

# Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Allotments

**Monday, 11 October 2010**

**Present:** Councillor Harold Heaton (Acting Chair) and Councillors Anthony Gee, Marie Gray, Harold Heaton and June Molyneux

**Also in attendance:** Councillors Martin Walls (Head of Streetscene), Jennifer Moore (Head of Planning), Andy Brown (Parks and Open Spaces Officer (Development)), Alan Bothamley (Streetscene Co-ordinator (Grounds Maintenance)), Steve Aldous (Enforcement Officer) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

## 10.A.17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Julia Berry (Chair) and Alison Hansford.

## 10.A.18 MINUTES

**RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Allotments meeting held on 11 August 2010 be held as a correct record for signing by the Chair**

## 10.A.19 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No declarations of any interest were declared.

## 10.A.20 COLLECTION AND CONSIDERATION OF EVIDENCE

To enable the Members to put forward any questions regarding Allotments, the under mentioned people attended the meeting and took part in an informal discussion.

Mr Bill Taylor – Chair of Chorley Allotments Society and a member of the public who requested a review of Allotments.

Mrs Iris Smith (representing Miss Eleanor Smith – a member of the public who requested a review of Allotments)

Jennifer Moore – Head of Planning Services, Chorley Council

Steve Aldous – Enforcement Officer (Planning), Chorley Council

Sarah Turner – Community Growing Officer, Chorley Council

The following points summarise the views expressed by the representatives.

Question 1 – The Council are currently considering certain restrictions on the types of fencing and sheds to be erected, what is your view on this?

- Allotment holders held the opinion that plots should retain an element of individuality but that there is a need to avoid the “shanty town “ look.
- It was felt that if the restrictions became a requirement, this must be a ‘reasonable’ test rather than a design requirement.
- There was agreement for a maximum size of shed, with two sizes being put forward for consideration. (2 x 3 and 8 x 10).
- The type of materials to be used should be agreed upon and tenants to regularly maintain.
- The communal storage options put forward by officers were rejected.

- It was felt that perimeter fencing was very important for allotment holders in terms of security and that the Council should maintain this fencing more frequently.
- Adequate fencing materials should be stipulated and adhered to. Recycled doors for example were deemed to be inappropriate.
- It was considered that fencing for individual plots was sometimes needed for peace of mind (a post and marker would be sufficient), but not always necessary; people should be free to fence off plots as they wish.
- It was however, recognised that 'too much' security may promote attractiveness to crime.
- Sometimes height was needed on a plot to grow certain types of produce, for example, runner beans.
- Some plot holders wished to fence off their plots to keep out rabbits.
- Some plot holders wished to erect poly tunnels but there were significant planning issues, especially on private allotment sites.
- There were also some concerns on costs, particularly those on benefits or retired.

Question 2 – Presently the Council supplies and pays for the supply of mains water on some of its sites. All allotment holders are in receipt of a water butt. What would be your views on the Council ceasing to provide water on site in keeping with the sustainability agenda.

- The LGA "Growing in the Community" was considered to be helpful guidance on the provision of water.
- Currently only 1.5 out of 5 Chorley Council sites have water.
- Chorley Council could fit meters and set targets for reducing usage. (Doesn't have to be United Utilities that fit the metres)
- Plot holders that don't have access to mains water should pay less.
- Existing water supplies should not be discontinued.
- Water butts provided by the Council were thought to be too small and too expensive to supply.
- Often allotment holders were transporting water to sites and this was not considered sustainable.
- If no water available on site, in months of drought the results can be catastrophic.
- How much does the Council pay for water on their metered site?
- Could the Council explore the idea of providing large tanks for the collection of water on its sites?
- There were some concerns that water butts on the Crosse Hall Allotment extension site had disappeared.

Question 3 – As there are not enough Allotments to meet current demand, the Council would like to review the inconsistencies on some of the sites, whereas plot areas are of different sizes. This could lead to us reviewing the large plots in order to provide smaller plots and reduce waiting lists. What are your thoughts?

- Presently plots vary in size from 60sqm – 350sqm, effectively double plots.
- The deemed 'standard plot' size is 250sqm – no single plots in Chorley are this size.
- It was considered that an adequate size for a plot should be 125sqm, that would provide 4 x 15m beds to work the rotational system, plus 1 x Greenhouse, 1 x Shed, 2 x fruit trees and paths.
- People in possession of the much larger plots should pay more.
- The general view was that the newer smaller plots being provided at 60sqm were too small, although there was an argument that these could be starter/taster plots. There was evidence that smaller plots, encourage Community Growing especially for older people.

- Bigger plots can become unmanageable in short space of time.
- There was a view that it would be difficult to take land off a plot that has been worked by the holder for a long period of time to a high standard.
- It was recognised that some allotments are used more for a social activity rather than for growing food.
- Is the 400+waiting list demand “real”.

Question 4 – Other local authorities are exploring the idea of the Community Management of Allotments; to give tenants greater control and allow them to cover some of the functions currently carried out by Officers of the Council. What are your views on Community Management of allotments?

- Chorley Allotment Society has only just started to take off and do not feel in the position to take on this role at the present time. The main reason being the lack of resources from within the Group. Presently have 85 members with some being private allotment holders and have difficulties maintaining a Committee.
- It was felt that relations between the Council and the Society had recently improved, but that the partnership needed to be strengthened before they could explore the feasibility of such a scheme.
- Chorley Allotment Society would be interested in being consulted more in the meantime.
- It was suggested that the new site on Manor Road could pilot a community based management arrangement with a view to rolling out across the other sites in the future.
- The question was raised as to whether it should be made compulsory for all Allotment holders to become a member of Chorley Allotment society?
- The Council could draw up a revised Tenancy Agreement in consultation with the Society that all the holders would adopt and sign up too.
- The membership for Chorley Allotment Society is £5-6 per year.
- Swifter action is needed by Chorley Council to evict non cultivators.

Question 5 – What do you feel about the level of annual rent charged?

- The current cost for a Chorley Council Allotment is £38 per annum (no matter what size of plot) which was considered reasonable for a standardised plot and comparative to neighbouring authorities. Although there is a 50%reduction for people over 60.
- It was felt that the smaller plots 60sqm could be £18 per annum and the biggest plots at 350sqm around £105.
- Some authorities have discounts for none earners and most charge a one off administration fee at the commencement of the tenancy and percentage discounts for sites with no water.
- Officers informed the Group that the budget for the Allotments is the total annual income from the sites. The majority of this is spent on maintaining the sites and administration costs. Officers very often just pay for material costs and look to more innovative ways of providing labour. For example the use of Community Pay Back Groups.
- Chorley Allotment Society would welcome involvement into how the Allotment budget is spent.
- Overall there was a feeling that there was no room to increase the actual charges but that work could be done to make the charges fair in terms of plot sizes and level of amenity.

Other issues that were raised

- Whether Section 106 monies could be used for the provision of allotments.
- Could the Council create a bank of available land that could be used for allotments.

- Chorley Council needs to invest in site drainage measures when laying out new sites.
- Head of Planning was happy to develop a set of guidelines and good practice, aimed specifically at avoiding enforcement actions and applying for planning permissions on allotment sites.
- Could private allotment sites be promoted to people on the Council's waiting lists? This was considered to be difficult for planning and would be inappropriate if the Council was considering enforcement action.
- The meeting discussed the development of planning policy on allotments. In terms of provision standards, Jennifer Moore explained that an Open Space Study had been commissioned by the three districts of Chorley, South Ribble & Preston to inform the Joint LDF Core Strategy and Site Allocations. This had not yet been published, but would inform open space policy on allotment provision. Bill Taylor expressed his wish to be consulted on that work and the development of policy and the Head of Planning Services agreed to arrange a meeting in the future to discuss this in more detail.

Chair