



CABE Space Enabling Briefing Paper

Allotments

David Lambert
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Introduction

Public green spaces include a wide range of landscapes, including parks, allotments, cemeteries, playing fields, children's playgrounds, and nature reserves. All of them make an important, and often under-valued contribution to the quality of life in England.

Since May 2003, CABA Space has sought to improve the quality of England's parks and public spaces by providing technical expertise to local authorities and other organisations responsible for public space. The Advisory Panel who provide this assistance is composed of experts in planning, design, management and maintenance of public space. The CABA Space staff team assess a client's needs, and select Advisors accordingly.

Much of the advisory work is focused on helping local authorities to plan green spaces comprehensively by producing borough-wide green space strategies. Advice is also provided on site-specific projects to create new public spaces, or to improve existing spaces.

Many of the issues have more than one solution or approach. However, a number of common themes and issues have emerged, which clients frequently need advice on and on which Advisors often wish to compare approaches.

This is one of a series of briefing papers cover these common areas of advice. They aim to pool knowledge gained over advisory work in the field, and are prepared as an internal CABA Space resource for advisors.

However, it must be noted that they do not recommend a 'correct' way to prepare a green space strategy, or breathe new life into a public space. CABA Space advisors must make judgements on the most appropriate advice to give the clients with which they are working, to reflect their needs, resources, skills, and programmes of work. Please note that they also do not represent CABA policy and are for internal use only at this stage.

CABA Space would welcome feedback on these papers, as well as suggestions for future topics.

Nicole Collomb

Enabling & Delivery Advisor, CABA Space

T: 020 7960 2400 E: ncollomb@cabe.org.uk

Key messages

- Under the 1908 Allotments Act, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide and retain allotments where there is a proven demand. PPG17 has advised that green space should only be declared surplus to requirements after robust assessments of the existing *and future* needs of the community, and consideration of *all* the functions that open space can perform.
- Demand-based assessment is tricky with allotments, as demand can be managed downward, either deliberately or inadvertently. Assessment should therefore focus on *potential* demand (ie. the demand if the allotments were actively promoted).
- Despite Government scepticism, many authorities are seeing an upturn in allotment demand, especially among non-traditional plot-holders, such as women, family groups and the disabled. The ODPM's current survey of local authority allotments is welcome but will need to be integrated into the findings of the English Allotments Survey of 1997.
- The law of allotments is piecemeal and complex. However, Government is resisting calls to clarify, notably from the 1998 Select Committee inquiry.
- There is a need to consider allotments' value above and beyond subsistence gardening – ie: their contribution to health, heritage, townscape, biodiversity, social exclusion, urban regeneration and quality of life agendas.
- Allotments should be a key part of strategic thinking on green space, as recognised by PPG17, but the best allotment authorities also have dedicated allotment strategies and officers.
- Many successful allotment sites are now subject to self-management agreements with the allotment authority. These vary but in principle they devolve greater or smaller aspects of day-to-day management and budget holding to the individual site's tenants' association. This only works where the local authority continues to provide adequate resources to support the association: it should not be viewed as a cost-saving exercise.
- The leisure garden concept, in which a plot accommodates a chalet for overnight and holiday use, was displaced in the UK in the early 20th century, but remains a strong tradition elsewhere in North and Eastern Europe.
- There is considerable scope for diversification of green space use in allotments, converting all, or more usually part, to other uses such as nature reserves, communal gardens, children's play, community orchards, wildflower meadows, or special plots for the disabled or schools.

“The town is, in every direction, bordered, by gardens; and, in the language of poetry, invested by a zone of vegetable beauty, in which are stuck, by way of grotesque ornaments, arbours, and summer-houses of all the forms that untutored fancy can devise,” from a description of Birmingham in 1803

I. **A brief history of allotments**

- Allotments began as part of the inclosure movement, designed to provide subsistence gardening for the ‘labouring poor’, and were an exclusively rural phenomenon.
- The first formal provision appears to have been in a parish inclosure act in Wiltshire of 1806. Provision only became mandatory under the General Inclosure Act of 1845.
- Detached town gardens for rent were a separate phenomenon, which probably began around the same time and which grew with the increase in the urban population throughout the 19th century. These ‘guinea gardens’ were generally private. With local authorities taking on the role of providers after 1908, their disappearance or conversion to allotments seems to have been rapid.
- The development of urban allotments for subsistence gardening really only began in the 20th century, and can be ascribed to changing social structures, the impact of war, and national need.
- The Allotments Act of 1908 introduced allotment responsibilities on councils of boroughs and urban districts as well as rural parishes.
- The outbreak of the First World War, with its ‘every-man-a-gardener’ campaign, gave impetus to the provision of urban allotments. From 1913 when there were some 600,000 allotments, the figure rose to 1.5 million by 1918. While the end of the war meant that requisitioned land had to be given up, demand among returning servicemen was extremely high. A similar surge occurred with the Second World War and Dig for Victory, the number rising from 740,000 plots to 1,400,000.
- The Act of 1950 restricted local authority responsibility to allotment gardens, which meant that the smallholdings provided in many rural areas ceased to be a statutory duty, and the urban emphasis was officially established.
- Allotment occupancy dwindled after the war, and in 1964 Harold Wilson commissioned an inquiry into allotments. Chaired by Harry Thorpe, this committee championed the continental leisure garden (see Key messages, page 1), inspired by the guinea gardens of 19th century England, as a model for the future revival of allotments.
- Leisure gardens did not catch on, and allotment gardening declined in the latter part of the 20th century, under pressure from other leisure pursuits, the growth of private gardens, and the increasing availability of cheap food.
- The English Allotment Survey, 1997, notes that the rate of 6,250 plots lost per annum between 1970-78, increased to 9,400 per annum between 1978 and 1996.

- However, there is now strong anecdotal evidence of an upturn in interest (Select Committee 1998), especially among 'new' users – professionals, women, families, ethnic minorities and leisure-gardeners. Many councils are recording upturns in demand and increasing waiting lists (ie: Bristol recorded a five per cent increase in tenancies in 2003/04).

2. Types of allotment site

Allotment sites today encompass a wide variety of horticultural and leisure activities. There are clear regional variations, for example the pigeon lofts on many sites in the north of England, and accommodation for children, in the form of communal lawns, barbeque areas and even play equipment.

Statutory

Statutory allotments are: "Parcels of land acquired or appropriated by the local authority specifically for use as allotments" (DTLR, 2001). Such sites cannot be sold or converted to other uses without ministerial consent.

Temporary

Temporary allotments are: "On land which is allocated for other uses but leased or rented by an allotments' authority. They are not protected from disposal in the same way that statutory allotments are" (DTLR, 2001). Many temporary, albeit longstanding, allotments on railway land for example have been sold in recent years. Government has resisted the Select Committee call for any temporary site of 30 or more years' standing to be made statutory.

Private

Private allotments are on land owned by private landowners. Some but not all are leased to the allotment authority to manage. They have the same legal status as temporary allotments.

3. Summary of statistics regarding allotments

- The only comprehensive data available is the English Allotments Survey, 1997, carried out by the NSALG and Anglia Polytechnic University.
- This records that there are 296,923 allotments in England, that is, 15 plots per 1,000 households, or one plot for every 65 households. The ratio varies across the country and between urban and rural areas. Measurement by household is a more realistic measure of allotment use. Half of the allotments are the traditional ten rods or 40 poles in size, and one quarter are half-size – ten rods is 0.25 of an acre (0.101 ha).
- The 300,000 allotments in England are located on 7,796 allotment sites, totalling 25,416 acres (10,286ha).
- 87% of allotments are owned by local councils. The majority of these are statutory sites, although there are still 40,000 temporary sites. The Survey concludes that 23,000 plots are in private ownership, although this figure may be higher as the questionnaire was targeted at local authorities.

<i>Status</i>	<i>No' of plots</i>	<i>%</i>
Statutory	220,000	74%
Temporary	39,221	13%
Private	23,221	8%
Unlisted		5%

- 43,584 (14.68%) of the plots were recorded as vacant at the time of the Survey, and the percentage of vacant plots varies widely across the country.
- 12,950 people were on allotment waiting lists at the time of the Survey. Of the 372 authorities that gave reasons, 124 gave 'allotment shortage' as a response, and 248 'residence/chosen site mismatch'.
- In 1970 there were 111,000 vacant plots, in 1996, 43,000.
- ODPM has now (Summer 2004) initiated a new survey, asking a range of different questions. Some of these will give useful information on numbers of self-managed sites, and inclusion in local plans etc. However, it will not pick up private sites, and it is demanding in terms of time for local authority allotment officers. The data will need to be knitted into the EAS, as well as used to form links with other green space data.

4. Summary of legislation and Government policy

- Modern legislation on allotments has developed piecemeal. The key act remains the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, which repealed and consolidated previous acts dating from 1887-1907. It confirmed the statutory duty on local authorities to provide allotments according to demand, including powers to compulsorily purchase land for such provision. It also established the principle of compensation payable in the event of termination of a tenancy. Section 27(5) of the 1908 Act provides for the temporary use of allotments for other purposes if it cannot be let as allotments.
- The Land Settlement (Facilities) Act 1919 addressed the needs of returning servicemen and extended allotment provision to all, not just the 'labouring population'. It also made Metropolitan Borough Councils allotment authorities. In addition it introduced a requirement for ministerial consent for erection of any dwellings, but not sheds or greenhouses on allotment land.
- The Allotment Act 1922 introduced the statutory definition of an allotment garden, stating that it should not exceed 40 poles, or 0.25 of an acre, in extent, and should be: "Wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family". Allotments had previously varied in size up to five acres.

- The Allotments Act 1925 established the procedure for disposal of statutory allotments, including the principle of adequate provision for displaced plot holders and ministerial consent.
- The Agricultural Land (Utilisation) Act 1931 further encouraged the development of allotments and smallholdings.
- The Allotments Act 1950 limited the duty of local authorities to provision of allotment gardens as defined in the 1922 Act. The period for notice to quit was extended to 12 months; the ability to charge tenants for dilapidations through neglect was introduced, as was provision for the keeping of hens and rabbits.
- As recognised by the 1998 Select Committee report, and indeed the Government's response, the law is complex although the Government did not agree that it required clarification.

5. Allotments as an open space typology to be considered in a Green Space Strategy

Allotments are included in PPG 17's typology of open space. There are clear benefits to be gained from considering allotments as part of the open space provision in a local authority, and including them in audits and strategies for open space. For too long allotments have been 'bottom of the heap' in terms of strategic thinking and resourcing, and there is a need to consider the contribution they make above and beyond merely providing opportunities for gardening: as wildlife resources, as educational resources, as contributing to public health and social cohesion, and to liveability.

However, it is also important to identify the qualitative differences between allotments and other forms of public open space. As public landscapes, they are mosaics of private endeavour. Their wildlife benefit depends on individual gardeners' decisions; their public benefit depends on a range of entirely local factors. Their contribution to townscape is highly fragile despite their robust, timeless appearance.

6. Benefits of a separate allotment strategy for local authorities

- There is a strong correlation between good allotment authorities and the existence of an allotment strategy. Allotments have significant differences from other green spaces, in terms of their requirements and their management, and for that reason alone it is important that they are distinguished strategically and in detail.
- There are currently a number of excellent local authority allotment strategies. Guidance is set out in the LGA's 'Growing in the Community'. Good examples include those for Exeter, Edinburgh and York.

Case study – York City Council Allotments Strategy

The York City Council Allotments Strategy offers a five-year plan for the allotment management team, to capitalise on the increased demand for allotments. It links allotments with parks and open spaces policy, including quality of life, community involvement, biodiversity and sustainability. It bases its aims and objectives not only on the principles of the LGA guidance, but also on the Green Flag criteria. Initiatives include a marketing plan, research on users and non-users, and the development of partnerships. While incorporation in an overall green space strategy helps to include them in strategic green space thinking and policy-development, a dedicated strategy helps to establish the specific and special needs of allotments.

- It is clear that allotment strategies fall into two categories: those that are basically copied from others, and those that are based on a research-based understanding of local needs and characteristics. The development of appropriate and effective Local standards (see Local standards, briefing paper) is a key task of an allotments strategy. The role of an allotment strategy in setting out a target level of provision, referring not just to the quantity of plots but to the quality of provision, is also highlighted in 'Growing in the Community'.
- NSALG is currently gathering information on allotment strategies: it is thought that there may be about 100 such documents in existence.
- Many authorities, such as LB Enfield, under the banner of PPG17, are carrying out reviews of allotment provision as part of formulating or updating a strategy and tackling the difficult question of analysing demand (see below). Such reviews can usefully consider other recreational uses for part or all of an allotment site.

7. The need for quantity and quality standards for allotment provision

- Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide allotments according to demand. However, allotment provision is not included in CPA audits, nor is there a Best Value Performance Indicator for allotments, apart from the catch-all BVPI 199. The statutory duty is not based on a national standard equivalent to the six-acre standard for provision of playing fields. The NSALG is currently researching such a national standard. At present, its National Survey found an average provision of 15 plots per 1,000 households: clearly any provision lower than the national average is unacceptable, and it is likely to recommend any national standard be set slightly higher.
- National standards are out of favour since PPG17, with its emphasis on developing local standards. It may be that the NSALG standard will evolve as guidance for local standards. On allotments, the guidance in PPG17 proposes broadly a demand-based approach to provision, although it is welcome in suggesting that a population-based local standard, coupled with an Accessibility standard or distance threshold is the way forward.

- In assessing need, the key requirement of PPG17, 'Growing in the Community' notes that 'there is at present no generally accepted procedure for assessing the gap between current use levels and the potential need for allotments that would eventually be realised if the allotments were indeed actively promoted'. This is a critically important area (dealt with at greater length under Protection and Disposal Issues below).

8. The role of allotment societies and devolved management

- Successful allotment sites almost invariably have a strong and active association or society of tenants. At the minimum it acts as a mediator with the allotment authority landlord, but the role varies widely.
- Devolving management decisions to associations or site self-management (SSM) was first mooted in the early 1990s, in the wake of CCT. Associations had become concerned about the possible impact of private contractors taking over council maintenance duties and the possible impact on rents. Now, some local authorities (ie: LB Bromley) have devolved management for all their sites and have a thriving allotment scene.
- There are pros and cons to SSM. For the local authority it offers reduced maintenance costs, better relationships, and the chance to tap into otherwise inaccessible funding sources. It also means a loss of control, dependence on volunteers and shared planning. For the allotment association, it offers higher quality maintenance, a sense of control, opportunities for broadening use, and better links with the community, but also the burden of responsibility for difficult areas such as notices to quit, dependence on both volunteers and the local authority, and legal liability.
- For local authorities, SSM should not be viewed as a form of sub-contracting; working long-term with the voluntary sector requires a significant commitment, and probably an increase in resources at the organisational level offsetting any savings in grounds-maintenance. In general, where SSM agreements have heralded cuts in the allotments budget, loss of staff or office-space, devolved management has struggled.
- The technical aspects of such agreements vary. In some cases an association obtains a comprehensive lease as landlords, setting and collecting rents, writing and signing tenancy agreements with plot-holders, letting plots and dealing with notices to quit, fund-raising, carrying out more or less minor repairs and maintenance such as verge-cutting, path-maintenance etc. In others the association secretary deals with limited aspects of management, such as lettings, while the authority retains managerial control. Such arrangements can be far cheaper and more efficient than private contractors or council staff, and many associations have welcomed the opportunity to take control of their site and 'get things done'.
- The Government is keen on such devolution of powers. However, the success stories in SSM, and there are many, invariably have two characteristics: one, a high level of capacity in the voluntary sector – time, energy and expertise - and two, commitment to partnership-

working on the part of the local authority, which means primarily resourcing. Associations will still need official back-up in the case of for example problem-tenants or major infrastructure problems such as flooding. SSM does work, but it is not an opportunity for allotment authorities to wash their hands of a commitment. Rather it is the reverse, an undertaking requiring a high level of commitment and resourcing from both sides.

9. The benefits of allotments and allotment gardening

Health

The Health White Paper, November 2004, refers to the importance of allotments in tackling community health problems, and includes as a case study the project in Hyndburn and Ribble Valley based on restoring a derelict allotment site, for use by not only the Healthy Heart project, but also by Learning Disabilities, a number of schools and a charity concerned with those seeking to re-enter employment. It concludes that the project: “Has improved the physical, social and mental health of participants by providing opportunities for increased physical activity and healthy eating, as well as engendering a sense of ownership”.

Wildlife

The wildlife benefit of allotment sites is widely recognised at a local and regional level. Cheshire CC has a Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Gardens and Allotments, the Hull LBAP, and the Cambridgeshire Local Habitat Action Plan both have a specific section on allotments, and there are a number of a number of borough-wide BAPs addressing allotments (ie: LB Hounslow). In addition, Local authorities can declare Local Nature Reserves such as Bedford Borough Council’s Brickhill Allotments. It should be noted however that traditional allotment gardening, with its emphasis on neatness and good order and the battle against weeds and pests, is not always entirely compatible with some principles of ecological conservation.

Heritage preservation

Allotments can also contribute to the townscape and heritage of a place. Four allotment sites are on the English Heritage *register of parks and gardens of special historic interest*, and more are on local lists. West Dorset District Council has prepared supplementary planning guidance for the south-west quarter of Bridport, a townscape dominated by mature allotments vulnerable to redevelopment (2002).

Education

The educational benefits of allotment gardening are being increasingly recognised, with schools taking on plots, or with the development of plots within school grounds. Learning through Landscapes has been a highly successful initiative promoting school-gardens since 1990 (www.ltl.org.uk) The Department for Skills and Education funds a number of initiatives under its Growing Schools Initiative, set up in 2002 (www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools).

Sustainable communities

The role of allotments in sustainable communities is recognised in *Creating Sustainable Communities: Greening the Gateway* (January 2004), which identifies their contribution to health, fitness and well-being, offering the healthy combination of fresh food, gentle exercise and landscape. Many sites are practical demonstrations of their role in community cohesion, drawing together a widening range of social groups. An increasing number are also supplying produce to the wider population via farmers' markets.

Opportunities for the disadvantaged, disabled and elderly

Allotments often have an important role to play in affording horticultural activity to the disadvantaged, disabled and elderly. *Thrive* is an independent charity which exists to enable such groups to participate in gardening, via a number of programmes for training and employment, therapy and health. It provides expert advice specifically on the needs of such groups, carrying out research and promoting the benefits of gardening (www.thrive.org.uk)

10. The future of allotments

The key to allotments, like cemeteries, is an understanding that their contribution to our towns and cities, lies in a tension between the individual, private plots and the public landscape they comprise as a whole. More so than public parks, the endeavours and aspirations of the private individual need to be fully understood if management is to be effective, because it is the private individual who is the steward of the allotment landscape.

- Since its response to the 1998 Select Committee, when it said it had no evidence of a potential increase in demand, the Government has shown signs of warming to allotments, backing the LGA's good practice guide and producing its own, promoting the ARI and commissioning further survey work.
- However, it is also clear that there is a limit to potential growth for purely subsistence gardening, which has become the norm for urban allotments since the early 20th century. Diversification however depends entirely on local needs and characteristics, and allotments tend to be resistant to imposed solutions. The huge diversity of cultures in the UK is reflected in the widely differing uses of allotments around the UK, and even in different parts of the same city.
- The potential for more flexible use of allotments is in part hampered by the legal definition of an allotment garden, dating from the 1950 Act, which restricts its use largely to subsistence food growing. The other source of restriction is in the regulations set by allotment authorities. Rules concerning the size of a shed or greenhouse, construction of hard-surfaces, the keeping of livestock, poultry or bees, the planting of trees or perennials, and construction of ponds for example are all subject to local variations.
- The 1998 Select Committee recommended that the main restrictions on the use of allotments contained in national legislation be repealed, in order to allow a greater range of uses, including flower-growing, commercial use with regard to site shops and sales of surplus

produce, and the keeping of livestock other than hens and rabbits. This would mean a change to the statutory definition of an allotment garden, 1950, which restricts it largely to subsistence food growing. The Government has not acted on the recommendation arguing that there was sufficient flexibility already available (DETR, 1998).

- Geoff Stokes of the NSALG comments: 'We're stuck in a bit of a time warp here'. Economic improvements mean that, although allotments continue to be principally attractive for offering access to fresh food and control of additives, they are no longer about subsistence gardening, except as a lifestyle choice. People choose to rent an allotment for a wide range of other reasons: exercise and health, contact with nature, social intercourse, and community participation. Although somewhat hampered by the statutory definition, efforts to accommodate this growing market and the flexibility to extend the recreational uses of allotment land could be a lifeline for many sites.
- Conversion of allotment sites to other green space or park-type use, either on a temporary or permanent basis, is problematic. An application for change of use to turn part of a site in Enfield into a park was recently refused by the Secretary of State. Permanent change of use requires planning permission, and of course, if taken out of allotment use, or if the primary function of a site is no longer allotment gardening, the land loses its statutory protection. Temporary change of use is enabled under s.27(5) of the 1908 Act – originally intended to facilitate grazing – and is now the vehicle being used for a host of such changes – ie: to community orchards, play areas, wildflower meadows, nature reserves, even though many of these hardly seem temporary. The Natural Growth Project set up by the Medical Foundation for victims of torture converted part of an allotment site to a memorial garden and uses the allotments and the garden for therapeutic gardening for its clients (www.ngp.org.uk)
- Community innovations that preserve the principle use of the land as allotments are easier to set up than seeking a temporary or permanent change of use for the whole site. Where there is a demand, conversion of a few plots to form a communal lawn for play, picnics, or a barbecue area can be a simple way of enhancing the viability of a site.
- The handful of model leisure gardens laid out in the wake of the Thorpe inquiry (see Brief history, page 2) have generally reverted to more traditional allotment use, even though the communal facilities, such as storage, clubhouses and toilets have been welcome. However, more recently a number of sites have converted in part to leisure gardens, with cultivation of flowers and plants and sitting areas.
- Whether there is a demand for the kind of holiday chalets familiar from continental leisure gardens is unclear. It may be that they are no longer part of our holidaying and leisure culture. And even if a demand were shown, there are substantial planning hurdles in the way of developing them. However, there are, as stated in the Brief history (page 2), indications of there being a latent demand for such facilities, although it would not be for existing allotment authorities alone to develop.

- One chalet garden site was developed in the 1970s in Bristol, and a second has recently been created with the refurbishment of the Talbot Road site, with each chalet supplied with electricity. The plot-holders are not entitled to use the chalets overnight but a wider range of gardening than traditional is encouraged.
- Despite the handicaps, many forms of diversification are being pursued across the country. Community orchards, community gardens, nature reserves, wildflower meadows, community food projects, ponds and wetlands, plots for local schools or disabled groups are all being successfully developed on parts of allotment sites or on derelict sites. Some associations have become regulars at local farmers' markets selling surplus produce donated by members. Models for diversification are useful but cannot necessarily be exported: the critical factor is the make-up of an individual site and the demand of the particular association members: memorial gardens to deceased plot holders are quite popular, as are play-areas for children, but clearly take their rationale from the social profile of the particular site and are not necessarily interchangeable as forms of diversification.
- In the latest Green Flag results for 2003/04, two allotment gardens were awarded Green Pennant Awards – Dorset Road Allotments, LB Bromley (see case study below) and Foredown Allotments Wildlife Garden, Brighton. At Foredown, managed by the Portslade Green Gym, the site has developed a wildlife garden on part of the allotment site, with a wide range of schools' educational programmes and sustainable food production, coppiced woodland, a wildflower meadow and a pond. In both cases, the sites meet the prime criterion of Green Flag, a "welcoming place" which appeals "to a wide range of members of the community".

Case study – Dorset Road Allotments and Leisure Gardens, London Borough of Bromley

Dorset Road Allotments is a unique site: it won a Green Pennant Award in 2003/4, and retained it in 2004/5. It is a mature site, having been in existence since World War I, comprising just over seven acres (2.89ha). Of this area, some former allotments have been fenced off with a view to preserving and enhancing them as a wildlife area, given that the land now supports a colony of bee-orchids.

A group of some 40 volunteers have established strong links with the local community, and transformed the site. It includes a community building constructed from recycled materials, public toilets, a communal lawn, flowerbeds and beehives.

The Association actively encourages a diverse range of uses, including free-range chickens on three plots, four plots to a training-ground for Springer spaniels, and a re-created English cottage garden on one of the allotments.

Like all sites in Bromley, Dorset Road is self-managed, and rents are used for projects as well as maintenance and administration costs. Bromley has a strong Federation and a Council Allotments Advisory Panel, comprising ten Federation members, five council members and two officers. Each Association has a 21-year lease, and pays the council an annual rent based pro rata on the number of plots. It submits an annual report to the council including an annual work plan. The council keeps a strategic overview and assists on infrastructure works, such as fencing. The Panel is an important safeguard against disposal, in ensuring need is subject of genuine assessment of potential as well as existing and that where possible the site is kept in green space use, and securing gains, such as a new communal building, car parking or toilets from any sales.

Dorset Road Allotments, photograph by Tom Douglas, Dorset Road Allotments and Leisure Gardens



- Increasing public access is a commendable route to establishing the wider value of allotments. Where there are problems with vandalism, tenants can be reluctant to open up the site, but there is no doubt that controlled public access increases the public benefit of a site and its eligibility for funding from many sources. Open days, shows, sharing of car-parking or of a community building, plant or produce sales, events involving non-plot holders or linking to other non-gardening community groups, can also help to spread the benefits of a site wider. In 2004, four allotment sites had open days under the National Gardens Scheme (The Yellow Book).
- The key is management: where there is a history of poor investment and high levels of vandalism a fortress-mentality on the part of tenants is understandable. A climate of security

needs to be established, although increased access and community support can have a catalytic role in changing public and political perceptions of a site.

11. Protection and disposal

Whether used or un-used allotments make a contribution to open space provision in a town or city, and their loss is irreplaceable. Any application to sell a statutory allotment site needs the approval of the ODPM, although, the correct procedure having been demonstrated by the allotment authority, in practice this is rarely withheld.

All applications for disposal of statutory allotments need the consent of the Secretary of State (1925 Act). The authority needs to demonstrate that the site is surplus to requirements, that adequate provision for displaced plot holders has been made, that the waiting list has been taken into account, that the council has actively promoted the availability of allotments and that it has consulted the NSALG. The NSALG does not keep figures on the loss of allotment sites, and is not convinced that the consultation process is completely reliable. The disposal of temporary or private sites does not require the same process.

The existing allotment legislation was strengthened in PPG17's guidance on disposal of open space of all sorts including allotments. It is very clear on the need for local authorities to undertake: "Robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities," for open space including allotments, stating clearly that existing open space, "should not be built on unless an assessment has shown it to be surplus to requirements. It also establishes that allotments must not be regarded as "previously developed land" or brownfield land, which PPG3 advises has redevelopment potential.

Despite these safeguards, the problem in basing assessment of need on demand is that demand can be deliberately or inadvertently affected by the local authority's management of the site: if fences are not maintained, or if flooding or vandalism are not addressed for example, tenants become discouraged and a site can quickly become semi-derelict, thus discouraging applications for tenancies. This was put forcefully to the 1998 select committee inquiry in which witnesses challenged the assumption that low demand for allotments is evidence that there is no desire or need for them. Similarly, demonstration of adequate provision cannot be citywide given the extremely localised nature of allotment use (ie: walking distance).

PPG17 however advises that: "Surplus to requirements' should include consideration of all the functions that open space can perform". This can be taken to mean that in the case of allotments, local authorities need to assess other uses than just the allotment gardening defined in law. This offers the potential for other forms of green-space use – wildlife reserves, communal leisure gardens, even grassed play-areas – which preserve the green space resource.

12. Some sources of funding

While funding for local authorities is restricted and largely dependent on central Government, devolved management allows individual allotment associations to tap into a wide variety of funding sources. Some which have been successfully applied to include:

- Allotments Regeneration Initiative
- Awards for All
- Communities Fund, now incorporated in the Big Lottery Fund
- BTCV Peoples Places Award Scheme
- Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
- Landfill Tax Credit Scheme
- Living Spaces
- Local district or borough council
- New Opportunities Fund, now incorporated in the Big Lottery Fund
- RSNC, SEED initiative
- Shell Better Britain

A useful guide to fund-raising for allotment associations, Money-Maze: Guide to Fundraising for Allotment Associations, has been produced by ARI and is available as a download from their website.

Where to go for help

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative is a partnership between the NSALG, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and QED Allotments Group, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and SEED (New Opportunities Fund). The ARI has run a Flagship grant scheme for projects designed to widen access to allotments, and has also made major grants to seven pilot projects. The Green House, Hereford Street, Bristol BS3 4NA. Tel: 0117 963 1551

www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

The Local Government Association publishes, 'Growing in the Community: a good practice guide for the management of allotments'. Tel: 020 7664 3000 www.lga.gov.uk

The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, Odell House, Hunters Road, Corby NN17 5JE. Tel: 01536 266 576 www.nsalg.co.uk

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister publishes 'Allotments: a plot holders' guide' www.odpm.gov.uk

www.allotments-uk.com is a directory of allotment links and information, principally aimed at gardeners

www.allotments4all.co.uk is a new forum designed principally for gardeners

The Virtual Potting Shed site, run by the local group Quality Environment in Dartford, is still running although the QED site is now, with the establishment of ARI, in abeyance:

www.btinternet.com/~richard.witshire/potshed1.htm

www.allotmentregister.co.uk is a recently-established website, intended eventually to offer a national register of allotment sites, but many entries are still incomplete

www.kitchengardens.dial.pipex.com is a good example of a local website, offering information on allotments in the London Borough of Barnet, a potted history, gardening advice and a range of links

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