

BRICKHILL PARISH COUNCIL

ALLOTMENT STRATEGY 2015-2018

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SECTION ONE

1 PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

- 1.1 This allotment strategy has been developed for allotment sites provided by Brickhill Parish Council (either directly or through devolved management), not for privately owned sites.
- 1.2 The overall objective of this strategy is to increase the ability and opportunity for people to cultivate allotment plots in Brickhill. The strategy seeks through its targets and initiatives to optimise the use of allotments for existing and potential plot holders, identify needs and meet demand. All initiatives contained in this document are considered in the context of other Parish Council strategies, policies and objectives.
- 1.3 This document provides a framework for the next three years to develop and manage allotments in partnership with the users, and provides a focus on five main target areas.
 - 1 Ensuring sufficient allotments
 - 2 Promoting allotment gardening
 - 3 Encouraging sustainability
 - 4 Providing good administration
 - 5 Maintaining adequate resources

SECTION TWO

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The provision of allotments by local authorities is a statutory duty. Brickhill Parish Council will continue to provide and promote allotments not only because of this statutory requirement but because allotment gardening can make a valuable contribution to the Parish's sustainability by providing health, social, economic and environmental benefits. These can be summarised as

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

2.2 Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space within the urban environment. They contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom as well as being highly beneficial to the wildlife of the area.

2.3 Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land, and some householders have no individual garden. These circumstances disproportionately disadvantage those on lower incomes. Allotments provide an opportunity to adjust this imbalance.

2.4 The high value – low cost benefits are readily available to all, but most importantly, those who find themselves socially or physically disadvantaged.

SECTION THREE

3 CURRENT PROVISION

3.1 The Site

Brickhill Parish Council operates one allotment site off Brickhill Drive, Bedford.

The site is divided into plots of 10 rods (250 sq m)

The site area is capable of providing a total of 125 plots, but due to shading by trees and drainage problems, only 122 can be practicably let.

A standard full plot is 10 rods (approximately 8.5m wide x 32m long) Half Plots are also available and currently the site has 16 half plots.

3.2 Management

The Allotment site is currently managed on behalf of the parish Council, by the Parish Clerk and Assistant Parish Clerk/Allotments Officer. Staff costs for managing the allotment site are met from the Parish Councils' general staffing budget. The Parish Clerk and Assistant Parish Clerk deal with day to day administration of the Allotments, including:

- Collecting and administering rents
- Administering tenancies
- Letting plots and new tenancy agreements
- Enquiries from prospective tenants including site visits
- Inspecting individual plots on a regular basis

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- Resolving disputes and dealing with complaints
- Arranging day to day maintenance of the site
- Managing alterations and improvement works
- Checking the water meter

An Allotments Handbook has been drawn up and agreed by the Parish Council. This explains the rules in the Tenancy Agreement and what can and cannot be done on the site, along with details of site management and contact details. The Handbook is reviewed and revised as needed.

3.3 Liaison with tenants

The Allotments & Open Spaces Committee meet quarterly and there is always a public open session. Tenants are informed of the meeting (5 days notice) and are welcome to attend.

3.4 Self management

There is at present no element of self management of the site, however the parish council would consider any requests for self management in the future.

3.5 Allotment Association

The Parish Council supports the establishment of an association for tenants of its allotments. The main purposes of an Allotment Association would be to:

- To promote the interests of plot holders
- Organise bulk purchase of compost and manure
- To provide an independent forum for discussion and dissemination of information
- Offer tips on cultivation and promote good practice.

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- Encourage initiatives to protect members from theft, damage and trespass.
- Access sources of funding for improvements to the site ie compost toilet

3.6 Site Maintenance

In addition to arranging for cutting of grass along with the main tracks and the remaining part of the fallow area annually, the parish council also considers the maintenance needs of the site.

The Parish Council are responsible for maintaining the fences on three sides of the site (in other words, all except those on the Curlew Crescent side). Defensive planting alongside the perimeter fence with the community orchard will require hedge laying and this will be the responsibility of the parish council.

There is a mains water supply, with a single inlet from off Brickhill Drive leading to a main that follows the main tracks. Taps from this supply are provided to enable plot holders to fill water containers.

SECTION FOUR

4 DEMAND FOR ALLOTMENTS

- 4.1 In February 2010, 100% of allotment plots were let, with a waiting list of 7 people. Potential tenants are added to the waiting list on a first come, first served basis, but tenancies will be offered according to the criteria detailed in section 5.1.

SECTION FIVE

5 TARGET AREAS OF THE STRATEGY

- 5.1 Ensuring sufficient Allotments
- 5.2 Promoting Allotment Gardening
- 5.3 Encouraging sustainability
- 5.4 Providing Good administration
- 5.5 Maintaining Adequate Resources

5.1 Ensuring Sufficient Allotments

It is the Policy of the Parish Council to continue to meet its legal obligation to provide allotments in Brickhill, for the residents of Brickhill Parish.

The Parish Council owns no land other than the existing site off Brickhill Drive. It is not anticipated that the Parish Council will either sell this site or buy additional sites within the three year period covered by this strategy. The aim therefore is to maximise the use of the existing site – as plots become vacant they are assessed to see if they could be converted into two half plots.

It is the Parish Council's policy to accept new applications for allotments only from persons resident in Brickhill Parish.

In addition to a residents only policy, the Parish Council may exceptionally accept applications from voluntary community groups for the tenancy of allotment(s), where the proposed use is beneficial to the residents of Brickhill and may increase allotment use.

If there are no Brickhill Residents on the waiting list for an Allotment then the Parish Council may consider offering the vacant allotment to a non resident of Brickhill but only if the plot has been vacant for a period of 3 months or more.

5.2 Promoting Allotment Gardening

Current position

It is the Parish Council's policy to promote allotment gardening.

Details of the Allotment site appear on the Parish Council Web site.

Periodically an Allotments newsletter is circulated to all allotment holders.

Articles about the allotments are included in the Parish Council newsletter from time to time, along with details of the cost of rental of plots. These may also be displayed on Parish Council noticeboards.

A community plot run by TCV allows volunteers to get a taste of allotment gardening without having to commit to a full plot initially – this plot is provided free of charge to TCV although this will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Proposals:

An allotments newsletter should be sent to all tenants at least once per year. Where possible this should be sent via email or with other mailing from the Parish Council. Allotment newsletters will be published on the PC website.

Consider increased use of email communication with tenants

Promote use of half size plots to new tenants with no previous allotment experience

Investigate what support could be provided to new tenants e.g. mentors, to reduce early drop-out rate

5.3. Encouraging Sustainability

Current position

Our handbook encourages organic gardening but does not forbid pesticides.

Proposals

To encourage and where possible support good environmental practice including use of organic alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides.

To make available to plot holders information on withdrawal of certain pesticides.

To promote composting, no dig techniques and similar alternative methods.

To encourage plot holders to draw on expertise already available including RHS , National Society of Allotment Gardeners

To consider opportunities for improved wildlife habitats, such as hedge planting, lace-wing and ladybird overwintering shelters.

To reduce maintenance and improve bio diversity by making use of unlettable plots and planting to encourage wildlife.

To consider planting poorly drained or shaded plots with Hazel which could be coppiced for use by plot holders – this will reduce maintenance costs and also provide shelter and encourage wildlife onto the site

To minimise water use by monitoring water meter readings frequently to allow exceptional use / leaks to be detected, and encourage use of organic mulches to conserve soil moisture. Use of rainwater capture by individual plot holders to be encouraged where practicable.

To investigate and promote recycling on the site

5.4 Providing Good Administration

Current position

To ensure that all allotment rents and fees continue to be collected in a timely manner and administered with this strategy.

Future considerations

To encourage the formation of a Brickhill Allotment Association, the purpose of which would be initially to provide a useful forum for plot holders and a contact point with plot holders for the Parish Council.

Once operating to encourage the Allotment Association to undertake beneficial activities, such as bulk buying of compost.

When established and running smoothly, to investigate the possibility of the Allotment Association taking over day to day management of the Allotment site on behalf of the Parish Council.

To circulate to all plot holders an annual financial report showing all income from the allotments and all expenditure by the Parish Council on the Allotment site.

5.5 Maintaining Adequate Resources

Current Position

At present the rental income from the site does not cover running costs with major capital costs having to be met from Parish Council General Reserves. The wages cost of the Assistant Parish Clerk's time spent on allotment administration are also met from the parish Council's staffing budget and not from rental income.

The Parish Council needs to balance the benefits of the allotments provision against the cost to the residents of Brickhill via the Council tax precept.

It is the long term aim of the Parish Council to make the allotment site self financing.

The level of rents, key and plot deposits plus any concessionary schemes is considered annually and any changes are introduced in time for renewals on 1 October. 6 months notice is required ie notice would be given no later than March for an increase in October.

All new tenants are only offered one plot. Where existing tenants have multiple plots this will be allowed to continue until a change of tenancy but the concessionary rate will only apply to one plot.

The Parish Councils policy is to make each vacated plot sufficiently attractive for letting, which could at one extreme include the use of external contractors to clear a plot, at the other, it could include offer of a rent free period to compensate the new tenants for having to clear the plot.

Proposals

In addition to the above there may be opportunities to obtain some external funding through Government, EU and Lottery Grants, but it is felt that this type of funding would be more likely to be made available to a self managing Allotment Association rather than the Parish Council itself.