

Survey of Allotments, Community Gardens and City Farms

Introduction

This summary presents the key findings of the *Survey of Allotments, Community Gardens and City Farms* carried out by the University of Derby on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government¹ (DCLG).

Although commissioned by DCLG, the findings and recommendations are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Department.

Key findings

- Three in ten local authorities who responded said they had an allotments policy. Those with more sites were more likely to have a policy. Almost two thirds of responding LAs had completed an audit on its open spaces in line with ‘*Planning Policy Guide 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*’ (PPG17) or were expecting to do so within six months of the survey.
- Most authorities (72 per cent) offered incentives to potential plot holders retired people, new plot holders or the unemployed. The majority also promoted their sites in some way (77 per cent), including via a website, leaflets or a site notice.
- Two thirds of respondents had not disposed of any sites, in whole or part, since 1996. Those who had disposed of sites were more likely to have more than twenty vacant plots.
- In terms of anti-social behaviour, almost one in five had faced low level problems or none at all. Just over half had moderate problems perhaps occurring on more than one site and 28 per cent had experienced severe problems.
- Half of city farms and community gardens identified by the survey reported moderate problems with anti-social behaviour while one third reported severe problems.

¹ ODPM, July 2002

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Policy background

Allotments, community gardens and city farms are valuable green spaces that can help improve people's quality of life by promoting healthy food, exercise and community interaction. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) aims to ensure that these spaces are properly preserved, promoted and cared for. Local allotments authorities are encouraged through guidance, *Growing in the Community: a good practice guide for the management of allotments*,² to adopt an allotments policy and develop a strategy, in order to ensure that allotments are provided where they are needed, to meet the community's needs, and have adequate resources dedicated for their management and maintenance.

*Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener*³ gave a commitment to improve information on allotments by updating the 1996 survey of allotments. The study was also expanded to cover city farms and community farms. The commitment was made in the context of a much wider audit of urban green spaces including cemeteries and burial grounds, all of which contribute to the urban quality of life.

An allotment is a plot of land where individuals can grow vegetables and fruit for consumption by themselves and their family. Allotments are managed by 'allotment authorities' who can include district authorities, unitary authorities and local councils.

Local authorities have a statutory duty under section 8 of the *Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908* to provide a sufficient number of allotments when they consider that there is a demand. They also have powers to acquire land for the provision of allotments.

Community gardens and city farms are local projects working with local people, plants and/or animals. They are managed for and by local community groups, sometimes run as partnerships with local authorities and may be core funded by local authorities. They mostly exist in built up areas, where their creation has been a response to the local community's lack of access to growing space, providing environmental and social benefits. Each project develops in response to changing needs of the community.

PPG17 contains a range of policies designed to protect and enhance open space, sports and recreational facilities. It recognises allotments in its typology of open spaces. Local authorities should assess the existing and future needs of their communities for all open spaces of public value, including allotments. Local authorities should then plan to meet those needs.

DCLG is developing a green space database for England. It will share data about a full range of green spaces, including allotments, through a map-based internet tool. This is the first step towards a comprehensive and consistent baseline that planners and managers of green spaces can use for their green space audits and assessments. It will also provide the DCLG with better evidence to steer policy developments and to help secure adequate and properly targeted resources and activity both nationally and locally.

About the study

The study was carried out by a team from the University of Derby lead by Professor David Crouch and Dr Peter Rivers, with fieldwork taking place between March 2004 and mid June 2005. The findings are based on 241 questionnaires about allotment policies returned by local authorities. This represents a response rate of 62 per cent.

The survey originally sought to produce figures for the total number of sites and plots in England, as well as more information on the characteristics of sites. However, response to the site questionnaire was too low to provide robust information. Location data provided in the site questionnaires on nearly 2,500 sites will be incorporated into the green space database which is being developed.

Allotment findings

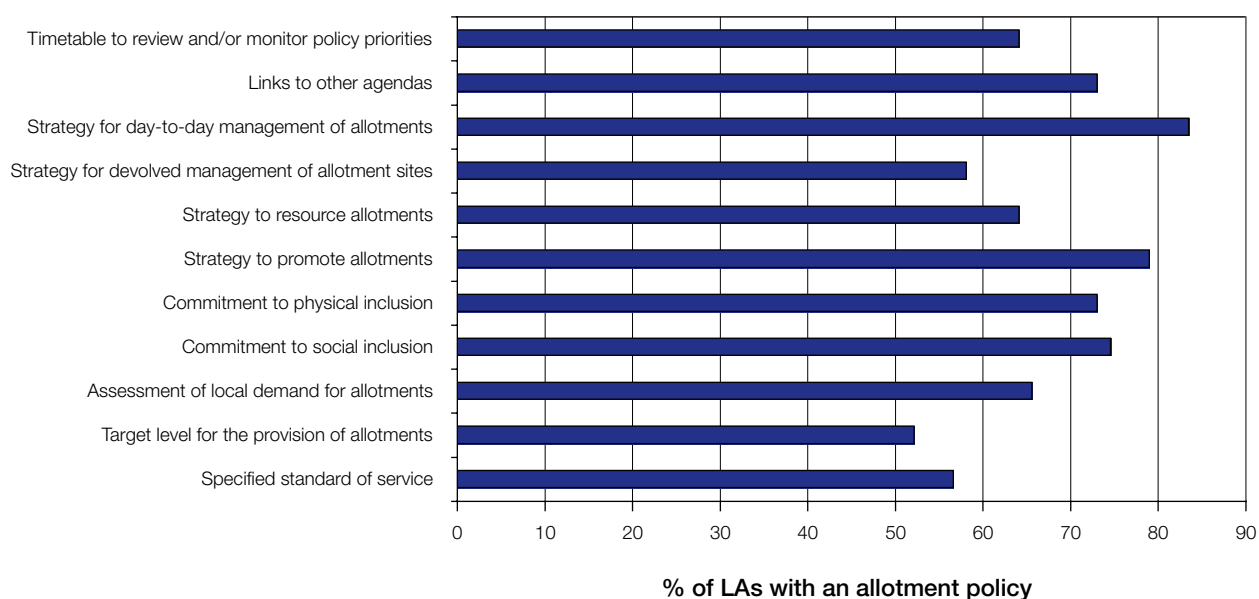
POLICIES

Three in ten local authorities who responded said they had an allotments policy. Those with more sites were more likely to have a policy. The most common elements included within the policy were; a strategy to promote allotments (79 per cent), a strategy for day-to-day management (84 per cent) and a commitment to social inclusion (75 per cent).

² DETR/LGA 2001

³ ODPM (2002) *Living Places: Cleaner, Safer*

Chart 1: Elements included in policy



OPEN SPACE STRATEGIES AND AUDITS

Just over eight out of ten respondents (81 per cent) either had an open space strategy or had one currently in development. Conversely, almost two out of ten didn't.

Almost two thirds of responding LAs had completed an audit on its open spaces in line with PPG17 or were expecting to do so within six months of the survey. Twelve per cent had not done so and were not planning to carry out an audit within twelve months. One quarter were unsure whether an audit had been carried out.

CONSULTATION

The majority (57 per cent) of respondents consult plot holders or their representatives regularly with 38 per cent consulting quarterly or more frequently and 19 per cent consulting once, twice or three times a year. Almost one third (31 per cent) consulted sporadically while 12 per cent did not consult at all.

INCENTIVES AND PROMOTION

The vast majority (72 per cent) offered incentives to potential plot holders. Of these, the bulk (78 per cent) offered incentives to retired people whilst 45 per cent offered incentives to new plot holders and the same proportion offered them to unemployed people. Only 10 per cent offered incentives to young people.

In terms of the kinds of incentives offered, three quarters offered reduced rents to specific groups. Just over half (51 per cent) provided information on plot preparation or smaller plots for starters (54 per cent) whilst 36 per cent offered rotovation of soil.

The majority also promoted their sites in some way (77 per cent). The most widely used methods were via a website (75 per cent of those promoting their sites), via a leaflet (64 per cent) and through a site notice (55 per cent).

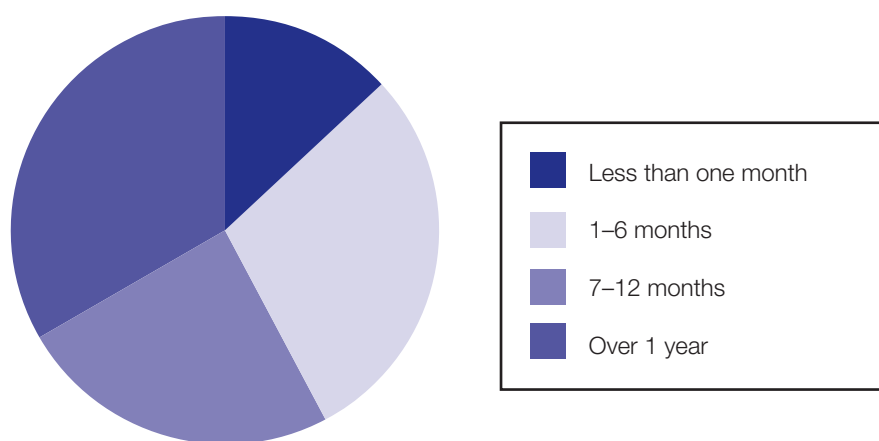
Almost three-quarters of respondents (73 per cent) said they offered plots for educational use. Of those that do, the most common use was by community and voluntary groups (83 per cent). Just under half (48 per cent) said schools used plots.

WAITING LISTS

The vast majority (92 per cent) maintained waiting lists for potential plot holders. Usually the list was organised by site (69 per cent) rather than aggregated for the whole council. However, 22 per cent organised their waiting list both by site and aggregated for the whole council.

One third of people on a waiting list wait more than a year for a plot and one quarter wait between seven and twelve months. At the other end of the scale, one third wait between one and six months while 13 per cent wait less than one month.

Chart 2: Approximate average length of time to wait for an allotment



The mean average number of people on the waiting list was fifty-nine people. Almost one third of respondents (32 per cent) had ten people or less on their list while just over half (51 per cent) had twenty five or less. About 8 per cent of respondents had more than 200 people on their list. The largest waiting list was 660 people.

When plot holders do not satisfactorily maintain their plots just over four fifths of respondents (82 per cent) issue a warning and then evicted the plot-holder if they were not responsive to the warning. Seven per cent would just issue a warning whilst 9 per cent would generally not get involved.

SITE DISPOSAL

Two thirds of respondents had not disposed of any sites, in whole or part, since 1996. Those who had disposed of sites were more likely to have more than twenty vacant plots. Over half of respondents (53 per cent) with more than twenty vacant plots had disposed of sites compared to 28 per cent of respondents with less than six vacant plots.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Almost one in five had faced low level problems or none at all. Just over half had moderate problems perhaps occurring on more than one site and 28 per cent had experienced severe problems. Respondents in Yorkshire and Humberside were more likely to report problems.

In terms of the types of problems that were experienced, the most common problem was vandalism (87 per cent of respondents reporting problems), closely followed by theft (77 per cent) and fly tipping (72 per cent). About one fifth experienced vehicles being abandoned on sites. It is not possible to determine how prevalent anti-social behaviour was on individual sites.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Almost half (49 per cent) did not provide facilities to encourage environmental friendliness. Respondents who said they had an allotments policy were more likely to provide facilities. Three quarters of those with a policy provided some type of facilities.

Of those that did provide facilities, just over three quarters (76 per cent) provided composting of waste on site and almost one third (32 per cent) provided a community composting scheme. Equal proportions of over a third (36 per cent) offered a community recycling scheme and organic cultivation.

Community Gardens

The survey identified 301 community gardens. The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens estimates there are nearly 1,000 community gardens in the UK. Four out of five sites had perimeter fencing. Half had toilets and the same proportion had a community building. Two-thirds provided wheelchair access and nearly half had raised beds. Overall though, few had special facilities for the disabled. Over half of sites were open to the public during daylight hours and half had educational visits from schools or other groups. Two-thirds offered environmentally orientated facilities (eg. Composting, encouraging organic

cultivation). Few sites kept livestock but where they did it was usually poultry or pigs. One half reported moderate problems with anti-social behaviour while one third reported severe problems.

City Farms

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens currently has fifty nine city farms as members. The survey identified thirty six city farms on 109 hectares with 113 plots for individual or shared cultivation. Almost two out of three were owned by local councils, one in six were privately owned and a small number were shared ownership. Almost all had perimeter fencing, most had toilets and a community building. Three-quarters had wheelchair access and two-thirds had raised beds while one quarter offered sensory gardens. Two-thirds kept livestock and, largely because of this, two-thirds had restricted opening times. All farms held entertainment or special events. One half reported moderate anti-social behaviour while one third reported severe problems.

Insights

The lack of accessible information on allotment sites suggests a procedure for regular keeping of data by local authorities should be established and included in annual returns on open space. This should also cover private sites.

Local authorities should be encouraged to place more emphasis on the importance of allotments. The poor response to the survey in part reflected a lack of staff resources within local authorities.

Further investigation is required into:

- the merits of devolved management compared to non-devolved management;
- the correlation between rents and facilities;
- policies and services to consider the relationship between performance and efficiency in order to identify improvements needed;
- waiting lists and vacant plots in a sample of local authorities to examine the dynamics between performance, supply and demand;
- rent levels and reasons for differences;
- promotion techniques and their effectiveness.

Further Information

Further copies of this summary are available on the Department for Communities and Local Government website:

www.communities.gov.uk

or from:

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