

ALLOTMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

TARGET AREA 1

1 Ensuring Sufficient Allotments

The improvements arising from the 2002 strategy have coincided with a nationwide interest in local and personal food production. As a result there are substantial waiting lists at most sites. In order to address existing and planned demand the following proposals are made.

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Actions identified
1A	<p><u>Safeguarding existing provision</u></p> <p>Retain the level of allotments provision for Exeter.</p>	<p>Provide an allotment site within 1 mile radius of any residential location in Exeter, with regard to likely changes in population density arising from the Local Development Framework. This will require the active management of Planning Applications at a strategic level.</p>	<p>Investigate the status of temporary sites and seek change of status to permanent site where it is the wider interest to do so. Identify threats or proposals that would adversely affect allotment provision, eg causes of sudden decline in tenancy level</p>
1B	<p><u>Meeting changes in demand</u></p> <p>Investigate whether any local or social demand deficiencies that occur due to demographic change can be met from existing open space or via Planning proposals (LDF and Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) Aim to provide an allotment site within a one-mile radius of any residential location, with regard to likely changes in population density</p>	<p>Potential additional sites are being investigated where Allotments are heavily over- subscribed or there is lack of current provision.</p> <p>Potential plot holders are prepared to travel across the city to secure a plot. It makes sense to reduce the need to travel by vehicle as far as possible.</p>	<p>A Public Open Space Audit was undertaken as part of the management of Section 106 agreements and to meet PPG17 needs.</p> <p>Plot planned population density by postcodes to match to existing provision, so that localised areas of shortfall area known. This information can be used by Planners to assist in using Planning controls to secure new allotment provision.</p> <p>Identify other potential sites outside the normal scope of locations. eg Royal Naval</p>

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	<p>arising from the Local Development Framework. Where demand is demonstrated or could be calculated.</p>		<p>stores, Ide (private land), St Loyes.</p> <p>See also 1D</p>
1C	<p><u>Maximise the use of existing allotments</u></p> <p>Improve existing locations Examine alternative uses for sites or parts of sites that cannot be let</p>	<p>Reassess further car parking areas, for example existing car parks on areas of good soil are returned to cultivation, using only areas of poor ground for car parking. Habitats enhanced by hedge planting and infilling unused corners with planting to aid security.</p> <p>Improvements to plot condition and soil where these factors are preventing take up of plots.</p> <p>Ensure that tenants actively work their plots, and plots with large percentages of uncultivated land are reclaimed to be let to others. This approach requires careful management to ensure those who use their plots as “Leisure Gardens” (eg young mums) are not penalised</p>	<p>List all unused areas of allotment sites to assess potential for alternative uses.</p> <p>Mincinglake Road allotments have restricted access and have a history of being poorly tenanted. Many plots were significantly overgrown. The site is in the process of being cleared and cultivated. Upon completion of the project an “additional” 8 plots will be available. With the heavy demand in the city for allotments the earlier proposal identified in the Local Plan for joint allotment / housing land at Marypole Allotments has been rescinded.</p> <p>Direct assistance to improve sites e.g. installing drainage systems, the control of pernicious weeds by such measures as the use of large scale membranes and re-soiling.</p>
1D	<p><u>Keeping options open to improve the service</u></p> <p>Consider offering alternative locations where available if tenants are in favour of moving even where</p>	<p>Ensure the wider needs for allotment provision are recognised as far as is possible within the Planning process.</p> <p>Investigate Partnership working with others, eg adjacent Local Authorities,</p>	<p>Meetings have been held with Planning officers to identify potential land use.</p> <p>The option of alternative locations is constantly under review.</p>

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	demand and supply are met.	other public bodies, the University, to use land for allotments on a leasing basis.	When examining alternative uses to consider in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibility of generating income • The potential for temporary uses.

TARGET AREA 2

2 Promoting Allotment Gardening

Since the first Allotment Strategy was written in 2002 a significant change has occurred locally and nationally in that the opportunity to grow your own food fruit and vegetables is perceived as an extremely desirable and achievable benefit by a large proportion of the population. The subject has received publicity and endorsement from a wide spectrum of the news media. However, whilst the subject is receiving positive publicity in general there remains the need to provide good quality relevant information as assistance and guidance at a local level, especially for new or aspiring plot holders. The Council should be seen as a facilitator for peer and support groups. Allotment Associations have been revitalised with support from the Council, at a time when the Exeter Allotment Federation has disbanded.

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Actions identified
2A	<u>Communication</u> Continue to improve on and target weaknesses in communication The production of easy to follow useful information, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pamphlets - Display boards/posters at key times/sites on a wider range of sites - Website information - Links with other promotions, eg healthy living, organic growing, traditional skills 	Continue to use web site as prime information tool. This is easy to provide regular update link to other promotions. Update and reproduce the series of information posters for notice boards. Ensure information on allotment issues is clearly and readily accessible to the widest range of users. There must also be a focus on the means of keeping information updated, pointing	Parks web site revised, and Allotments are listed under the “Active People” section. Quarterly topical information posters to be produced. The Council’s website now contains a substantial amount of information on allotments, where to find them and how to rent one. Most sites are equipped with notice boards.

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Actions identified
		towards <i>e</i> -communication, and on-site notice boards, which can also be used by associations and individuals.	Undertake user survey (see also 4D)
2B	<p><u>Equalities</u></p> <p>To make a wider range of plots available to suit different needs and ethics. This will include, where appropriate standard plots, half and quarter plots and group plots:</p>	<p>All sites have a percentage of smaller plots. Managers are now alert to the possibility of non-standard plots and have identified a number suited for possible splitting when they become vacant.</p> <p>Cater for those who wish for organic methods of gardening.</p> <p>Recognise the social element of allotments, particularly the benefits to those minorities for whom the cultivation of specific fruit and vegetables has particular value.</p> <p>To support tenants who have temporary disabilities caused by ill health</p>	<p>Earmark plots nearest to entrances and car parking areas as those more suited to people with mobility restrictions.</p> <p>Advertise on the website and elsewhere the availability of non-standard plots.</p> <p>Identify more segregated “No Chemical” options.</p> <p>A number of ethnic and refugee groups have been encouraged to take up allotment plots. These are frequently grouped together.</p>
2C	<p><u>Accessibility</u></p> <p>Specific needs To identify and designate plots suitable for those with mobility difficulties or for organic use, where demand is indicated. This could be as part of the revitalisation of an area of vacant plots, as part of site improvement scheme or on a new allotment site.</p>	<p>Identify the potential for disabled use or demand for organic gardening at all allotment sites. By definition those with mobility difficulties drive or are driven to sites, therefore the most sensible approach at this level is to provide facilities at specific sites.</p> <p>Need to identify “lower level” disabilities so that those who have some difficulty in getting to or working their plots have some assistance.</p>	See also 1C

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Actions identified
2D	<p><u>Newbies</u> Improve customer care and on site help for new or inexperienced plot holders and to reduce early drop out rates by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use of notice boards - investigating the introduction of site representatives - encouraging better partnership 	<p>Site representatives are in place on most sites.</p> <p>Noticeboards are on most sites.</p> <p>Expand the current practice of maintaining vacant plots in reasonable condition in order to encourage letting.</p>	<p>Regular AAM meetings are held.</p> <p>Set up training and induction for new representatives, and a structure of regular meetings/consultations.</p> <p>Allotment Associations have been revitalised in St Thomas and Cowick. Associations or similar groups are actively encouraged as they can provide aid and assistance at a local level, and act as a focus group.</p> <p>See 2A</p>
2E	<p><u>Appearances are important</u></p> <p>Control weed growth and reduce the spread of seed from vacant plots. This will improve the appearance of the site both for tenants and passers by. Initially this will be done by strimmer but other methods, in keeping with the Council's Environmental Strategy and sustainable practices will be considered.</p>	<p>Positive management of sites has led to an increase in the number of plots available for letting. See 1C</p> <p>Contractors will be used at peak periods (when parks staff are busiest) to control vegetation on vacant plots.</p>	<p>Use of mulching mats in preference to herbicides.</p> <p>The practice of keeping plots tidy has been very successful in achieving high occupancy levels, which in turn reduces maintenance costs.</p>
2F	<p><u>Fair distribution of facilities</u></p> <p>Prioritise available resources, in a balanced way, between maintaining promotional activity and the</p>	<p>Increase recycling options to reduce use of skips and landfill.</p> <p>A database of all structures in allotments has been set up, including trading huts to plan</p>	<p>Undertake a quality assessment of all sites to ensure a balanced and equitable approach to site management. This will assist in making a value judgement on the infrastructure and facilities on allotments.</p>

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Actions identified
	maintenance and improvement of site facilities.	<p data-bbox="824 220 1404 323">maintenance and improvements. (Trading huts provide the focus for the Allotment Associations.)</p> <p data-bbox="824 363 1404 467">Toilets are seen as vital in encouraging women and those with young families onto the sites.</p> <p data-bbox="824 507 1404 579">Roads and tracks need to be maintained in good condition to encourage access by all.</p>	<p data-bbox="1426 252 1816 284">Identify lifespan of structures.</p> <p data-bbox="1426 323 1989 395">Investigate use of self composting toilets at sites where exceptional use is identified.</p>

TARGET AREA 3

3 Encouraging Sustainability

Allotment sites provide an increasingly valuable and noticeable area of green space, as gardens continue to reduce in size. However, the security needs of allotments mean that they cannot fully be a substitute for public open space.

The range of plant species on an allotment site means they are a rich habit for wildlife. Opportunities remain to develop wildlife value in hedging areas and sections that have no realistic prospect of coming back into use, but care is needed to ensure this is not to the detriment of allotment provision.

Within the cultivated area of allotments, principles of sustainable gardening are relevant. Many plot holders are very skilled and knowledgeable on issues of sustainability (it is an inherent aspect of allotmenting.) The Council has a commitment to minimise the use of pesticides (this includes insecticides, fungicides and weed killers). However this commitment will be approached by persuasion not coercion through rules and regulations, except where an area of plots is designated for 'organic' use.

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Actions identified
3A	To encourage, and where possible, support good environmental practice including organic alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides.	<p>See 2A</p> <p>Provide information giving advice on good organic practice to all allotment holders There needs to be a culture of encouraging organic use and good practice that reduces the need for pesticides. As amateur pesticide use becomes more restricted, with approval for chemical formulations being withdrawn, plot holders will have to turn to other methods. The use of pesticides by plot holders will need to be more actively managed, and information made available on a regular basis, especially regarding the withdrawal of pesticides.</p> <p>Bonfires are now banned throughout summer months and timing changes made to winter permissible timings with good results in an overall reduction in need for or complaints about them.</p>	Continue the promotion of composting, no-dig techniques and similar alternative methods.
3B	Encourage associations to draw on the expertise already in the allotment movement both locally and nationally through links with NSALG.	The City Council should act as a mentor and conduit for relevant information and guidance from a range of sources eg RHS, Henry Doubleday Research Assoc, Soil Association.	<p>Information/updates provided for the associations at AGMs etc.</p> <p>The Allotments officer attends AGMs of the various Associations when available.</p>
3C	To consider opportunities that arise for improved wildlife habitats in partnership with the allotment holders and their associations i.e. wildlife groups. In particular using	Wherever practical e.g. at boundaries and car parks, plots with severe perennial weed problems or in odd corners, hedges, plantations or simply grass banks are managed to enhance biodiversity.	<p>Continue to enhance hedgerows where the opportunity arises.</p> <p>Consider willow and hazel coppicing (for use by plot holders).</p>

	natural features within the site, for example: hedging.	Reduce unnecessary maintenance eg high levels of strimming	
3D	<p>Continue to support the development of the allotment associations and appropriate trading to support cost effective gardening and encourage organic or sustainable gardening.</p> <p>Opportunities for associations to sell surplus fruit and vegetables produced on allotments should be investigated. These may include sale days in allotment huts or the possible use of the Farmers Market.</p>	There is not yet the organisational ability or support for selling surplus vegetables and fruit on a regular basis or even at local level. (eg at the trading huts). Ad hoc selling or bartering does go on and could be actively encouraged.	Officers have begun to investigate the feasibility of sale at markets and to appropriate local organisations
3E	Supply and use of water	Be more pro active in promoting and encouraging better sustainable use of water	<p>The use of rain water capture and storage is being investigated</p> <p>Composted material is made available on a regular basis from the Green Waste tip</p> <p>Timing of cropping to maximise soil water</p> <p>Use of drought resistant species and varieties promoted</p> <p>Investigate and identify the possibilities to abstract water from underground sources.</p>
3F	Recycling	Investigate opportunities to promote/reward recycling initiatives	Ongoing

TARGET AREA 4

4 Cultivating Good Administration

The need for good records and administration is essential for the efficient running of this public service and the development of a partnership approach to management.

At present all except one site, (Trews Weir) is managed directly by the Council. This self-management scheme has been a success due to the hard work and commitment of this group. It may never be suitable for all sites or desired by all allotment holders. However potential may exist if the commitment of a group is strong enough but support from the council would also be needed.

The recent development of the allotment associations could provide a platform to encourage the optimum participation for each group, at the level with which they are comfortable.

All records are maintained on a database subject to the Data Protection Act 1998. It would be beneficial if this could be transferred to the Asset Management system. If improved and meaningful participation is to be achieved and informed decisions made it is important that the way in which information is coded and held is progressively improved.

The improvements over the lifetime of the first Allotment Strategy has shown the benefits of better on-site customer care, forward planning, financial management, promotion of sites to a wider audience and supporting the development of the associations.

Ref	Proposal	Target	Actions identified
4A	To encourage the Allotment Associations to be active in providing a useful forum for their plot holders, in particular to have healthy and appropriate trading services to reduce the costs of allotment gardening, to accurately represent the views of their members in resolving problems, prioritising any future spend and initiatives.	Associations and Allotment Groups are beneficial on a number of levels, and should be actively encouraged in areas where there are currently no Allotment Associations or similar groups. See 2D.	Existing Associations appear to be working well and in partnership with each other.

Ref	Proposal	Target	Actions identified
4B	To carry out basic essential maintenance to the infrastructure of the sites and to consult the associations in the prioritisation of available funds for improvements.	Build on successes. Identify weaknesses.	See 2F Use the lessons learnt to inform other improvement programmes. Complete the assessment of water supply. Undertake “reality checks” to check quality of repairs and improvements.
4C	Continue to improve clarity of accounting and decision-making and to investigate integrated computer system incorporating a Geographical Information System (GIS) for modern management of the service.	Make use of available IT, eg GIS, IPAQ etc	Map sites onto GIS. Work towards expanding the use of Asset Management software.
4D	Continue to improve the on site customer care for all plot holders	Site representatives are in place on most sites (see 2D)	Undertake another user survey to complement and update the 1996 data. (see also 2A)
4E	To review the tenancy agreement periodically, at least every five years. The purpose of this will be to ensure that the service continues to develop and the tenancies/leases reflect the current vision for allotments.	The New Rules and Regulations were formally adopted in 2007.	Monitor effectiveness (eg through AAM liaison meetings)
4F	To provide support and advice to groups who wish to move towards self-management either wholly or in part.	Maintain liaison with existing groups Consider self-management as part of any partnering arrangement with other bodies especially if this results in broader	

Ref	Proposal	Target	Actions identified
		allotment provision.	
4G	Ensure all income is collected and banked, and all payments made within guideline timescales.	Continue assistance of Audit to ensure accuracy and probity in rent collection and banking	

TARGET AREA 5

5 Maintaining Adequate Resources

There has been substantial investment in making improvements to site facilities, information and promotional activity.

Appendix 7 gives a summary breakdown of the budget currently provided by the Council. As at 2006/7, this is £38,850 for the year, supplemented by the budgeted rental income of £18,000, giving a total of £56,850 available for the allotment service.

Of this £16,920 is for maintenance and improvements. This part of the budget needs careful prioritisation as it is needed for both reactive and planned as well as cyclical grounds maintenance on the sites.

(Direct comparison of rents is difficult as local authorities have different discount systems. The current charges and discounts were shown in Appendix 8 of the Strategy with some comparative data from other local authorities.)

From time to time there may be opportunities to obtain some external funding through Government, European Union or Lottery Grants. Other opportunities for income generation may emerge, for example the various Lottery funding initiatives for health related promotions and community schemes. Funding has been achieved through the Council's Equalities funding.

Neither of these options is likely to provide the core funding required to maintain the service.

It may be possible to reduce the budgetary requirements of allotments by increasing rent, as demand currently exceeds supply. However, this could be seen as counter-productive in terms of community health, and would adversely affect the very people who most need allotments.

The proposals are:-

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Action identified
5A	Prioritise improvement projects with an annually revised action plan, drawn up in consultation with the AAMs, Field representatives and allotment associations. The Council will consider the allotment priorities each year against other projects also requiring funding and the capital resources available.	Allotment infrastructure improvements targeted those issues of greatest concern to plot holders. The improved communications between field representatives, AAMs and the APEO has resulted in an understanding of prioritisation and phasing of works.	Continue the long term planning and phasing of improvement schemes. See 2F
5B	Seek opportunities for external funding for improvement or promotional projects and apply as found appropriate.	Continue to seek out additional funding streams, with a particular focus on equalities and sustainability.	
5C	Due consideration and consultation will be given to the possibility of generating some income from the sale of non-viable sites or parts of sites.	Consideration to be given to any proposals that would be of long term overall benefit to allotment provision, eg land swaps.	
5D	The fees and charges will be reviewed from time to time, but with the value of low cost food production, healthy activity and social inclusion in mind.	Allotment rents are increased every two years in line with RPI. Continue to increase rents as appropriate. Consider the value of rent increases above inflation to fund more expensive capital improvements eg water management	