

Watford Allotments Strategy



Contents



WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL

2020-2025



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1.0 Aim and purpose of the Watford allotments strategy

Aim

“To maintain and where appropriate, improve the quality, management and promotion of Watford Borough Council allotment sites, and to offer access to this unique leisure activity to all members of the Watford community”.

Purpose

This allotments strategy reviews Watford Borough Council’s allotment provision with the overall intention of providing a well-managed service offering good quality allotments throughout the borough, in the most cost effective manner over the next 5 years (2020-2025), whilst also taking note of factors which could impact on allotments beyond this period. Integral to this review will be:

1. To ensure that the strategic aims of this strategy compliment and support the overall aims of the council and link to national initiatives; and
2. To consider the most effective way of providing an allotment service for gardeners in our community through the following measures:
 - How the allotments are managed and administered;
 - How the allotments are funded;
 - How the quality of allotments can be improved further particularly with regards to biodiversity;
 - To ensure that there is an adequate stock of allotments to meet the present and future needs of our communities; and
 - To ensure the benefits of allotment gardening are promoted to all sections of the community.



2.0 Introduction

Allotments have been part of our urban and rural communities for over 150 years. They were created to empower those on low incomes to improve their quality of life, health and diet, by growing their own food. The common land these people worked was the remains of land that had once been communal agricultural land.

The General Enclosure Act of 1845 made the provision of allotments for the 'labouring poor' mandatory and introduced the concept of landlord and tenant for allotment land. The 1908 Allotments Act made allotments the responsibility of local authorities and the 1922 Allotments Act made allotments available to all, not simply those on low incomes.

The use of allotments peaked during World War II as people responded to Britain's 'Dig for Victory' demand for self-sufficiency, with one and a half million plots being cultivated. During this period 1,300,000 tonnes of food per annum was grown on 1,400,000 plots, which was nearly 1 tonne of food per plot. Post war Britain saw a fall in allotment use due to changes in society with 'cheap' food and the negative stereotyping of allotment gardening as the leisure pursuit of those on low incomes, or the white, retired male.

Allotment law was last updated under The Allotments Act 1950, but there remains the need for alteration in the law to reflect changes in allotment gardening. In modern allotment gardening people of all ages and backgrounds are creating vibrant communities that produce fresh, healthy food and offer a healthy lifestyle too. In 1998 the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions published a White Paper on the Future of Allotments. 'A Good Practice Guide' from the Local Government Association has followed this. Both documents highlight the contribution that allotments make to an improved quality of life.

Allotment gardening remains a very popular leisure activity in the UK because it offers a relaxing alternative to the stressful pace of modern day life, improving health and wellbeing. Increasingly allotments are being valued for their therapeutic benefits in providing a quiet refuge, where people can have the sense of gardening in the country, within an urban environment.

The Local Government Association however, estimated that more than 200,000 allotments have been lost in the last 35 years, totalling over eleven square miles, an area 15 times the size of Hyde Park.

Despite these losses, there continues to be a demand for allotments, with an estimated 78,827 people on waiting lists in the UK compared to 13,000 in 1996. This is now an average of 52 people waiting for every 100 plots. Another reason for this demand for allotments is increasing concerns over the safety and quality of our food. Food scares and the poor vitamin and mineral quality of food grown in depleted, intensively farmed soils, have led to an increasing awareness of the value of home grown produce, free of chemicals. This desire for 'home grown food' and concern over environmental damage from 'air miles' is leading many people to turn to allotment gardening as a means of producing healthy, fresh, locally produced food that is often organically grown.

This concern over our diet is acknowledged at government level with increasing concern over obesity in the population. Public health campaigns are consistently highlighting the necessity of a diet high in fruit and vegetables, along with adequate exercise.



- In 2016/17, there were 617,000 admissions in NHS hospitals where obesity was a factor. This is an increase of 18% on 2015/16.
- In 2016, 26% of adults were classified as obese. This has increased from 15% in 1993 but has remained at a similar level since 2010.
- In 2016, 26% of adults and 16% of children consumed 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- In 2016/17, 1 in 5 children in Year 6 and 1 in 10 children in reception were classified as obese.

A study published in *The Journal of Public Health* in September 2016 found that:

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that one single session of allotment gardening can improve both self-esteem and mood, irrespective of how long participants spend on the allotment, whether they have attended in the last 7 days and their overall length of tenure. Furthermore, allotment gardeners have a better level of self-esteem and mood and a reduced level of abnormal psychological functioning than non-gardeners. Thus, in order to improve health and well-being, people in the UK should be encouraged to take part in short bouts of allotment gardening. Health organizations and policy makers should consider the potential of allotment gardening as long-term tool for combatting the increasing prevalence of ill-health and local public authorities should seek to provide community allotment plots to allow residents to have regular opportunities to partake in gardening activities.

Despite increasing affluence in Britain the original need for allotments as a means of improving the quality of life for those on low incomes remains. Studies have revealed that under-nutrition still remains a problem in the UK.

“One of the major causes is poverty. It is estimated that nearly 14 million people in the UK live in households with incomes below the European poverty line of half the average income. Diets in low income households are characterised by less dietary variety and poorer nutrient profiles. Dietary surveys of British adults have reported lower intakes of many vitamins and minerals, particularly vitamin C, beta-carotene, vitamin E and iron in those who are unemployed, receiving benefits or in the two lowest social classes. Similar results have been reported for young children and schoolchildren; those from manual social classes or less-advantaged homes had lower vitamin and mineral intakes. Low income is also associated with lack of knowledge and skills related to food, nutrition and cooking.”

British Nutrition Foundation ‘Under-nutrition in the UK’ 2003.

So although the demand for allotments has varied during the twentieth century, the twenty-first century is seeing the continuation of a strong allotment revival as people turn to allotments as a means of enhancing their health; physically, mentally and emotionally. As far back as 1998 a select Committee of the Department for the Environment, Transport & Regional Affairs published a report called “The Future for Allotments” supporting the practice of devolving a share of the responsibility for managing allotment sites to local allotment societies / associations (known as devolved management). In recent years, many local authorities have adopted this practice of looking at devolving management to allotment associations. Watford Borough Council has been partly proactive on this initiative



and has so far entered into only one agreement (2011) with an allotment association and has looked to develop further agreements but without success.



3.0 Background information and strategic context

As part of the process of developing this revised and updated allotments strategy, it is important to recognise the council's overall wider community aspirations and overarching policies as well as emphasise any national context that is relevant to allotments. This is important as it adds value to the strategy, ensures national and corporate aims are linked to service delivery plans and ensures that funding is targeted to the relevant areas whilst desired outputs and results are achieved.

In 2002, Watford Borough Council drafted its first **Allotment Strategy**. At the time, the strategy stated that:-

"The Council believed that the future of allotments was secure and provided multiple benefits, not just to gardeners, but also to the environment and the wider community. The Strategy's aim was to maximise the numbers of people using allotments by promoting opportunities to all residents. It aimed to protect all allotment sites and ensure the provision of attractive, safe allotment sites with a good standard of service and infrastructure. Finally, the aim of the strategy was to protect and enhance the wildlife value of allotment sites."

The previous strategy also highlighted 14 objectives and whilst these were important at the time, these were re-assessed and where relevant, incorporated into the following strategy covering 2013-2018. This last strategy has been reviewed below – see Section 4.

3.1 National, Regional and Local Strategic Context – Policy Review

National

- **Allotment Waiting Lists in England**

(Published by Margaret Campbell and Ian Campbell - Transition Town West Kirby in conjunction with the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners 2013)

This survey of the allotment waiting lists held by the English principal local authorities is an update of similar surveys carried out in 2009, 2010 and 2011. All 323 English principal authorities were surveyed in January 2013, and 321 responded. The main findings were:

- 215 (67%) of the authorities held waiting list data;
- This data was for a total of 3,558 allotment sites (averaging 17 sites per council);
- These allotment sites contained 152,432 plots (averaging 43 plots per site);
- The waiting lists for these plots totalled 78,827 people; and
- This is an average of 52 people waiting for every 100 plots.

Compared to the similar survey 2 years ago, the average waiting list has changed from 57 to 52 people waiting per 100 plots. In view of the considerable uncertainties around the total figures, this is best summarised as allotment waiting lists remaining high. New allotment sites were brought into use by 51 councils in the last two years. The total number of new sites was 65. For the 58 sites where information was supplied, the total area of the new sites was 30 hectares, and the total number of plots on these new sites was 1,950. In conclusion, waiting lists for allotments remain high. Even at a time of budgetary restraint, a strong argument can be made for a large increase in allotment provision because:-



- Food grown on allotments means fewer food miles, and could be an important part of the new greener low-carbon economy;
- Allotment sites often provide a focus for a community, and improve community cohesion · growing one’s own food is an important part of a healthy-eating programme;
- Allotments offer a productive activity for the unemployed;
- Local and national government reports have been promoting the benefits of allotments for some time; and
- Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide sufficient allotments.

Regional and Local

- **The Core Strategy 2006-31**

Watford Borough Council’s Core Strategy sets out the key elements of the council’s planning vision and spatial strategy for the borough. The Core Strategy is the central part of the Local Plan, and establishes the direction for other documents that will set out our planning strategy and policies in more detail. All other Local Plan documents must be consistent with the Core Strategy.

The council will continue to have regard to the remaining saved policies of the Watford District Plan 2000 and includes policies on allotments:-

Leisure Objective 9.4 (3) *To ensure the retention of allotment land for horticultural purposes or other uses compatible with its status as open space. Such uses include wildlife areas, leisure gardens and orchards.*

L12 Allotments – *The Council will protect existing public and private allotments and will ensure equivalent replacement where affected by development proposals.*

Where allotments become surplus to demand, other forms of public open space or facilities for the wider community which maintain the openness of the site, will be preferred before other land uses are considered.

The Local Plan noted that there are 12 statutory allotments serving the Watford population but that the distribution is poor with a particular shortage in the high density residential areas of North and Central Watford. It highlights that the opportunity to provide new sites will be very limited so it is therefore important to retain existing sites where a demand exists. It is however important to emphasise that where sites are affected by development, a replacement site must be secured.

- **Watford Corporate Plan to 2020**

Our vision reflects our approach to the current challenges and opportunities facing the council and the town as a place to live, work, visit and study. We want to champion our town so that it is a place where all our communities thrive and prosper, benefitting from strong economic growth and good quality local services and facilities. This will require the council to be innovative, explore new ways of working and champion initiatives that will transform the town and the organisation. More of the same isn’t going to secure the future we want for Watford, which is why bold and progressive lie at the heart of our ambitions.

Supporting this vision, the council has five priority areas of work. Our priorities are critical to the Council achieving successful outcomes for its ambitions for the town.



Our **FIVE** priorities are:-

- Identify ways to manage the borough's housing needs;
- Champion smart growth and economic prosperity;
- Provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities;
- Deliver a digital Watford to empower our community; and
- Secure our own financial future.

In addition, our core, day to day business underpins everything we do and all of our work and effort contribute to our success. In particular, we recognise the importance of three core objectives which at all times makes us a more effective organisation, in touch with our residents and delivering in the areas and in a way that they expect. These are:

- Effective two-way engagement and communication;
- Sound management and high performance; and
- Improving the town's environment.

Listening to local people and ensuring they have the opportunities to influence decisions is essential if we are to focus on what matters most to our communities. We are committed to understanding needs and ensuring everyone has an opportunity to have a say.

Through consultations and engagement our community has told us what is important to them and the town. This has been reflected in our new corporate priorities but it also influences the work we do to deliver these priorities.

Priorities for the borough 2017

The survey also asked people about their priorities for the borough.

The top choices were:

Priority	% response
Ensuring a vibrant and prosperous local economy that offers a range of jobs and opportunities for local people	48.5%
Keeping the town clean and our streets free from litter	38.6%
Working with community safety partners to tackle issues and make Watford even safer for our communities	38.0%
Creating a well-connected borough with good infrastructure such as better transport links	37.4%
Supporting our more vulnerable residents so that they can live independent lives	35.5%
Protecting and enhancing our parks and open spaces	31.5%
Helping to provide a range of new homes that meet local needs, including more affordable homes	30.2%

Total responses: 1,095



- **Green Spaces Strategy 2013-2023**

The Council's adopted 10-year Green Spaces Strategy (GSS) is the overarching policy document for green space throughout the borough. It covers parks, open spaces, natural green space, children's play, playing fields as well as allotments.

The aim of the strategy was that:

"Watford will have a network of accessible, high quality valued green spaces to be proud of, promoting sustainability, supporting biodiversity and extensively contributing to the economic, social and environmental aspirations of the town."

The strategy set a number of objectives that included:-

- To provide clear policies for the provision of Green Spaces; and
- To provide clear policies for the management of Green Spaces.

Allotments are defined within the Green Spaces Strategy as *"Opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion."*

The GSS acknowledges the existence and importance of allotments and the role they play. In the past few years, there has been a significant improvement in the service, which is reflected in the growing occupancy rates (66% in 2002, 89% in 2006 and 91% in 2011) and a satisfaction level of 73%, which had risen to 92% in 2011 and was 89% by 2018.

The GSS is due to be reviewed in 2020 and will include further updated policies from this revised allotments strategy but will underpin the importance of allotments to our green infrastructure.





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4.0 Review of 2013-2018 Allotments Strategy

The adoption of the 2013-2018 Strategy was a milestone in the development and management of allotments in Watford. The outcome was a number of key policies and action plans leading to significant investment in allotments across the town. As part of the development of this new strategy, all policies and actions have been reviewed and where still relevant, included in this new and revised strategy. However, the following successes should be noted:-

- £800,000 investment in our allotments with improvements to fencing, water provision, footways, introduction of toilets, signage;
- Occupancy rates have remained high;
- Successful re-provision of Farm Terrace tenants and the successful extension at Paddock Road allotments;
- Successful promotional campaigns across the borough using a wide variety of media;
- An allotments forum established and successfully meets bi-annually;
- Terms and conditions fully updated and the tenancy agreement updated;
- Clear guidance on animal welfare from the RSPCA issued where relevant;
- Stricter regulations on non-cultivations;
- Rents reviewed annually; and
- The successful award of a Green Flag for Paddock Road Allotments in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

However, a number of actions require carrying forward with further work required including:-

- The role of the site supervisor;
- The lack of enthusiasm for self-management;
- Tackling waiting lists;
- Maintaining occupancy rates and vacancies on some sites; and
- Improving local biodiversity on sites.

These will be included in the Action Plans for this strategy.



5.0 Facts and Figures – the current position in Watford

As previously stated, there are 12 allotment sites within the Watford Borough Council boundary with only one currently self-managed as an association. A small number of allotments also exist which are managed by Network Rail.

Site Location	Managed by	Size and Status	Occupancy Rates (2019)
Garston Manor Horseshoe Lane	Veolia	Size of site – 2.31ha 107 Plots Waiting List – 1	95%
Briar Road	Veolia	Size of site – 0.51ha 37 Plots Waiting List – 10	100%
Cherry Tree Berry Avenue	Cherry Tree Allotment & Garden Association	Size of site – 0.93ha 51 Plots Waiting List – 15	100%
Callowland Leggatts Way	Veolia	Size of site – 6.5ha 301 Plots Waiting List – 17	93%
Tavistock Road Radlett Road	Veolia	Size of site – 0.33ha 19 Plots Waiting List – 5	85%
Timberlake Radlett Road	Veolia	Size of site – 1.52 116 Plots Waiting List – 27	89%
Chester Road	Veolia	Size of site – 0.32ha 21 Plots Waiting List – 8	100%
Holywell Vicarage Road	Veolia	Size of site – 2.34ha 84 Plots Waiting List – 12	90%
Brightwell Tolpits Lane	Veolia	Size of site – 2.35ha 126 Plots Waiting List – 1	87%
Wiggenhall Longcroft	Veolia	Size of site – 0.74ha 44 Plots Waiting List – 0	86%
Oxhey Grange Oxhey Avenue	Veolia	Size of site – 2.12ha 90 Plots Waiting List – 11	88%
Paddock Road Lower Paddock Road	Veolia	Size of site – 7.47ha 222 Plots Waiting List – 17	81%

NB Figures September 2019 and do change

Those directly managed by Veolia are overseen by the Community and Environmental Services Department and the Parks and Open Spaces Section.



Since outsourcing of the service in 2013, Veolia are responsible for all aspects of allotment management including:

- The administration and collection of fees and charges;
- Letting of vacant plots and liaison with allotment supervisors;
- Ensuring that the rules and regulations are adhered to;
- Resolution of disputes;
- Promotion of allotments;
- Ensuring that all allotment plots are cultivated and where they are not, operate a system for positively monitoring and re-letting them; and
- Ensuring that sites are maintained and repairs undertaken.

The fees and charges are generally reviewed every year by Watford Borough Council. This has not always been the case but rents were increased substantially in 2011/12. These were increased for the first time in several years to bring them in line with the national average. Watford Borough Council continues to encourage the management of a number of allotments through associations and self-management and this has been promoted over several years and has been carried out when opportunities have arisen. Partnerships are seen as a way of improving the occupancy levels at allotment sites and, by giving responsibility for the day to day operation of the sites to Associations, it is considered that they would be better managed.

As part of the process for producing this final strategy, in 2019 we consulted **all** allotment tenants on Council and Association managed sites.

The results of this survey are summarised on in Section 6.



Current Provision

There are now 12 sites in Watford totalling just over 27 hectares. This is equal to 0.36ha per 1000 people (3.6m² per person). There is good access to allotments in the north and south of the borough but little access from the central strip.

Current shortfalls

The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) suggests a national standard of 20 allotments per 1000 households (ie 20 allotments per 2,000 people based on 2 people per house) or 1 allotment per 200 people. This equates to 0.125 hectares per 1000 population (1.25m² per person) based on an average plot size of 250m².

Based on the current provision Watford is well over the NSALG standard, however as stated, the majority of allotments are in the north and south of the borough with less provision in the central area.



6.0 Other Factors to be considered for the Future Provision of a High Quality Allotment Service in Watford

When the 2002 Allotments Strategy was developed, little was known what tenants thought about the provision of allotments in the borough and we knew little about the profile of our allotment tenants. We also knew little of what our tenants considered important in relation to allotment provision.

We know that the profile of a typical allotment gardener has changed and that more women and younger people are taking up allotment gardening. As part of the development of the 2013-2018 strategy, we consulted in 2011/12 with all our allotment tenants and the feedback shaped that 5-year plan. In 2019, we once again consulted and the results are highlighted below. The overall response rate was 43% with over 427 survey forms returned.

Figures in **bold** are from the 2019 survey and those in brackets are from the 2011 survey.

Many people have had an allotment for many years. However, several have recently taken up allotment gardening only recently.

14% (17%) less than a year; **40%** (45%) 1 to 5 years; **18%** (14%) 6-10 years; **15%** (12%) 11 to 20 years; **13%** (12%) more than 20 years +

77% of respondents stated that it would have been helpful if the plot had been pre-prepared before letting

The main reason why tenants have an allotment is to grow their own - **76%** of respondents; get fresh air and contact with nature - **70%** of respondents; keeping fit and healthy - **53%** of respondents.

Most people only have only one plot and choose their site because of convenience to home. - **87%** of respondents chose this as the main reason.

The quality of current allotment sites ranges but overall **95%** (92%) of allotment tenants rate their site as average to excellent and only **5%** (8%) as poor to very poor.

The most essential items on an allotment are water, secure boundary fencing and maintenance of vacant plots.

Visiting their allotments, the majority visit three times or more a week **79%** (75%).

33% (55%) travel by car with **54%** (35%) who walk. The majority take no longer than 10 minutes to get there **83%** (88%).

On average, each visit lasts 3 to 4 hours per visit **50%** (53%).

A vast range of crops are grown on plots, but the most popular are root vegetables and green vegetables.

94% only grow with **6%** having livestock (chickens and bees)



87% of tenants have a shed

91% of tenants compost their own waste

66% of ploholders were dissatisfied with the level of maintenance on untended plots

88% of tenants felt that the level of rent was reasonable

60% of tenants felt that a dedicated allotment officer was a good idea

52% of tenants were supportive of a rental increase, although **44%** said it depended on by what amount

82% of tenants supported offering a plot to residents outside the borough but subject to paying a higher rent and subject to agreeing a distance from Watford.

Allotment Tenant Profiles

Male - **50%** (57%)

Female – **50%** (43%)

White British – **80%** (95%)

20% (16%) have a disability

16-24 years – less than 1%

25-34 years – **6%** (5%)

35-44 years – **18%** (15%)

45-54 years – **19%** (19%)

55 – 59 years – **11%** (12%)

60-64 years – **14%** (14%)

65+ years – **31%** (34%)

In October, 2018 we also held our second allotments forum at Watford Colosseum and debated a number of allotments issues and asked for feedback generally. These are highlighted below.



SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK FROM ALLOTMENTS FORUM 2018

Interest in stakeholder forums
More meetings required
Can we encourage greater take up with disabled groups?
Stakeholder panel needs fresh blood

Issues

Security
Improved maintenance
Better engagement would lead to more volunteers doing more
More definition of non-cultivation
Advertising on site for plots available
Could keys be posted?
Assistance on plots that are let and are overgrown
Overgrown plots can't be let - sort out those unlettable
Rubbish left on plots after tenants give up
Newsletter to all tenants from Veolia
Better communications
Allow non-residents plots but at an enhanced rate – lots of support for this
Green Flag?
Water turned off on sites that have livestock
Funding of allotment officer
Slow response from Veolia and communications with site supervisors needs improving
Plots overgrown by the time they are available to let
Stricter on non-cults
Repairs take too long
Deputy site supervisors for larger sites
Promotion of allotments needs improving
Increase rents gradually to fund an allotment officer
Allotment officer should be funded by the council not rent increases
More interest in the stakeholder panel
Use of noticeboards needs improving
Dogs allowed on sites but on leads?
Should BBQs be allowed?
Support for dedicated allotments officer
Water leaks an issue
Large trees on some plots an issue
Takes too long to re-let a plot when vacated
Allow tenants to keep plots if they move out of Watford
Display T&C on site
More than 1 supervisor per site
Plot preparation for new tenants
More areas for wildlife
Cover vacant plots
Increase rent level to get better maintenance



7.0 Future management and future demand? Local authority or allotment association?

“A lively allotment society can negotiate, liaise, work with, local councils, local firms, local sponsors of a variety of kinds and local voluntary groups, schools, social service departments, environmental food growing organisations, local civic trusts....., to develop events, to encourage people to visit the site for particular purposes, perhaps ecological work, and enabling youngsters to participate in repairing buildings, clearing areas and things like that, in ways that give people a responsibility, a responsiveness to the environment ... in a sense allotment holding has been sustainable for much longer than the word sustainability has existed and in a sense it offers a great example of good ways of using the environment.”

Rio Summit of 1992

It is felt that self-management fulfils the twin aims of ensuring greater control of a site by allotment holders and also reducing a local authority's administrative responsibilities. A previous government report recommended that all local authorities examine the potential for self-management of their allotment sites.

It recommended the drawing up of an appropriate model agreement that can be used by local authorities formally to devolve responsibilities to allotment societies. In particular, it should make provision for a local authority to take back control of a site in exceptional circumstances.

In Watford, all sites are controlled by Veolia on behalf of Watford Borough Council with the exception being Cherry Tree which is now managed by an allotment association. Despite the general satisfaction with allotments in Watford, the Council see the benefits in developing association managed sites and are keen to promote the benefits of allotment associations. However, if there is no specific desire for these sites to be managed by an association, the Council will continue to manage each site accordingly. The 2002 and 2013 Allotment Strategies highlighted the need to explore devolution of management. It recognised for plot holders, *“devolution can bring more responsive management on a day to day basis, a sense of pride in any improvements to the site, and opportunities for volunteers to bring their skills and expertise to a new challenge”*.

The 2011 survey highlighted that only 19% of tenants were keen to look at self-management. Attempts were made to deliver self-management solutions at Callowland, Oxhey Grange (2015 – 73% voted to remain under council management) and Paddock Road Allotments (2015 – 89% voted to remain under council management), but without success. The Council will continue to support any site that wishes to look at self-management but will no longer pursue actively as a distinct action.



8.0 Promotion and encouragement of allotment gardening

The present information shows that all the allotment sites in Watford are very popular with relatively high occupancy levels (some being at full capacity with waiting lists). We now have updated and detailed local data (2019) available which shows there are increasing numbers of women and younger people from wider social and economic backgrounds starting to take allotment plots but there is still more work that could be done to encourage a wider profile of usage, particularly amongst schools, disabled groups, minority groups and to promote the health agenda. As well as physical problems such as obesity (which has increased locally), heart disease and the need to take more exercise, there is also the opportunity for allotments to tackle psychological issues such as stress. At the same time there are a number of sites with some vacant plots which could be promoted locally. Consideration is also to be given for making available plots to non-residents but within a defined radius.

Encouragement and initiatives

Despite the relative high demand, there is however a number of reasons for people not wanting to rent allotment plots. Many do not enjoy gardening and would not rent a plot whatever was offered. For others there is a range of initiatives which could encourage new gardeners and which should be considered:

- For the Council to arrange for an overgrown plot to be tidied prior to letting even if there was a recharge for providing this service. The problem with this is that many gardeners take the plot, find that it is too difficult and lose interest. The plot remains overgrown and another gardener is offered the plot. They also find it too difficult and the cycle continues;
- Offer plots to residents outside of the borough where vacancies exist;
- Larger plots to be resized if requested;
- Produce booklets to give advice and advise new gardeners e.g. How to Get a Garden, Clearing an Overgrown Plot, What to Grow, Basic Skills, Composting etc.;
- The production of a newsletter to share information between allotments and Associations;
- The development of the Council's existing allotment website. This could link to other complimentary sites e.g. Community Food Project, Green Gym, the Allotment Regeneration Initiative (ARI), the National Society of Allotment Gardeners (NSALG), sources of external funding;
- For existing gardeners to offer advice to new gardeners;
- To provide new gardeners with starter packs which could include advice sheets, a range of seeds and the offer of a mentor to help offer advice;
- A poster campaign to promote the benefit of allotments;
- To sponsor an annual allotment competition; and
- To hold an annual allotments fair when members of the local community can inspect a site, talk to a site supervisor and take up a prepared plot on the same day. This would be aimed at people who are perhaps curious and wanting more information about what having an allotment entails.



9.0 Management arrangements – building relationships with tenants

Considerable progress has been made with building relationships with tenants through the allotments forum, improved communications and the investment on most sites. There are a number of further ways management arrangements can be improved which should lead to an improvement in relations with tenants. These will include:-

- Role of allotment supervisors re-assessed;
- Option of appointing a part time dedicated allotments officer (subject to funding); and
- Re-focussing and further support of the allotments stakeholder panel;

Allotment site supervisors

Each site is allocated a dedicated site supervisor which is a volunteer appointed from one of the local tenants and is site specific. This has worked well in some cases but unfortunately in others, we have been unable to appoint and retain such positions. These sites have then had to be 'managed' by an officer from Veolia which has been challenging with regards to site monitoring, letting and monthly reports. The council's view is that a dedicated resource is required to enable a more positive management focus on all sites.

A dedicated allotment officer

The management of allotments prior to outsourcing was through the two parks development officers who were responsible for a number of areas, including allotments. The management of this area was always 'resource heavy' and this remains the case now the responsibility lies with Veolia. The Horticultural Development Manager within Veolia has a wide portfolio of responsibility including allotments and currently only 10% of that role is dedicated to allotments. The appointment of a part time but dedicated allotments officer would improve the day to day management of our allotments and relationship with tenants. However, this requires funding, estimated at £25,000. Options include:-

- Refocus of the Veolia contract and re-allocation of funding from elsewhere. This would mean ceasing something elsewhere;
- Increase allotment rents over a period of time to cover this, over and above inflation. There are currently 140 vacant plots at present that if were fully occupied would bring in c£6,000 - £7,000 a year. This would offset some of these costs; and
- Seek partnership funding through a public health / healthy eating initiative.

This will be a key action within this strategy, as whilst the quality of the allotments has improved, there is a greater need to focus on management and day to day liaison with tenants. The 2019 survey highlighted support for this initiative and for an increase in rents to cover this, although dependent on the level of increase.





10.0 External funding and investment

In most cases rent will be the only income derived from an allotment site and expenditures will be manifold. These include not only site maintenance and repair but also administrative costs and promotion. They cannot be sustained without adequate finance. Levels of rent generally are currently the national average, although very low compared to allotments in London.

The following factors are taken into account when setting allotment rents:

- Long term financial sustainability;
- The nature, quality and cost of facilities provided (and desired);
- Expenditure on promotion and administration;
- The present level of rent and its historic tradition; and
- The likely effect of rent levels on plot take-up.

Rent concessions are permitted by allotment law and are granted by Watford Borough Council to the following tenants:-

- Housing Benefit, in the form of Rent Allowance or Local Housing Allowance for people living in rented accommodation;
- Council Tax Benefit;
- Income Support;
- Job Seekers Allowance (income based);
- Working Tax Credit and /or Child Tax Credit;
- Guaranteed Pension Credit (not 'Savings Pension Credit'); and
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income based).

Allotment rents are also governed by the provisions of section 10 Allotments Act 1950, which speaks of allotment rents being that which

“ . . . a tenant may reasonably expect to pay . . . ”.

This is invariably objective to the allotment site rather than subjective to the tenant, and there is provision in s. 10 for a lesser rent to be charged where circumstances might warrant this. However, the charging of any such lesser rent is in the discretion of the local authority. A local authority is under no mandatory obligation to provide water, or fencing, or pathways, or anything over and above the bare earth for cultivation. Where water, etc., is provided, a tenant may expect to pay a realistic rent.

In 2019, nationwide the cost an allotment varied considerably for a 10 pole plot. Rents have been increased considerably with a recent headline was 300% over 5 years in Nottingham in 2018 and similar in Edinburgh.

Rental examples across the London area are currently:-

- £175-00 in Richmond on Thames
- £171-00 in Brent
- £193-00 in Merton
- £200-00 in Greenwich
- £140-00 in Enfield
- £79-00 in Harrow



Rental examples outside the London area are currently:-

- £50-00 in Liverpool
- £79-00 in Brighton
- £185-00 in Poole
- £47-20 in St Albans
- £88-00 in Stevenage

The cost in Watford in 2019 for a standard site is £54-70 and therefore remains affordable to local residents, with agreed concessions as detailed above.

The Council is also fortunate that it receives funding through Section 106 / CIL Developer Contributions and has continued to allocate funding through its capital programme to improvement of open spaces as well as a number of allotment sites in recent years.



11.0 Improving biodiversity on allotment sites

Biodiversity means the variety of life around us. Allotments provide valuable wildlife habitats that make a major contribution to maintaining Watford's biodiversity, even when fully operational as productive allotments. This is of considerable importance as many parts of Watford are densely developed and many houses have small gardens, or no gardens at all. Allotments are therefore important "green lungs" for the town.

Some sites contain old hedges, significant large trees and support populations of scarce, protected species, including stag beetles and slow worms. The allotments provide foraging and nesting areas for invertebrates, small mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. Slow worms, like hedgehogs and frogs, are popular with allotment tenants as they subsist largely on a diet of slugs.

Sites with significant wildlife interest include Callowland, Oxhey Grange, Paddock Road and Holywell.

There is considerable scope to develop the wildlife value on some areas of allotment land that are unlikely to come back into use or on the margins of full sites. Biodiversity and allotment gardening benefit from this positive use of unused plots compared to the alternative of neglected and derelict plots.



12.0 Key policies and action plan

Key Policy 1: To ensure sufficient stock of allotments at the recommended quantity and quality standard and to meet the present and future needs of Watford’s community.

Reference	Action	Who	Timescale
1.1	To regularly monitor the level of occupancy and the level of cultivation at all allotment sites in Watford and does not fall below 80%, and ensure vacant plots are re-let within 4 weeks where a waiting list exists.	Veolia	Monitor monthly and ongoing S,M,L
1.2	To increase the number of plot provision to reflect the longer term minimum shortfall in supply across Watford by looking at the increased provision of smaller plots as they become available where appropriate	Veolia	Ongoing S,M,L
1.3	To ensure the proper procedures have been pursued in the event of any allotment sites becoming surplus to requirements.	Planning Legal	L
1.4	To ensure that all allotment sites meet the recommended quality standard and all are classed as high quality.	WBC	Ongoing S,M,L

Key Policy 2: To ensure the benefits of allotment gardening are extended to all sections of the Watford community so that there is more diversity in the take up of allotments.

Reference	Action	Who	Timescale
2.1	The regular updating of the website with links to appropriate allotment and gardening sites.	Veolia	S
2.2	Local promotional campaigns advertising the benefits of allotments focused on Doctors surgeries, libraries, community centres, leisure centres and health food shops where there are plots vacant. Develop an allotments poster.	Veolia WBC	Ongoing
2.3	Update the council website or have a web page on the WBC website dedicated to allotment gardening linked to complimentary sites such as the ARI, National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.	WBC	Ongoing
2.4	To develop partnerships with organisations such as the PCT, community groups, local schools, Herts County Council, Schools, WCH, BME and Youth Groups to broaden the appeal of allotment gardening	Veolia	M,L
2.5	To offer plots to non-residents within a 2-mile radius covering Bushey, Carpenders Park, South Oxhey, Croxley Green, Abbots Langley, and Brickett Wood and agree a rate for non-residents	Veolia	M,L
2.6	To adapt plot sizes to suit different needs, looking	Veolia	S,M,L



	at plot size, levels, access in relation to groups such as schools, youth clubs and groups and individuals with disabilities.		
2.7	To re-assess the role of site supervisors on WBC run sites to ensure that the allotment is being run properly and all tenants needs are being met. To ensure monthly reports are submitted from Supervisors.	Veolia	S,M,L
2.8	To look into the opportunities for appointing a dedicated allotments officer part time	WBC	S
2.9	To promote school use of sites & options available & support Healthy Schools Program	Veolia	M,L

Key Policy 3: To ensure allotments in Watford are managed and administered in the most effective and efficient way.

Reference	Action	Who	Timescale
3.1	To look into the opportunities for appointing a dedicated allotments officer part time	WBC	S
3.2	To have a formal procedure to annually review the administration of its allotment stock managed by Associations and WBC. This should include: occupancy levels, cultivation levels, waiting lists and a financial statement for the previous 12 months. To be reported at Allotments Forum	Veolia	L
3.3	To ensure that all sites encourage high levels of cultivation and follow policy and procedures for dealing with gardeners who rent plots but do not cultivate them.	Veolia	S,M,L
3.4	To review allotment charges annually	WBC	Ongoing
3.5	To consider the opportunities of capital and external funding	Veolia WBC	Ongoing
3.6	To review the Terms and Conditions annually	WBC	S
3.7	To ensure animals are kept on Watford Council allotments in line with RSPCA / NSALG animal welfare guidance by issuing guidance to all plot holders who wish to keep animals or livestock on plots.	Veolia	S
3.8	To manage and protect local biodiversity on sites and enhance where possible	Veolia WBC	S, M, L



Key Policy 4: To ensure that resources match the needs of the service.

Reference	Action	Who	Timescale
4.1	The Council to review every 2 years the process and principles by which the rent charges are arrived at by benchmarking with neighbouring authorities and within the Borough itself	WBC	L
4.2	To maximise grant opportunities as and when they arise	WBC	S,M,L

S – Short Term (12-18 months)

M – Medium Term (18-36 months)

L – Long Term (36 months +)



WEEDS
FOR SALE
PICK YOUR OWN

GONE TO
THE PUB