

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY
8 MARCH 2011

ALLOTMENT STRATEGY REVIEW

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To report to committee the progress made to date on the action plan outlined in the revised Allotment Strategy, adopted by the Council in 2007.
- 1.2 Further actions planned for 2011/12 are set out in Appendix 1 which is to be found on the Council's website (linked to this agenda on the web site).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The original Allotment Strategy was adopted in 2002, and revised in 2007. This built on the achievements of the first strategy, and identified the significant improvements in both occupation levels and meeting the needs of ploholders.
- 2.2 5 target areas are identified within the strategy
 - 1. Ensuring Sufficient Allotments
 - 2. Promoting Allotment Gardening
 - 3. Encouraging Sustainability
 - 4. Cultivating Good Administration
 - 5. Maintaining Adequate Resources
- 2.3 Under these headings an action plan has been produced, and specific targets identified.
- 2.4 There are now 27 Council Allotment sites in Exeter, providing 1436 Plots, an increase of 143 plots since 2006. There are currently no available plots and there are in the region of 550 people on the waiting list, equating to over 30% of the total number of allotments.
- 2.5 With increased awareness of the benefits to health, good fresh produce and the cost effectiveness of having an allotment, waiting lists continue to grow at a remarkable rate.
- 2.6 In order to better achieve the actions identified in the plan there has been engagement with a wide range of organisations and partners. The council continues involvement with the Allotment Regeneration Initiative (ARI), which enables comparisons of provision, problems and solutions amongst the attending groups.
- 2.7 Other independent organisations are encouraged to help cater for the growing numbers on the waiting list; Harvest is an externally funded organisation with a community gardening remit that is involved with projects to provide Community Growing Champions to assist Exeter residents with Exeter garden match, community gardens and incredible edible mini gardens. Exeter Community Agriculture is a co-operative styled community organisation gardening organically on a 4 acre site near Exeter. Links are provided to both these on the allotment web pages.

2.8 There is continued partnering with various organisations to provide allotment access for those with disabilities. A more rigorous requirement for community garden provision within building schemes is being identified with the assistance of planning.

3. PROGRESS IN 2010/11

3.1 2010 saw the continuance of a number of existing and also new projects that originated from the 2007 review of the 2002 strategy.

3.2 Following the unfortunate sale of part of the Trews Weir Riverside Allotments in 2009 strenuous efforts were made to secure a suitable site for both the displaced tenants and for the ever-increasing list of people waiting for plots in the St Leonards and Alphington areas.

3.3 After overcoming several major obstacles and with unanimous cross party support for the revival of the Canalside site, planning approval was gained in January 2010. A full wildlife survey delayed some of the works, but was complimented for its thoroughness.

3.4 Perimeter fencing and water infrastructure followed the completion of the transition survey and enthusiastic plot holders started work in Field 1, Canalside in May 2010. Reptile finds delayed start on Field 2 Canalside but gardeners started late July 2010.

3.5 The two new Canalside Allotment sites provide a total of 57 new plots. Field 1 has 20 new plots; 3 x 10 (250m²) rod plots, 13 x 5 rod (125m²) plots and 4 x 2.5 rod plots (65m²). Field 2 has a total of 37 new plots; 19 x 5 rod plots (125m²) and 18 x 2.5 rod plots (65m²)

3.6 A new disabled accessible self composting toilet is sited in Field 2. Water will be abstracted from Exeter Canal. Members will appreciate that this has taken considerable time and effort to achieve. Without the support and patience of the allotment association and its members it would not be the success it clearly already is as evidenced with the attached journal.

3.7 Sweetbriar Lane benefitted from a substantial grant from Devon County Councillor Olwen Foggin via the Investing In Devon Grant and further security measures have been undertaken by the Council

3.8 Prince Charles Road Trading shed is once more to be run by volunteers from the site and will open weekly. This follows investment by the Council in the building, with new door and windows and it is hoped that a revival of the Allotment Association will follow.

3.9 Full size allotment plots 10 rod (250m²) continue to be split into half plots of 5 rod plots (125m²) and also smaller ones on sites across the city, to further increase the opportunity for people to take on plots more suited to their means and needs. It should be noted that not all sites are suited to this approach, and demand continues for 10 rod plots.

3.10 The charging system for allotment rentals has been successfully changed to enable rents to be collected in September each year to enable new tenants to have winter preparation time.

3.11 Further works have been carried out to ensure that tracks within the Allotments enable users to safely access their plots.

4. PLANNED WORK FOR 2011/2012

4.1 Key actions are to:

- Continue to maximise the current available allotment space. The most effective method is to divide larger plots into smaller ones wherever practicable. These smaller plots not only enable a higher number of tenants having access to a plot, but suit the requirements of many younger and professional people.
- Continue support for associations.
- Support “dig it days” and community projects such as the planned community poly-tunnel at Guys Allotments.
- Follow a successful trial of “Starter plots” at Guys/Hylton with other sites where possible. These would be for people on the waiting list as a “taster”, before being allocated a plot.
- Endeavour to secure future additional provision within existing financial constraints, particularly further self-composting toilets.
- Introduce greater sustainability awareness.
- Investigate water harvesting and other methods to reduce the use of treated water for watering thereby reducing costs.
- Provide further security to perimeter fencing of vulnerable sites.
- Investigate the use of raised beds on otherwise unusable areas of allotment land eg stony or waterlogged ground.
- Investigate charges for additional services such as allotment clearance.

Appendix 1 lists the works identified for the year in greater detail.

5. RECOMMENDED

- 1) that Scrutiny Committee Community note progress and support future proposals.

HEAD OF CONTRACTS AND DIRECT SERVICES

S:PA/LP/ Committee/311SCC3 v2
21.2.11

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report: