



**Carrickfergus
Borough Council**

**ALLOTMENT
STRATEGY**

2008 - 2013

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This strategy was equality screened on January 2008 and adopted by Council on February 2008.

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

- 1.1 The strategy seeks through its targets and initiatives to develop allotment facilities in the Borough of Carrickfergus; and manage the facilities for the period 2008 to 2013. All initiatives contained in this strategy must be considered in the context of other council strategies, policies and objectives.
- 1.2 This document sets out to put in place a framework for the next 5 years to develop and manage allotments in partnership with the users and provides a focus on the four target areas.
- 1.3 It also seeks to promote allotment gardening for:
 - 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

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Allotments could be an important asset to the Borough of Carrickfergus, providing a wide range of benefits to the community and the environment.
- 2.2 Allotments are not just a great way of producing good and low cost food, though this remains important. They offer a variable recreational role involving healthy exercise, social contacts, the fun and challenge of growing competition vegetables, fruit and flowers.
- 2.3 Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space - part of the urban culture. They will contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom as well as being highly beneficial to the wildlife of the Borough.
- 2.4 Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land. Those who live in apartments often have no individual garden. These circumstances disproportionately disadvantage those on lower incomes. Allotments provide an opportunity to adjust this imbalance.
- 2.5 The high value – low cost benefits are readily available to all, but most importantly, those who find themselves socially disadvantaged.
- 2.6 Allotments have been evolving since the Tudor times. The Allotments Act (Northern Ireland) 1932, as amended, enables local Councils to provide, at their discretion, allotments for use by residents in their areas. In providing allotments, local Councils are required, under the 1932 Act, to make regulations concerning the control and management of these facilities.

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2.7 It is Carrickfergus Borough Council's policy to provide and promote allotments because:

- allotment gardening can make a valuable contribution to the Borough's sustainability by providing health, social, economic and environmental benefits
- allotments are an important recreational facility with benefits to both physical and mental well being

2.8 These benefits can be increased significantly over the period of this strategy. Fundamental to this is to increase the number of people involved in allotment gardening.

2.9 **The overall objective of this strategy is to optimise the number of people using allotments.**

This is broken down into four target areas:

- Promoting allotment gardening
- Encouraging sustainability
- Cultivating good administration
- Maintaining adequate resources

2.10 All proposals are set within the overall framework and operation of the council's policies, the local area plan and linked strategies.

3.0 LINKS TO CARRICKFERGUS'S VISION AND STRATEGIES

3.1 The Council's Mission and Vision Statements: These give strong support to the objectives of improving the quality of life for residents and the targeting of resources for community use.

3.2 The Leisure Strategy: Allotments are an important leisure facility and this strategy seeks to maximise the use of allotments as a valuable leisure resource, encouraging fitness in all age groups.

3.3 The Parks & Countryside Strategy: Allotments are an important greenspace facility and this strategy seeks to maximise the use of allotments as a valuable greenspace resource. This strategy helps to meet some of the 'core principles' of the Parks & Countryside Strategy i.e. the 'Healthy Living Centre', 'Promoting Sustainability' and 'Parks with a Presence'.

3.4 Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion: Providing equality of access to all sections of the community is seen as central to the allotment service. This will be considered in the way in which we promote allotments, design and layout of facilities and the setting of charges.

3.5 Community Safety Strategy: Encourage safety by good liaison, self-help schemes and designing in safety and a sense of security in our sites.

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- 3.6 Health Improvement Plan: Links can be made to the Healthy promotions campaigns. Physical exercise in working and relaxing in the fresh air on allotments can benefit people physically and mentally. The production and consumption of vegetables and fruit will contribute to a healthy diet. Allotments may also be used via the GP referral scheme.
- 3.7 Biodiversity Action Plan: Links can be made to the Council's Action Plan on Biodiversity. Allotments make a valuable contribution to biodiversity on a local level and provide a refuge for many species including amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates and small mammals. In parts of the Borough where natural habitat is scarce, allotments can be extremely valuable in terms of wildlife conservation.
- 3.8 Sustainable Development Strategy: By working in partnership internally and externally to deliver the Strategy through mainstreaming social, economic and environmental matters in an integrated manner.
- 3.9 Other Links: This strategy has been prepared with reference the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions 'Good Practice Guide for the Management of Allotments' published in 2001 and the local BMAP Plan for the Borough.

4.0 PROPOSED PROVISION

4.1 The Sites

It is proposed that during the term of this strategy we will locate one allotment adjacent to Eden Playing Fields and consider another adjacent to Greenisland Playing Fields in 2011. Each site will be broken down into plots of $\frac{1}{2}$ ($\frac{1}{4}$ as required) and full size plots on year long Leases. Appendix 2 outlines the *draft* tenancy agreement associated with the Lease.

We will also work with other organisations that would consider a partnership with the Council to provide allotment services or land for allotments. For example a major land owner in the Borough such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). It would also be expected that the NIHE customer base would be a significant user of allotments. This strategy would also contribute to the NIHE core values of 'contributing to improved health and social well-being', 'sustainability and protection of the environment' & 'promoting active citizenship'.

4.2 Management

It is proposed that allotments will be managed by the Parks & Countryside Section, part of the Development Services Department. The maintenance and improvements will be carried out by staff and funded through the annual allotment budget. The Parks & Countryside Development Officer will be responsible for the planning and administration of all sites.

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4.3 It is proposed that each allotment area will have a constituted 'Allotment Association' who will be made up of plot holders. Their main purposes will be to:

- To promote the interests of plot holders
- Organise bulk purchase and resale of seeds, stock and other relevant materials
- Provide a forum for discussion and dissemination of information
- Offer cultivation tips and promote good practice
- Encourage initiatives to protect members from theft, damage and trespass

The Association will have an elected committee. The duties of the committee will be to:

- Advise on the tenancy rules and ensure they are followed
- Resolve disputes and pass on complaints and items requiring maintenance to the Council
- Liaise with existing and potential plot holders and the Allotment Associations.
- Fund raise to continually improve the site.

Self-Management: It is envisaged that the allotments could in the longer term be managed under a system of self-management via the Council 'Facility Management' policy.

4.4 Budget

Allotment Budget Summary Breakdown

Overheads in 1st year	£
Set Up (per site)	4,000
Reactive & Planned Work	0
Hire	400
Marketing	1,500
Equipment	1,000
Rental Income	- 400
TOTAL BUDGET	6,500
Year 2 Annual Budget	
Set Up	0
Reactive & Planned Work	500
Hire	400
Marketing	500
Equipment	500
Rental Income	- 700
TOTAL BUDGET	1,200

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5.0 TARGET AREAS OF THE STRATEGY

These target areas of the strategy will be set within overall policies and strategies of the Council.

5.1 Promoting Allotment Gardening

The use of allotments both nationally and locally has declined since the 'Dig-For-Victory' days of World War 2. It is envisaged that some initial marketing and education may be required to ensure our proposed allotment site (and any new sites) are successful. And ensure a broad range of residents will be cultivating allotments by the end of this strategic term.

- a) The production of easy to follow useful information, including:
 - pamphlets
 - display boards/posters at key times/sites; and to broaden the locations where these can be found, for example GP surgeries, libraries, leisure centres, health food shops, other support groups etc.
 - website information
 - on site notice boards
 - link other promotions, by the Council or other bodies, for example healthy living, organic growing, traditional skills, historical exhibitions
- b) To make a wide range of plots available to suit different needs and ethics. This will include, where appropriate:
 - standard plots
 - half and quarter plots
 - group plots
- c) To identify and designate plots suitable for those with mobility difficulties or for organic use, where demand is indicated.
- d) To give customer care and on site help for new or inexperienced plot holders and to reduce early drop out rates by:
 - a tenants handbook;
 - use of notice boards;
 - introduction of site committee;
 - encouraging better partnership.
- e) To prioritise available resources, in a balanced way, between maintaining promotional activity and the maintenance and improvement of site facilities. These would include:-
 - prepare newly created plots ready for occupation;
 - provide a skip to site for bulk removal of allotment arisings;

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- keep tracks and paths accessible including areas designated for people with disabilities.

5.2 Encouraging Sustainability

Allotment sites provide an increasingly valuable and noticeable area of green space, as gardens generally reduce in size. However, the security needs of allotments mean that they cannot fully be a substitute for public open space.

A neglected or derelict site is often a rich habitat for wildlife but so can a well-managed one. Opportunities to develop wildlife value in hedging areas and sections that have no realistic prospect of coming back into use, but care is needed to ensure this is not to the detriment of allotment provision, so careful evaluation of these options would be needed.

Within the cultivated area of allotments, principles of sustainable gardening are relevant. The Council has a commitment to minimising the use of pesticides (this includes chemical insecticides and weed killers) via our stated biodiversity commitments. However this commitment will be approached by persuasion not coercion through rules and regulations, except where an area of plots is designated for 'organic' use.

- To encourage, and where possible, support good environmental practice including organic alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides.
- To encourage Associations to drawing on the expertise already in the allotment movement both locally and nationally through links with National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG).
- To consider opportunities that arise for improved wildlife habitats in partnership with the allotment holders and their Associations i.e. wildlife groups. In particular using natural features within the site, for example; hedging.
- To support the development of the allotment Associations and appropriate trading to support cost effective gardening and encourage organic or sustainable gardening. Opportunities for Associations to sell surplus fruit and vegetables produced on allotments should be investigated. These may include sale days in allotment huts or the possible use of the Local Thursday Market.

5.3 Cultivating Good Administration

The need for good records and administration is essential for the efficient running of this public service and the development of a partnership approach to management.

- It is proposed that allotments facilities are managed directly by the Council. However, it is envisaged that self-management may be appropriate. The on-going development of the Allotment Association

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could provide a platform to encourage the optimum participation and ultimately self-management of allotment facilities.

- b) On-site customer care is desirable and if this can be done by committed plot holders then the Council will be able to have more focus on forward planning, financial management, promotion of site(s) to a wider audience and supporting the development of the Associations.
- c) The Council must ensure that allotment sites, including those leased to the Associations under a self-management scheme are managed with probity and equity, and therefore leases will include appropriate requirements as specified under the Council Facility Management policy.
- d) To encourage the Allotment Associations to be active in providing a useful forum for their plot holders, in particular to have healthy and appropriate trading services to reduce the costs of allotment gardening, to accurately represent the views of their members in resolving problems, prioritising any future spend and initiatives.
- e) To carry out basic essential maintenance to the infrastructure of the sites and to consult the plot holders / association in the prioritisation of available funds for improvements.
- f) To provide on site customer care for all plot holders, with special emphasis on new and inexperienced allotment gardeners. To do this consideration will be given to the introduction of formal 'site representatives' (this could be the Chairperson of the Committee) to complement the role of the Council Officer and how their efforts should be recognised. For example in some other local authorities that have found this useful have provided recognition by providing up to one standard allotment plot free of charge.
- g) To ensure that tenancy agreements are time bound and flexible. The purpose of this will be to ensure that the service continues to develop and the tenancies/leases reflect the current vision for allotments.

5.4 Maintaining Adequate Resources

Section 4.4 gives a summary breakdown of the proposed budget that would build the allotments and then maintain the facilities. This is £6,500 for the first year and then £1,200 per annum, supplemented by anticipated rental income.

The higher the vacancy rate the lower the income and the greater the resources needed for weed control, promotion and re-letting.

Direct comparison of rents is difficult as local authorities have different discount systems. The proposed charges and discounts are shown in Appendix 1.

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From time to time there may be opportunities to obtain some external funding through Government, European Union or Lottery Grants.

Other opportunities for income generation may emerge, for example the Lottery's New Opportunities Fund for health related promotions and community allotment schemes.

Neither of these options are likely to provide the core funding required to maintain the service but will be useful for development work in education, biodiversity and improved infrastructure.

- a) To minimise the vacancy rate to maximise income. The occupancy rate is currently just below 87%. The target is to improve occupancy by 1% per year for the period of this strategy.
- b) Opportunities for external funding for improvement or promotional projects and apply as found appropriate.
- c) The fees and charges will be reviewed from time to time, but with the value of low cost food production, healthy activity and social inclusion in mind.