minor maintenance works;
- Delegation: a properly constituted allotment society accepts formal responsibility for a range of duties under licence – a proportion of rental income is released for this purpose e.g society arranging tenancies and maintenance but the local authority carries out repairs, pays for overheads such as water;
- Semi-autonomy: the allotment society leases the site from the Council, arranges tenancy agreements and reinvests revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repairs and capital items. Depending on the terms of the lease, the tenants may become tenants of the society rather than the local authority;
- Autonomy: the allotment society purchases the land and operates independently. Complete privatisation of the local authority allotment's portfolio would be problematic, however, given the statutory duty to provide.

6.5 Financial Advantages of Devolved Management

6.5.1 If local authorities raised plot rents to a level that realistically reflected both the revenue (ongoing maintenance) and capital (fencing, roads and water provision) costs, there could be a legal challenge and ultimately a potential decline in plot take up.

⁶⁹ www.btinternet.com/~richard.wiltshire/lga4.htm. A Brief Prepared for the Local Government Association's Working Group on a Best Practice Regime for Allotments December 1998

⁷⁰ see 53 above



Allotments

6.5.2 Allotments, just like other recreational facilities such as swimming pools, libraries and leisure centres are subsidised by the Council. However allotments differ in a key respect from most other recreational facilities in that once provided, they are not universally available. Exclusive occupancy is granted to an individual effectively for an indefinite period. In these circumstances, there is a justification for saying that the tenants have an obligation to reduce the burden on the public purse. Economic rents would be unacceptably high; therefore there is a good case for expecting tenants to contribute "in kind". This contribution includes a degree of self management achieved through the formation of associations acting as agents for the local authority.

6.6 Community Development Advantages of Devolved Management

6.6.1 Community based management of green open spaces is increasingly necessary and desirable. It is explicitly encouraged by the government in its guidance on preparing green space strategies.

6.6.2 In Birmingham, a recent Overview and Scrutiny Report on Resources for Improving Parks⁷¹ demonstrated the importance of the Birmingham Open Space Forum (BOSF) in attracting resources to parks and generating community development and local pride.

6.6.3 The City's Community Strategy⁷² and its Local Area Agreement Action Plan⁷³ stress the importance of partnership working throughout the City.

6.7 Devolvment Issues

6.7.1 Devolved Management needs commitment from the local authority, the allotment societies and plot holders. Volunteer managers can be easy targets for dissatisfied plot holders. The capacity for an allotment society to take on and succeed with Devolved Management will depend in part on the duties to be devolved – this depends on the type of delegation. Capacity also depends on the leadership abilities of present and future tenants and both the willingness and ability of plot holders to take on voluntary community effort. This is likely to vary across the City with the character of the local community. Any allotment society has to be democratically elected and must operate with fairness and accountability. Their performance has to be monitored as the local authority has a statutory obligation to provide equal access for all residents to allotment land.

6.7.2 The greater the level of devolution of management, the greater the responsibilities assumed by the plot holders. Given the benefits to local authorities of devolving management, it is appropriate for them to help identify and facilitate capacity development of allotment societies. Training in financial and management skills and enabling access to specialist knowledge may be required.

⁷¹ See www.birmingham.gov.uk

⁷² Birmingham Sustainable Community Strategy. Birmingham 2026. Published by Be Birmingham.

⁷³ Birmingham LAA 2008/11. Working Together for a Better Birmingham. Published by Be Birmingham.



6.7.3 Whilst great autonomy of allotment societies reduces the day to day work load of local authority officers, it is essential that a mechanism is put in place (and reviewed from time to time) to ensure that allotment societies can communicate effectively with the Council.

6.8 Levels of Devolved Management in Birmingham

6.8.1 Although the City Council has overall responsibility for the management of allotment sites, certain functions are devolved to Allotment Associations. Most Associations operate under a Basic Agreement established decades ago; a small number operate under a Self Management Agreement and in the absence of an Association (or an effective Committee) responsibility falls to Allotment Officers - these are known as Departmental Sites.

6.8.2 The table below shows the current⁷⁴ levels of devolved management in the City:

	Number of Sites	Total Plots	Let	Vacant	% vacant
Self Managed	19	1373	1313	60	4.6
Association Sites (Basic Agreement)	75	5348	4830	518	9.7
Departmental Sites	18	391	341	50	12.8
TOTAL CITY WIDE	112	7112	6484	628	8.8

6.9 Responsibilities of Associations

6.9.1 The Basic Agreement requires Associations to perform the following key tasks :

- Plot lettings;
- Rent collection;
- Enforcement of the Allotment Rules.

6.9.2 In general, Associations perform the first two functions to varying degrees of accuracy but tend to avoid the 'police' role due to increasing confrontation.

6.9.3 Over time, the City has given Associations the additional roles of monitoring plot cultivation and issuing the first 'warning' letter and of monitoring horticultural maintenance performance. In

⁷⁴ figures taken at 26 April 2010; exclude 25 plots at Garwood Road (closed), 26 at Dawberry Fields (due to be reconstructed) and 80 plots at Victoria Jubilee.



Allotments

practice, very few Associations carry out those tasks and it falls to Allotments Officers to make assessments during their site inspections and, where cultivation is concerned, issue the warnings.

- 6.9.4 Self Managed Associations have a separate Agreement that requires the execution of the basic tasks mentioned above, but also provides the financial means for them to carry out minor day to day repairs and permitted horticultural maintenance. They also have to provide an Account Statement of their income and expenditure.
- 6.9.5 At Departmental Sites, all of these functions are carried out by Allotment Officers.

6.10 Performance

6.10.1 Most Associations perform basic tasks to a reasonable standard, albeit that detail is too often lacking on Tenancy Agreements and in the submission of rents. Performance has generally deteriorated over the past decade. The increased frequency of Secretary changes has undoubtedly contributed to this decline. At the extreme, a small number of Associations have had those functions taken away because of poor quality and that is becoming an annual feature. Nevertheless there are good sites that operate well. Associations such as Manor House Lane, Donegal Road and May Lane are the leading Self Managed Associations and are complemented by good non self managed Associations such as Bells Sports Field, Wheelers Lane, Westfield/Pereira Road, Walkers Heath and Fox Hollies No.2. They would perform well as Self Managed sites as too, potentially, should Coventry Road and Harborne Hill. Where the performance of Associations is inconsistent or simply inadequate, this places additional work on Allotment Officers to correct or take over the procedures usually during the key period of rent collection. There is probably a sound argument for making training obligatory.⁷⁵

6.11 Remuneration

6.11.1 Non self managed Associations receive a commission of 9% of the rents collected. Under a separate Agreement, the BDAC receives a 1% commission. Self Managed Associations retain 60% of rent collected. This is then split 50/50 into their Repairs Account (from which they pay for maintenance) and the Association Account (from which they can pay for improvements to the Association facilities). The Repairs Account is audited, the other is not as it is subsumed within the Association's general income.

6.12 Co-production

6.12.1 The concept of 'co-production' or 'self-sufficiency' is an idea that is currently being researched by local authorities which has the ultimate aim of self-reliant individuals and communities who rely less

⁷⁵ Information from Allotments Office



on public agencies. This approach recognises that the public are not consumers of public services, rather that outcomes are typically produced as a result of joint action by citizens/communities and public bodies.⁷⁶ This theory is gaining popularity because of the need for local government to operate with considerably fewer resources in the years ahead, alongside a drive for greater empowerment of communities. However in order for communities to become more self-sufficient, they need good leaders and strong, well organised groups and supportive networks.

6.13 Birmingham and District Allotments Council

6.13.1 The Birmingham and District Allotments Council (BDAC)⁷⁷ are a voluntary body which works to ensure that allotments across the City receive the best service for allotments holders and Associations. Their website states that:

- We work with Allotment Associations, allotment holders, City Allotment Officers and City Councillors for the benefit of allotments;
- We support Allotment Associations with advice and information which enables them to carry out their tasks;
- We act as an active 'watchdog' to ensure the City provides the maintenance and repairs for allotment sites;
- We encourage Associations to take on self-management/self help;
- We play an active part in influencing allotment policy so that any changes are for the benefit of allotment holders and Associations;
- Organising competitions for individuals and Associations.

6.14 Allotments Working Party

6.14.1 This is the successor to the Allotments Sub-Committee and is the consultative forum for allotments issues. The group consists of three Elected Members, Allotment Officers and four representatives of the Birmingham & District Allotments Council, and meets quarterly. Current members are:

- Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture (Chair);
- two vacancies for Elected Members;
- four Allotments Officers;
- Birmingham and District Allotments Association; Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer;
- One vacancy.

⁷⁶ The Challenge of Co-Production, David Boyle and Michael Harris, NEF & NESTA December 2009.

⁷⁷ Information from the website www.bdacallotments.webs.com/



7 Finance

7.1 Annual Revenue Costs

- 7.1.1 From a financial perspective, allotments are substantially subsidised with rental income falling far short of expenditure. In 2008/09, the Allotments Service cost some £467k with rental income of £75k, giving a subsidy from the City Council of 523%. The figures for 2009/10 were costs of £450k and rental income of £95k – a reduction in the level of subsidy.
- 7.1.2 Budget reductions, voluntary staff loss and a comprehensive review of Grounds Maintenance will reduce expenditure to around £410 for 2010/11, with income likely to outturn again at £95k. The reduction of the subsidy is now a pre-requisite and rises in rent are inevitable.

7.2 Rental Income

- 7.2.1 The current comparison of income and service costs for Birmingham City Council shows a subsidy of around 374%, which is regarded as unsustainable. Increasingly, local authorities are revising their view of rent rates and introducing substantial rises to reduce the amount of support given. Many City Councils now apply a standard plot rate of between £40-50, whereas Birmingham's is £28 (gross).
- 7.2.2 Demand for allotments is at its highest level for a generation with most sites full and waiting times in some areas running at 3-5 years (at certain sites this increases to 5-10 years). It is unlikely that tenancy levels will increase without greater plot splitting or the addition of sites in key areas and occupancy potential must be assumed to be close to maximum. Demographically, there has been a gradual shift away from the traditional retired pensioner age groups towards younger, salaried, groups. There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest an expectation, even acceptance, of higher rent rates though the traditionalists will oppose any increase.
- 7.2.3 The current trend is towards smaller plots – in part this reflects lifestyle changes where time is short and serves to accommodate novice gardeners with limited ability and the elderly who want to downsize plots due to age/infirmary. The move towards smaller and mini-plots has been highly successful and has increased plot numbers by almost 300 in 2 years. Similarly, overall tenancy occupation has risen by c.25% in this period.
- 7.2.4 Large (double) plots could be split as opportunity arises to create more flexibility in plot provision, reflect public demand for smaller plots and ease pressure on waiting lists.
- 7.2.5 In 2001, the proportion of tenants over age 60 was 64.6%, the proportion now is 54%. Whilst this improves rental income potential, there is also a need to recognise that the older group is more likely to have limited income and there is an argument to preserve the 50% concession. This is



consistent with national policies that provide reduced charges for pensioners. Major rent rises would undoubtedly be felt by those on lower incomes.

7.2.6 Since 1999, the City's rent for a standard plot has increased by £5.50, or 30% (roughly 3% pa). During this period, inflation has risen by virtually the same amount. It is not perceived that any 'catch up' increase is necessarily required to balance inflation. There is clearly an argument to reduce the gap between income and subsidy and a more realistic scale of fees is defensible when set against the services of repairs, horticultural maintenance, water, staff etc that are expected by tenants.

7.2.7 The table below shows rent rates over time by size of plot:

Year	Small £	Standard £	Large £
2010	22.00	28.00	39.00
2009	22.00	28.00	39.00
2008	20.00	25.00	35.00
2007	20.00	25.00	35.00
2006	19.00	24.00	34.00
2005	19.00	24.00	34.00
2004	18.00	23.00	33.00
2003	17.00	22.00	32.00
2002	17.00	22.00	32.00
2001	17.00	22.00	32.00
2000	16.00	20.00	30.00

7.2.8 The Allotment Acts provided plots primarily for the working poor and there is an underlying philosophy that they should be affordable to those on low incomes. Ability to pay needs to be recognised as well as the conventional discount given to pensioners.

7.2.9 Commission for carrying out functions such as rent collection on behalf of the City has been set at 10% of rent for many years. Associations receive 9%, BDAC 1%. The higher the rent, the less justifiable this percentage in relation to the work performed or the quality demonstrated. This begs review. Self Management; 15 Associations have Management Agreements that allow the retention



Allotments

of 60% of rent for carrying out minor repairs or making other improvements to the Association or site. There is a financial benefit as the City does not have to pay labour costs or contractors' on-cost

7.3 Capital Costs of Site Maintenance and Improvement

- 7.3.1 The infrastructure of many allotment sites is approaching the end of its life expectancy and requires substantial funding to repair or upgrade facilities. Whilst local authorities are required by the Allotment Acts to provide a level of subsidy to the service, in reality, maintaining support at previous levels can only be achieved by raising income or by attracting external grant funding to Allotment Associations.
- 7.3.2 In the 1990s, declining tenancy figures prompted the review of a number of sites resulting in rationalisation or closure particularly in the south east of the City. The most significant of these was the reduction of the Bordesley Green site from which the Allotments Service gained capital receipts amounting to around £1.6m. A Capital Receipts Fund was created which provided refurbishment of the host site and other City-wide improvement schemes.
- 7.3.3 A further site disposal (the Robins) gave rise to the Florrie Pickering Memorial Fund which is now the repository for any future capital receipts.
- 7.3.4 Section 106 funds have also been acquired in the last 10 years to support localised site improvements at Lower Tinkers Farm (Northfield), Berwood Farm (Erdington) and Tennial Lane (Quinton).
- 7.3.5 Currently, there are 4 areas of former allotment land awaiting disposal – Court Lane, Erdington (part), Bulls Head, Stechford (all), Wychbury Road, Bartley Green (part) and Yardley Green Road, Small Heath (part). Declining land values have affected the likelihood of sale and income potential, but disposal might realise capital receipts of around £2m which would be used for allotment site improvements over the next 3-5 years.
- 7.3.6 One other pending land disposal will see the reduction of the Dawberry Fields site, Brandwood and its reconstruction as a fully appointed 26 plot site possibly by 2011.

7.4 Grants in 2010

- 7.4.1 With the need for local authorities to operate with considerably fewer resources in the years ahead, it is very important that Associations become more able to attract funding from other sources. A number of Associations have been successful in acquiring grants from various sources (e.g. Awards for All - Big Lottery Fund, Sutton Coldfield Municipal Charities and BBC Breathing Spaces). However applying for grant funding is a skilled process and requires to have volunteers who are able and



willing to find out what grants could be available and to understand the application process. The following grants were obtained in 2010⁷⁸:

SITE	AMOUNT	FUNDING SOURCE	PROJECT
Newhall	£1,500	Community Chest	Joint funding with Association for shed
Scribers Lane	£2,000 £5,000	Community Chest Grass Roots Foundation	Fencing
Shades of Black	£6,740	Community Chest	Relocation of project from Uplands to Francis Road
Aldridge Road	£2,500	Community Chest	Joint funding – pavilion roof replacement
Uffculme	£2,000	Community Chest	Fencing
Falcon Lodge	£1,500	Community Chest	Steel container
Birches Green	£500	Community Chest	Joint funding for bridge repair
The Leys	£1,900	Community Chest	Concrete shed
Fox Hollies No2	£3,000	Community Chest	Gates, tools, machinery
Gospel Lane	£535	Community Chest	Fencing
Clay Lane	c.£ 2,500	Community Chest	Replacement sheds
Warstock Lane	£8,608 £5,000 £10,000	Big Lottery Breathing Places Awards for All	Raised beds, wildlife pool Activity day Fencing
Donegal Road	£3,616	Community Chest	Shed

⁷⁸ Information from Allotments Office



7.5 Big Lottery Funding

7.5.1 The policies of the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) were set out by the policy officer from the Big Lottery Birmingham.⁷⁹ BIG are not just simply a distributor of National Lottery Funds; they offer support to the sectors that they fund, work with other funders to develop and share leading practice and promote the analysis of the impact of their funding to policy makers. Their three UK wide themes are:

- Community learning and creating opportunity;
- Promoting community cohesion and safety;
- Promoting well-being.

7.5.2 As a result of consultation they are focussing on those undergoing difficult transitions in their lives or experiencing isolation. BIGs funding aims to contribute to a stronger civil society where more people feel part of their community.

7.5.3 'Awards for All' is the Big Lottery Fund's small grants programme, which aims to help improve local communities and the lives of people most in need. Between £300 and £10,000 grants are available to help improve local communities and the lives of people most in need. They are awarded to voluntary or community associations, schools, parish/town councils or health bodies.

7.5.4 Funding is aimed towards projects that meet one or more of the following outcomes:

- People have better chances in life – with better access to training and development to improve their life skills;
- Stronger communities – with more active citizens working together to tackle their problems;
- Improved rural and urban environments – which communities are better able to access and enjoy;
- Healthier and more active people and communities.

7.5.5 The Awards for All programme is suitable for improvements to allotments and the local office of BIG are very keen to receive more applications from Birmingham. The City is only receiving 50% of the level of resources that it should – some more affluent areas of the West Midlands are receiving 400% more resources because of the greater number of applications being submitted. BIG have found engaging with Birmingham City Council difficult.

7.5.6 BOSF recently held a seminar to demonstrate to their members how to fill in the Awards for All application form. One or two allotment groups were amongst those who attended.

7.5.7 Another funding strand "Local Food" was launched in 2009 – a £50m programme to support a variety of food-related projects to help to make locally grown food accessible and affordable to local

⁷⁹ Meeting 30th March 2010 with Cllr Roger Harmer



communities. Unfortunately this programme is now closed to new bids as it was massively oversubscribed.

7.6 Warstock Lane Case Study

In 2008, the Association successfully applied for a grant of £8,608 from the Big Lottery Fund under the Breathing Places grants programme. The grant was initially used towards the construction of a wildlife area and pond and this was completed and formally opened on 7 June 2009. A further £5,000 was received from BBC Spring Watch to support this celebratory event. The grant also funded the construction of a raised bed plot specifically intended for elderly residents of the adjoining Servite Housing sheltered accommodation. A gateway allowing direct access to the allotments was created and the Association constructed raised beds and pathways allowing full access for residents. A formal opening ceremony was held on 21 March 2010. In addition the Association gained a further grant of £10,000 in 2009 which although originally intended for road and path improvements was re-assigned to provide fencing to enhance site security.



8 Demand and Supply of Allotments

8.1 National Trends and the Policy Response

8.1.1 There has been a recent surge in demand for allotments. The recent New Local Government Network (NLGN) publication *"Can You Dig it?"*⁸⁰ suggests that this is due to:

- The interest in "growing your own" generated by popular TV Chefs;
- Organic food campaigns;
- Improved awareness of climate change and the importance of environmental sustainability;
- Increasing food prices;
- Challenges to stereotypes about allotment growers.

8.1.2 It is estimated that there are nationally 100,000 on waiting lists for allotments⁸¹.

8.1.3 At the same time the number of plots is decreasing. In the late 1940s there were 1.4 million allotments; popularity was high due to World War II and the 'Dig for Victory' campaign which encouraged people to grow their own food. In the 1980s and 1990s, plots were sold off by Councils around the Country primarily due to lack of demand. Not only have the number of sites declined, but also the number of plots within sites. Today an insufficient supply of about 200,000 allotment plots remain.⁸²

8.1.4 At national level, there has been a vigorous response to the surge in interest in growing vegetables. The shortage of plots and long waiting lists especially in London have resulted in numerous press articles.⁸³ Much of the information in this chapter is taken from the report *"Can You Dig It"*.

8.1.5 The report suggests that more innovative approaches need to be adopted involving converting under used land into more productive allotments. Some local authorities are considering using land within existing public parks and open spaces for allotments.

8.1.6 London's "Capital Growth" project aims to create over 2,000 new growing plots to feed the athletes for the 2012 Olympics. Public organisations such as schools, hospitals and councils have pledged to make land available, as have the National Trust, Royal Parks and British Waterways.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Can You Dig it? Meeting Community Demand for Allotments by Nick Hope & Victoria Ellis. New Local Government Network September 2009.

⁸¹ NSLAG (2009), Survey Data from 'A Survey of Allotment Waiting Lists in England'. Transition Town West Kirby and National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.

⁸² LV (2009), 'Brits Rediscover the Good Life', Press Release, Liverpool Victoria, 2 June 2009.

⁸³ Davies, C. (2009), 'Queen turns corner of palace back yard into allotment'. The Observer, 14 June 2009. Osborne, H. (2007), 'Harrods Unveils Rooftop Allotments' The Guardian, 17 April 2007. Miller, A (2008), 'Up the Allotments', The Telegraph, 24 May 2008.



- 8.1.7 Brownfield land (areas that have been previously developed but are currently unused) offers potential for allotments, subject to reassurances on lack of contamination. With redevelopment of sites slowing due to the recession, this vacant land offers temporary grown spaces. Sheffield City Council recently requested that the governments gives them a “rebuttable right” to enter into temporary leases compulsorily with owners of vacant Brownfield land, which they could then sublease to community groups.⁸⁵ New developments are being encouraged to incorporate roofs strong enough to support greenhouses and rooftop gardens. Perhaps large scale urban development should be forced to allocated land for allotments, as residential densities rise.
- 8.1.8 The report also goes on to suggest “top landowners”⁸⁶ in Hampshire, Cheshire and Kent make available small areas of land for local residents to establish 10 year community leasehold projects.

8.2 Demand in Birmingham

- 8.2.1 This national increase in demand has been seen in some areas of Birmingham, but not others. The major areas of demand are Moseley/Kings Heath, Edgbaston and Sutton Coldfield. Historically there was high demand in Handsworth, but there are now many vacant plots.
- 8.2.2 Within Birmingham, encouraging the take-up of plots features strongly. During the period 1999 - 2000 the Council worked hard to stimulate demand with a multicultural advertising campaign across the City “Allotment Gardens welcome everyone”, “Grow enough food to feed your family - food that’s free of additives or preservatives”, “You’ll probably save money on your groceries and the exercise will keep you fit”. This was funded from capital receipts.
- 8.2.3 There are (at May 2010) nearly 833 names on waiting lists for plots. Some of these names will be on the waiting list for several sites. The number of vacant plots available in the City is approximately 75% of the unmet demand – they are predominantly in the south east of the City and in Handsworth. The reasons why there is still a waiting list, despite there being vacant plots are:
- The vacant plots may be located away from the areas of demand;
 - They may be on unpopular sites;
 - They may be too overgrown from lack of previous cultivation for inexperienced new tenants to take on;
 - The re-letting process may be slow.
- 8.2.4 Analysis of vacant plots and the waiting list as at April 2010:

⁸⁴ Mulholland, H (2008), ‘Boris Johnson unveils plans to create 2012 new vegetable gardens in London’, The Guardian, 4 November 2008.

⁸⁵ LGA (2009), Lead Authority: Sheffield City Council

⁸⁶ Large areas of land held by an elite group of wealthy landowners such as the Duke of Westminster



Allotments

CONSTITUENCY	TOTAL PLOTS	VACANT PLOTS	WAITING LIST	% VACANT	COMMENTS
Edgbaston	706	22	50	3	With the exception of the Guinea Gardens (Westbourne Road) which saw demand grow rapidly following exposure on BBC 's Gardeners World, other sites in Edgbaston (Westfield, Pereira and Meadow Road) have a much more modest level of demand which is being met.
Erdington	572	71	72	12.4%	In Erdington, the more central sites have always attracted tenants and more recent growth has seen significant take-up at outlying sites such as Court Lane, Berwood Farm and Birches Green which had hitherto struggled to attract tenants. However, to the north, Wyrley Birch and Kingstanding which hitherto had problems, are seeing more growth.
Hall Green	773	53	181	6.9%	The rise in demand within Moseley/Kings Heath has seen take up spread to neighbouring Billesley, Brandwood, Kings Norton, Stirchley and Bournville. The majority of demand centres around Billesley Lane/Wheelers Lane. Lettings at Moor Green have been suspended until the re-establishment of the Committee.
Hodge Hill	937	214	10	23%	The south-east of the City (Yardley to Washwood Heath) has always had subdued demand. Hodge Hill Constituency has over 200 vacant plots available predominantly at the Bordesley Green and Burney Lane sites. Francis Road in Stechford has a large proportion of the site held in reserve as a nature conservation area, but is likely to be returned to cultivation.
Ladywood	15	0	3	0	There is only one site in this area. Despite its poor location, it has enjoyed a strong level of demand since opening in 2005.
Northfield	586	20	70	3.4%	Rising demand over the last 12 months has extended take up further west of the City into Quinton, Northfield and West Heath.
Perry Barr	1268	135	70	10.6%	Handsworth Wood, particularly the Uplands and Sandwell sites, experienced a relative decline until 2007 when numbers began to rise, though they have still failed to reach capacity. The retention and reconstruction of part of the former Victoria Jubilee allotments was partly based on historic demand within the Handsworth area and the new site will provide an additional 80 plots. This site is expected to open in early 2010 and already has a waiting list of over 80 names.
Selly Oak	765	39	169	5%	The rise in demand within Moseley/Kings Heath has seen take up spread to neighbouring Billesley, Brandwood, Kings Norton, Stirchley and Bournville.
Sutton Coldfield	632	7	208	1%	Sutton Coldfield has generally maintained a consistent balance between supply and demand. With the recent surge in demand, every site is full with significant waiting lists.
Yardley	864	67	71	7.7%	The south-east of the City (Yardley to Washwood Heath) has lost the greatest quantity of plots due to low levels of demand. Newbridge, Oaklands and Bulls Head sites were closed and Bordesley Green, Yardley Green and Clay Lane have all been rationalised. Fragile growth at Francis Road and Burney Lane has not yet extended to produce any waiting lists in this part of the City.
TOTALS	7112	628	833	8.8%	



8.3 Numbers of sites

- 8.3.1 The Thorpe Report (1969) recommended a minimum provision of 7 plots per 1,000 head of population. Birmingham's is slightly better than this ratio with 7,112 plots for a population approaching 1 million (2001 census).
- 8.3.2 Planning Policy Guidance Note PPG17⁸⁷ sets out obligations to assess the need for open space provision including allotments, sports and recreational facilities. The Companion Guide to the Government's Planning Policy Guidance states that it is "desirable for local authorities... to provide and rent allotments (and) to keep a waiting list as this helps to identify the level of unmet demand and its spatial distribution". In practice, plot letting is predominantly carried out by Allotment Associations who manage lists. Allotment Officers review lists annually in the Spring when the majority of vacant plots have been relet.
- 8.3.3 PPG17 also promotes the protection of "recreational facilities that are of high quality or of particular value to the community". It highlights those sites that provide a "community resource" or that "benefit wildlife and biodiversity". There is also a recommendation that provision is assessed within new developments to address a "facility that is in deficit".
- 8.3.4 The majority of the City's allotments were acquired in the 1920's and 1930's. Following the Second World War, tenancies began a slow decline resulting in site closures as the City expanded. Despite a Government review of allotments published in 1969 (the Thorpe Report) and the creation of Leisure Gardens, tenancies continued to reduce from a highpoint in the mid 1970's and, despite overt marketing of allotments in the late 1990's and early 2000's, levels dropped to around 5,000 (c 70% occupancy). However, in a reversal of historic trends, 2007 and 2008 saw a national resurgence of interest with increased enquiries and take up of plots.
- 8.3.5 Birmingham City Council now has 115 allotment sites as part of the former Victoria Jubilee Allotments adjacent to Handsworth Park has now been reopened as an 80 plot site.
- 8.3.6 Since 2005 the Allotments Service has acquired a new site in Soho (Ladywood) and additional land at Thornbridge Avenue (Perry Barr), but this does not balance the loss of land at Billesley Lane (Hall Green) and Harborne Lane (Selly Oak). The redesigned Victoria Jubilee site (Perry Barr) is now open. In collaboration with Birmingham Property Services and Housing, Allotment Officers are exploring the possibility of acquiring former 'garage land' predominantly in the Sutton area to provide land for use with raised beds.
- 8.3.7 Officers are also collaborating on the Ladywood Allotments Initiative to identify sites adjoining social housing that could support allotment gardening.
- 8.3.8 Allotments are provided and managed under the various Allotments Acts, principally 1908, 1925 and 1950. All but 8 sites are statutory and their status as allotments is therefore protected in law. Under

⁸⁷ www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/planningpolicyguidance17



Allotments

the Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908 (section 23), local authorities have a duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments there they are of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments in that area. The Act also requires that any written representation for allotment provision must be given consideration.

8.4 Losses and gains of sites and parts of sites

8.4.1 Since the year 2000 (total allotment land 693.42 acres) there have been losses of 56.92 acres and gains of 0.75 acres. The area in 2010 is therefore 637.25 acres. The changes in area of allotment land are shown below:

YEAR	ACREAGE	NOTES
2010	637.25 acres	Addition of Victoria Jubilee site expected Spring 2010
2009	637.25 acres	
2008	637.25 acres	
2007	637.07 acres + 0.18 acres	Gain – Thornbridge Avenue (Land acquired from Housing)
2006	637.07 acres	
2005	649.84 acres +0.57 acres -12.54 acres -0.80 acres -1.73 acres	New Site – gain Matthew Boulton Rationalisation – Loss Yardley Green Road (part) (Assigned to Waverley thru School Scheme) Loss – Gospel Lane (part) (Acquired by Kineton Green School) Loss – Billesley Lane (part) (retained by Moseley Golf Club)
2004	651.57 acres -3.16 acres	Rationalisation Loss – Dawberry Fields (part) (Allenscroft Initiative)
2003	654.73 acres -5.71 acres	Loss – Harborne Lane (part) (Selly Oak By-Pass Scheme)
2002	660.44 acres -3.2 acres	Rationalisation – Loss – Wychbury Road (part)
2001	663.64 acres -2.48 acres -3.83 acres	Site Closed – Loss – Bulls Head (all) Site Closed – Loss – Formans Road (all)



YEAR	ACREAGE	NOTES
	-4.20 acres -11.55 acres -2.37 acres -3.00 acres	(POS/Flood alleviation scheme) Site Closed – Loss – Oaklands (all) Site Closed – Loss – Robins (all) (sale to Europackaging) Rationalisation – Loss – Slingfield (part) (returned to POS – West Heath Rec) Rationalisation – Loss – Clay Lane (part) (Nature Conservation)
2000	691.07 acres -1.20 acres -0.49 acres 0.66 acres 693.42	Rationalisation – Loss – Berwood Farm (part) (Pitts Farm Development) Rationalisation – Loss – Lower Tinkers Farm (part) (Bellsfield Development) Rationalisation – Loss – Warwick Road (part) (Transferred to Tyseleys School) N.B FIGURES DO NOT INCLUDE GARWOOD ROAD, – CLOSED, BUT DECISION PENDING ON DISPOSAL

8.5 Site Occupancy Levels

8.5.1 Occupancy by size of plots:

	Number	%	No let to tenants	% let
Mini plots	121	1.7	109	90.1
Small plots	1439	20.2	1302	90.5
Standard plots	5274	74.2	4626	87.7
Large plots	275	3.8	251	91.3
Total	7109		6288	

(excludes Dawberry Fields and Garwood Rd)



Allotments

8.5.2 Occupancy over time:

DATE	NO OF PLOTS	TENANTS	OCCUPANCY
August 09	7071	6381	90.24%
October 08	6905	6076	87.99%
September 07	6843	5797	84.69%
October 06	6785	5459	80.46%
September 05	6836	5243	76.70%
April 04	6915	5149	74.46%
June 03	6907	5025	72.75%
October 02	6892	5123	74.33%
September 01	7073	5268	74.48%

8.6 Protecting existing sites

- 8.6.1 It seems likely that the best way of protecting existing sites is to ensure that they are fully cultivated and well used by the local community. In the 1990s when allotment gardening was not so popular, some sites became untenable and were either closed or rationalised particularly in the east of the City. Capital receipts accruing from disposals helped to fund City-wide improvements to allotment stock. At the same time, sites became a target for developers.
- 8.6.2 The planning context has been set out earlier in this report; the UDP policy states that "Allotments provide a much needed facility especially in areas where private gardens are limited and they will continue to be protected." "Planning permission will not be granted for the redevelopment of allotments simply because the allotments have fallen out of use and become derelict. Where it can be demonstrated that the demand for allotments has fallen, consideration will be given to alternative uses for surplus allotments."
- 8.6.3 The implication is that they should be protected. Planning permission will only be granted for alternative uses where it can be demonstrated that demand has fallen and there are exceptional circumstances.



8.6.4 Members were keen to look at a particular case study illustrating current issues and therefore considered the following information for Court Lane Allotments:

Court Lane Allotments Erdington

Part of the allotment site off Court Lane was declared surplus to requirements by the Council in 1997 and the Government gave its consent to dispose of the 3.39 hectare site in February 2002. The site is situated between two council housing estates and adjacent to existing allotments. Within the Erdington private finance initiative housing project, there are proposals to re-allocate the former allotment land to housing and/or public open space.

The Committee from Court Lane Allotments attended the meeting of the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee on 13th January 2010 to tell Members about issues facing allotments today. With regard to their site (immediately adjacent to the former allotment land), their presentation said that "In the past two years the remaining portion of the allotment site has had new life breathed into it. As recently as 2007, only ten or so hardy plot-holders kept the site alive and safe from the developers grasp. Today we enjoy a full contingent, an active committee, a large number of new plot-holders and a waiting list of prospective growers. In addition we have tamed a wild corner to create the wildlife pond and garden, along with a cabin, vegetable beds for local schools and a raised bed to enable wheelchair access. But it does not stop there. Court Lane is not just a collection of plots for the growing of flowers and vegetables; we have also developed a social dimension. Our open days and seasonal events have become popular; not only with plot-holders but also local residents, many of whom were not aware of our existence! We even won a prize for our produce at 2008 Kings Heath Show! These features were much admired by the *Britain in Bloom* judges as part of the Erdington bid for a gold medal this year. We recently planted 500 hawthorn and blackthorn whips around the perimeter which, as they grow, will improve security for everyone. And the opening of the shop has added another dimension to Court Lane. This transformation earned us an award for the Most Improved Site in Birmingham last year".

The Committee would like to see at least some of the land which was formerly allotments adjacent to their site, returned to allotment use.

The proposed timetable for the Erdington Housing PFI will require an application for planning permission to be made. Although the government gave its consent to dispose of the former allotment land in 2002, it remains to be seen whether planning permission will be given for the whole site, or whether, given the demand, some of the allotments will be re-instated.



8.7 Ways to increase the number of sites

8.7.1 Alternative ways of providing new allotment sites in areas of the City with high demand include:

- Converting land currently in the Leisure Portfolio into allotments. Examples include converting land in parks and other public open spaces. Legal advice would need to be sought as this would comprise taking land out of public use and creating private open space;
- Converting land held by other Council portfolios such as Housing. This would require some sort of lease to ensure some security of tenure for ploholders. For example, Allotment Officers are exploring the possibility of using land formerly laid out as garages on Housing land in an area of Sutton Coldfield to provide raised beds for cultivation. Officers are also collaborating on the Ladywood Allotments Initiative to identify site adjoining social housing that could support allotment gardening;
- The Council leasing land from public bodies such as hospitals and colleges;
- The Council leasing privately owned brownfield land not being used for development, or facilitating Community Organisations entering into such a lease;
- The Council purchasing privately owned land;
- A private company purchasing land on behalf of shareholders to create allotment clubs. Shareholders would be given priority in the allocation of plots. The price of the land and therefore the viability of the scheme would depend on the planning status of the land and the degree of security of tenure of the ploholders. Such a company has been proposed by some Birmingham business people – “Local Allotments”.⁸⁸

8.7.2 Since 2005, the Council has acquired a new site in Soho (Ladywood) and additional land at Thornbridge Avenue (Perry Barr).

8.7.3 The financial cost to the Council of providing new sites includes:

- The capital cost of the land where it is not already in the ownership of the Council;
- The cost of leasing land from public bodies or private owners;
- The laying out of a site including installing fencing, access road, toilets, paths, water supply and clubhouse/storage sheds. The creation of a medium sized site of 80 plots would cost in the order of £400,000.

8.7.4 In the past the creation of new allotment sites has been financed by disposal of allotment land in areas of the City where demand is low, or where sites are no longer suitable for cultivation. Due to the recession, it is the Council's current policy not to sell land.

⁸⁸ 'Allotment group caters for green – fingered boom' by Toni Scotney. Birmingham Post. 27 May 2009.



- 8.7.5 There are four sites where there are plans to dispose of allotment land. The income is unlikely to be realised for three to four years. In the past surplus land has been sold for housing development, thereby creating income for improvements to allotments. The four sites likely to be disposed of may be used for leisure facilities and school relocation and will therefore not generate the capital receipts that their sale for private housing would have done.
- 8.7.6 There is no finance available at the present time from within the budget of the Leisure Portfolio to fund the purchase of new sites, nor the cost of allotment infrastructure on new sites.

8.8 Numbers of Plots

- 8.8.1 The quantity of plots fluctuates almost daily according to the scale of plot splitting and presently stands at 7112 of which 6484 (91.2%) are tenanted. Since March 2007 an additional 348 plots have been created through downsizing which largely reflects a demand for smaller plots and measures to address waiting lists. More importantly, tenancy numbers have increased by nearly 1,000 in this period reflecting the major demand for allotment gardening across the country. Analysis suggests a marked increase in female tenants and a gradual movement from older to younger gardeners.

8.9 Ways to increase the number of plots on existing sites.

- 8.9.1 Existing sites could be more intensely cultivated so that more people could cultivate each site. Ways of doing this include:
- Halving standard plots so that smaller plots are let, especially to novice gardeners;
 - Encouraging the surrender of multiple tenancies where an individual gardens several plots;
 - Bringing back into use former plots which have not been cultivated and have become too overgrown to attract new tenants. This would require horticultural works such as rotivating which would require funding;
 - Converting parts of the site which have never been previously cultivated, such as grassed amenity areas, into new plots – this would require funding.
- 8.9.2 There are also initiatives agreed with the Birmingham & District Allotments Council through the Allotments Working Party that seek to address high demand through the letting of smaller plots (i.e. halving standard plots) and encouraging the surrender of multiple tenancies where plotheolders agree to give up some of their plots for reletting.
- 8.9.3 On sites with amenity grass areas, Associations are being asked to identify any land that may be converted to allotments. Some allotment sites do have unused areas, generally former plots, which with suitable horticultural works could be returned to cultivation. Attention is also being focussed towards sites with shrub beds or amenity grass areas that can be converted to plots as well as clearing derelict areas and reinstating former plots. Sites at Moor Green (Moseley), Uffculme (Kings Heath), Aldridge Road (Perry Barr), Forge Farm (Sutton Newhall) and Hazelwell (Stirchley) have



been identified for an initial phase of works this Spring (2010) funded from savings on Grounds Maintenance.

8.10 Ways to increase the number of people enjoy vegetable gardening on existing sites.

8.10.1 Allotments have traditionally been let to individuals for their personal and family use, subject to the terms of the tenancy. This right to sole use and a degree of freedom in deciding how to use the plot is jealously guarded.

8.10.2 The way in which the plot is cultivated can only be challenged by the Allotment Service (including the Allotment Association where there is delegation), if it seriously contravenes the terms of the lease, and even then the process for evicting the tenant can be long winded and time consuming.

8.10.3 Some plots have a very small proportion of land used for cultivating vegetables. Other uses include:

- Flowerbeds (traditionally acceptable on allotments to a certain extent);
- Grass or paved areas where leisure can be enjoyed along the lines encouraged by the "Leisure Garden" movement resulting from the Thorpe Report on Allotments;⁸⁹
- Wildlife areas where nature plants are encouraged to benefit wildlife;
- Unkempt areas where cultivation does not take place – these areas may be covered with black plastic, or revert to perennial weeds including brambles.

8.10.4 The current procedure allows Allotment Associations or the Council's Allotment Officer to review levels of cultivation by inspecting plots and to issue a "letter of concern" to the tenant where an acceptable standard is not being achieved. An acceptable standard is defined as "the majority of the plot under construction with the remainder under preparation or well maintained". This letter of concern will provide a defined time period for improvement (maximum 28 days). Whether this is the responsibility of the Allotments Association or the Council's Allotment Officer depends on the degree of delegation for managing the site. At the end of the 28 days a re-inspection will take place and where improvement is inadequate, a formal Notice of Re-entry (28 days) is issued. This means that the tenant is legally evicted and the City Council regains possession of the plot. In practice, the personal circumstances of the tenant are taken into account and allowance made for illness, family difficulties etc.

⁸⁹ Thorpe Committee of Inquiry into Allotments, 1969 (Cmnd 4166)



8.11 Increasing community gardening

8.11.1 The Allotment Act of 1922 defines the term 'allotment garden' as "an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family".

8.11.2 Some allotments are used as "community allotments"⁹⁰ where:

- People work together for mutual benefit to regenerate neighbourhoods and strengthen bonds in a community producing food in a sustainable fashion;
- Promoting gardening as physical and mental health therapies and as recreation and training for people who are socially disadvantaged;
- Gardening projects for school children both primary and secondary;
- Projects aimed at promoting social inclusion and building confidence amongst some ethnic minority groups;
- Community projects on allotment sites enable more people to enjoy gardening, however care needs to be taken that the land is used in accordance with the Allotment Acts and that the project is well managed with a clear project leader taking on the tenancy.

8.12 Temporary Use of Vacant Land

8.12.1 GEML (Grow It, Eat It, Move It, Live it) started in April 2009 under the partnership of Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust and Ladywood Constituency. The 'Grow It' element is about looking at a range of unused private and public land sites across the Constituency (green space, communal drying areas, ex garage sites etc.) as potential 'community grow sites'. Working with various landowners, for example Housing, they aim to establish a protocol and procedure for transferring land sites over to a 'community grow site' on a temporary to mid term basis. Some of the land sites have a history of environmental issues and/or criminal activity; by converting these sites into productive community growing spaces, the project aims to reduce those activities. GEML also covers other elements, such as healthy eating, active lifestyles (physical activities) and building 'Good Neighbours' through volunteering.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Page 33. Growing in the Community second edition. Local Government Association.

⁹¹ Information from Ladywood Constituency Office



9 Representations from Birmingham & District Allotments Council (BDAC)

Written evidence received from the Chairman of BDAC on 11th November 2009

- 9.1.1 "All allotment tenants on Birmingham's allotments are represented by the BDAC – this is a recent agreement between the BDAC and the City Council. We have always represented all tenants, but previously we had an affiliation system which strictly meant we had a restricted membership. We have an Executive Committee of 20, including three officers (the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer). Executive Members gather information and views from Allotments Associations. Discussions on various issues take place once a month at Executive Committee meetings.
- 9.1.2 Communication with Executive Members takes place at monthly meetings, together with phone calls and emails. Communication with Members is through phone calls, letters, emails, and meetings on site. Our Executive meetings are open to all allotment tenants. Discussions with Associations are usually through Secretary of Association. I deal with Chairmen of Associations on some issues. Communications with the City Council are by emails, phone calls, letters, meetings on a regular basis. We send a quarterly newsletter to all sites. We have a website – www.bdacallotments.org.uk
- 9.1.3 We have training sessions for new site committees- this particularly covers rent collection, plot letting and communicating with the City. Officers from the Allotments Office are important partners in these meetings. We use Association AGM's to help committees run effectively. At our AGM, we have representation from over thirty-five Associations.
- 9.1.4 We worked with the City to evolve the current self management agreement. There are one or two Associations who want to adopt self management, however I understand City is not willing to introduce new Associations to Self Management at the moment. I think the one essential change needed is to allow Self Management Committees more flexibility in getting work done on site – use a wider body of workers, rather than just the Council's contractors.
- 9.1.5 We are the local representative body of the National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens (NSALG). We promote them locally and encourage members to make use of the NSALG's expertise. On our monthly agenda is an item for Area 5 of the NSALG. NSALG invariably attend our AGM. We send representatives to NSALG's AGM. We are in contact through websites etc. We use the various Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI) publications to help members.
- 9.1.6 The management of the allotments is a four way partnership – Tenants > Associations > Allotment Officers > BDAC. Communications are the essential element for success. There are variable – I have found as Chairman that communications between myself and the City and Associations (main point of contact on sites) are usually sound. A weakness lies in slower communications between



Associations and City. A new system is in operation which is intended to improve response time to Associations.

9.1.7 The Allotment's Working Party (AWP) enables regular meetings between City Council officers and BDAC officers to discuss particular problems, general matters, matters of policy and the opportunity to talk with elected members. It is noted that usually the only elected member present is the Chairman of AWP, the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture. Its purpose is to discuss and agree policy and matters that affect allotments across the City. It is not a vehicle for dealing with individual site problems unless they impact across the City. The AWP has the potential to be a powerful and influential body. One area is arbitration when difficult situations need an authoritative voice. We agreed this with the City, but officers have declined to make use of arbitration.

9.1.8 Positive ways in which we help are:

- Training and education of association committee members;
- Dealing with individual Associations to assist the Allotments Officers – this is essentially when Associations are failing to collect rents properly (in spite of straight forward guidelines), use of hosepipes, fires and personality clashes;
- We offer advice for instance where there is a problem between association/tenant and the Allotments Office;
- We are involved in ways of recycling natural water falling on sites;
- We are positive in change;
- We support tenants in some issues and the City in others – decisions are not always fair;
- We positively encourage Associations to do more work for themselves (we recognise a tenant mentality) 'it's the Council's job';
- We remain pragmatic about many issues – disposal of allotment land, rent rises – however, we use our experience and judgement to ensure such issues are properly addressed before decisions are made."



10 Representations by Plotholders

Evidence heard at the meeting of the Leisure, Sport & Culture O&S Committee on Wednesday 13th January 2010⁹²

Court Lane Erdington Allotments Association

- 10.1.1 Local people had taken over disused allotment sites and brought them back into use. The Committee and allotments continued to grow and included a wildlife pond garden, work with schools and wheelchair access. A shop had been opened.
- 10.1.2 They provided plots, vegetables, social activities and open days and had won prizes for their produce displays. There were 92 plots. The new holders were mainly young families. Demand for plots could not be met and there was a waiting list.
- 10.1.3 Benefits were provision of fresh food, social activities and involvement with local schools. Funding for allotments was not good and they did fundraising to raise funds.
- 10.1.4 In response to questions they reported that they had links with Ward End Park and had set up a community garden in the summer. Sladefield and Ingleton Road School had taken up allotments.
- 10.1.5 The Probation Service had taken up two plots for use as part of their rehabilitation programme. The Committee hoped to approach and guide users through the allotment process. Links had been built with Wilson Stuart, Osborne and Court Farm Schools also Birmingham Settlement. There were an increased number of young families taking up allotments.

Ward End Gardeners

- 10.1.6 Allotment sites were Black Lane, St Margarets Avenue, St Margarets Road, Fairholme Road and Lime Tree Road. The five sites consisted of 150 allotment plots.
- 10.1.7 The Committee was made up of members of the five sites. Meetings were held at weekends attended by members and allotment holders. Discussions were held about problems on allotments. They also provided advice on gardening. There were some schemes to help newcomers to set up with local farmers.
- 10.1.8 During the year three shows had taken place as well as trips and talks.
- 10.1.9 The benefits of allotments were the production of food, relaxation, exercise help with stress and the social activities. Allotments led to a lower carbon footprint and helped to improve health.

⁹² Text taken from the minutes of the O&S Committee.



Discussion

- 10.1.10 In the discussion that followed, one Councillor commented that schools were more likely to maintain the site if it was on their own land. He asked how successful income generation was and how the lack of facilities and vandalism had been overcome.
- 10.1.11 Representatives from Court Lane responded that they had used money received from Community Chest Funds for a toilet block, running water and a marquee. Money raised from fund raising had been used for the shop, storage water heating. They were trying to raise funds to put a building on site. There was now less vandalism after they opened up the allotments to the public even though there was still some vandalism. More people on site acted as a deterrent and the Community Officer had been given a key.
- 10.1.12 Ward End Gardeners had the use of a pavilion and also used a marquee. There was still some vandalism. The fencing on the front of the allotment had been vandalised and the shed and office broken into. There had been an increase of allotments and the majority were occupied.
- 10.1.13 Another Councillor said there were a lot of allotments in the north of the City. He felt there were health, environmental and social benefits from allotments. Allotments also helped towards better cohesion of communities.
- 10.1.14 A suggestion was made that the Newsletter from the Council be reviewed and produced in A4 size with enough copies being sent to display front and back copies. The officer said that he could also email copies if email addresses were sent to him; 300 – 400 copies were distributed each month.
- 10.1.15 It was felt by allotment holders that the work carried out by Grounds Maintenance Contractors in maintaining the grass and hedges etc. was unsatisfactory and questioned whether the work could be carried out by allotment holders. An officer from the Allotments Service said this could be considered, however there were Health and Safety and insurance issues to consider. Some allotments in Birmingham were Self Managed and received 60% of the rent back, but were required to do their own maintenance work; 15 Associations had Management Agreements. Some sites maximised the use of the Self Management Fund, whilst others did not have the degree of experience to do this.
- 10.1.16 In response to a question from a Councillor about what support had been received from Birmingham City Council and what could be done to help, representatives from both allotments said that little help had been received apart from Community Chest Funds and guidance. Ward End Gardeners had been successful in gaining funds from 'Awards for All' to put two containers on site. They had now been told by planning officers that planning permission was required for all containers. Allotment holders joined as members of Birmingham and District Allotments Association (BDAC) and received help when requested.
- 10.1.17 In response to a query from a Councillor about the rent on plots both organisations felt that the rents were reasonable compared with other parts of the country.



Allotments

Response from Allotment Officers

10.1.18 In response to the comments that "representatives from both allotments said that little help had been received" the Allotment Officers⁹³ have detailed the finance allocated to works on the two sites:

10.1.19 Court Lane:

- 2008/09 - underground burst £2,302.00;
- 2007/08 - triple spike fencing £45.00;
- 2006/07 - new ball cock £80.86;
- 2005/06 - fencing £1954.25; anti vandal paint £75.00;
- 2004/05 - stop cock and chamber £678.92; repair toilet door £100.26; underground burst £165.08;
- in addition we also installed a disabled compliant toilet (c. 1999) at a cost of c.£15,000. We also discussed and approved the creation of the project plots and prepared unused plots for letting.

10.1.20 Ward End:

- 2005/06 Northleigh Rd - underground burst £658.97;
- 2004/05 Northleigh Rd - fencing £1965.01;
- this Association is Self Managed and therefore has benefited from retained rent since 1996 of c.£700 per annum;
- In addition, we also carried out statutory electrical checks, fire extinguisher inspections and Grounds Maintenance.

10.1.21 In response to comments that the fence and path were in poor condition at Court Lane, the Allotments Office replied: "The Allotment Liaison Officer, has inspected the fencing and although it is leaning, it is structurally sound. The cost of stabilising the fence is £1650 which is beyond our budget and the works are not viewed as a priority. The contractor reports that the road is also sound and that the reinstatement is up to 'road level'. It is not considered that any further works are necessary at this point. Whilst the condition of the road and fence may not be optimum, both are considered serviceable." ⁹⁴

⁹³ Email from Allotments Office 27.01.10

⁹⁴ Email from Allotments Office 16.03.10



11 Evidence from Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)

Comments by BOSF on BCC Allotments Service at a meeting on Monday 8th March 2010.

Background

11.1.1 Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) was set up five years ago as a linking organisation for Friends of open spaces. It is a voluntary organisation staffed mainly by volunteers. It supports Friends Groups in order to bring about improvements to open space through community development. BOSF supports Friends Groups to make bids for external funding and it represents the views of Friends Groups to the City Council.

11.1.2 Evidence shows that open spaces with active Friends Groups can attract £30,000 per year and the equivalent of one and a half additional park workers. BOSF contributed evidence to the Scrutiny Review 'Resources for Improving Parks' - the report contained a case study on the role of Friends in attracting resources to parks.⁹⁵

BOSF and Allotments

11.1.3 The last two or three years have seen a change in the way allotments are used which has resulted in Allotment Associations and tenants seeking to become involved in BOSF. The open space role of some allotment sites has increased with a greater 'open door policy', more shared community gardening and the use of spare land in sites for nature conservation.

11.1.4 BOSF has particular knowledge of ways to apply for funding from external organisations. When BOSF have organised seminars to teach Friends Groups how to access funding (and fill the forms in) they have proved popular with Allotment Associations.

11.1.5 As a result of an increase in interest from allotment groups in what BOSF has to offer, one of the BOSF voluntary Committee Members has allotment liaison as their particular remit.

Attracting Funds from External Sources

11.1.6 Funding sources include: Lottery Awards for All, Landfill Tax. BOSF send out a monthly email information sheet listing funding opportunities, training, job opportunities and conferences/meetings. At a time when City Council resources are decreasing, funding from external sources is especially important. However in the past, there have been some blockages to spending

⁹⁵ See birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Scrutiny-Office%2FPPageLayout&cid=1223092748095&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper#attachments. Section 9.



Allotments

grants on allotment sites due to a lack of an agreed process with the Allotment Officers. This has recently improved. The work funded by external grants may be implemented by:

- The City's Grounds Maintenance contractors who maintain those parts of the site beyond the plots themselves, including roads, perimeter fencing and grassed areas not in cultivation;
- Other contractors managed by the allotment association;
- Site volunteers.

11.1.7 This process may need further refining to ensure that grant monies achieved are spent on the site without delay.

11.1.8 In future, finance from Primary Care Health Trusts could be significant as part of the healthy eating campaign.

11.1.9 We see this as part of a strategy that recognises the role open spaces play in improving the environment, exercise opportunities, growing food, community cohesion etc. ie that open spaces are more than leisure opportunities and should therefore be funded by more than the parks service

Work by Grounds Maintenance Contractors

11.1.10 Evidence collected elsewhere suggests that some Allotment Associations feel that that the work done on sites by the Grounds Maintenance contractors is difficult to control and to monitor. In the past Allotment Associations have been discouraged from direct contact with the contractors. Since contractors don't visit the sites very often, there is unlikely to be a close relationship with Associations, unlike that formed between Friends Groups and park contractors.

Planning Issues

11.1.11 BOSF would like to be more involved with the Planning Department so that when there are major changes to parks and open spaces (including allotments) they are consulted. In this way they could facilitate contact between the planners and the local community.

11.1.12 There have been examples of City parks land being converted to allotments - eg Small Heath Park.

Relationship with the Birmingham and District Allotments Association (BDAC)

11.1.13 BOSF concentrate on the role of allotments as open space, rather than as a place for semi-private food cultivation. They respect the traditional role of BDAC. They have invited BDAC to sit on their Committee.

Communication

11.1.14 Traditionally allotment holders have not been supporters of communication by email. The written newsletter on a notice board, displayed by the site secretary, has been the norm. However the widening of types of people becoming plot holders means that communication by email, and the dissemination of information through websites, is becoming more popular. This holds great potential for better communication.



12 Experiences of other Cities

12.1 Introduction

12.1.1 We contacted several of the other Core Cities by telephone to provide the following comparisons:

City	Number of Sites	Number of plots	City wide waiting list	% sites Self Managed	Rent
Birmingham	115	7,000+	950	17%	£28
Manchester	41	2,300		80%	About £50
Leeds	96	3,400	2,000	63%	£28
Bristol	108	3,800	1,100 ⁹⁶	20%	£20-£45
Nottingham	50	3,300	2,100	40% ⁹⁷	About £40

12.2 Manchester

12.2.1 There are 41 sites in Manchester with 2,300 ploholders. Of these 41 sites, 33 are run by Allotment Societies; ploholders who serve on their Societies receive 30% discount on their allotment rent. Societies collect rents and manage the plot letting process.

12.2.2 There is one allotment officer⁹⁸ who facilitates the development of the service, supports the societies with funding applications, organises legal advice, mediates disputes where the Societies fail to reach agreement with ploholders and manages those sites which to not have Societies.⁹⁹ The website directs people interested in taking on a plot to the website of Association of Manchester Allotment Societies (direct link provided) which has an interactive map of sites.

⁹⁶ Does not include Association sites and therefore the total figure will be considerably higher.

⁹⁷ 70% of total plots

⁹⁸ Most of the information on this page from telephone conversation with the Allotments Officer on 23/11/09. The rest is taken from their website.

⁹⁹ See www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200073/parks_and_open_spaces/3104/allotments_in_manchester/1.



Allotments

- 12.2.3 Manchester has a yearly tenancy agreement which plotholders have to sign each year. The rules and conditions of tenancy are set out. If there are any problems with the tenancy, then a new agreement is not issued and notice to quit issued.
- 12.2.4 When a new plotholder takes on a plot, they have to cultivate a quarter of the plot within the first three months, otherwise the agreement can be terminated. At the end of the second year, the plot has to be fully cultivated.
- 12.2.5 Rents: It depends on the size of the allotment, a full allotment will cost around £50 per year, some allotment societies only rent half allotments to new members - these will cost around £25 per year. Concessions are available for pensioners, disabled people and those in receipt of benefits.
- 12.2.6 The Association of Manchester Allotment Societies represents the Societies and liaises closely with the Council. They have a modern website with an interactive map showing all the plots in the City with a guide to whether plots are available "likely now, a wait, long wait". The list of sites provides a direct link to a detailed ward map and contact details for each site including email, telephone number and the best time for prospective plotholders to visit the site to have a look. The website also gives details of events at sites and a download link to bi-monthly newsletter. The Association is funded through subscription from the Allotment Associations¹⁰⁰.

12.3 Leeds

- 12.3.1 There are 95 allotment sites in Leeds and 3,400 plots including half and quarter plots. The waiting list City wide is 2,000. Sixty of the 95 sites (63%) are self managed including lettings and procedure for non-cultivation.
- 12.3.2 There are two Allotments Officers; a technical officer and a Community Liaison Officer. The first deals with lettings and management of Non-Association sites, the Community Liaison Officer supports Associations and promotes the formation of new Associations.
- 12.3.3 The website for the Allotments Service says if you are interested in acquiring a plot to contact the Allotments Office by telephone. There is a downloadable map of the City with the sites marked, but no interactive map enabling details to be displayed.¹⁰¹
- 12.3.4 The rents are:
- Full plot: 250 sq m = £30 per year;
 - Half plot : 125 sq m = £15.00 per year;
 - Plots with water supply are an extra £10 per year for each half plot and £15 for each full plot.
- 12.3.5 The rents were increased this year, from £28 to £30 but will be held at this level for two years.

¹⁰⁰ See www.amas.org.uk/.

¹⁰¹ See www.leeds.gov.uk/page.aspx?pageidentifier=B6EB1F2AB3ECC7CB80256F2600439DED



12.3.6 The Leeds and District Gardeners Federation¹⁰² promotes allotment gardening, promotes Associations and gives advice. Membership costs a pound a year. They hold a social event once a year with prize giving.

12.3.7 The Allotments Working Group meets every three months and comprises City Councillors, officers and representatives from self managed sites.

12.4 Bristol

12.4.1 There are 108 sites in Bristol and 3,800 plots. The waiting list for City run plots is around 1,000, but this excludes Association run sites, so the total figure will be much higher.

12.4.2 There is a Senior Allotments Officer¹⁰³ nearly two other Allotment Officers (1.6 posts) and an admin officer. The Senior Allotments Officer deals with policy issues and advice to Associations - the office manages the sites that are not run by Associations.

12.4.3 They have recently published their Bristol Parks Allotment Strategy 2009 - 2019.

12.4.4 Their website¹⁰⁴ has an interactive map of the City. This will take people to a detailed location map that shows them the allotment sites in all areas including details of the sites and notes about the availability of plots. Applications for a plot can be made on-line, or an application form can be downloaded for posting to the office - this is especially appropriate when concessions are being claimed. Plot holders can also pay their rents online.

12.4.5 The current rent levels are shown below - price increases are planned over the next two years:

Plot type / size	2009 / 2010	2010 / 2011
Chalet gardens	£65	£85
Large plots (270–420 sq. yds)	£43.50	£53.50
Medium plots (180–269 sq. yds)	£32	£39.50
Small plots (90–179 sq. yds)	£21.50	£26.50
Very small plots (below 90 sq. yds)	£11	£13.50

¹⁰² see <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/philip.gomersall/leeds-gardeners/>

¹⁰³ Phone call 25/11/09 and information included from their website.

¹⁰⁴ see www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/environment-and-planning/parks-and-open-spaces/allotments



Allotments

The following discounts are available:

Discount Type	Discount
Site Representative	50%
Site Representative (plot letting)	100%
25 Year Tenancy	50%
Lack of Water on Site	25%
New Tenants (First 2 years overgrown plots only)	50%
50 Year Tenancy	100%

12.4.6 There are five types of sites:

- Leasing Association completely self-managed (peppercorn rent) =11;
- Leasing Association managing tenancies and collecting rents only = 11;
- Site Representative maintains waiting list and lets plots =20;
- Non plot letting Site Representative = 21;
- No site representative or Allotment Association = 35.

12.4.7 Whilst their Allotment Strategy encourages more sites to take on self-management, it is accepted that this needs to be by persuasion and not force otherwise sites might fall into mis-management and have to be taken back into Council management. There is some resistance to taking on this additional responsibility.

12.4.8 There is no forum of Allotment Associations - the 22 Association run sites liaise directly with the Allotments Office.

12.4.9 The Bristol Allotments Consultative Panel comprises three Elected members (cross party), four representatives from leasing sites, four representatives from non-association sites and Allotment officers. Representatives are put forward and elected where there is competition.

12.4.10 New tenants are only offered half plots until their commitment has been demonstrated.

12.4.11 They have recently had a drive to bring uncultivated plots back in to use by a roving Allotment Gang (working in the winter months) to enable a promise in the Strategy to be implemented "freedom from overgrown plots". This means that the number of plots in popular areas has been increased without the need for new sites.



12.5 Nottingham

- 12.5.1 There are over 50 sites and about 3,300 plots in Nottingham. The figure of 3,300 includes plots on three private sites and on some derelict unused sites. The demand for plots is estimated at 2,200. The bigger leased sites have considerable demand, the smaller inaccessible sites have much less demand and there are empty plots. Demand is also affected by changes in communities with transient populations not interested in allotments. The City has 308 vacant plots but around 270 of these are derelict or in a poor condition, while 180 are 'land-locked' – which means access has been blocked by overgrowth or by changes in boundaries meaning passageways now belong to householders.
- 12.5.2 There are two Allotments Officers; ¹⁰⁵ one full time post and some part time work totalling one day. They have recently obtained funding for half a post to re-invigorate their policies including drawing up a new allotments strategy in response to growing demand for vegetable gardening. As 40% of their sites (70% plots) are leased to Allotment Associations, their role is to support them with funding applications and planning issues. They retain direct management of 27 small isolated sites where there is less demand.
- 12.5.3 Their website contains basic details of how to apply for an allotment and what is involved. ¹⁰⁶ There is a link to an electronic bulletin; the first issue was in Autumn/Winter 2009.
- 12.5.4 People interested in a plot are asked to contact the Allotment Team and they will send an information pack which includes a map which shows where the different sites across the City are located. Also included in the pack is list of contacts for the Association run sites.
- 12.5.5 Direct Let Sites are those that are directly leased from Nottingham City Council; 24 of the 50+ sites). They keep 75% of the rents to fund site management. Association Sites are those that are leased to Associations by Nottingham City Council and the Associations lease plots to the public. If the site is run by an Association, potential ploholders will need to contact them directly to see if there are vacancies and arrange a time to have a look round the site, or to be put on a waiting list if the site is currently full. A list of contact details can be obtained from the Allotment Team. These Associations are responsible for all management including maintenance, boundaries, trees and watercourses via a licence agreement, as well as lettings and rent collection.
- 12.5.6 For sites without an Association, potential ploholders contact the Allotments Team directly. They inform of availability, or place people on a waiting list.
- 12.5.7 Rent levels: the cost of the plot will vary depending on its size: if the plot has water then it is 11p per sq/yard, if there is no water then it is 6p sq/yard. The average plot, with water, works out about £40 a year.

¹⁰⁵ Some of the information in this section from their website, the remainder from telephone conversation on 24/11/09.

¹⁰⁶ See www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3623



Allotments

- 12.5.8 There is no one overall umbrella society for Allotments Associations. This is partly because the strength of the individual Associations and partly because there is a sub-group of the National Allotments Council covering Nottingham.
- 12.5.9 The City Council runs an Allotments Forum which meets quarterly and a Strategy Group of Officers and Association representatives. It also holds officer meetings across departments as some allotment land is owned by housing and education.