

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Allotments

Agenda and Reports

For consideration on

**Thursday, 25th November
2010**

In Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Chorley

At 10.00 am



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19 November 2010

Dear Colleague

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - ALLOTMENTS -
THURSDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER 2010**

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Allotments to be held in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Chorley on Thursday, 25th November 2010 commencing at 10.00 am.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for absence**

2. **Declarations of Any Interests**

Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any personal interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda. If the interest arises **only** as result of your membership of another public body or one to which you have been appointed by the Council then you only need to declare it if you intend to speak.

If the personal interest is a prejudicial interest, you must withdraw from the meeting. Normally you should leave the room before the business starts to be discussed. You do, however, have the same right to speak as a member of the public and may remain in the room to enable you to exercise that right and then leave immediately. In either case you must not seek to improperly influence a decision on the matter.

3. **Minutes (Pages 1 - 6)**

To confirm the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Allotments meeting held on 9 November 2010 (enclosed)

4. **Collection of Evidence**

The Head of Streetscene Services will provide information that the Group had requested at the last meeting (to be circulated at the meeting)

5. **Draft Final Report of the Allotment Review (Pages 7 - 22)**

To consider the enclosed draft report of the review. The report summarises the Groups findings and lists the proposed recommendations.

6. **Any other item(s) that the Chair decides is/are urgent**

Yours sincerely

Donna Hall .

Donna Hall
Chief Executive

Dianne Scambler
Democratic and Member Services Officer
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Distribution

1. Agenda and reports to all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Allotments (Julia Berry (Chair) and Anthony Gee, Marie Gray, Alison Hansford, Harold Heaton and June Molyneaux for attendance.
2. Agenda and reports to Martin Walls (Head of Streetscene) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer) for attendance.
3. Agenda and reports to Jamie Carson (Director of People and Places), Alan Bothamley (Streetscene Co-ordinator (Gronds Maintenance)) and Andy Brown (Parks and Open Spaces Officer (Development)) for information.

This information can be made available to you in larger print or on audio tape, or translated into your own language. Please telephone 01257 515118 to access this service.

આ માહિતીનો અનુવાદ આપની પોતાની ભાષામાં કરી શકાય છે. આ સેવા સરળતાથી મેળવવા માટે કૃપા કરી, આ નંબર પર ફોન કરો: 01257 515822

ان معلومات کا ترجمہ آپ کی اپنی زبان میں بھی کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ یہ خدمت استعمال کرنے کیلئے براہ مہربانی اس نمبر پر ٹیلیفون

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Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Allotments

Tuesday, 9 November 2010

Present: Councillor Julia Berry (Chair) and Councillors Anthony Gee, Alison Hansford, Harold Heaton and June Molyneux

Also in attendance: Councillors Martin Walls (Head of Streetscene Services), Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer) and Andy Brown (Parks and Open Spaces Officer (Development))

10.A.21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Marie Gray.

10.A.22 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were declared.

10.A.23 MINUTES

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

10.A.24 COLLECTION AND CONSIDERATION OF EVIDENCE

The Group received for consideration the consultation response of the Chorley and South Ribble Disability Forum on the provision of allotments.

The Forum made the following points:

- People often did not apply for allotments because of the huge waiting lists.
- They felt that some groups were disadvantaged because of the difficulties they experienced in accessing information about the allotments or tenancy agreements. This applied to people with visual impairments, BSL users and those who have learning difficulties.
- Information should be more readily available about charges. There was some concern that there was different charges for similar sized plots but no explanation as to why.
- The overall layout and access to allotments is crucial for disabled people. Wheelchair users and people with visual impairments need accessible parking close to the site, with level, smooth, unobstructed pathways and raised beds.
- The formation of User Groups for consultation purposes.

RESOLVED – That the points made be noted and taken into account when considering the management and maintenance of allotments within Chorley.

10.A.25 ALLOTMENTS MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE REPORT

The Group received a report of the Head of Streetscene Services that summarised the areas for review with regards to the management and maintenance of allotments within Chorley.

The report highlighted the current position on each issue and some suggestions of areas to explore.

Members were asked to consider these issues in light of the information they had gathered to date, on site visits; from other officers; and from the representatives who had expressed a view.

Standard Charges

The current charge for an allotment is £39.50 per year with a 50% reduction for old aged pensioners. This generates an income of around £6000 and does not currently cover the costs of administration and management of the allotments, which includes on site fresh water supply on two of the sites.

Members agreed that the existing annual rental charges need to be reviewed. Some consideration was given to the differing sizes of plots and whether or not this should be reflective of the cost.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the annual charge of £39.50 increases in line with inflation.**
- 2. That the concessionary rate be phased out over the next two years. 75% of rental will be charged in 2011/12 with the full rental being charged in 2012/13**
- 3. That the annual charge be regardless of plot size.**
- 4. That it be Council policy to carve up the larger plots as and when they become available.**

Layout of New Sites:

The last site developed in Chorley had no restrictions on what could be allowed on the plots in terms of shed and fences etc. This has led to a fairly informal arrangement where the plot holders have an open rein to erect what they want. This can lead to sites looking rather untidy as the types of sheds and fences are never uniform.

Although it was agreed that by imposing some restrictions, the sites would look a lot tidier and be easier to maintain, there was also a view that the plot holders should be allowed to recycle materials if able in order to drive through the sustainability agenda. This view had been strongly expressed by allotment holders at the last meeting.

It was felt that the plot holder could define their own boundaries using suitable materials and could erect suitable structures for storage/cultivation, subject to consent, and a defined maximum floor space (to be determined).

If the allotment holder used any materials that the Council considered to be unsafe or hazardous they would be asked to remove them from the plot and this standard should be enforceable through the Tenancy Agreement.

Members were also keen to minimise further costs to the plot holder, particularly bearing in mind that the decision to increase rental costs would impact on a number of tenants.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the Council provide suitable perimeter fencing on all its new sites, that will be adequately maintained.**
- 2. That the allotment holder be responsible for defining the actual plot, using safe and suitable materials.**

3. That the subject to consent, the allotment holder be responsible for erecting structures on the plot for the purposes of storage/cultivation using safe and suitable materials with a total floor space (to be determined)
4. That the new Tenancy Agreement be implemented for all new sites and when an allotment is taken up by a new holder.

Provision of services (Water)

Currently two of the sites have clean piped water on site. This is not controlled and subject to abuse. In addition the high cost of supply impacts on the overall running costs of the service. On newer sites the provision of butts to encourage plot holders to take a more sustainable approach has had a mixed response, the scheme is a considerable cost to the Council and the allotment holders deem them to be too small in size.

Officers advised Members that the cost of installing clean piped water to the remainder of its sites, would generate high costs and it was accepted that this was not a feasible option in the current financial climate.

It was however recognised that although the present water provision should remain, this needed to be cost neutral to the Council and Members considered charging the allotment holders for this amenity. This view had also received support from the allotment holders at the last meeting and there seemed to be an expectation that tenants would be prepared to pay more for the level of amenity they received.

Members considered implementing a new water provision charge in 2012/13. Allotment holders would be notified in April 2011 that the charges would be based on the water usage on site in 2011/12, this would also allow time for any further views and feedback and it was hoped that this would encourage the allotment holders to take a more sustainable approach and promote good housekeeping and self management on site. With this in mind Members asked officers to provide information on the current costs to the Council for the provision of this water.

Members also discussed ceasing the provision of water butts. Instead new allotment holders would receive help and guidance on the sustainability agenda, advice on suitable water collection methods and contact details for suppliers.

Recommendations:

1. That the present water provision is maintained on the two sites but at cost neutral to the Council.
2. That the allotment holders be charged for the water provision based on the usage of the previous rental year.
3. That the provision of water butts to new allotment holders be withdrawn.
4. That information help and guidance be provided to new allotment holders on the sustainability agenda.

Waiting List Management

At the start of the review there were around 400 people on the waiting list. However there was no fixed procedure in place to determine its accuracy and at an earlier meeting Members were of the opinion that the onus was on the individual to inform the Council yearly of their intention to remain on the list. This instruction had been communicated to all the existing people on the list and had resulted in the removal of over 100 applicants and a reduction of administration costs.

The waiting list had also been split to represent the demand in each of the Neighbourhood Areas. A general list was also still available for those people who had indicated that they would take up the tenancy on any plot across the Borough.

Members expressed their views about the importance of implementing the Neighbourhood Area lists to support the Neighbourhood Working agenda. In future any applicant on the general list would only be allowed to refuse a plot on one occasion, then be placed on the relevant Neighbourhood Area list.

Some thought was given as to how the plots should be allocated when they become vacant and it was decided that for existing sites, plots would be offered to those who had been on the waiting list the longest. For all new allotment sites there would be a 50/50 allocation split between applicants on the relevant area list and applicants on the general waiting list.

Recommendations:

- 1. That applicants apply annually to the Council to be kept on the lists.**
- 2. That any vacant plot be firstly offered to the person who has been on the waiting list the longest.**
- 3. That applicants on the general waiting lists only be allowed to refuse a plot on one occasion, then placed onto the relevant Neighbourhood Area list**
- 4. That all new sites be allocated by a 50/50 split between the Neighbourhood Area list and the General list to support the Neighbourhood Working Agenda.**

Tenancy Agreements

All tenants must sign up to a Tenancy Agreement when they take up occupancy of a plot. It is this document that sets out the rules and conditions that must be adhered to. Members were keen for these controls to be tightened in order to facilitate effective management and enforcement procedures and to avoid subjectivity being applied when considering further action.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the Tenancy Agreement be reviewed to include:**
 - Appropriate rules and conditions to promote higher standards of maintenance.**
 - Definitive guidance and procedures on non compliance issues, to protect the Councils position.**

Planning Guidance

At the last meeting the Head of Planning Services outlined some of the issues relating to planning permissions on private allotment sites. Both Members and the representatives present shared concerns that the planning laws seemed ambiguous and asked if any guidance could be provided on this matter.

It had also been explained that an Open Space Study had been commissioned by the three districts of Chorley, South Ribble and Preston to inform the Joint Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Site Allocations. This had not yet been published, but would inform open space policy on allotment provision. The Chorley Allotments Society expressed a wish to be consulted on this work and the development of the policy.

Recommendations:

1. That the Head of Planning Services be asked to provide written guidance/policy for planning permissions relating to private allotment sites.
2. That the Head of Planning Services arrange a meeting with representatives of the Chorley Allotments Society to discuss the Open Space Study.

Chair

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Draft Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Allotments



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1. PREFACE

The Scrutiny inquiry into Allotments was requested by two members of the public.

We collected evidence from a number of different sources including allotment holders, the Community Growing Officer for the Council and consulted the Chorley Disability Forum.

A site visit of allotment sites was undertaken by the Group and documentation was analysed that included current Tenancy Agreements and a report on Allotments and Community Growing that had been approved by the Executive Cabinet, outlining current allotment provision and arrangements.

The recommendations have the capacity to increase revenue and minimise running costs with no major budget implications to the Council, some are organisational and will establish best practice.

I would like to thank the Task Group Members for their deliberations, the Officers and those who made a contribution to this report.

Councillor Julia Berry
(Chair)

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of two members of the public, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked the Task Group to undertake a scrutiny inquiry to look at Allotments in Chorley.

Objectives

1. To assess current provision and demand for allotments within Chorley
2. To examine the content of the tenancy agreements and rules governing occupation.
3. To assess the current monitoring and inspection procedures of allotment sites.
4. To review the current charging mechanism against the cost of administration.
5. Encourage community growing/partnership working across the Borough.
6. To consider the potential for forming Committees and User Groups within individual allotment sites to give tenants greater control and allow them to cover some of the functions currently carried out by officers.

Desired Outcomes

1. Increase the provision of allotments through standardisation of existing and future plots and fairness of allocation.
2. Improve management controls to enforce higher standards on allotment plots, which in turn will improve their overall appearance.
3. Ensure charges for allotments are fair and reflective of other authorities and where possible cover the management costs.
4. Introduce guidance and education of residents on the waiting list to encourage growing on alternative sites/shared facilities or at home.
5. Encourage future self management of the Allotments

Task Group Membership

Councillor Julia Berry
Councillor Anthony Gee
Councillor Marie Gray
Councillor Alison Hansford
Councillor Harold Heaton
Councillor June Molyneaux

Officer Support:

Lead Officers

Martin Walls	Head of Streetscene Services
Andrew Brown	Parks and Open Spaces Officer (Development)
Alan Bothamley	Streetscene Co-ordinator (Grounds Maintenance)

Democratic Services

Dianne Scambler Democratic and Member Services Officer

Meetings

The meeting papers of the Group can be found on the Council's website:

www.chorley.gov.uk/scrutiny. This includes the inquiry project outline and other relevant information on policy and procedures.

Contribution of Evidence

The Task Group would like to thank all those who have provided evidence and contributed to the Inquiry, including:

Miss Eleanor Smith,

Mrs Iris Smith,

Mr Bill Taylor, Chair of Chorley Allotments Society

Eileen Bee, Chorley Disability Forum

Jennifer Moore, Head of Planning Services, Chorley Council,

Steve Aldous, Enforcement Officer, Chorley Council,

Sarah Turner, Community Growing Officer, Chorley Council/PCT,

Lindsey Ralston, Assistant Parks and Open Spaces Officer, Chorley Council

Recommendations

The Executive Cabinet is asked to consider the following recommendations:

Provision and demand for allotments

- That applicants apply annually to the Council for an allotment.
- That vacant plots from within existing allotment provision be offered to applicants who have been on the waiting list the longest.
- That applicants on the general 'any site' waiting list only be allowed refusal of one plot, then placed on to the relevant Neighbourhood Area list.
- That any new sites be allocated by a 50/50 split between the Neighbourhood Area applicants and the general 'any site' applicants to support Neighbourhood Working.
- That Chorley Allotments Society be consulted on the Site Allocations Development Plan Document.
- That the Council considers the provision for allotments when negotiating Section 106 monies.
- That the Head of Planning Services, Chorley Council be requested to develop a set of guidelines and good practice for use by private allotment owners.

Tenancy Agreement and monitoring and inspection procedures

- That the Tenancy agreement be reviewed to include:
 - Appropriate rules and conditions to promote higher standards of maintenance
 - Definitive guidance on non compliance issues, to protect the Council's position.
- That the Council provide suitable perimeter fencing on all its new sites that will be adequately maintained.
- That the allotment holder be responsible for defining the actual plot, using safe and suitable materials.
- That subject to consent, the allotment holder be responsible for erecting structures on the plot for the purposes of storage and cultivation using safe and suitable materials within a total floor space (to be determined)

- That the new Tenancy Agreement be implemented on all new sites and when an existing allotment is occupied by a new holder.

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Allotment charges

- That the annual charge of £39.50 be **increased annual with inflation or reviewed periodically**
- That the concessionary rate be phased out over the next two years, 75% of rental to be charged in 2011/12 with the full rental being charged in 2012/13.
- That the annual charge should be regardless of plot size.
- That it be Council policy to carve up the larger plots as and when they become available.
- That the present mains water provision be maintained on the two sites but at cost neutral to the Council.
- **That the allotment holders be charged for the water provision based on the usage of the previous rental year. The charge would be implemented in 2012/13 based upon water usage in 2011/12**
- That the provision of new water butts be withdrawn.
- That information help and guidance be provided to new allotment holders on the sustainability agenda.

Community Growing

- That the Council be encouraged to continue working closely with Lancashire Wildlife Trust over the next three years, sharing information, staff time and resources to ensure the success of the Community Food Growing Action Plan.

Community Management of Allotments

- **That allotment holders on any new site be supported and encouraged to pilot a community based management arrangement.**
- **That the Council would endorse the value of its allotment holders joining the Chorley Allotments Society through the contract and other associated paperwork.**
- **That User Groups be established as and when required for the purposes of consultation.**

3. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Evidence

The Group received and considered several reports and documents, these included:

1. Allotments and Community Growing Report
2. Existing Allotment Tenancy Agreement
3. Current Charging details
4. Details on the current Allotments Waiting List
5. Feedback from Chorley Disability Forum

Witnesses

The Task Group interviewed:

Mr Bill Taylor, Chair of Chorley Allotments Society and member of the public that requested a review of allotments.

Miss Eleanor Smith, (represented by Mrs Iris Smith) a member of the public that requested a review of allotments.

Sarah Turner, Community Growing Officer, Chorley Council/PCT

Jennifer Moore, Head of Planning Services, Chorley Council

Steve Aldous, Enforcement Officer, Chorley Council

Site Visit

On 16 July 2010, the Group visited a number of different allotment sites:

- Private allotment site – Brown House Lane, Wheelton
- Council allotment site – Crosse Hall Lane, Chorley
- Comparative neighbouring authorities site – Plank Lane, Leigh

4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective 1: To assess current provision and demand for allotments within Chorley.

Chorley Council currently has 147 plots on seven sites with differing levels of provision and management methods, all are occupied. It is impossible to calculate accurately how long people would have to wait before being offered an allotment but on average it is estimated that this would be 7 years assuming the current level of plot turn around and growth of the waiting list continued.

Recent measures have been taken to increase the number of allotments in Chorley over the past few years. When larger plots are handed back, they are divided to create a more manageable size. In 2009 a further 33 plots were created in this way and the Council is currently in the process of looking to develop new allotment sites in the Borough.

The Astley Park Walled Garden was created in 2008 and is a community space enabling Chorley residents to learn about, watch or get involved in growing fruit and vegetables. There are two large plots and four raised beds for use by all. There are also a great number of established growing schemes, mainly in primary schools but there also some private allotment sites across the Borough.

It was recognised that the overall layout and access to allotments was crucial for disabled people. Wheelchair users need accessible parking that is reasonably close to their allotment, with level, smooth (definitely not cindered), unobstructed pathways and raised beds. Unobstructed pathways are also important for people with visual impairments. The provision of smooth (tarmac) footpaths and car parks would greatly increase costs and reduce the number of sites that could be developed. However, the Council are required to consider these issues in the future, to ensure the development of sites that are reflective of need.

The Council would also look to secure external funding for this provision and regular inspections and enforcement of good housekeeping standards through the implementation of the revised Tenancy Agreement would ensure that pathways are kept clear and accessible.

At the start of the review Chorley had a waiting list of around 400 applicants and Members were shown various statistics on how this figure had increased since 2003, with the last couple of years providing the biggest increases. The popularity of food growing has greatly increased primarily due to publicity on television gardening shows, the environmental sustainability agenda and the current financial climate.

There are currently no fixed procedures in place to assess the present accuracy of the waiting list and Members were of the opinion that the onus should be upon the individual to inform the Council yearly of their intention to remain on the list.

The Group expressed a view about the importance of implementing Neighbourhood Area waiting lists to support the Neighbourhood Working agenda and considered that any future applicants should be allocated to their relevant area. Any applicants still wishing to remain on the waiting list for acceptance of a plot on any of the sites would

only be allowed one opportunity for refusal, and then be placed on the relevant Neighbourhood Area list.

Thought was given to how the plots should be allocated when they become vacant. It was considered that available plots on existing sites would be allocated to applicants who had been on the waiting lists the longest. For all new allotment sites, the Group proposed a 50/50 allocation split between applicants on the relevant area list and the general any site list.

The Council are currently producing a Local Development Framework (LDF) that will replace the Local Plan. The LDF will be made up of a number of documents including a Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) which will allocate land for various uses such as housing, employment and leisure. As part of this document there will a review of current leisure allocations, including allotments, to identify which sites should continue to be allocated and protected and to identify whether there is a need to allocate more sites. The Chorley Allotments Society were invited to be part of the consultation process.

A request was also made for the Council to consider allotment provision when negotiating Section 106 monies in relation to planning developments across the Borough.

There was a view that more private landowners would be prepared to develop allotments if planning policy allowed them and the Group acknowledged that there seemed to be some confusion over planning permissions on private allotment sites. To this end, the Head of Planning Services at Chorley Council offered to develop a set of guidelines and good practice that would be aimed specifically at avoiding enforcement actions and applying for planning permissions on sites.

Recommendations:

- That the applicant apply annually to the Council for an allotment.
- That any vacant plot from within existing allotment provision be offered to applicants who have been on the waiting list the longest.
- That any applicant on the general 'any site' waiting list only be allowed refusal of one plot, then placed on to the relevant Neighbourhood Area list.
- That any new sites be allocated by a 50/50 split between the Neighbourhood Area applicants and the general 'any site' applicants to support Neighbourhood Working.
- That Chorley Allotments Society be consulted on the Site Allocations Development Plan Document.
- That the Council considers the provision for allotments when negotiating Section 106 monies.
- That the Head of Planning Services, Chorley Council be requested to develop a set of guidelines and good practice for use by private allotment owners.

Objective 2 – To examine the content of the tenancy agreements and rules of governing occupation and Objective 3 – To assess the current monitoring and inspection procedures on allotment sites.

All tenants must sign up to a Tenancy Agreement when they take up occupancy of a plot. It is this document that sets out the rules and conditions that must be adhered to.

The present Tenancy Agreement had been updated around eighteen months ago to include a condition about the keeping of chickens and rabbits on the plots.

Members were keen for these controls to be tightened in order to facilitate effective management and enforcement procedures and to avoid subjectively being applied when considering further action.

Presently Chorley has no restrictions on what can be allowed on the plots in terms of sheds and fences etc. This has led to a fairly informal arrangement. Where the plot holders have an open rein to erect what they want. This has led to some sites looking untidy as the types of sheds and fences are never uniform.

Although it was agreed that imposing such restrictions the site would look a lot tidier and easier to maintain, there was also a view that the plot holders should be allowed to recycle materials if able, in order to drive through the sustainability agenda. It was felt that the plot holder could define their own boundaries using suitable materials to erect suitable structures for storage and cultivation, subject to consent and a defined maximum floor space (to be determined)

If the allotment holder uses any materials that the Council consider to be unsafe or hazardous they will be asked to remove them from the plot and this standard will be enforced through the Tenancy Agreement.

Members acknowledged that perimeter fencing was very important for allotment holders in terms of security and that the Council should maintain this fencing more frequently. It was however recognised that 'too much' security may promote attractiveness to crime.

Recommendations:

- That the Tenancy agreement be reviewed to include:
 - Appropriate rules and conditions to promote higher standards of maintenance
 - Definitive guidance on non compliance issues, to protect the Council's position.
- That the Council provide suitable perimeter fencing on all its new sites that will be adequately maintained.
- That the allotment holder be responsible for defining the actual plot, using safe and suitable materials.
- That subject to consent, the allotment holder be responsible for erecting structures on the plot for the purposes of storage and cultivation using safe and suitable materials within a total floor space (to be determined)
- That the new Tenancy Agreement be implemented on all new sites and when an existing allotment is occupied by a new holder.

Objective 4 – To review the current charging mechanism against the cost of administration.

The current charge for an allotment is £39.50 per year with a 50% reduction for old age pensioners. This currently generates an income of around £6000 and does not currently cover the costs of administration and management of the allotments, which includes the provision of water on two of the sites.

The Chorley Allotments Society considered that an adequate size for a plot should be 125sqm, this would provide 4 X 15m beds to work the rotational system, plus 1 X Shed, 1 X Greenhouse, 2 fruit trees and paths.

The Council aims to provide a standard plot size of 100 – 120sqm on any new site, however this size could be reduced or increased to reflect the location and demand of an area.

Members agreed that the existing annual rental charges needed to be reviewed. Some consideration was also given to the differing sizes of the plots and whether or not this should be reflective of the price.

At present two of the sites have clean piped water on site. This is not controlled and open to abuse. In addition the high cost of supply impacts directly on the overall running costs to the service. On newer sites the provision of butts to encourage plot holders to take a more sustainable approach had received a mixed response, the scheme is at considerable cost to the Council and the allotment holders deem them to be too small in size.

Officers advised Members that the cost of installing clean piped water to the remainder of its sites, would generate high costs and it was accepted that this was not a feasible option in the current financial climate.

It was however recognised that although the present water provision should remain, this needed to be cost neutral to the Council and Members considered charging the allotment holders for this amenity. This view had also received support from the allotment holders and there seemed to be an expectation that tenants would be prepared to pay more for the level of amenity they received.

Members considered the implementation of a new water provision charge in 2012/13. Allotment holders would be notified in April 2011 that the charges would be based on the water usage on site in 2011/12, this would allow time for any further views and feedback and it is hoped that this will encourage the allotment holders to take a more sustainable approach and promote good housekeeping and self management on site.

Members also discussed ceasing the provision of water butts. Instead new allotment holders will receive help and guidance about the sustainability agenda, advice on suitable water collection and contact details for suppliers.

Recommendations:

- That the annual charge of £39.50 be **increased in line with inflation or reviewed periodically**
- That the concessionary rate be phased out over the next two years, 75% of rental to be charged in 2011/12 with the full rental being charged in 2012/13.
- That the annual charge should be regardless of plot size.
- **That the plot size on new sites be 100 – 120sqm unless location or demand dictates a different size.**
- That it be Council policy to carve up the larger plots as and when they become available.
- **That the allotment holders be charged for the water provision based on the usage of the previous rental year. The charge would be implemented in 2012/13 based upon water usage in 2011/12**
- That the allotment holders be charged for the water provision based on the usage of the previous rental year.
- That the provision of new water butts be withdrawn.
- That information, help and guidance be provided to new allotment holders on the sustainability agenda.

Objective 5 – Encourage community growing/partnership working across the borough

In 2009, NHS Central Lancashire led on and commissioned a feasibility study on Community Food Growing (CFG), and the findings were presented to the Chorley Partnership – Health and Well Being Thematic Working Group. A multi stake-holder task and finish group was established to drive forward the recommendations for Chorley.

Chorley Council are working in partnership with NHS Central Lancashire, Public Health Directorate, Lancashire Wildlife Trust and the Chorley Partnership Health and Well Being Thematic Group to deliver national, regional and local targets through a co-ordinated and integrated partnership approach.

The Primary Care Trust (PCT) has invested resources for the next three years on the promotion, co-ordination and pump priming initiatives that support CFG. Lancashire Wildlife Trust has taken the lead role to write and oversee the delivery of a Community Food Growing Action Plan for Chorley, and a Community Food Growing Officer, based at the Council offices has been employed for three days a week to implement the plan.

Recommendation:

- That the Council be encouraged to continues working closely with Lancashire Wildlife Trust over the next three years, sharing information, staff time and resources to ensure the success of the Community Food Growing Action Plan

Objective 6 – To consider the potential for forming Committees and Users Groups within individual allotment sites to give tenants greater control and allow them to cover some of the functions currently carried out by officers.

The Chair of Chorley Allotments Society commented that this group had only just started to take off and did not feel that they would be in a position to take on board this role at the present time due to a lack of resources from within. They presently have 85 members; with some being private allotment holders and already have difficulties maintaining a Committee.

The Group recognised the value and importance of the Chorley Allotments Society and wanted to encourage more allotment holders to join.

It was pleasing to learn that relations between the Council and the Society have recently improved, but an acceptance that the partnership need to be strengthened before the feasibility of such a scheme could be further explored. In the meantime Chorley Allotments Society has expressed an interest to be consulted on and become more involved.

Members and officers were also supportive of the idea of forming User Groups that were committed to the principles of inclusivity, for consultation purposes.

Members considered that allotment holders on new Council sites should be encouraged to pilot a community based management arrangement with a view to, if successful, rolling out to other sites in the future.

Recommendations:

- ***That allotment holders on new Council sites be supported and encouraged to pilot a community based management arrangement.***
- ***That the Council would endorse the value of its allotment holders joining the Chorley Allotments Society through the contract and other associated paperwork.***
- ***That User Groups be established as and when required for the purposes of consultation.***

5. CONCLUSION

The Council recognises that the provision of allotments is a valuable facility for the community, providing an excellent opportunity to grow your own fruit and vegetables, meet new people and get plenty of fresh air and exercise. They are sustainable, reduces the carbon footprint of the food we eat and the impact on our environment.

It is acknowledged that the Chorley Allotments Society is providing a valuable contribution to the promotion of community cohesion by supporting allotment holders with help and guidance on developing their plots and improving environmental sustainability.

Something about working in partnership

The recommendations will allow for the effective management and maintenance of the Allotments and the Council are committed in continuing to look at ways of increasing provision in line with current and future demand.

Chorley Council



2008-2009
*Transforming Services:
Citizen Engagement
and Empowerment*



2009-2010
Cohesive and resilient communities



2009-2010
Better outcomes for people and places

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