

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY 16 JANUARY 2007

ALLOTMENT STRATEGY 2007 - 2011

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Council's existing five year allotment strategy was approved in 2002, and therefore needs to be updated for April 2007. The purpose of this report is to allow Members to consider the revised 2007-2011 Allotment Strategy and to scrutinise the action plan.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The provision of allotments by local authorities is a statutory duty. Exeter City Council is committed to continue to provide and promote allotments not only because of this statutory requirement but because allotment gardening makes a valuable contribution to the city's sustainability by providing health, social, economic and environmental benefits. These can be summarised as

- Low cost fresh food production for the family
- Promotion of healthy affordable diets
- Healthy recreational activity
- The opportunity to maintain and develop skills
- Social contact and as a contribution to community spirit
- Better partnership working.

- 2.2 Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space within the urban environment. They contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom as well as being highly beneficial to the wildlife of the City.

- 2.3 Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land, and some householders have no individual garden. These circumstances disproportionately disadvantage those on lower incomes. Allotments provide an opportunity to adjust this imbalance. The high value – low cost benefits are readily available to all, but most importantly, those who find themselves socially or physically disadvantaged.

3. CURRENT PROVISION

The Sites

- 3.1 There are 26 local authority allotment sites across the city, with a reasonable spread of sites for a city the size of Exeter. This compares favourably to the rest of Devon and nationally. Exeter has well above the average number of plots per household, yet despite this, demand cannot be met.

- 3.2 Each site is divided into plots that are normally 10 rods (250m²) each. The preference is now to provide more plots of a smaller size, so that as plots become vacant they are frequently sub divided to provide allotments for two people. This approach has been extremely successful in increasing the number of tenanted plots and encouraging more women to take on an allotment. A balance is maintained so that those who wish can have larger plots.

Management

- 3.3 The Parks and Open Spaces team, of the Contracts and Direct Services Unit, manages allotments. The maintenance and improvements are carried out by staff and funded through the annual allotment budget. The Allotments and Play Equipment Officer is responsible for the management and administration of all sites.
- 3.4 There are currently five Area Allotment Managers who are all plot holders and receive payment based on a percentage of the annual rent collection. Their duties are:
- To collect and administer rents
 - Let and oversee plots
 - Advise on the tenancy rules and ensure they are followed
 - Resolve disputes and pass on complaints and items requiring maintenance to the Allotments and Play Equipment Officer
 - Liaise with existing and potential plot holders and the local allotment associations.
- 3.5 The management of allotments is governed by a set of rules and regulations, which due to the statutory nature of the provision reflect the appropriate legislation and also includes additional operational requirements. These rules and regulations are updated on a regular basis. Any such updates will be agreed prior to implementation with the Head of Legal Services.

Self-Management

- 3.6 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. The arrangement works well and is a tribute to the considerable effort of their committee. 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.

Allotment Associations

- 3.7 These associations are made up of plot holders, usually including the Area Allotment Managers, 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 an independent forum for discussion and dissemination of information
 - Offer tips on cultivation and promote good practice

- Encourage initiatives to protect members from theft, damage and trespass

3.8 The City Council provides and maintains trading huts for the associations' use at Ashwood, Butts Park, Cowick Lane, Guys/Hylton, Hamlin Lane, Prince Charles Road, Trews Weir, Whipton Lane.

4. DEMAND FOR ALLOTMENTS

4.1 Demand for allotments has risen dramatically in the last few years, to the point where in September 2006 just under 98% of allotment plots were let. Most sites have a two to four year waiting list. Given the relatively high number of plots in Exeter this indicates the value that the community, as well as the Council, places in this tradition. The reasons are twofold. There is an increasing awareness and desire within the community to grow fresh foodstuffs and have control over the manner of production, and the measures taken within the framework of the 2002 Allotment Strategy have greatly assisted people in being able to take on and manage an allotment plot.

4.2 The challenge for the future is to meet the increasing demand in a sustainable manner, when the available land for allotments is increasingly hard to find.

5. THE WAY FORWARD

5.1 The revised strategy for 2007 -2011 is available on the intranet with a hard copy in the Members' Room. The overall objective of this strategy is to continue the excellent work of the original 2002 strategy, by providing the framework to increase the scope of these benefits, target areas for improvement, and allow the significant improvements over the previous five years to be continued.

5.2 The strategy seeks through its targets and initiatives to optimise the use of allotment sites for existing and potential plot holders, identify needs and meet demand. All initiatives contained in this strategy are considered in the context of other council strategies, policies and objectives.

5.3 This document provides a framework for the next five years to develop and manage allotments in partnership with the users, and provides a focus on five main target areas:

- Ensuring sufficient allotments
- Promoting allotment gardening
- Encouraging sustainability
- Cultivating good administration
- Maintaining adequate resources

5.4 Section 5 of the strategy outlines the actions that will be taken over the life of the strategy to improve the allotment service. It also identifies where appropriate the progress against the actions identified in the existing strategy.

5.5 In order to better tailor the needs of the service to users a census is to be taken during 2007 to seek the views of holders and also obtain demographic information that will aid the development of future plans.

5.6 Reports will be brought before Members at regular intervals to monitor progress.

6. RECOMMENDED that Members:

- 1) support the Allotment Strategy and in particular the Action Plan contained as Section 5 within the strategy.

HEAD OF CONTRACTS AND DIRECT SERVICES

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S:PA/LP/ Committee/107SCC12
11 December 2006

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None