

## Report of the Assistant Director Asset Management to the meeting of Regeneration & Economy Improvement Committee to be held on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2010

# K

---

### Subject:

Allotments

### Summary statement:

This report outlines arrangements currently in place for the management of the Council's allotment sites.

---

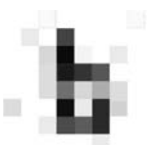
Mike Bell  
Assistant Director, Asset Management

**Portfolio:**

**Corporate**

Report Contact: Belinda Gaynor, Acting  
Principal Property Services Officer  
Phone: (01274) 434309  
E-mail: [Belinda.gaynor@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:Belinda.gaynor@bradford.gov.uk)

**Improvement Area:**



2006-2007  
Improving Rural Services  
Empowering Communities



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Suzan Hemingway, Assistant Director Corporate Services (City Solicitor)



## 1. **Summary**

This report outlines arrangements currently in place for the management of the Council's allotment sites.

## 2. **Background**

- 2.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility for the provision of allotments except where a Parish Council exists. Where a Parish Council exists or comes into existence the responsibility for the provision of allotments within its boundaries statutorily transfers to that Council. The management of sites at Baildon and Keighley has been handed over to the Parish and Town Council respectively and it is intended that similar arrangements will be made for Haworth and Silsden this year.
- 2.2 The Council's Allotments Service sits within Asset Management's Estates Section and is responsible for the management of approx 1500 allotment plots on 41 sites across the District.

## 3. **Report issues**

### **Management Arrangements**

- 3.1 The Allotments Officer has day to day responsibility for the management of the Council's allotments and is the first point of contact for all queries about the service. Decisions concerning the management of sites and letting of plots are made by the Allotments Officer in consultation with the Principal Property Services Officer (Estates) as appropriate.
- 3.2 Information about the allotments service is provided in publications promoting Council services such as the A-Z booklet of services which is delivered to homes throughout the District each year. Further information is provided on the Allotments pages of the Council's website where information can be found about the location of sites; vacancies; which sites have waiting lists; prices; sample tenancy agreement; newsletter and planting tips; and contact details for the Allotments Office.

### **Letting**

- 3.3 Where a plot becomes available to let on a site for which there is a waiting list the availability of the plot is offered to the next person on the list and if that person declines to take the plot it is to the next person on the list. Where there is no waiting list vacant plots are offered to people who have enquired about the availability of allotments and the availability of such plots will be advertised on the Council's web site. At present there are only four sites that do not have waiting lists these are; Scotchman Road; Harewood Street; Cecil Avenue and; Legrams Lane. It is proposed that the availability of plots on these sites will be regularly advertised in future editions of Community Pride and signs will be erected at sites providing information about whether plots are available and how to apply for a tenancy. Opportunities to advertise available plots in local community facilities will also be explored.

- 3.4 The length of waiting lists varies according to the popularity of each site. Northcliffe Allotments has the longest waiting list of 126 people and an estimated waiting time based on the current rate of tenant turnover of 10 years. Bowling Park on the other hand has 18 people on the waiting list and it is estimated that the waiting time for this site is 1 – 2 years. However, this estimate is dependant on work being undertaken to bring 10 currently unusable plots back into use. Save for instances where uncultivated plots can be brought back into use we have little opportunity to influence the turnaround and therefore availability of plots.
- 3.5 Plots do become available to relet when a tenant confirms to the Allotments Officer that he wishes to relinquish his tenancy or if the Council terminates a tenancy if a tenant has failed to cultivate a plot or is in breach of their tenancy agreement. Tenancy agreements run from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December however where tenants wish to give up plots a handover date is agreed and the availability of the plot is offered down the relevant waiting list almost immediately. Similarly, where the Council terminates a tenancy steps are taken to relet the plot as soon as the termination notice expires.
- 3.6 Each allotment plot is subject to an annual inspection to verify that the plot has been cultivated during the past year. Where an assessment is made that a plot has not been cultivated a 'bad cultivation letter' is sent to the tenant providing him with three options; 1) provide a valid reason for why the plot has not been cultivated an undertaking that the plot will be used straight away; 2) the tenant to agrees to give up the plot and; 3) the tenant disagrees with the assessment. Where a plot assessed as not being cultivated has been let to a new tenant within the last twelve months the tenant is sent a letter asking whether they intend to use the plot, if the plot is not used during the second year the tenancy is automatically terminated as provided for in the tenancy agreement.
- 3.7 The tenant is given a date, usually a month from the date of the letter, by which to reply to a bad cultivation letter. If a reply is not received the tenant is sent written notification of the Council's intention to terminate his tenancy; occasionally people appeal against the second letter and the Allotment Officer considers each appeal on a case by case basis.

### **Assistance**

- 3.8 Assistance provided to tenants ranges from the provision of general advice and gardening tips on a daily basis to the provision of skips and cutting back high hedges both of which are technically tenant's responsibilities. Further support, information and tips are provided via the annual newsletter and administrative support is provided to Allotment Associations by the Allotments Officer distributing newsletters and letters to tenants on their behalf. We are in the process of entering into long term tenancy agreements with community groups to allow them to demonstrate security of tenure which enables them to access external funding. Community groups automatically qualify for concessionary rents.

### **Repairs and Maintenance**

- 3.9 It is recognised that repairs and maintenance of allotment sites has in the past been inadequate. We are restricted in what we can do by available budget which often results in maintenance being reactive rather than planned and also rely to

some extent on tenants notifying us when there are problems and contend with some tenant's unrealistic expectations and disregard for their own responsibilities. The most common repairs are to burst or leaking water pipes, clearance of dumped asbestos and fly tipping and the replacement of missing or broken padlocks.

- 3.10 Some sites such as Northcliffe have experienced security problems. Issues dealt with include arson, vandalism, theft from plots and drug use on sites. Affected tenants are encouraged to report incidents to the police and as budget becomes available security fencing is upgraded and repairs carried out to existing fences as the annual repairs budget allows.
- 3.11 The additional capital allocation for allotments in the 2009/10 is being spent on addressing security issues; bringing approximately 40 unused plots back into use by removing trees and old buildings, reinstating boundary fences and removal of rubble, fly tipping and carpets. Additional revenue funding is being used to appoint staff to the Allotments team to improve the service that we provide to customers.

## **Water**

- 3.12 Mains water supply is provided to the majority of sites with only 5 sites not connected to the mains. Those sites without mains water use techniques such as rain water harvesting to water plants and mulching to reduce the need for watering. Asset Management does not have the staff resources or IT systems in place to enable each site to be individually billed for its actual consumption instead, all tenants on sites with mains water are charged a standard £20 pa for the provision of water. This charge covers consumption costs only and does not finance repairs to pipes and taps which are paid for out of the allotments repair budget. We occasionally receive complaints about how water charges are billed from tenants concerned that they may be subsidising tenants on other sites with higher water consumption.
- 3.13 Although tenants are encouraged to conserve water there have been instances where tenants have been found using hose pipes in heavy rain. Where water consumption on a particular site is found to have significantly increased and such an increase is not due to leaking pipes we will, if considered appropriate, turn off the water supply to a site. It is acknowledged that inadequate notice was given to the tenants of Scotchman Road that the water would not be turned on in 2009. However, ideally where the Allotments Officer has concerns about high water consumption on a particular site tenants will be notified of concerns in January/February and asked to take steps to reduce consumption over the coming year. The level of water usage will be checked mid year and if the situation has not improved tenants will be informed of the Council's intention to not turn the water on in the next year and provided with guidance about how to reduce the need for water and rain water harvesting.
- 3.14 All mains water supplies are turned off in October each year to protect pipes from frost. We have experienced problems in the past with tenants turning supplies back on themselves which has resulted in burst pipes, where this is a persistent problem the water supply to the site is capped off each year. Ideally, we would like to move away from providing mains water to sites to conserve water and also free up budget to be used elsewhere on allotment sites. We are aware that this is a particularly sensitive issue for some tenants and are working with other Officers within the Council to explore ways in which we can assist tenants to move away

from the use of mains water by using gray water harvesting. Any proposal to remove mains water from a site would be phased in over a period of time in consultation with plot holders.

#### **4. Other Considerations**

- 4.1 There is an increasing focus and interest in allotment use, healthy eating and the provision of sustainable food and initiatives such as Incredible Edible Todmorden and the establishment of a garden want/available or land share register will be investigated. The implications of such schemes in terms of resourcing and legalities and where best the administration of such schemes would sit within the Council are being considered. The Allotments Service will contribute toward the preparation of the District Food Plan.
- 4.2 The Allotments Officer is consulted about any proposal to dispose of an allotment site. It is proposed that the allotment site at Beech Grove will be included in a parcel of land to be sold for residential development. Beech Grove is an underused site due to steep banks and drainage problems. Any sale of the site will be subject to a requirement that the developer creates a new allotment site which will include measures such as a gravity fed water pumping system to deliver water to plots. If a decision were made to sell a statutory allotment site the Council would be required to reinvest any sale proceeds in allotment provision.
- 4.3 Asset Management is keen within available resources to explore ways in which partnership working with other agencies can be developed. At present multi-agency working mainly takes the form of advice and assistance provided to agencies which happen to be allotment tenants, for this to be successfully developed it will be necessary for all agencies to take an active role rather than there being an expectation that only the Council should act on or implement proposals.

#### **5. Contribution to corporate priorities**

- 5.1 The work of the Allotments Service contributes toward the achievement of the corporate priorities; Sustainability and Improving the Environment,

#### **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 That the report be noted.

#### **7. Background documents**

None

#### **8. Not for publication documents**

None