

REQUEST FOR ALLOTMENTS

We have 17 Houghton and Wyton parish households formally requesting an allotment. Anecdotally we believe there is more demand than this, and the recent Parish Plan questionnaire also showed a demand for allotments. Once we have 6 households requesting allotments we are legally obliged to provide allotments. We have people from both the villages and WotH requesting allotments.

The last few years have seen a real revival in “growing your own”, in line with current thinking on healthy eating, organic food and exercise. Government policy now very much encourages a growth in the provision of allotments and protection of those already provided. Several bodies provide practical and financial help in establishing and maintaining allotments.

How big?

- A full-sized allotment is 40 poles (approx 1000m² or ¼ acre). It is common to offer ½ sized plots (ie 20 poles) as well as full-sized.
- If we decided to offer, for instance, 16 ½ sized plots, we would need 2 acres of land.

How many, when and where?

- We need to assess the demand from our parish and provide a “sufficient” number of plots. We do not have to satisfy peaks in demand and we can have a waiting list.
- There is no time limit by which we have to provide allotments. If we have to purchase the land (as opposed to lease) it is a significant capital expenditure for us and we have to make provision in our 2009/10 budget.
- The allotments provided need not be in the parish, but it would be preferable if they were.

How do we get the land?

- If necessary, land can be acquired by compulsory purchase at “agricultural rates”

How much will this cost?

- The land necessary for 16 ½ sized plots would cost very roughly £20,000 at current market rates (£1,250 per ½ plot). To lease the land would cost very roughly £700/year (£43.75 per ½ plot).
- Management costs and the cost of additional facilities, if provided, would have to be added to this depending on the approach we take (see more details below)
- Grants are available and if we were successful in applying, would offset the costs above.

Who pays?

- We would need to decide whether we subsidised the cost of allotment provision, recovered our costs fully from the allotment holders or adopted some mid-position.
- For councils who have been running allotments for a long time, their rents may be very low as it is difficult to raise them once set. Such rents are often too low to even cover administrative costs (local examples: Huntingdon Town Council rent is £9/year for a full plot, St Ives Town Council rent is £15.40/yr for a full plot).
- We can have reduced rents for the more disadvantaged, providing we have a clear policy.

Who manages?

- Council allotments can either be fully managed, management completely devolved to an Allotment Association, or some mid-position adopted.
- Costs/rents are lower the greater the involvement of an Allotment Association as they bear much of the costs of management.

What facilities should be provided?

- As a minimum we only need offer the land for the allotment. However, additional facilities such as:
 - Water supply
 - Access/parking
 - Toilets
 - Hedges and fencing
 - Sheds or glasshouses

can be provided by a council. The greater the facilities provided the greater the cost. But offering greater facilities is likely to lead to the community feeling that an attractive and useful service was being provided by the council.

How long do allotments have to be provided for?

- Once “statutory” allotments have been provided, the Secretary of State has to approve disposal. Temporary allotments do not need such approval. More work is required on the implications of this for us. For instance, if a private landowner was prepared to offer us land for allotments on a fixed-length lease we would have to reject this option if a statutory allotment would be created.
- As far as allotment holders are concerned, they are offered tenancy on a 12 month basis.

RECOMMENDATION

We form a working party of councillors and potential allotment holders with the following terms of reference:

- To establish the demand for allotments in the parish, the rental costs people would be prepared to pay and what additional facilities would be desirable
- To investigate available land
- To investigate potential sources of grant funding
- To recommend to the council a mutually agreeable method of funding the allotment service fund (ie extent of any subsidy from the council, extent of involvement of an Allotment Association, etc)
- To recommend what additional facilities, if any, should be provided by the council on the allotments.

The working party could be formed from 2 councillors, 2 potential allotment holders and the Parish Clerk.

Roger Hall
Parish Clerk
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