

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM No.

REPORT TO CABINET

11 JUNE 2009

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Environment – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillors Mrs J Beaumont
Arts Leisure & Culture – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Mrs M Womphrey

ALLOTMENT PROVISION AND MEETING FUTURE DEMAND WITHIN STOCKTON ON TEES

1. Summary

Allotments have become increasingly popular over recent years. 2008 saw a dramatic shift in demand for allotments. With the increasing emphasis on healthy lifestyles and current building practices providing reduced outside space for horticulture and vegetable growing areas, allotment provision is becoming a priority for residents. This report highlights that there is insufficient allotment provision within Stockton on Tees.

Within Section 23 of the Allotment Act 1908 it is made the express duty of every allotment authority, where there is a demand for allotments; provide a sufficient number of them for residents of that area. There are currently in excess of 400 names on the waiting lists.

2. Recommendations

1. That potential new allotment sites are identified as part of the action planning process for Stockton on Tees Green Infrastructure Strategy and to ensure plans compliment the Sustainable Communities strategy.
2. A separate strategy is developed to look at the future of allotment provision within Stockton on Tees, linking in with possible community partnerships and identifying potential bodies that might be able to be set up to access charitable or grant facilities.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

Stockton on Tees has an under provision of allotments. These recommendations allow further work on identifying potential additional allotment sites.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- In a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- In any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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SUMMARY

1. Allotments have become increasingly popular over recent years. 2008 saw a dramatic shift in demand for allotments. With the increasing emphasis on healthy lifestyles and current building practices providing reduced outside space for horticulture and vegetable growing areas, allotment provision is becoming a priority for residents. This report highlights that there is insufficient allotment provision within Stockton on Tees.
2. Within Section 23 of the Allotment Act 1908 it is made the express duty of every allotment authority, where there is a demand for allotments; provide a sufficient number of them for residents of that area. There are currently in excess of 400 names on the waiting lists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That potential new allotment sites are identified as part of the action planning process for Stockton on Tees Green Infrastructure Strategy and to ensure plans complement the Sustainable Communities strategy.
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DETAIL

1. The administration and management of Stockton Borough Councils Allotment Portfolio is within CFYA, Direct Services, however there are 21 sites across the borough that are owned by Town / Parish Councils with management responsibility devolved to Allotment Associations.
2. There are a total of 1103 allotment plots within the borough, the breakdown of plots as follows: -

SBC SITES	TOTAL PLOTS	VACANT PLOTS	NO ON LIST
STOCKTON NORTH	16	0	0
STOCKTON SOUTH	NA	NA	NA
BILLINGHAM	NA	NA	NA
THORNABY	215	41 development plots	105
PARISH COUNCILS / SELF MANAGED SITES	TOTAL PLOTS	VACANT PLOTS	NO ON LIST
STOCKTON NORTH	299	2	143
STOCKTON SOUTH	332	0	94
BILLINGHAM	216	21	85
THORNABY	NA	NA	NA

3. There are currently 23 vacant plots, the majority of which are within the Billingham Area on the Clarences allotment site where there is no demand.
4. Current vacant plots in Thornaby are not ready for occupation and require some redevelopment, yet the demand on this site exceeds the availability even when these plots are brought back into use.
5. There are 427 people waiting for allotment plots across the Borough with the average waiting time to receive a plot now standing at 2 to 3 years, depending on the location. This figure is expected to rise.

Trends

6. Historically, demand for allotment sites have been sporadic and have fluctuated between periods of high and low demand.
7. With a decline in demand for allotments in recent years, Stockton has seen closure of many allotment sites, with sites being used for housing redevelopment, alternative green corridors and wildlife habitats – since 1995 a total of 411 plots have been lost within the borough.
8. It is important to note that some of these former sites became disused due to a range of factors including increasing levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, due to the remote locations and lack of security, with expectations of tenants rising these allotments were no longer fit for purpose.
9. In 2008 there seems to have been a dramatic shift in demand for allotments, with the increasing emphasis on healthy lifestyles and current building practices with reduced outside space for horticulture and vegetable growing areas, allotment provision is becoming a priority for residents.
10. The National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners Ltd are in the process of undertaking a countrywide survey of allotments and so far they have identified 11,000 people on waiting lists from just 30 Local Authorities.
11. Within Stockton we have 427 people on the waiting list for an allotment, amounting to more than 25% of the total available plots.

Available Allotment Land

12. A recent audit has been undertaken on allotment provision and this has highlighted allotment sites that have been declared surplus since 1993 that are still classed as disused sites and with appropriate funding source are available to be brought back into use.

SBC SITES	TOTAL PLOTS	COST
STOCKTON NORTH	73	£80,000
THORNABY	110	£60,000

13. The costs are based on estimates for land cultivation, upgrades to water supply and other services as well appropriate security and car parking.

Future Allotment Provision

14. As with all leisure activities demand for allotments has fluctuated in recent years, however national statistics and the current demand for allotments within Stockton on Tees has proven that there is an under provision of allotment land.
15. As with all developments funding will need to be sought in order to bring the land back into use, however the Authority are looking at a number of options to meet future demand for allotment land:

- Future allotment provision is now included within the Local Development Framework, a total of 21 out of 26 sites are now protected under planning policy.
 - Trends for allotment demand have been identified and are being used to identify appropriate land for future use of allotment land.
 - The Thornaby Allotments Steering Group are in the process of submitting grant applications to develop disused plots within the Thornaby sites to bring these back into use, it is expected that the waiting list will be reduced to 50 people.
 - A consultation exercise is currently being carried to inform development of the Action Plan for the Stockton on Tees Green Infrastructure Strategy. This exercise will look at residents priorities for open space land and its future use. Allotment provision is included as part of this exercise which will be complete by the end of June 2009. Once land prioritisation is complete a separate strategy will be developed to include funding opportunities to develop further allotment sites across the Borough to meet current and future demand.
16. Current priorities for additional land is within the Stockton South and Billingham areas, where at present little provision exists and waiting list turnover is at its highest. (Vacant plots in Billingham area are all based within the Clarences).

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

17. Potential legal obligations are transfer of land usage.
18. The financial implications associated are for capital costs to purchase land as well as costs associated with developing and improving the sites that will link into external funding organisations, a review of income generation and links into developers contributions.
19. On going revenue implications are based on Officer costs to manage any retained SBC sites and look at self-management arrangements with existing associations and community groups.

RISK ASSESSMENT

20. The associated risks are against budgets where there is no provision for ongoing management of the sites and the cost to the council for obtaining and developing allotments.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

21. The allotment review and increase in provision links into the following strands of the community strategy:
- Liveability Theme – Improving the quality of life for local people, through working with associations within the community, promoting community cohesion and participation and improving our facilities thus improving the local environment.
 - Safer Communities – by improved facilities and security to tackle crime and the fear of crime and anti social behaviour.
 - Children and Young People – By encouraging participation with young people we will promote health, well-being and achievement.
 - Healthier Communities and Adults – By providing more allotment plots we will promote healthier communities giving the community an opportunity to ‘grow their own’ and access to healthy foods and healthy eating tackling key health issues.

- Economic Benefits - Allotments also provide an opportunity for residents to grow high quality cost efficient food providing an economic benefit to the family budget.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

22. Extensive consultation will be carried out via the Green Infrastructure Strategy Consultation.

Background Papers

Appendix 1 – Planning Protection
Appendix 2 – Analysis of current facilities
Appendix 3 – Disused Allotment Land
Appendix 4 – Process to identify suitable land
Appendix 5 – Plans showing allotment sites

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Background Papers:

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

All ward boundaries included.

Property

Current allotment land.