

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO HEALTH, WELLBEING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

7th September 2023

Report Title: Review of Allotment Waiting List

Submitted by: Service Director – Neighbourhood Delivery

Portfolios: Sustainable Environment

Ward(s) affected: All

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To advise the committee of the current position in relation to the waiting list for allotment plots on the Council's 6 allotment sites and to seek the committee's views on potential affordable and sustainable community solutions to address the demand	
<u>Recommendation</u> That the Committee:- 1. Receive the report 2. Provide views on potential affordable and sustainable community solutions to address the demand for allotment plots	
<u>Reasons</u> To seek to support the community in addressing the current demand for allotment plots	

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council currently provides 190 allotment plots, spread over 6 sites at Basford, Dimsdale, Lyme Valley, Thistleberry, Blackbank and Jason Street. Current occupancy is at 98% and the current waiting list contains 524

names. Waiting times vary from a few months for new applicants to 5/6 years for those who have been on the list for a length of time. Waiting times can be dependent on whether people wish to specify a particular site, or if they are satisfied to take a plot on any site which becomes available. There is a mix of management approaches across sites, with some having established committees who assist the Council with various duties and others with no committees which are completely reliant on the Council to administer and manage the site.

- 1.2 There are other providers of allotments in the Borough. In parished areas, it is the duty of town and parish councils to provide allotments. There are currently an estimated 310 plots spread over 8 sites provided by town and parish councils in Kidsgrove (Crown Bank - 27 plots and 15 people on waiting list; Lamb Street is self-managed and data isn't available for this site), Silverdale (Park Road – 40 plots no data on waiting list; the Acre – 45 plots and 12-15 people on waiting list), Audley (1 site with estimated 30 plots), Madeley (Wharf Terrace – 38 plots and 8 people on the waiting list; Manor Road – private charity site – 41 plots and 2 people on waiting list) and Loggerheads (Eccleshall Road – 30 plots and 9 people on waiting list).
- 1.3 The Council produced the current Allotment Strategy in 2014 which was intended to be reviewed after 2020. One of the guiding principles of the strategy was to facilitate community management of allotments and move to self-management models where possible. It is now an opportune time to refresh and update the strategy in light of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy.
- 1.4 Due to the successful delivery of the Allotment Strategy, the service costs have reduced and the income has increased, meaning that the net cost to the Council is currently only £6490 per annum. Any increase to costs would result in an unbudgeted additional pressure on the Council's revenue budget.

2. Issues

- 2.1 Allotment gardening has become more popular in recent times, prompted partly by the Covid 19 pandemic which brought the benefits of outdoor green space into sharper focus, and also by the cost of living crisis which has made people think about growing their own food. In addition, a heightened awareness amongst communities of the climate change agenda has resulted in more people seeking a more sustainable lifestyle.
- 2.2 This has resulted in an increase in demand for allotment plots, which is currently outstripping supply. Analysis of the geographical spread of demand in the Borough has not identified any particular concentrations, rather it is spread across a range of mainly urban locations (see attached map). Where demand exists in rural areas, responsibility for additional provision rests with the relevant town or parish council so interested parties could engage with those organisations to discuss supply and demand.

- 2.3 In urban areas of the Borough, demand is sporadic and does not indicate any particular geographic area which would be an obvious location for an additional allotment site. This brings other sustainability considerations into play around accessibility and travel to and from sites, as well as affordability to the council taxpayer if additional sites are provided at public expense. The affordability issue also has to be balanced against the benefits new sites would bring to a relatively small percentage of residents, when considered in the context of other service provision for services which benefit a much larger proportion of the community. Prioritisation must be a factor in considering potential solutions to the current demand.
- 2.4 The creation and operation of new sites by the Borough Council would result in both significant financial pressure to acquire and/or lay out land for allotments, and the need for a staffing resource to manage new sites, neither of which are available within current budgets or staffing levels. Therefore, other alternatives need to be considered which are led and managed by the community to ensure that provision is sustainable in the longer term.
- 2.5 The Borough Council could, for its part, provide advice and support to community groups in terms of forming a constituted organisation or management committee, sourcing and bidding for funding, and commissioning project management support. It could also potentially consider making land available in its asset holdings for allotment purposes, subject to consultation with the wider community and any other planning or legislative restrictions which might apply. However, there would need to be a firm commitment and proven critical mass of demand before a feasibility study for a new site could be supported with Council resources. Any new provision on Council land would be subject to a constituted organisation being in a position to secure full funding for the laying out of the site and committing to set up a suitable management committee for the operation of the site, including the waiting list, letting of plots, collection of rents, enforcement, maintenance and paying of all running costs. The site would potentially be leased to the group with a management agreement from the Council to ensure that the site is managed appropriately.
- 2.6 There may be other potential solutions to address demand, which do not require support or assistance from the Council, and members are invited to consider and discuss ideas with interested residents and potential allotment plotters to determine the appetite for additional provision and community management models.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 That the report is received.
- 3.2 That the committee provide views on potential affordable and sustainable community solutions to address the demand for allotment plots.

4. Reasons

- 4.1 To seek to support the community in addressing the current demand for allotment plots.

5. Options Considered

- 5.1 Option 1 – continue with the current waiting list system for the existing plot provision. This is unlikely to reduce demand in the foreseeable future.
- 5.2 Option 2 – consider ideas from members and residents on how an affordable and sustainable community solution to address demand could be progressed.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 6.1 The Council has a duty under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 and Allotments Act 1950, if they are of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments, then the council shall provide a sufficient number of allotments.
- 6.2 Under the same legislation, in parished areas, Town and Parish Councils have a duty to provide allotments where if they are of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments, then the council shall provide a sufficient number of allotments.
- 6.3 Other providers can provide allotment plots

7. Equality Impact Assessment

- 7.1 There are not considered to be any adverse impacts on equality directly related to this report.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial and resource implications directly related to this report. However, future provision of new allotment sites would require both capital and revenue investment, staff resource and the need to acquire or make land available for this purpose.
- 8.2 The Council has no current provision in existing capital and revenue budgets for this purpose, nor is it likely that such provision could be made at present in light of other competing service priority pressures. Therefore it would be incumbent on other providers or community organisations to source funding for the acquisition, laying out and running of any new sites.

9. Major Risks & Mitigation

- 6.1 There is a risk that demand for allotments continues to be unmet. This could be mitigated by providing support to community groups to set up and manage new sites where demand and appetite can be clearly demonstrated.

10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

- 10.1 The proposal contributes towards the following UNSDGs



11. **Key Decision Information**

- 11.1 N/A

- 11.2 Depending on the decision of the committee, it may be necessary to report to Cabinet for a decision on next steps.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

- 12.1 None

13. **List of Appendices**

- 13.1 Allotments Strategy 2014 - 20

- 13.2 Plan showing distribution of residents wishing to rent an allotment.

14. **Background Papers**

- 14.1 None