

# **Gloucester City Council Allotment Review**

**Report of the Allotment Task &  
Finish Group October 2007**

## **1. Introduction**

At its meeting on 18 January 2007 Council resolved to set up a Task and Finish Group to review the Council's allotments.

The Task and Finish Group has comprised:

- Councillor Gillespie (Chair)
- Councillor Tracey
- Councillor Witts

The group has been assisted by its Lead Officer, Frances Mangan, Streetcare Manager and supported by Beverly Barber, Senior Democratic Services Officer. At its first meeting the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group were agreed as follows:

1. To address the strategic issues relating to allotments in the City, in particular future management of allotments, demand and provision of sites in the City.
2. To examine the operational issues relating to allotments in the City, including maintenance, conditions of use and levels of investment.

The Allotments Task and Finish Group has undertaken numerous meetings since its first meeting on 11 April 2007. Its activities have included the following:

- site visit of all the City Council's allotments (9 May 2007)
- attendance at the Annual Allotments Consultation Meeting (25 June 2007)
- open discussion with Allotment representatives on Allotment Policy and Tenancy Conditions (9 July 2007)
- discussion with the Assistant Director (Finance and Asset Management) (6 August 2007)
- site visit to Cheltenham Borough Council's allotments (30 August 2007)

The Task & Finish Group would also like to acknowledge input from the following people who assisted with the review.

- Enterprise (Accord), Carol Dovey, Denise Bullock
- City Council, Nigel Kennedy, Assistant Director (Finance and Asset Management)
- Cheltenham Borough Council Allotments Officer, Fiona Warin
- Allotment representatives
- Planning, Chris Hargraves
- Policy Design & Conservation, Jane Cox

This report sets out the findings of the Task & Finish Group along with their recommendation on the future management of Gloucester City Council's Allotments.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Why have allotments?**

Allotments provide a useful additional recreational resource for some residents, and are especially helpful to residents whose houses have small gardens or no gardens at all; particularly if the allotments are utilised as a source of good quality, cheap food. In this respect allotments have a role to play in helping to:

- tackle poverty in the city
- contribute toward sustainability
- encourage healthy eating and healthier life styles
- provide an excellent means of exercise
- encouraging social cohesion and celebrating diversity
- benefit to wildlife habitats

### **2.2 What is an allotment?**

There are two types of allotment provision, Allotments and Allotment Gardens.

- An '**allotment**' is a parcel of land not more than 5 acres in extent, cultivated as a garden or farm.
- An '**allotment garden**' is a parcel of land not exceeding 40 poles, (1,012 square metres), cultivated by the occupier for the provision of vegetables and fruit crops for himself and his family. By definitions outlined in the Allotment Act of 1922, an allotment garden is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of fruit or vegetables for consumption by himself and his family. The definition gives allotment authorities some flexibility to determine what is grown, but care should be taken when relaxing restrictions so that the character of the site is maintained.

All of the allotment sites provided by Gloucester City Council are allotment gardens.

### **2.3 Is there a legal requirement for the council to provide allotments?**

Allotment provision is a statutory function and whilst an authority *may* provide allotments, **there is a statutory obligation** except in the case of inner London boroughs **to provide allotment gardens sufficient to meet the demand** (Cross, The Recreational Services 8<sup>th</sup> Edition).

## **2.4 What is the difference between a Statutory and Temporary Allotment Gardens?**

The Allotments Act of 1925 stipulated that land purchased or appropriated by a local authority for the purpose of creating allotments would be known as 'statutory' allotment sites and must not be disposed of or used for other purposes without central government consent. 'Temporary' allotment sites are those where a local authority allowed land that has a different long term usage or purpose, to be used, on a temporary basis, as allotment land. There is no time limit as to how long a site can remain a temporary allotment site. They do not automatically change to statutory allotment sites after 30 or 50 years. Temporary sites only change to statutory sites when the local authority decides that that area is not needed for any purpose other than allotments and officially gives the site statutory designation.

## **2.5 Is there any guidance on what is “sufficient to meet the demand”?**

Central Government guidance to local authorities on the provision and protection of sport, recreational facilities and open space is contained within Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17 'Sport, Open Space and Recreation' (2002).

PPG17 recognises allotments, community gardens and city farms in its typology of open spaces and sets out that Local Authorities should undertake robust assessments of the needs of their local community for open space.

A separate 'companion guide' to PPG17 recognises that the need for allotments, community gardens and urban farms is likely to rise with the growth of interest in organic farming and as a result of rising housing densities and the consequential reduction in the size of many gardens. It recommends a demand-led approach to the assessment of need for allotments and suggests that a population-based standard of provision is likely to be appropriate in most instances, coupled with an accessibility standard or distance threshold.

Planning Policy Statement 3 'Housing' reflects the Government's desire to ensure the availability of, and adequate protection for, good quality open spaces within urban areas, including allotments emphasising that housing density policies should have regard to the current and future level and capacity of infrastructure, services and facilities, in particular green and open space.

In terms of local policy, the adopted 1983 City of Gloucester Local Plan includes Core Policy L.1, which states that the Council will ensure the provision of an adequate level of public open space in the City through the retention of existing areas, and the inclusion of public open space within new areas of development. More specifically, in relation to allotments Core Policy

L.5 states that 'the City Council will seek to meet the demand for allotments subject to the availability of suitable land'.

In June 2001, Gloucester City Council produced the First Stage Deposit of its new Local Plan and a further Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan was then published in August 2002. The revised deposit draft plan includes two policies on allotments, one requiring the provision of an allotment site in new housing schemes of more than 30 dwellings (to a standard of 0.2 hectares per 1,000 population) the other seeking to protect existing allotments unless certain criteria can be met including; the loss of the allotment would not result in unmet demand within a reasonable walking distance, replacement provision is made in a convenient, accessible location, or other allotments in the locality would be enhanced by the development or by compensatory measures secured by a planning obligation.

The policies of the revised draft Local Plan relating to allotment provision are being carried forward into the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) - the replacement to the Local Plan.

There are no formal national standard for the provision of allotments. Each local authority is duty-bound by legislation to provide enough allotments to meet the demand by their residents.

However, in 1969, the Thorpe Report (government commissioned report on allotment provision) recommended a minimum standard of ½ acre (0.2 hectares) per 1,000 population.

### **3. Gloucester City Council Allotments**

#### **3.1 Current capacity and demand for allotments in Gloucester.**

There are 11 allotment sites providing a total of 587 allotment plots, currently a combination of allotments of 253 square metres and 126 square metres, in the city.

The sizes of each allotment site vary considerably with Saintbridge having 146 plots and Hempsted with just 2. The table in Appendix 1 shows the list of sites along with the number of plots per site. (The number of plots per site is variable depending on the number of plots in each size)

There is a further new allotment site, 1 hectare (2.47 acres) planned for Kingsway which is due to come on stream in the near future for which there is already a waiting list. This will provide in the region of 79 allotments of 126sq mtrs or 39 allotments of 253 sq mtrs. This will be a statutory allotment site.

Of the 11 allotment sites in the city sites 8 are "statutory" and 3 are "temporary" allotment sites. The status of each site is listed in Appendix 1.

Using the recommended minimum standard of ½ acre (0.2 hectares) per 1,000 population and including the new Kingsway allotments this will provide 15.68 hectares of allotments resulting in 0.14 hectares per 1000 population. Compared with the recommended standard there is a shortfall of 6.58 hectares.

In September 2007 there were 587 available allotment plots (a combination of 253 square metres and 126 square metres). Of which 504 are let leaving 83 plots vacant. At the same time there is a waiting list of 149 plus a further 20 on the waiting list for the new Kingsway allotments.

Whilst there are some allotments that are not currently being used to capacity there is now a waiting list that exceeds the number of plots available. Therefore there is an under rather than an over provision of allotments. With the more proactive approach now being taken to letting the allotments it is anticipated that all allotments will be let within the next 18 months, once the plots in a poor condition have been made usable.

***Recommendation:***

- ***That the minimum standard of 0.2 hectares per 1,000 population included in the draft local plan continue to be used as a standard for allotment provision in the city.***
- ***That whilst there is more demand than supply the City Council should continue to seek to protect the current allotment provision and acquire new allotment sites as part of new developments using the section 106 process.***

### **3.2 Who uses allotments?**

In October 2007 the allotment records show there are 504 allotments let of which 247 (approx 49%) of total users were on concessions thus being retirement age or over.

To date records have not been kept of the age, sex, race and disability profile of allotment users. However, from observation it is known that residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds use allotments. This provides an opportunity to share different methods of cultivation and to learn from each other.

In 2007 the Cabinet Member for Environment extended the concessionary rate to include people in receipt of disability benefit. There are no allotments specifically designed to encourage use by people with disabilities.

***Recommendation:***

- ***That raised bed allotments be permitted on the allotment sites on condition they are temporary by nature and can revert back to a standard allotment.***
- ***That the benefit of allotments be actively promoted to encourage younger people to take up allotments and a healthier lifestyle.***

### **3.3 How far do people travel to allotments?**

The 11 city council allotment sites are concentrated in certain areas of Gloucester, meaning that there are no allotment sites in Abbey, Elmbridge, grange, Hucclecote, Podsmead, Quedgeley Severndale, Quedgeley Fieldcourt . The lack of provision in Quedgely will be addressed by the new provision due in Kingsway. In an allotment survey carried out by Gloucester City Council in 1999, 49% of allotment holders travelled to their sites on foot or cycle with the remainder travelling by car.

The current uneven distribution of sites across the city means that there will continue to be a significant number of allotment holders travelling by car. As and when the opportunity arises the Task & Finish Group would like to see the majority of allotment holders travelling on foot or by bike and a more even distribution of allotments across the city. A travelling distance of 1 mile is considered reasonable for walking to an allotment. With the inclusion of the new Kingsway allotments the majority of residents are within 1 mile of an allotment see appendix 2. Areas falling outside a mile are Hucclecote , part of Quedgely and it should be noted that the Westgate Ward is serviced by Hempsted allotments which is a very small site and there will be an increase of housing in this area over the next few years.

#### ***Recommendation***

- ***That a travelling distance of 1mile to an allotment site for any resident be adopted as a standard when planning for future allotment provision.***
- ***That priority be given to identifying allotment provision to service areas of the city that are not currently within a mile of an allotment site, or a reasonably sized site : Hucclecote, part of Quedgely and Westgate.***

### **3.4 How are the allotments managed?**

The city council is responsible for the overall management of the allotments including the development of the strategy, policies and standards relating to allotments in the city.

Enterprise undertakes the administration of the allotments on behalf of the council along with basic maintenance.

The Task and Finish Group has learnt that whilst the City Council has responsibility for strategy and policy there is no specific staff time allocated for this purpose and it would appear that over recent years allotments have been

a very low priority. In fact, up until the commencement of the new Streetcare Contract they were to all intent and purposes forgotten about.

The lack of profile for the allotments has manifested in their being no communication with allotment holders, low levels of maintenance, a large number of un-let and uncultivated allotments. Yet nationally there has been an increase in demand for allotments. Another consequence is that the conditions relating to allotments have not been reviewed for a considerable number of years. Lastly, but not least, the City Council has had a poor understanding of the performance of the allotments.

Since the commencement of the new Streetcare contract and the introduction of the new Streetcare Team and the setting up of the Task & Finish group steps have been taken to redress this situation by the Cabinet Member for Environment, officers and Enterprise.

At the allotment holders meeting in June 2007 the view of participants was sought on whether or not there was an appetite from the allotment holders to move to community management of the allotments. The consensus at the meeting was that, at this point in time, community management was not an option, as most of the sites do not have an association in place. Furthermore they would only consider community management if and when the allotments are put in good order with adequate security and water facilities.

In the visit undertaken by the Task and Finish Group to Cheltenham it was observed that Cheltenham Borough Council has a full time allotment officer who undertakes the following roles:

- Administration of the letting of the allotments
- Manages maintenance and site inspections
- Organising and co-ordination of maintenance work including development of an allotment warden scheme.
- Production of an annual allotment newsletter
- Promoting and allotments including raising awareness of the benefits of allotments.
- Advice to new allotment holders on start up
- Maintaining and analysing of allotment data
- Liaison with and support for the allotment association.
- Identifying and applying for funding for allotments.

The Task & Finish Group considered there are a number of benefits of having one person in sole charge of allotments as this improves the communication with allotment holders and allows for a better link between policy, strategy and operation of the allotments. To that end the Task and Finish Group would like to see the introduction of an allotment officer explored in more detail. A part time allotment officer, say for 3 days a week, would cost in the region of £17,000 per annum including on costs. A full time allotment officer would cost in the region of £28,000

### ***Recommendation***



- ***That the Cabinet note the improvements that have been made to the City's allotments over the last six months***
- ***That the cabinet ask officers to explore in detail the benefits and disadvantages of creating an allotment officer post and funding for this position.. This post would work directly to the council with maintenance only being retained within the Streetcare Contract.***
- ***That the possibility of community management be revisited as and when the allotment infrastructure has been improved and an allotment association(s) has been developed.***

### **3.5 How can the existing use of allotment be maximised?**

In September 2007 there were 587 available allotment plots. Of which 504 are let leaving 83 plots vacant. At the same time there is a waiting list of 149 plus a further 20 on the waiting list for the new Kingsway allotments.

Enterprise is currently preparing plots and is actively working through the waiting list. It can be seen that, with the size of the waiting list, in the very near future all workable plots will be let leaving a residual waiting list in the region of 66. If this is the case there will be no surplus demand. However this may take some 18 months to achieve as the process includes the re-measuring and remarking out of allotments that have not been in use for a while.

There are a number of ways allotment provision can be increased without having to acquire new sites.

The first of these is to review the size of the allotments. A standard size allotment is 253 square metres. An allotment of this size should be able to provide sufficient vegetables (with the exception of potatoes) to feed a family of four for a year.

In reality a plot of this size is, in this day and age with modern day pressures, too large for many people to cultivate effectively. This is why in recent years when plots have become vacant it has become practice to re-let them as two 126 square metre plots, which are more manageable.

In Cheltenham they have begun to set aside some plots half this size again which are proving popular with some individuals who have limited time.

What has been identified since Enterprise took over the administration of the allotments is that there are a number of people with more than one allotment and some with multiple allotments. There is currently no clear policy governing the number of allotments one person can have.

At the allotment holders' meeting in June it was proposed that a policy be introduced limiting any one person to a maximum 253 square metres (or equivalent plot).

This proposal caused concern should such a policy be introduced immediately. It may be more acceptable for the above policy to be introduced

over a period of time, i.e. as and when plots become vacant, except where it can be proven that a plot holder is growing crops on the allotment for personal commercial gain, which is prohibited.

There is no existing policy on the letting of allotments to organised groups. Schools could be encouraged to use allotments as an educational tool introducing young people to healthy living lifestyles, likewise youth groups. Also in other districts the health service use council allotments as part of their physio and occupational therapy programmes. These are just two examples but there are others.

The Task & Finish Group also discussed whether or not non- residents can be allotment holders. The majority of allotment holders are residents of Gloucester but there are some who work in Gloucester but live elsewhere and there are some who live close to the city boundary but not within the city. The view of the group was that priority should be given to residents including people living within half a mile of the city boundary where there is no allotment provision.

***Recommendation:***

- ***That a maximum of 253 square metres allotment plot (or equivalent) per person be introduced as and when allotment holders terminate their agreements.***
- ***That firm action is taken if any allotment holder is found to be using their allotment for personal commercial gain.***
- ***That officers' consult with allotment holders on the introduction of a new minimum allotment size that can be effectively cultivated.***
- ***That community and group lettings be encouraged where they raise awareness and encourage people to adopt healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.***
- ***That allotment holders must either live or work in the city or live within a half mile of the City boundary with priority being given to city residents.***

**3.6 Process of renting an allotment within Gloucester City?**

If a resident wishes to rent an allotment they need to contact the Council's Contact Centre through Enviro or by telephoning 396396 and then

- They will be put through to Enterprise who will take their details and find out if they have a preference for any site
- The person will then be put on the waiting list. They will be informed what number they are on the list
- When they get to the top of the waiting list they will be contacted and a viewing of the plot will be arranged
- If they are happy with the plot being offered they will be sent a tenancy agreement to complete and an invoice.

- Once the tenancy agreement has been signed and the invoice paid they can start working their allotment.

### **3.7 What can allotment plots be used for?**

The allotment tenancy agreement sets out the conditions setting out what can and what cannot be grown on an allotment as well as other rules relating to the use of the allotment plot and site.

The Task & Finish Group has reviewed the existing conditions in consultation with allotment holders and has reached the conclusion that they need amending and updating. The particular changes the Task & Finish Group would like to see are set out below subject to final consultation with allotment holders :

#### ***Recommendation***

- ***Sheds, greenhouses or polytunnels to be permitted on site on condition***
  - ***No one structure is more than 6ftx8ft x8ft high***
  - ***No more than 25% of a plot being used for structures***
  - ***The structure must be sound and safe but must not be of a permanent nature***
  - ***The position of the structure on the plot must not cause overshadowing of neighbouring plots.***
  - ***Any shed or greenhouse must include a rain water collection system feeding a water butt on the plot.***
  - ***Written approval is required in advance***
- ***Trees, fruit trees and hedges will not be permitted on site excepting where they are already in situ.***
- ***The growing of fruit bushes, strawberry plants, asparagus and rhubarb to be permitted***
- ***Allotment plots can be used for the growing of crops or flowers or a combination of both.***
- ***The keeping of livestock or fowl will not be permitted***
- ***Bonfires will continue to not be permitted***

### **3.8 What is the maintenance regime for allotments in the City?**

The Task & Finish Group visited all the allotment sites as part of this review and was concerned about the low level of maintenance and the overall state of most of the allotment sites. This is a consequence of there being minimum maintenance and investment in allotments over the years.

The Task and Finish Group learned that there is no planned maintenance or investment programme for the allotments.

Prior to the Streetcare Partnering Contract the previous contractor was required to undertake grass cutting to the access paths and cutting of hedges. On top of this the city council instructed them annually, usually, in the

summer, to flail the uncultivated plots. The only other works undertaken was any essential health and safety works –this has been minimal.

Enterprise as part of the Streetcare Partnering Contract Enterprise is required to continue with the same level of maintenance.

Enterprise is also working with council, over the next two years to re-measure and mark out each of the allotment sites. The aim of this being to:

- Clearly delineate each plot as there has been encroachment over the years
- To bring uncultivated areas, where possible, back into use thereby increasing the number of plots available.

The target is to have this completed by December 2009.

This was welcomed and supported by the allotment holders at the June allotment holders meeting.

At the same meeting allotment representatives expressed a willingness to work with the council and Enterprise to make sure this exercise is successful. However, it will not be possible to harness this support without the council allocating staff time (an allotment officer) for this purpose.

At the visit to Cheltenham the Task & Finish Group were impressed with the Allotment Warden scheme that Cheltenham (and a number of other authorities across the country have introduced). In essence, this works as follows

Each allotment site has a warden or 2-3 wardens on larger sites. The warden is an allotment holder and agrees to

- Show new allotment holders around
- Undertakes quality inspections to ensure allotment holders are not encroaching on footpaths
- Regularly walks the site to identify if any of the plots are not being cultivated
- Checks to make sure allotment holders are adhering to the conditions of use
- Keeps notice boards up to date
- Nominates allotment holders for annual allotment awards

They act as a liaison person between the site and the council allotment officer. In Cheltenham they have a formal meeting with the allotment officer and representatives from the allotment association 4 times a year at which they discuss ongoing issues, consider each wardens quarterly report and receive a quality report for each site.

Each of the wardens receives a small remuneration for this work (75p per plot per year).

The feeling in Cheltenham was that since the introduction of the warden scheme the management of the sites has improved by working with wardens

and it has enabled the Council to be more proactive in ensuring plot holders cultivate their plots.

The allotment officer was seen in Cheltenham as being pivotal to the success of the scheme.

The conclusion of the Task & Finish group is that if an investment is made in the allotments to bring them up to standard and steps are taken to improve communication and involvement of allotment holders through the introduction of a warden scheme, along the lines set out above, then the level of ongoing maintenance would be minimal.

### ***Recommendation***

- ***That an allotment warden scheme similar to that developed in Cheltenham be explored***

### **3.9 What improvement need to be made to the allotments ?**

In May this year the Task & Finish Group accompanied by the Cabinet Member for Environment and the Streetcare Manager visited the majority of allotment sites in the City to see them first hand.

The feeling of the Task & Finish group were echoed by the allotment holders at the meeting in June at which there was a very strong view that there was a need for investment in the allotments.

The Task & Finish Group was particularly struck by the difference good security can make to a site. Robert Raikes, which has good security, has the highest occupancy rate and is well cared for. Other sites such as Innsworth and Saintbridge and White City have very poor security and this impacts on the overall feel of the site.

Again in their visit to Cheltenham the Task & Finish Group noted the benefit of good security.

The highest priorities for improvements identified by the identified by the Task & Finish Group and the allotment holders are:

- **Security:**  
The majority of the allotment sites have very poor perimeter fencing that makes them very vulnerable to vandalism. This is seen as the highest priority
- **Water**  
The second highest priority is the provision of water on all sites.
- **The reduction in the number of uncultivated allotments**
- **Lockable notice boards on each site**

The Task & Finish group has asked officers to undertake a survey of each site and identify the cost of improving security, providing water at standpipes across the sites to avoid the necessity to use hoses and to provide a notice and information board at each site.

This work is underway and costs will be available shortly.

The Task & Finish Group is aware that the level of investment could be significant and there is currently no provision for these improvements.

As part of the review the group considered how the identified improvements could be funded. One suggestion was that an allotment site be disposed of to raise the capital required. This is how some other local authorities have funded improvements. This has happened where there has been surplus allotment provision. This is not the case in Gloucester.

The Task & Finish Group also recognises that it may not be possible to identify funding from the council's capital programme to fund the improvements over a 1 to 2 year period, though this would be ideal. If this is not possible they would support a 5 year rolling programme of improvements through the council's capital programme.

### **Recommendation**

- ***That the cabinet support the introduction of an improvement and investment programme for the allotments and ask officers to prepare a capital proposal for consideration.***

## **3.9 Sustainability**

Allotments are seen as being environmentally friendly and sustainable but they could be more sustainable.

One of the major costs incurred is the cost of water and if there is improved water provision at each site this could well result in an increased use of water as it is more accessible. Whilst supporting the need for improved water provision the Task & Finish Group would also like to see a hose pipe and sprinkler ban introduced and allotment holders encouraged to harvest water through the use of water butts.

Allotments also generate a considerable amount of green waste. Some of which is compostable on site but not all. The Task & Finish group would like to see individual allotment holders encouraged to compost on site. Where possible the Council should provide compost in bays at allotment sites along with bays for recycled material being brought to the sites for reuse on the allotments, such as manure from the Countryside Park, wood chippings from the arboriculture works undertaken by Enterprise. At the same time, to prevent the need for bonfires, an annual skip or similar should be provided by Enterprise to remove larger green non compostable material from each site in autumn would be welcomed.

### ***Recommendation***

- ***A hose pipe and sprinkler ban is introduced as and when water facilities are improved at each site***
- ***An annual autumn skip or similar be provided for each site to remove larger non compostable green waste .***

### **3.10 External sources of funding**

There are various sources of external funding that could be attracted to invest in allotments. In most instances grant aid and external funding is not available for infrastructure works. Instead it tends to be available for education and awareness programmes, increasing community engagement and encouraging more sustainable means of cultivating plots.

To date funding raised from external for allotments has been negligible as there is no one to identify the funding source, make applications or to support a advise allotment associations with their applications.

### **3.11 What is the annual rental cost of an allotment ?**

The fees and charges for allotments in Gloucester are comparable with other neighbouring authorities.

This year the cost of a 126 square metre plot is £15.86p (£1.32p per month) charged at the full rate and for a concession it is £9.24 (0.77p per month). The view of most of the allotment holders at the meeting in June was that this is good value for money.

Cheltenham Borough Council would consider increasing the charges as they implement improvements to their allotments. The view of the Task & Finish Group is that there is potential to increase charges for allotments but only if the security and facilities are improved.

In 2005/06 the previous contractor reported an income of £5,000 from allotment charges. Enterprise is estimating an income of £11,800 in 2007/08. The explanation for the difference is that in 2007/08 correct charges have been levied and Enterprise has undertaken a rigorous audit and has implemented systems to ensure all the charges are being collected. This is welcomed.

At the June 2007 allotment holders' meeting it was proposed that allotment charges

- Increase in 2008 by 5% and by a further 5% in 2009 in line with the council overall policy for fees and charges.
- That in future charges be levied on a cost per square metre basis to reflect variations to allotment plot sizes.

- That the concession rate be 50% of the full price this would be a reduction in real terms for those on a concession.

Since the meeting a further question has been raised about what is the purpose of the concessionary rate.

The proposed fees and charges for 2008 and 2009 are set out below based on the concessionary rate at 50%.

	2007/2008	Prop 2008	Prop 2009
	Charge £	Charge £	Charge £
126sq m			
OAP's / disabled	£9.24	(£9.99)£8.32	£10.48)£8.74
Ordinary	£15.86	£16.65	£17.48
253 sq m			
OAP's/disabled	£18.27	(£19.98)£16.64	(£20.97)£17.48
Ordinary	£31.71	£33.30	£34.96
Per sq metre			
OAP's/ disabled		(£0.079)£0.066	(0.82)£0.069
Ordinary		£0.132	£0.138

The proposed charges based on a 50% concession and the same level of lettings as per Sept 2007 would generate an income for 2008 (full year equiv) of £10,7365 and 2009 of £11,016 which in real terms would be below the 2007/08 estimate income for the year. The alternative is to set the concessionary rate at 60%, which is shown in brackets in the above table.

A further recommendation made at the allotment holders meeting, supported by all those present, was that the letting year be changed to coincide with the growing year. Thus the new year will run from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December each year with invoices being sent to allotment holders in the October preceding the start of the year.

It is proposed that this new arrangement be fully implemented by January 2009 with 2008 being a transition year. This will mean there will be a 9 month year for 2008 running from April to December 2008 for which plot holders will be charged for a 9 month period then they will be required to make full year payment for 2009 by December 2008.

#### **Recommendation:**

- ***That the proposals taken to the June 2007 allotment holders meeting and set out above be endorsed by the Cabinet***
- ***That until such time as investment is made to the allotments infra structure the annual increase in charges should be in line with Council's overall policy. However, if and when, there are***



***improvements to the allotments it may then be pertinent for the Cabinet to undertake a review of allotment charges.***

### **3.12 What do the allotments cost to run?**

In the past the cost of operating the allotments was included in the grounds maintenance contract cost and was not separately identified .

The key areas of expenditure are

- The administration of the letting of allotments
- Water rates
- Core maintenance costs (Based on the existing maintenance regime)

Within the new Streetcare Partnering Contract the outgoing expenditure is met by Enterprise and they also retain the income generated.

The City Council Streetcare Team does not have any specific staff or resources allotted to allotments.

The water rates for the calendar year 2006 were £3,513 but Enterprise has informed the council that there has been a significant increase in 2007/08. Enterprise are investigating the increase to ascertain the reason and whether or not the bills received need to be challenged.

An estimate for core maintenance, work that does not include the costs of any improvements, is in the region of £5,000 to £6,000 depending on the level of work.

Enterprise has allocated 3 days a week staff time plus on cost and overheads to the administration of the allotments.

Thus on the above basis the current net cost to the council after taking income into account is in the region of £9,000 to £11,000 per year but this could go up if the water rates increase significantly. At the higher figure this equates to a cost per head of population of 0.098p a year

#### ***Recommendation:***

- ***That officers work with Enterprise to confirm the annual cost of operating the allotments***
- ***That the Streetcare Partnering Board receives an annual breakdown of the income and expenditure for allotments along with usage figures.***

### **3.13 Who is responsible for insuring allotments?**

The City Council is responsible for keeping safe common areas within each allotment site and un let allotments and this is covered by the City Council's public liability insurance. This does not extend to individual allotments. The

individual allotment holder is responsible for his or her insurance covering theft, vandalism and public liability.

There is insurance available that allotment associations can take out on behalf of their members. One allotment association in the city is currently exploring this in more detail.

### **3.14 Marketing and promotion of allotments in the City**

There has been no marketing of allotments over the years. Nor has there been any promotion of the benefits of allotments.

At the June 2007 Allotment Holders Meeting it was suggested that more use be made of the Council web site to promote allotments and that an annual news letter would greatly improve communication with allotment holders as well as being a very useful vehicle for promoting a more sustainable approach to the cultivation of allotments. This has worked very well for Cheltenham.

The Task & Finish Group would like to see increased marketing and promotion particularly encouraging low income groups, young people, schools and community groups to get more involved. However they recognise that this cannot be delivered within existing resources and would strongly recommend that if funding is identified for an allotment officer that this be a key part of their role.

### **3.15 Consultation with allotment holders and allotment associations.**

In June this year an allotment holders meeting was arranged which was the first of its kind. It was well attended and welcomed by the allotment holders and it opened up an important means of communication between the Council and the allotment holders. It provided the opportunity for the Council to consult on the proposed fees and charges and other changes and to gain the views of the allotment holders. The meeting was very positive.

When officers organised the allotment holders meeting an invitation went to every allotment holder, as officers were unaware of any allotment association in existence with whom they could consult.

The disadvantages of there being no formal groups representing each allotment site is that holders attending meetings can only represent themselves and there is no easy way to obtain a broad range of views or know whether or not an individual is representing the views of the majority of allotment holders.

It also makes it difficult if either the Council or Enterprise want to work with allotment holders to help improve the site as there is no formal link.

Further benefits of an allotment association is the possibility of bulk purchasing of seeds etc at discounted rates, taking out insurance cover for allotment holders and generally sharing knowledge and information and lastly but not least access to other external funding.

Estcourt Close and Estcourt Park appear to have the most established allotment associations in the City and there are embryonic associations at Tredworth, Robert Raikes and Innsworth.

### **Recommendation**

- ***That an Allotment Forum be established that meets twice a year and that the Cabinet Member for Environment and one member from each of the other parties plus representatives from each of the allotment sites be invited to attend.***
- ***That the Council work with allotment holders to seek to create an allotment association, or similar for each site which may or may not become part of an umbrella allotment association for the City.***
- ***That the next meeting with allotment holders be arranged for the end of January 2008 at which the outcome of this review will be reported.***

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The Task and Finish group has identified that the allotments have been moored in a backwater. They have operated with a low level of maintenance, no promotion or liaison with allotment holders, policies not being reviewed regularly to make sure they are still relevant and in the last contract there was effectively no monitoring. This has resulted in a significant number of uncultivated allotments, encroachment onto paths and other plots, charges not being properly levied and the Council having a poor understanding of what is happening on the allotments.

Since April this year with the commencement of the new Streetcare Partnering Contract Enterprise have reviewed the administration of the allotments. They now have a good record of all the allotment holders who are being levied the correct charge for their plot(s). This means they are now in a position to start letting the uncultivated plots. Enterprise is now providing the council with information on a regular basis. However there is still some work to do before an accurate cost of running the allotment can be confirmed.

At the same time even though there has been no promotion there is a keen interest in allotments with the waiting list currently being more than the plots available. Using the Thorpe Standard of 0.2 hectares per 1000 population there is currently a deficit of 6.58 hectares in the city. However, the majority of residents will be within 1 mile of an allotment site once the Kingsway allotment gardens are provided

The allotment users see improved security and getting uncultivated plots back into use as the highest priorities.

Allotments have a key role to play in the City Council's healthy lifestyle and sustainability agendas. The Task and Finish Group feel there should be greater promotion to of allotments to young people and families to encourage them to use allotments especially as more recent residential developments tend to have smaller garden areas.

Lastly the Task and Finish Group have identified the top priorities being

- Improving security and bringing uncultivated plots back into use
- The creation of an allotment officer post responsible for administering and managing the allotments to include promotion, supporting the allotment associations, education and awareness and development of a warden scheme.

and are seeking cabinet approval for the recommendations as set out in the body of the report .

Lastly but not least I would like to thank my colleagues Chis Witts and Pam Tracey for the time and energy they have put into this review and to the officer who have supported us and everyone else who has contributed. It has been a lot of work but at the same time we have learnt a lot and it has been enjoyable even getting soaked to the skin on the allotment site visit..

**Chair of the Allotment Task & Finish Group**

**Cllr Geraldine Gillespie**

#### **Background information**

- The draft Allotment Strategy, For the City of Gloucester April 2002
- Allotment tenancy agreement
- Notes of the Allotments Holders meeting 25th June 2007
- Notes of the allotment Task & Finish Group meetings
- Allotment law