

A Vision for Allotments

An Allotment Strategy



“A Vision for Allotments”, An Allotment Strategy 2011 to 2016

Executive Summary

Allotments are an important asset to North East Lincolnshire, providing a wide range of benefits to communities and the environment. They are not just a great way of producing good, low cost food, though this is still important today. Allotments offer people a viable means of recreation involving healthy exercise embracing the fun and challenge of growing vegetables, fruit and flowers and even keeping livestock.

North East Lincolnshire Council along with its delivery partner Balfour Beatty Workplace (BBW) recognises its statutory duty to provide allotments where that need is established and this strategy describes the issues for consideration in the deployment of these duties, confirming the benefits to Council allotments in North East Lincolnshire from successful strategy implementation. Over a long period of time there has been a general deterioration in the condition of allotment sites. This strategy will serve to counter this decline and promote a sustainable future for allotments in North East Lincolnshire ensuring that the benefits of allotment gardening are recognised.

Allotments have a valuable role to play in modern society that should not just be confined to the promotion of health and well being to the individual allotment tenant. Communities will be strengthened through active participation, landscape quality will be improved, biodiversity will be enhanced and innovative approaches to site design and management will encourage urban regeneration offering benefits to the whole community.

Valuable capital from the disposal of selected allotment land will bring the essential investment to all allotments, which the Council cannot currently finance by alternative sources. The overall regeneration of sites will also act as a catalyst for the introduction of self-management opportunities for participating allotment associations.

The Councils' 'Allotments Forum', comprising of representatives from allotment tenant associations', BBW representatives and political members have been involved in the development of the strategy and will continue to oversee the implementation of the strategy. The forum will be pro-active both in developing an action plan for the improvement of allotments, encouraging self-management and identifying sources of funding.

The primary aim of the strategy is to optimise the use of allotments in the borough ensuring a sustainable future for further generations of gardeners. The principal themes by which performance will be met to achieve this aim and reinforced in the management plan are:

- **Rationalisation and reinvestment.**
- **Marketing and development.**
- **Standards and best practice.**
- **Developing stakeholder partnerships.**
- **Sustainability -Allotments and the environment**
- **Devolved management**

This document will be reviewed and re-appraised where necessary to reflect changes to local conditions and to ensure the strategy is meeting with the Council's priorities.

This strategy will continue to examine issues such as perceived under utilisation of allotment land, alternative uses of vacant allotment land, security and vandalism on all allotment sites and include methods of encouraging an increased number of allotment tenants. There will be a reality check that acknowledges local conditions, the financial position and the diverse interests of stakeholders in the current and emerging political position. The strategy will offer a long-term direction to allotment provision in the Borough.

Clearly, the key to the successful implementation of the strategy will be the ability to achieve the rationalisation and reinvestment programme. Capital receipts received from rationalisation will be used to improve allotment sites and support self-management and community improvement initiatives.

“A Vision for Allotments” - An Allotment Strategy 2011 – 2016

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Foreword

By the Cllr Karl Wilson Forum Partner

The word allotment originates from land being allotted to an individual under an enclosure award, and is defined as ‘a portion of a field assigned to a cottager to labour for himself, or a piece of grounds let put for spare time cultivation under a public scheme, and area not exceeding 40 pole used wholly or mainly for the cultivation of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by the occupier or his family’. So what does this mean to our modern day families? Hopefully this strategy will looking forward enable:-

- Low cost fresh food production for the family
- Healthy recreational activity
- The opportunity to maintain and develop skills
- Social contact and as a contribution to community spirit
- Better partnership working

This fits perfectly into the council vision of “A place of opportunity where people want to live, work, invest and visit”

Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space - part of the urban culture. They contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom as well as being highly beneficial to the wildlife of the Borough.

Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land. Those who live in flats often have no individual garden. These circumstances disadvantage those on lower incomes. Allotments provide an opportunity to adjust this imbalance and have an important role as the current austerity measures currently being imposed begin to bite.

I hope that the residents of North East Lincolnshire embrace the aims and purpose of this strategy and together we can enjoy all the benefits that allotment gardening has to offer.

So, let's get Digging!

1. An Introduction to Allotments

1.01 An "allotment garden" is defined in the *Allotments Act 1922* as:

"An allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for the consumption by himself or his family." (40 poles is 1,012 square metres)

1.02 This description remains important because it defines the permitted use of an allotment plot. Provided it is used mainly for growing vegetables or fruit, part of the plot can be used for growing flowers, as a leisure area or for keeping small livestock, and surplus produce can be shared with others.

1.03 The term allotment derives from the enclosure legislation of the 18th and 19th centuries and the word 'allotment' originates from land being allotted to an individual under an enclosure award. The *General Inclosure Act 1845* required that provision should be made for the landless poor in the form of 'field gardens' limited to a quarter of an acre. Initially many allotments were confined to rural areas although this distribution changed with the growth of high density housing in towns and cities.

1.04 The First World War prompted a major growth in the number of allotments throughout the country from 600,000 to 1,500,000 although many of the temporary allotment sites returned to their original use. The Second World War again increased the role for allotments and the 'Dig for Victory'

campaign saw the number of plots in the country rise to about 1,400,000. Once more the end of the war saw a diminished role for allotments.

1.05 The *1969 Thorpe Inquiry* reviewed the reasons for the decline in allotment numbers that had taken place since the Second World War. Although it had been argued that the decline was caused by allotment land being taken over for other purposes, the Inquiry suggested that factors such as increasing prosperity and the popularity of other spare time activities were also relevant.

1.06 The early legislation requiring allotment provision was implemented at a time when allotments were important for food production. Allotments are largely still used for food production the, but even in 1969 the Thorpe Inquiry recognised their importance for recreational use. The Inquiry also made a number of recommendations including wholesale revision of allotment legislation, but these recommendations were not acted upon.

1.07 One such recommendation was that there should be a minimum standard of allotment provision of 0.5 acres per 1000 population. This measure can be converted to suggest that approximately seven 'standard' plots each measuring 33 square metres would offer a similar equivalent provision per 1000 population.

1.08 The allotments legislation does not lay down minimum standards or a required nature

or extent of allotment garden provision. The Government has considered it appropriate that each local authority should decide for itself what proportion of its resources to devote to these purposes.

1.09 Although the Government recognises the value of allotments, local authorities control the provision of land for allotments, which is dependent upon demand. As allotments serve local needs, local authorities are best placed to take a view of the competing demands for resources for other recreational activities and local services.

1.10 Where an allotments authority is of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments in its area, Section 23 of the *Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908* puts the authority under a duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments and to let them to persons residing in its area who want them.

1.11 Section 8 of the *Allotments Act of 1925* gives protection to land acquired specifically for use as allotments, so called statutory allotment sites, by the requirement for consent of the Secretary of State in the event of sale or disposal.

1.12 However, land which was originally acquired for other purposes and which has been used for allotments in the interim (temporary allotments) is not protected in this way.

1.13 Section 32 of the *Small Holdings and Allotments Act, 1908* requires that any capital obtained from the sale or exchange of statutory allotment land be spent on

discharging debts associated with the acquisition of allotment land, in acquiring new land for use as allotments or on improving the existing stock of allotments. Only the surplus may be used for other purposes.

1.14 Some temporary sites have been used as allotments for many years and the government's Parliamentary Select Committee inquiry into the '*Future for Allotments*' report recommended that land which has been in continuous use as allotments for over thirty years should be designated as 'statutory' if possible. Although it also states in minute 72 of that inquiry, "With the exception of those sites which are ultimately intended for use as cemeteries."

1.15 "Statutory" allotment land is land of which the freehold or very long lease is vested in the allotments authority, and which was either originally purchased for allotments or subsequently appropriated for allotment use.

1.16 "Temporary" allotment land is leased by an allotment authority or owned by the authority but ultimately destined for some other use. In such cases the allotment authority and holder agree the terms of the tenancy for the letting of individual allotment gardens, taking into account the terms of the letting of the land to the authority and all other relevant factors.

1.17 North East Lincolnshire Council has 8 statutory allotment sites totalling 43 hectares (inc. gross area of Beacon Hill) which are:

- Beacon Hill
- Carr Lane
- Littlecoates

- Peaksfield
- Saltings
- Springfield
- Weelsby
- Winchester

1.18 Table 3.1 (see page 11), sets out the occupation levels at each site, together with the current overall occupancy, which is 63% as of July 2011.

1.19 Of the 14 Parish Councils in the borough of North East Lincolnshire, there are 6 statutory allotment sites totalling 5.92 hectares which are:

- Humberston
- Immingham
- New Waltham
- Stallingborough
- Waltham
- Laceby

1.20 Table 3.2 (see page 11), sets out the occupation levels at each site, together with the current overall occupancy, which is 100% as of October 2011.

1.21 It should be noted that Laceby Parish Council has 1.45 hectares of recognised allotment land. However, this land is not statutory allotment land and was acquired under *The Public Health Act 1936* and leased to the parish council in 1979 on a year to year term with 12 month notices for termination. The land itself was intended for allotment use but this land proved unsuitable as it was previously used as a land fill area.

1.22 The requirement for the Secretary of

State's consent to be obtained before statutory allotment land is disposed of provides an important check on local authorities.

1.23 Allotments cannot be put to alternative planning use without planning consent, and planning policies will seek to achieve a reasonable balance between the need to make adequate provision for development, and the need to protect open land from development.

1.24 The cost of allotment provision or maintaining under-used sites has to be weighed against other priorities at a local level. *The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, (NSALG)* survey report 1997, recognised that examination at a local level may reveal ways to make more efficient use of existing allotment land, for instance by making areas into open space for periods of time and converting them back to allotments as required in order to meet demand.

1.25 The nature of this document offers an ideal means for the Council and the community to set out its vision for the future and to develop further programmes to realise its potential. The vision of this strategy is to help shape the environment that may create confidence in allotments by:

- Mapping a future for allotments in North East Lincolnshire by:
 - Generating investment
 - Developing regeneration
 - Developing community involvement

2. Background

2.01 The Borough of North East Lincolnshire has a population of circa 157,000 people with a statutory allotment land provision amounting to some 52 hectares. North East Lincolnshire Council owns 46 hectares and the Parish Councils collectively own 6 hectares. There is no private statutory allotment provision in North East Lincolnshire although a small amount (0.126 ha) of private land on Torrington Street, Grimsby is recognised by Council records as being allocated as allotment land.

2.02 North East Lincolnshire Council currently has 8 allotment sites that are managed by the BBW. In all 63% of the allotment plots are tenanted.

2.03 Since March 1997 local allotments benchmarking information has been collected by the Council, which is summarised in Table 4.1 (see page 11). Analysis of this information shows some encouraging trends.

2.04 Total occupancy levels have increased almost consistently 2005 as can be seen in Table 4.1. Each year a larger number of tenants have taken up allotments compared to those taking leaving their plots.

2.05 The average plot sizes for NELC sites are 250-300 square metres and the current charge for year 2011 is £79.55 and £44.81 p.a. for full rate and concession respectively.

2.06 The allocation of allotment sites within the ward boundaries is summarised in Table 2.1 (see page 11). Within the six wards that

contain allotments, the level of provision varies, from 761 plots in the Heneage Ward to 45 plots in Scartho Ward.

2.07 In two wards there is more than one site, in other wards there are no sites at all.

2.08 This uneven distribution is offset to some extent by additional allotment facilities provided in the North East Lincolnshire area by the Parish Councils. Although Parish Council consists of only 8% of allotment provision in the Borough it has a valuable role to play. Of the 14 Parish Councils, 6 have allotment sites, although only 5 of the sites are statutory allotment sites. In addition this non-statutory site has no tenant occupation.

2.09 Of these Parish Council sites the occupancy would appear to be stable with all sites enjoying good levels of occupation. The average occupancy of plots to tenants across all of these Parish Council sites consisting of 6 hectares is some 100%.

2.10 The average plot size for Parish Council sites vary although they are not dissimilar mainly to NELC plot sizes. The rental charges do vary somewhat from a charge of nil pounds to £52 per annum.

2.11 The size and distribution of allotment sites administered by the Parish Councils complements those sites provided by North East Lincolnshire Council in terms of location. There are key parish sites at Humberston, Waltham and Immingham which make a significant contribution to the local provision

consisting of some 145 tenanted plots.

2.12 The ratio of workable plots to 1000 population is approximately 10. Similarly the area in acres of land used as allotments in the Borough is approximately one acre per 1000 population. These values are important when making a direct comparison with the Thorpe Inquiry, and the recommendation of a minimum standard provision of 0.5 acres per 1000 population.

2.13 Allotments are reasonably widespread throughout the Borough, although this distribution has been based upon historic demand and land availability. Rationalisation and the number of allotment plots to be provided by the Council will need to consider the effect of reinvestment and improvements to the allotment sites together with issues of 'latent demand', either as a result of marketing and promotion or due to other factors such as lifestyle changes. Allotment land provision will have a direct link with The North East Lincolnshire Council's Green Space Strategy.

2.14 The *'Growing in the community a good practice guide for the management of*

allotments' produced by DETR, recognises the plight of allotment use around the country. It states: "that if there is a genuine surplus of allotment land and those prospective tenants who desire allotments should have access to good quality allotment plots. It is not unreasonable to put surplus land to other uses. Ideally it should be possible to return the land to use as allotments if demand exists at some time in the future."

2.15 A *New future for Allotments-an advocacy document for sustainable living* produced by Local Government Association (LGA), describes allotments as being able to "offer immense scope to tackle sustainable development, community development, open space, bio-diversity, healthy living and education objectives in an integrated way".

2.16 Allotments are of particular significance to groups such as the elderly in North East Lincolnshire who consist of 52% and are the majority of allotment tenants. The retainment and support of key groups such as these require consideration by the Council together with the manner by which they benefit from this subsidised leisure provision.

Statutory Allotment Provider	Allotment ownership in North East Lincolnshire by percentage
NELC	88.5%
Parish	11.5%

Table 1.1 Summary of Statutory allotment provision in the Borough of North East Lincolnshire by provider

Electoral ward	Number of sites	Number of plots	Area of allotments (acres)	Area of allotments (sq mtrs)
Croft Baker	1	171	9.45	38,264
Freshney	0	0	0	0
Haverstoe	0	0	0	0
Heneage	2	770	60.02	243,642
Humberston	0	0	0	0
Immingham	0	0	0	0
Marsh	1	144	11.51	46,612
North East	0	0	0	0
Park Cleethorpes	0	0	0	0
Park Grimsby	1	179	13.10	53,049
Scartho	1	45	2.62	10,645
South	2	265	17.43	70,536
Wold Parishes	0	0	0	0
Yarborough	0	0	0	0
Total	8	1574	114.13	462,748

Table 2.1 Distribution of NELC Allotment sites with size of sites (Ward identified) as of July 2011

Parish	Number of sites	Number of Plots	Area of allotments Acres	Area of allotments Sq mtrs
Humberston	1	75	3.46	14,000
Immingham	1	95	4.67	14,500
New Waltham	1	10	0.86	3,500
Stallingborough	1	8	.49	2,000
Waltham	1	60	2.67	10,800
Laceby	1	45	2.5	10,117
Total	6	293	14.65	54,917

Table 2.2 Parish council's allotments sites in North East Lincolnshire with size of site as of July 2011

Site Name	Electoral Ward	Plots on Site	Plots Workable	Plots Tenanted	Occupancy Rate
Beacon Hill	Croft Baker	171	154	152	99%
Carr Lane	Heneage	660	632	262	42%
Littlecoates	Marsh	144	140	119	85%
Peaksfield	Park	179	177	104	60%
Saltings	South	338	168	153	91%
Springfield	Scartho	45	45	45	100%
Weelsby	Heneage	108	102	100	98%
Winchester	South	98	98	47	50%
Total		1743	1516	982	64%

Table 3.1 Tenant occupation by allotment site of North East Lincolnshire Council allotments (as of July 2011)

Site Name	Plots on Site	Plots Workable	Plots Tenanted	Occupancy Rate
Humberston	75	75	75	100%
Immingham	95	95	95	100%
New Waltham	10	10	10	100%
Stallingborough	8	8	8	100%
Waltham	60	60	60	100%
Total	248	248	248	100%

Table 3.2 Tenant occupation by allotment site of Parish Council allotments (as of July 2011)

Measure	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10
Total Occupancy %	47	47	56	60	60
New allotment holders	268	152	188	235	169
No of plot terminations	183	143	135	223	159

Table 4.1 Local benchmarking figures for North East Lincolnshire Council (only) allotments as of July 2011

3. Rationalisation and reinvestment

The Council will seek to rationalise allotment sites due to perceived over-provision and re-invest in retained assets in order to improve sites and service delivery.

3.01 Options for rationalisation will not only consider disposal to assist in income generation and bring about sustainable improvements, but will also consider the use of allotments land as managed green space to be used for 'latent' demand purposes and where there is a local deficit of public open space.

3.02 Substantial residential development in the Borough may increase the demand of local allotments which may be required to serve such development. The Local development framework (LDF) will be required to reflect the need of allotment provision to meet with local demand.

3.03 *Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925*, states that the Secretary of State must consent to the disposal of land by a local authority which they have purchased or appropriated for the use of allotments. If they propose to sell, or use that land for a use other than allotments, such consent may not be given unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that either adequate provision will be made for displaced plot holders or that such provision is not necessary or is impracticable. This 'provision' acts as a safeguard against the erosion of allotment sites through pressure on local authorities to provide land for other purposes.

3.04 Applications under section 8 of the 1925 Allotment Act are dealt with by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The ODPM informs the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, (NSALG) of all applications

under section 8 in order that they can make representations on their members' behalf.

3.05 The distribution of North East Lincolnshire Council sites provides some overlap of provision; the Carr Lane site is only ¼ mile from the Beacon Hill site in Cleethorpes. This situation arose as the former Grimsby and Cleethorpes Borough Councils were merged in 1996 to form North East Lincolnshire Council.

3.06 There has never been a Capital Finance allocation for the planned maintenance needs of allotments or for allotment improvements in North East Lincolnshire Council. This has lead to a reliance on revenue funding to pay for a growing backlog of maintenance and improvements, consequently resulting in many sites becoming neglected.

3.07 There are also areas of new legislation that affect allotment sites which will begin to have a financial impact:

3.08 *The Disability Discrimination Act 1995* came into force in October 2004 and requires the Council to make services accessible without discrimination. Access to allotments should be considered a high priority. Work has been completed at Littlecoates Allotment site for improved access, the provision of raised beds, centrally located parking, improved path construction and disabled toilet provision with a combination of grant funding and external funding from a rationalisation of the site.

3.09 *The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2006* (CAR) will require a

proactive management approach supported by revised tenancy agreements to reflect that materials with a suspected asbestos content are not permitted on site and that appropriate measures are taken in identification and removal.

3.10 In addition, with the use of capital funding obtained from rationalisation the council will seek to ensure that allotments are as secure as possible. Allotments require immediate investment such as the renewal of fences and hedges to secure the perimeter boundaries of sites. It is preferable to erect two-metre steel fencing for security, although scarce financial resources have made such planned maintenance work difficult to implement.

3.11 Traditionally allotment sites may be well cultivated but there are a variety of materials used by plot holders for fencing and sheds and this is part of the image of allotment gardening. Recycling waste products is something that allotment gardeners are very adept in doing, but this can often look untidy and unattractive to newcomers and prospective gardeners. Over time with the vacation of some plots, site structures can become neglected and possibly dangerous.

3.12 Site clearance programmes are necessary in order to remove unsightly, redundant and dangerous structures. Stricter controls have been implemented in the design and the materials used for site structures such as sheds and greenhouses, together with the approach taken when a tenant vacates a plot.

3.13 Many of the sites have vacant plots and therefore any rationalisation programme will look to consolidate tenants into the same area

of the site. This makes the management and maintenance more effective and helps to give a good visual 'feel good factor' to the occupied area of the site.

3.14 Sometimes a plot holder may be reluctant to transfer to another plot. This is understandable particularly if their plot has been personally cultivated for a number of years. Consultation is therefore vital to the success of any rationalisation scheme.

3.15 New tenants are essential in order to sustain the initial impact of investment and regeneration and this will require the Council/Association to prepare plots for a new tenant and to sustain a tidy site. This will include rotavating or flailing as appropriate in order to present potential usable plots in a workable condition and to stem the unsightly appearance of vacant or overgrown plots. A realistic allocation of revenue funding is required to maintain sites as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to re-investment in allotments.

3.16 *Section 312 of The Small Holdings' and Allotments Act, 1908* requires that any monies obtained from the sale or exchange of statutory allotment land be spent on discharging debts associated with the acquisition of allotment land. This is also the case when improving the existing stock of allotments. Only the surplus may be used for other purposes than allotments.

3.17 There will be changes in the provision of allotments, which will deliver many opportunities and benefits. It will be the aim of the Council to consult at all levels and lead the process of change.

4. Devolved Management

The Council will establish the devolved management of allotment sites

4.01 The Parliamentary Select Committee inquiry paper *“The future of allotments”*, 1998 on self management stated:

4.02 “We believe that self management fulfils the twin aims of ensuring greater control of a site for allotment holders and also reducing local authorities’ administrative responsibilities. We recommend that all local authorities examine the potential for self management of their allotment sites.”

4.03 Currently there is one site in North East Lincolnshire which is in the process of operating under a system of self-management. The lease terms are agreed with the Beacon Hill site and the process should be complete by January 2012. This will provide an example for future devolved management of other allotment sites in the Borough.

4.04 Although it is highly desirable for all allotment sites to become self managed it is acknowledged that this will be difficult to wholly achieve during the period of this strategy. There will be lead sites who will guide the way for other sites and those sites that have been subject to regeneration should be encouraged to progress in the direction of self management.

4.05 The Allotments Regeneration Initiative, (ARI), has produced a fact sheet, termed “Gardeners in Charge”, which is a guide to

devolved management for allotment associations and have referred to devolved management as:

4.06 “Devolved management is the practice of devolving a share of the responsibility for managing allotment sites to the allotment gardeners themselves. They usually act as a formally constituted allotment society or association if the responsibilities are considerable or bring liabilities.”

4.07 Self or devolved management schemes can benefit both local authorities and their allotment holders. It is also a route to engaging with local communities in the management and regeneration of important environmental assets. This can help turn under-utilised sites around, and provide best value to service users.

4.08 Sites considering the self-managed approach need to have a nucleus of highly committed plot holders. Success requires considerable efforts from the Council and tenants in not only establishing such an arrangement but in maintaining an understanding relationship when tasked with issues such as under funding.

4.09 The Council will continue to have responsibility as the statutory provider of allotments; ensuring devolved management practices are exercised appropriately so as to demonstrate compliance with legislation and

statutory requirements. There will be undoubtedly be a change in the role of the Council in the manner by which it manages allotments in the borough, when a number of sites come under a self-managed status. The roles of both Council and self-managed associations will need to be agreed, with suitable terms of agreements produced to reflect a partnering approach to allotment management.

4.10 Key issues to be considered when dealing with devolved management for both 'landlord' and 'tenant' can simply be referred to as: commitment, capacity and accountability.

4.11 No options chosen for devolved management will prove successful unless there is sustained commitment to it on the part of the Council, the allotment association and individual plot holders (tenants). The Council will require some assurance that site associations to which responsibilities are devolved will remain committed, reliable and responsible partners despite occasional changes in the membership of the group. Site associations will also require similar safeguards from the Council despite changes in personnel, policies and political complexion.

4.12 The capacity of an allotments association to make a success of devolved management will depend in part on the extent of the duties to be devolved. Predominantly it will be dependent upon a wide range of other variables, which may or may not be within its control. These would include:

- the size of the site
- the tenancy turnover rate

- the quality of the infrastructure
- the level of rental income
- the leadership abilities of present and future tenants
- the character of the local community

4.13 The quality of service provided under devolved management will depend upon the professionalism with which new responsibilities are discharged by the association and its membership. It will be important that new skills, if required, are given time to be honed to meet the demands of tenants and support will be required from the Council in advising on these skills.

4.14 Accountability is central to the task of devolved management amongst tenants and the Councils transparent procedures and audit trails will be required to ensure that poor performance does not go either undetected or more importantly unreported. Self-management has to be performed in a way that is fair and not in an elitist way that that precludes interest in the site.

4.15 The Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI) fact sheet describes a number of different models of devolved management for allotments. The pros and the cons of devolved management would need to be identified and understood before proceeding with the appropriate option. Maximising the pros and minimising the cons is what successful devolved management is all about. This strategy promotes two models of devolved management:

4.16 Delegated management – A properly constituted allotment society accepts formal

responsibility for a range of duties under license from the local authority under financial arrangements, which release a proportion of rental income for this purpose. For example the society may arrange tenancies and carry out regular minor maintenance duties but leave the local authority to carry out repairs to the site infrastructure and undertake all legal formalities. The local authority retains defined oversight and strategic functions.

4.17 Self-management (Semi-Autonomy) –

The Allotment society leases the site from the Council, arranges tenancy agreements and reinvests revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repair and capital items. Depending upon the term of the lease, plot holders may become the tenants of the society rather than of the local authority. The local authority retains defined oversight and strategic functions.

4.18 Each allotment site in the borough is different. There are varying levels of occupation, tenant mixes, soil types and site amenities and the two options indicated suggest the possibility of the type of devolved

management available.

4.19 One of the keys to the success of any self-management arrangements are founded on the nature and type of agreements that are put into place by the Council and the tenant association, and the commitment to these agreements.

4.20 The length of the lease agreement can also impact on the success or otherwise of the new association. Short term leases can restrict associations from long term planning and applying for grant assistance.

4.21 Longer term lease agreements are permitted under section 123(2) of the *Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consents (1998)*, which allows for the disposal of leasehold interests for the purpose of the continued provision of recreational facilities.

4.22 The Council will continue its work at a strategic level in the borough working closely with associations and Parish Councils as part of its Community Strategy and Allotments Strategy.

5. Marketing and Development

The Council will ensure that allotments are promoted to attract new allotment holders from all sectors of the community

5.01 *The Local Government Act 2000*, “places a duty on local authorities to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas through the creation of ‘community strategies’ which reflect local circumstances and needs”. This strategy and action plan sets out the manner by which allotments will be developed in the future, the outcomes anticipated and the contribution they will make to the community.

5.02 Allotments are an opportunity for all people to engage in a healthy lifestyle all year round that is socially inclusive, rewarding and sustainable.

5.03 Allotment gardening has the capacity to benefit the wider community which can be seen as enclaves of open space benefiting the protection and promotion of wildlife and biodiversity. They represent an important opportunity for community interaction where social stigma and other boundaries can be overcome, bringing the young and the elderly alike to experience the wonders of nature together.

5.04 Increased leisure time, a greater awareness of the benefits of recreation, early retirement and increased unemployment will have a significant effect on the demand for recreational activity including that of leisure gardening. Participation in leisure gardening can help improve the physical and mental health of the population, through providing

healthy exercise and well-being in the open air, as well as providing a valuable social and economic role.

5.05 There is potential for the mentoring of young people by older people in cultivating plots, fostering education and community cohesiveness. Gardeners are great resources, with years of experience and knowledge of working allotment plots that if passed on to newcomers will remain in the community for generations ahead.

The Councils’ allotment tenants can be an important marketing asset and the *Thorpe Inquiry, 1969* noted:

5.06 “Those sites of low occupancy, where the users are not prepared to look outwards to help recruitment and to share their enthusiasm for gardening must be prepared for the site’s demise.”

Active promotion will include the following:

- Creation of awareness in the wider community
- Sustained level of promotion and support
- Methods of measuring success

5.07 The wider role of allotments will include:

- Providing a sustainable food supply
- Promoting healthy activity for all age groups
- Educational purposes
- Fostering community development and cohesiveness

5.08 New groups of potential users need to be reached in addition to the retention of existing experienced tenants in order to broaden the range of tenants cultivating allotments.

5.09 There will be a need to provide support to all plot holders, with special emphasis on new and inexperienced allotment gardeners. This is currently provided by the Site Representative during the site interest visit and in addition the 'welcome packs' provided by the Council.

5.10 Unfortunately a high level of vacant plots reduces the condition and perception of the whole site by weed spread from overgrown plots, a sense of dereliction and a lowering of value. Concerns about security also need to be addressed if the promotion is to be effective and sustainable.

5.11 Many initiatives have already been implemented with regard to an active promotion of allotments in order to attract new tenants. To date this has included:

- Joining leaflets
- Display boards/posters at key sites such as Council receptions; and to broaden the locations where these can be found, for example at libraries, leisure centres,
- Website information
- Welcome pack for new starters which includes local store discount vouchers
- On site notice boards
- GP Surgeries

5.12 The Allotment forum meetings held quarterly, with representatives from allotment sites have identified ways in which the council could retain existing tenants and promote allotments. These are:

- Improved security fencing
- Seek ways to encourage new allotment holders
- Reduce the size of plots
- Keep vacant plots tidy

5.13 Allotment holders are predominantly male with only 28% of tenants being female, an improvement from 19% as reported in the 2006-2011 strategy. More effort will be made to promote allotments for the use of all the family. This promotion can begin with the improvement of basic site amenities such as the provision of toilets.

5.14 There needs to be a greater flexibility by the Council and allotment associations by offering a wider range of plots to suit different needs. This will include, where appropriate:

- Standard plots
- Half and quarter plots
- Group plots

5.15 The Council will identify and designate plots suitable for those with mobility difficulties or for organic use where demand is indicated.

5.16 The methods of promotion and advertising needs to be targeted at those who would benefit most from allotment gardening and this will be subject to sponsorship and funding. Examples of new areas of promotional

work are:

- Links to other promotions, by the Council or other bodies, for example healthy living, organic growing, traditional skills, and historical exhibitions.

5.17 This will build on the work already performed by allotment tenants and the Council in connection with 'Allotments week', which is a national event, held each summer

aimed at encouraging visitors to allotments.

5.18 Allotments have a distinctive contribution to make to the achievement of 'social inclusion' at a local level. This will bring communities together that have a common interest, including people from different gardening traditions and cultures. This is another way in which allotments will be promoted in the future. Officers are currently working with the health service in giving people with health problems the opportunity to take on an allotment plot.

6. Standards and Best Practice

The Council will provide allotments to Industry Best Practice Standards

6.01 At North East Lincolnshire Council the administration of allotments is managed by its appointed regeneration partner, BBW using a computerised 'Clear Advantage' Allotment Management System. The Clear Advantage system is flexible and links to the Council's Financial Management Information System so that financial data can be accessed easily at any point in the year

6.02 The need for good records and administration is essential for the efficient running of an allotments service and with the introduction and development of self-managed sites there is a need for a proactive partnership approach to management of the sites. In addition, as the allotment service develops and changes to meet with modernisation then the tenancy/lease arrangements needs to be reviewed to reflect the current situation and the law.

6.03 To develop best services in line with best value it is important to compare performance with other councils, but particularly with those in the top quartile. This gives an opportunity to learn from those Councils that are providing a different or a better service.

6.04 Users of the 'Clear Advantage' Allotment Management System are amongst those who have been attempting to produce a standard set of meaningful and easily measured performance indicators for Best Value purposes, which include e:

- Total occupancy as a percentage of

total plots

- Percentage of allotment site with designated facilities

6.05 It is important that the choice of indicators is consistent, challenging and helps to move the service forward to achieve best practice.

6.06 Good practice for North East Lincolnshire Council will be:

- A clear commitment to a high quality allotment service
- The provision of allotment sites with good facilities where possible and plots in sufficient numbers to satisfy latent demand.
- Effective policies to promote the use of allotment gardens by people of all backgrounds.
- A financial strategy to enable the achievement of other aspects of good practice.
- Commitment to working with other stakeholders in the communities, to achieve wider objectives including sustainable development.
- Piloting new ideas and being flexible where required in the implementation of change.
- Efficient procedures for managing the allotment service on a day to day basis.

6.07 Not all allotment sites in North East Lincolnshire have access to toilet facilities although 6 sites have dual facilities for both

male and female tenants.

6.08 Consideration will be given to providing improved toilet facilities for the gardeners on allotment sites, particularly when regenerating sites from capital funding

6.09 Questionnaire responses, consultation and complaints have shown that there is a strong desire to receive improvements to site facilities and to carry out basic essential maintenance to the infrastructure of the sites.

6.10 Much of the allotment budget is committed to dealing with reactionary repairs of which the largest proportion is due to vandalism. In addition uncultivated areas of the sites require grounds maintenance such as grass cutting in order to render the sites safe and presentable. Clearly, conflicts in priorities arise as a direct result of the Council operating within restricted budget allocation and a growing backlog of maintenance work.

6.11 Rates have risen annually by the rate of inflation so as to not out price the use of an allotment plot beyond the reasonable expectation of allotment tenants in the Borough of North East Lincolnshire.

6.12 There are issues of rent differences between that of the Parish Councils and North East Lincolnshire Council in addition to the consideration of concession rates.

6.13 However different rates on different sites may lead to a migration of allotment tenants from sites of high cost to low cost. Individual site costs should both be linked to site and management quality and set at a level that is sustainable.

6.14 There will be a need to provide substantial support and advice to groups who wish to move towards self-management either wholly or in part. The success of self-management is reliant upon the support of plot holders and their desire to become self-managed. The Council will make every effort to support groups making the transition. The Council must ensure that allotment sites, including those leased to associations under a self-management scheme are managed with probity and equity, and therefore leases will include appropriate requirements.

6.15 Tenancy agreement documents reflect a more modern approach to site management and also to recognise a transition arrangement from council to self-management. Issues of importance are:

- Tenancy conduct and behaviour
- Cultivation standards
- Rates and appropriateness of discounts and concessions

6.16 Rents need to be maintained at reasonable levels to balance recruitment and retainment of allotment tenants.

7. Developing stakeholder partnerships

The Council will work in partnership with allotment stakeholders on management and development issues promoting community involvement and social inclusion

7.01 Consultation with stakeholders helps to develop an understanding of stakeholder needs and which can ultimately lead to better service provision. Of the 944 allotment tenants invited to participate in the questionnaire in 2011, 242 (26%) responded. Some key findings from the questionnaire results are indicated.

7.02 The key reasons why plot holders first become interested in becoming a tenant were to provide fresh produce and have the pleasure of seeing it grow and as an opportunity for exercise.

7.03 The Council continues to actively encourage a representation from each allotment site in the Allotments Forum to strengthen the partnership of stakeholders. These principal stakeholders include:

- BBW/NELC officers
- Allotment holders
- Site Associations
- Council members
- The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) – as the national body offering a wider perspective and expertise

7.04 There are also compelling reasons for the Allotments Forum to embrace both North East Lincolnshire Council owned and Parish owned allotments. A forum where non-Council

allotment managers can communicate with each other would bring all tenant stakeholders together sharing common aims and objectives.

7.05 The creation of a strong, representative and inclusive partnership body or Forum is fundamental to the process of implementing this strategy and advancing the development of allotments in North East Lincolnshire.

7.06 Officers feel that the consultation has provided them with good feedback from the plot holders about them and their views. It will enable the service to develop in line with government guidelines and the need of the local community.

7.07 Most people stated that the gates, site access, pathways, parking and water availability are good or satisfactory. There were a number of issues raised and generally fencing/security, site information, council skip provision are felt to be poor. It is also felt that grounds maintenance generally on the site is poor.

7.08 The council can encourage greater take-up of allotments by:

- Greater promotion to the public
- Some smaller plot sizes
- Schools using plots as an educational tool

7.09 The on-going development and membership of the local allotment association could provide a platform to encourage the optimum participation for each group, at the level with which they are comfortable.

7.10 In 2003 the Council re-established the allotment forum in an attempt to include tenant representation in the decision making process.

7.11 Wider membership of the forum is a matter for discussion between the key stakeholders. Representatives of certain wider community themes such as social justice, biodiversity and landscape could be co-opted on to the group as required.

7.12 Forum members should have a recognised mandate and should have the means available to communicate effectively with other stakeholders and not just with those people whom they represent.

7.13 Whilst further expansion or membership of the forum is a matter for discussion, the Councils' strategic link with Parish Councils can be forged independently. Management issues and experiences of best practice can be obvious exchanges and bring improvements generally to allotments across the Borough.

7.14 Site development projects could attract sponsorship from business. The Allotments Forum is the ideal body to form such relationships and associations are encouraged and supported by the Council in seeking new sources of funding.

7.15 One of the keys to sustainable provision is through the establishment of partnerships achieved by working with internal and external partners. There is the need to form partnering agreements with local agencies and contractors as a means to gain access to additional funding.

8. Sustainability – Allotments and the Environment

The Council will wherever possible ensure that allotments are managed in a sustainable way, which enhances the environment

The emerging North East Lincolnshire Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy states as one of its objectives 'SO2 Social and Health Inequity' To narrow the gap in terms of social and health inequity; addressing issues of housing choice, working and training opportunities, promoting healthier lifestyles, improving educational attainment and cultural facilities; and the establishment and good maintenance of a network of accessible good quality open space, sport and recreation facilities.'

8.01 The emerging North East Lincolnshire Council LDF Core Strategy maintained the commitment to safeguarding appropriate allotment provision as set out currently in the NEL Local Plan (adopted 2003). It seeks to grasp opportunities to improve allotment facilities. In so doing recognises the benefits for the health and well being of the community, as well as wildlife and climate change adaption.

8.02 The Government is committed to the sustainable regeneration of our towns and cities, and recognises the role that allotments can play in food provision. Food grown on allotments can contribute to a healthy diet and can lessen the impact of food production on the environment. Local food production can reduce food transportation, reduce the waste produced by food packaging and reduce the use of agricultural chemicals in favour of the increased use of recycled matter.

8.03 Planning Policy Guidance has previously made little reference to allotments. The Planning Policy Statement PPS3 (Housing) (Annex B) explicitly excludes allotments and associated outbuildings from the definition of 'previously developed land' and thus protects them from the priority given to development on so-called 'Brownfield sites, PPG 17 (Sport, Open Space and Recreation), revised during 2001, includes explicit reference to allotment issues (as recommended) in the 'Future for Allotments' Inquiry Report. This includes their protection and disposal, as well as broader guidance on informal open space in general, which will have implications for allotments.

8.04 Allotment gardening can make a valuable contribution to the reuse and recycling of waste materials, including materials brought in from beyond the allotments and put to new uses.

8.05 Issues such as biodiversity and landscape quality are common to all allotments and the Council will act as a leader and enabler with regard to strategic direction and the promotion of environmental enhancement supporting allotment tenants, local communities and championing wildlife, flora and fauna issues.

8.06 The Local Government Association (LGA) is keen to encourage all local authorities to realise the full potential of allotments as a resource for sustainable food supply.

8.07 In North East Lincolnshire bee keeping and the keeping of livestock such as chickens is still encouraged. Bee keeping is practised safely (and with full insurance).

8.08 A wide variety of materials can be usefully employed on allotments that would otherwise go to landfill, including pallets and other wood sources, bark chippings, and compostable materials.

8.09 In all cases care should be taken to ensure that these materials do not become inadvertent sources of soil pollution or odour/vermin nuisance, and in community based schemes, that fly-tipping is avoided. Interpretation boards at these sites are helpful, so that the public understand the process. Links can be made through The Community Composting Network.

8.10 There has been the subsidised purchase of compost bin schemes that helps in recycling and education, working towards Local Agenda 21,

8.11 Uncultivated corners of individual plots and compost bins offer significant habitats for wildlife, some of which (especially predators of garden pests) can aid good cultivation and should be protected.

8.12 Some vacant plots will be managed as wildflower meadows. Seeds, flowers, fruits and insects are all important to bird life, and beneficial species e.g. blue tits can be encouraged with nesting boxes.

8.13 It is preferable to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers and poisons. This can be

achieved by the continued use of organic alternatives, and will assist to promote a healthy environment for wildlife. The growing popularity of organic produce also suggests that information on bio-diversity and measures to protect and enhance habitats should be included in promotional materials for allotments to encourage greater uptake.

8.14 There are many interest groups involved in the conservation of wildlife to which allotment authorities, associations and individual gardeners can turn for advice.

8.15 A local authority may make rules as to the letting of allotments and the conditions under which they are cultivated. Since the amendment of Section 28 of the 1908 Act by the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 such rules no longer require the approval of the Secretary of State. Section 10 of the Allotment Act 1950 requires that an allotment must be let at a rent which a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay, but the local authority may let the land at a lower rent if they are satisfied that special circumstances exist. Most local authorities give at least a 50 per cent discount to pensioners and the unemployed NELC gives 44%.

8.16 This will serve to provide a business focus to allotment land management.

8.17 Sustainability should also include affordability and the ability to manage allotments within budget allocation ensuring standards and quality are maintained. In the Borough of North East Lincolnshire 35% of allotment plots are vacant or unusable causing the distraction and diversion of scarce

resource funding from the delivery of quality allotment provision.

8.21 Consideration should, where possible, be given to the identification of alternative green, community-oriented uses, such as community gardens or land held as open space.

8.22 These alternatives can serve a complementary role when integrated into an under-used site, assisting in regeneration of the remaining plots by making the site as a whole more attractive.

8.23 A few vacant plots may be of benefit to an otherwise successful site, when kept mown for use as a picnic area, with tables, a barbecue and possibly play space for children. This can make a site more family-friendly and

encourage a more co-operative spirit. In addition plots could be set aside for November bonfires which in turn would serve to reduce skip use and aid site clearance.

8.25 This strategy therefore sets out the Council's intention to rationalise allotment site provision retaining adequate numbers of plots to meet demand along with areas set aside for latent demand.

8.26 This strategy document will therefore provide a framework for the sustainable development and management of allotments in partnership with the users and providing a focus on key areas of performance. It will combine the key expectations of stakeholders with the realism of strategic and operational implementation.

Allotments Management Plan 2005/06 to 2010/11

The action plan is an integral part of the Allotments strategy policy document and is intended to monitor progress to ensure that the strategy is put into action.

Rationalisation and Reinvestment

Aim: The Council will seek to rationalise allotment sites due to perceived over provision and re-invest in retained assets in order to improve sites and service delivery.

Service Objective	Action	Timescale	Outcomes
Establish sustainable management of allotments portfolio	Rational allotments portfolio	2011 onwards	Ensure provision meets with demand as part of service delivery
	Dispose with part of Saltings site to commence reinvestment program	Complete	Generation of finance for reinvestment, benefiting council allotments sites and service provision in the Borough
	Declare Bradley site surplus to allotment needs	Complete	Site improvements due to potential site re-use as a community project or managed green space
	Confirm status of Beacon Hill site which consists of both statutory and temporary allotment land	Complete	Ensure local provision is available and meets with demand
Re invest in allotment sites to offer sites which are safe secure and provide good value for money services	Reinvestment programme into allotment sites	2011 onwards	Site improvements Increased and retained tenants Improved site health and safety and general appearance
	Improve and renew site infrastructure such and site building, roads and access and security.	2011 onwards	Improved site health and safety and general appearance
	Demolish and remove abandoned and dangerous structures as part of a site clearance and asbestos removal program	2011 onwards	Improved site health and safety and general appearance
	Improve facilities such as toilets and watering facilities	2011 onwards	Improved site health and safety and general appearance
	Plot cultivation prior to tenancy	2011 onwards	Increased and retained tenants

Marketing and Development

Aim: The Council will ensure that allotments are promoted to attract new allotment holders from all sectors of the community

Objective	Action	Timescale	Outcomes
To develop and review marketing	Explore linkages with local strategic partners	2011	Improved occupancy Improved awareness of the benefits of allotments and allotment gardening to the community Improved opportunities for obtaining supported funding.

Standards and best practice

Aim: The Council will provide allotments to Industry Best Practice Standards

Objective	Action	Timescale	Outcomes
Identify current and potential benchmarking standards and develop benchmarking partners	Liaise with Councils and partners in the development of the service standards	2011	Report outlining results of research

Developing Stakeholder Partnerships

Aim: The Council will work in partnership with allotment stakeholders on management and development issues promoting community involvement and social inclusion

Objective	Action	Timescale	Outcomes
Identify issues of service performance, tenant needs etc	Provide a consultation questionnaire to all allotments tenants	2011 onwards	Produce report outlining results of research Improved awareness of tenancy needs, demographics etc Feedback on service performance
Increase community involvement with allotments	Develop alternative approaches to allotment service provision	2011	Allotment sites enjoy stronger links with their surrounding communities Improved linkages with local strategic partners
Continue links with	Collate details of Parish	2011 ongoing	Improved relationship

Parish Councils	Council provision		and knowledge of borough allotment issues
Continued allotment forum with Council and Allotment Associations	Meet with Association at least every 3 months and develop forward planning for allotment sites	Ongoing	Improved Council and Association relationship

Sustainability – Allotments and the Environment

Aim: The Council will wherever possible ensure that allotments are managed in a sustainable way, which enhances the environment

Objective	Action	Timescale	Outcomes
Improve waste management	Identify alternative means of waste management	2011 onwards	Reduce waste charges
Increase the use of allotments sites including the number of plots cultivated and the number of active tenants	Promotion of allotments	2011 onwards	Increased use and occupation leading to greater site sustainability Increased awareness of the benefits of allotments gardening Increase local food production and reduce 'food miles'
Improve water management	Upgrade and replace standpipes and water supply infrastructure	2011 onwards	Reduce water consumption and charges Improve quality of site infrastructure and reduce water costs over time Introduce anti-vandal standpipe protection
Improve the contribution of allotments sites to green space management and planning in the borough	Develop biodiversity and conservation action on each site.	2011 onwards	Increased awareness on site of biodiversity and conservation issues Establish areas for set aside to provide havens for wildlife