

APPENDIX 1

ACTION PLAN 2009/10

TARGET AREA 1

1 Ensuring Sufficient Allotments

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

Ref	Proposal	Targets	Action taken 2008/9	Actions identified 2009/10
1A	<u>Safeguarding existing provision.</u> Retain the level of allotments provision for Exeter.	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.	Trews Weir Allotments are for sale by the current owner. It is a requirement of the Act that all tenants have been served notice of intended repossession on 20 th September 2009.	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, e.g. causes of sudden decline in tenancy level
1B	<u>Meeting changes in demand</u> 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 arising from the Local Development Framework. Where demand is demonstrated or could be calculated.	Potential additional sites are being investigated where Allotments are heavily over- subscribed or there is lack of current provision. 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.	Unfortunately potential land identified in 2008 at St Loyes College was not forthcoming.	A Public Open Space Audit was undertaken as part of the management of Section 106 agreements and to meet PPG17 needs in 2004. This work needs reviewing in the light of allotment use since this time 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. Identify other potential sites outside the normal scope of locations.
1C	<u>Maximise the use of existing allotments.</u> Improve existing locations	Reassess further car parking areas, for example existing car parks on areas of good soil are returned to	List all unused areas of allotment sites to assess potential for	Direct assistance to improve sites e.g. installing drainage systems, the control of pernicious weeds by such

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	<p>Examine alternative uses for sites or parts of sites that cannot be let</p>	<p>cultivation, using only areas of poor ground for car parking. Habitats enhanced by hedge planting and infilling unused corners with planting to aid security. Improvements to plot condition and soil where these factors are preventing take up of plots. 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" (e.g. young mums) are not penalised</p>	<p>alternative uses. Overgrown areas of land at Mincinglake Road Allotments have been cleared and let, providing 8 additional plots. Plot audit undertaken west of the river and untended plots investigated. This resulted in the reduction of waiting lists and new tenants able to take up plots</p>	<p>measures as the use of large scale membranes and re-soiling. Take further measures to try to prevent flooded plots, specifically Clapperbrook Lane.</p>
1D	<p><u>Keeping options open to improve the service.</u> Consider offering alternative locations where available if tenants are in favour of moving even where demand and supply are met.</p>	<p>Ensure the wider needs for allotment provision are recognised as far as is possible within the Planning process. Investigate Partnership working with others, e.g. adjacent Local Authorities, other public bodies, the University, to use land for allotments on a leasing basis.</p>		<p>Meetings have been held with Planning officers to identify potential land use. The option of alternative locations is constantly under review When examining alternative uses to consider in particular: The possibility of generating income The potential for temporary uses.</p>

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	Action taken 2007/8	Actions identified 2009/10
2A	<p><u>Communication</u> Continue to improve on and target weaknesses in communication The production of easy to follow useful information, including: Pamphlets Display boards/posters at key times/sites on a wider range of sites Website information Links with other promotions, e.g. healthy living, organic growing, traditional skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 towards e-communication, and on-site notice boards, which can also be used by associations and individuals. 	<p>With some sites applications suspended to further applications, clear and concise information is available to view on the internet and the opening of waiting lists were also invited from newspaper "adverts"</p> <p>User survey produced for inclusion with the March 2009 rent letter (see also 4D) Parks web site revised, and Allotments are listed under the "Active People" section. Most sites are equipped with notice boards</p>	<p>Allotment information will require crosschecking and updating following the major review of the Council's website</p>
2B	<p><u>Equalities</u> 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 had 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>A new project, to be completed by April 2009 at Ashwood Allotments will provide access for both able and disabled persons with raised bed provision being funded from a successful Disability discrimination Act bid in 2007.</p>	<p>Earmark plots nearest to entrances and car parking areas as those more suited to people with mobility restrictions. Identify more segregated "No Chemical" options</p>

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2C	<p><u>Accessibility</u> 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>Cater for those who wish for organic methods of gardening. Recognise the social element of allotments, particularly the benefits to those minorities for whom the cultivation of specific fruit and vegetables has particular value. To support tenants who have temporary disabilities caused by ill health</p>	<p>Advertise on the website and elsewhere the availability of non-standard plots A number of ethnic and refugee groups have been encouraged to take up allotment plots. These are frequently grouped together</p>	<p>Continued support for groups with learning / physical disabilities.</p>
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: use of notice boards investigating the introduction of site representatives encouraging better partnership <u>Appearances are important</u> Control weed growth and reduce the spread of seed from vacant</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. Need to identify "lower level" disabilities so that those who have some difficulty in getting to or working their plots have some assistance.</p>	<p>At Ashwood Road Allotments in Alphington a new project, similar to that at Marypole, consisting of varying heights of raised beds is to be completed by April 2009. This wheelchair accessible facility will provide access for both able and disabled persons with provision being funded from a successful Disability discrimination Act bid in 2007.</p>	<p>Earmark plots nearest to entrances and car parking areas / water tanks as those more suited to people with mobility restrictions. Identify areas of allotments that could be utilised for raised beds for those wishing only small areas because of disability or other reasons. See also 1C</p>
2E	<p>Control weed growth and reduce the spread of seed from vacant</p>	<p>Site representatives are in place on most sites Noticeboards are on most sites Continue to manage vacated plots prior to re-letting.</p> <p>Positive management of sites has led to an increase in the number</p>	<p>Allotment Associations have been revitalised in St Thomas and Cowick. Associations and Marypole Allotment Association is newly formed and receiving support from ECC.</p> <p>Investigate ban of use of carpets as weed control as unsightly and</p>	<p>Investigate "starter plots" to give an indication to new tenants the hard work that is entailed in looking after a plot. These would be for people on the waiting list as a "taster", before being allocated a plot. Promote the use of mulching mats in preference to</p>

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	<p>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>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>potentially hazardous to soil.</p>	<p>herbicides.</p> <p>Continue the practice of keeping plots tidy which has been very successful in achieving high occupancy levels, in turn reducing maintenance costs.</p>
2F	<p>Fair distribution of facilities</p> <p>Prioritise available resources, in a balanced way, between maintaining promotional activity and the maintenance and improvement of site facilities.</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 maintenance and improvements. (Trading huts provide the focus for the Allotment Associations.)</p> <p>Toilets are seen as vital in encouraging women and those with young families onto the sites.</p> <p>Roads and tracks need to be maintained in good condition to encourage access by all.</p>	<p>Investigate use of self composting toilets at sites where exceptional use is identified. Two sites, Hamlin Lane and Trews Weir now have this provision and funding will be sought to provide further facilities for the other sites.</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> <p>Identify lifespan of structures.</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	Action taken 2007/8	Actions identified 2009/10
3A	To encourage, and where possible, support good environmental practice including organic alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides.	See 2A 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. The City Council should act as a mentor and conduit for relevant information and guidance from a range of sources e.g. RHS, Henry Doubleday Research Assoc, Soil Association	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.	Continue the promotion of composting, no-dig techniques and similar alternative methods. Investigate the use of raised beds on otherwise unused areas of Allotment land..
3B	Encourage associations to draw on the expertise already in the allotment movement both locally and nationally through links with NSALG.			Continue to provide updates for the associations at AGMs etc. The Allotments officer attends AGMs of the various Associations when available.
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.		Continue to enhance hedgerows where the opportunity arises Consider Willow and hazel coppicing (for use by plot holders)

	<p>natural features within the site, for example: hedging.</p> <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>	<p>Reduce unnecessary maintenance e.g. high levels of strimming</p> <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. (E.g. at the trading huts). Ad hoc selling or bartering does go on and could be actively encouraged.</p>		
3D				<p>Officers have begun to investigate the feasibility of sale at markets and to appropriate local organisations</p>
3E	<p>Supply and use of water</p>	<p>Be more pro active in promoting and encouraging better sustainable use of water</p>	<p>Timing of cropping to maximise soil water Use of drought resistant species and varieties promoted</p>	<p>The use of rain water capture and storage is being investigated Composted material is made available on a regular basis from the Green Waste tip Investigate and identify the possibilities to abstract water from underground sources. Install self shut-off taps near toilets for washing of hands.</p>
3F	<p>Recycling</p>	<p>Investigate opportunities to promote/reward recycling initiatives</p>		<p>Ongoing</p>

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 accept 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	Action taken 2007/8	Actions identified 2009/10
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.	Continued to encourage and assist existing Associations to work well and in partnership with each other.	Continue association assistance
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	Track improvements carried out at several sites, inc. Cowick and Guys/Hylton.	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	Make use of available IT, e.g. GIS,	Database amended to	Map sites onto GIS

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	decision-making and to investigate integrated computer system incorporating a Geographical Information System (GIS) for modern management of the service.	IPAQ etc	include all changes of tenancy for all sites	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)	Use data from survey to identify trends and changes in comparison to earlier surveys
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 (e.g. 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 allotment provision.		Maintain liaison with existing groups
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 2008/9, this was £42,260 for the year, supplemented by the budgeted rental income of £21,750, giving a total of £64,010 available for the allotment service.

Of this £19,050 is for maintenance and improvements. This part of the budget needs careful prioritisation as it is needed for 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 taken 2007/8	Action identified 2009/10
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.	New roof for Guys/Hylton trading shed with water harvesting.	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.		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, e.g. land swaps		Investigate whether charges could be made for allotment clearance
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 e.g. water management	Rent increases for 2010 are set above inflation in order to fund further allotment infrastructure improvements	