

## **Preliminary Scoping Report for the Culture and Prosperity Commission's Allotments Topic Review**

At its meeting on 26 September 2005 the Culture and Prosperity Commission chose Allotments as a topic for consideration during its 2005/06 work plan.

The review was selected because Commission members wished to examine the usage and promotion of allotments within Derby and in particular how they fit into the Derby City Partnership's 2020 Vision.

This report provides some background information to the topic and outlines the possible scope for a review by the Commission.

### **1 Introduction**

In February 2002 the Best Value Review of Derby City Parks was published, which included allotments. Below is the relevant extract from the executive summary to the report which refers to allotments and includes the recommendations.

#### **1.1 Best Value Review of Derby City Parks 2002 - Extract**

The leasing of City Council owned allotments to associations who manage the sites themselves has been particularly effective. This policy of encouraging self-management where possible reduces the net cost to the Council, while the associations collectively manage to meet their needs. Currently, 75% of Council owned allotment sites are leased to associations, however of the remaining five Council owned sites, two have become virtually disused over a period of years due to lack of demand, and of these, one has been allocated for an extension to an adjacent cemetery.

Seventy-six per cent of allotment plots in Derby are currently occupied and this figure could be further increased by filling vacant plots, which would generate more income.

Better communication with allotment associations will ensure that the City Council is aware of stakeholders' needs and that the service provided can be adopted to meet customers' requirements. Concerns can be raised and resolved by a regular, sustained programme of consultation.

Security is a major issue for allotments and it can be shown that the most secure sites are the ones with the highest levels of tenancy. Further provision of fencing may increase usage on vulnerable sites.

Currently, allotments are promoted in the parks service newsletter 'Parklife' and through an annual allotments competition, which provides an opportunity for media coverage. There is a need for the service to develop further opportunities for increased publicity to promote allotment gardening in Derby.

## Recommendations

- a Implement a programme of regular site visits to provide a forum for addressing problems regarding allotments, including those relating to security and rebate payment.
- b Improve publicity on the advantages of allotment holding.

While the leasing of allotments to either associations or individuals falls under the remit of the Derby City Parks department, the Environmental Sustainability team are also involved in the promotion and enhancement of the City's allotments. There are a number of benefits that well managed allotments bring to individuals, communities and the wider environment.

### 1.2 Government Support for Allotments

The Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, (the Committee) published a paper in 1998 on *The Future of Allotments*. In their report the committee states that it believes that the benefits of allotment sites mean that they have a critical role in modern, urban life. They list the following benefits in particular:

- Exercise
- Supply of affordable fresh vegetables
- Increased biodiversity
- Green space
- Potential for educational and therapeutic benefits for communities

The report also identifies that in the Committee's opinion many local authorities are failing to stimulate demand for allotments and this is contributing to the erosion of sites, which halved in the 30 years up to the time of the report.

The Committee noted that allotments form an important part of leisure provision and this should be reflected within local authorities' Leisure Strategy.

### 1.3 Links to the Council's Physical Activity Strategy

The definition of physical activity that Derby has used within its Physical Activity Strategy includes all elements of moderate intensity activity including for example, walking, cycling and gardening. The sections of the strategy are aimed at the generic challenges to encourage people to become more active.

1. Information, how, who, what, where and branding of physical activity
2. More People to lead, coach, train or advocate physical activity
3. Create and open access to facilities, venues and spaces

4. Raise the profile of Physical activity - impact on planning, transport and health improvement
5. Measure its impact and contribution.

#### **1.4 Derby City Partnership – 2020 Vision**

Derby's Community Strategy or 2020 Vision is a plan to make Derby a great place to live, work and visit. The 2020 Vision sets out what Derby City Partnership wants to achieve for Derby based on partner organisations' existing plans and strategies.

The Environment City theme group has six objectives intended to provide a diverse attractive and healthy environment. These objectives will be achieved through a number of actions, including several which can be related to the City's allotments. For example,

- Promote the benefits of local growing projects in the city from both an environmental, social and economic perspective.
- Continue to protect wildlife within the city according to the Biodiversity Greenprint for Derby.
- Improve people's access to the natural environment and their understanding of the city's natural heritage.

## **2 Objectives**

It is suggested that the objectives of the Commission's review should be to:

1. Define how allotments fit into the 2020 vision for Derby by identifying:
  - a. The level and type of need for allotments across the City including new housing areas
  - b. How this might change in the future
  - c. The organisations that are best placed to contribute towards this vision.
2. Identify the actions needed to achieve this vision and any barriers preventing progress.
3. Make recommendations if appropriate to encourage alternative uses of the sites and safeguard the future of allotments.

### 3 Stakeholders of the Review

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) identifies the following key groups involved in the running of allotments. They are:

1. Local authorities
2. Allotment societies; and
3. Individual plot holders

For the purposes of the Commission's review and in addition to the above it considers that the following are also main stakeholders to the review:

4. Derby City Partnership
5. The public

### 4 Methodology for the Review

If the review objectives specified in 2 above are acceptable to the Commission, then it is suggested that the following methodology could be adopted for the review.

|    | <b>Requirement</b>  | <b>Action to Achieve</b>   |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Familiarise the Commission with the 2002 Best Value Review report, in order to establish a starting point for the review.   | Circulate a copy of the relevant sections of the report to Members of the Commission.                        |
| 2. | Update the Commission on progress made within the Derby City Parks department against the recommendations made in the report. To obtain information on the following:<br><br>Allotment Promotion<br>Management of the sites<br>Occupancy levels<br>Uses of the sites<br>The Council's allotments policy | Arrange meetings with the relevant officers from Derby City Parks and the Environmental Sustainability Team. |
| 3. | Define how allotments fit into the 2020 vision for Derby  | Interviews with the relevant Derby City Partners in the 'Environment City' theme group.                      |

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|----|--|---|
| 4. | Identify areas for improvement within the service  | In addition to the interviews identified above the Commission should invite representatives of the City's allotment associations to contribute to the review. |
| 5. | Compare allotment sites both within Derby and with other local authorities, in order to identify areas of best practice. | Attend site visits of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Derby's Allotments</li> <li>• Other sites outside the City</li> </ul>                         |

## 5 Suggested Timetable for the Review

If the Commission are in agreement with the objectives and methodology of the review, the following timetable is suggested.

| Week Commencing | Action  |
|-----------------|---|
| 10 October      | Circulate the following to the Commission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the draft scoping report</li> <li>b. the relevant sections of the 2002 Best Value Review of Parks report.</li> </ul> |
| 17 October      | Arrange evidence gathering interviews and visits with members of the Commission and Witnesses.  |
| 24 October      | Arrange evidence gathering interviews and visits with members of the Commission and Witnesses.  |
| 31 October      | <b>Scheduled meeting</b><br>Agree the timetable of the review and confirm the arranged interviews.  |
| 7 November      | Tour of Derby City Allotment sites<br>Meeting with representatives of allotment associations  |
| 14 November     | Visit to another local authority allotment sites  |
| 21 November     | Write up draft report   |
| 28 November     |   |
| 5 December      | <b>Scheduled meeting</b><br>Draft Recommendations considered by the Commission  |

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 12 December | Final report agreed with Commission either via email consultation or at a review meeting<br><br>Report sent to meet 17 January Council Cabinet deadline |
| 19 December | Council Cabinet report deadline – 21 December   |

This is a demanding schedule, but the review could be completed by Christmas 2005 if the Commission were in agreement and able to commit the time to carry it out.

Members will be aware that the January meeting of the Commission is allocated for consideration of the Revenue Budget. Therefore it may be advantageous to complete this review by January 2006 in order to free up the Commission's time after January for consideration of a second topic review.

## 6 Members' Time Commitment

Based on this timetable the provisional time commitment for Commission members would be:

- Visits – 2 days, one in Derby and one outside the City
- Interviews – 6-8 hours over two or three days
- An additional meeting to 'sign-off' the final report – if preferred this can be done via email consultation with Commission members.

KJT October 2005