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**THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF TWO SMALL  
AREAS OF LAND FOR NEW ALLOTMENT PLOTS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Chris McEwan  
Efficiency and Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To obtain Members' approval for a proposal to appropriate two small areas of land from the current designation as agricultural and as public open space to a new designation of land available for allotments.
2. To obtain delegate authority for the Director of Community Services to consider all objections and consultation responses received and to make the appropriations reasonable to do so.

**Summary**

3. The land in question is identified by the attached two maps (**Appendix 1 and Appendix 2**). The first is land adjacent to an existing Council owned site at Hummersknott. This will see a further six plots added to the existing site, bringing the total up to 136. The second site is a brand new site but will be administered by the existing allotment association at Glebe Road allotment. The site is located to the rear of houses on the Ridgeway just off Longfield Road. The site will allow a further eight half plots available to the public for the purpose of vegetable gardening.
4. The need to find extra areas of land for allotments is well understood across the UK with waiting lists for allotments growing rapidly. These two small areas of land lend themselves in different ways to this process and help the Darlington situation where demand is far outstripping supply.
5. The Hummersknott initiative sees an area of agricultural land given over to this new function and will help the self managed Allotments Association reduce its own waiting list, currently standing at 61, by six.
6. The land just off the Ridgeway is currently a problem area of open space, sometimes used for anti social behaviour and as a cut through to the playing fields of Longfield School by forcing a gap in the perimeter fence. Despite closing this off on several occasions, this is still likely to reoccur if left as an area of open space.

## **Recommendations**

7. It is recommended that Members:
  - (a) Support the proposal to appropriate the two plots of land as indicated in the report;
  - (b) Delegate to the Director of Community Services authority to make the appropriations following advertisement and consultation as outlined in the report and proper consideration of responses received;
  - (c) Support the principal of setting up new allotments on these two pieces of land if the appropriations are made.

## **Reasons**

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :
  - (a) The current allotment service is not able to satisfy the current demand for allotments with only 760 Council owned plots across the town, largely at capacity, and over 466 people on the waiting list.
  - (b) Having the two existing Associations willing to take on the management of the newly designated land, any extra work that may have resulted from an expanded service is absorbed by the voluntary sector.
  - (c) Increasing the allotment provision brings with it many benefits to the sustainability agenda.

**Cliff Brown**  
**Director of Community Services**

## **Background Papers**

- (i) Darlington's draft Allotment Strategy.
- (ii) Darlington Sustainable Community Strategy.

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The land just off the Ridgeway is a known black spot for anti social behaviour and altering its designation and use in the way envisaged will remove this as a problem.
Health and Well Being	Working on an allotment has been identified as a highly effective way of promoting mental and physical well being.
Sustainability	Producing local food, helping people grow their own healthy food and improving health and knowledge of natural processes all help to promote sustainability.
Diversity	Growing your own food is an activity that is free and available to all and provides those involved with a common sense of purpose that helps bring communities together.
Wards Affected	Harrowgate Hill and Hummersknott.
Groups Affected	People on the waiting lists for allotments in Darlington and residents in the surrounding areas of each site.
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no implications for the Budget and Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The SCS refers to the importance of local food as well as the importance of healthy green activities as important elements of a future sustainable Darlington.
Efficiency	The creation of these two new areas of allotment land is being carried out in partnership with two existing associations and sees two areas of land, currently with limited value as green space, transformed into highly productive land.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

9. The two sites referred to in the summary report need to be considered separately and have arisen as areas for proposed allotment expansion, independently from one another. The need to identify new land for allotments comes about as a consequence of a big increase in the demand for the service through an increased interest in growing your own food. This is a national trend that can be seen locally with the Council's own waiting list currently standing at 466. With only 760 plots in total, the Council's provision will not be able to reduce the waiting list very significantly with only between 20 or 30 people relinquishing their tenancy each year. As a consequence of this situation, the Council is currently producing a strategy, due to be completed by April 2010, which will look at some of the options for addressing this situation.

### The West Cemetery Site

10. Hummersknott Allotments became a self managed association seven years ago and have been a largely successful organisation, managing the site ever since. They have been at capacity for most of this time and now have over 60 people on their waiting list. Given the slow turnover of tenants across Darlington (people giving up their allotments), this amounts to a wait of close to 10 years for people at the bottom of the list. This is thought to be too long a timescale in which to expect most people to wait for an allotment.
11. The existing allotments stand next to a field that is allocated in the Local Plan for a future expansion of West Cemetery. It is currently let as an agricultural field. The proposed extension will only occupy a very small part of this field and the Council's Cemetery Officer has been made aware of the proposal.
12. The site proposed for the expansion is an area of rough grassland that has not been cultivated for some years, although it did form a part of an existing tenancy agreement. Discussions with the Farm Tenant will be undertaken to regularise the land required for these additional allotments.
13. There has been a period of consultation with local people who adjoin the proposed site and although there is a local concern amongst the residents of Salutation Road over a long standing drainage issue from this field, it is generally accepted (after a series of meetings) by the residents that the creation of allotments on this land will not make this situation worse.

### The Ridgeway Site

14. The area of land identified for an expansion of the allotments provision in the Harrowgate Hill Ward is a small piece of land to the rear of houses on the Ridgeway, just off Longfield Road. The patch of land receives little or no positive use, is maintained by the Council and is in Council ownership. It will provide sufficient land for approximately eight half plots. (A half plot is about the size of half a tennis court.) Glebe Road Allotments Association are intending to look at their waiting list to see who lives nearby and who would be interested in an allotment at this new site. They are also intending to give people who live immediately adjacent to the site an opportunity to express an interest in taking over one of the plots, even if they are not on the list.

15. As this could appear unfair to people who may already be on one of the waiting lists for an allotment in Darlington, it will need to be pointed out to anyone who does express concerns over the process, that it is intended for there to be some flexibility in the Allotments Strategy once it is finalised whereby proximity to a site will be a factor in the allocation of plots. This is in order to address issues of sustainability whereby allotments should, where possible, be accessible by foot.
16. The existing site presents local people with a serious anti social behaviour problem at times, lying as it does in a secluded position behind people's houses. It also allows people to take a short cut into Longfield School playing fields, which creates an additional security issue.
17. In order to appropriate the land from its current use as recreation land to land available for allotments it is necessary for a Notice under Section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972 to be advertised for two consecutive weeks in a local newspaper and to consider any objections to the proposed appropriation. If there is an objection under this process then the matter will be re-submitted to Cabinet for it to be taken into account. This, combined with the planning process, will give another two opportunities for local people to express their views about the proposed change in the role of this piece of land.
18. It is recommended that the various costs of the appropriation procedure be shared between the Council and the Association. The cost associated with this process is unlikely to exceed £1,200.
19. It is proposed that the Council should offer the Glebe Road Allotment Association the opportunity to manage the new site as an extension of their own site. It was this association that entered into discussions with the Council over the possibility of an alternative use of the land early in the process. The association is a well run organisation and has been operating successfully for over seven years.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

20. There has been an element of consultation in both areas, especially with people living near the sites. All those consulted so far at the Ridgeway location have been in support of the proposal. The residents who adjoin the proposed new plots at West Cemetery are generally in support now that they are satisfied that the establishment of new allotments will not increase water run-off rates.