

CABINET

Referral from Allotments Task Group 11 November 2008

Report of Overview & Scrutiny

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To seek Cabinet support to a recommendation of the Allotments Task Group recommendation regarding future allotment management arrangements			
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Referral from Overview & Scrutiny	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Date Included in Forward Plan			
This report is public			

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR HEATH (Chair of the Allotments Task Group)

- 1.1 That Cabinet considers the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and adopts the recommendations as set out in this report.
- 1.2 That Cabinet recognises that the proposals set out in this report have manpower and financial implications and that these are brought forward in terms of the budget and policy framework proposals for 2009/10.
- 1.3 That Cabinet recognises that the proposals set out in this report would require a change to Council policy that would allow the letting of a property asset at less than market value and authorises officers to take the necessary action that would allow this to happen. The details of such a variation will need to be the subject of a further report to members for consideration.
- 1.4 That should these proposals be supported as part of the budget and policy framework for 2009/10 then the renewal of allotment leases scheduled for April 2009 take into account both the findings of the study commissioned by the Association of Lancaster and Morecambe Allotments Association (ALMA) and the recommendation of the Allotments Task Group.

1.5 That Cabinet provides a written response to the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee within a reasonable timescale.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On the 18 January 2005 Cabinet considered a report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which set out a series of recommendations based on the Committee's investigation into the provision and management of allotments in the district.
- 1.2 Cabinet adopted the recommendations set out in the report (with one revision - see Appendix 1) and they were brought forward as part of the budget and policy framework proposals for 2005/06. (Min. No. 125 refers)
- 1.3 Recommendation 4 of the Task Group committed the Council to instigate a review of allotment leases prior to their expiry in April 2009. It further recommended that a full consultation with all stakeholders including Allotment Associations and tenants on any emerging proposals should be part of that process.
- 1.4 In July 2007, an independent study commissioned by ALMA was published. The intention of the study "Allotment Management in the Lancaster District" was to inform the intended review of allotment leases.
- 1.5 On the 9 July 2008 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that the Allotments Task Group be re-established to consider the ALMA study and consider its findings in considering future allotment management prior to the scheduled lease renewals in April 2009. (Min. No. 16 refers). These renewals have now been put on hold pending future decisions on this matter by cabinet and Council.
- 1.6 The Task Group met on the 10 September 2008 and the outcome of that meeting is set out in this report.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 The ALMA study is attached as Appendix 2 and provides a needs assessment of the 12 allotment sites owned by Lancaster City Council, an analysis of the current arrangements and options for suitable management arrangements for the future.
- 2.2 The study was intended to build upon the work of the original task group with a particular focus on the Council's change in policy arising from Recommendation 3 of the task group "That the Council views allotments as essential community resources, not simply as property assets"
- 2.3 The report provides a comprehensive analysis of the needs of each of the Council's allotments in respect of the current management arrangements and possible alternative arrangements. It examines best practice across the country and it provides a series of options for consideration regarding the future management of allotments.

- 2.4 This report was considered in detail at the Task Group's meeting on the 10 September 2008. All of the individual allotment associations were invited and most attended the meeting and their views were taken into account by the Task Group prior to it identifying its preferred option. That option is set out below in Section 5.
- 2.5 In considering the report, due recognition must be made of the Council's existing policies relating to the management of its property assets. Whilst it is recognised that the Council has expressed a wish that the allotments should not be treated purely as a property asset, the Council cannot escape the fact that the allotments are a property asset and are subject to the existing policy that all assets should be let at market value.
- 2.6 This policy was most recently reaffirmed by the Grants Committee in December 2003 when it was resolved:
- (1) That the policy of all property being let at market value and that where the occupier is a charitable organisation that any financial assistance that the Council wishes to give to such organisations be through the system of grant aid be reaffirmed.

In addition the minute indicated that:

"This resolution confirms the original policy made in the early 1990's that the occupation of property by charitable organisations should be dealt with by way of grant aid. This enabled the Council to be in a position where it knew how much money was being given to charitable organisations rather than some part of the funding being via a separate route i.e. via a rent reduction. This policy enables the Council to have a greater choice in where its funding is to be directed rather than being fettered by property arrangements. The policy is one that is promoted as good practice by the Audit Commission, Government Office etc."

- 2.7 In considering the recommendations, the Council could of course decide to change its policy despite the fact that this would not be considered good practice. To do so, the Council could utilise its powers under the ODPM Circular 06/2003 Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 the Secretary of State has given consent generally to a disposal for a consideration less than the best that can reasonably be obtained in certain circumstances known as the "well-being provisions".
- 2.8 In entering into this process, the Council would require an independent valuation of the allotments in a "before and after" situation so that the amount of rent being forgone can be assessed.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 All allotment associations were consulted during the preparation of the ALMA report and there was considerable representation by individual allotment Associations at the meeting of the Task Group held on the 10 September.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

1. Option 1- Status quo

	Pro	Con
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change from current arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsustainable (see study)
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change from current arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsustainable (see study)

2. Option 2- Responsibility for management of allotments returns to the Council

	Pro	Con
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relieves allotment associations of a long list of duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allotment associations have been used to self management Could result in increased costs for plots
Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using example of Preston would require additional revenue of around £30,000 to fund an allotments officer post Best practice is to devolve management of allotments

Option 3a - Partnership with Council (Peppercorn rent)

Partnership

Council

- Capital to improve basic infrastructure at allotment sites (initially 5 year programme is recommended).
- Strategic oversight of allotments
- Agreement with allotment associations as to priorities for officer time allocated to allotments
- Allotment sites provided at peppercorn rent to allotment associations
- Provides support in practical ways (e.g., insurance, access to compost, grass cutting, waste management etc)

- Review infrastructure needs on an annual basis and feed into capital programme

Allotment associations

- Self manage allotment sites on a day to day basis
- Seek external funding opportunities for their allotment sites
- Continue to contribute to Council priorities

ALMA

- Represent allotment associations when dealing with Council
- Seek external funding for allotment development

	Pro	Con
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to self manage allotments • Will continue to charge same level of rent to plot holders but will have a far greater amount to spend on day to day management and admin of the allotment site • Site infrastructure will be improved at the sites that need it which will encourage demand • Increased investment will raise morale of allotment association volunteers • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed needs • Capital investment by Council may help attract some external funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that this model would encourage the participation of plot holders in wider site management issues
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and administration of allotments is devolved to associations • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed needs • Increased capital and revenue requirement is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for capital investment in region of £80,000 over next 5 years • Reduction in revenue income • Existing Council policy would require amending to reflect the

	<p>still an invest to save option when compared with costs of directly managing allotments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital funding by Council may help attract external capital funding 	<p>letting of the land at an amount which is less than market value</p>
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3. Option 3b - Partnership with Council (market rent)

Partnership

Council

- Capital to improve basic infrastructure at allotment sites (initially a 5 year programme is recommended).
- Agreement with allotment associations as to priorities for officer time allocated to allotments
- Strategic oversight of allotments
- Allotment sites provided at market rent to allotment associations
- Provides support in practical ways (e.g., insurance, access to compost, grass cutting, waste management etc)
- Review infrastructure needs on an annual basis and feed into capital programme

Allotment associations

- Self manage allotment sites on a day to day basis
- Seek external funding opportunities for their allotment sites
- Continue to contribute to Council priorities

ALMA

- Represent allotment associations when dealing with Council
- Gain registration as an environmental body
- Seek external funding for allotment development

	Pro	Con
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to self manage allotments • Site infrastructure will be improved at the sites that need it which will encourage demand • Increased investment will raise morale of allotment association volunteers • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that this model would encourage the participation of plot holders in wider site management issues. • Will still only have same amount to spend on day to day maintenance and admin.

	<p>needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital investment by Council may help attract some external funding 	
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and administration of allotments is devolved to associations • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed needs • Increased capital and revenue requirement still represent an invest to save option when compared with costs of directly managing allotments • No loss of income from allotments • Capital funding by Council may help attract external capital funding • This would be in line with existing Council policy on the letting of assets at market value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for capital investment in region of £80,000 over next 5 years • Revenue investment insufficient to meet need • Some allotment associations are struggling with resources for day to day maintenance and this proposal will not encourage self management.

5.0 Task Group Preferred Option (and comments)

- 5.1 The Task Group recommends to Cabinet that Option 3A is adopted by the Cabinet as the Council's future approach to the management of allotments. (Task group 10 September Min No. 5 refers). In doing so it recognises that the provision and use of allotments by local people supports many of the Council's Corporate Plan objectives and that the proposed change in these arrangements would support the Council's position to view allotments as essential community resources, not simply as property assets. In addition, it recognises that the Council policy on lettings at less than market value will require amendment

There is existing staffing capacity both to manage the capital programme and continue ongoing liaison with both ALMA and the allotment associations.

6.0 Conclusion

It is the Council's duty to provide allotments, and by definition to ensure they are properly managed. Under current arrangements allotment associations are effectively managing the vast majority of allotment management functions to the benefit of the Council.

Under current arrangements the value (and efficiencies generated) that allotment associations add to the Council is not recognised in a way that benefits the allotment associations.

The expiry of the current lease arrangements in April 2009 provides the Council with an opportunity to consider future management of allotments in line with Council policy which views allotments as essential community resources and not simply as property assets. However, it is also recognised that the Council would need to amend its current policy on the letting of property assets at less than market value.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Supports Councils Corporate Plan objectives:

- To provide value for money customer focused services.
- To make the district a cleaner and healthier place.
- To support sustainable communities.
- To ensure local communities have more influence and involvement in the way services are delivered and decision that affect them are made.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

The growing of local good and the promotion of allotments as community resources impacts upon, sustainability, health and community cohesion.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The preferred recommendation, if adopted, would potentially add an additional £80,000 over 5 years to the Council's capital programme and if approved a bid would need to be submitted as part of the process for the 2009/10 Capital Programme.

There is currently a forecasted amount of £10,500 for rental income for Allotments in 2009/10. If the recommendations are approved and only a peppercorn rent charged in the future this reduction in income will need to be built into the estimates as part of the 2009/10 budget process.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Any potential growth should be considered in context of Cabinet's proposed priorities/non-priorities and alongside other competing demands, as part of the 2009/10 budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal Services would be required to develop new lease arrangement for allotments should the recommendations be adopted

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Section 10 of the Allotments Act 1950 provides that land let by a Council for use as an allotment shall be let at such rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land if let for such use on the terms (other than terms as to rent) on which it is in fact let. The section further provides that land may be let by a Council to a person at a less rent if the Council is satisfied that there exist special circumstances affecting that person which render it proper for it to let the land to him at a less rate. This suggests that a judgement should be made in respect of each tenant, and it is arguable that a blanket policy for the Council to let all allotments at a peppercorn rent, even to allotment associations, would not be lawful. However, the Act does not appear to recognise the possibility of a Council letting to an association rather than direct to an allotment plot holder, and this may account for the wording of the legislation.

The Monitoring Officer would reiterate that any proposals must be consistent with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework for 2009/10

BACKGROUND PAPERS

ALMA report – Allotment Management in Lancaster District

Allotments Act 1950

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APPENDIX 1

Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered by Cabinet on 18th January 2005.

Recommendation 1

- That the Council recognises the vital role that allotments can play in promoting health, well-being and biodiversity and as contributory elements towards the objectives of the Corporate Plan, Community Strategy and Sustainable Development (LA21) strategy
- That the Council seeks to secure more support for allotments and local food initiatives, both from within the Council and through local partnerships in accordance with this recommendation.
- That where possible, and in partnership with Allotment Associations, the Council helps to seek funding from grants, section 106 money and Landfill tax credits to support the development of allotments.

Officer Comment

Role recognised and support for allotments offered both through the Council and through local partnerships. Assistance with potential grant funding currently offered.

Recommendation 2

- That the Council confirms and ensures that all allotment sites within the district are afforded protection under the Local Development Framework.

Officer Comment

Allotment sites are protected green space under the current Local Plan. Council is now moving toward consideration of land allocations stage of the Local Development Framework

Recommendation 3

- That the Council views allotments as essential community resources, not simply as property assets, and that the Council's Environmental Coordinator (now designated Sustainability Officer) helps to promote allotments, and create or strengthen links with corporate policies, the Wildlife forum, Food Forum and Recycling Forum.

Officer Comment

Help to promote allotments and create/strengthen links with corporate policies and partnership structures is now offered

Recommendation 4

- That the Council instigates a review of allotment leases in two years in partnership with ALMA in order to consider issues including-
- Leisure Garden
- Sale of surplus goods
- Community gardens
- Placing allotments in trust

And that this should include full consultation with all stakeholders including Allotment Associations and tenants on any emerging proposals.

Officer Comment

Lease review is subject of cabinet report under consideration 11 November 2008. Under current arrangements allotment associations are effectively managing the vast majority of allotment management functions to the benefit of the Council.

The change in policy to view allotments as essential community resources and not simply as property assets is inconsistent with the current arrangements of charging market rent and then devolving all responsibility for the management of allotment sites to the individual association.”

Recommendation 5

- That the Council designates a lead officer for allotment enquiries, advice and support to community groups who wish to establish new or enlarged allotment sites within the Lancaster District and that in the absence of expertise or capacity to provide such support directly, the Council refers groups to alternative sources of support (e.g. Council for Voluntary Services)
- That the Council encourages and supports officers in obtaining funding for the ‘Local Growth’ project as a contributory element towards objectives 1. (m) of the Community Strategy.

Officer Comment

Lead officer designated. Development of a Local Growth project is being supported.

Recommendation 6

- That the Council consider using section 106 money to provide allotment facilities in areas of high demand and secure a sum of money to assist with the ongoing running and maintenance costs of such sites.

Officer Comment

Section 106 funding opportunities linked to specific development proposed. Has been used to date for provision of play areas and green space but no specific opportunities for

allotment provision. If a future demand for additional plot spaces could be evidenced in specific parts of the district then could attract 106 funding.

Recommendation 7

- That the Council in conjunction with ALMA organises a district wide allotments forum (including rural and privately owned allotments) twice per year to enable information and ideas to be shared, and issues of concern to be discussed and addressed.

Officer Comment

No capacity to establish and maintain such forums though an event is being planned for November 2008 to consider Cabinet's decision.

Recommendation 8

That ALMA be asked to assist the Council through providing Allotment Association contact details for the Council's website, and liaising with the Council on behalf of Allotment Associations.

Officer Comment

Council's website is being used to promote allotments and provide information
Recommendation 9

- That ALMA be recommended to become a properly constituted organisation and investigate becoming an environmental organisation for the purposes of receiving and distributing funding from land fill tax.

Officer Comment

No progress to date

Recommendation 10

- That the Council reduces lease fees from the financial year 2005/6 onwards to a breakeven level, reappportioning the surplus by acreage, to Allotment Associations to enable them to spend more of their income from plot rental on site maintenance and running costs.

Officer Comment

See below. The recommendation is not in line with Council policy which identifies that all property should be let at market value. This policy was most recently reaffirmed by the Grants Committee in December 2003.

The proposed recommendation set out in the Cabinet report being considered 11 November regarding the allotment leases is therefore not in line with Council policy."

Recommendation 11

- That the Council's Environmental Co-ordinator be asked to help ALMA to take advantage of internal and external funding opportunities – e.g. by passing on information about available grants.

Officer Comment

Support and advice regarding funding opportunities is offered.

Cabinet adopted the recommendations as set out above subject to recommendation (10) being deleted and replaced with: -

That surpluses on the allotments account be set aside in a revenue reserve for improvements on the allotments.

APPENDIX 2

Allotment Management in the Lancaster District

A report to the Association of Lancaster and Morecambe Allotments

COMMISSIONED BY-

Association of Lancaster and Morecambe Allotments

FUNDED BY-

Lancaster City Council / LSP

WRITTEN BY-

Mark Davies

DATE

July 2007

The report has been written to provide an independent and objective view of the current status of allotment provision within the District and to make recommendations as to how allotments could be managed in the future. As such the opinions in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the Association of Lancaster and Morecambe Allotments, individual allotment associations or Lancaster City Council.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all the representatives of the District's allotment associations (especially John Lambert, Linda Secker, Linda and Tom Jones), officers from Lancaster City Council (especially Joy Grayson, Richard Tulej), officers from other Councils and representatives from other allotment associations. Thanks for your time, knowledge, information and constructive challenge.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4. This report has been commissioned by the Association of Lancaster and Morecambe Allotments (ALMA) and Lancaster City Council and has been funded by the LSP and Lancaster City Council. The purpose of the report is to provide a needs assessment of the 12 allotment sites owned by Lancaster City Council, an analysis of the current arrangements and options for suitable management arrangements for the future.
5. Authorities are duty bound to provide allotments for residents in their areas (section 23 of the 1908 allotment act) if they consider that there is a demand for them. If there is a demand for them the local authority, by definition, has a responsibility to ensure they are properly managed.
6. The Council recognises that allotments are an important community resource. The Council does not have in place a strategy for allotments but has adopted a range of recommendations made by the Council's overview and scrutiny committee in 2005, although progress in implementing these recommendations has been difficult due to lack of resources.
7. Under current arrangements allotment associations lease their site from the Council, at market rates, and are then solely responsible for the management and administration of their site. Plot holders rent their plots directly from the allotment association.
8. The Council's Sustainability Officer and Environmental Officer are responsible for promoting and supporting allotments within the District. However, the allotment associations are responsible for all aspects of management of their site. In managing their sites the value (and efficiencies generated) that allotment associations add to the Council is not recognised in any way that directly benefits the allotment associations and their plot holders. Effectively, the Council's responsibility to manage their allotments has been discharged to the allotment associations without any consideration being given to the sustainability of such an arrangement.
9. In visiting the District's allotment sites and talking to committee members and plot holders it is clear that there whilst self management is accepted in principle, and in practice, there is a need for the Council to recognise the need to support self management. Allotment associations need support to resolve basic infrastructure problems, fencing and water supply at a number of sites. The resources required to resolve these infrastructure problems cannot practically be raised from increasing plot holder rents and external funding for allotments is extremely hard to come by. In addition many allotment associations are struggling to tackle day to day maintenance issues on their allotment sites due to lack of resources.
10. Maintaining the status quo would appear to be unsustainable. Returning to a position whereby allotment associations become dependent on the Council would be a backward step and very expensive.
11. Best practice indicates that Councils should encourage devolution of allotment management but that for it to be successful devolution needs to occur within a

strategic framework. The vision for allotments needs to be defined, as do the ongoing responsibilities of the stakeholders. The strategy should also identify what resources are needed to get allotments to a condition from which allotment associations could reasonably be expected to manage them and ensures that the ongoing management and administration of allotments can be sustained. As a starting point best practice for self management suggests that the basic infrastructure of the site should be sound. In addition Councils should consider the administration savings generated by self management and assess what level of lease would be appropriate to charge an allotment association that is in return effectively improving the Council's asset and generating efficiencies for the Council.

12. An examination of best practice identifies that whilst the Council has devolved management of allotments no account has been taken of the needs of individual allotment sites and their plot holders. In addition the medium and long-term impact of the current management arrangements on the allotment sites and their plot holders has not been considered.
13. It is apparent that demand for allotments far exceeds supply within the District. Consideration should be given by the Council as to whether additional sites are required or what assistance should be provided to extend existing sites.
14. The upcoming lease review of allotments provides the ideal opportunity for discussion amongst all stakeholders as to the most appropriate way of managing allotments in the future. The purpose of the report is to provide the lease review with an appraisal of current arrangements, analysis of best practice and recommendations for the future
15. After considering the current situation of the Districts allotments and examples of best practice the report identifies that an effective model of management for this District could be one where a partnership exists between the Council, allotment associations and plot holders to develop allotments as a community resource.
16. For this model to work partners would need to contribute the following-

Council

- Capital to improve basic infrastructure at allotment sites (programme over several years).
- Ensure that the two days per week officer time allocated to allotments is utilised in a way that meets the agreed aims and objectives of the Council and allotment associations.
- Strategic oversight of allotments
- Allotment sites provided at peppercorn rent to allotment associations
- Provides support in practical ways (eg, insurance, access to compost, grass cutting, waste management etc)
- Review infrastructure needs on an annual basis and feed into capital programme

Allotment associations

- Self manage allotment sites on a day to day basis

- Seek external funding opportunities for their allotment sites
- Continue to contribute to Council priorities

ALMA

- Represent allotment associations when dealing with Council
- Seek external funding for allotment development

Plotolders

- Meet management and administration costs of their allotment site
- Contribute to the aims and objectives of the allotment partnership.

This model for allotment management should be clearly defined within an agreed allotment strategy that sets out how allotments will be sustained in the short, medium and long terms.

17. Other potential options are also considered and appraised within the report.

BACKGROUND

18. In 2004, the Association of Lancaster and Morecambe Allotments (ALMA) and the North West Counties Association of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners (NWCAA) initiated a review of the management of allotments. Prior to this, local allotments in the Lancaster District were simply treated as property assets of Lancaster City Council. Allotment Associations would pay an annual rent to the City Council and then took responsibility for all site maintenance and associated costs.
19. Recommendations were put forward to the Council for developing the allotments as community resources. Some of these recommendations have now been acted upon, but with minimal resources, progress has been slow or non-existent in several areas. An officer of the council (Sustainability Officer) is now responsible for general signposting to grants etc and promotion of the allotments as community resources. Allotment Associations are still paying the annual rent and are still responsible for site maintenance. All Allotment Associations are voluntary associations with very limited resources.
20. At a recent progress meeting ALMA highlighted two areas that would lead to a significant improvement in allotment management.
 - Undertaking of a needs assessment of all 12 Lancaster City Council owned allotment sites
 - Assessment of the current management model with a view to updating and improving it in line with best practice.
21. As a result ALMA commissioned this report

SCOPE

22. The scope of the report is as follows-

Needs assessment of all 12 Lancaster City Council owned allotment sites

Identify local needs / issues not being addressed due to lack of resources.

Identify infrastructure problems that Allotment Associations are currently facing, and are unable to do anything about themselves.

Develop a strategy for completion of essential improvements. Including development action plans for improvement to the 12 sites for existing users, as well as potential community involvement.

Prepare cost estimates for this work and identify funding options.

Assess the current management model with a view to updating and improving it in line with best practice

Assess the current management model and identify its strengths and weaknesses

Examine best practice management models for allotments in other regions / authorities

Assess the options in terms of what would be the most appropriate model for allotments in the Lancaster District.

Feed information into lease reviews of the allotments and council policy on allotment management and support

CURRENT SITUATION

2004 Review

23. In 2004, Lancaster City Council's Overview and Scrutiny committee produced a report entitled 'Allotments'.

The recommendations of the report were as follows-

Recommendation 1

- That the Council recognises the vital role that allotments can play in promoting health, well-being and biodiversity and as contributory elements towards the objectives of the Corporate Plan, Community Strategy and Sustainable Development (LA21) strategy
- That the Council seeks to secure more support for allotments and local food initiatives, both from within the Council and through local partnerships in accordance with this recommendation.
- That where possible, and in partnership with Allotment Associations, the Council helps to seek funding from grants, section 106 money and Landfill tax credits to support the development of allotments.

Recommendation 2

- That the Council confirms and ensures that all allotment sites within the district are afforded protection under the Local Development Framework.

Recommendation 3

- That the Council views allotments as essential community resources, not simply as property assets, and that the Council's Environmental Coordinator (now designated Sustainability Officer) helps to promote allotments, and create or strengthen links with corporate policies, the Wildlife forum, Food Forum and Recycling Forum.

Recommendation 4

- That the Council instigates a review of allotment leases in two years in partnership with ALMA in order to consider issues including-
- Leisure Garden
- Sale of surplus goods
- Community gardens
- Placing allotments in trust

And that this should include full consultation with all stakeholders including Allotment Associations and tenants on any emerging proposals.

Recommendation 5

- That the Council designates a lead officer for allotment enquiries, advice and support to community groups who wish to establish new or enlarged allotment sites within the Lancaster District and that in the absence of expertise or capacity to provide such support directly, the Council refers groups to alternative sources of support (eg Council for Voluntary Services)
- That the Council encourages and supports officers in obtaining funding for the 'Local Growth' project as a contributory element towards objectives 1. (m) of the Community Strategy.

Recommendation 6

- That the Council consider using section 106 money to provide allotment facilities in areas of high demand and secure a sum of money to assist with the ongoing running and maintenance costs of such sites.

Recommendation 7

- That the Council in conjunction with ALMA organises a districtwide allotments forum (including rural and privately owned allotments) twice per year to enable information and ideas to be shared, and issues of concern to be discussed and addressed.

Recommendation 8

- That ALMA be asked to assist the Council through providing Allotment Association contact details for the Council's website, and liaising with the Council on behalf of Allotment Associations.

Recommendation 9

- That ALMA be recommended to become a properly constituted organisation and investigate becoming an environmental organisation for the purposes of receiving and distributing funding from land fill tax.

Recommendation 10

- That the Council reduces lease fees from the financial year 2005/6 onwards to a breakeven level, reappportioning the surplus by acreage, to Allotment Associations to enable them to spend more of their income from plot rental on site maintenance and running costs.

Recommendation 11

- That the Council's Environmental Co-ordinator be asked to help ALMA to take advantage of internal and external funding opportunities – eg by passing on information about available grants.

The report of the Overview and Scrutiny committee was considered by the City Council's Cabinet on 18th January 2005

As a result the City Council's Cabinet made the following recommendations-

24. Cabinet 18th January 2005 -

- 1) That Cabinet adopts the recommendations, as set out in the report, subject to recommendation (10) being deleted and replaced with: -

That surpluses on the allotments account be set aside in a revenue reserve for improvements on the allotments.

(2) That Cabinet recognise that the proposals, as set out in the report, have manpower and financial implications and that these are brought forward in terms of the budget and policy framework proposals for 2005/06 and that the Chief Executive be requested to report upon the manpower and financial implications and how these will be prioritised in the 2005/06 Business Plans.

(3) That Cabinet provides a written response to the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee within a reasonable timescale.

25. Cabinet 22nd Feb 2005

To address recommendation (2) above Cabinet 22nd Feb 2005 made the following recommendation-

That the City Council's Environmental Co-ordinator becomes the Officer lead contact for allotments, for up to half a day per week and any scope over and above the half day be used for the purposes of promotion of allotments, but that it is recognised that her current workload is such that the issues identified by the City Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee cannot be fully addressed without additional resources and ,therefore, only those activities which can be absorbed without adding significant additional work, e.g. website development, general signposting, creating links with the Sustainability Forums, will be taken forward. For this to happen the Environmental Co-ordinator will still have to offer less administrative support to the Sustainability Partnership and its Forums.

Progress

26. The report 'Allotments' served as a starting point in that it acknowledged the importance of allotments as a community resources as opposed to a property asset. In addition it served a starting point for this report.

The table below shows what progress has been made with the recommendations to date-

Recommendation	Progress
1	Linkage of allotments with key Council strategies has been established (eg the Core Strategy) but not developed. The immediate priority for most allotments is improved infrastructure, however, sourcing grants to fund infrastructure is very difficult and time consuming. In many cases the criteria for grant application specifically excludes allotments (eg Lottery Funding, landfill tax credit funding).
2	Established as open space within the Local Development Framework.
3	The shift to viewing allotments as essential community resources is significant but needs to be fully developed. The Council's Sustainability Officer is promoting allotments and establishing some links with corporate policies and forums.
4	ALMA has taken the initiative on reviewing allotment management through this report. This work has been supported by funding from the City Council and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).
5	The Sustainability Officer has been designated the lead officer for allotments, although capacity in this regard is extremely limited. Capacity has recently been increased from half a day a week to two days a week due to the recent appointment of an Environmental Assistant (new post from 27 th June 2007).
6	No additional allotment sites have been established using section 106 money.
7	Basic issues such as who leads on the organisation of this forum and what the purpose of such a forum would be have yet to be resolved so no further progress has been made.
8	Ongoing
9	ALMA's capacity is strictly limited. Investigation of the use of landfill tax shows that it cannot be used to fund the projects that allotments require as a priority. At this stage there appears to be no practical advantage to becoming an environmental organisation.
10	A sum of £3,200 per annum has been set aside for allotment associations to utilise. However, the criteria for use of the funding does not include ongoing repairs and maintenance. There is a lack of clarity as to how the lease fees collected from allotments are

	allocated and how the figure of £3,200 was arrived at, as the leases fees collected are considerably greater than that.
11	Ongoing

Since the allotments report progress has been slow. Some of the recommendations have proved to be difficult or impractical to implement and although the report served as a starting point to raising awareness of allotments many of the real issues faced by allotments were not fully explored at this stage.

Lease Review

27. The current lease arrangements come to an end in April 2009. The current lease agreement is described by a legal consultant as 'a ponderous document' and several areas that have been highlighted as being outdated and in need of review. The upcoming lease review provides the ideal opportunity for discussion and agreement between all stakeholders as to the most appropriate way of managing allotments in the future. The purpose of this report is to provide the lease review with an appraisal of current arrangements, analysis of best practice and recommendations for the future.

The District's Allotments

28. Lancaster City Council currently owns 12 allotment sites in the District. Of these ten are in Lancaster, while Morecambe and Carnforth each have one allotment site.

The actual location of the allotments is as follows-

Allotment	Location	Ward
Dorrington Road	Lancaster	Scotforth West
Barley Cop Lane	Lancaster	Skerton East
Torrisholme	Lancaster	Skerton West
Highfield	Lancaster	Bulk
Devonshire Road	Morecambe	Heysham North
Highfield	Carnforth	Carnforth
Cork Rd	Lancaster	John O'Gaunt
Shrewsbury Drive	Lancaster	John O'Gaunt
Scotforth Cemetery	Lancaster	Scotforth West
Bridge Road	Lancaster	Scotforth West
John O'Gaunt	Lancaster	John O'Gaunt
Fairfield	Lancaster	Castle

29. The 12 allotments contain 536 full sized plots. There has been more emphasis in recent years to provide smaller plots for those who wish them. The number of full sized plots equates to four plots per thousand of population. This compares with-

Ipswich-	18 plots per thousand
Carlisle-	8 plots per thousand
Exeter-	11 plots per thousand

Preston-	4 plots per thousand
Chorley-	1 plot per thousand

In addition there are several private allotments within the District that are outside the scope of this report.

The Stakeholders

30. The main stakeholders involved in the management of allotments in Lancaster are as follows-

Lancaster City Council

- Leases each of its 12 allotment sites to the respective allotment association at a market rate value for a period of 10 years per lease. The lease sets out specific conditions that the allotment association must adhere to and places responsibility on the allotment association for management and administration of the allotment site. Under the conditions of the lease the allotment associations are solely responsible for infrastructure, including provision of fencing, maintenance of water systems, fencing, gates, pathways, removal of rubbish etc. In addition the allotment associations are responsible for the administration of their site and all that entails.

Allotment Associations

- Each allotment association leases the site from the Council, arranges tenancy agreements and reinvests any available revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repair and capital items. The allotment associations are solely responsible for the management and administration of their site.

Individual Plot holders

- Each individual plot holder rents their plot directly from the allotment association. Plot holders sign a plot agreement and agree to abide by the rules of the allotment association. Plot holders pay an annual plot fee which generally covers lease from Council, water, insurance, sundry items. In most cases prospective plot holders either contact individual associations directly (some contact details are available on the Council waiting list) or they contact the Council's sustainability team who will then provide information on how to go about obtaining an allotment.

ALMA

- ALMA was set up in response to individual allotment associations' frustration at an apparent neglect of allotments by the Council. ALMA consists of representatives from individual allotment associations. As an entirely representative body ALMA has no resources and relies on volunteers who are already volunteering at their own allotment associations.

A more detailed description of the stakeholders responsibilities is outlined later within the report.

The Individual Allotment Sites

31. In order to understand the needs of each allotment site and to assess current management arrangements each of the allotment sites were visited.

Shrewsbury Drive, Lancaster

32. Shrewsbury Drive site is approximately 3.59 acres and has 43 full sized plots. The site is mainly bordered by the surrounding properties so has very little fence line to maintain. The small amount of fenceline and gates that exist are in good condition having been recently funded through a green partnership award grant. There are some half plots on the site and there is currently a waiting list of around 5 people.
33. At the time of my visit United Utilities were carrying out work on the site to solve a long standing problem with sewage in the area. The effect of this work would be that at least one and a half plots would be lost to the site. The allotment association had, however, managed to persuade United Utilities to carry out some work on the site to try to resolve drainage problems on one of the plots. If this work failed to solve the issue the association would consider using the plots as a wildlife area.
34. The secretary of the site had fulfilled the role for around four years now. When she took over the role she was given very little support on what was expected of the role and what the duties of the role were. The site also has a treasurer and other committee members. The committee meets as and when and also holds an annual general meeting.
35. The secretary was aware of the role of the Council's Sustainability Officer in relation to allotments, and has received emailed information on various issues, but considered the time allocated to the role as insufficient. She considered that better advice could be provided by the Council on issues like asbestos, waste management and fly tipping. Besides providing better advice she also considered that practical assistance could be given through the provision of skips or waste collection by the Council. Particularly as the site is thoroughfare the Council should consider maintaining the track and provided bins and litter removal.
36. This site had experienced problems with at least one neighbour extending boundaries onto the allotment site. The secretary felt that a periodic inspection regime from the Council would help to prevent this. She was concerned that in the event of a full blown boundary dispute the allotment association would get little support from the Council and had heard of other disputes at other sites.
37. Vandalism and fly tipping had been a problem in the past but seemed to be less of a problem at the moment. The secretary attributes the low level of theft and vandalism to the linkage with the local community and takes the view that bigger and better fences create a bigger and better challenge for would be vandals.

38. The secretary considered that the role of ALMA was to facilitate networking between the local allotment associations and to act as a representative body for the Council's allotments. The secretary was very conscious of the community impact of allotments and their contribution to issues like sustainability and climate change and felt this was an area that could be further developed.
39. It was considered that the current lease was outdated and needed to be reviewed. An example cited was an outdated prohibition on growing anything other than annuals on the site.

Highfield Road, Lancaster

40. Highfield allotments cover 3.81 acres and contain 52 plots. The site is on a fairly steep slope and offers superb views of the District.
41. The site has a committee that meets on the first Sunday of every month and in addition holds an annual general meeting. The committee carry out the majority of maintenance work required on the site including rebuilding of stone walls, maintenance of the ditch and dyke, preparation of an area for storing waste, demolition of unsafe sheds and so forth.
42. The allotment association hires its own skip at least once a year and expressed a view that this was something that really the Council should make provision for. In the past the Council had dropped off swept leaves for mulching and these were welcome.
43. Plot holders rental includes plot fees, water and sundry expenses but not insurance. Long standing plot holders were very price sensitive, however, new members often expressed surprise as to how cheap the rent was. Currently there is a waiting list of around 15 people.
44. The fact that the site is on a slope means that especially in winter the pathways can get very slippery. The fence line to the left of the site (bordering the school) consists of asbestos sheets staked against the hedgeline. In the past the Council had sent out a letter to allotment associations telling them of their responsibilities in relation to asbestos but not offering any support or advice beyond that.
45. The secretary was clear that for an allotment site to function properly somebody on the site had to take responsibility for it and although the work involved in running the site was very onerous if they didn't do it nobody else would.
46. The secretary was aware of the Council's Sustainability Officer's role in allotments but communication was an issue as he didn't regularly use his email. He was aware that grants of different kinds were available for allotments but the application process was long winded and time consuming and committee members already had enough to do.

John O' Gaunt, Primrose

47. John O'Gaunt allotments cover 2.31 acres and contain 53 full sized plots. The waiting list for the allotments consists of twenty five people.

48. Boundary fencing is a big issue for this site. The allotment association secured £5,000 of lottery, match funded by St Martin's College and £1000 of Council funding (allotment reserve fund) which helped replace the fencing on the St Martin's college border of the allotments. There is still a length of fencing on this side that needs replacing and the fencing on the Scotch Quarry side is in urgent need of replacement.
49. Fly tipping is an issue on this site and people regularly deposit rubbish at the entrance of the site which the allotment association then has to remove.
50. Many of the plots are separated by hedging, which helps separate the plots but is time consuming to maintain. Some have accumulated lots of rubbish over the years which can be off putting to prospective tenants. The allotment association arranges for a skip at least once a year and also arranges work days.
51. There is a shortage of people willing to volunteer for the site committee so the secretary carries out the majority of administration and management duties. Site maintenance issues like grass mowing, repair of the water supply and arranging of skips are especially time consuming and difficult and are issues that the secretary feels that the allotment association should be able to seek support from the Council on.
52. As has been mentioned the allotment association was successful at obtaining external funding for replacement fencing. Obtaining the funding was one thing but then there was also a requirement for someone to actively manage the project, eg choose contractors, check work, manage budgets etc. This again was something that allotment association members do without any support, but requires considerable time, commitment and effort.
53. The secretary is aware of the support offered by the Council's Sustainability Officer and has found the support useful.

Dorrington Road, Lancaster

54. Dorrington Road allotments cover 3.73 acres and contain 53 full sized plots. The waiting list for the allotments is at least 15. The allotment site is long and quite narrow, bordered one side by the railway and the other by a wood which contains a public right of way.
55. The entrance gate is in need of renewal and widening and needs to be usable by all. The wood that borders one side of the allotments has a public right of way going through it and a very long fence line which the allotment association is responsible for and currently has in place a programme to renew sections of the chestnut pailing fence. The association considers that the fence should be replaced with more secure boundary fencing to prevent vandalism, theft and fly tipping as well as giving reassurance to the more vulnerable members of the association. The allotment association purchases the fencing and the members then carry out the work.

56. Several plots on the site have problems with drainage and shading which again the allotment association are seeking to remedy. In common with many allotments that water system has been cobbled together over the years and suffers from frequent leaks. There is a path that goes right through the site that can be accessed by vehicles but which is in need of some maintenance.
57. The committee meets every two months. Plot holders on the site pay a fee which covers the lease to the Council, water, insurance, sundry items and skip hire. The committee arranges a yearly skip and work party days. Getting volunteers to contribute towards communal activities can prove difficult.
58. The allotment association have accessed grants to fund various environmental improvements, however, the application process is time consuming. The allotment association has also considered the possibility of using voluntary organisations to undertake some works on the site and advice was being sought on what insurance the allotment association would require for this.
59. The allotment association were keen to provide accessible plots for disabled members but some infrastructure work would need to take place eg ensuring that the gates that could be opened by all are fitted, improving access tracks. The site had suffered problems with neighbour encroachment.
60. The secretary was of the opinion that certainly older plot holders are very price sensitive.

Barley Cop Lane, Skerton

61. Barley Cop Lane allotments cover 3.37 acres and contain 44 full plots. There is currently a waiting list of nine people.
62. One side of the site is bordered by a playing field and the Council has recently replaced the fencing on that side. Another side of the site is bordered by Council Housing property and that fencing has recently been renewed. In addition the allotment association has received green partnership funding to replace other fencing. The only parts of the fence line that are incomplete are where the County Council owned day centre borders onto the site. This used to be a residential centre but since becoming a day centre vandals have been able to gain access to the site through the grounds of the day centre. There are also some very small lengths of fencing required at two other points to ensure the site is secure. Historically vandalism has been a very significant problem on this site.
63. In the past the allotment association has provided skips for its plot holders but these attracted non plot holders who quickly filled them up with various other items of rubbish.
64. The site has several plots available for pigeon fanciers.
65. The secretary made the point that looking after the administration and management of the allotments was a full time job. She had taken on the job because there didn't

seem to be anybody else who wanted to do it and had had to pick it up as she went along.

66. Plotolders on this site were thought to be very price sensitive and many were pensioners.

Highfield, Carnforth

67. Carnforth's allotments cover 1.06 acres and contain 12 full plots split by a public pathway. There is always a waiting list for allotments on this site. The site itself is surrounded by a housing estate and the plots are fenced but the fence is in need of renewal. The site has a new gate which was funded via a green partnership award.
68. There is no direct water supply to the site so the plotholders rely on collecting rainwater for their plots. Plotholders consider that obtaining a proper water supply is the utmost priority for the allotments.
69. Plotholders fees consist of rent for the plot, insurance and sundry items.

Fairfield, Lancaster

70. Fairfield allotment site covers 4.39 acres and contains 56.5 plots. There is currently a waiting list of 64 people.
71. The boundaries of the site are either on good condition or not the responsibility of the allotment association. However, some of the boundaries are not well maintained by their owners, and the allotment association have been forced to repair them to maintain the security of the site. The allotment association has completely refurbished the water supply system at the site, however, there is now a need to replace the water containers. Vandalism does occur at the site usually in the form of arson or aluminium thefts and the association regularly liaises with the Police..
72. In common with the majority of sites some of the plots have been split into half plots and the association is also trialling the use of quarter plots for new starters.
73. The allotment committee meets every two months and holds an annual general meeting. The committee consists of eight members. The majority of committee members have served for a long time and recruiting new members is not easy. The allotment association has held competitions and fund raising days. The use of voluntary organisations to carry out works on site has been considered although the practicalities and usefulness of such a step is a cause of concern to the allotment association. Such a move may well generate more work than it produces.
74. The association is currently planning to increase capacity by extending the allotments and plans have been developed which would provide extra plots. There is clearly a need for increased capacity at the site, however, the implications of expansion are likely to result in the need for new boundary fencing, extended water supplies, improved trackways, establishment of new plots, new windbreaks and hedging as well as placing an additional management burden on the allotment association and its committee.

75. The allotment association offers a seed scheme, a newsletter, and an annual externally judged competition. In addition the association provides skips and pest control as well as holding a fundraising day to contribute to the Fairfield association.

Scotforth Cemetery, Lancaster

76. Scotforth allotments cover 1.35 acres and provide 19 full sized plots. There is a waiting list of about twenty for this site. The allotments adjoin the cemetery and would be used by the Council to provide additional capacity for the cemetery should it ever be required.

77. The fencing alongside the main road is in need of refurbishment and continues from the cemetery fenceline. The fencing around the actual plots is in need of renewal. Several of the plots suffer shading problems from the large surrounding trees.

78. Plotholders pay an annual fee based on lease cost, water and sundry expenses.

79. The allotment committee were aware of the role of the Council's Sustainability Officer and had seen information on grants but taking into account all the other responsibilities entailed in managing the allotments considered that filling in grant forms was an additional responsibility that they did not have time for. The type of support that would be more welcomed from the Council was practical eg provision of skips and renewal of fencing.

Torrisholme

80. Torrisholme allotments cover 3.22 acres and provide 44 full sized plots. There is currently a waiting list of 25 people.

81. A few of the plots require considerable work on them which is off putting to prospective plotholders. In the past the allotment association had developed a partnership with a local school which had mutual benefits, however, circumstances have now changed and unfortunately this partnership is no longer in operation.

82. The site has historically suffered from neighbours encroaching on the boundaries, fly tipping and vandalism. The fenceline along the main road is in urgent need of renewal.

83. Plotholders rent consists of lease cost, water, insurance and sundry items. The management and administration of the allotment site is dependent on the efforts of a committee of three. The view of the committee is that the problems with infrastructure are in urgent need of addressing. If plotholders were confident that their plots wouldn't be vandalised that would be a good starting point.

Cork Road, Lancaster

84. Cork Road allotments cover 6.59 acres and provide 84 full size plots. A number of the plots are allocated to people wishing to keep livestock. There is currently a waiting list of about five people for plots on this site.

85. The boundaries are in reasonable condition although there is a considerable section that has in the past been a dumping ground, become overgrown and is now in need of clearance.
86. The price of a plot is £26.00 for a year.
87. The committee generally manages but would welcome more technical support on a range of issues from dealing with problems with ploholders to developing a proper constitution and set of rules for the site.

Devonshire Road, Morecambe

88. Devonshire Road allotments cover 4.06 acres and provide 63 full sized plots. A few of the plots are allocated to people wishing to keep livestock. There is currently a waiting list of over forty at the site.
89. The site has been regenerated over the past few years. Boundary fencing is in good condition. Car parking is available. A water harvesting project is underway and a site hut is being built. There are several plots that have been made accessible for disabled people and the pathways around the site are in good order.
90. The committee have been very active in applying for external funding which has been made much easier by the availability of regeneration funding in the Morecambe area.

Bridge Road, Lancaster

91. Bridge Road allotments cover 0.50 acre and provide 12 plots. There is currently a waiting list of 2 people. There is strong local support for the allotments and 10 out of 12 plot holders live within 50 metres of the actual site. The site is popular with families and considered a safe place for families because of its excellent visibility.
92. There is a trend towards letting half plots. Local demand may be greater if there were more communal and shared facilities and easier access to the site for removal of rubbish and delivery of compost.
93. The allotment association does not currently hold meetings but communication is effective and site initiatives (eg clean up weekends) attract nearly all plot holders.
94. There are issues with costs of purchasing, servicing and risk assessment of communal items like strimmers, which rely on the resources, knowledge and skills of plot holders to deal with.
95. The small size of the site makes it difficult to provide communal space for facilities like a communal shed or water recycling facility. The major issue is the sloping nature of the site, as it lies in a disused quarry. This could be overcome by levelling out the banks which would provide additional space and make for easier maintenance. However, the costs of this are currently prohibitive.
96. The allotment association is currently planning to apply to the Council for funds for extra maintenance equipment and would like to see better publicity of the site. The

perception is that vacancies are rare whereas in fact the average waiting list is less than one year.

General issues

97. In visiting each of the allotment sites and talking to plot holders and committee members there were a number of common issues that emerged-
98. The view of the allotment associations is that the current lease arrangements are very much along the lines of landlord / tenant and that this seems at odds with the status of allotments as a community resource. Allotment associations point to a situation whereby they are expected to provide a Council service to members of the local community, that if they weren't providing the Council would have to. In return for this they are still charged the going rate for lease of the land and expected to be responsible for all aspects of management of that land. The opportunity to have a far greater input into the process leading to developing the terms of the next lease (due 2009) is one that is welcomed by all. This would provide the opportunity to define the relative roles of the Council and allotment associations in the development of allotments as a community resource. The general feeling from all allotment associations is that their allotments are an invaluable community resource and that by working with the Council this resource could be developed further and for the benefit of all.
99. As will be seen later in the report self management of allotments is seen as best practice. Whilst the District's allotments are self managed this has arisen as a reactive response from individual allotment associations to historical Council policy on allotments rather than as a carefully planned strategy. The allotments sites are by default 'self managed.' The allotment association leases the land from the Council and is then left to its own devices. Visiting the sites there is a feeling of survival of the fittest. On every site there are plot holders who because they want to ensure that their allotments prosper are prepared to put in additional effort to managing and administering the site. These people form the backbone of each of the allotment associations. Some sites appear to be more successful in some respects than others, and this seems to be due to a combination of the location of the allotments and the willingness of people to carry out the range of management and administrative duties needed at each site. What all the allotment associations are extremely successful at is managing the very limited resources they have. Looking at the range of duties fulfilled by the allotment associations at each site it is clear that the dedication and commitment of these volunteers is saving the Council a large resource.
100. The main reasons why people take an allotment is because they enjoy growing vegetables, have limited garden space, want to have a more healthy and sustainable lifestyle and enjoy being outside. There is a social element and there are also elements of exercise. The conditions of the current lease make it clear that the people who use the allotments are responsible for the management and administration of the allotments. Self managing allotments means that not every plot holder can just go to the allotment to grow vegetables. As will be seen later in the report the management and administration of allotments is very involved. In theory every plot holder is a member of the allotment association and should contribute equally to the management and administration of the allotment. In practice this does

not and never will happen. To divide tasks equally between all members would be unworkable. Not everybody has the necessary energy, skills or time. At each site only a few are able to actually commit themselves to the necessary management and administration of the site. These plot holders become the foundation of the allotment association and its committee. Once committed it becomes extremely difficult to relinquish the role and the role tends to grow and grow.

101. For the committee members it appears to be quite frustrating. Because committee members have an overview of the site they can see the issues that need to be resolved which can vary from a problem tenant to a falling down fence. They know what the problems are and in most cases they know what the solutions are. However, in many cases they don't have the resources to be able to implement the solution.
102. 'Self management' of allotments is generally accepted as a good thing. However, in most cases plot holders have never experienced anything other than what happens currently. Self management creates a sense of ownership and it is clear that each individual allotment association has a huge sense of pride in its site.
103. Because of the way allotments have been left to their own devices 'self management' means different things at different sites. Some allotment sites have well attended committees and are very inclusive, some sites because of a lack of willing people have to operate self management on fairly autocratic lines. Both models appear to work to the overall benefit of the association and the individual plot holders. With a clearer sense of direction for allotments and more support from the Council more people would be likely to volunteer to help manage their allotments.
104. The concept of allotments as a community resource requires development. Allotments are regarded as open space. Any member of public can apply to have an allotment. However, there is only a limited supply of allotments so not everybody can have access to an allotment. Most sites that have experimented with leaving gates open or are naturally open, or have fencing that can be easily breached experience problems with fly tipping, vandalism and theft of their own equipment and produce. Shrewsbury Drive was an interesting case in that being an open site created very little theft and vandalism which the Secretary put down to community ownership of the site. The idea of widening the use of allotments by the community is one that allotments are interested in but requires thought on how it can work in practice.
105. The extent to which allotment associations can effectively self manage is determined by factors such as length of waiting lists, enthusiasm of plot holders, skills and experience of committee members, availability of funding, potential for vandalism, surrounding population, size of allotments, condition of existing boundaries. When new committee members are 'appointed' very little information on to how to fulfil their role is provided. Tasks like setting the fees for plots are not straightforward and will result in problems if areas of expenditure are overlooked or if emergencies occur. Definitive information on matters like insurance and grant applications is very hard to come by.
106. There are twelve Council run allotment sites in the District yet they appear to operate in isolation. There seems to be very little communication with other allotments. Every allotment site visited contained examples of how the association

had encountered and resolved problems in often ingenious ways. As examples some sites have in place clearly defined development plans and have been very successful at attracting funding. There is a wealth of knowledge, experience and practical wisdom available at each allotment site which when resources are already scarce it makes sense to share with others, which in turn could benefit the Districts allotments as a whole.

107. ALMA exists as a way to allow allotment associations to share best practice. All the District's allotment associations are by definition members of ALMA. ALMA meets on a periodic basis although attendance is not always high. With all the other commitments of allotment associations it is not always possible to find somebody who can attend the meetings. The acting chair and secretary of ALMA also send out regular information to other associations. Most associations have an email contact address, however, for various reasons not everybody regularly reviews their emails, so useful information isn't always communicated.
108. All allotment associations are aware of the work of the Sustainability Officer. The current position is affirmed via the Council's Cabinet decision following 'Allotments report'. Half a day per week is assigned to 'allotment officer'. Most allotment associations feel that this amount of time is insufficient and that some of the information that is received, whilst being relevant and valuable, is information that they have already obtained by other means. From the end of June 2007 this has been increased to 2 days per week following the recruitment of an Environmental Assistant. It is clear that allotment associations will welcome this increase in capacity. However, it will be important that the time is focussed on achieving objectives agreed between the Council and allotment associations.
109. Most allotment associations are aware that a new lease will need to be signed before 2009. Naturally they want to continue gardening at the allotments. The assumption from some allotments is that in order to ensure that they continue at the allotments they sign up to the lease even though they are not necessarily happy with it.
110. Due to the current popularity for allotments waiting lists at all sites are lengthening. In the past people from the area immediately surrounding the allotment have been the plot holders. This is no longer the case and there are people on several waiting lists prepared to travel considerable distance to the allotments. Some associations wonder if the number and the distribution of allotments right.
111. The priority of the committee at each site has to be the administration and management of the allotment. Some allotment associations have organised fund raising and social events which obviously help the scarce resources of the allotments. However, the effort required in organising these events on top of doing all the other things makes the idea good in theory but not so good in practice.
112. Most allotment associations are aware of the Allotment Reserve that has been set aside for allotment associations to apply to the Sustainability Officer for. However the application process is generally perceived as being restrictive in that it will fund items that many allotment associations would consider to be non essential when they are faced with very real issues like falling over fences or leaky water systems.

Lancaster City Council

113. Prior to the Allotment report referred to earlier allotment sites had been included within the portfolio of the Council's Property Services. Under current arrangements they fall within the remit of the Corporate Strategy service and specifically within the role of the Council's Sustainability Officer. Property Services no longer have any specific allotment duties but do provide the Sustainability Officer with advice on relevant technical queries. Across Councils generally the responsibility for allotments tends to lie with services responsible for the management of open space. Approximately half a day per week was originally allocated to allotments by the environmental coordinator. Tasks carried out in this time include-

- creation of and maintenance of allotment information on the Council website
- dissemination of relevant information to allotment associations
- management and administration of the allotments reserve
- provision of advice
- dealing with general allotment related queries
- dealing with general allotment related queries (about 10 a week)
- help with developing this current allotment study (e.g. the grant application, the project officer brief, the interviews, the report)
- negotiating reduced rates for pest control
- assisting with boundary fence issues and grant applications (eg Barley Cop Lane)
- provision of 500 water butts to Allotment Associations free of charge
- linking the allotments to the priorities of the Lancaster District Sustainability Partnership
- exploring the provision of extra sites, e.g. Tan Hill re-development
- identifying additional land that could be used for food growing
- working to get a full time food growing co-ordinator for the district (the Local Growth project. Allotment Associations were involved in the development of this project at an event at the Friends Meeting House. A Lottery Grant is currently being assessed)
- raising food growing issues strategically in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) by developing an 'Eat Local Action Plan' with targets for local food growing projects,
- writing to all Parish Councils to identify other allotment sites in the district
- responding to 'complaints' from neighbours such as fires and overgrown plots. The time capacity allocated to Allotment development has recently been increased to two days a week.
- Working on specific projects to improve allotments (eg communal metal sheds and battery operated drills are being supplied via the Rainwater Harvest Project to a minimum of 6 sites.

The time allocated to allotment development has recently been increased to two days a week

114. Stakeholders within the Council do genuinely recognise the importance of allotments as a community resource and would welcome the opportunity to work with allotment associations to develop this resource for the benefit of all.

Stakeholder Responsibilities

115. The range of general responsibilities of the stakeholders is set out below-

Item	IAA	ALMA	LCC
INFRASTRUCTURE			
Provision of boundary fencing	x		X- only on specific boundaries at Barley Cop and Fairfield
Provision of mains water supply	x		
Provision of accessible plots	x		
Provision of paths , roads	x		
Provision of communal facilities	x		
Provision of gates	x		
Providing communal equipment	x		
Provision of parking areas	x		
MAINTAINING INFRASTRUCTURE			
Reclamation of overgrown plots	x		
Maintenance of boundary fencing	x		X- only on specific boundaries at Barley Cop and Fairfield
Maintenance of mains water supply	x		
Mowing of grassed areas	x		
Maintenance of paths, roads	x		
Management of waterlogged, shaded plots	x		
Maintenance of communal facilities	x		
Maintenance of gates	x		
Maintaining hedges, pruning trees	x		
Improving biodiversity of site	x		x
Maintenance of communal equipment	x		
Providing labour	x		
Removing fly tipping from allotments	x		
Managing allotment waste	x		
Repairing vandalism	x		
Maintenance of parking areas	x		
Providing pest control	x		x

Item	IAA	ALMA	LCC
Ensuring security of site	x		
Demolition / removal of old structures (greenhouses, sheds etc)	x		
INDIVIDUAL ALLOTMENT ADMIN			
Management of waiting lists	x		
Managing membership list	x		
Collection of rents from plot holders	x		
Communication with plotholders	x		
Resolving disputes with neighbours / plotholders	x		x
Providing keys to plotholders	x		
Inducting new plotholders	x		
Providing information to new plotholders	x		
Dealing with plotholders concerns, queries etc	x		
Inspecting plots	x		
Informing plotholders of result of inspection	x		
Setting, managing budgets	x		
Setting of fees for plot holders	x		
Development of association constitution	x		
Development of association rules	x		
Carrying out fund raising activities	x		
Training new committee members	x		
Providing sundry items for allotments	x		
Arranging meetings facilities for AGMs etc	x		
Administering meetings- preparing agendas, sending out, taking minutes, sending out minutes etc	x		
Serving notice on plotholders	x		
ALLOTMENT WIDE ADMIN			
Setting of annual overall lease cost			x
Provision of legal advice	x		x
Provision of insurance to cover allotment holders / public liability	x	x	
Provision of insurance to cover volunteers	x		x
Provision of technical advice	x	x	x
Provision of grant information	x	x	x
Support for grant application	x	x	x
Making grant applications	x	x	x
Marketing of allotments as a whole			x
Marketing of individual sites	x		x
Communication with IAA		x	x
Negotiation of lease with LCC	x	x	

Item	IAA	ALMA	LCC
Addressing demand for allotments	x	x	x
Planning development / extension of allotments	x		x
Developing community ownership / use	x		x
Providing seed schemes	x		x
Development plans of allotment sites	x		x
Managing projects	x		x
Setting criteria for waiting lists	x		
Looking at best practice elsewhere	x	x	x
Sharing best practice	x	x	x
Ensuring health and safety of site (asbestos etc)	x		x
Managing volunteers	x		
Being point of contact with public	x		x
Arranging fund raising events	x		
Arranging competitions	x		
Maintaining information on Council website	x	x	x
Administration of allotments reserve fund			x

Relative Perception of Stakeholders

116. The perception of the stakeholders as to their and other stakeholders responsibilities provides good context-

	ALMA	IAA	LCC
ALMA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide variances in practice from allotment site to allotment site and best practice could be shared more • Difficult to build any capacity for ALMA from IAA • Difficult to communicate with IAAs • Difficult to represent IAAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allotments not high on agenda • Take rent for allotments • Forward via email best practice, grant information etc • Meet with ALMA which is more convenient than meeting with all 12 IAAs • ALMA only came into existence because the Council has neglected allotments • Council wants

	ALMA	IAA	LCC
			<p>ALMA to develop so as to avoid accepting its own responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of frustration ALMA is taking positive action eg Allotments report and now this one. But what's being done as a result? • Council uses ALMA, and refers to allotments being self managed in order to tick boxes.
IAA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty as role of ALMA and what it's role is • Confusion between ALMA and other representative organisations (eg NSALG) • Managing our own allotment and allotment site is time consuming enough. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split here between- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) We pay the Council the rent and they leave us to it which is good b) We pay the Council the rent and they leave us to it which is good but advice on technical issues, support for grants would be welcome c) (which is a minority) we'd really like to be left to it but we are struggling due to lack of capacity.

	ALMA	IAA	LCC
			<p>d) Infrastructure issues need addressing but the Council has no resources to do anything.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current self management model helps Council tick boxes. • LCC takes rents and play a passive role • LCC provides some technical advice • Forward via email best practice, grant information etc
LCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer to deal with representative body rather than IAAs • ALMA could develop it's role more • LCC has affirmed it's position via 'Allotments report' and via allotments reserve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides technical advice to IAAs • Lease and terms therein have been agreed with IAAs • Forward via email best practice, grant information etc- don't get much response • Send information by post for displaying on the allotment notice boards – local projects and events • Help Allotment Associations with accessing and applying for grants 	

	ALMA	IAA	LCC
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a reserve in place which IAAs can claim from but don't always • IAAs are allowed to just get on with it and manage their allotments within the loose framework provided by the Council • If a statutory allotment couldn't cope under current arrangements that would cause the Council a resource problem which would have to be resolved 	

BEST PRACTICE

The Law

Recreation

117. At present allotment gardening is not recognised in law as a 'recreational activity' although it is widely promoted as such and it is noteworthy that Lancaster City Council views allotments as 'essential community resources.'

Provision

118. Authorities are duty bound to provide allotments for residents in their areas (section 23 of the 1908 allotment act) if they consider that there is a demand for them. In their assessment of demand an authority must take into consideration any representations made to them by six parliamentary electors or council tax payers resident in the area. They must also provide a sufficient number of plots.

Statutory / Temporary

119. Statutory sites are those that have been acquired by the authority for the purpose of being allotment gardens whilst temporary sites have been acquired for other purposes and are used as allotments in the interim. Statutory sites are directly protected by the allotments legislation but temporary ones are not.
120. If statutory allotment land is considered to be surplus to requirements it may be sold with the consent of the Secretary of State (section 8 of the 1925 Act). If ploholders are displaced by the action then adequate provision must be made for them unless he is satisfied that such provision is unnecessary or not reasonably practicable.

Fixing of rents

121. There is no requirement on the authority to exact a 'full fair rent'.
122. Section 10 of the 1950 Act provides that land let by a council for use as allotment land shall be let at such rent 'as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land if let for such use on the terms (other than terms as to rent) on which it is in fact let.' In other words the allotment rent should be what one could reasonably expect an allotment rent to be.
123. There is also provision in section 10 of the 1950 Act for payment of reduced rent in special circumstances which might include retired, elderly, unemployed, or disabled tenants or tenants of long standing, or any other circumstance which the authority thinks fit.

Management

124. The Good Practice Guide for the management of allotments states-

Devolved management schemes can benefit both local authorities and ploholders. A reduced burden of administration and maintenance responsibilities not only results in savings for the authority, but can also be a route to engaging with local communities in the management and regeneration of important environmental assets, as part of Agenda 21 and community planning strategies. This can then kick start the process of turning under-utilised sites around, and provide best value to service users.

For ploholders, devolution can bring more responsive management on a day to day basis, a sense of pride in any improvements to the site, and opportunities for volunteers to bring their skills and expertise to a new challenge.

125. The involvement of allotment ploholders in management of allotments can be broadly categorised as follows-

Dependence- neither ploholders nor associations play any practical part in site management, beyond exchange of information, perhaps through a site representative.

Participation- ploholders informally accept responsibility for minor maintenance works, and some mechanism may exist (such as an allotments forum) for the views of ploholders or site reps to be canvassed on capital expenditure or repairs.

Delegation- a properly constituted allotment association accepts formal responsibility for a range of duties under licence from the local authority, under financial arrangements which release a proportion of rental income for this purpose. For example, the association may arrange tenancies, collect rents and carry out regular maintenance duties, but leave the local authority to carry out repairs, pay for overheads such as water, and undertake all legal formalities.

Semi- autonomy- the allotment association leases the site from the council, arranges tenancy agreements and reinvests revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repair and capital items. The council retains the right to review the lease at periodic intervals and has defined oversight and strategic functions.

126. The greater the degree of self – management the greater the saving to the council and the greater the degree of responsibility assumed by allotment ploholders.

127. Richard Wiltshire's 'Devolved Management for Allotments: models and processes makes the following relevant points-

No scheme for devolved management will work unless there is sustained commitment to it on the part of the local authority, the allotment society and individual ploholders.

The capacity of an allotment society to make a success of devolved management will depend in part on the extent of the duties to be devolved, but also on a wide range of other variables which may or may not be within its control- the size of the site, the tenancy rate, the quality of the infrastructure, the level of rental income, the leadership abilities of present and future tenants, the character of the local community, and so on.

Accountability is central to the task of maintaining support for devolved management amongst plot holders – and local authorities. Without transparent procedures and audit mechanisms, there is always the risk that failures in the performance of devolved duties will go undetected (or unreported), and conversely, that societies will become too zealous in implementing their powers.

128. The Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs (Future of Allotments, 1998). Made a number of observations in relation to best practice for allotment management these were-

Designation of Allotments Officers- an allotments officer should be designated to maintain an authority's active allotments policy.

Providing of facilities- The availability of water on site is noted as being critical in encouraging plotheolders. Allotment sites are unique amongst leisure facilities in rarely having toilets available.

Prevention of theft and vandalism- Theft and vandalism are serious problems on many allotment sites. Various possible solutions include- improved security fencing and locks, using hedges effectively, setting up Plot- Watch scheme and ensuring that the site plays a role in the local community.

Encouraging, maintaining and broadening demand- Local authorities should give consideration as to how they might further broaden the appeal of allotments to attract more women and young people with families. Wherever possible, a site should be made more child-friendly: for instance, by converting the occasional vacant plot into a play area for the children of the allotment holders.

Development of community role- the best allotment societies often play an active role in the wider community. This may be through involvement in Local Agenda 21 initiatives, community composting or annual events. Allotment gardening can be very educational for school children learning about growing vegetables and fruit. The therapeutic role of allotments should be exploited and put to the benefit of people with a variety of different problems and needs.

Plot size and sharing- the traditional plot size can be too large for many people. Offering smaller plots can be a way of stimulating and sustaining greater demand. Perhaps a more imaginative way round this problem is to encourage people to share plots, particularly where this involves a younger, novice gardener with a more experienced but less physically able gardener.

Self management- There is little doubt that, when successfully implemented, self management schemes ensure greater control of a site by allotment holders and

tend to work to the benefit of the site. Self management fulfils the twin aims of ensuring greater control of a site by allotment holders and also reducing a local authority's administrative responsibilities. Local authorities should examine the potential for self management of their allotment sites.

- 129.** Allotments a plot-holders guide' produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government sets out the responsibilities of stakeholders-

Local authorities

Allotments are usually provided by the local authority which is sometimes known as 'an allotment authority'. This can be the local district, borough or parish council. The allotment authority will usually provide the plot holder with a renewable one-year lease and is responsible for the collection of rent, management, and maintenance of the site. Where there is no available land within a parish, district or borough, the allotment authority may provide land outside of these areas.

Each allotment authority decides for itself how much of its resources to devote to allotments. However, if an authority believes there is a demand, it has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient quantity of plots and to lease them to people living in its area. If local people feel there is a need for allotments which is not being met, they can get together a group of any six residents who are registered on the electoral roll and put their case to the local authority.

Allotment authorities usually have arrangements for consulting plot holders and many even employ dedicated allotment managers who liaise over the day to day management of sites. Some authorities also have consultative panels for communicating and resolving disputes between the authority, the plot holders and their associations.

Allotment societies and devolved management

Instead of letting and managing allotment sites themselves, some authorities will lease sites to local allotment societies or associations under devolved management agreements. The local society or association is then responsible for letting the plots, collecting the rent, maintaining the site and running it on a day to day basis.

The Government believes that people should be more involved in decisions affecting their local community and sees many benefits in devolving management to allotment societies. It can bring more responsive management and give plot holders a greater sense of ownership and pride in improvements made to the site. Of course, it is up to each individual to decide how involved they wish to become.

A society wanting to take on site management must first have a proper constitution. It will also need public liability insurance to protect itself, its volunteers and its members. The NSALG can advise on both and has also published general guidance on devolved management and possible lease arrangements.

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

The DCLG has responsibility for policy and legislation on allotments and also has a key role to play in their protection and promotion as valuable green spaces in our communities. In addition to this, the Department monitors disposals of allotments, which are handled by the Government Offices for the Regions.

Plot holders

A plot holder's responsibilities, including those for maintenance and security, will be set out in the tenancy agreement. An allotment requires commitment to maintain it to a reasonable standard.

The success of an allotment site depends on co-operation between plot holders and those responsible for the management of the site as a whole. Site contacts and site representatives can provide an effective line of communication. Again, individuals must decide how much or little they wish to participate.

130. With regard to the question as to what can reasonably be expected to be provided the same guide states?-

Facilities will vary, but there are some basic things that you should normally expect on any site.

Access to allotment sites should be safe and secure and not in itself a barrier to any group of users, such as people with disabilities. Main paths should be kept clear and plot holders themselves are responsible for minor paths.

An accessible **water supply** is essential. The allotment authority should ensure every plot holder has access to a mains water supply and that it is easy for elderly and disabled gardeners to use it. The cost of water is often incorporated into the rent for each plot.

Allotment authorities may provide **toilet facilities**. Many sites also provide site huts such as clubhouses although this is not compulsory. **Site huts** serve as a meeting place for the plot holders, for the storage of bulk materials and as a centre for the sale or distribution of seeds and equipment.

Some councils also provide **sheds** for plot holders and charge rent for them. If this is the case, the authority should ensure that they are in a good condition at the start of the tenancy.

Vandalism can be a problem on some sites. The allotment authority should ensure that **adequate security measures**, such as good fences and hedges, are in place and that tenants know what is provided and how to use them. Informal schemes known as Plot Watch can be effective particularly on smaller sites. This means local residents keeping an informal watch on a site and calling the police if they see any damage or trespass. Tenants themselves should always report instances of vandalism to the police and obtain an incident number.

Allotment rents and funding

131. The good practice guide for the management of allotments states-

In most cases rent will be the income derived from an allotment site. This will not only include site maintenance and repair but also administrative costs and promotion. These cannot be sustained without adequate finance. The level of rent should be set so that, together with other available funds and incomes, there is sufficient funding to meet both present and projected needs of the site. Otherwise the quality of sites and facilities will inevitably suffer.

Many ploholders are unaware of the true costs of providing allotment sites and maintaining facilities. When fixing the allotment rent the following factors need to be considered-

Long term financial sustainability

The nature, quality and cost of facilities provided (and desired)

Expenditure on promotion and administration

The present level of rent and its historic tradition

The likely effect of rent on plot take up

In addition, if the strategy is for self-financing of allotments there is a need for accrual of funds for future capital expenditure or maintenance programmes relating to the allotment sites. This assumes that the allotment site is in a fully maintained condition and does not require any immediate expenditure, and that the accrual of funds is for maintenance or replacement work that would be carried out in the normal course of events, such as the eventual renewal of gates or fencing.

Sustaining devolved management involves strategies to cope at times when enthusiasm and commitment subside. Where the problem is serious there may need to be reduction of the responsibilities associated with devolved management by switching to a scheme involving greater input from the Council, if only temporarily.

Allotment Strategy

132. A good practice guide for the management of allotments (LGA 2001) recommends the need for stakeholders to work together to achieve a better future for allotments. To achieve this there is a need for clear strategic direction. A good allotments strategy should include-

An opening statement of commitment to allotment gardening

A vision of what the service aspires to achieve, including standards and targets for provision and an acknowledgement of the wider agendas (eg sustainable development)

The vision should spell out the level of provision of allotment plots and standard of facilities, which Lancaster City Council, hopes to achieve. It also links to other wider agendas (eg Corporate Plan, LA 21 etc)

Clear plans for achieving the vision with a particular emphasis on promotion and resourcing.

The promotional strategy should be inclusive of all groups in society. Needs to emphasise the distinctive contribution that allotments can make to the achievement of 'social inclusion' at the local level.

Attention should also be given to the quality of allotment plots and associated facilities to ensure that there are no qualitative barriers which deter potential ploholders from exercising their right to garden.

The strategy should also address the issue of how upgrading and management of sites is to be financed on a sustainable basis

A specified role for devolved management

A strategy for enhancing the quality of day-to-day administration of allotments

A timetable for achieving the strategy and procedures for monitoring and reviewing progress

A concise summary of the contents, which can be used to promote the strategy to other stakeholders.

133. The organisation GROW recommends steps that allotment associations should take prior to agreeing to self management. The key step is ensuring that the site is at a reasonable standard and that expensive issues like fencing and water are in order prior to agreement.

134. The above sets out the theory and best practice of allotment management. It is also valuable to provide information on how other Councils manage allotments.

How are other Allotments Managed?

Preston City Council

135. Preston City Council has eight allotment sites and around 550 full sized plots. Each of the sites has a long waiting list.

136. Only one of the sites (Frenchwood) is self managed. The other sites are managed by the Council's Parks section. The Parks Development Officer is assigned the responsibility of managing allotments and spends approximately 30% of the working week managing allotments. In addition one of the sections administration assistants spends around 50% of the working week dealing with allotment enquiries. Further Council resources are devoted to pest control, grounds maintenance, skip provision, removal of fly tipping, site maintenance and other issues.

137. Full paying tenants currently pay £22 per year for a full sized plot. For this £22 per year ploholders are provided with the following-

- Free water (the cost to the Council is approximately £10,000 per annum)
- Free skips (approximately five skips are provided to each site per annum)
- Council organised competition and flower fair

- Maintenance of boundary hedges, roadways and paths
- Weed killing, clearing and cultivation of vacant plots prior to letting. The majority of plots have been cultivated within the previous year the ploholders are offered a rent free year for clearing their own plots.
- Grass cutting and maintenance of allotment paths.

138. Each Council allotment site has an elected Council site representative. The role of this person is to liaise between the Council and ploholders and also to help develop and promote the allotment association. The site representative is paid a small annual honorarium (£50.00 per year) and their voluntary duties include-

- Maintaining records of ploholders. These records are then fed to the Council who have a central database.
- Showing prospective tenants available plots and keeping a waiting list of people waiting for the plots. The majority of prospective tenants now apply online through the Council website and therefore a central waiting list is maintained.
- Informing the Parks section of any vacant plots that need weed control
- Informing the Parks section if any tenants are not maintaining their plots
- Meeting with staff from the Parks section to discuss problems / maintenance requirements
- Attending quarterly meetings with other site representatives and the Parks section
- Acting as a spokesperson for ploholders
- Liasing with the allotment association for the site

Some of the sites have their own allotment associations.

139. Frenchwood allotments have been self managed since 1921. In 1997 the association found itself in trouble. The site badly needed improvements but all of the rent was taken up by paying for the Council lease and water charges leaving very little for essential maintenance work. Following discussion with the Council and agreement was reached whereby the Council provided water free of charge, skips, pest control, maintenance of main paths and repair of some of the boundary fencing in exchange for a peppercorn rent.

140. By providing a small subsidy the council was able to aid the regeneration of the site and make it viable (hence fulfilling its legal obligation for the provision of allotment sites). This approach was more economical than assuming or retaining control of the allotment site.

141. Some of the allotment sites infrastructure is in need of improvement and the Council has been able to source funding for repairs to fencing through Lancashire Constabulary.

142. Preston's allotment service is heavily subsidised. The annual income is around £2,000. The annual expenditure is estimated to be in the region of a minimum of £40,000-

Water-	£10,000
Officer time-	£25,000

Repairs/maintenance- £5,000

143. Officers are aware that many Councils have devolved their allotments but at this stage Members have not formally considered the issue.

Carlisle City Council

144. Carlisle City Council has 66 allotment sites providing 765 plots. The largest site has 66 plots and the smallest has only one. The annual rent for a plot is around £20, depending on the size of the plot. There is a 50% reduction for those on a pension. If the site has water available, ploholders are also charged an additional £2.90 a year in water rates. There is no reduction for the water rate.

145. There are 6 self-managed sites in Carlisle, all towards the "dependency" end of self management. This represents about 30% of the plot total. The Council directly manages the other sites.

In 2005/6-

Expenditure- £39,900

Income- £13,700

Break down of 2005-6 expenditure:

£6,800 - spent on minor repairs to plumbing, fencing, gates etc. The largest expenditures were £3120 for partial fence replacement (in chestnut paling) and £1240 for replacement of damage to sections of paling security fencing. These repairs are carried out by the Council's direct in house staff or contracted out by staff in Council's the Maintenance section.

£28,500 - for grounds maintenance, fencing/plumbing works, padlocks, pest control and skip hire. In 2005-6 the biggest expenditure was £2,450 for replacement fencing chestnut paling replaced with palisade security fencing. The rest of the money was spent on grounds maintenance.

This is not usual, normally a larger proportion of the money would have been spent on new work (about £15,000) and less on grounds maintenance. The floods in January 2005 required a lot of repairs, and a new system of working with the grounds maintenance staff led to the different spending pattern.

Grounds maintenance work involves rubbish removal, some grass cutting, hedge cutting and clearing up plots for new tenants.

Self-management

146. There are four self managed sites. These sites collect the rent, let the plots, do day to day management. There is, in theory, a committee and full complement of officers but this is not always the actuality. They all have a constitution but the management agreements with the Council are still at the draft/theoretical stage.

One site does all the above except collect the rent which the Council does.

One other site collects the rent but does nothing else - the Council does it instead.

As is common with allotments, it's ad hoc and idiosyncratic - what works best for the individual sites at any particular time.

There is no city-wide organisation or management committee.

Exeter City Council

147. Exeter has in place an allotment strategy the objectives of this strategy are -

- 1 Ensuring sufficient allotments
- 2 Promoting allotment gardening
- 3 Encouraging sustainability
- 4 Cultivating good administration
- 5 Maintaining adequate resources

148. There are 26 Local Authority allotment sites across the city providing over 1,200 plots. Exeter has well above average number of plots per household. Currently only 90% of plots are occupied.

149. Allotments are managed by Contracts and Direct Services, part of the Community and Environment Directorate. The maintenance and improvements are carried out by staff and funded through the annual allotment budget. The Allotments and Play Equipment Officer (APEO) is responsible for the planning and administration of all sites.

150. There are currently 5 Area Allotment Managers (AAM's) who are all plot holders and receive payment based on a percentage of the rent collected. This is done twice a year. Their duties are:

-
- To collect and administer rents
- Let plots
- Advise on the tenancy rules and ensure they are followed
- Resolve disputes and pass on complaints and items requiring maintenance to the Council
- Liaise with existing and potential plot holders and the local allotment associations.

151. There is currently one site, Trews Weir, which operates under a system of self-management. The site has a very good nucleus of highly committed plot holders and they have managed to improve security and other facilities on the site over recent years. The committee retains the majority of the rental income for maintenance of the site. Major works remain the responsibility of the council.

152. Allotment associations are made up of plot holders and the AAM's and their main purposes are:

- To promote the interests of plot holders

- Organise bulk purchase and resale of seeds, stock and other relevant materials
- Provide a forum for discussion and dissemination of information
- Offer cultivation tips and promote good practice
- Encourage initiatives to protect members from theft, damage and trespass

153. Several sites have 'trading huts' for the associations' use, provided by Exeter City Council

154. To illustrate the resources devoted to allotments by Exeter the following information is useful-

ALLOTMENT BUDGET 2002/3

Expenditure	£
Administration	8,940
Self management	710
Staff pay	12,690
AAM commission	3,270
Cleansing	700
Accommodation Costs	9,730
Reactive & Planned Work	9,970
Cyclical Grounds Maintenance Work	2,200
Total Expenditure	48,210
Income	
Rental	(17,210)
Total Income	(17,210)
NET BUDGET	31,000

Ipswich Borough Council

155. There are 18 Ipswich Borough Council owned allotment fields in Ipswich, 11 with statutory protection and 7 temporary sites providing a total of nearly 2,200 plots. Most sites have a security fence, lockable gates, roadways, adequate water supply and communal shed. The population of Ipswich is approximately 117,000. This gives a figure of 18 plots per 1,000 of population.

156. Ipswich has an allotment strategy. **The aims of the allotment strategy are:**

- to raise the awareness of others to the benefits of allotments for all leading to an increase in the number of plot holders
- to set a standard for the provision of allotments in Ipswich
- to improve the standard of service provision
- to investigate ways to improve the financial position of the service

- consider the demand for allotments both now and in the future
- review and propose changes if required to the provision and distribution of allotment land in Ipswich.

In achieving these aims Ipswich recognises that the service needs to be developed so that present and future plot holders can depend on the commitment of the Council to ensure:

- sites are secure with good pathways and water provision
- that work on reducing problems with vacant or neglected plots continues
- sustained promotion of allotments as a facility for people of all backgrounds, either individuals or communities
- encouragement to develop skills and help new allotment gardeners
- continued good partnership working with the Ipswich Allotment Holders Association to provide an efficient management service
- open and effective allotment administration to aid communication and service delivery
- fair rents, to enable continued reinvestment

Pilkington Horticultural Society, Alder Hey Road, St Helens

157. This allotment site belongs to Pilkingtons Glass and was originally part of Pilkingtons recreational facilities and made available to ex employees. The site contains about seventy-five full sized plots.
158. Over the years the site started to run down. In 2003 Pilkingtons began selling off adjoining land for housing. Apparently Pilkingtons original intention was to also sell off allotments but a school across road closed. The school was also located on land that belonged to Pilkingtons. Therefore, Pilkingtons sold off that site instead.
159. The allotment holders at the site were desperate to retain the facility and eventually managed to negotiate with Pilkingtons and secure a 25 year lease (the lease is on the form of peppercorn arrangement in the region of £100 per annum). Under the terms of lease Pilkingtons takes no responsibility for site infrastructure at all.
160. The Pilkington Horticultural Society were now faced with a situation where they had secured the future of the allotments but were left with a site that required considerable upgrading. The committee's way forward was to connect with local community. Eventually they managed to develop a partnership involving-
- Sure Start
 - Pilkington House (rest home)
 - Coalition of disabled people
 - Scouts
161. The partners were identified through frequent open days and asked-
- What do you want? (PHS have provided plots, raised beds, wheelchair accessible areas). Scouts camp at night
 - What can you offer? (PHS have obtained funding- £3,000 from SS, toilets, communal facilities). NVQs offered on site, Tutor at night, horticultural lessons to local people
162. The allotment association worked hard to raised the profile of allotments within community – (80% of ploholders live within ¾ radius)
163. The allotment site has now reached the stage where there is little end of capacity for community development.
164. Now 65 plots – 17 on waiting list which is currently closed.
165. The annual rent per plot £65, £1200 water bill per annum. Rent consists of rent insurance (EL, PL, maintenance. Contingency fund also match fund of £5,000
166. Each plot is provided with sheds / greenhouses already. New ploholders given £100 to refurbish their shed / greenhouse which covers cost of wood, glass. Plot holders have to use services of site joiner to carry out repairs which they have to pay for. The allotment association replaces glass damaged by storms / significant vandalism but not fair wear and tear

167. As the landlord a representative from Pilkington Glass visits annually to inspect the site and provides a lists of jobs that need to be done.
168. The allotment association has links with Council owned allotments through the St Helens allotment federation.

Bromley

169. Bromley has been included for the details of its lease agreement with allotment associations (See Appendix 2). The lease has two options. One option is for the allotment association to self manage the other option is based on the allotment association being dependent on the Council. In the case of the self management option the allotment association pays a peppercorn rent and in the case of the dependency option pays a full market rent.

Cheltenham Borough Council

170. Cheltenham's Council is responsible for 9 allotments sites and around 500 plots. The allotments are directly managed by the Council. The Council employs a full time allotments officer who manages waiting list, terminations, site maintenance etc. Each allotment site has a nominated site warden who will show prospective ploholders around the respective site. Total expenditure on provision of all aspects of the allotment service is £75,000 per annum. Of which £10,000 per annum is spent directly on allotment maintenance (grounds maintenance, skips etc).

CONCLUSIONS

171. It is essential that the conclusions of this report are considered within the following context -

- It is the Council's duty to provide allotments, and by definition to ensure they are properly managed.
- Under current arrangements allotment associations are effectively managing the vast majority of allotment management functions to the benefit of the Council.
- Under current arrangements the value (and efficiencies generated) that allotment associations add to the Council is not recognised in a way that benefits the allotment associations.

Current Situation

172. Although allotments are recognised as an important community resource and although they clearly contribute towards the Council's aims and objectives the terms of the current lease still make it clear that the allotment association is the tenant and the Council is the landlord. As such allotment associations are treated as any other tenant leasing Council land. Councils have a statutory duty to provide allotments. Despite central government encouraging devolution of allotments many Councils directly manage their allotments. The examples shown within the report highlight the costs of so doing.

173. In the Lancaster District management of the Council's allotments has been devolved to the allotment associations so that they are effectively semi-autonomous. However, for devolution to be sustainable the long-term implications need to be considered. To date the Council as landowner benefits from an arrangement whereby allotments operate with minimal support and no ongoing investment. In turn individual allotment associations are expected to manage their allotment site and all that entails. This arrangement is not sustainable. The infrastructure of several allotment sites is in need of significant improvement. The amount an allotment association can reasonably charge for a plot only covers the cost of lease, water, insurance (where charged), sundry items. This leads to a downward spiral where the infrastructure on some sites has deteriorated with no resources allocated or available to make improvements. In turn a deterioration in infrastructure leads to problems like vandalism which in turn place pressure on the allotment associations extremely limited resources. Fortunately allotments are undergoing a renaissance and there are waiting lists for allotments. Otherwise a situation would exist where the lack of investment ultimately leads of a lack of demand for allotments which in turn would exaggerate the downwards spiral.

Lease Review

174. The upcoming lease review of allotments provides the opportunity to ensure that the relative roles of the Council and allotment associations are clearly defined. The current tenant / landlord model is not consistent with an arrangement whereby allotment associations are expected to effectively provide a Council service for the benefit of the local community. Both the Council and allotment associations recognise the importance of allotments as a community asset. In order to develop the role of allotments in the community there is a need to harness the resources of the Council and allotment associations. The lease review should take place in such a way as to ensure that all stakeholders are

aware of their responsibilities and are provided with the resources to undertake these responsibilities.

Allotment Strategy

175. Best practice shows the need for an agreed allotment strategy that clearly articulates the vision for the District's allotments and places allotment management within a strategic framework. A sample of what an allotment strategy could look like is included within the appendix to this report.

Future Management of Allotments

176. For self-management of allotments to be strategic and sustainable requires a shift from the traditional landowner and tenant arrangement to a partnership. The partnership would involve the Council, individual allotment associations and ploholders as the main stakeholders. The main aim of the partnership would be to effectively manage allotments as a community resource. Each of the stakeholders would be expected to contribute to the partnership in the most appropriate way. The approach taken by many Councils when devolving allotment management is to charge allotment associations a peppercorn rent for the allotment. It would then be expected that the allotment association would charge ploholders the same level of rent as previously charged but utilise the element of rent that would in the past have been passed to the Council to improve the day to day maintenance and administration of allotments. An arrangement of this kind would enable allotment associations to better provide their service and thus meet the Council's aims and objectives in providing this service.

Maintenance issues

177. In addition to the capital investment required it is clear that each allotment site has specific day to day issues that are not being fully addressed due to lack of resources. These include day to day items like mowing, repair of water supply, maintenance of pathways and the like. The report has also outlined the specific management and administration duties undertaken by the allotment associations. Allotments are a valuable community resource and legally there is no lower limit on the amount of lease that should be charged to allotments. Currently a sum of £3,200 has been allocated for allotment improvements, but whilst information has been sent to allotment associations on this fund allotment associations are unclear what exactly this funding can be utilised for.

Allotment Funding

178. The report has shown that in the main plot holders are price sensitive. The cost of a plot varies from allotment association to allotment association. In comparison with other examples costs are in a middle range. Allotment associations do have the option of raising rents to cover essential repairs but this move would be extremely unpopular, and have a disproportionate impact on people on low incomes. It would undoubtedly have a significant impact on demand for allotments. The resultant backlash would do nothing to encourage self management of allotments as committee members have commented on the criticism they already receive when inflationary charges are imposed.

179. It is apparent that the District's allotment associations are more than capable of managing their allotments and have demonstrated their ability to make a little go a long way. However, a point has been reached where for allotment associations to continue to effectively self manage there is a need to invest in the infrastructure of a number of allotment sites. The estimated capital investment required is £75,000. This would fund priority works which and could reasonably be spread out over a planned programme spanning several years. As an example a 5 year programme would require £15,000 of investment per year. Whilst capital works have been identified that should as priority take place within the next few years there needs to be an ongoing programme to invest in allotments which should be linked to the allotment strategy. This will ensure that the management of allotments takes place in a sustainable way.

180. Within this District each year the Council receives income of around £9,700 from the allotments. From 2005/6 a fund has been set up which allocates £3,200 per year of this income to allotment improvements. Until recently the Council's Sustainability Officer had one half day per week allocated to allotment responsibilities. So in effect the Council receives an estimated income of £9,700 and was spending an estimated £8,000 (including officer time). From the end of June the Council's allocation of time to allotments has increased to 2 days per week which represents an increase in expenditure of around £5,500 per annum. The report highlights that for a similar number of allotments Preston receives an estimated income of £2,000 and spends around £40,000, effectively a net subsidy of £38,000. Based on Preston's model which seems consistent with other Councils this District's allotment associations are saving the Council a minimum of £26,500 in management and administration costs by self managing allotments. This represents a considerable efficiency to the Council.

181. There are a number of options for managing allotments in the future. These include maintenance of the status quo and a return to a dependency model whereby the Council would be responsible for the management and administration of allotments. As referred to earlier the model that would seem to be most effective for the District is one where allotment associations continue to self manage their allotments in partnership with the Council. The Council's role is clearly to have strategic oversight of allotments and to provide the necessary resources to allow allotment associations to manage their site. The increase in time allocated to allotments by the Council is very positive. To best utilise this time will require agreement between the Council and allotment associations as to the priorities for this role.

182. Taking into account the conclusions of this report would allow allotments to be sustainably managed in the future. It is estimated that the proposals would require the following-

Capital Programme spanning several years - £75,000

Revenue (peppercorn rent)- reduction in annual income by £9,700 per annum

183. Currently the Council generates around £9,700 income from allotments of which £3,200 is allocated to the allotment improvement fund and the remainder contributes to the general fund. If allotment associations were charged a peppercorn rent in return for self managing their allotments the £9,700 of income

would no longer be received by the Council but would be reinvested by the allotment associations in what is ultimately the Council's asset so would therefore benefit all parties.

Future Needs

184. It is apparent that demand for the District's allotments exceeds supply. The Council should consider whether additional allotment sites are required or whether support could be provided to existing allotments associations to extend their sites.

185. Allotments have been recognised by the Council as an important community resource and indeed allotment associations and their ploholders already contribute to the Council's objectives in many areas. Given an improved management model could further contribute to the Council's aims and objectives in many ways. A summary of these contributions is shown in the appendix.

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

186. Option 1- Status quo

	Pros	Cons
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change from current arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsustainable (see report)
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change from current arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsustainable (see report)

187. Option 2- Responsibility for management of allotments returns to the Council

	Pros	Cons
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relieves allotment associations of a long list of duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allotment associations have been used to self management Could result in increased costs for plots
Council		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using example of Preston would require additional revenue of around £30,000 to fund an allotments officer post Best practice is to devolve management of allotments

188. Option 3a - Partnership with Council (Peppercorn rent)

Partnership

Council

- Capital to improve basic infrastructure at allotment sites (initially 5 year programme is recommended).
- Strategic oversight of allotments
- Agreement with allotment associations as to priorities for officer time allocated to allotments
- Allotment sites provided at peppercorn rent to allotment associations
- Provides support in practical ways (eg, insurance, access to compost, grass cutting, waste management etc)

- Review infrastructure needs on an annual basis and feed into capital programme

Allotment associations

- Self manage allotment sites on a day to day basis
- Seek external funding opportunities for their allotment sites
- Continue to contribute to Council priorities

ALMA

- Represent allotment associations when dealing with Council
- Seek external funding for allotment development

	Pros	Cons
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to self manage allotments • Will continue to charge same level of rent to ploholders but will have a far greater amount to spend on day to day management and admin of the allotment site • Site infrastructure will be improved at the sites that need it which will encourage demand • Increased investment will raise morale of allotment association volunteers • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed needs • Capital investment by Council may help attract some external funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that this model would encourage the participation of ploholders in wider site management issues
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and administration of allotments is devolved to associations • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed needs • Increased capital and revenue requirement is still an invest to save option when compared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for capital investment • Reduced revenue income

	Pros	Cons
	<p>with costs of directly managing allotments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital funding by Council may help attract external capital funding 	

189. Option 3b - Partnership with Council (market rent)

Partnership

Council

- Capital to improve basic infrastructure at allotment sites (initially a 5 year programme is recommended).
- Agreement with allotment associations as to priorities for officer time allocated to allotments
- Strategic oversight of allotments
- Allotment sites provided at market rent to allotment associations
- Provides support in practical ways (eg, insurance, access to compost, grass cutting, waste management etc)
- Review infrastructure needs on an annual basis and feed into capital programme

Allotment associations

- Self manage allotment sites on a day to day basis
- Seek external funding opportunities for their allotment sites
- Continue to contribute to Council priorities

ALMA

- Represent allotment associations when dealing with Council
- Gain registration as an environmental body
- Seek external funding for allotment development

	Pros	Cons
Allotment associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to self manage allotments • Site infrastructure will be improved at the sites that need it which will encourage demand • Increased investment will raise morale of allotment association volunteers • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed needs • Capital investment by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that this model would encourage the participation of ploholders in wider site management issues. • Will still only have same amount to spend on day to day maintenance and admin.

	Pros	Cons
	Council may help attract some external funding	
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and administration of allotments is devolved to associations • Officer time utilised in way that meets agreed needs • Increased capital and revenue requirement still represent an invest to save option when compared with costs of directly managing allotments • No loss of income from allotments • Capital funding by Council may help attract external capital funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for capital investment • Revenue income generated insufficient to meet current demands • • Some allotment associations are struggling with resources for day to day maintenance and this proposal will not encourage self management.

