

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Environment and Amenities Committee
Meeting date	9 March 2022
Report author	Nigel Warner
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Allotments

1. **Purpose of the report**

1.1 To provide a briefing paper on allotments, as requested by the Committee.

2. **Summary**

2.1 At the Committee meeting on 16 November there was an item on the agenda to consider allotment provision in Abingdon and whether that provision could be expanded.

It was agreed “to request a paper from officers which would provide further information on the number of people waiting for allotments, the duties of the Town Council and the potential cost of provision of new allotments.”

2.2 The scope of the report for this meeting was discussed at a pre-agenda meeting with the Chair and Vice-Chair. It was agreed that this paper should set out the current position regarding allotments and that, subject to Members’ direction as to whether the council should explore the possibility of extending its allotment offer, a further report come forward in June 2022 setting out options ahead of a feasibility study and inclusion in the Forward Plan.

3. **Action required and recommendations**

3.1 To approve this report.

3.2 To request officers to undertake further work to establish the demand for additional allotments and to outline the broad options for provision of any additional allotments.

4. **Link to strategic plan and objectives**

4.1 Allotment provision is not in the Forward Plan.

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4.2 Allotment provision was raised as a matter for investigation at the meeting of 16 November 2021 hence this report.

4.3 Allotment provision links to the council's strategic plan and in particular the following objectives:

KO1: To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency.

KO2: To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.

5. **Background**

5.1 The Town Council provides allotments on three sites under its statutory powers. It also has a duty to provide allotments in certain circumstances.

5.2 Town Council Powers

The council's power to provide allotments are contained in the following legislation:

- Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908; Allotments Act 1922; Allotments Act 1925;
- Allotments Act 1950; The Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980, Section 1(5) and Schedules 5 and 34.

Most local authority allotments, including ours, fall within the definition of an allotment garden contained in Section 22(1) of the Allotments Act 1922 which is in an allotment not exceeding one quarter of an acre in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetables or fruit crops for consumption by the occupier and their family. Allotments cannot be land used for the purposes of trade or business. Allotments are treated as agricultural land for the purposes of exemption from domestic rating.

5.3 Duties

Town Councils must provide allotments where there is an unsatisfied demand. Councils must consider written requests by six parliamentary electors or council taxpayers' resident in the parish to provide allotments.

5.4 Local arrangements

Our allotments are managed and administered by allotment associations – see below.

6. **Key information and options**

6.1 Current service delivery arrangements

Our allotments are managed and administered by allotment associations. The

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value of their work has not been quantified but is significant. Without the associations the Council would have to take the service back in-house and this would involve time in administration on tenancy agreements, annual issue of rent demands, maintenance of communal areas, dealing with tenancy and site issues. The current arrangements mean a low-level of involvement by the council: the associations liaise with the council as and when issues arise and the council invoices them for the rental of the allotment sites. The council provides grant funding, upon formal application, to assist with works benefiting the site as a whole. In recent years the available funds have been £2,000 per association and this is usually fully utilised.

6.2 Allotment usage – plots available and vacancies

Our records show the following:

Allotment site	Percentage occupancy 2004/05	Percentage occupancy 2021/22	Number of full plots	Number of half plots	Current waiting list
Drayton Road	86%	98%	60	18	2
West End	72%	94%	88	20	2
Wildmoor	100%	100%	59	96	29

There is a demand for the allotments service and there is no provider of a similar service is apparent in Abingdon or the surrounding area, beyond the parish councils.

Unfortunately, our figures do not go back beyond 2004 but pre-2000 the council's issues in relation to the allotments we in relation to the number of vacant allotment plots. This resulted in issues for the council, with requests for the council to clear over-grown plots and deal with fly tipping.

Now the allotments are fully utilised with waiting lists on all sites and all sites effectively full, the small percentage of vacant plots simply being vacant following one tenant leaving and another commencing.

6.3 Ownership of each site

6.3.1 Drayton Road

This site is located next to the sewage works and has been used as allotments for many years. Under the 1975 deed of transfer (drafted a year after the 1974 local government re-organisation) it is owned by the district council and leased (holding over) to the town council. However I have recently looked at the allotment provisions subsequent to the Local Government Act 1972; whilst not legally qualified but my reading is that there

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is an argument that it should in 1974 have been automatically transferred into the town council as the allotment authority for Abingdon; I will ask our legal advisors to give their opinion.

6.3.2 West End

West End allotments are outside the parish, part of Abingdon Common, west of the A34 and south of the A415. It is owned by the Town Council.

This site was formerly east of the A34, where Tesco is located. It was moved post 1974.

6.3.3 Wildmoor

This site is off Long Tow, north of the A34 and outside of the parish. The allotments at Wildmoor are to the Town Council and the current lease ends on 31 December 2025. If the lease is not renewed by the owners the Town Council will have to acquire an alternative site.

The site was previously south of the A34 but was relocated when Mons Way, Ypres Way and Inkerman Close were developed.

6.4 Next steps

The council's allotments are fully utilised and, having regard to the growth of the town councillors may wish now to proceed with the further investigations outlined at 3.2 (above).

7. Climate change/green implications

7.1 Allotments make a positive contribution to the environment by giving residents the ability to produce fruit and vegetables locally without the consequential environmental costs involved in commercial production and transportation.

7.2 The allotment sites are a haven for biodiversity, with a wide variety of crops for food and also flora and fauna in common areas and boundaries etc.

8. Financial/budget implications

8.1 There are no budget implications directly resulting from this report.

8.2 If the Council wish to extend its allotment offer then there would be significant financial implications in terms of capital. However if the same management model were adopted if new allotments were opened i.e. empowered allotment associations, then the revenue implications would be low.

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9. **HR implications**

9.1 There are no HR implications directly resulting from this report.

9.2 If the Council wish to extend its allotment offer then there would be a significant HR if full project management was undertaken "in-house." This would be reduced by out-sourcing. However if the same management model were adopted if new allotment associations were opened i.e. empowered allotment associations, then the ongoing HR implications would be minimal and accommodated within existing staffing.

10. **Supporting papers and appendices**

10.1 None.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
4 March 2022