

# Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Planning, Transport and Environment Panel
MEETING DATE:	26 <sup>th</sup> July 2012
TITLE:	Draft Strategy for the Provision of Allotments in Bath & North East Somerset
WARD:	ALL
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> Appendix 1 – Draft Allotments Strategy Appendix 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment	

## 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Draft Allotments Strategy has been developed with the full involvement of representatives of the Allotment Association. Its key purpose is to maximise participation in allotment gardening. The Draft Strategy recognises the importance of allotments as a leisure and recreational facility and for their benefits to local communities, green spaces, health and well-being wildlife, as well as their role in producing low-cost healthy food produced locally in a sustainable way.
- 1.2 This Draft Allotment Strategy aims to facilitate a satisfactory level of service provision over the next 5 years to 2017 and into the future. It is suggested that this needs to be at least a 5 year Plan as the targets set are dependent upon the finances and resources available, especially in relation to revenue implications, capital investment, Community Infrastructure Levy, or other planning gain and income from allotment rents. It is intended that the Allotments Strategy will connect to the wider developing Green Infrastructure Strategy and existing Green Space Strategy, and inform the Core Strategy and other key Council policies.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide allotments within Bath. Outside of Bath responsibility for allotment provision falls to the respective Town and Parish Councils throughout the district. The Council has a duty to ensure that efficient and effective management of the allotment sites for which it is responsible, takes place.
- 2.2 There has been an increasing demand for allotments over recent years for a variety of reasons. These include concerns about the use of pesticides and chemicals in food production, the environment, food miles, food quality, food knowledge among children, the rising cost of fruit and vegetables and lifestyle choices.

- 2.3 In order to address the increasing demand the Council has undertaken a range of measures to increase plot numbers including dividing large plots, creating new plots in areas of rough ground, bringing derelict areas back into cultivation and working to ensure that abandoned and uncultivated allotments are identified promptly and handed on to new tenants. The Council has also recently committed resources to create additional sites through the More Plots for Bath project, which is aiming to create an additional 200 plots within Bath over the next 3 years. Where possible, sites already in Council ownership will be identified as part of this project, thus minimising any land acquisition costs. However, there will be a need to ensure that there is sufficient resource provision to ensure infrastructure is in good order and that sites are secure and have sufficient water supplies.
- 2.4 However the Council will continue to face additional pressures on resources over the foreseeable future and therefore it is important to ensure that there is a more strategic overview for allotment provision and a need to plan to avoid a situation where there is reliance solely on the Council to provide allotments.

### **3 THE WAY FORWARD**

- 3.1 It is important that the Panel understands that what is before them is a **draft** strategy and is **un-costed** at this stage. Any commitment to a 5 year plan/service level would have to be subject to the Council's usual budgetary processes and challenge. Because of the pressures on the authority's budget, it would seem prudent to move to a model where the management of allotments is not dependent upon the level of available Council funding.
- 3.2 The results of the forthcoming consultation will be incorporated into this draft Allotment Strategy which will be reported back to the Panel later this year. This is in order that the Panel may consider the feedback and make final recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods with a request that these are forwarded on to Full Cabinet for their consideration and possible adoption of the draft strategy as Council policy.
- 3.3 It is hoped that the results from the consultation will be completed and reported to the Panel by December 2012.

### **4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel is invited to:

- 4.1 Note and comment on the report and in particular the draft strategy.

The Panel is asked to recommend that:

- 4.2 Consultation be undertaken to determine the standard of service provision for allotments in Bath & North East Somerset through the adoption of the Allotments Strategy.
- 4.3 That the results of the consultation be incorporated into the draft Allotment Strategy to be reported back to the Panel later this year as set out in para 3.3 of the report.

## 5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This Allotment Strategy sets out to achieve a high quality service provision over the next 5 years to 2017 and then beyond. It is considered that this needs to be a 5 year Plan as the targets set are dependent upon the finances available, especially in relation to revenue implications, capital investment, increased allotment rents, Community Infrastructure Levy, or other planning gain.
- 5.2 Property Services are responsible through the Corporate Repairs & Maintenance Budget (R&M) for all aspects of physical maintenance of structures including boundaries, gates, pathways, water supplies and drainage. Close liaison with Parks and Estates is maintained in order to prioritise R&M in a corporate manner. This prioritisation is achieved through a programme of 5 yearly Condition Surveys which produce items of outstanding R&M which in turn form the starting point for the production of programmes of work on a financial year basis.
- 5.3 As stated in para. 3.1 this is a **draft** strategy and is currently **uncosted**. Any commitment to a 5 year plan/service level would have to be subject to the Council's usual budgetary processes and challenge. Costs associated with this service that need to be included are officer time, operational maintenance, plot clearance, on-site services such as fencing, security, paths, water supply, tree work and other costs. It would be unwise to rely upon Council funding being available and so the Council and allotment stakeholders need to consider alternative models of funding that are not solely dependent upon the Council providing the entire service.
- 5.4 Costs associated with any decisions on the strategy will be researched further prior to the provision of a further report to the Panel on the outcome of the public consultation.

## 6 THE REPORT

- 6.1 Allotment provision is (a) historical and (b) set out in legislation and guidance on allotment management provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government, through various policy documents. The legislation and national policy, and their implementation in local policy, are set out in Appendix A of the draft Allotment Strategy. Essentially there is a statutory duty on the authority to provide allotments where there is demand. This is the case within B&NES where the current waiting list exceeds 550 applicants, with some applicants waiting more than 4 years before they can be offered a plot. Advice received suggests 1 year is an acceptable period to wait.
- 6.2 Extensive work has been undertaken with Allotments Association and subsequently the Allotment Forum to jointly create the draft strategy. The strategy incorporates best practice from other authorities as well as guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).
- 6.3 Key elements of the strategy are the efficient and effective administration of the existing provision of 1120 plots on 24 sites within Bath, adequate resourcing of the infrastructure for allotments such as security of sites and the 'More Plots for Bath Project' which ensures we have an acceptable standard of service provision.

## 7 RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 Key overarching issues that have been identified in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance are summarised below:

7.2 **Strategic** - A strategy for the provision of allotments will contribute to the medium to long term goals and the Council's priorities in the areas of:-

- Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone
- Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live
- Building a stronger economy

It would clearly define what the Council is seeking to provide in this area and may help to arrest any decline in the standard of provision brought about by reductions in budget.

7.3 **Timescale** - Approval of the strategy early in 2013 will allow integration with the Local Development Framework, the Green Infrastructure Strategy and other planning interventions that will facilitate and capitalise on future opportunities for funding contributions such as through the Community Infrastructure Levy. This timescale would also enable an early inclusion in the budget setting process for 2013/14. As previously stated because of the likely future pressures on the authority's budget, the Council and relevant stakeholders need to explore alternative models of allotment management which are not totally dependent upon Council funding.

7.4 **Stakeholders** - It will help to establish the public's expectation for allotments in Bath & North East Somerset and the standards that can be achieved.

7.5 Specific detailed risk assessments will be carried out where appropriate and relevant to individual projects and work areas as necessary and in consultation with the Lead Member.

## 8 EQUALITIES

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were found.

## 9 CONSULTATION

9.1 Representatives of the B&NES Allotment Association have been heavily involved in the creation of the draft documents. With further input from Property and Legal Services.

9.2 Consultation is proposed following the panel's consideration of this report. This will be achieved via a variety of means and the panel's views on the most effective approach would be welcomed.

## 10 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

10.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Property; Human Rights; Corporate; Health & Safety; Other Legal Considerations*

## 11 ADVICE SOUGHT

11.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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<b>Background papers</b>	Green Spaces Strategy
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	