

## A DRAFT ALLOTMENT POLICY FOR STIRLING COUNCIL - 2010

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Allotments are an important asset, providing a wide range of benefits to both communities and the environment. They are not just a way of producing good and low cost food, though this remains important. They offer recreation involving healthy exercise, social contacts and the fun and challenge of growing a variety of fruit, vegetables and flowers. They contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom.
- 1.2 Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space, providing a haven for wildlife in the heart of the town.
- 1.3 Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land, and those who live in flats often have no individual garden, circumstances that can disproportionately disadvantage those on lower incomes. Allotments can help to redress the balance.
- 1.4 All local authorities have a statutory duty “to provide a sufficient number of allotments if they are of the opinion that there is a demand for them”. Stirling Council provides 137 individual plots spread across three sites, Bridge of Allan, Stirling and Dunblane.
- 1.5 **The overall objective of this policy is to encourage greater use of allotments in the area.** This in turn will help to achieve outcomes and objectives in the Stirling’s Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government and Community Planning Partners, including Scottish Natural Heritage, Greenspace Scotland and Going Carbon Neutral Stirling.

### 2 Purpose of the Policy

- 2.1 The policy seeks to encourage and increase the use of allotment sites for existing and potential plot holders. It puts in place a framework to develop and manage allotments in partnership with users. The policy will:
  - set standards for the provision of allotments
  - encourage the uptake of allotments
  - seek to improve the standard of service provision
  - evaluate the benefits derived from allotments and
  - improve the financial position of the service

- 2.2 As a result of implementing this policy a strategy will be developed in which people can expect:
- good access, good security, well maintained and safe access routes and pathways, adequate water provision and freedom from neglected plots
  - opportunities and encouragement to individuals and communities wishing to be involved in the cultivation of allotments
  - efficient and effective allotment administration
  - fair open and equitable treatment, and safe tenure
  - opportunities for developing gardening skills
  - encouragement to sites to develop self-management and associations
  - fair rents

### **3 Current Provision**

- 3.1 Stirling Council provides 3 allotment sites in the district for those interested in allotment gardening. The Council manages and maintains the Bridge of Allan site while the sites at Bridgehaugh and Dunblane are leased to the Stirling Allotment Association and the Dunblane Allotment Group respectively. At Bridgehaugh the grass between the plots is maintained by the Council while the Dunblane site is self-sufficient. The map at Appendix 1 indicates the location of these sites.
- 3.2 Management and promotion of the allotment service now falls under the responsibility of the Roads, Transport and Open Space Service. A modest maintenance budget for the allotment service is held by Land Services. Land Services maintain the trees, paths, and boundary fence at the Bridge of Allan site only.
- 3.3 A development budget to support the actions in the policy will require to be identified for the 2010-2011 financial year. Currently the rent income does not cover the expenditure costs to provide the service.
- 3.4 The allotment service should monitor performance against the following criteria:
- % occupancy rates
  - income against expenditure
- 3.5 A review of the allotment service was carried out as part of an Internal Audit in 2008. The review highlighted various issues with the allotment service and developed a detailed action plan to help to improve the service. Recommendations from that review are included within the aims and objectives of this policy. A recent request, placed before the Council's Petitions Panel, has called for an increase in allotments throughout the area.

## 4 The role and benefits of allotments

4.1 Allotments offer huge potential to help create a sustainable community:

- **Allotments as a sustainable source of food.** Increasing people's awareness about food and how it is made and grown can encourage people to eat more fresh vegetables and fruit. There are benefits to the environment by providing a local source of food that does not have to be transported over great distances, is often free from chemicals and encourages the composting of green waste. It also provides dietary benefits at low cost to people with low incomes.
- **Allotments as a resource for health and well-being.** Working an allotment offers healthy physical recreation for people. It is increasingly being recognised for its therapeutic value, to the extent that it is being prescribed as a treatment for stress by GPs in some areas.
- **Allotments as a community resource.** Allotment gardening is a great leveller. It can bring together people from all age groups and backgrounds around a common interest. It can help foster a mentoring relationship where experienced gardeners can pass on their knowledge to younger or less experienced ones. If allotments become more important to local communities, then problems with security and vandalism should decrease, demand should increase and participation should widen.
- **Allotments as an educational tool.** Increasingly there is a need for children to be taught about where food comes from and the value of fruit and vegetables to healthy lifestyles. School based projects on allotments offer an ideal opportunity to do this and some of our local school are already encouraging pupils to discover the benefits of gardening and growing their own produce.
- **Allotments as a resource for bio-diversity.** The range of plants on allotment sites offers a varied and valued habitat for flora and fauna, as do compost and wood-piles.
- **Allotments as open space.** Open space is becoming increasingly more important within our communities, as the intensity of development increases in response to growing population and the demand for more households. Stirling is fortunate to have extensive areas of open space and now may be the time to reconsider how we use some of them.

### Allotments Legislation

There is legislation and regulations surrounding allotments provision and maintenance. Allotments, meaning parcels of land allocated to an individual, arose initially as a result of the enclosure movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and their origins were almost totally rural. It was only in the nineteenth century that the idea of urban allotments took hold and this culminated in the Allotments (Scotland) Acts of 1892, 1922 & 1950 and the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919, which made the provision of allotments compulsory on any Local Authority where a need was shown to exist.

The 1998 White Paper, The Future for Allotments, recognised the undisputed health benefits of allotments and recommended that allotment provision be explicitly noted in national and local public health strategies. It stated that there is a need for urgent action to protect existing allotment sites, and that allotment legislation must be overhauled to ensure the long-term protection of allotments. At the time of writing no new legislation has been introduced.

## **Objectives and Actions**

To deliver the desired outcomes the following objectives have been identified. The objectives have been drawn up in accordance with "Allotments in Scotland", COSLA Guidance for Scottish Councils 2007. The intention is to use current practices for green spaces and open spaces and incorporate them in the management of allotment sites.

### **Objective 1**

#### **Provide allotment sites that are welcoming and accessible to all**

- Ensure good and safe access to all sites
- Ensure sites are as far as reasonably practicable Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant
- Work with site representatives and tenants to ensure all sites are attractive and productive
- Investigate the demand for variable plot sizes

### **Objective 2**

#### **Provide healthy, safe and secure allotments**

- Provide sites that are secure places for all members of the community
- Provide sites that are free from hazards to health
- Undertake risk assessment visits
- Ensure dogs on sites are kept under control and that sites are free from dog fouling
- Work with community wardens and the local police officers to improve site security

### **Objective 3**

#### **Ensure well-maintained, clean and safe allotments**

- Update tenancy agreement to reinforce tenants responsibilities
- Undertake individual site audits to identify extent of unwanted waste on each site
- Ensure internal paths and access routes are well maintained

### **Objective 4**

#### **Provide allotments that encourage sustainable practices**

- Manage the allotments in line with the Council's Policy
- Promote a reduction in the use of chemicals
- Improve waste management on sites
- Encourage the use of composting
- Minimise the amount of pollution generated on allotments

- Maximise water efficiency

#### **Objective 5**

##### **Improve and encourage bio-diversity and conservation**

- Identify and recognise any areas rich in wildlife value, such as hedges and marginal areas
- In line with Local Bio-diversity Action Plans develop habitat management plans for each site
- Improve the range of habitats available for wildlife where practicable

#### **Objective 6**

##### **Promote community involvement and self-management**

- Encourage and support the establishment of effective allotment associations on sites
- Encourage education and learning opportunities on sites
- Identify all groups who are, or may be able to work in partnership
- Develop joint projects with partner organisations
- Support and develop projects and practices that increase the sustainability of allotment gardening

#### **Objective 7**

##### **Continue to improve the management of allotment sites**

- Support the work of site representatives and ensure all sites are represented
- Encourage tenant involvement with the management of allotment sites
- Provide efficient allotment administration
- Maximise the benefits of available funding for all site

- 4.2 This allotment policy by its very nature is a working document, which should be reviewed regularly to ensure the views of users are taken into account. This will be achieved by an annual review, linked to the Service Planning process, to assess the success of short-term targets and their relevance to an ever-changing environment.