

Brighton & Hove Allotment Strategy 2014-2024



[logos] Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation, Brighton & Hove City Council

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Foreword

Because many of the issues covered in this document are of a long term nature this strategy sets out a route map for the next 10 years. It is underpinned by an action plan for the next three years which will be reviewed annually by the Allotment Liaison group. A strategy review will take place in 2019. This strategy has been produced in partnership and is jointly owned by Brighton & Hove City Council and the Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation. It is supported by the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and recognised as a key area of work in achieving the ambitions set out in *Spade to Spoon Digging Deeper* the city's food strategy. The findings of the research and consultation work that inform this strategy are also important for broader work on health and wellbeing, healthy ageing, physical activity and environmental sustainability and evidence gathered will be shared widely including with Public Health, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Local Strategic Partnership.

The strategy was developed over 2013 led by an Allotment Strategy Working Group.

The group first met in December 2012 and included:

Brighton & Hove City Council	Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation (BHAF)	Other BHAF members on Strategy Working Groups
Gillian Marston	Alan Phillips	Hannes Froehlich
Jan Jonker	Mark Carroll	Teresa Cairns
Robert Walker	Allan Brown	Henry Christie
David Cooper	Russ Howarth	Richard Howard
Graeme Rolf	Anne Glow	Hilary Standing
Brighton & Hove City Council Public Health	Emily Gardiner	Saskia Wesnigk-Wood
Barbara Hardcastle	Simon Powell	Melanie Matthews
		Giuseppina Salamone
		Gerry Nevill
Brighton & Hove Food Partnership	National Association of Allotments	
Vic Borrill	Paul Neary	
Emily O'Brien		
Helen Starr Keddle		

A huge amount of effort went into strategy development by these and others including over 700 hours of unpaid volunteer time from the Allotment Federation. This strategy is underpinned by the opinions of the allotment community including the 1700+ people who participated in surveys and the 70+ who attended meetings or events, many of whom also contribute a huge amount of voluntary work on allotment sites. Thank you to them all!

Abbreviations

BHCC = Brighton & Hove City Council

Summary of key findings and recommendations

This strategy aims to make allotments enjoyable, inclusive, sustainable and affordable for the people of Brighton & Hove.

It is jointly produced by Brighton & Hove City Council and Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation who worked in partnership to consult the city's allotment community. The strategy is informed and guided by evidence from the consultation and sets down current practices and future ambitions.

Brighton & Hove's allotment community is comprised of 6000 food growers with 3100 plots on 37 sites. The strategy emphasises increasing the number of people growing high quality local food by ensuring the availability of good quality land. It promotes a self-sustaining and efficient service, encourages site participation, while fostering biodiversity, organic practices, good food and healthy living. It encourages a cooperative approach.

Around 1800 people were involved in developing the strategy, many of whom contributed substantial time to respond to surveys that generated valuable and detailed evidence. Almost everyone stated that the major benefits of allotments included access to healthy food and general exercise. Whilst allotments did not bring about major savings on food bills, individuals and families reported that they felt able to make better choices (e.g. organic or healthier food).

A large majority thought that their allotment has a powerful impact on their overall health and happiness, relieving stress and improving their mental health; while many enjoy being part of a community. In comparison to the general population, allotmenters feel healthier. Charities and community groups run 30 community plots providing access and facilities for vulnerable people. They too emphasise the benefits of allotments for good mental health.

It is clear that more work should be done to understand how participation in food growing can lead to savings in health and social care costs and a better quality of life. The findings of this research should be shared widely.

The Allotment Strategy makes recommendations on accessibility to ensure that all sections of the community can participate. This includes protecting the

concessionary discount of 25% on allotment rental; targeting those who may benefit most, and ensuring that suitable plots are available for those with limited mobility. A feasibility study is needed on the possibility of 'fast tracking' applications from certain priority individuals and community groups.

Many people on allotments care passionately about their own plot and the wider allotment community. This is an asset that this strategy seeks to recognise and build on. A co-operative and participative approach is essential for delivering the strategy, overseeing the action plan, and running the service if the ambitions set out in the strategy are to be achieved. The strategy makes recommendations around structures for governance; developing allotment rules; and communication to facilitate this building on the trust and goodwill of the strategy processes.

Four out of five people reported being happy with their current plot size; however there is overwhelming support for introducing a choice of plot sizes, changing the current policy of only letting half plots. This choice will include full plots, half plots and the consideration of the introduction of new smaller individual beds. An important finding is that the number of people on allotment waiting lists is possibly half the number previously thought, about 1000 people.

An improved, chargeable service should be introduced for those on the waiting list. People should be kept informed of their position on the waiting list, know if there is spare capacity at other sites and have information on training, site open days, and co-working opportunities. There should be better information about the time commitment for different size plots and the alternative options for food growing. Once they start renting an allotment many allotmentees want better training and information and to have opportunities to be mentored by more experienced growers.

In 2013 there were over 400 empty plots, representing lost income and causing frustration to plot holders and those on the waiting list. This figure needs to be reduced via streamlining the lettings process, giving better support to site representatives, who manage lettings; and improving ICT systems.

Allotments play an important role in conserving the biodiversity of the city. There is good practice already around composting; growing organically; minimising chemical use; and planting schemes that benefit pollinators / bees, but more can be done around the management of water usage and rainwater harvesting.

Allotmenters already contribute thousands of hours each year in volunteer time. Volunteers run the Allotment Federation and Site Associations, manage lettings and cultivation notices (Site Representatives) and organise social events, tidy up days and/or routine maintenance at some sites. The strategy recommends providing greater clarity, accountability and support for the role of Site Representatives, while encouraging more people to participate and increasing the range of opportunities for volunteering.

There is considerable difference in levels of on site participation by allotmenters across the city ranging from little or no involvement to site associations that run shops, organise open days and help with running the site. The strategy recommends that all sites are encouraged and helped to undertake activities that encourage on site participation and communication.

This strategy seeks to work towards a self-sustaining and efficiently run service that keeps down costs for both tenants and the Council. Rent rises should be minimised and avenues explored for reducing costs. Additional sources of revenue should be explored, especially services which would benefit plot holders as well as generate income. Grants or sponsorship for certain pieces of work should be sought. There should be a voluntary option to pay a higher rent for those on higher incomes. If a concession is not needed, the option for individuals to waive it voluntarily should be promoted. In parallel, consideration is needed on whether concessions for vulnerable groups could be funded via the City's public health budget.

In the longer term, exploring greater self-management on site is needed to strengthen community involvement, encourage participation while promoting sustainability and reducing costs.

Introduction

Purpose of allotments

Allotments are primarily about **growing food** however as the evidence from the strategy consultation shows, allotments are about 'more than just the veg'.

The benefits for the mental health and wellbeing of residents; and the role that allotments play in the city's network of green spaces are also reasons for ensuring that the allotment community in the city thrives.

Why and how was this strategy was developed

Why an allotment strategy for Brighton & Hove?

- A lack of an agreed allotment strategy in the past had meant confusion about how priorities had been decided, and how decisions were made, leading to communication breakdown between stakeholders.
- This strategy was developed against a background of reduced funding available to the City Council, which led to controversial price increase proposals for allotment holders in 2012. Other issues were opposition to the council policy on only letting half plots and frustrations around the length of the waiting list.
- The city's food strategy *Spade to Spoon: Digging Deeper 2012* recognised the importance of allotments in achieving the ambitions of a sustainable food system and recommended that strategic work on this issue be undertaken.
- Plot holders and people on the waiting list were telling the Council and Allotment Federation how important allotments were to them, and asking for the opportunity to contribute ideas on how the city's allotment could be run in the future.
- With 3000+ plot holders and at least twice that number of people involved in allotments, their reasons and benefits will differ. The production of a strategy sought to respect different motivations and respond to the changing demographics of allotmenters; and maintain a fair service whilst keeping a firm eye on the primary purpose of allotments – food growing.

How has the strategy been developed?

The Allotment Strategy is co-produced by Brighton & Hove City Council and the Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation (BHAF). A strategy steering group oversaw the process with the involvement of Council Officers, staff from the Public Health team and the Food Partnership. BHAF's team was elected from its membership and its participation in the strategy discussed at their AGM in March 2013. BHAF members were also invited to participate in strategy working groups that looked at land, governance, finance and research. Regular strategy updates were included in BHAF newsletters and on their website.

Key principles in developing the strategy were:

- **Partnership:** without the commitment of both the council and the Allotment Federation to jointly look for solutions and commit to resolving them together, this strategy could never have been written. This principle of partnership work will need to be maintained if this strategy is to be successfully implemented.
- **Informed by evidence:** this included open sharing of information with the strategy steering / working groups about the current way the service is delivered including detailed financial information.
- **That it would involve a setting down of current practices and future ambitions:** this is so that there is an understanding of where we are (even if the people involved now leave), where we want to be and a framework for making decisions in future.
- **A bottom up approach:** the strategy was built with a commitment to being led by the allotment community at its heart with time built into the process for consultation and engagement. Consultation included:
 - Two very detailed surveys – of plot holders (808), community plots (9) and of people on the waiting list (901) – which between them gathered over 1700 responses and generated an enormous wealth of information and opinion
 - A consultation event with over 50 attendees
 - A facilitated focus group with 12 site representatives

- Interviews with key council staff

The consultation work with plot holders and the waiting list and the compilation of the strategy document has been supported by the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership.

The Allotment Strategy and Action Plan is recognised as a key area of work in achieving the ambitions set out in 'Spade to Spoon Digging Deeper: a food strategy for Brighton & Hove' (2012). There is detailed information on the consultation which took place in [Appendix 1: Consultation for the Allotment Strategy](#).

Because many of the issues covered are of a long term nature the strategy set out a route map for the next 10 years. It is underpinned by an action plan which will be reviewed annually by the Allotment Liaison Group¹. A full strategy review will take place in 2019. This is a living document that will require adaptation over time.

Implementing the strategy

This strategy includes an action plan. During Year 1 the strategy steering group will meet quarterly to ensure that momentum against the action plan is maintained and to allow the proposed new structures for the governance of allotments to become established.

The strategy recognises the funding constraints faced by the allotment service and that some of its aspirations will be dependent on securing additional funding.

¹ A new liaison group with terms of reference will be established to include BHAF, BHCC and other stakeholders

Vision and Objectives

The Vision:

Enjoyable, inclusive, sustainable and affordable allotments for Brighton & Hove.

The Objectives:

1. Provide an economic way for people to produce good quantities of high quality, locally grown food.
2. Increase the number of people participating in food growing on allotments, so that all sections of the community – particularly the most vulnerable - can enjoy the benefits and fulfill their horticultural potential.
3. Ensure sufficient availability of good quality, accessible land for allotments.
4. Work towards a self-sustaining and efficiently run service that keeps down costs for both tenants and the Council.
5. Encourage on site participation to ensure the protection and promotion of allotments for food growing.
6. Support the very best practice in growing, so that allotments are a source of education and inspiration for the whole city in good food and healthy living.
7. Ensure that the allotment sites, alongside the main role of food growing, play a role in conserving the biodiversity of the city contributing to a healthy living environment.
8. Take a co-operative and participative approach to running the service and developing allotment policies and practices.
9. Ensure that learning and evidence gathered from the development of this strategy is shared within the city and used to inform other policy work.

Allotments: The Context

History of allotment provision

Allotments came about as a result of the Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th Centuries. These were a series of Acts of Parliament which enclosed the open fields and common land across the country and removed the existing rights of local people to grow food on previously common land.

The right to an allotment was promoted by the Victorians and was eventually made law in the '1908 Smallholdings and Allotments Act'. Allotments were traditionally rented by those on lower incomes but during the World Wars and the 'Dig for Victory' campaigns they were more widely used. There is more information on allotment legislation in [Appendix 3: Allotment legislation & modern interpretation](#).

Allotments in Brighton & Hove

The service is managed by the City Council on land owned by them. It is one of the largest allotment services in the country. There are 37 allotment sites with 3092 plot holders². There are 30 community plots used by volunteers and/or service users of voluntary sector organisations. Three sites provide specific features for limited mobility users (18 plots). The response to the strategy survey suggests that 6000+ adults regularly take part in allotment gardening.

In addition to allotment growing, there is a thriving grow-your-own culture in the city including 45 community food growing projects on land other than allotments.

Profile of plot holders

More information on plot holders can be found in [Appendix 1: Consultation for the allotment strategy](#) but some key points to note are:

Information from Council statistics on plot holders (as of Sept 13)

- Plot holders are now 45% male, 53% female (2% not known/not applicable) - whereas in the past more men were plot holders than women
- The majority are in the 44-63 year old age bracket
- 412 (or 15%) are over 64
- Over time the profile of the allotment community has been getting younger.

² In October 2013

Information gathered from the plot holders' survey (808 responses)³

- 20% use their plot with children
- 25% of allotmenters garden alone
- 9.5% consider themselves to have a disability
- 32.5% are full time employed
- There is a fairly even distribution across different income brackets.

There is more information on specific groups of users in [Allotment accessibility](#).

Concessions

The Council offers a concession of 25% on allotment rent for certain groups of people. This concession has to be applied for and is taken up by around a quarter of plot holders. Concessions are for people over 60, residents in receipt of benefits (income support / disability benefits) and students. The largest group of concessions are those aged 60+ with 704 (23% of plot holders) getting this discount. Not all allotmenters that are eligible for a discount choose to apply for it.

Waiting list / vacant plots

Work undertaken as part of this strategy review suggests that the current waiting list for plots is approximately 1000 people, with the average waiting time for a plot around 2 years - depending on the site.

At the end of 2013 there were 400+ vacant plots in the city and managing vacant plots / waiting list demand is a key area of this strategy. For more detail see [Waiting Lists and Demand for Allotments](#)

Plot size

In Brighton & Hove there are a variety of plot sizes most are either 250m² plots referred to as 'full plots' and 125m² plots referred to as 'half plots'.

³ At the time the survey was undertaken the full number of plot holders was calculated as 2716 so this is an impressive response rate of approx 30%. Independent evaluation work undertaken as part of the process suggests that the survey sample is representative of plot holders in terms of gender, site, plot size, concession and reason for concession although slightly less so for age (survey slightly younger sample). For more information see Appendix 1.

Since 2008 plot splitting and re-opening of derelict allotment land has led to an increase in the total number of people growing on allotments - with 3111 available plots as opposed to 2311 in 2008. However restricting people to a half plot and splitting in half every full plot that became available was an approach that the Allotment Federation and a number of Site Associations did not agree with for reasons that are outlined in [Appendix 7: Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation reasons for opposing further splitting of plots](#). These include their view that a half plot is not enough land to grow sufficient food to feed a family on or practise proper crop rotation and that smaller plots lead to overcrowding, increased administration and an over-cultivation of land with a loss of bio-diversity.

Understanding and addressing this complex issue of balancing demand with an appropriate provision of land suitable for differing needs was a key issue for this strategy. For more information see [Land, plot size and plot splitting](#).

Costs

In 2012/13, the rental income from allotments was £107,155 and the expenditure was £155,123. All the council's allotment income currently comes from plot rentals. The shortfall between income and expenditure, called the allotment service subsidy was approx £48,000 in 2012/13

The rental charge per m² of an allotment in 2013/14 was 28.56p. This means that a half plot (125m²) cost £35.70; and a full plot (250m²) cost £71.40. This price currently includes the land rent (m²), water, security & fencing, basic maintenance and administration.

The [Resources and finance](#) section gives more information on costs and charges.

Why allotments are important for our city

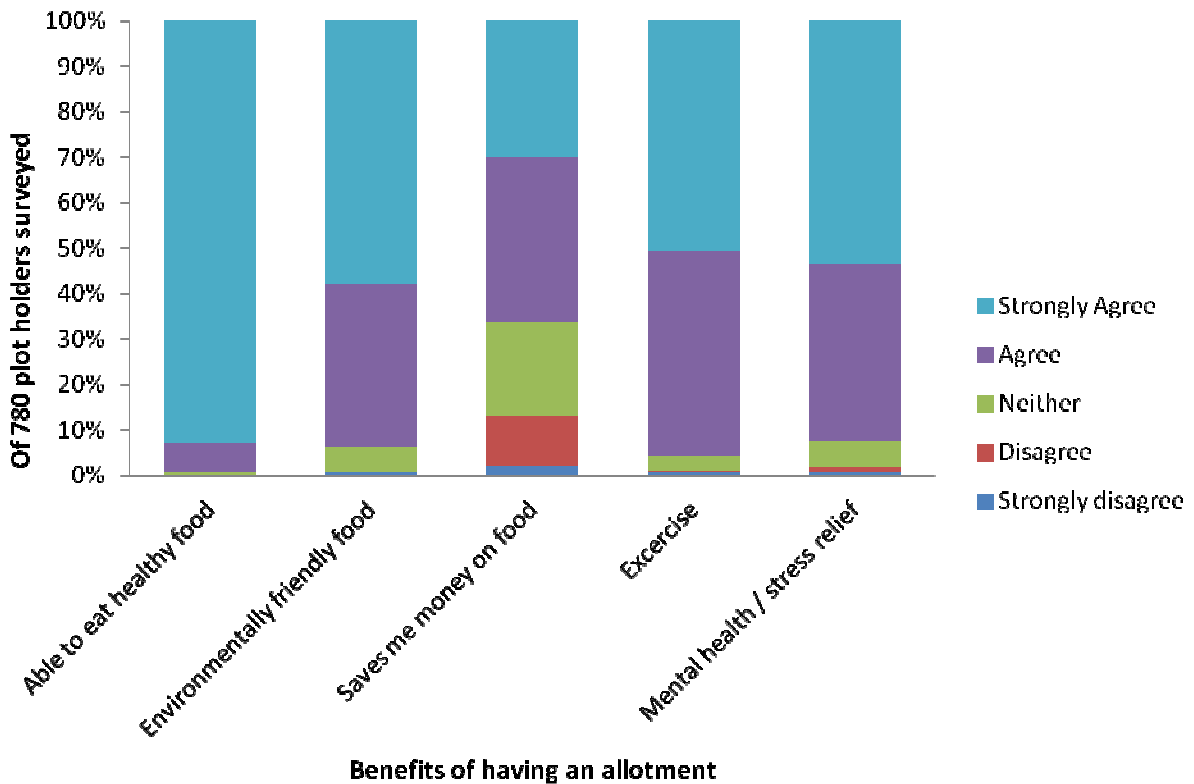
Benefits of Allotments

The survey of plot holders asked respondents to rate the benefits of having an allotment against the following areas:

- I am able to eat healthy food
- My food is grown with low environmental impact
- It saves me money on my food bill
- I am more aware of nature and the environment
- I can meet and socialise with people of different ages and backgrounds
- To improve mental health / provide stress relief
- General exercise

Overall there was strong agreement with all of the benefits statements. For detailed analysis of this section of the survey see [Appendix 1: Consultation for the Allotment Strategy](#)

Benefits of having an allotment responses from the plot holders survey 2013



The survey also asked plot holders to rate their overall health and their perception of the impact of their allotment on their health and happiness. People viewed their allotment as having a powerful impact on their overall health and happiness with 74% giving this a score of 8 or more out of 10.

The majority of allotmentees from the survey say that having an allotment is about access to healthy and sustainable food but 80% also feel that allotments benefit their mental health, 95% say it is good exercise and 72% say they feel part of a community.

Plot holders reported (free text comments and consultation events) that whilst saving money overall may not be the main benefit; an allotment did allow them to make food choices (e.g. organic or healthier food) that they wouldn't otherwise have been able to. The younger age groups tend to see growing food with low environmental impact as a particular benefit.

A striking difference in terms of the seven benefits listed was that people with disabilities saw greater benefit for all seven compared to those people without disabilities. The main differences were seen in terms of saving money on food bills,

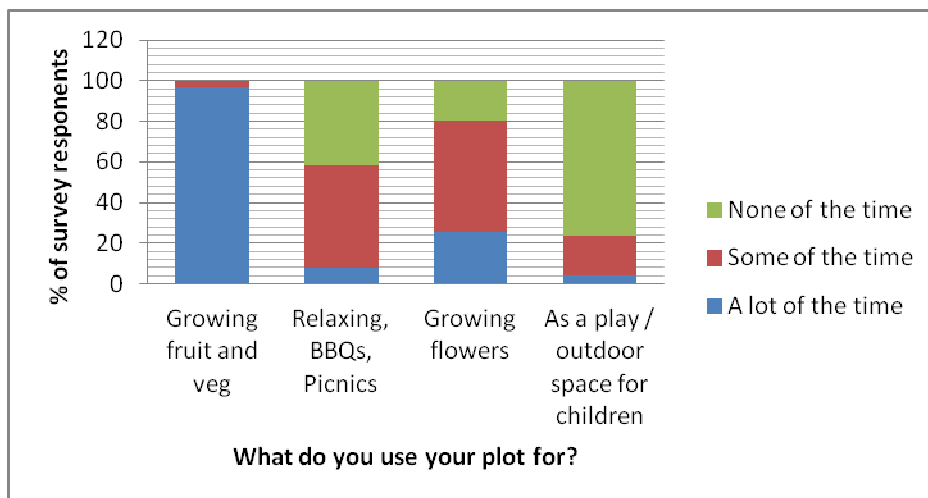
being more aware of nature and the environment, improving mental health and general exercise.

In comparisons across the employment groups it appears that unemployed people perceived greater benefits than employed people in particular for accessing healthy food, saving money, mental health and general exercise. The highest rating for the benefit being saving money came from unemployed people. Retired people and carers reported high benefits in terms of socialising and general exercise.

Access to food grown yourself

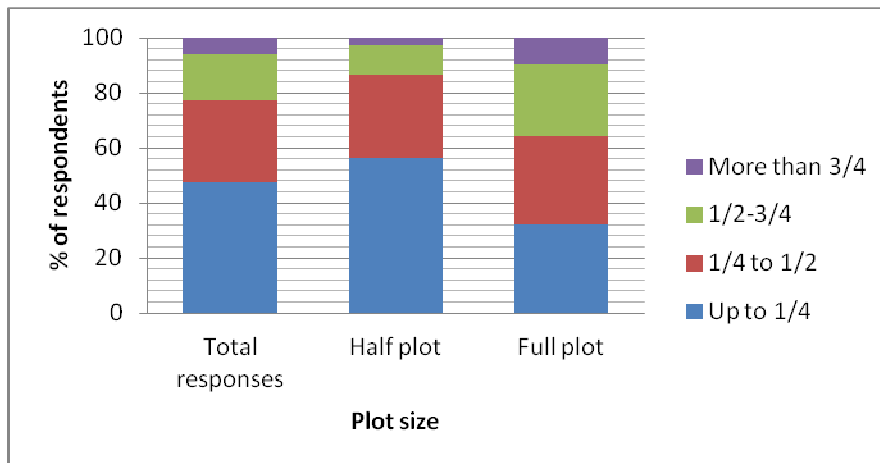
As defined by the Allotments Act of 1922 allotments are *wholly or mainly cultivated for the production of vegetables or fruit crops*. A plot in Brighton & Hove can also be used for growing flowers or as a leisure area as defined by the allotment rules for the city.

The plot holder survey asked people what they use their plot for



The survey also asked people what proportion their fruit and veg consumption came from their plot. It can be seen that of the plot holders in the survey (77%) get less than half of their fruit and veg from their plot.

Averaging it out over the year what proportion of your fruit and vegetable consumption comes from your plot?



Not surprisingly given the smaller amount of land those on half plots generally report a lower proportion (56% said less than $\frac{1}{4}$ compared to 32% of those on a full plot). However an average fruit and veg consumption per day per person in the UK is 258g⁴ so this is still a significant amount of food being produced on allotment land in the city. Further research here may be helpful.

When compared back to the seven general benefits, those who reported increased levels of fruit and veg consumption provided by their plot were also more likely to report increased benefits in terms of eating healthily, growing food with low environmental impact and saving money on food bills. Therefore those that grow a greater proportion of their food gain greater benefits.

Interestingly, there was no difference in improving mental health or stress release according to the proportion of fruit and veg consumption provided by the plot. This particular benefit was seemingly universal for all allotmenters, regardless of how much of their fruit and veg consumption was provided by their allotment.

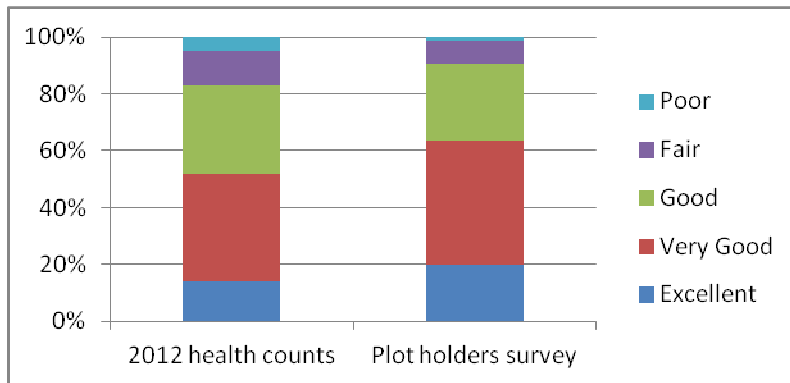
Health and Mental Health Benefits

Those answering the plot holders survey (n=787) were asked to rate their overall health. The same question was asked in the 2012 health counts survey⁵

In general would you say your health is

⁴ <http://www.eufic.org/article/en/expid/Fruit-vegetable-consumption-Europe/>

⁵ <http://www.bhlis.org/surveys>



From this it can be seen that in general allotmenters say they have better health than the general population.

Allotmenters were asked to consider the extent to which having an allotment is an important factor in their health and happiness (on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest). 90% of plot holders surveyed believed that allotments were important to their health (range 7 to 10) and a remarkable 42% gave this figure a top rating of 10. More women reported that having an allotment was an important factor in their health and happiness than men and the older age groups especially agreed that the allotment contributes to their overall health and happiness.

Unemployed people rated their health as the poorest of all employment groups, although they provided one of the highest ratings for the allotment acting as an important factor in their health and happiness. In general, people with a disability provided a lower score for their overall health – 50% rated it as fair or poor relative to 4.1% of those not having a disability.

Those with a disability saw the allotment as a means of contributing to their overall health and happiness to a greater extent to those without a disability.⁶ Clearly, having an allotment plays a valuable role in people’s health and happiness, particularly for those people with disabilities and unemployed people.

It would not be possible for me to put a price on the significance that having an allotment has had for me in terms of improvement to my physical and mental well-being. I am able to harvest a small but reasonably sized amount of produce from my small half plot-all delicious of-course! But the primary benefits are social and spiritual. I can't imagine my life now, without having an allotment – Plot holders survey response

⁶ mean score of 9.19 versus 8.44

Healthy diets and exercise

A very significant number of plot holders agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that a benefit of having an allotment was to eat healthy food (98%) or for general exercise (96%).

Obesity is estimated to have cost the NHS in Brighton & Hove £78.1 million in 2010⁷. York University⁸ state that the [cost of Diabetes](#) is approximately £23.7 billion with direct and indirect costs in the UK in 2010/11. Locally, the Clinical Commissioning Group (NHS Brighton & Hove) spent £3.1 million on prescriptions for Diabetes items between April 2012 and March 2013⁹, which is equivalent to £302 per adult with diabetes.

Forms of Diabetes are preventable through the consumption of good food and undertaking healthy exercise. NICE guidance¹⁰ emphasises local action to promote a healthy diet and physical activity among communities at high risk.

Mental health and wellbeing

In England, mental health conditions cost approximately £105 billion a year, due to loss of earnings and associated treatment and welfare costs¹¹. Up to one person in four experience some form of mental health illness in their lifetime.

92% of survey responses from plot holders agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that a benefit of having an allotment was to improve mental health / provide stress relief

Factors that are known to support emotional wellbeing have been developed by the New Economics Foundation into 'Five Ways' based on five simple messages about what helps to maintain positive mental health

Connect – Be active – Take notice – Keep learning – Give

⁷ NHS Brighton & Hove Public Health Directorate (2011)

⁸ York Health Economic Consortium Report, Journal of Diabetes Medicine (2012)

⁹ Diabetes Community Health Profiles 2012/13 developed by Yorkshire and Humberside Health Intelligence.

¹⁰ <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/PH35>

¹¹ Centre for Mental Health 2010

Allotments provide an ideal setting to take part in activities that maintain positive mental health as can be seen by the survey results.

From the plot holders survey:

- 701 people agreed or strongly agreed that having an allotment made them more aware of nature and the environment
- 590 felt they were good places to meet and socialise with people of different ages and backgrounds
- 779 people agreed or strongly agreed that their site was a friendly place
- 562 agreed or strongly agreed that they felt they belonged to a community on their site.

“My allotment is the only reason I leave my flat. If it were not for my plot I would vegetate indoors” Plot holders survey

Recommendations

Allotment provision for both the population as a whole and for vulnerable groups in particular should be regarded as an effective intervention for the prevention of ill health, and evidence of the health benefits cited in the allotment plot holder’s survey should be incorporated into the city’s Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and decision making about public health.

More work should be done to unpick the findings of the survey that plot holders are in better health than the general population by comparing Health Counts data for certain population groups to the survey data.

Work should be undertaken on the Social Return on Investment of the allotment service for the city looking at if participation by certain groups can lead to savings in health / social care costs.

As part of the equalities impact assessment, access to the service should be reviewed to ensure that those who would most benefit can participate including communities at risk of poor physical and mental health

(see later) for example via community plots, fast tracking opportunities for certain groups (perhaps via GPs) or specific promotional work with certain communities. (see also [Allotment accessibility](#)).

Information about allotments should be included on the city's Information Prescription website and included in any future work on social prescribing.

Information from this work should be shared with the national Growing Health project (Sustain).

Role of allotments for biodiversity / sustainability

Allotments offer important spaces for small-scale food-growing, as spaces for people to take healthy exercise and relax but they also provide potential havens for local wildlife. In the city they are an important part of the green networks that provide an important role in management of bio-diversity¹²

Brighton & Hove along with neighbouring local authorities and other partners from the not for profit and private sectors is applying to UNESCO for Biosphere Reserve status and the recommendations in this strategy with regards to allotments overlap with the Biosphere management plan¹³.

The Biosphere management plan recommends that allotment sites are encouraged to be more wildlife friendly by incorporating nature areas / elements as well as working with plot holders on practices around water management and minimising the use of chemicals.

¹² Green networks are the interlinked green spaces in the city that connect the urban and countryside areas. http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/brighton-hove.gov.uk/files/downloads/ldf/Green_Network_for_Brighton_Hove_final_report.pdf

¹³ www.biospherehere.org.uk p83 for section on allotments.

This allotment strategy recognises that more can be done to incorporate nature areas especially around the edges of sites, within hedgerows or in communally managed areas. Plots themselves need to be managed within the cultivation rules, although as is covered in the section on rules and fairness there is a need for a greater clarity (and possibly training for those doing inspections) over the difference between problem pernicious weeds and companion planting, green manures and fallow land (all elements of an organic approach that would also support wildlife).

There is already good practice on sites. The survey showed that of the 771 people who responded to the question about environmentally friendly practices

- 83% grow food with a minimum of chemicals and 74% grow organically
- 94% make their own compost
- 78% plant flowers to attract pollinators

As is well documented, work to protect bee populations from decline is an important element of food production and alongside planting to support pollinators bee keeping is allowed on allotment sites (with a permit) and this will remain.

With regards to water management there could be improvements

- 65% of people said they collect rainwater
- 56% of people said they garden in ways that reduce water use
- Information gathered during the strategy process suggests that there are problems with leaking pipes on certain sites

With the allotment service water bill coming to £25,000 a year and Brighton & Hove being identified by national government as an area of 'serious water stress' this is a key area for action.

Recommendations

Encourage plot holders to minimize the use of chemicals / grow organically including signposting to training and information on this subject especially for new plot holders.

Promote opportunities for people on the waiting list to learn about organic growing for example at BHOGG and the Whitehawk Community Food Project.

Provide information and training around gardening in ways that minimise water use and encourage rain water harvesting.

Work to identify sites where the worst problems are for water leakage in order that any maintenance work can be prioritised.

Link in with experts e.g. Sussex Wildlife Trust / RSPB to look at managing habitats on the edges of sites for the benefit of wildlife.

Continue to permit bee keeping on site (with a permit).

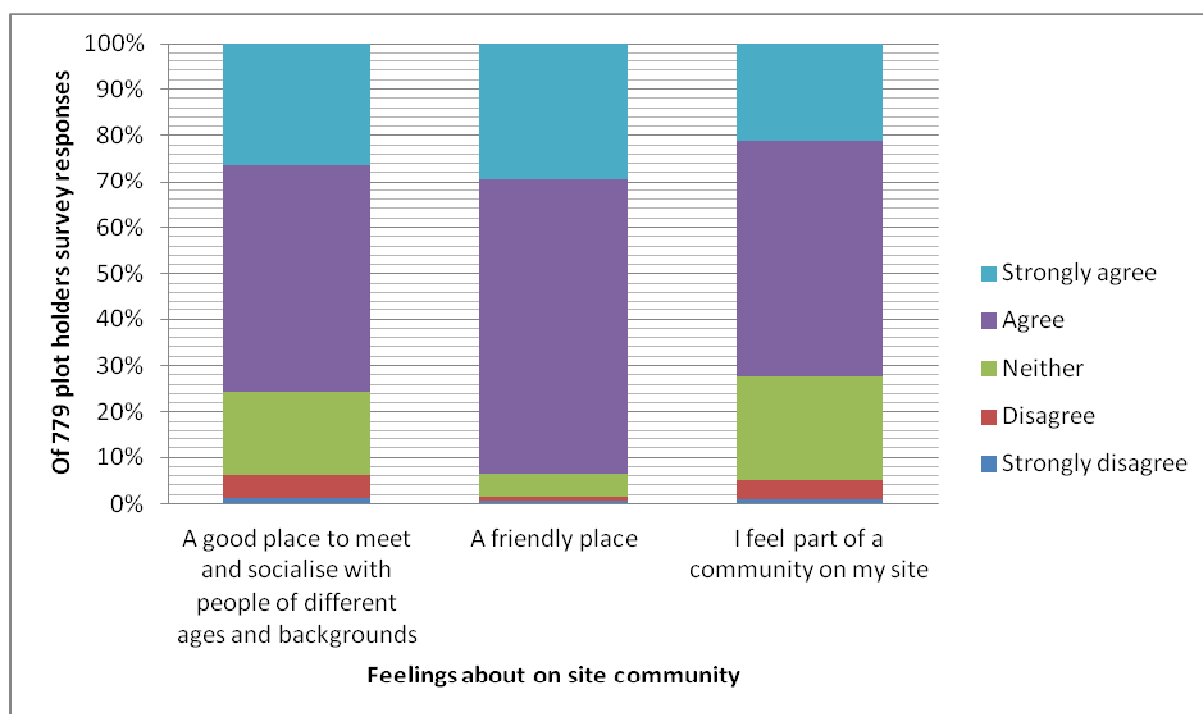
If the Biosphere application is successful there is scope to work further with allotment holders on conservation initiatives, such as recording wildlife, supporting surveys, analysing records, encouraging plants for pollinators and voluntary restrictions on harmful chemical use and to have greater integration of work on bio-diversity and allotments with other green-spaces as part of Brighton & Hove's Green Network.

The Allotment Community

Allotmenters come from a wide variety of ages, backgrounds and parts of the city however through a shared interest in food growing everyone involved in allotments is part of a wider community. At a citywide level the Allotment Federation provides the forum for this community to come together communicating via the website, newsletter and Annual General Meeting.

Although people are part of a city-wide group most people experience the benefits and challenges of being part of a community at a site level.

The survey asked plot holders a number of questions about the sense of community on allotments



From the plot holders survey it can be seen that one quarter of allotmenters work their plot alone, 22% of people are or have a co-worker, and 20% bring children to their plot.

The process of developing the strategy identified that the people on the waiting list wanted more opportunities to get involved in allotments whilst they are waiting.

People on the waiting list are stakeholders in the allotment community and there was

feedback that they were pleased that their voice was being heard in the development of the strategy (both at the consultation event and in the survey responses). .

Practically there was interest in getting involved / learning about growing including 415 people being interested in training if it was free and 266 people being willing to pay a small amount to cover costs. The most popular suggestion was inclusion in open days where they could meet other allotmentees and see what is involved (381 people wanted to do this). Open days would also be a chance to find out about co-working options. Opportunities to get together on an informal basis (eg picnics / juicing sessions / seed swaps) were felt to be a good idea by Site Reps at the focus group, and participants at the consultation event.

Co-working

Tenants can share cultivation by registering a co-worker on their plot – they are issued keys but have no legal tenancy right and are not responsible for the rent. Co-working is a good option when people can't manage a plot alone or who want to grow with friends; and is a great way of learning how to grow on an allotment if an inexperienced grower co-works with a more experienced person. Getting a Co-worker can be a way for someone who is struggling to cope with their plot to keep growing. Co-workers can take over tenancies if the plot holder gives up but there are rules on how this is applied in order to prevent queue jumping.

176 people from the waiting list survey said they would be interested in Co-working, 220 new growers from the plot holders survey said they would have been interested in for co-working but only 23 had been offered options for doing so.

Clearly Co-working provides a good opportunity for more people to get involved in growing and learning about allotmenteeing. The challenge is how to match people up and a suggestion is that site open days should be used to promote opportunities for both sides.

Pairing experienced growers with new growers

From the waiting list survey one third of people said that they would be interested in being put in contact with with a more experienced grower when they neared the top of the list, so they had someone to go to for information and advice. 385 people from

the plot holders survey agreed or strongly agreed that as a new grower they would have appreciated the support of someone more experienced.

398 people from the plot holders' survey agreed or strongly agreed that they would be willing to support new growers. Whilst there is work to be done on how this might be arranged the consultation event group that considered this idea felt that simple was best – for example a flag that could be put out on a plot saying 'happy to help' when someone was willing to have questions asked; or a list of plot numbers of experienced growers willing to help on a communal notice board.

New plot holders giving up within the first year is a problem that needs to be addressed (as identified elsewhere in this document) so the strategy recommends that finding ways to match those that want to help with those needing help should be explored to address this. Additionally having a more experienced 'friendly face' will help with other problems that new plot holders reported such as knowing where to get seeds, compost manure etc and help with welcoming new people to the site. This would also reduce the expectation on the Site Rep that they should be supporting new plot holders along with everything else they are asked to do.

Site Associations

Site Associations (used interchangeably with 'Allotment Societies') are official groups that bring together the allotment community on a voluntary basis. They may oversee the smooth running of an allotment site, undertake minor repairs, offer members opportunities to buy seeds or compost at a discount and represent the views of its members to others. A Site Association can also provide a point of focus to help create community spirit. There are currently 7 site associations. Site Associations can join the national society which gives access to legal advice and wholesale supplies. They can also apply for funding for on site activity.

Where Site Associations exist, awareness varied from site to site (from 40-70% of survey respondents on sites where there was an association) suggesting that there is scope to do some promotion to help improve awareness. However, of the people who do know them, around 75% are involved in some way, suggesting people tend to get drawn in to Site Associations once they find out about them.

Amongst those who were aware of but not involved in their Site Association, the major factor was lack of time (cited by 71 people out of 194 responses to this question).

Other reasons included being new to allotments (so not thinking they had anything to offer yet); not being able to find out about what is happening and not knowing how they might contribute. The survey also suggested that a number of people would be interested in getting involved with volunteering, events or activities at their site, but not with being part of a committee. It seems therefore that good information and giving people a range of ways to get involved is important.

Site Associations are highly valued. Positive responses particularly related to provision of shops – which were seen as a real community asset; and friendliness/ community spirit. But a few people said that they weren't involved because of perceptions around cliques/ unfriendliness.

Site associations are seen as a key way of delivering on many of the ambitions set out in this strategy by those involved in the strategy working group. Their establishment where they don't exist was supported by more than 50% of the survey respondents (only 7% were against the idea the remainder were not sure)

There were significant differences in both awareness of and attitudes to site associations between the different sites. See [Appendix 4: Governance: More on Site Reps & Associations](#) for detailed information. Encouraging, strengthening and improving the numbers and diversity of people involved in site associations is a recommendation of this strategy.

Community engagement where there is no on site association

One of the objectives of this strategy is to foster a greater sense of community engagement and participation, and on sites where there is no association the question of who should lead this activity has come up.

Alongside encouraging sites to set up associations, this strategy recommends that information about other community activity – site clears ups / open days etc that can be organised should be shared via the Federation website to inspire others. Feedback from the consultation event and conversations with the Allotment Officer

suggested that having a hub point was important – even if to begin with this is just a well used notice board.

Allotmenters reported that they wanted ways to swap tools, sheds and other equipment. Different activities may need to take place to develop a sense of community depending on the size of the site. For example on the smaller sites allotmenters reported that they may not even see other plot holders, so having occasional on site events might be a first step so that people can begin to talk about on site participation. Larger sites with communal facilities may already have a place that this coming together happens.

Site security and feeling safe and on site problems

Although most people were very positive about their allotment experience there were problems. Theft / damage or vandalism had been experienced by one third of respondents to the survey. 51 people said they have felt unsafe or vulnerable in the last three years which although a fairly small number in percentage terms is obviously significant at an individual level. 125 people reported that dogs fouling plots was a problem.

It was agreed that site security is important but that sites need to feel welcoming. The most popular suggestion was (subject to funding) to improve fencing. Fixing faulty locks was also a priority. The planting of 'spiky' hedges around fencing is also happening as part of the Allotment Watch scheme at some sites and if successful could be replicated elsewhere.

Having a strong sense of community and a well used site was felt to be important; as was clear information about how to report problems. Tips on security e.g. marking tools are already shared via BHAF and this should continue.

The most common problem reported by plot holders was the spreading of weeds from empty or badly managed plots, but cars blocking access paths and people 'hogging' water taps were problems at certain sites. Where there is site specific feedback this will be shared with Site Reps / Allotment Officer to see what can be done.

Recommendations

Improvements should be made to the new plot holder's pack to provide more information to help people when they get started.

Ways to involve the waiting list including Co-working, training and open days should be established.

Opportunities for new growers to be supported by more experienced growers should be established.

Site Societies and Associations are popular with the allotment community; provide accountability; and relieve the pressure on Site Reps. Therefore where there are no such associations they should be encouraged, however this is practical (e.g. smaller sites may choose to affiliate to pre-existing societies).

Different sites should learn from each other about ways to develop a sense of onsite community for example sites that organise open days / seedling swaps etc could share information with other sites about what is involved

All sites should have an information hub. Where there is no onsite notice board these should be installed (funding will be required).

Given that security is an ongoing issue the Federation should continue to work on the Allotment Watch programme and make links to the community police teams.

Information on being safe should be included in the new plot holder's pack and on BHAF's website.

Community plots

There are 30 community plots on allotment sites across the city (For a list see [Appendix 1: Consultation for the Allotment Strategy](#)). They can be independent groups, operate on a membership basis or be part of larger charities.

Some community plots have input from a paid member of staff (either on an ongoing or sessional basis) but most are volunteer led. Community plots can be open to the public or for use on a referral basis for specific client groups e.g. adults with learning disabilities, families from a deprived neighbourhood, people who have experienced homelessness or addiction.

Nearly all of the community plots operate by having regular open days where people come together to work on the plot.

Community plots are a crucial part of ensuring that allotments are accessible for vulnerable residents as they offer a supported opportunity to take part in growing without having to commit to a plot of your own. Whilst some people involved in community plots will go on to apply for their own plot many report that the comradeship that a community plot offers is what appeals to them.

Community plots vary widely in size most have one full plot although there are also much larger well established projects including BHOGG, Moulsecoomb Forest Garden and Whitehawk Community Food Project. Most of the community plots are happy with the size of their plot however 2 (on single plots) have said that they would be interested in more land.

All of the community plots can access information and support from the Food Partnership's Harvest project that works with growing projects across the city. They can also use Harvest's volunteer signposting service. In the past Harvest staff have acted as an intermediary between the Council and community groups when there have been complaints; and helped community groups to apply for plots.

As well as an online-survey of community plots undertaken as part of this strategy development, during 2013 the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership undertook an evaluation of the Harvest project including research with these and other growing projects. Volunteers on projects reported various benefits of involvement including access to health food, mental wellbeing, skills development and social interaction.

Community plots said they need ongoing support with accessing small grants and free equipment and materials. Many said they need training for volunteers on various topics for example supporting vulnerable people, first aid and risk assessments in outdoor space. They also said they appreciate the opportunity to network with others

doing similar work. These activities are currently offered by the Harvest project which the Food Partnership is applying for funding to continue. The Food Partnership is also applying for funding to offer training for volunteers on food projects on supporting people with complex needs and to expand the current volunteer signposting service.

Many of the open access community projects say they need more volunteers on both an ongoing basis and for one off jobs. 167 people from the waiting list survey said that they would be interested in opportunities to volunteer on community plots and whilst 56% of new plot holders (n=470) from the plot holders survey said they would have liked to know about growing on a community plot, only 5% said they had been told about opportunities.

The Allotment team at the Council raised a number of issues about the way that community plots are managed including lack of consistency or clarity around rules, charging and complaints. During the consultation period Council staff, community plots and Site Reps all suggested that an amended set of rules for community plots should be considered.

Recommendations

Community plots that are open to the public provide an opportunity for people on the waiting list to learn about growing and opportunities to get involved should be promoted. The process of joining the waiting list should allow for an option where people give permission for their details to be shared so that they can be kept informed about open days / options for co-working / volunteer opportunities on community plot and training.

That separate rules for community plots should be considered.

Where a community group is mainly working with a group of people that would be eligible for a concession and/or the community group furthers the aims of this strategy they should be able to apply for the 25% discount.

The Food Partnership and the Allotments team at the Council should work together on a procedure for applications from community plots. This will

include processes for applying for a community plot that can be published on the website and a setting out of criteria that defines who can apply for a community plot.

This strategy recommends that applications from community groups in areas of the city where there aren't community plots and/or with communities of interest that are under-represented should be fast-tracked. The procedure for community plot applications including when groups should be fast-tracked should come to the Liaison Group for agreement.

Allotment Accessibility

Demographic information

Plot holders are 45% male and 53% female (2% not known or not applicable). The male / female ratio has changed in the last few years as previously more men than women were plot holders.

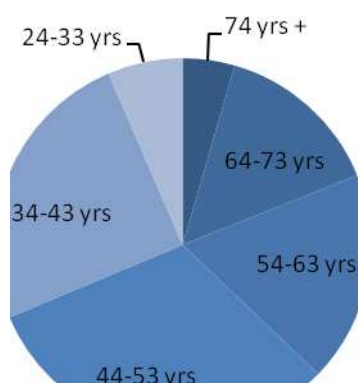


Chart – Total age data for 2216 plot holders based on BHCC data Sept 2013. There is no age data for 498 plot holders).

Age of allotmentees

As can be seen the majority of allotmentees are 44 –63 yrs old (49%). A significant number are over 64 (18.5%). In considering the benefits of allotments the survey results show a slight trend in mental health / stress relief seen as beneficial for younger groups, they also tend to see growing food with low environmental impact as a benefit. General exercise, socialising and saving money on food bills is relatively similar across age groups. The older age groups especially agree that having an allotment is important in their overall health and happiness.

Ethnicity and disability information for allotmentees

Demographic information held about allotmentees by the Council is not complete, for example for the ethnicity data 77% of the information is 'blank'. This may be because people chose not to share this information or because they have had a plot along time when this information wasn't routinely asked for. Demographic information is collected when people join the waiting list not when they are given a plot.

Of the 714 people who answered the demographic questions on the survey 624 were White British (87%) and for the 620 plot holders for whom the Council does hold ethnicity data 89% are White British. Census data for 2011 shows that 80.5% of the population of Brighton & Hove list their ethnicity as White British. This indicates that BME / Other White people on allotments are probably under-represented although the lack of data makes this a little unclear.

Information held by the Council on disability only relates to people who claim a concession on the basis of being registered disabled so this does not provide an accurate picture of the total number of allotmenters who have a disability.

Of the 712 plot holder survey respondents who answered this question 67 said they had a disability (9.4%). Census data for 2011 shows that 16.3% of residents consider that their day to day activities are limited because of a long term health problem or disability.

As has been seen earlier in the document (Benefits of Allotments) people with disabilities saw great benefit in having an allotment across all of the seven benefits areas covered in the plot holders survey (access to healthy food, access to affordable food, socialising etc). People with a disability in the plot holders' survey provided a lower score for their overall health – 50% rated it as fair or poor relative to 4.1% of those not having a disability however disabled people saw an allotment as very significant in their overall health and happiness. For disabled people, 85% showed this extent by rating it as between 8 and 10 out of 10, compared to 72% of people without a disability.

Waiting list

We are using demographic information from the waiting list survey because this is based on people who have confirmed they wish to stay on the waiting list. The Council collect demographic information when people join the waiting list but because of the clean up exercise it was felt that the waiting list data from the survey provided a more accurate picture.

The survey indicates (n=714 respondents who answered this question)

- 54% of those on the waiting list are female.
- 79% are White British (as mentioned above the figure from the 2011 census is 80.5% White British).
- 7% say they have a disability (figures from the 2011 census are that 16.3% of residents have a disability)
- A relatively high proportion (43%) have a household income of less than £15,000 a year. The majority group was full-time employed (37%) although there were notable proportions of part-time employed (17%), unemployed (11%) and retired (10%).

Plots adapted for mobility needs

There are 18 limited mobility plots that have been adapted to include raised beds and easy access paths. These are available at Foredown, Coldean and Weald. As well as adapted plots there are also plots that are easy access. That is to say that they are near parking, have flat paths to reach the plot, and in some cases have nearby toilet facilities.

28 people from the plot holders survey said they had a plot that the Council had adapted for accessibility and 19 people had made their own adaptations (e.g. wider / flat paths, raised beds).

83 people who completed the waiting list survey said they would be interested in a plot that had been adapted for mobility needs. Most people interested in a plot adapted for limited mobility were between the ages of 30 and 49 (56%) with only 13% of those interested aged 60 or above.

“My small raised plot for people with disabilities has made it possible for me to have a vegetable growing experience. I couldn’t have had an allotment otherwise”

Quote from consultation event

The Site Reps focus group raised a concern that the specially adapted limited mobility plots are not being used to their full capacity with there being empty plots. The feedback was that this may be because people who may be interested in a limited mobility plot are not aware of how to apply for one.

Promotion and fast-tracking

Currently little outreach is done to promote allotments to specific groups of residents. There is good information about accessible allotment plots on the Allotment Federation’s website and information about community plots on the Food Partnership’s website. The allotment page on the Council’s website includes information about concessions. The Food Partnership also signpost volunteers to community projects and offer one to one appointments for adults with additional support needs (e.g. mental health, learning disabilities or history of addiction) to help them to access community growing project including those on allotments.

At the consultation event one of the themes discussed was about promoting allotments to priority groups and investigating ways to fast-track applications for people who may benefit most from involvement. Whilst there was agreement that these ideas warranted further work it was also felt that there should be good provision for everyone who wants to take part (because as the survey work has shown many people derive benefits from being an allotmentee). There was concern that any work on prioritising might leave out groups such as single working people on a low income; or people with undiagnosed mental health issues.

Concessions

A 25% discount is applicable for the following groups – people over 60, residents in receipt of benefits and students. This discount aims to enable people who may most benefit from allotment growing but are not able to afford the full rent to participate.

People apply for the discount so some people who are eligible and yet can afford the full rent may choose not to claim the 25% discount.

The cost of this concession can be seen as the difference in income that the plot would bring in if it were rented out at the full price.

Using 2013 data

373 plot holders claim a discount on a half plot (£8.90) = £3320

69 plot holders claim a discount on a 125 – 250m² plot (£8.90 for ease of calculation) = £614

326 claim a discount on a full plot or bigger (£17.85) = £5819

Total = £9753

Of this over 60s account for

275 plot holders @ £8.90 = £2447

295 plot holders @ £17.85 = £5265

Total = £7712

Recommendations

People joining the waiting list and being given a plot should be encouraged to complete demographic information. Demographic information from the waiting list should be reviewed every two years and information from this used to inform targeting of promotional work amongst any communities of interest that are under-represented.

Engagement with agencies that represent Communities of Interest (e.g. Federation for Independent Living, BMECP, SpeakOut, Age UK Brighton and MIND) should be undertaken to understand how to address barriers to access by certain groups and to explore opportunities to promote allotments (including community plots) to the groups they represent. Targeted promotion should focus on sites where the wait is shorter. This should include information about the expectation of the length of wait to help people plan. For example older people may choose to join a waiting list in advance of retiring.

With 1 in 20 people in Brighton & Hove having a disability¹⁴ (and strong evidence of the benefits of allotments for people with disabilities) more should be done to promote allotments to them via disability support organisations. This should include detailed information about the options – easy access, limited mobility, co-working and community plots. Site Reps and the Allotment Officer to monitor the demand for limited mobility and easy access plots. Limited mobility plots at all sites should be promoted to people on the waiting list who have indicated that they are interested in a limited mobility plot (rather than just the site they are waiting for).

The 25% discount that is applicable for people over 60, residents in receipt of benefits and students should remain in order to enable people who may most benefit from allotment growing but are not be able to afford the full rent to participate. The availability of concessions and how and when they can be applied for should be advertised clearly both to people on or interested in

¹⁴ For more than one in twenty residents (20,445 people, 7.5%) their day to day activities are 'limited a lot' due to a long term health problem or disability. For a further 24,124 residents (8.8%) their day to day activity is limited a little (BHLIS, 2011 Census Briefing)

joining the waiting list and to current plot holders (as their circumstances may change). Community plots that work mainly with groups that would receive a concession should be eligible to apply for a concession.

Opportunities for Site Reps to take part in training about accessibility issues (including for example understanding mental health or physical access) could be provided. These courses are often run by the voluntary and community sector and Site Reps could be signposted to them or they could be run for Site Reps as part of an ongoing programme of training. Some courses may be free for others there may be a small charge for which funding would need to be found.

A sub group of the Allotment Liaison Group to include other interested organisations / experts should be set up to look at the issue of fast-tracking applications for priority groups of people perhaps via a GP referral. Any proposal should consider fairness in relation to the criteria used – for example the prioritising of people in receipt of certain welfare benefits would leave out single working people on a low income; or people with undiagnosed mental health issues. Any criteria / process used should be unambiguous and transparent; not reliant on the individual discretion of officers or site representatives.

The plot holders survey has shown that older people rate their allotment highly in terms of health and happiness. With the healthy ageing agenda an important area of work for the city and nationally, opportunities to consider how funding could be attracted to support the concessions for older people could be explored. The Council is currently working towards becoming a more Age Friendly City including a submission to the Big Lottery fund for a citywide project on healthy ageing. Findings from this strategy work should be fed back to Age UK Brighton who are leading on this work.

Not all sites have access to a toilet which prevents people from participating. Where sites don't have toilets (or there aren't nearby public toilets) funds should be sought to install and maintain them.

People with mental health issues and physical disabilities may need additional support to take part in allotment growing (although they may want their own plot rather than being part of a community group). Individual or micro beds may be appealing for people with disabilities because of the more manageable size. The development of this proposal should consider this.

The Governance: How Allotments are managed section includes reference to work to make the governance structures of allotments more representative of the demographics of plot holders.

Governance: How allotments are managed

Allotments are currently run in a complex partnership between the City Council, who deal with much of the administration and some of the maintenance; and plots holders themselves who may volunteer as site representatives; be involved with an association; or simply do things for others and/or themselves. The culture of 'self-help' in allotments is a huge and valued asset and this strategy aims to acknowledge and build on this basis.

The City Council

The current council allotment service includes an Allotments Officer, Administrator, and maintenance staff. There are also other council teams which contribute staffing, including middle and senior managers and the Environment Department Contact Centre. Finance staff oversee billing and payments including collecting arrears.

Allotments Officer

The Allotments Officer oversees maintenance of the sites, lettings, waiting lists, and rule enforcement including termination of lettings on top of other duties. Various stakeholders noted that this job was 'huge'. This strategy acknowledges the pressures and that currently there are no resources to increase staffing levels, so there are recommendations on efficiency (see also [Appendix 6: Additional information on Resources and Finance](#)) which could help free up officer time.

Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation (BHAF)

Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation is an independent city wide organisation, run by allotment holders, to promote allotments and to represent the allotment community's' interests. All plot holders and registered co-workers in the city are members of the Federation. The Federation has a steering committee made up of volunteers elected from its membership, and is accountable to members via its annual general meeting.

For more detail see their constitution at www.bhaf.org.uk

Allotment Associations and Societies

As well as the activities outlined in the Allotment Community section Site Associations also play a key role in governance. All sites, whether or not they have an association, may nominate a contact to attend committee meetings of the Federation. But any properly formed association can elect a representative to attend Federation committee meetings and vote on the issues addressed. Where Associations exist they are also able to work alongside the Site Reps and provide an additional mechanism for communicating with allotmenters.

Volunteer roles on sites

This strategy acknowledges the huge amount that volunteers contribute to allotment sites, both formally (e.g. by helping with site shops or associations or as Site Reps) or informally, for example by advising and supporting other plot holders.

Site representatives (or Site Reps) are all volunteers. They issue keys, resolve difficulties and often undertake additional work on top, such as minor maintenance. They can claim expenses and free rental on an allotment (half or full plot). There is currently no standard mechanism for either appointment or dismissal, although at some sites including Moulsecoomb, The Weald, Lower Roedale & Roedale Valley, they are elected at the site association's AGM. These are referred to in this strategy as 'elected Site Reps'. Otherwise they are recruited by the Council's Allotment Officer. These are referred to as 'appointed Site Reps'.

Site Reps play an important role in running the lettings process (see the waiting list section) and liaising with new plot holders. They act as a point of contact for and as a representative of plot holders to the City Council. Conversely their role sometimes means enforcing rules on behalf of the City Council, such as carrying out inspections for weed notices. Sometimes this dual role causes tension, with some Site Reps feeling "caught between 'plot holders who moan' and 'the Council who do nothing'; and some Site Reps felt that there was confusion over the nature of their role, particularly a lack of clear understanding and expectations among plot holders which could cause frustration on both sides.

Whilst the contribution of Site Reps is greatly valued, in the past there have also been misunderstandings in the role that Site Reps play in communicating with the allotment community and sharing the views of plot holders with the Council. There has also been criticism that they do not 'represent' anyone as a majority are not elected. Ensuring representation by election is therefore a key aim of this strategy and there is a commitment to this being in place within the first five years of the strategy.

Concern has been raised by current Site Reps, the allotment community and the Council that Site Reps are already asked to do a lot. The suggestion that new allotmentees are 'mentored' by more experienced plot holders and that over time more maintenance of sites is done by volunteers introduces further roles for volunteers on a site.

All volunteers require a clear understanding of their role, clarity on who they are volunteering for, an understanding of how they apply for or are elected to become that volunteer, access to training and support and clarity on how long they have committed to the role for.

Strengthening and clarifying the role of Site Rep

Clarification of the role, and drawing a clear role description for Site Reps (and any other volunteer roles) is as a vital first step. It was suggested by Site Reps that greater clarity about expectations might encourage more volunteers to come forward.

In general smaller sites are easier for Site Reps to deal with practically and Site Reps identified that larger sites require more site representatives in order that the task is not overwhelming. This is generally the case in practice but isn't made explicit.

Site Reps felt that a good rapport with Council Officer is vital, and stressed the importance of a relationship based on mutual trust. Where this doesn't work well (e.g. if communication is poor; or if the council officer does not back up site rep recommendations e.g. on rule enforcement) Site Reps can feel undermined. However it was acknowledged that it would be very difficult for a single officer to have an effective working relationship across all sites simultaneously.

The survey showed that in general Site Reps are highly valued by the allotment community, with more than 65% of them finding their Site Reps easy to contact and helpful. They were particularly valued in providing advice and guidance; and this was the part of the role seen as most rewarding by many site representatives.

There was however some patchiness between different sites with some sites finding their Site Reps more helpful than others. There was some concern that the range of Site Reps did not currently reflect fully the diversity of allotment holders, and recommendations to strengthen the accountability of site representatives (including elections) may also help to address this.

Site Reps identified the need better support, e.g. reintroducing induction and training programmes which had been successful in the past, particularly when led by experienced Site Reps; this was echoed by plot holders in the survey.

Site Reps also identified that they would like to share good practice better with each other. For example at the Site Reps focus group (which took place as part of the strategy consultation) they discussed the lettings process, which was carried out very differently reflecting the needs of different sites. One Site Rep subsequently decided to carry out plot lettings differently as a result.

Site Reps therefore requested that similar small group discussions could take place in future. They felt that it was important to create an environment to discuss issues and share good practice from the practical (shared ordering of seeds, materials and equipment) through to governance issues such as the revision and interpretation of rules.

Liaison Group

These are meetings between the BHAF committee and staff from the BHCC Allotments Service to discuss what is happening within the allotments service and raise issues of importance to allotment tenants. Whilst a small group is valuable as a means for discussing and testing out ideas, this strategy recommends that the membership and purpose of this group is made more transparent, with terms of

reference agreed, Also that the group should take an overview of implementing this strategy and ensuring progress stays on track.

Recommendations

A great deal of detail went into these recommendations - for fuller information please see [Appendix 5: Recommendations on the role of Site Reps – further detail](#)

A revised structure which has participation by the allotment community at its heart should be implemented. This will need further discussion and review, particularly in evaluating how the new Allotment forum works out, as this will be fulfilling a dual role i.e. acting as a space for Site Reps to meet and share information and decide policy, such as reviewing the allotment rules; but also as a place to engage with wider stakeholders.

Site Associations should be encouraged to make formal links with the Allotment Federation, ensuring the Federation's accountability

Encouraging strengthening and improving the numbers and diversity of people involved in site associations is a recommendation of this strategy; alongside improving opportunities for people to volunteer in other ways All Site Representatives should be elected, and this should take place within the first five years of implementing this strategy. In the meantime a transparent appointment mechanism should be agreed as an interim measure for when Site Reps are directly appointed.

The role should be clarified, supported and strengthened. Transparent processes for dismissal and complaints should be agreed, along with clear role descriptions. Better training and support – especially chances for reps to share learning with each other - should be available

Greater diversity should be encouraged and barriers to this identified and addressed

The role of Site Reps should be reviewed in three years to assess whether further changes need to happen eg split into two or more roles

Time savings which allow the Allotment Officer more time to prioritise relationships with and support to site representatives should be explored. (see also [Resources and Finance](#) Section).

A new City Allotment Forum organized by BHAF will replace the current Site Reps meeting and meet three times a year. It will provide a platform for Site Reps to engage with each other and the city council, and be a working forum to take forward issues on allotment running and agree new rules and policies. It will be outward facing, seeking engage with and gather the views of other stakeholders for example from public health, the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) the police, voluntary and community groups “ and possibly some representation from people on the Waiting List. How effectively this dual role works should be reviewed as it developed; for example it might be necessary to target one or more meetings per year for wider stakeholder involvement; and keep the remainder focused around Site Reps.

Both the Allotment Forum and the Allotment Liaison group will put together smaller working groups to take forward specific actions or research which will be reported back to them.

The Allotment Liaison group will oversee implementation of the allotment strategy and track progress.

During the first year of strategy implementation, Liaison group membership should be based on the current allotment strategy group to ensure continuity and forward progress on the strategy action plan

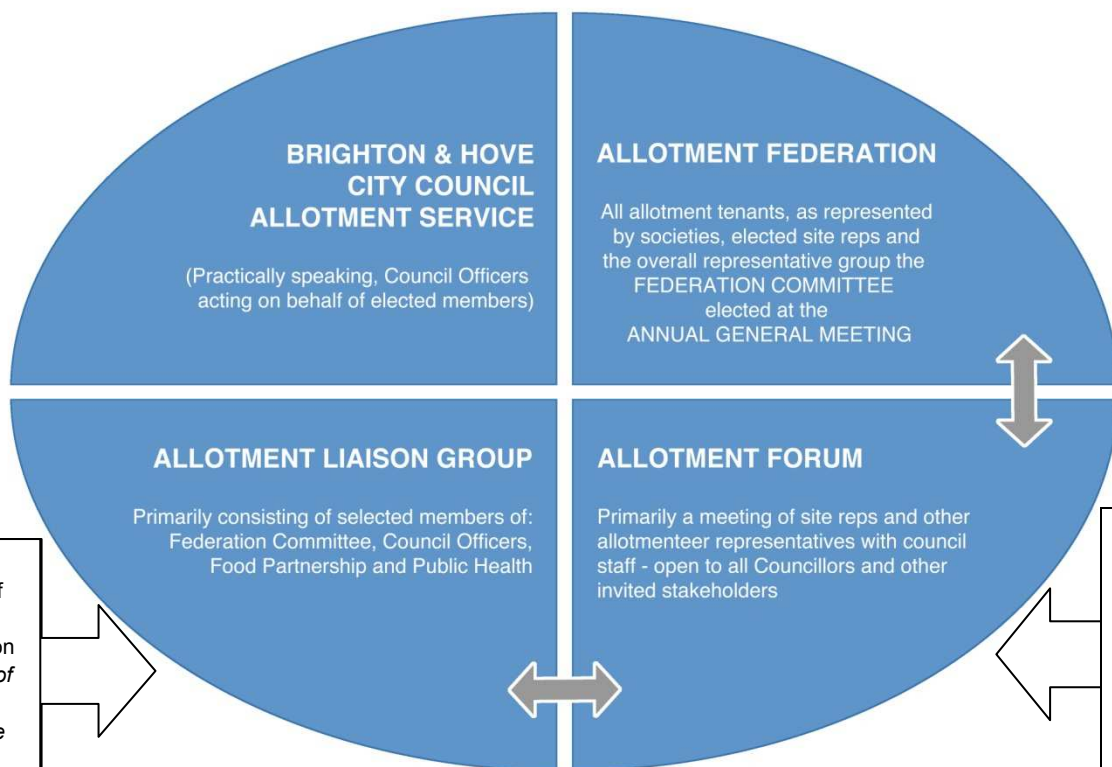
The liaison group should during this time develop clear and transparent terms of reference, and revise membership for a refreshed group taking over from year 2. Terms of reference should be subject to regular review.

The relationship and the reporting arrangements between the Allotment Forum and the Liaison group should be clarified.

Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation (BHAF) is already revising its structures and constitution parallel with this strategy. BHAFs aims and objectives, along with its partially revised constitution, form an appendix to this are at www.bhaf.org.uk. This strategy recommends that BHAF should:

- Broaden its active membership and widen the participation in its decision making (e.g. its committee) to better reflect the diversity of allotmenters and therefore improve its accountability.
- Promote the interests of its members whilst at the same time developing space to share ideas and best practice, including organizing the new Allotment Forum

Diagram to show revised structure for governance and communications



Will oversee implementation of the allotment strategy and action plan. *New terms of reference and membership to be agreed.*

May invite other interested parties such as the Police, organisations representing differing ability communities. Will establish working groups e.g. rules revisions, Site Reps training, women plot holders, development of societies etc. *New terms of reference and membership to be agreed.*

Participation and self-management

The involvement of the allotment community in managing allotment services is a key principle of this strategy. Increased participation by plot holders and people on the waiting list was seen as positive amongst all stakeholders; can be rewarding for individuals; could possibly save money; and leads to better run, more inclusive sites.

There was also recognition that participation has a cost in terms of time and energy, and expectations about what individuals contribute must be realistic. This strategy acknowledges that many people already contribute a huge amount helping with site shops; local associations or as Site Reps. There were concerns about 'burnout' if too much is expected of too few volunteers.

Core to this strategy is the idea that greater devolved management should be 'tested' in a range of different ways, to see what works. There will never be a one size fits all solution, and different approaches may suit different sites and the individuals involved with them.

Firstly, this strategy recommends that allotment associations and plot holder representation should be encouraged and strengthened.

Another step might be an association taking on small areas of site management, as many are doing already, as there is the potential to offer a more responsive and efficient service for less money than if this is provided by the Council. For example on some plots currently a site association volunteer will replace a broken padlock with a new one supplied by the council. This is cheaper than using the council's maintenance staff, so saves money to be spent on other things to benefit the site.

A further step would be to pilot 'self-management' as happens on some allotment sites in other parts of the country. This would mean that the budget and responsibility for running the site would be passed to an association or similar body on the site. Some advantages of self-management could be that those best placed to understand the needs of the allotment community are in charge of organising the service; that community spirit could be developed; and that the service could offer a better service for less money.

The disadvantages could be that there is unequal buy-in, i.e. that some allotmentees won't get involved and too great a burden will fall to too few; that

service provision could become uneven across different sites, as each one develops locally according to different priorities. This could also mean a loss of strategic oversight of the service as a whole.

It is also possible that advantages of economies of scale would be lost i.e there may be some things that are best provided on a city wide basis. Concern has been raised about issues like billing; collecting payments; and managing waiting lists for sites, as there is an argument that this needs an effective central ICT system.

As this is a new approach for the city it is hoped that more than one site will be willing to try taking on small areas of site management approach, to learn what works in different settings; and find out whether this approach will work for other (or even all) sites; and if so what would need to remain centralised to be effective.

Whilst participation is not – and should never be – purely about saving money, it could help. There are further thoughts on different levels of participation, and ultimately self management in Resources and Finance.

Recommendations

Participation, and the involvement of the allotment community should become a key principle in allotment management and an increased and more diverse involvement should be encouraged at all levels.

Opportunities for people who want to volunteer (not just by joining committees) should be established for example helping with open days, mentoring new allotmenters or taking part in routine maintenance (see [The Allotment Community and Environment](#))

Self-management should be explored, at a range of different levels and degrees, not just as a way of saving money but also of strengthening community involvement and participation. See also the recommendations in Resources and Finance.

Rules and Fairness

Allotmenters agree that there should be rules (only 7.8% of people in the survey of plot holders disagreed that there should be rules on how plots were used)

But the survey results and consultation events raised some concerns about allotment rules¹⁵ and their enforcement, for example the issuing of weed notices and non-cultivation notices. Common concerns were:

- Inconsistency both between sites and within sites in enforcing rules.
- A feeling that there are too many rules; some of which are out of date, unnecessary or not capable of being enforced.
- A lack of enforcement which leads to other issues, in particular a high number of uncultivated plots – this caused immense frustration for both plot holders and people on waiting list. (see also [Waiting Lists and Demand for Allotments](#))
- The need for clarity over the difference between weeds and wildlife areas - given that organic approaches to food growing can also involve companion planting, green manures, fallow land etc - and over specific issues such as ponds and polytunnels.

Community plots in their nature operate differently. (See Community Plots) There were suggestions that the rules should be adapted for community plots, and it was felt that the rules are in practice applied differently compared to individual plots in any case, which caused uncertainty and in a few cases resentment. It was also felt that security and health and safety implications when a plot is being worked communally needed more detailed work for the protection of those involved.

Recommendations

Rules should be clarified and streamlined – with an emphasis on overarching key principles but allowance for:

- a degree of site specific flexibility, as some rules are needed for some site but not for others
- different styles of growing

It should be clear which rules are enforced by the council, and which should be looked after by the Site Reps. There should be a hierarchy of rules

¹⁵ http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/brighton-hove.gov.uk/files/downloads/allotments/allotment_rules_v3_Dec_2011.pdf

The Allotment Rules should be subject to a 3 year review led by the Allotment Forum (if necessary informed by a working group) to ensure that rules are up to date with current policy and that they are enforceable on a practical level. This process should involve site representatives as not only are they the front line in enforcement, but Site Reps are also aware of practicalities around how to support plot holders in complying with any rule change.

As full review could be costly and time-consuming (because the rules form part of a legal contract between the City Council and the Allotment Tenants) there should also be an annual process involving the council and Site Reps for identifying rules that need to be revised on an interim basis and a list of any interim changes kept for the next 3 year review.

To ensure that rules are both fair and enforceable there should be tests for new and existing rules. This needs further discussion but some rule tests could be:

- Does this rule protect the environment, other current tenants or future tenants from genuine risk of harm?
- Is this rule enforceable?
- Is the rule proportionate? I.e. the benefits from enforcing it outweigh both the effort involved and the consequences (e.g. distress to tenants)
- Is it clear who is responsible for enforcing this rule? (Site Reps or Council)
- Is the rule consistent with the objectives of this strategy?

Site representatives have the difficult task of applying many allotment rules. There should be a trial programme of “moderation” meetings, where group of representatives and contacts from different sites visit a site together to jointly look at how they enforce particular rules (e.g. giving out non-cultivation notices). This would help to develop consistency in the interpretation of these rules, and also offer support, particularly for newer Site Reps.

The rules should be adjusted to address the needs and issues of community plots and provide guidance on what the policies and practices community groups should have in place.

Waiting Lists and Demand for Allotments

Demand for allotments

Demand has varied widely over time and in the 1990s demand was so low that many plots fell into disrepair and sites were reduced or closed down altogether. However from 2000 there was a growing interest in allotments and a large waiting list developed.

In 2009, as a solution to relieve pressure from a large waiting list BHCC decided to offer only half plots to new tenants and to halve every full plot that became available for rent and rent it to two people. (See [Land, plot size and plot splitting](#))

The Council also extended the land available by providing new plots at Foredown (12 new half plots); and reclaimed disused plots at Whitehawk Hill (30 new half plots) and Craven Vale (70 new half plots). They are exploring the possibility of opening two further sites.

How big is the waiting list and who is on it?

As part of the strategy development, a survey of people on the waiting list was carried out. People on the waiting list were asked to confirm that they still wanted an allotment to better gauge the real size of the waiting list and at the same time to clean up the list so it would be a more effective tool for lettings.

Over 900 people completed the survey, of which 842 wanted to stay on the list. Since the survey has closed more people have confirmed that they wish to stay on this list giving us the anticipated figure of a waiting list of 1000. For more information on the survey see [Appendix 1: Consultation for the Allotment Strategy](#).

The number actually waiting for an allotment is believed to be around 1,000 which is approximately 1,000 less than previously thought, although this figure does not take into account latent demand for allotments i.e. the people who were did not join because the waiting list for that site was closed, or did not bother to apply because they were told they would have to wait several years.

The consultation identified that people on the waiting list are important but relatively unheard stakeholders in the allotment community. There was the same high level of response from those on the waiting list as from existing plot holders, to both the on-line survey and the consultation event.

How the waiting list works

The City Council manages allotment waiting lists. Each site has a separate waiting list. People can apply for just one site per person; or two sites per household, either on-line or via a paper form. The average wait for a plot is approximately 2 years, although this varies from site to site. In practice it generally ranges from 6 months to 4 years and people can wait up to 10 years in exceptional circumstances. There is particular demand for sites which are in a central location without many alternative sites nearby. There are also less popular sites with no waiting list. When there is spare capacity these plots are offered to people on waiting lists for nearby sites, however there isn't a systematic way of alerting people on all waiting lists to available capacity elsewhere,

In the 1990s, when demand was low, people could apply for more than one plot on sites which had spare capacity, so a few individuals now have multiple plots, - an anomaly when demand is high. Under current rules people can only apply for a maximum of one plot per household.

A waiting list is closed when it reaches the same number of people as there are plots on a site. Smallest sites are most likely to have a list which is closed.

The Council receives regular email and phone calls from people enquiring their position in the list, generating additional work. The current waiting list information is not linked to the Council website and people are not able to check their position on-line.

The City Council occasionally contacts people on waiting lists to ensure they are still interested; however with the current ICT system this is a time consuming exercise and not done systematically. These exercises are usually targeted at sites where people have been waiting the longest.

Issues identified through the consultation

The current waiting list database requires staff to manually re-enter data which has been provided on line, which does allow the allotment office to weed out some ineligible applications (e.g. people who are already on another waiting list or live outside the city). Any replacement system would need to do this task automatically. The letting process is reliant on site representatives who are all volunteers, and carry this duty out in different ways to suit their personal circumstances and their site. Site Representatives identified that when they are given a list of people at the top of the waiting list for their site, they can often only contact about a half of them i.e. many people on the waiting list no longer wanted plots or have moved away.

As well as making their job frustrating, this means that current data on waiting list size is inaccurate. Site representatives see improvements to the waiting list mechanism are a priority.

“The satisfaction of having let a plot to an enthusiastic gardener outweighs the disappointment of those who give up.” Site Reps focus group

Site Reps gave positive feedback on the lettings process when this went well but also identified problems which hindered the efficiency of the lettings process as well as causing them personal annoyance. It was frustrating for Site Reps when people didn't show up for viewings of vacant plots when these had been arranged.

Conversely was difficult for people on the waiting list if they were expected to go to viewings on a day they needed to be at work. Other issues they reported were resentment at plots being informally passed on (e.g. to friends) rather than to people on the waiting list, feelings of unfairness that some plot holders have more than one allotment when they are unable to access any; feeling it didn't make sense that they can only sign up for one site when there were several they could access, or simply hearing nothing for years. A number of newer plot holder also remarked that the only thing they heard after joining the list was when someone phoned up to offer them a plot.

A yearly update to check that you wanted to remain on the waiting list was considered to be a good idea by 96% of the 696 people on the waiting list that answered this question and 98% of them said they would also like to be kept informed of their position on the waiting list.

Above all, far too often plots were let to people who then quickly lost interest and didn't work them and the plots become overgrown. Once plots are overgrown they are harder to let and harder to cultivate; and spread weed seeds to other nearby allotments. This frustration was also one of the main ones individual plots holders and those on the waiting list smoothing the lettings process including good support for site representatives is seen as a priority and is referred to in various areas of this strategy.

“Why are there so many empty plots and so many people waiting for years?”

Waiting list survey

Site Reps stressed that it was important that lettings mechanisms if possible assess people's real understanding of and commitment to the regular work which will be involved in maintaining a plot.

Currently, there is no clear policy on what happens to their waiting list position if people refuse a plot they are offered (even if this several times) – 5% of those who answered the waiting list survey have turned down a plot in the past; or if they don't show up when they are invited to view vacant plots with a site representative. This wastes time for site representatives and slows down the process. Some possible solutions include

- They could be put back on the waiting list by 1-2 years
- A “3 strikes and you are out” rule i.e. 3 refusals means going to the bottom of the list.

However it should be noted that of the people who responded to the waiting list survey 90% (630 people) said ‘that if they were offered a plot tomorrow they would take it’.

Many on the waiting list are already allotment co-workers and others would be keen to explore this option. Co-working has been identified by site representatives and others as an excellent route into allotment ownership – building skills and ensuring that people are aware of the realistic time commitment needed for an allotment; and supporting existing plot holders to keep their plots in use and maintained.

Others are keen to be involved in the allotment community e.g. via events, going to site open days, training or mentoring whilst they wait. There are more recommendations on a greater role for people on the waiting list this in [the 'Allotment community'](#) section.

Recommendations

The work started under this strategy to clean up the waiting list should be completed with all people on the waiting list who have not responded via the online survey being contacted again, to make sure that they have had a fair chance to respond.

There should be a regular waiting list cleansing exercise. This would have to be manageable within current resources. Using the current ICT system this could be every 3 years, on a rolling basis i.e. with 1/3 of the site waiting lists cleansed each year.

Should additional resources be secured, there should be a new ICT system implemented which would streamline the waiting list management and allow people to check their position on-line. This could be part of a bigger change to ICT (see 'Finance' section) or as a stand-alone exercise, i.e. there could be a separate stand-alone system for managing the waiting list

There should be a process for keeping people informed of their waiting list position. With the existing ICT system this could be part of the rolling '3 year' cleansing but this should eventually become annual with improved technology.

When people apply for a plot and when they are updated on their waiting list position, they should be told if there is any spare capacity at any other plots in the city (see Resources and Finance section for more detail on making lettings more efficient).

If in future demand drops, and there is spare capacity on sites meaning that people are again allowed to apply for more than one plot, there should be an absolute maximum of 4 plots per household as this is the maximum size that can legally be considered an allotment.

A clear policy should be developed on what happens to someone's waiting list position if they refuse a plot they are offered; or if they don't show up.

People on the waiting list should be considered part of the allotment community. There should be great involvement of and opportunities for people on waiting lists (training, information about site open days and volunteering opportunities, and in particular co-working opportunities which has been identified as a 'win-win' option for people on the waiting list). In particular people near the top of the list should be targeted as this has been identified as an optimum moment (once people have a plot they are often too busy working on it).

Land, plot size and plot splitting

Brighton & Hove has constraints on land availability as it is bounded by the sea on one side and the South Downs on the other. There is competition for land from housing in addition to commercial and leisure activities, leading to high land prices. There is very dense housing with a high proportion of flats in the city compared to houses.¹⁶ There is a high proportion of single person households in the city¹⁷ which may be reflected in the survey's findings that 25% of plot holders generally use their allotments alone.

The allotment service is one of the largest in the country¹⁸ and 84% of the city's population is within a 20 min walk of an allotment based on a 5kmh/3mph pace. (A breakdown of these figures is in [Appendix 8: A closer look at land and plot sizes](#)). There are limited opportunities for providing new allotment sites, other than at the periphery of the city (e.g. in Woodingdean); whilst the allotments which are most in demand are in the city centre where more people have limited access to growing space. A planning advisory note¹⁹ gives guidance to developers, encouraging them to include food growing space within new developments but this is mostly on a small scale.

The survey found that whilst the primary use for allotments is food growing, they also serve a wider social and cultural function in a city which has limited land e.g. 23% of plot survey respondents said that a benefit of having an allotment was to have a play / outdoor space for children and 58% said that some of the time or a lot of the time they used their allotment for relaxing outdoors.

In addition to allotment growing, there is a thriving grow-your-own culture in the city, including 30 community food project on allotments; and 45 projects on land other than allotments²⁰. There is potential for raising awareness of these alternatives amongst those who are on the waiting list (See also [Allotment Accessibility](#)).

¹⁶ www.bhlis.org.uk 2011 Census Briefing Housing (50.2% properties are flats, apartments or converted houses)

¹⁷ www.bhlis.org.uk 2011 Census Briefing City Profile

¹⁸ <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/parks-and-green-spaces/allotments-0>

¹⁹ http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/brighton-hove.gov.uk/files/downloads/ldf/PAN6-Food_Growing_and_development-latest-Sept2011.pdf

²⁰ <http://www.bhfood.org.uk/downloads-publications/4-harvest-evaluation-report-full>

Disparities between sites

Common problems identified by allotmenters in the consultation survey included poor quality soil for growing (particularly with allotments on chalk) and issues with rubbish disposal and plot clearance. There is not scope within this strategy to look at all these issues in detail – though it is expected that they will be looked outside of the strategy process – however in terms of this strategy it is important to understand that there are inequalities both within and between sites.

Within sites there can be better soil in different parts of the sites; areas with particular issues such as vandalism or badger damage; and different levels of access to for example water or parking.

“On our Site we feel we have a really bad deal compared to other plots We are in a corner surrounded on 2 sides with dense weeds, brambles and bindweed. There are trees overhanging the plot. We are also a very long way from the nearest tap and the water pressure is appalling. The paths are not mown. So we get considerably less for our money than the plot holders along the main path. There should be equal facilities for all plot holders.”

Plot holders survey

Between sites there can be different levels of provision, e.g. some sites have trading huts or other shared facilities and others don't. Some have better parking or public transport access. New sites may be piloted without water or with metered water provision. The same formula for calculating rent (£ per square metre) is used regardless of provision.

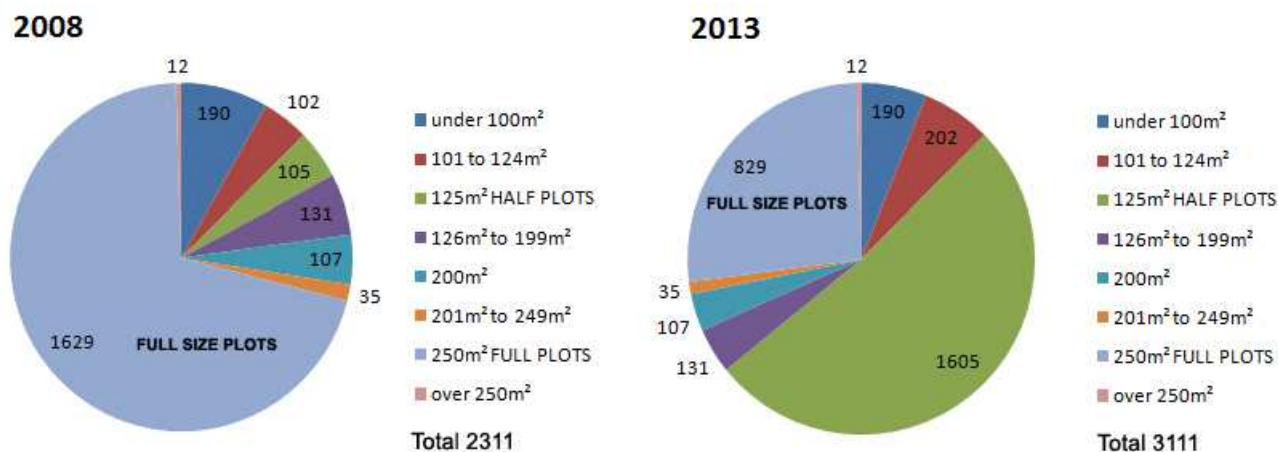
Plot Size and plot splitting

From 2009, Brighton & Hove City Council introduced a policy of only offering 'half' (125m²) plots to new tenants i.e. halving every 'full' (250m²) plot that became available for rent, so that it could be rented to two people. This was in order to reduce waiting list sizes. The [Waiting Lists and Demand for Allotments](#) section shows that the waiting list is currently smaller than had been thought, possibly half the size.

Plot splitting has increased the number of people involved in allotment growing in the city; but reduced the land available to many individuals. There are now around 800

full plots in the city, about half the number in 2008; and about 3111 plot holders, about 800 (or 35%) more than 2008.

Half and full plot holders: how this balance shifted from 2008-2013



The figures for different plot sizes in 2008 are the strategy working group's estimate as the Council does not hold the historical data on plot size.

Figures for 2013 relate to February 2013.

Restricting people to a half plot was an approach that the Allotment Federation and a number of Site Associations opposed for reasons outlined [Appendix 7: Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation reasons for opposing further splitting of plots](#). These include their view that a half plot is not enough land to grow sufficient food to feed a family on or practise proper crop rotation and that smaller plots lead to overcrowding, increased administration and an over-cultivation of land with a loss of bio-diversity.

Understanding and addressing the complex issue of balancing demand with an appropriate provision of land suitable for differing needs was a key issue for this strategy, and both consultation surveys asked for opinion on this. Further detail is in [Appendix 8: a closer look at land and plot sizes](#) but some key points from the plot holders' survey include:

- The majority of people (82%) are happy with their current plot size.

- The majority (64%) thought their land needs would not change in the next five years. However 28% thought they may require a bigger space.
- Although most of the half plot holders viewed their current needs as about right (76%), 22% viewed their land as too small (compared to just 4% of full plot holders).
- 83% of full plot holders did not view any change in land needs over the next five years, compared to 57% of half plot holders.

From the waiting list survey it was found that

- Given a choice, only about 18% of the waiting list would opt for full plots.
- Over half (55%) would choose a half plot.

This means that the current balance in provision of full plots and half plots in the city roughly matches the demands of the people on the waiting list.

Nearly a quarter (22%) of those who responded to the waiting list survey would choose an individual bed if the option was offered. Individual (or 'compact' or 'micro') beds take up very little space compared to full or even half plots, and could be a supportive environment for people new to growing. Site Reps also supported this option as a way to help people develop their skills, and confirm their commitment, before taking on a larger plot.

Therefore this strategy contains a recommendation that a mechanism for providing individual beds should be explored. Issues include

- Whether the Council, allotment associations, existing or community projects (self-organised by people who have rented an individual bed) would manage these.
- The cost per square metre will be higher than the same land managed by just one plot holder due to extra administration, plus additional facilities may potentially be provided (for example a shared shed) so the charge will need to reflect this.

Plot holders showed strong support for introducing a choice of plot size. When asked 'should current plot holders have the opportunity to change plot size?' 91% of people

who replied either agreed or strongly agreed. In response to the question 'should people joining the waiting list have a choice of plot size?' 75% of people who replied either agreed or strongly agreed.

This was re-stated at the consultation event but it was stressed that any choice should be informed about levels of time and skill needed to maintain the different sizes, to ensure that people only take on what they can deal with.

Recommendations:

The City Council and BHAF should continue to monitor the levels of waiting lists in different areas of the city and seek to open new sites in response to high demand, where this is practical. In the meantime the focus should be on the best management possible of existing sites.

There should be a 'principle of choice' established, whereby existing plot holders and those on the waiting list should be able to choose their plot size *according to the mechanisms below, which will be different for large and small sites.* (NB these will develop over time)

New allotmenters should get clear information before choosing a plot as to the hours and work they would need to put in to properly maintain the different sizes of plots, so that these choices realistic and workable (see [Waiting Lists and Demand for Allotments](#) for more detail about informing people on the waiting list)

Site representatives have an important role in helping new plot holders choose appropriate size plots at the letting stage, ensuring that people are aware of the time commitments for different sized plots; and in future facilitating when people choose to upsize or downsize. The Allotments Officer should hold a workshop for site representatives to explain the new processes for both large and small sites.

Further work should be done to explore how 'individual beds' (much smaller than a full or half plot) could be offered to the 22% of people on the waiting list that would choose them, and one or more pilot schemes introduced to look at how this would work in practice, including how much should be charged for them.

Offering a choice of plot sizes – how this could work in practice



1) New categories of sites will be established:

- a. **Small sites** (less than 100 plots)
- b. **Large sites** (greater than 100 plots)

(These categories will be reviewed in three years.)

2) Applications from the waiting list: small sites (<100 plots)

- Irrespective of size of plot that becomes available, the first person on the list will be offered it.

Scenarios

- A full plot becomes available. If the first applicant prefers a full plot, it will be let intact; if they prefer a half plot, it will be halved.

- A half plot becomes available. If the first applicant wants a half plot, it will let intact; if they prefer a full plot, they may accept half or wait longer.

3) Applications from the waiting list: large sites (>100 plots)

- Available full plots (including previously split plots, if both halves are simultaneously available) will be let whole, if one of the top ten applicants has expressed a preference for a full plot.
- The first applicant in the top ten preferring a full plot will be prioritised.
- If only half plots are available, the waiting list will be processed in customary chronological order. If someone would prefer a full plot they may accept half or wait longer.

4) Applications for a second half by existing tenants

- Existing half plot tenants who wish to adopt the neighbouring half plot may apply to do so but only if:-
 - The half plot in question was previously the conjoined half of a whole, e.g. 10/1 may adopt 10/2 but not 9/2. (Note that plots on recently created sites are all 125m² & cannot be conjoined.)
 - The tenant does not have a history of correctly issued notices in the past three years.
- Tenants should communicate that wish to the Allotments Service and their site rep(s).
- The Allotment Service will retain separate records of applications for second halves. (This will effectively be a second waiting list).
- Tenants will be entitled to the second half if it becomes available, provided they expressed their interest more than a year ago. (In practice the likelihood of the second half becoming available will be low).
- Some-one on a half plot can move to a new full plot if one becomes available subject to the same criteria above re cultivation notices.
- They would give up their half plot which would be offered to the waiting list. They would have proved themselves as capable of dealing with a half plot and will know what is involved in taking on a full plot.

5) Choosing to downsize

- Existing plot holders on both large and small sites will be able to downsize from a full to a half plot if they choose, by either spitting their plot (if practical) or swapping with another tenant on their site who wishes to upsize. (Note that this recommendation should be seen along other recommendations made about better support for people who are finding it hard to manage their allotment, such as help for finding a co-worker.)

Resources and Finance

Rental income and the allotment service subsidy

In 2012/13, the rental income from allotments was £107,155 and the expenditure was £ 155,123. The projected budget for 2013/14 showed income of £109,000 and expenditure of £160,130. All the council's allotment income currently comes from plot rentals.

The shortfall between income and expenditure – called the allotment service subsidy - was a little over £48,000 in 2012/13 and is likely to be about £51,000 in 2013/14.

Allotments are charged per meter squared. This price currently includes the land rent water, security & fencing, basic maintenance and administration.

The cost of allotments, rents and the subsidy²¹

	yearly cost of full plot (250sqm)	yearly cost of half plot (125sqm)
Allotment rent	£ 71.40	£ 35.70
Council subsidy	£ 33.60	£ 16.80
Total cost of providing plot	£ 105.00	£ 52.50

In the survey of allotment holders about two thirds of respondents (63%) did not know that the rents from plot holders failed to meet the costs of the service and that the shortfall was met from Council funds.

“You need to weigh up the paltry £51k against the quality of life, health and wellbeing benefits and social cohesion allotments provide. I for one feel much fitter and healthier having an allotment” Plot holders survey.

In the current financial situation (with ever reducing funding from central government) the City Council may have to make allotments, along with many other services,

²¹ Figures from 2013/14 budget

become self-financing. This would mean that the income from allotments would meet the costs associated with providing allotments.

Note that the Council does not wish to make a 'profit' out of allotments – their aim financial sustainability. Also that they are not looking to charge any kind of additional rental or 'premium' on the land itself (as with a commercial model) - the discussion here is purely about covering direct running costs.

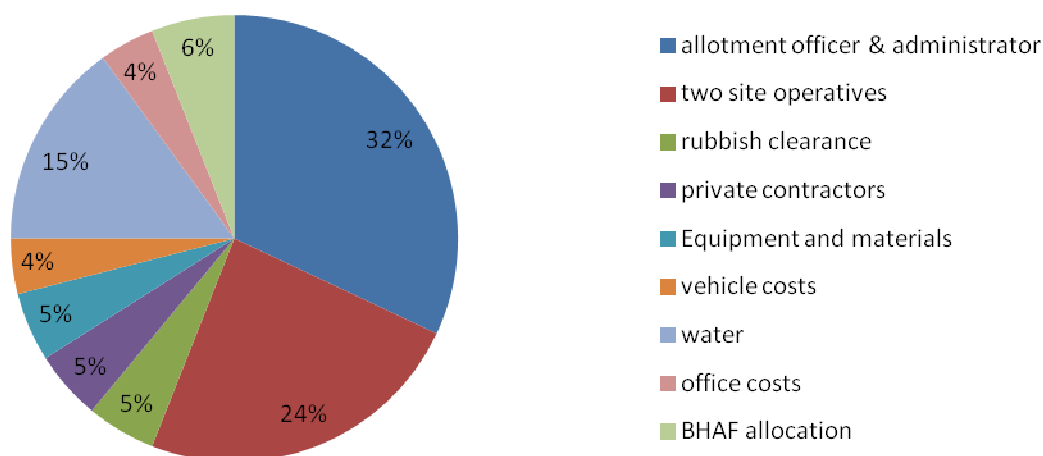
The Allotment Federation also acknowledges the financial position of the City Council and has accepted that it is reasonable for allotment rentals to increase with the cost of inflation and it would be appropriate to accept rental rises proportionate to the decreases in central government support, if these cannot be met through other savings.

In 2013 The City Council compared the cost of their allotments with elsewhere in the country (see [Appendix 6: Additional information on Resources and Finance](#)). Brighton & Hove was roughly in the middle, charging £35.70 for a half plot (125sqm). The cheapest comparable authority was Southend which charged £20 for the same size; the most expensive was North Tyneside, charging £53.75, without concessions available. This figure is close to the 'unsubsidised' figure i.e. the actual cost of providing a half plot in Brighton & Hove.

The cost of providing allotments

The major areas cost areas in 2013/14 are Allotment Service (Office based 36%), Allotment Service Operatives (on site 45%) – including staff and support costs- and Water (15%). There is a hidden cost associated with rubbish removal as it is likely that staff time is spent on this. There is a detailed breakdown carried out by Strategy Working Group on Resource in [Appendix 6: Additional information on Resources and Finance](#)

Approx breakdown of allotment costs



Currently those renting a 'half plot' (125m²) pay exactly half the price of a full plot (250m²), even though the administration costs are greater for two half plots than for a full plot as there is more work dealing with two plot holders than with one.

Value for money?

According to the survey of plot holders of 811 respondents 46% of people think the cost of allotments is about right, 24% good value for money and 21% excellent value for money. Around 9% think they are poor or very poor value for money.

Those on a half plot considered their plot better value for money with 26% considering it excellent value for money compared to 16% of those who have a full plot. Those who have been on plots longer tend to think that their plot is worse value for money (possibly because they have experienced a number of rent increases).

Value for money in relation to income

Nearly a third of plot holders in the survey (30%) were in receipt of a concession for their allotment. Overall there was very little difference (about 1%) in their perception of value for money compared to those paying full price.

However there was a substantial difference in perceptions about value for money when these were compared with household income, with 40% of the highest earning households (total income over £45k) finding their plots excellent value compared with around 18% of those on incomes below this. [Appendix 6: Additional information on Resources and Finance](#)

Increasing income through a rise in rents

Currently the only income from allotments is via rental from allotments.

The consultation process has clearly identified allotmenters perceive social, economic and environmental benefits of being involved in food growing so the value of allotments extends far beyond food production and further evidence should be gathered on the potential costs savings in health / social care budgets.

Recognising that allotments have wide benefits the Allotment Federation are keen to work with the Council to reduce the risk of disproportionate rental increases, maximise the efficiency of the Council service and reduce costs through effective partnership working and trialling proposals such as self management of sites.

In order to evidence the impact of allotments on the health and wellbeing of the city and the potential savings in health and social care budgets that allotments may contribute to, a more detailed Social Return on Investment analysis would need to be done.

In the survey, despite high perceived value for money, allotment holders were reluctant to accept a rent increase. 76% of respondents believe that the Council should continue to subsidise the costs of the service that are not met by rents from plot holders.

“Increasing the cost of the plot will reduce economic diversity on the sites. I hope this doesn't happen as I enjoy the mix of people..... The allotment is a great source of peace and relaxation for me and my family and I hope it doesn't become unaffordable” Plot holders survey

There was however more acceptance amongst plot holders for increasing rents to those who are paying the full price, while protecting for those on concessionary rates. Even then, 53 % disagreed or disagreed strongly.

There was also reluctance to support increasing rents per square metre for half plots. 49 % disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement that the rental for half plots should increase to take into account that the proportionate administration and management costs are higher.

Alternatives to increasing the rent per square metre

Variable rental levels

There were several suggestions made during the consultation around charging higher rents for people who are on higher incomes. As an example, using data from the survey, if those household which earn over £35,000 a year (30% of plot holders) paid £10 a year more this would generate an extra £9,000 for the service. However there are difficulties in policing such a system and how much that would cost in relation to the additional income generated. Also it would need to be clear why there was an additional charge and what it was going towards.

Therefore the recommendation below is that voluntary methods should be explored, i.e. people should be given the option to pay extra if they are on a high income and can afford it; and/or some of those eligible for concessions can choose to donate the additional cost back if they are able to afford it. This is similar to schemes where people choose to donate their Winter Fuel payments if they are not in need of it.

Covering the costs of managing the waiting list

Managing the waiting list has a cost attached which currently is included in the general cost of running the service, meaning that the waiting list service is in effect paid for by existing plot holders and the allotment service subsidy. This strategy includes recommendations for improving the experience of people on the waiting list, particularly better communication with them, which could further increase the cost. (See [Waiting Lists and Managing Demand](#))

This strategy recommends to help fund better management of the waiting list a non-refundable waiting list fee (£15) should be introduced.

For example, if 500 people a year paid a £15 charge, this would generate £7500²². As well as generating income to cover the service this may encourage people to consider their commitment more seriously prior to signing up to a waiting list, which is a core aim of this strategy in order to reduce the level of drop outs among new plot holders. (See [Waiting Lists and Demand for Allotments](#) for more on this)

²² This rough calculation uses the figure of 670 applicants to the waiting list in 2013. Assuming that 25% of these would be eligible for concessions so not pay a charge, this would make 502 people.

If implemented it is important that those who would benefit most from allotments are not deterred i.e. there should be no charge for people who are eligible for concessions. It is also important that efficiency savings for running the waiting lists are explored alongside the charge.

People on the waiting list are important stakeholders in the allotment community – this charge should always be related to the service they receive.

Generating additional revenue

There was a consensus between the Council, the Allotment Federation and people who participated in the survey that, whilst at the same time preserving and ideally even improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the service, there should be a serious attempts to operate the service as cost effectively as possible. It is agreed to explore additional sources of revenue, especially services which would benefit plot holders as well as generate income. It was recognised that Council finances may deteriorate significantly and that the Allotment Service may have to work towards a non subsidised model.

The consultation event identified that some plot holders would like to have access to additional paid options– ranging from delivery and erection of sheds or fencing; to wood for DIY construction; and in particular regular deliveries of woodchips, mulches, manure or other soil improvers brought to their plots.

There are also recommendations around exploring alternative funding. In particular there is evidence that allotments may have a positive impact on health, particularly for vulnerable groups, and support public health agendas on promoting mental health, reducing obesity, increasing physical activity and increasing access to green spaces (see [Why allotments are important for our city](#)) Therefore there is an argument for exploring whether concessions for vulnerable groups in particular could be funded via the public health budget, while understanding that these budgets are also under pressure.

The long term aim should be that the cost of concessions should be covered by additional funding (for the social, health and wellbeing provision) rather than by the allotment budget or by allotmenters (see also [Allotment Accessibility](#)).

“An allotment is a ‘social service’ too and helps to avoid loneliness and isolation, so therefore the cost of the service cannot be estimated in traditional ways” Plot holder survey

Savings and efficiencies

Almost a third of those answering the questionnaire (258 People) offered suggestions on ways to make the allotment service more efficient or provided ideas on how to save money.

There were several comments which noted the high cost of rubbish removal. In some cases people felt that they were not seeing sufficient benefit from this charge i.e. they felt that rubbish removal was inadequate.

There were several suggestions for automating systems e.g. introducing payment by automatic annual direct debit; and billing via email. There is evidence the current ICT systems for waiting list management and billing ICT systems are very time consuming for staff and it was suggested costs should be obtained for upgrading these. As well as saving staff time these would lead to a better service for plot holders.

“Paying once a year by debit card isn’t that hard, but it would be easier if it could just be collected as part of my council tax direct debit”.

“There should be a way to get plot-holders to cut communal grass and hedges, saving money”

“Involve volunteers more in the management of the sites”

Plot holder survey suggestions

Additionally, the survey showed that there is support for the allotment community becoming more involved if organised in a fair way. This could range from routine maintenance such rubbish removal or path maintenance; to an additional role in carrying out inspections; through to a fully devolved structure for self-management, as happens in some other areas (see [Participation and Self-Management](#)). There was however concerns about lack of time; and the danger of too much work falling to too few people, leading to burnout.

Also practical issues are important, for example rubbish removal must consider issues such as type of transport, cost of disposal, and legal restrictions on the transport of waste.

Based on figures from November 2013, there are over 400 un-let plots, representing an annual lost income of around £15,000 as well as causing frustration to both plot holders and those on the waiting list. Whilst some plots will inevitably remain vacant whilst they are in the process of being let, it is recommended that this figure is reduced via the recommendations of improving the lettings process including seeking additional funding to improve ICT systems; and supporting site representatives better in managing lettings (see [Waiting Lists and Managing Demand](#) section)

Additional Ideas that have been explored when developing the strategy

In some authorities **deposits** are paid when people first rent an allotment, which is withheld if rubbish is not removed on departure. This is not a recommendation of this strategy currently as these are often modest amounts (e.g. £25) that would not cover the costs, especially when the cost of administering refunds is taken into account. Higher, more realistic deposits may make allotments unaffordable for those on low incomes or with small amounts of savings, particularly if introduced alongside a possible new charge for joining the waiting list (see above).

Water cost are high (15% of total costs). There has been water wastage in the past, with some individuals being insensitive to the costs. There has been little work done to emphasise the possibilities of water harvesting from roofs in the winter and water conservation in the summer. The Working Group which explored this issue also noticed unexpected variations in cost between sites so believe that water leaks may also have quite a high impact on water costs.

Some authorities charge separately for water (calculated on a site by site basis and shared), some authorities do not provide water, and some authorities are looking at providing individually metred water supplies to plots, which could be a consideration for future allotment provision.

There was very little support from allotment holders for the proposal that water use should be rationed (18%) and even less support for the proposal that water should be charged for additionally (7%). Therefore this isn't a recommendation for existing sites, although options such as individual water metering should be explored for future allotment provision. There are important recommendations around encouraging water harvesting and saving water in [The Allotment Environment](#).

The idea of charging different amounts per square metre dependent on different conditions at different sites (e.g. quality of soil, provision of shops, mains water, better parking or transport) was rejected as unworkable at this stage, particularly as there are sometimes similar disparities between different plots on the same site. (More detail in [Land, plot size and plot splitting](#)). It was felt that any charging system which addressed this would fail generate any realistic savings, as the admin time would increase.

These ideas should be revisited when this strategy is reviewed in future.

Recommendations

Rent rises should be minimised and other avenues explored for reducing costs and generating revenue.

Any proposed rent rises which are higher than inflation should be brought to the Allotment Forum as early in the process as possible for discussion with and feedback from elected Site Reps.

There should be an option to pay a higher rent for those on higher incomes; or to turn down a concession if this is not needed. This should be offered on a voluntary (honesty) system; it should be simple to administer; and it should be clear where the money is going e.g. to the allotment improvement fund (for site improvements) or to continue to offer subsidised allotments to those on concessions.

The allotment service should explore efficiency savings in managing both the service and the waiting list, including exploring the costs of new ICT systems for one or both of these. (NB new ICT would require additional funding, it could not come from within current budgets)

Whilst the option for paper invoices should remain, these should become the exception rather than the rule as billing by email is more cost effective.

Payment by annual Direct Debit should also be explored.

The allotment service should introduce a non-refundable administration charge for joining the waiting list of £15 (waived for concessions) to contribute to the costs of running the waiting list including offering a better service to those on the list.

The turnover of plots should be increased, to reduce the amount of vacant plots and increase income. This can be achieved

- by better supporting Site Reps with the lettings process (see [Appendix 5: Recommendations on the role of Site Reps – further detail](#))
- Reducing the time from non-payment or non-cultivation to eviction, which often takes between 6 months and a year. It is believed that the current rules allow for this so it is about enforcing them more promptly. For example there is currently a three month trial period in the tenancy but this is really enforced.
- Better supporting new plot holders via training, mentoring etc to reduce drop-out among new plot holders
- The figures which the council allotment service compile on number of vacancies at different sites should be shared with Site Reps via the allotment forum, to make it easier to track and address where there are high numbers of vacant plots or the lettings process is getting ‘stuck’

Alternative sources of income should be explored including charitable support and business sponsorship.

Many site associations already do their own local fundraising, and this should be further encouraged.

The City Council’s public health team should consider if there is scope for public health budgets funding some of the concessions thereby in the long

term moving the subsidy for this concession away from plot holders towards health and wellbeing budgets.

The allotment service should explore providing additional services such as manure delivery, and delivery/erection of sheds, as opportunities to generate additional income whilst improving the service to allotment holders. If successful further work could take place to establish demand for services such as provision of vegetable seedlings grown in Council nurseries.

Water reduction should be a priority

- There should be support for the allotment community in for water harvesting and low water methods of gardening (see also [The Allotment Environment](#)).
- The allotment service should review how it identifies water leaks – for example raising awareness of the issue with plot holders – and how effectively they are dealt with by Southern water. Note that the tackling of leaks is already a service priority.
- Future allotment provision should explore ‘smart’ options such as individual water metering.
- The Food Partnership should look for funding e.g. from water companies to resource education work for allotments on water conservation.
- The Allotment Federation should explore how it can offer advice and/or practical support with water harvesting such as providing water butts.

The allotment community should also be supported to reduce the amount of rubbish requiring removal. (See also [Allotment Sustainability](#)).

At least one pilot should look at how some elements of site management and maintenance could be undertaken more cost effectively by plots holders or site associations, for example fence maintenance or rubbish removal (without full self-management).

At least one, and ideally 2-3 sites should pilot self-management (see also [Participation and Self-Management](#)) to explore whether this model could be more cost effective i.e. whether some sites could eventually become self-funding and self-managing. Note that these pilots should not in themselves be expected to save money; but to generate information as to whether this could be a cost-saving model in future (a 'ghost budget' should be kept to check this). Also whether self-management is an effective and empowering model for those involved – this should not just be about cash.

Other options which should be explored - but only if it is still not possible to increase revenue sufficiently to meet actual costs – include:

- Modest price increases for half plot holders to reflect the higher charge of providing half plots. [note that the prices for new individual beds will need to reflect the higher cost of providing – see [Land, plot size and plot splitting](#)]
- Rental rises proportionate to the decreases in central government support, if these cannot be met through other savings.

