

ALLOTMENTS

LOCAL HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Reviewed: May 2008

1 CURRENT STATUS

1.1 Definition

The word “allotment” originates in land being allotted to an individual under an enclosure award and is defined as a portion of a field assigned to a cottager to labour for himself, or a piece of ground let out for spare time cultivation under a public scheme.

1.2 Historic Context

Early allotments of the middle ages were the first kind, with areas of land bequeathed by landowners to be cultivated by poor countrymen. Much later, following the enclosure of common land, cottagers were sometimes compensated for their loss of rights to common land by the “allotment” of small areas of land usually adjacent to their cottage. These uses depended upon charitable landowners.

The first recorded enclosure was about 1650. The period between 1760 and 1818 saw 3 500 Enclosure Acts of Parliament but it was not until the General Enclosure Act of 1845 that a determined effort was made to make provision for the landless poor in the form of “field gardens” limited to one quarter of an acre to be cultivated by a labourer in his spare time, and for the provision of food for himself and his dependants. At this time allotments were virtually confined to rural areas.

The urban allotment has a rather different history than the rural allotment. It sprang from the traditions of the Pleasure Garden or Guinea Garden as well as the tradition of the allotment set aside for the poor as a source of fruit and vegetables.

The Pleasure Garden or Guinea Garden was based on the principle of pleasure and beautiful flower gardens with summer houses and high boundary hedges were used for recreation purposes by the wealthy. The second type of urban allotment was founded on the rural tradition and generally for the urban poor.

At the turn of the last century the pressure for urban allotment provision increased as a result of the spread of closely packed housing with small gardens, but intensified greatly with the outbreak of war in 1914 which brought about the realisation of the importance of home grown food. The Defence of the Realm Act of 1916 empowered local authorities to requisition for this purpose any small bit of open space including playing fields and undeveloped land. During the period 1914 - 1918 the number of allotments rose from some 600 000 to 1.5 million, one plot for every 5 families.

After the 1st World War, the national demand for allotments diminished and many thousands of acres, temporarily requisitioned, were returned to their original use.

However, the demand for allotments from returning ex-servicemen continued unabated particularly due to the economic conditions and the Land Settlement Facilities Act of 1919 was aimed at helping them. This Act finally deleted reference to “labouring poor” and made it clear that all members of the community were eligible to take up allotment gardening.

During the 2nd World War there was again an increase in the number of plots with the Government taking an active part in promoting allotments with demonstration plots and leaflets. After the 2nd World War there was a huge increase in suburban houses with large gardens. A period of decline in demand and numbers of allotments followed caused by increased pressure on development land, increase of convenience foods, the assumption that the new suburban dweller with large gardens no longer needed allotments, and the association of the allotment with the war and rationing.

During the 1970's and 1980's environmental concerns again increased demand. The Thorpe Report 1969 into allotments was commissioned by the Ministry of Natural Resources. In it, Thorpe advocates that allotments should be turned into a leisure activity, not based on solely economic considerations. He suggests that allotments should be designed spaces, however the decline nationally from 55 000 acres in 1970 to 33 000 acres in 1996 represents a decline of almost 43% during this period.

1.3 Context

Allotments cover a notable portion of land in towns and cities. They can therefore make a significant contribution to the urban environment. They provide green oases within densely built up areas. Sometimes they are associated with adjacent open space and thus contribute to green wedges penetrating deep into the urban structure. They are a haven for wildlife as they provide a diversity of habitats including cultivated and fallow ground, nectar producing plants, compost heaps, empty plots, grass areas, sheds and stores as well as boundary hedges and banks.

Today's allotment creates an image of an open area of utilitarian strip plots separated by grassy paths, often with makeshift sheds or outbuildings and bounded by hedges, usually with dense urban development all around.

Allotments are a community facility, and their present and future role in the contribution to biodiversity are inextricably linked to how they are used, their contribution to Local Agenda 21 priorities, the planning and political issues involved, and to the policies for their future use and development. Allotments are quite distinct from other unbuilt areas within a city, as they are usually on public land where local people have control over planting, cultivation and maintenance regimes as long as they comply with leasing agreements.

Allotments offer benefits for the community at large. This aspect of allotments was recognised in the Fifth Report by the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs 1998 that “Allotments are an important feature in the cultural landscape. They combine utility, meaning and beauty with local distinctiveness.” This report confirmed that the Government is committed to the sustainable regeneration of towns and cities and recognises that allotments can contribute to our

aim of providing green areas in urban environments.

Data from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens (NSALG) for year 2000 suggests that for England and Wales there were just over 305 000 council plots with an estimated 1,220,500 people involved in allotments. In 2007 there are in the region of 250 000 allotments nationally. In Cambridgeshire in year 2000 there were 4770 allotment plots on 208 sites covering an area of 950 acres and involving nearly 20 000 people(NSALG).

Data from NSALG also suggests that in year 2000 there were 1600 plots on 27 sites covering over 100 acres in Cambridge City. In Peterborough 2248 plots were on 27 sites covering an area of 146 acres. In East Cambridgeshire there were 451 plots, in Fenland 1179 plots, in Huntingdonshire 563 plots and in South Cambridgeshire 1099 plots.

Between 2004/ 5 and 2007 it is estimated that allotment usage in Peterborough has increased from 50% to 70% occupancy overall. In 2007 Peterborough City Council's records say that out of the 24 allotments, 10 have 100% occupancy with waiting lists, 3 with more than 90% occupancy and 6 with more than 60% occupancy. There are 5 new sites under construction totalling 3 hectares which have come about through new developments.

1.4 Biological Status

Evidence from the NSALG shows that allotments have on average an up to 30% higher species diversity than urban parks.

The Natural Areas of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough cover a wide variety of soil types, and many species associated with these different soils could be expected to thrive on allotments given appropriate management and nearby seed sources.

The biological interest of allotments comes from a variety of habitats associated with the boundary treatment - hedgerows, often left to grow tall offering refuge for birds and invertebrates, also ditches and grassy banks with low maintenance regimes. Unused plots often offer a haven for wildlife while some tended plots act as seed banks for rare vegetable species. The grassy paths between the plots are often managed in a different way than the boundary. Compost heaps also are a haven for insects and invertebrates and overwintering invertebrates and mammals.

1.5 Species

Invertebrates are also associated with tussocky grasses, hedges and wildflowers found on the boundaries, and include butterflies, bumble bees and other beneficial insects. Birds such as tree sparrow, common sparrow, blackbird, thrush and mistle thrush, finches, tits, and robins can all find nesting and foraging habitat in hedges. Foxes are also known to make use of hedgerows.

Disturbed ground from freshly dug soil makes worms, grubs and insects more accessible and is especially good for birds feeding in the breeding season. The addition of manure and composts to the soil encourages earthworms. Hedgehogs

and grass snake may also be associated with tall grass, hedges and compost heaps.

The undisturbed margins next to hedgerows provide nesting sites for small mammals such as mice and field voles which in turn attract raptors such as kestrel. Next to rivers and ditches field margins create the ideal habitat for overwintering amphibians such as frogs, toads, newts, great crested newts and may offer nesting and foraging sites for water voles.

2 CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING ALLOTMENTS IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

- Demand for development land leading to loss of allotments. In 1997 a Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs looked at the future of allotments. A major concern was that there was an apparent decline in allotment provision, especially in connection with growing pressures on land-use for development purposes.
- Use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers especially in agribusiness, affecting wildflowers and reducing invertebrate populations. The use or non-use of chemicals on allotments can cause disagreements between neighbouring allotment holders.
- Management of boundaries and communal areas.
- Inappropriate management for wildlife value.
- Lack of resources and administration to manage allotments. Insufficient staffing can be a major threat to the survival of allotments because it can lead to poor records and poor statistics being kept which then give the impression of underuse.
- Lack of flexibility in the size of the allotment. People have different needs and capabilities and the size of the allotment can discourage some people from taking an allotment on.

3 CURRENT ACTION

3.1 Legal Status

The first statutes establishing allotments were aimed mainly at provision from charitable sources, and it was not until the Act of 1908, which consolidated all previous legislation, that for the first time local councils had a statutory duty to provide. Additional Acts followed in 1925 and 1950.

Each allotment authority decides for itself how much of its resources to devote to allotments. However, if an authority believes there is a demand, it has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient quantity of plots and to let them to people living in its area. If local people feel there is a need for allotments which is not being met, they can get together a group of any six residents who are registered on the electoral roll and put their case to the local authority.

The allotment can be designated as being statutory or temporary. If an allotment authority wishes to sell a statutory allotment site it must have the consent of the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government who will first want to be satisfied of certain conditions. Further information can be found on the [Department of Communities & Local Government's](#) website.

Allotments are covered in planning policy under Planning Policy Guidance 17.

More information is available on the DCLG website;

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127687>

Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation (PPG17) recognises allotments, community gardens and city farms in its typology of open spaces and states that allotments must not be regarded as "previously developed land" as defined in Annex C of PPG3. The guidance sets out that Local Authorities should undertake robust assessments of the needs of local communities for open space.

3.2 Example Projects

The Allotment Societies in Cambridge, with the help of the Greenways Project and Sustainable City initiatives have been particularly proactive in using and promoting their allotments for biodiversity.

Coppice plots were established at Vinery Road, Cambridge in 1999 and are now a valuable source of materials for the plot holders.

At Burnside allotments, Cambridge a management plan has been produced, wildlife areas have been created and perimeter hedges maintained. A hazel coppice has been created for producing peasticks.

The Histon Road allotment site has also established a hazel coppice area. Plot holders have created a wildlife area including a pond, which is now a breeding site for amphibians.

In line with its designation as a 'Wildlife Corridor', some disused plots on Empty Common are now a wildlife area. This consists of a mosaic of long grass, hedgerow and mature scrub.

At Trumpington allotments, a 20 pole allotment has been strimmed and raked to establish a chalk grassland sward. This area also contains a well-used bee hive. Management of the sites' hedges is being undertaken by the allotment society under the guidance of the City Greenways Project.

The Pen Close allotments in Cherry Hinton, Cambridge support an area of scrub and long grass. There are small patches of long grass between plots for the benefit of the established Common Lizard population.

There is a community recycling scheme of wood chippings for composting at Burnside and Nuffield Road allotments, Cambridge.

The Cambridge City Greenways Project is involving allotment holders in Cambridge

in the Cambridge amphibian and reptile survey. Many plot holders want to take part and reptile refugia have been placed at a few sites for monitoring.

Cambridge Preservation Society is considering working with other organisations to establish a tree and shrub nursery propagating native species with local provenance on its allotment site in Coton village.

Peterborough Eco Art Project aims to provide users information on eco projects and to develop an online community of eco minded individuals, groups and businesses to promote sustainability in people's day to day lifestyle. The site is based on the Dogsthorpe Allotments, where visitors can see a demonstration wildlife garden, food growing and arts projects all in the same area.

Froglife is also working at the Dogsthorpe Allotments in Peterborough with young offenders. There is a pond and a composting scheme and they are working to create valuable wildlife habitats as a demonstration of wildlife friendly practices on allotments.

The Greater Dogsthorpe Environmental Forum, which includes Froglife, is also supporting the development of a community allotment site on Olive Road in Dogsthorpe, Peterborough.

Members of the St Neots Town Centre Initiative's Redevelopment and Environment Group are raising awareness of wildlife on Rowley allotments in St Neots by carrying out wildlife surveys. It is hoped that these surveys will lead to recommendations being made about the management of some of the allotments' public areas. Rowley allotments was nominated for the 2008 Biodiversity award by St Neots in Bloom.

3.2 Wider Benefits of Allotments and Links with Local Strategies

Organic cultivation. A national survey in 1993 found that weedkillers and fungicides were used by around half of all allotment holders, although they were applied sparingly. Organic gardeners recognise the value of pollinator and predator species.

Heritage. Allotments can be an important genetic resource for the conservation of rare species.

Recycling. Allotments holders are encouraged to recycle and allotments offer the potential for community composting sites.

Transport. Home grown food means there is less transport (less 'food miles') and less packaging.

Employment and Training. New skills and opportunities whether promotional, managerial or cultivation

Education. Potential links with schools, special needs and adult learning. Close contact with wildlife can lead to a lifelong interest and growing of food can improve

health.

Leisure. Promoting local tourism - arts, crafts and volunteering

Sustainable neighbourhoods - revitalising allotments and neighbourhoods

Community Developments. Co-operation across ethnic age and other barriers. Allotment societies often play a wider role in community schemes, becoming involved with local schools as well as programmes for the mentally and physically ill or disabled.

Health. Increased consumption of fresh foods and more exercise and relief from stress, and therapy for those with mental health problems. There are many health benefits to all allotment holders of doing physical activity outdoors.

Some allotment societies play an active part in Local Agenda 21 issues helping plan for the implementation of sustainable development. Professor Crouch reported to the Select Committee in 1997 that

“A lively allotment society can negotiate, 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 the repairing buildings, clearing areas.....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.”

For plot holders the practical values included the production of fresh vegetables, physical exercise and social activity and the therapeutic value that allotment gardening can make to physical and mental good health.

3.3 Other Guidance

The National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardens (NSALG) have a web site, home page giving information, advice and news on <http://www.nsalg.org.uk>

Cambridge Allotment Societies has a web site giving local information and availability of allotments at <http://www.allotments.net>. “Cambridge Allotments Newsletter” gives allotment news as well as covering wildlife schemes and relevant training events. Cambridgeshire County Council has an on line directory of community groups which includes allotments and garden societies. This can be found at <http://www2.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/cambsccl/infocam/cid.nsf/index.htm>

The Henry Doubleday Research Association provides much information and demonstration gardens at Ryton and Yalding gardens for people wanting to garden organically or in a wildlife friendly way. They also support a network of school gardening projects. More details from <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/> and <http://www.hdra.org.uk>

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI) aims to stimulate more people to get growing on urban allotments, both as individual plot holders and through community projects. <http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari>

The Forestry Authority produced a leaflet promoting woodland on allotments - Allotment, Forestry on your patch.

4 OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

4.1 Objectives

- Assess and monitor existing urban habitats
- Maintain the extent of our urban habitat resource
- Create new urban habitats
- Manage and enhance our urban habitat resource
- Raise awareness and increase accessibility and involvement

4.2 Targets

- 1) Establish baseline information on allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2009.
- 2) Survey allotments every 5 years to update information, monitor wildlife (including BAP species) and assess habitat value.
- 3) Maintain the area extent of allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (established in Objective 1)
- 4) Ensure the biodiversity value of allotments is recognised in policies and guidelines for local development plans and wildlife site protection processes.
- 5) ? ha of new allotments created by 2015.
- 6) 40% of allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough implementing a Wildlife Management Plan or wildlife friendly management techniques by 2015.
- 7) Increase the number of formally constituted groups with responsibility for managing an area for people and wildlife by 5%? by 2012.
- 8) 30% of allotment holders are aware of organic gardening and wildlife sensitive management on allotments.
- 9) Raise awareness amongst non allotment holders of local allotments and the benefits of them.

5 ACTIONS

Allotments - Objectives, Targets and Actions

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Responsible	Timescale
Assess and monitor existing urban habitats	1) Establish baseline information on allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2009.	1.1) Desktop exercise to collate all available information on allotments in the area including notable features and wildlife records.	WiT - Cambridge	2009
	2) Survey allotments every 5 years to update information, monitor wildlife (including BAP species) and assess habitat value.	2.1) Work with allotment holders, owners and partners to conduct general wildlife surveys and more detailed species monitoring.	WiT, AS? Allotment holders? Landowners? PCC?	Every 5 years starting 2010
		2.2) Work with allotment holders to carry out a reptile and amphibian survey on allotments in Cambridge and put reptile refugia at suitable sites.	Cambridge City Greenways Project	2009
		2.3) Survey Mill Lane Allotments, St Neots with a view to making recommendations for wildlife friendly management.	Peter Walker	2008
Maintain the extent of our Urban habitat resource	3) Maintain the area extent of allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (established in Objective 1)	3.1) Ensure the requirements for provision of allotments are met.	LA?	?
	4) Ensure the biodiversity value of allotments is recognised in policies and guidelines for local development plans and wildlife site protection processes.	3.2 and 4) Investigate what policies make reference to allotments and how we can influence these.		
Create new urban habitats	5) X ha of new allotments created by 2015.	5.1) Ensure allotments provision in new developments.	LA?	2015

<p>Manage and enhance our Urban habitat resource</p>	<p>6) 40% of allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough implementing a Wildlife Management Plan or wildlife friendly management techniques by 2015.</p>	<p>6.1) Write management plans for 3 allotments each year in consultation with allotment holders and owners.</p> <p>6.2) Produce an information sheet to be given to allotment holders and owners to inform them about the benefits to them of biodiversity on allotments. ie. planting and management of hedgerows can improve site security and natural areas, beetle banks and organic production can help with pest control.</p> <p>6.3) Provide information and advice to allotment holders and owners about good management techniques in management of ditches and banks, hedgerows, buffer zones etc.</p> <p>6.4) Encourage alternative use of vacant allotments such as woodlands and hazel or willow coppicing, orchards and local varieties.</p> <p>6.5) Create Grizzled Skipper Garden on Peterborough Allotment</p>	<p>LA? WiT?</p> <p>Town and Parish Councils?</p> <p>BC, PCC, Eco-arts</p>	<p>3 per year to complete 40% by 2015</p> <p>2009</p> <p>2011?</p>
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<p>Raise awareness and increase access and involvement</p>	<p>7) Community composting schemes or community groups involved in 20% of allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.</p> <p>8) 30% of allotment holders are aware of organic gardening and wildlife sensitive management on allotments.</p> <p>9) Raise awareness amongst non allotment holders of local allotments and the benefits of them.</p>	<p>7.1) Promote composting by communities and individuals.</p> <p>7.2) Encourage groups eg. Special needs groups, excluded teenagers to manage vacant allotments or areas in under used allotments.</p> <p>8.1) Organise events for allotment holders to improve biodiversity at the sites. Eg increase predatory species at allotments by making bat and bird boxes, dig ponds, make lacewing boxes etc.</p> <p>8.2) Provide information and promote organic food production, use of companion planting and appropriate pest control.</p> <p>9.1) Promote allotment and garden societies and best allotment competitions.</p> <p>9.2) Promote wildlife schemes by individual allotment holders on their own plots.</p>	<p>WiT? Master Composters? LA? Town and parish Councils? AS?</p>	
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Abbreviations

- AS Allotment Societies
- BC Butterfly Conservation
- CCC Cambridgeshire County Council
- CPBRCCambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre
- LA Local Authorities
- PCC Peterborough City Council
- Wi T Wildlife Trust
- ? unconfirmed

6 LINKS TO OTHER PLANS

The diverse nature of these habitats means that many other plans will be relevant. In particular this plan should be considered in conjunction with the habitat action plans for

- Arable land
- Gardens
- Churchyards and cemeteries
- Brownfield sites and the built environment
- Urban forest
- Standing Water HAP including ponds (within the wetland HAPs)
- Drainage Ditches (within the wetland HAPs)

It is likely that implementation of this plan will also benefit the objectives of species action plans for Song Thrush, Pipistrelle Bat, Great Crested Newt and Water Vole.

7 REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

This action plan will be reviewed by the Biodiversity Partnership on a regular basis and checked annually by the Urban BAP Group.

8 REFERENCES

- Cambridge City Council 1998. Review of Allotments. Public Report for Environment Committee.
- Crouch, D and Ward, C 1997 (revised ed.). The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture. Five Leaves Publication.
- House of Commons, Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. Fifth Report (1998). The Future of Allotments House of Commons, Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. Minutes of Evidence. Memorandum by the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd
- Peterborough City Council 1992. Allotment Review. Public Report for Leisure Services Committee.
- Response of the Quality Environment for Dartford Allotments Group to the DETR “Making Biodiversity Happen” Supplementary Consultation Paper.
- Thorpe Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Allotments, Cmnd 4166. HMSO 1969

9 LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

Anglian Water Services Ltd
Allotment and Garden Societies
Allotment owners
Bat Conservation Trust
BTCV Parnwell Project
Buglife
Butterfly Conservation
Cambridge Allotments Network
Cambridge City Council
Cambridge Preservation Society

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Amphibian and Reptile Group
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre (CPBRC)
Cambridgeshire County Council
Cambridgeshire Bats Group
Cambridgeshire Natural History Society
Chatteris Town in Bloom
Countryside Properties
Diocese of Ely Environment Group
East Cambridgeshire District Council
Eco-arts Project Peterborough
Ely Allotments Association
Environment Agency
Fenland District Council
Friends of Sudbury Meadow
Friends of Parnwell
Froglife
Gallagher Estates
Greater Dogsthorpe Environmental Forum
Green Grid and Green Infrastructure Groups
Hanson/Philip Parker Associates
Huntingdonshire District Council
Little Downham Conservation Group
Natural England
Opportunity Peterborough
O&H Hampton
Orton Waterville Allotments and Gardens Society
Peterborough City Council
Peterborough Environment City Trust
Peterborough Horticultural Society
RSPB - East Anglia
South Cambridgeshire District Council
St Neots Town Centre Initiative
St Neots Town Council
The Wildlife Trust
Trumpington Allotment Society