



Allotment Strategy 2017 – 2022 All Sites

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1. Purpose of the Strategy

The provision of allotments by local authorities is a statutory duty. Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council (BFSTC) will continue to provide and promote allotments not only because of this statutory requirements but because it recognises the importance of allotment gardens as great place for people of all ages and backgrounds to grow organic fruits and vegetables, keep fit, socialise with like-minded people and enhance biodiversity by cultivating the plots.

The overall objective of this strategy is to ensure that BFSTC provides consistent, cost-effective, well managed allotment service which meets the needs of the community and contributes to the environmental well-being of the parish. The strategy seeks through its targets and initiatives to optimise the use of allotments for existing and potential plot holders, identify needs and meet demand. This strategy provides a framework for the next five years to develop and manage allotments in partnership with tenants and allotment associations/groups, and provides a focus on four main target areas:

- 1) Ensuring Sufficient Allotments
- 2) Providing Good Administration and Communication

- 3) Maintaining Adequate Resources
- 4) Encouraging Sustainability

2. Current Provision

2.1. Sites

The Council owns five allotment sites within the parish at Larch Grove, Manor Fields, Orchardside, Stoke Road and Pinewood Drive thus providing over 200 plots for the people of the Council to enjoy. The sites at Manor Fields, and Larch Grove and Orchardside are managed by the Council. The rent is specific to each plot and is calculated in line with our charging policy (£0.25 per square meter in 2017-2018). A new allotment site at Newton Leys is expected to be opened in late 2017 or 2018. The Council is accepting names for the waiting list.

As of July 2017, 95.48 per cent of allotment plots are let with no waiting list. Prospective tenants are added to the waiting list on a first come, first served basis, and tenancies will be offered according to the criteria detailed in section 3.1.

BFSTC also owns the Community Orchard by Manor Fields site. It is currently used by walkers, dog walkers and pre-schools/nursery and valued by a proportion of the community.

2.2. Management

The allotment sites are currently managed on behalf of the Council by the Town Clerk, Allotments Officers and Parish Rangers. Allotment Officers deal with day to day administration of the allotments including:

- Collecting and administering rents
- Administering tenancies
- Dealing with enquiries from prospective tenants including site visits
- Resolving disputes and dealing with complaints
- Holding Allotment Meetings quarterly

Parish Rangers deal with day to day tasks on the site including:

- Inspecting individual plots monthly
- Providing prospective tenants with site visits
- Arranging day to day maintenance of the site
- Managing alterations and improvement works (i.e. fence, marking)
- Checking the water meter

2.3. Communication with Tenants

Allotment Meetings take place quarterly to meet with allotment tenants informally to discuss any issues or other items that tenants wish to discuss. Following the meeting, a formal report is tabled at the Full Council meeting where it authorises the staff team to look into all the issues discussed and report back about what can be implemented as soon as possible.

An Allotment Newsletter is published on the website quarterly and hard copies are available from the Council's office. This can be sent to all tenants via email if they wish to receive it. The purpose of the Allotment Newsletter is to provide tenants with updates from Allotments Officers and Rangers and advertise meetings and events. A monthly/annual financial report showing all income from the allotments rent and expenditure by the Council on the sites is included in the Allotment Newsletter so that tenants can see how much the service costs to run.

The Council holds events including Allotment Open Day periodically. The aim of this event is to make the Allotments Officers available to members of public and existing allotment tenants so they could have a chat and potential tenants could be shown around the sites.

2.4. Site Maintenance

The Council is responsible for cutting grass on the ridings and maintaining the fences surrounding the sites. The Council also ensures to make each vacated plot sufficiently attractive for letting by strimming weeds and grass. Water troughs are provided on all sites and taps on Larch Grove and Orchardside to enable plot holders to fill water containers. The Council also considers the maintenance needs of the site.

2.5. Security

BFSTC currently have padlocks with combination keys to secure the gates at the site. The Council advises all the tenants to keep the gates shut while working on the plots and report issues including thefts to the police directly and get crime reference numbers.

3. Target Areas of the Strategy

3.1. Ensuring Sufficient Allotments

It is the policy of the Council to continue to meet its legal obligation to provide allotments in Bletchley and Fenny Stratford for the residents of the Parish.

The Council owns no land other than the existing sites. It is not anticipated that the Council will either sell these sites or buy additional sites within the five year period covered by this strategy. The aim therefore is to maximise the use of the existing sites – as plots become vacant they are assessed to see if they could be converted into two half plots if the original size is large and hard to rent out.

In addition to a residents only policy, the Council may exceptionally accept applications from voluntary community groups for the tenancy of allotment(s), where the proposed use is beneficial to the residents of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford and may increase allotment use. Currently three plots in Manor Fields have been allocated to Care Support MK Ltd, The Disabilities Trust and Walnut School.

3.2. Providing Good Administration and Communication

Allotments Officers aim to ensure that: all allotment rents and fees continue to be collected in a timely manner; inspection letters are sent out to tenants with untidy plots promptly to prevent nuisance to plots nearby; notice of events/meetings reach the tenants in advance. Schedule of Allotment Meetings is advertised in advance in all the notice boards across the parish including those on the allotment sites, Allotments Newsletter and on the website. From October 2017, calendar of meetings will be sent out with tenancy renewal letters and reminder notice is issued nearer the time.

In order to help tenants purchase gardening materials at affordable price, Allotments Officers can strengthen networks with other allotment groups/associations/shops which undertake beneficial activities for all tenants, such as bulk buying of compost/horse manure; and provide such information to the tenants on various channels.

3.3. Maintaining Adequate Resources

The aim of the Council is not to make a profit running the allotments but just to break even. However, the rental income from the tenants currently does not cover running costs. Neither wages cost of Allotments Officers' time spent on allotment administration nor Rangers' time spent on the sites is allocated in allotments cost centre, and not met from rental income.

The Council needs to balance the benefits of the allotments provision against the cost to the residents of the Bletchley and Fenny Stratford parish via the Council tax precept. The level of rents is considered annually and any changes are introduced in time for renewals on 1 October with six months notice. BFSTC will continue to ensure that allotments are good value for money for all the tenants. It is the long term aim of the Council to make the allotment site self-financing.

Allotments Officers are currently looking into several options to keep the costs down: the Council explores the tenants cutting some/all of the grass ridings by themselves to keep the costs down; and the Council looks into outsourcing of allotment maintenance (in part or whole) and/or purchasing a boom to save time and cost for strimming weeds and grass. Future considerations include exploring opportunities to obtain some external funding and introducing a deposit scheme to help the Council

run this service. Whilst Councils cannot apply for grants, allotment associations can. Tenants could seek to form an allotment association so they could be eligible to apply for some grants.

Proposal: The Council agrees upon the formula for rent setting through the analysis of the expenditures from previous years. Rent should go up at recommended rate each year. This is to be agreed yearly by Full Council.

3.4. Encouraging Sustainability

The Council encourages organic gardening and aims to improve biodiversity but does not forbid pesticides. It is a health concern that mice are running on the fence and active moles make the surface uneven. The Council puts pest controllers in when necessary.

Rangers could monitor water meter readings more frequently to detect exceptional use/leaks and encourage the tenants to use individual rainwater capture where practicable.

BFSTC could hold events to raise consciousness about enhancing biodiversity (i.e. 'Beecause') and share gardening skills (i.e. composting, no dig techniques). Apple Day at the Community Orchard could also be planned.

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