

**COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 APRIL 2025**

ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT REVIEW

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update to Members on how Darlington Borough Council (DBC) manages Council owned allotment sites and those transferred to 'self managed' associations.

Summary

2. The Council developed an allotment strategy when the majority of allotments were in Council ownership. The lapsed allotment strategy is appended as Appendix 1.
3. The strategy was not renewed, as during the period of the strategy, 13 of the 16 allotment sites transferred to 'self-managed' associations. However, the principles in the strategy have continued to be used as management framework to manage allotments going forward.
4. The report provides an update on how allotments are managed, including:
 - (a) management of sites
 - (b) promotions and marketing
 - (c) methods of meeting demand
 - (d) resourcing
 - (e) on-site provisions at sites
 - (f) association forming

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Members receive the update on allotment management

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Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. The Allotment Strategy (2009-2019) expired 6 years ago. It was determined that renewal of this strategy was no longer necessary due to the large-scale transfer of these assets to 'self-managed' associations and the reduction in Council managed allotment sites.
7. Members of the Scrutiny Committee requested information on how Darlington Borough Council (DBC) currently manages those sites still in DBC ownership, and also what our responsibilities are regarding those sites transferred to 'self managed' associations.

Management of Sites

8. There are a total of 16 allotment sites across the DBC area; 3 are operated by DBC whilst the remaining 13 are operated by 'self-managed' associations. There are in excess of 800 individual plots available across the Borough, both DBC and self-managed. There are also four privately owned allotments sites in the Borough.
9. The Council currently manages three allotments sites: Arnold Road, Honeypot Lane and Parkside. The remaining sites are self-managed associations and run by committees. In relation to the three sites, the Council are subject to the following responsibilities.
 - (a) Maintenance and repair of roads.
 - (b) Maintenance and repair of perimeter fencing.
 - (c) Maintenance and repair of standpipes.
 - (d) Cut back vegetation from paths (hedges/grass).
 - (e) Payment of monthly water bills.
 - (f) Regular inspections carried out every 4-6 weeks in the summer and every 6-8 weeks in the winter. An internal audit of the allotment service is also undertaken.
 - (g) Issuing of rental letters/collection of rent and contacting tenants if there are issues with rental payments.
 - (h) Rent vacant allotments (contacting people on waiting list).
 - (i) Deal with any complaints raised by tenants and or residents about the allotments.
 - (j) Deal with fly tipping issues.
 - (k) Deal with allotment waiting list applications (online system for application).
Manage the waiting list spreadsheet for Arnold Road, Honeypot Lane and Parkside.
 - (l) Liaise with other companies who need access e.g. utility companies, such as pylons in Arnold Road allotments.
 - (m) Issue warning letters to tenants if plot has weeds, not cultivated.
 - (n) Issue termination letter (last resort) if not using plot or not paid rent.
 - (o) Tenancy agreements are given to each plot holder (full plot and half plot). Arnold Road is a livestock site so can have pigeons and hens. Honeypot Lane and Parkside are vegetables only.
 - (p) Full plot is approx. 250m² and half plot 125m² and some plots have sheds, polytunnels and pigeon lofts on, these stay with the plots.
 - (q) Issue keys/ replace main gate padlocks.
 - (r) Installing/ updating signage e.g. dog control signs.

10. The Association(s) responsible for self-managed allotment sites (13 in number) are subject to the following responsibilities, as outlined in the lease agreement.
 - (a) Repair and maintenance of all boundary fencing/hedges enclosing the site, except where otherwise indicated.
 - (b) Repair and maintenance of access tracks and pathways within the site.
 - (c) Repair and maintenance of water taps and pipes.
 - (d) Pruning/felling of trees and shrubs.
 - (e) Grass cutting
 - (f) Reinstatement after vandalism (clearance of all rubbish, lock/key replacement)
 - (g) Maintaining the site to the standards as recorded in the photographic Schedule of Conditions set out in Schedule 3 of the lease agreement.
 - (h) The Association shall ensure individual tenants of allotment plots comply with the Tenants Obligations set out in Schedule 2 of the lease agreement.
 - (i) The Association sets and collects the rent.
 - (j) The Association pays the water bills.
 - (k) The Association carries out inspections.
 - (l) The Associations sends warning letters if the plot is not cultivated.

Promotion and Marketing

11. There is an allotments page on the Council website with the information regarding the various allotment sites in Darlington. There is information about the allotments together with contract details for the self-managed sites. There is also information and an online form to complete if you wish to go on the allotment waiting list.
12. Some self-managed associations have websites and also hold public events on their sites. DBC have placed articles in the One Darlington magazine and on social media about allotments e.g. on when best to grow/ plant seeds, seed exchange.

Demand

13. The planning department encourages developers to create allotment space/ green living in the Local Plan for future developments.
14. For all major proposed developments there is the requirement to provide open space within them. For example, the adopted Local Plan 2016-2036 includes specific reference to providing for the green infrastructure needs of the new community at Skertingham. In Policy H10, the following wording is included: "the site will provide a pattern of well-integrated and interconnected green spaces (along with provision for their long term maintenance) across the site, providing for the green infrastructure needs of the local community, including wildlife friendly natural spaces, sport and recreation facilities and allotments, in accordance with policies ENV4, ENV5, ENV9.
15. Elsewhere in the Local Plan, allotments are treated as part of the green infrastructure network, as clarified in the glossary, to include locally important green spaces, green wedges, wildlife sites, allotments, urban fringe, trees, woodland, rights of way and countryside.

16. The waiting list for Council allotments is currently in excess of 300 applications. When a plot becomes available, the person at the top of the list is contacted (email, phone, letter) and they have 14 days to get in touch to arrange a viewing of the plot. After 14 days (if they haven't been in touch) they are removed from the waiting list and the next person on the waiting list is contacted.
17. Available land is a key consideration and areas of Council land that is available/suitable for allotments is earmarked for other types of development.
18. Whilst demand is high there are no funds available to create new Council allotments as the infrastructure for these sites can be expensive (roads, fences, water etc).

Resourcing Allotments

19. In the 2025-2026 financial year, the Council subsidised the Allotment Service by circa. £21K. Rent accrued (£8,440) offsets those costs associated with management of the premises (i.e. water, minor R&M, electricity etc.) but does not cover costs associated with officer time, removal of fly tips, storm damage etc.

On Site Provision

20. Council run sites all have water standpipes on site. Arnold Road, as it is a livestock site, has chicken coops, pigeon lofts and sheds. Some plots also have polytunnels. The vegetable plots at Honey Pot Lane have sheds.
21. Self-managed sites will vary depending on if it's a livestock site or vegetable only site. As these were former Council sites, they have water standpipes (for which the relevant committee pays the bill). They will have pigeon lofts, sheds and coops and some may have polytunnels and greenhouses.

Association Forming

22. The majority of Council allotment sites transferred to self-managed associations in 2017. The process was undertaken in partnership between the Council and Groundwork NE and consulted all the tenants at each allotment site to form a committee. Procedures were put into place by the committees, and these are based on the Council's own procedures, i.e. that there be elected members of the committee (chair, secretary, treasurer), an AGM, tenancy agreement, rules and regulations etc.
23. Of the 3 allotments sites that are still run by the Council, only Arnold Road has enquired about going self-managed. We provided the individual who registered the request and was interested in potentially setting up an association the necessary information, but there was little interest from the rest of the tenants on the idea.

Conclusion

24. It is recommended that this report is received for information and discussion.