
Agenda Item: Allotment Provision

Meeting Date: Monday, 17 March 2025

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to inform Members on the Council's duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments for residents and to decide if any action should be taken to increase this number following an enquiry from a resident in 2024.

Background

There is no fixed definition of an allotment or legal minimum size but on average they are 300 sq. yards or 250m. The technical definition is a piece of land allocated or allotted to a person as the result of an enclosure award. Town Council allotments are regulated under the Allotments Acts 1908–50.

If the Council believes there is a demand for allotments, it has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of plots under section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908. This is a duty to *consider* providing allotments and does not mean it must.

For reference, Section 25 of this Act refers to powers of compulsory acquisition for this purpose, Section 27 provides for letting to a co-operative, and Section 30 adds that if a tenant lives more than one mile outside the area for which the allotments are provided; the local authority can serve notice.

Current Situation

The Town Council provides allotments across four sites in Witney at Newland, Hailey Road, Lakeside, and Windrush Place which are administered by the Witney Allotment Association.

Information from the Allotment Association website indicates there at least 233 people on the waiting list for allotments in Witney. It has not been established how up to date this information is.

There is no minimum number of allotments the Council should provide but research shows that the 1969 Thorpe Report is often quoted, which recommends a minimum provision equivalent to 15 per 1,000 households, but this is not binding.

A survey undertaken by Government in 2006 showed the national average was 13 plots per 1,000 households, and it is understood the National Society for Allotment & Leisure Gardeners suggests a minimum of 20 per 1,000 households (300 sq. yards).

The number of allotments currently available in Witney is 230, which include a mixture of 300 sq. yard plots and smaller. There are currently approximately 14,000 households in Witney. Based on the figures above this would mean the following for provision:

13 allotments per 1,000 households	182	230	+159
15 allotments per 1,000 households	210	230	+20*
20 allotments per 1,000 households	280	230	-50

*This figure could be interpreted as less, depending on the size of the plots.

Further allotments sites are expected at East Witney (in Witney parish) and at North Witney (outside of Witney Parish) in the coming years but there is no time frame for these developments. If on the same scale as Windrush Place, the developments could provide a further 100+ allotment sites.

It should also be noted that a number of allotments at Lakeside continue to be subject to flooding during extreme weather events. Any mitigation measures which reduced this number would clearly lower the number of available plots.

The cost of providing further new allotments may be prohibitive or appropriate land may not be available, easily let or purchased in or outside the Witney boundary. In the first instance, it may be prudent to request if the WAA can ascertain if the current waiting list is correct.

By considering this report, the Council is in effect carrying out its duty to *consider* providing more allotment sites if it considers there is an insufficient number.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – Allotments can provide access to healthy food for low-income and vulnerable groups, especially if designed with disability inclusiveness in mind.
- b) Biodiversity – Allotments can increase green space for wildlife, create habitats for Pollinators and improve soil quality.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no impact.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – Allotments can offer a reduction in food miles and in energy use through the promotion of sustainable practices.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

By pre-emptively considering this issue, the Council is mitigating the risk for challenge to perform its duty to consider providing more allotment sites.

The Council may face reputational risk; taking into account the interests of the local community as a whole, if the provision of further allotments on unreasonable terms would not be the best use of the council's resources. However, the reverse is also true for those who believe the current number of plots is not sufficient.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

By supporting community gardens and allotments, parish and town councils can help residents access affordable, nutritious food, promote community engagement and social cohesion, and contribute to the overall health and well-being of their communities.

Allotments can and do improve the wellbeing of communities, and close inspection of community strategies reveals many opportunities for the achievement of strategic priorities through allotment gardening, and in ways that engage with communities at a very local level. Allotments provide a source of fresh food, healthy outdoor exercise and social interaction, and can benefit all groups in society. By providing a link to nature, allotment gardening addresses all three aspects of wellbeing – social, economic and environmental.

Financial implications

- There are no direct financial implications pertaining to this report however, the cost of seeking new land for allotments is likely to be high.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and,

- Consider whether the current allotment provision and strategy of requesting Section 106 funding from developments to provide further plots is sufficient or not. If not,
- Consider how best the Council could move forward with obtaining further land for allotments in or around Witney.
- Ask the Witney Allotment Association if they could conduct an audit of the current waiting list, if not already underway.