

CABINET

Allotments Provision 8 November 2011

Report of Head of Community Engagement

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To advise members of the current provision for allotments in the district				
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date Included in Forward Plan	n/a			
This report is public				

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR BARRY

1. That Cabinet note the current position regarding the provision of allotments in the district.
 2. That officers continue to work with Lancashire County Council to support the proposed 'Greenfingers' project at Heysham.
 3. That Cabinet defer any decision to extend the allotment site at Scotforth once the policy delegation in the Local Development Framework is decided, the issues surrounding the current agricultural tenancy are determined and the Allotment Association bring forward further details as to how the site is to be developed, project managed and funded.
 4. That the Regeneration and Policy Service use the opportunities in the preparation of the Local Development Framework land allocations document to identify and subsequently protect sites for new allotments to be created.
 5. The Regeneration and Policy Service prepare a short piece of supplementary planning guidance on the criteria to be met to obtain planning permission for allotments proposed on unallocated land.
- 1.0 Introduction**
- 1.1 Lancaster City Council recognises the importance of allotments not just because it has a statutory duty to provide them but because they consider them to be a valued community resource.

- 1.2 Due to the current popularity of allotments, waiting lists at all sites are lengthening. The Lancaster District PPG17 Study – Open Space, Sport & Recreation Facilities (Dec 2007) report gives a figure for waiting lists equivalent to 44% of stock. The report makes a series of 7 recommended actions relating to addressing this deficiency, including seizing any opportunities to provide new allotments within the local area, particularly in areas of identified accessibility deficiency. These recommendations are set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 As part of the Corporate plan and Budget Process 2012/13, it was agreed at Cabinet on the 6 September 2011 that officers examine the provision of more allotments because of the current very long waiting lists and that consideration be given to a proposed allotment initiative at Heysham. (Min No 34(2) refers)

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 Lancaster City Council currently owns 13 allotment sites across the district of various sizes, totalling approximately 542 full size plots. Of these, 11 are in Lancaster. The site at Devonshire Road in Morecambe is now the responsibility of Morecambe Town Council and the site on Highfield in Carnforth will become the responsibility of Carnforth Town Council. There are also some privately owned sites including ones in Morecambe, Halton and Galgate.
- 2.2 The smallest sites at Carnforth and Bridge Road in Lancaster each have 12 plots, whilst the largest site at Cork Road in Lancaster has 84 full sized plots. The total area of City Council owned allotment sites is approximately 15.36 hectares. Details of the current sites are set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.3 Although there are approximately 585 plots, there has been more emphasis in recent years to provide smaller plots for those who wish them. This has resulted in many plots being split into halves and it is common for two people to share the responsibility for a half size plot, therefore, the number of plot holders will be greater than the number of plots listed above. There are a number of plot holders who rent multiple plots, some on the same site others on more than one allotments site. The number of full sized plots on sites owned by Lancaster City Council equates to four plots per thousand of population.

This compares with-

- Carlisle - 8 plots per thousand
 - Preston - 4 plots per thousand
 - Chorley - 1 plot per thousand
- 2.4 Appendix 3 sets out the potential opportunities for further development of those existing sites and opportunities for new sites. The Appendix suggests that of the existing sites Scotforth provides the best opportunity to expand. The outcomes of the PPG17 study found that although the highest levels of allotment provision are to be found in the South Lancaster area, this is also where proportionally the demand is highest and waiting lists are longest.
- 2.5 It also identifies a potential initiative by a local community group for a new

allotment site in Heysham (Greenfingers) and the LDF 'call for sites' as sources of potential sites for new provision. Details of these opportunities are set out further in this report.

Smithy Lane, Heysham

- 2.6 Greenfingers (a local community group) are working with staff from the County Council's Environmental and Community Projects Area North to bring forward some plans for the area which will be included in any planning application. A lease can be agreed with the new allotment association for the land if planning permission is obtained. The Head of Property Services is authorised to grant leases of land for potential new allotment sites in the control of other services (provided that such land would not be capable of achieving a market rent exceeding £6000 p.a. for alternative use) and subject to the approval of the managing service, both of these qualifying conditions have been assessed and met accordingly (minute No.1 24th of June 2010 refers).

LDF 'Call for sites'

- 2.7 The planning system locally can help by using the opportunities in the preparation of the Local Development Framework land allocations document to identify and subsequently protect sites for new allotments to be created. The Regeneration and Policy Service could also be asked to prepare a short piece of supplementary planning guidance on the criteria to be met to obtain planning permission for allotments proposed on unallocated land. The guidance could also require new housing schemes to be provided with allotments where appropriate as part of open space requirements.
- 2.8 It is worth noting however that if sites are identified and the Council wishes to develop those sites themselves then significant capital expenditure would be required to deal with ground clearance, fencing, gates, water connection, pathways, digging of plots, edging of plots, consideration of DDA compliance etc. Estimates suggest anywhere between £50K - £100K per site depending upon local conditions surrounding the site.

Scotforth Allotments

- 2.9 Scotforth Allotment Site is a 5458m² area of statutory allotment land located on Ashford Road, adjacent to Scotforth Cemetery. There are 29 allotment plots on the site. The waiting list was closed over a year ago with 37 people on the list. Waiting time for a site is over three years.
- 2.10 Mature poplar trees growing on the eastern boundary of Scotforth Cemetery cast shadow onto the allotment site throughout the day and their large root systems remove considerable amounts of the moisture from the soil, resulting in poor growing conditions on at least 13 of the 29 plots.
- 2.11 A proposed extension could provide 6000m² of extra land for allotments.
- 2.12 The site could comprise of a variety of different sized plots, with 125m² being the largest, to appeal to a larger cross section of the local community and may then accommodate more than 48 new plot holders. This would create

capacity for current plot holders moving from the area affected by the poplar trees, clear the current waiting list and allow the Association to open the waiting list up once again.

- 2.13 There would be no requirement for planning permission for change of use as the land is already classified as 'agricultural.' Securing the site with fencing 2m in height or lower would also not require planning permission. Planning permission would need to be sought if there were any changes to access from the highway.
- 2.14 Scotforth Allotments Association has put forward a proposal to extending their site to incorporate an adjacent field which is owned by Lancaster City Council and leased as grazing land under an agricultural tenancy. The income to the Council for this land is £90 per year. A notice to quit would require one years notice which that the earliest date to take the site back would be 13 February 2013
- 2.15 There may be financial implications arising from any variation to the existing tenancy agreement either as as a result of any arbitration process which may occur as a result or through the payment of compensation.
- 2.16 The land proposed for the extension is adjacent to the south east corner of Scotforth Cemetery and has been considered by Health and Housing for a possible area for cemetery extension. However investigations have determined that once the existing cemetery is full, it will be closed rather than giving any consideration to extending the existing boundary.
- 2.17 The proposed extension site currently doesn't have any policy designation in the Local Development Framework, but it is very close to the boundary of the Whinney Carr which is land which could be allocated for development of housing in the future. It should be noted here that allotments are a land use which can take place outside the urban boundary without conflict with countryside polices.
- 2.18 If the allotment site is to be included in a future land allocation for Whinney Carr then it is essential that it's boundaries are clearly identified and that it is protected as part of the allocation..

3 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 Consultation has taken place with the relevant Services affected by this report and their comments are reflected in the report
- 3.2 There is an ongoing dialogue with Scotforth Allotment Association.

4 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

	Option 1: Maintain the status quo ie support self management of allotments, continue with the existing capital upgrade programme, support local community led	Option 2: Maintain the status quo but use Planning Policy and guidance as the means to which additional allotment development sites can be identified
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	initiatives for additional allotment sites	
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No additional cost. • Still allocates minimal resources to support self management of allotment sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help achieve more of the PPG17 recommended actions. • Improved resources for the community.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for allotment sites cannot be met. • The Council will not be fulfilling all of the PPG17 recommended actions. • Costs to the Council of in terms of officer resources and potential liabilities re the tenancy issues at Scotforth allotments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will divert planning officers away from other tasks. <p>No resources available to develop identified sites</p>
Risks	The limited resources available to the council, is at times having difficulty maintaining the status quo.	Increased expectations that the demand for allotment sites can be met

Options Appraisal

Option 2 is the preferred Option --it recommends that Planning policy be the vehicle by which allocations can be made and supported and recommends that development of new sites be community lead and supported by the Council as and when they arrive. This option also recognises the limitations in terms of resources that the Council currently has in taking any further work forward.

Conclusion

Currently demand for allotments far outstrips supply and this trend is likely to continue. There is a need to consider whether, in the current financial climate, the establishment of new allotments is affordable and a priority. There will be significant resource implications connected with attempting to meet the current demand for allotments.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Supports the concept of partnership working through the existing self management arrangements but no other explicit links to the Council's current Corporate Plan priorities.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Council has already determined that allotments are a valued community resource that has a number of positive impacts

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising as a result of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising as a result of this report other than potential costs associated with a possible variation to the existing agricultural tenancy arrangement at Scotforth. These potential costs have not yet been determined. The existing capital programme includes £59K in 20012/13 and under these proposals, this would not change.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

Additional Planning Officer time in developing guidance and site identification. None though cabinet should note the current allocation of resources dedicated to allotments is limited.

Information Services:

None

Property:

Issues are identified in the report

Open Spaces:

Issues are identified in the report

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Contact Officer: Richard Tulej
Telephone: 01524 582079
E-mail: rtulej@lancaster.gov.uk
Ref:

APPENDIX 1:

Recommended actions from the Lancaster District PPG17 Study – Open Space, Sport & Recreation Facilities (Dec 2007)

ALL 1: Regularly review, investigate and monitor demand for allotment provision and look for opportunities where demand improving/increasing and ensure new housing developments allow for any increase in demand as necessary.

ALL 2: Ensure continued support to allotment providers and Allotment Associations across Lancaster District and protect these sites from development.

ALL 3: Prioritise qualitative improvements at sites where current provision.

ALL 4: Investigate the demand for the provision of allotments in Heysham and Morecambe and investigate the need for additional sites across the area.

ALL 5: Investigate the demand for the provision of allotments in the Carnforth area and investigate the need for additional sites.

ALL 6: Investigate the demand for the provision of allotments and consider the development of new sites.

ALL 7: Support Parish Councils in the provision of new allotment sites where specific demand is identified.

ALL 8: In the light of the presence of waiting lists across Lancaster City seize any opportunities to provide new allotments within the local area, particularly in areas of identified accessibility deficiency.

ALL 9: Explore alternative opportunities for the provision of allotments including co-location at school sites.

APPENDIX 2

Allotment	Location	Ward	No. of plots	Hectares
Dorrington Road	Lancaster	Scotforth West	81	1.51
Barley Cop Lane	Lancaster	Skerton East	50	1.36
Torrisholme Road	Lancaster	Skerton West	44	1.30
Highfield	Lancaster	Bulk	52	1.54
Cork Rd	Lancaster	John O'Gaunt	84	2.67
Shrewsbury Drive	Lancaster	John O'Gaunt	43	1.45
Scotforth Cemetery	Lancaster	Scotforth West	19	0.55
Bridge Road	Lancaster	Scotforth West	12	0.20
John O'Gaunt	Lancaster	John O'Gaunt	57	0.93
Fairfield	Lancaster	Castle	68	1.78
Ambleside Road	Lancaster	Bulk	38 (not full sized)	1.14
Devonshire Road	Morecambe	Heysham North	63	1.64
Highfield	Carnforth	Carnforth	12	0.43
TOTAL			585	15.36

APPENDIX 3

Site	Potential for Development
Ambleside Road	A new site developed for residents of Bulk Ward on Council owned land. The facilities include a poly-tunnel, compost toilet, underground water tank, secure fencing.
Bridge Road	Small site with only 12 plots. There is no potential to extend the site as it is surrounded by houses and roads. Space may be created by levelling the bankings to create a communal area, or install a compost toilet.
Cork Road	This is already the largest site in the District, there is little potential for extension. The site does not have any toilet facilities.
Dorrington Road	No potential for expansion, the site is surrounded by private housing, the railway and a wooded area with very steep bankings. Drainage issues prevent two plots from being cultivated and surface runoff means haulage ways are often unusable creating access issues.
Highfield	Possibility of extending onto the recreation field, or unused tennis courts next to the site. The site is on a slope and paths become very slippery in poor weather. There is asbestos buried in the boundary with the school access road.
John O'Gaunt	No potential for expansion, surrounded by housing, the childrens play area in Scotch Quarry and University of Cumbria land. The water supply network needs significant works of improvement, or replacing with a rain water harvesting set up.
Scotforth	Possibility of extending into adjacent grazing land and a proposal has been prepared.
Shrewsbury Drive	No potential to expand, surrounded by housing.
Skerton	Potential to extend onto King George's Playing Field, but only if the football pitch can be moved.
Torrisholme	No potential to expand, surrounded by houses

Potential for new allotment sites:

Green Fingers Project in Heysham
 PPG17 and 'Call for Sites'
 Request for new sites in Carnforth from Cllr Johnson

Parish Provision

Carnforth Town Council taking responsibility for Highfield Allotments
 Over Kellet want to develop site near Church Bank
 Warton have new site
 Caton PC wish to provide allotments, but Lancaster City Council is unable to provide any suitable land.