

**SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND
LEISURE DEPARTMENT**

**Report of the Healthy Living
Development Officer on the provision
of Gwynedd Council allotments to the
Communities Scrutiny Committee.**



1.0 Background

1.1. Nationally, interest in allotments has transformed with a recent regeneration, with emphasis on local and seasonal produce, healthy eating and reducing the environmental impact on the food chain. Economic decline has meant that people want to find new ways of accessing cheaper food. The opportunity to grow fresh and affordable food, meeting with others, sharing tips and knowledge, community inclusion and keeping active are all things which appeal more and more to people. These factors have created more and more demand for allotments and local authorities are coming under more pressure to provide more allotments in order to satisfy this trend at a time when financial resources are becoming scarce.

1.2. In general, Local Authorities identify the positive environmental and social effects of providing good allotments. Although there is no legal duty on Local Authorities to provide allotments, often residents expect Gwynedd Council to provide land for this purpose. Nationally, meeting current requirements is a challenge, with spare land in short supply, waiting lists growing and limited finance. As well as the above, there is a complex network of legislation involving the administration of allotments, controlled by law.

1.3. Currently, the Council receives between two and three applications a year from community groups who want to establish a new allotment. The Council does not employ an officer with specific responsibility for allotments, therefore these applications are dealt with by the Property Department as part of the property management work.

2.0. The current process of establishing allotments on Gwynedd Council land.

2.1. Appendix 1 contains a flow chart which notes the process facing a community group who wish to establish an allotment on Gwynedd Council land. As seen at the beginning of the chart, any enquiries involving allotments are referred to the Healthy Living Development Manager who then discusses the matter with the appropriate officer in the Property Department. As mentioned above, promoting and ensuring the success of allotments in Gwynedd is not a

formal part of the job of a member of staff in the Property Department; work involving allotments is reactive not proactive. There is currently no information available formally for the public on how to go about establishing an allotment in the County; a factor which can be frustrating for individuals and community groups. Having looked through the websites of other Councils across Wales, the majority have a formal process of establishing an allotment which is advertised on the Council website with contact point and details available. Some counties also have an allotment strategy available on their websites along with frequently asked questions on matters involving allotments. The Gwynedd Council website does not currently have this information or an allotment policy or strategy.

3.0. Existing Allotments in Gwynedd.

3.1. Existing allotment sites in Gwynedd are either historic allotments or lands that the Council is not able to sell, either for strategic reasons (e.g. Botwnnog site, where they share the site with the school) or because there is no market (e.g. Blaenau Ffestiniog).

3.2. The Council does not have much land surplus to requirements. The vast majority of the Council's urban lands are parks and playing fields.

3.3. In terms of assessing the provision of allotments, there is no recognised standard for the provision of allotments available, although the publication 'Good practice guidance to grow in the community' recommends that a useful rule of thumb would be '15 plots per 1,000 homes'. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners suggests a national standard of 20 allotments per 1,000 homes. The Council has never undertaken an allotment assessment in the County to see whether the provision is adequate.

4.0. Waiting lists.

4.1. As the Council is not directly managing sites, it does not keep a waiting list. The sites are managed by constituted groups – or Community / Town Council or similar body. However, it is given to understand that all allotments across the County have been let with waiting lists in some cases.

5.0. Financial and land procurement implications.

5.1. The Local Government Act 1972 places a duty on Local Authorities to ensure best value when disposing of property assets. General Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003 permits disposal for less than market value under special circumstances should the disposal result in economic, environmental or cultural benefits. The Council can consider disposing of land for less than market price if it can satisfy the conditions of the Disposal Consent. The Council's ability to cope with the

financial loss of disposing of land for less than actual value is, of course, another matter.

5.2. In terms of land procurement, a traditional allotment plot is 1/16 acre. The procurement costs of agricultural land are approximately £8,000 - £12,000 per acre, whilst urban land or land on the outskirts of towns where there is development potential is likely to be 10-20 times this amount. As mentioned above, the Council deals with allotment matters in a reactive way at present. If it is decided to adopt a more proactive attitude, consideration would have to be given to employing an allotments officer or similar. However, without a budget to procure land, there may not be any purpose in increasing staff capacity.

6.0 Recent developments

Following recent discussions between the Property Department, the Healthy Living Manager, the Cabinet Member responsible for Healthy Living and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, several developments have been agreed in order to facilitate the process of establishing an allotment in Gwynedd. These developments include:

- Create/develop a page on the Council website which signposts the public to the officer responsible for this work within the appropriate department.
- Guidelines for residents and Council staff on the current provision in terms of established allotments in Gwynedd (contact points etc.).
- The process of establishing a new allotment, which would include information about planning guidance, providing sample policies and tenants' agreements, a sample application by a community group which has already established an allotment in Gwynedd etc.
- Provide links to useful websites such as the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.

This work has started, and it is hoped that this information will be available on the Council website by September 2013.

7.0 Potential further developments for the future

7.1. Create an Allotments Charter for Gwynedd which outlines the Council's promises in relation to Allotments for the next 'x' years. This could be a Charter which outlines the work being done by the Council now or a proactive one, where the Council sets out the development stages for the future.

7.2. Develop an Allotments Strategy and Action Plan for Gwynedd. This will involve quite a substantial investment of time by officers within the Council.

Dependent on the nature of the strategy, it could also mean investments in terms of additional costs for the Council.

7.3. Hold an Allotments Assessment in the County to see whether the current provision of allotments is adequate.

7.4. Undertake an audit of green land in Council ownership. If suitable land is available to create an allotment, this should be advertised in the local paper to see whether anyone is interested in running an allotment. This may mean paying for a fence and connecting water to the site. Although this method is proactive, it could be expensive in terms of staff capacity to undertake an audit and the possibility of connecting services such as water.

8.0. Conclusions

8.1. Advantages and disadvantages of the options mentioned are recognised. In the current economic climate, it may be difficult to justify investing in staff in order to develop the services mentioned above. However as noted in the Background section, there are several advantages to developing and promoting the residents of Gwynedd to be involved in allotments – economic and health advantages. What is currently missing is the support for community groups to establish allotments i.e. someone to guide them through the process and to support them to do the appropriate paperwork etc.

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APPENDIX 1

A flow chart noting the process facing a community group who wish to establish an allotment on Gwynedd Council land.

Member of the group (constituted) to contact the Healthy Living Manager in order to discuss the idea of establishing an allotment.



Property Department to check land ownership and if the land is in Council ownership it will ask the group to create a brief statement about the prospective allotment.



Once this is received, the Property Department to contact the Department responsible for the land to see whether they are willing to release the land.



If they are willing in principle to release the land the group will be asked to create a more formal business plan, including details about its constitution, finance, layout, access, planning permission, water etc.



The Property Department will then assess the plan and identify any shortcomings to which the group will have to respond before the plan is approved.



If a viable business plan is produced, the Property Department will seek political authority from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Property.



The Council and the community group will enter into a legal agreement.



Access to the property.