

BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Unused Council Land, Garages and Garage Plots Scrutiny Review 2011/12

April 2012

Foreword from Councillor Hilary Gilmour

Chair of the Improvement Scrutiny Committee

It is a pleasure to present this review on behalf of the Improvement Scrutiny Committee.

It details findings, conclusions and recommendations from the committee on it's review of Unused Council Land, Garages and Garage plots.

I would like to give our thanks to all those Officers who contributed to this report but especially Peter Campbell, Roger Owen, Adie Lowry, Danielle Troop and Julie Lewis for their data and information throughout the review.

Many thanks to Abby Brownsword, Democratic officer and special thanks to Robin Raily, Performance and Quality Officer, the Scrutiny support for Improvement Committee, for all his dedicated hard work and commitment to this review.

Finally, thank you to all the members of the Improvement Scrutiny Committee for their involvement and commitment in this review.

Contents

	Page
1.Introduction	3
2.Recommendations	3
3.Scope of Review	5
4.Method of Review	5
5.Evidence	5
6.Key Findings	8
7.Conclusions	11
8.Appendixes	12
Appendix 1 – Stakeholders engaged during the Review	
Appendix 2 – All allotments sites breakdown	
Appendix 3 – Review questions posed to Officers	
Appendix 4 – Local Authority Allotment Services: State of the Market survey 2012	
Appendix 5 - Extract from DirectGov: Allotments	

1. Introduction

Elected Members have been concerned that the authority is expending resources keeping unused Council land, garages and garage plots clean and tidy when this land could be disposed of to developers or other bodies. The Scrutiny Review has questioned Key Officers on the prospects of disposal and also looked at alternatives to the sale of these assets.

2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Consider undertaking a project to identify Council-owned sites and garage plots that consume a disproportionate amount of the Grounds Maintenance and Cleansing budgets and look at measures to reduce problems.

Identify hot spots; consider the particular areas that incur higher costs for cleansing and maintenance and look at re-configuring sites to reduce the incidence of fly tipping, dog fouling, etc. Options that could be considered include, for instance, looking at the issues around diverting paths away from garage sites (to reduce footfall and thus, litter, dog fouling, etc),

(References: 5:2, 5:3, 5:4, 5:5, 5:6, 5:7, 5:12, 6:6)

Recommendation 2

Consider producing an Improvement Plan to put in place arrangements for the management of Council-owned sites and garage plots with a view to disposal and/or development.

As disposal of unused Council land and plots has stalled due to market conditions, alternative uses should be considered. Options could include, producing a list of Council-owned sites that are not suitable for disposal. Revisit the list of sites that are suitable for disposal; look at each site individually and consider what changes could be made to improve the prospects for disposal. Update the database that first appeared in the Executive report 'HRA Garage Sites' (01/12/2008) to reflect changes in land usage, any disposal, etc. Consider the implications of the Disposals and Acquisitions Strategy (6/3/2006).

(References: 5:1, 5:2, 5:3, 5:5, 5:6, 5:7, 5:9, 5:10, 6:1, 6:2, 6:7)

Recommendation 3

Allotments

- I. **Examine the present rate charged for allotments and what services are delivered for that fee.**
- II. **Consider increasing the annual fee to cover the cost of administration and bring charging more into line with national trends and with the facilities provided.**

- III. **Consider the relative sizes of each plot and adjust the area so each plot is the same as the national average of 250/300 m²**
- IV. **Determine the exact number of allotments that are invoiced per year.**
- V. **Produce an allotments strategy, with a vision and clear objectives, detailing activities that will make best use of allotments in the future.**
- VI. **Approach Parish Councils to see if they would be interested in being part of a strategy for the disposal/development of their allotments.**
- VII. **Consider the creation of Allotments Management as an activity and approach Parish Councils as a potential income stream.**

Plotholders would be given adequate warning of any impending rise in costs and then charges could be introduced that reflect the facilities provided, for example, water or security. Also, costs would reflect the relative difference in area from one site to another. More detailed research with a family benchmark group could be undertaken to ascertain what would be a reasonable amount to charge. The District could formally contact Parish Councils to consult on their pricing, disposal and development policies.

(References: 5:5, 5:7, 5:8, 5:9, 6:3, 6:4, 6:8. See Appendixes 2, 4 & 5))

Recommendation 4

Look into how Social Enterprises could develop unused Council plots of land

This proposed activity is appropriate for the Aims and Objectives of this Review, that is, to promote and to make more efficient use of vacant Council land. The activity also contributes to the Corporate Plan Target, R 06 and fits well with the Council's Corporate Plan priorities.

Consider similar projects to the recently awarded summer works StreetScene (Shaw Trust) scheme. Or a coordinated environmental improvement scheme could be undertaken, for example, a 'clean-up' campaign of various pieces of land utilising the Probation Service's workforce. Also, look at the model provided by the Rhubarb Farm project and consider if there is a place for another Community Supported Agriculture project in the District. Consider a liaison with Groundworks Creswell to establish construction projects in the District to build Eco-bungalows (or similar) using NEETs-type labour.

(References: 5:1, 5:2, 5:3, 5:5, 5:6, 5:7, 5:10, 5:11, 6:5, 6:9)

3. Scope of Review

To consider the use of Council-owned land within Bolsover District under the remit of Regeneration, by:

- 3.1. Reducing Council expenditure on the maintenance of unused land and building assets.
- 3.2. To consider options for making better use of these assets.
- 3.3. To make recommendations for the management or disposal of these assets.

The Committee is comprised of the following Members,

Cllr Hilary Gilmour (Chair)

Cllr Jim Smith (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Toni Bennett

Cllr Rose Bowler

Cllr Pauline Bowmer

Cllr Ray Brooks

Cllr Jim Clifton

Cllr Terry Cook

Cllr Ray Heffer

Cllr Rita Turner

Support to the Committee was provided by the Scrutiny Officer, the Performance and Quality Officer and a Democratic Services Officer.

4. Method of Review

The Committee met on 2 occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and the people they wished to interview.

The Committee interviewed relevant officers and stakeholders in order to identify what procedures were in place and how the authority was meeting its obligations to maintain these sites.

Attached at **Appendix 1** is a list of stakeholders interviewed.

Equalities and Diversity

Within the process of the review the panel have taken into account the impact of equalities and have not identified any negative impact.

5. Evidence (with references)

The following documents were considered as part of the review:

- 5.1. Briefing by the Head of Housing – HRA Asset Management and HRA Business Plan.
 - 5.1.1. The briefing by the Head of Housing outlined how the authority is responding to the changes in legislation that the coalition government is implementing. The explanation included detail on the financial arrangements that are required for the authority to take responsibility for a self funded HRA. There was some explanation of the impact that the Localism Act and Welfare Reform legislation is going to have

on the public and private rented sectors. Equally, there may be opportunities in the future for the authority to undertake building new houses in the District.

5.2. Council Owned Garages and Garage Sites Policy (Dec 2006)

5.2.1. A policy that aims to ensure that garage sites are managed in a way that maximises their value to the community. This policy covers the following areas:

5.2.1.1. Service standards for the management and maintenance of garage sites

5.2.1.2. Guidance to tenants who rent garages or garage plots

5.2.1.3. Guidance as to how to evaluate the options of investing in, improving sites or considering disposal or alternative use of sites.

5.3. Report to Executive: HRA Garage Sites – (Dec 2008)

5.3.1. The authority is currently spending money on maintaining garage sites with little or no return. This report recommends disposing of a number of sites resulting in a capital receipt to the authority and a saving on maintenance.

5.4. Untidy Land and Buildings Policy (Jan 2008:reviewed Feb 2012)

5.4.1. The aim of the Policy is to improve the amenity of residential neighbourhoods across the district in order to make them a cleaner, safer, greener place to live.

5.5. Disposals and Acquisitions Strategy (Mar 2006)

5.5.1. This Strategy was produced to provide a framework for the disposal and acquisition of land and property assets.

5.6. Neighbourhood Management – Report from Communities Services Project Coordinator on the use of the Probation Service’s work team(s).

5.6.1. As present, the Probation Service’s Community Service work team(s) are utilised by the Neighbourhood Management team to clean up paths, edges of back roads and communal areas. The Project Coordinator explained that these work teams are also available for one-off projects with the only proviso being, the teams will not undertake work that is within the remit of another body e.g. work that should be done by the authority’s Grounds Maintenance teams.

5.7. Summary of questions: Grounds Maintenance related issues, Housing related issues and Regeneration related issues.

5.7.1. A series of questions all originally raised by the Committee Members over the period of the Review but gathered together in one document. Officers from 3 different services attended the Committee meeting and provided responses to these specific questions. (see Appendix 3)

5.7.1.1. Head of Housing;

5.7.1.2. Street Services Manager

5.7.1.3. Senior Valuer

5.8. APSE State of the Market Survey 2012 of Local Authority Allotment Services (see Appendix 4)

5.8.1. An on-line survey carried out by the Association for Public Sector Excellence in Jan/Feb 2012.

5.8.2. 131 authorities took part, answering questions on:

5.8.2.1. 1. Number and management of allotments

- 5.8.2.2. 2. Cost of allotments
 - 5.8.2.3. 3. Size of allotments
 - 5.8.2.4. 4. Future increases in the number of allotments
 - 5.8.2.5. 5. Budget for allotments
 - 5.8.2.6. 6. Facilities at allotment sites
 - 5.8.2.7. 7. Security
 - 5.8.2.8. 8. Allotment strategy
- 5.9.** Breakdown of data and information for Bolsover DC Allotments (see Appendixes 2 & 5)
- 5.9.1. Tables setting out details of;
 - 5.9.1.1. Where Bolsover DC (as opposed to those run by Parishes) allotment sites are situated;
 - 5.9.1.2. The number of plots;
 - 5.9.1.3. The occupancy rate for each site
 - 5.9.1.4. The square area of the sites
- 5.10.** Briefing by the Deputy Leader: Groundworks Creswell Construction Training projects.
- 5.10.1. The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration briefed the Chair and Vice Chair of Improvement Scrutiny on the discussions that have been taking place with Groundworks Creswell (GC).
 - 5.10.2. Groundworks Creswell (GC) has been inspecting plots of land in Bassetlaw and North East Derbyshire with a view to new construction projects in those areas. GC has been looking for plots to build eco-friendly bungalows using a workforce recruited from the NEETs* category or similar. The Deputy Leader explained that Bolsover would be interested in being involved in similar projects and had passed this along to GC.
- 5.11.** Summer Street Scene Works: a tender was recently submitted by a third sector organisation to carry out works. Shaw Trust, one of the organisations who have tendered for the works, is the UK's largest third sector provider of employment services for disabled and disadvantaged people.
- 5.12.** Corporate Plan Targets (PERFORM):
- 5.12.1. CS 04: Reduce the incidence of fly tipping, dog fouling and littering by 20% by March 2015.
 - 5.12.2. E 06: Increase the Standard of Cleanliness, so that 96% of streets each year meet the criteria of an acceptable standard, established by Keep Britain Tidy Group Local Environment Quality Standards (LEQS).
 - 5.12.3. R 06: Deliver £100,000 of New Homes Bonus per annum in the district as part of Local Investment Plan

6. Key Findings

Strengths

6.1. 'Laying the Foundations – a new Housing Strategy' (Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager)

The government has stated that housing has a key role to play in addressing the Coalition's priorities of economic growth and social mobility. In the run-up to the Autumn statement, the Chancellor softened poor growth figures with news of new housing incentives. Many elements of the new Housing Strategy released November 2011 and which provides the framework for the Chancellors Housing spend plans, were also contained in the Localism Act released the week before.

Key Governmental interventions include;

- Support for a Challenging Market
- (Moving) from Grant to Investment
- Focus on Assets
- Stepping up Supply
- Changing how Social Housing is Accessed

6.2. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Asset Management Plan (draft) Strategic Priorities (Head of Housing)

6.2.1. To have in place well designed repair and maintenance systems which ensure the stock is well maintained and kept in a good state of repair.

6.2.2. To ensure the housing stock is brought up to and maintained at a locally determined Bolsover Standard, remaining attractive and meeting modern requirements and tenant expectations.

6.2.3. To replace obsolete or uneconomic stock with new properties, which are better designed to meet future needs and create a better balanced portfolio.

6.2.4. To identify land, whether it be HRA, General Fund or non-council to build additional affordable homes to increase the number of Council owned properties available of the type and quality needed in locations where people want to live whilst ensuring a Balanced Housing Market

6.2.5. To identify and consider potential opportunities for increasing the stock of properties available by acquiring homes, (e.g. RP disposals, new builds, reposessions & properties previously sold under RTB)

6.2.6. To ensure the ongoing availability of housing stock, which specifically caters for the particular housing needs of older vulnerable, special needs or minority households through the provision of appropriate attributes and facilities.

6.2.7. To have a long term strategy and programme in place to incrementally improve the thermal efficiency of the housing stock, at the same time helping to reduce levels of fuel poverty.

6.2.8. To use procurement processes to best effect to ensure value for money in the delivery of all repairs, maintenance and improvement works

6.2.9. To use the housing asset base to help deliver the wider corporate priorities of the Council

6.3. Allotment Services

6.3.1. The authority has 71 allotment plots across the District, approximately 4.63 acres in area.

6.3.2. 81.7% are occupied (58) while 18.3% (13) are vacant.

6.3.3. The authority charges £2.50 p.a. per plot.

6.3.4. Property Services raise an invoice which is sent out periodically by Billing and Recovery and process the invoice on return.

6.3.5. Property Services estimates that administration (including Billing) of allotments costs about £500 p.a.

6.3.6. Of the 131 authorities that responded to the APSE State of the Market survey, 71.3% report that they charge at least £31.00 p.a.

6.4. Allotments: Temporary (see Appendix 5)

6.4.1. The authority has 71 allotment plots across the District but they are temporary so are not protected from disposal and can be sold.

6.4.2. Further guidance on allotments is available from the The Allotments Regeneration Initiative.

6.5. Groundworks Creswell

6.5.1. Groundworks Creswell (GC) are starting a series of constructions projects in the Bassetlaw and NEDDC areas.

6.5.2. GC are setting up training schemes for young people who fall into the NEETS category.

6.5.3. GC are building Eco-bungalows on small plots of land donated by the local authorities. (GC does not have the cash flow to buy land).

6.5.4. When each Eco-bungalow is complete the property is sold on to the open market and the capital receipt is given back to the local authority in return for the land donation.

Areas for Improvement

6.6. Unused Council Land Garages and Garage Plots: Grounds Maintenance (Street Services Manager)

6.6.1. Represents 1.25% of the overall Grounds Maintenance (GM) budget. - This includes approximately £10,000 p.a. on GM and approximately £15,000 p.a. for Cleansing functions like Dog Fouling, Fly Tipping and Litter. Street Services recharges the HRA approximately £600k p.a.

6.6.2. The majority of the Garage site GM budget is expended on just a few 'problem' sites.

6.6.3. If garage sites were put to an alternative use e.g. building houses, Dog Fouling, Fly Tipping and Litter problems would not necessarily end but just be moved on to other sites i.e. it would not result in savings.

6.6.4. A higher level of Garage Site Management would more likely result in savings.

6.6.5. Investment in garage sites would increase returns e.g. making garages larger (to accommodate bigger modern cars), making the sites more secure, etc.

6.7. Unused Council Land Garages and Garage Plots: Regeneration (Senior Valuer)

6.7.1. No separate small plots of land have been sold since 2008

6.7.2. Not viable to dispose of individual plots

6.7.3. Barriers to disposal

6.7.3.1. Poor location of many sites

6.7.3.2. Access difficulties.

6.7.3.3. Unofficial pedestrian and vehicular accesses that have been in use for many years.

6.7.3.4. Close proximity of other dwellings restricting development.

6.7.3.5. Current state of property market.

6.7.3.6. A lot of sites are very small for only one plot and may not be viable in the current market.

6.7.3.7. If land is not maintained it may become overgrown and attract fly tipping.

6.7.3.8. There is also the possibility of encroachments by adjoining owners onto the land.

6.7.3.9. No land is currently being marketed due to the current state of the residential market. The last two sites that sales were agreed (2007 & 2008), fell through due to the depressed state of the market. No sites have been disposed of since the garage site report of 2008.

6.7.3.10. Research carried out by Knight Frank shows residential land values in the East Midlands fell by 24% between 2008 and 2009.

6.7.3.11. Research in 2011 shows that land values were 40% down on the peak values of 2007 and values having recovered slightly during 2010 were down 3% at the end of 2011.

6.7.3.12. Any assets with a value under £10,000 are not shown on the asset register. There are a number of areas of POS that have recently been acquired under S106 agreements that are not currently shown.

6.7.3.13. 22 garage plots and 10 'other' sites across the District are considered suitable for disposal.

6.7.3.14. Suggestions for alternative uses include, garden extensions and private off road parking/garaging

6.8. Allotment Services

6.8.1. Property Services estimates that the administration (including Billing) of allotments costs about £500 p.a.

6.8.2. Property Services have stated that there are 58 allotments occupied whereas Billing and Recovery have reported that they invoice only 46.

6.8.3. Billing and Recovery have stated that they are dependent on Property Services (Regeneration) to inform them who should be invoiced.

- 6.8.4. As there is such a low annual fee charged, if an allotment holder doesn't pay, there are no other measures taken for collection.
- 6.8.5. The annual fee for the rental of an allotment is £2.50 but the area of that plot in one ward might be 150m²; in another ward it might be as much as 890m² per plot.
- 6.8.6. The Allotments Service lacks a clear vision and objectives.
- 6.8.7. Parish Councils have a list of unused allotments; Parishes could be approached to see if they would be interested in signing up to Bolsover's marketing strategy for the disposal/development of land or if they would be interested in having their allotments managed on their behalf.

6.9. Groundworks Creswell

- 6.9.1. The District has unused land with planning permission that may be suitable for Groundworks Creswell's Construction Training project.

7. Conclusions

The Review of Unused Council Land, Garages and Garage Plots by the Improvement Scrutiny Committee was initially decided upon by Conference in mid-2011. Elected Members were concerned that resources were being expended on the grounds maintenance of these areas when ideally these plots could be sold off.

Initial research revealed that the sums expended on Grounds Maintenance (GM) are negligible (Cleansing is a bigger issue) and these areas had been considered in 2008/09 and new Policies for dealing with the problems were introduced. The main issue at this point was the fact that Property Services had been unable to dispose of any sites since the property crash of 2008. As a result of this issue, the Review then shifted emphasis to look at alternative uses for unused sites.

This Review has been able to make recommendations for developing new or improving existing processes, for instance, the management of allotments or the maintenance and cleansing of unused Council land. But the main direction of the Review's recommendations is towards either alternative uses for sites or managing the sites better. Also, successful 'alternative use' examples for the District like Rhubarb Farm or Groundworks Creswell construction projects are highlighted.

This Review has concerned itself with considering options for the alternative use of sites or better managing the ones we have. The parallel Review 'Demand for Housing' being conducted by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee has been considering how unused Council land can be used for building houses. It is appreciated that the recommendations from this Review complement those of the 'Demand for Housing' Review.

Stakeholders

Councillor Alan Tomlinson	Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
Councillor Keith Bowman	Portfolio Holder for Housing
Councillor Duncan McGregor	Portfolio Holder for Corporate Efficiencies
Adie Lowery	Street Services Manager
Danielle Troop	Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager
David Hill	Head of Finance and Revenues
Diane Bonsor	Housing Needs Manager
Grant Galloway	Building and Contracts Manager
Ian Collis	Planning Policy Manager
John Ritchie	Head of Community and Street Services
Julie Lewis	Project Coordinator
Kevin Hopkinson	Director of Development
Matt Broughton	Project Officer (Business Growth)
Peter Campbell	Head of Housing
Roger Owen	Senior Valuer
Sam Bentley	Senior Environmental Health Officer

All allotment sites breakdown

Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area (Acres)
71	58	13	81.7	18.3	4.63
4.63 acres = 18737m ² (average 18737/71 = 264 m²)					

Individual Sites

Waterloo Street, Bramley Vale

Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
4	4	0	100	0	0.88 acres
0.88 acres = 3561m ² (average 3561/4 = 890 m²)					

King Street, Clowne S43 4BS

Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
16	15	1	93.75	6.25	0.64 acres
0.64 acres = 2445m ² (average 2445/16 = 151 m²)					

Portland Avenue, Creswell

Breakdown

Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
17	15	2	88.24	11.76	0.88 acres
0.88 acres = 3561m ² (average 3561/17 = 209 m²)					

Whaley Common, Langwith

Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
6	6	0	100	0	0.16 acres
0.16 acres = 647m ² (average 647/71 = 108 m²)					

Burlington Avenue, Langwith Junction (evens NG20 9AD odds NG20 9AB)

Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
13	11	2	84.62	15.38	0.87 acres
0.87 acres = 3521m ² (average 3521/13 = 271 m²)					

Hillcrest, Shirebrook					
Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
4	4	0	100	0	0.22 acres
0.22 acres = 890m ² (average 890/4 = 223 m ²)					

Moorfield Lane, Whaley Thorns					
Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
2	2	0	100.00	0.00	0.19 acres
0.19 acres = 769m ² (average 769/2 = 385 m ²)					

Bakestonemoor, Whitwell					
Number of Plots	Occupied	Vacant	% Occupied	% Vacant	Area
9	1	8	11.11	88.89	0.79 acres
0.79 acres = 3197m ² (average 3197/9 = 355 m ²)					

**Questions for Officers relating to;
Unused Council Land, Garages and Garage Plots Scrutiny Review**

Aims and Objectives of the Review

To consider the following issues for each area;

1. Savings identified/made in the last year?
2. Further savings that could be made?
3. Efficiencies in the particular areas?
4. Value for money of the areas?
5. Whether the authority can generate income from the areas?

Issues to be resolved

The initial drive behind this Review was Members concern about the cost of maintaining unused sites, garage and garage plots. Members thought that the disposal of this land and properties would realise savings and efficiencies.

Grounds Maintenance-related issues

- For the maintenance of the areas under review (Unused Council land and Garage areas), typically, what proportion of the overall budget does it represent i.e. how big is it a drain on the budget is it maintaining this land?
- What costs (approx) have been incurred keeping land clean and tidy since the policies below were agreed i.e. in the last 2-3 years?
 - Council Owned Garages & Garage Sites Policy (Jan 2009) and,
 - HRA Garage Sites report (Dec 2008) and,
 - Untidy Land & Buildings Policy (Jan 2008)?
- What costs are incurred by other services e.g. Anti Social Behaviour, Environmental Health, passed on to the HRA?

Housing-related issues

- How many Garages/Plots are there? Of all the garages; how many have been:
 - Rented?
 - Empty?
 - What's the rental income from Garages: Costs balanced against income?

Regeneration-related issues

- Is there an alternative i.e. what would happen if this land was not maintained?
- What are the main barriers to the disposal of land?

- What alternative uses could the sites be put to if disposal of the land does not succeed?
- Has any thought gone into the 'batching' of land i.e. disposing of small plots of land as one lot e.g. instead of one plot of 5 acres, 2-3 plots of 1-2 acres each?
- How many sites have been disposed of since the HRA Garage Sites report was agreed by Exec in Dec 2008?
- What is not on the Fixed Asset Register?

Allotments

- Please provide a position statement on the management and disposal of Allotments.
 - What proportion of Allotments are operating and what proportion are unused?
 - Are there alternatives for those allotments that are unused? E.g.
 - Disposal
 - Turning into public open space
 - Reclaiming and promoting as new allotment space
 - Reclaiming and promoting as new schemes e.g. Rhubarb Farm, etc.

Local Authority Allotment Services State of the Market 2012

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) conducted an on-line survey on allotments during January and February 2012. In total, 131 responses were received from local authorities throughout the UK.

Results from the survey

1. Number and management of allotments

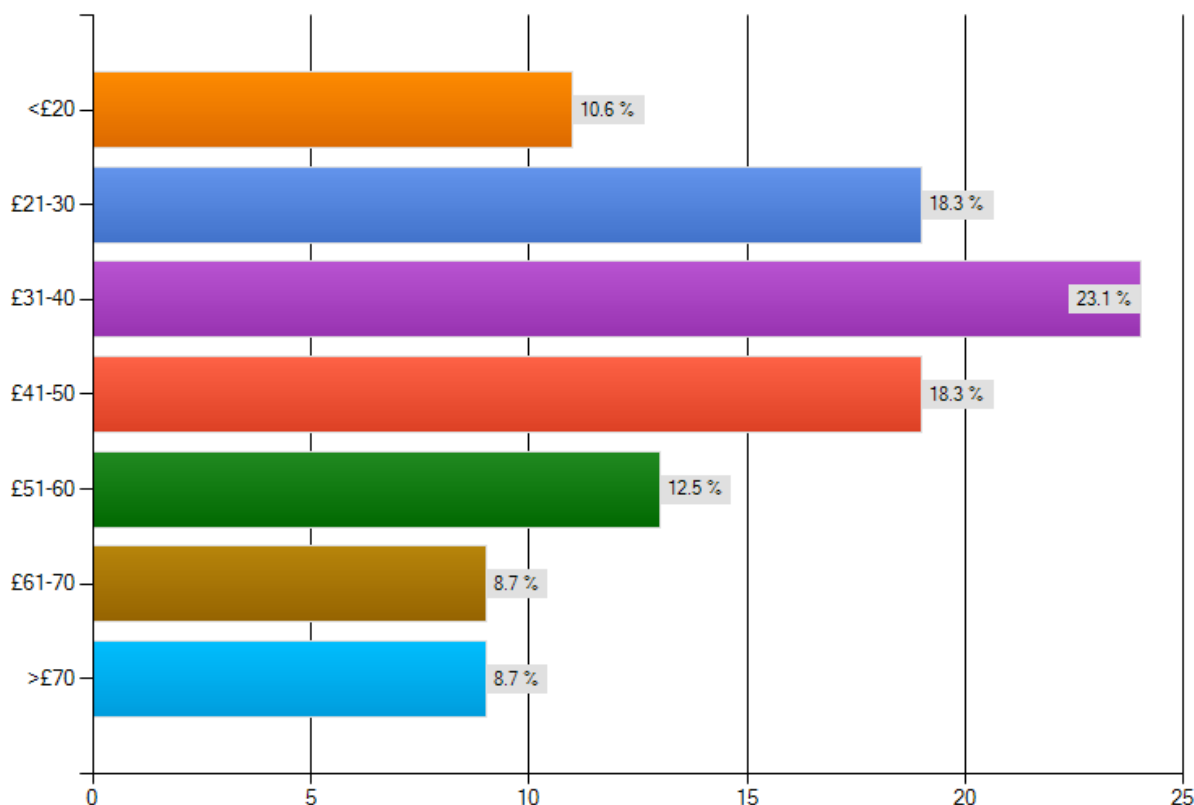
93% of respondents answered that they have council managed allotments within their authority. From the respondents that answered 'no' to this question; 75% stated that demand has been expressed for these.

In terms of management of the allotments, 79% stated that they have allotments which are managed by a council officer and 21% stated that these are managed through a site committee or association.

2. Cost of allotments

The majority of respondents stated that the cost per annum to rent an allotment in 2011-12 was between £21 and £50. The full breakdown is as follows:

Cost per annum to rent an allotment plot in 2011-12 (Note: if you have different costs according to size of land, please use the cost for a typical 250 square meter plot including water).

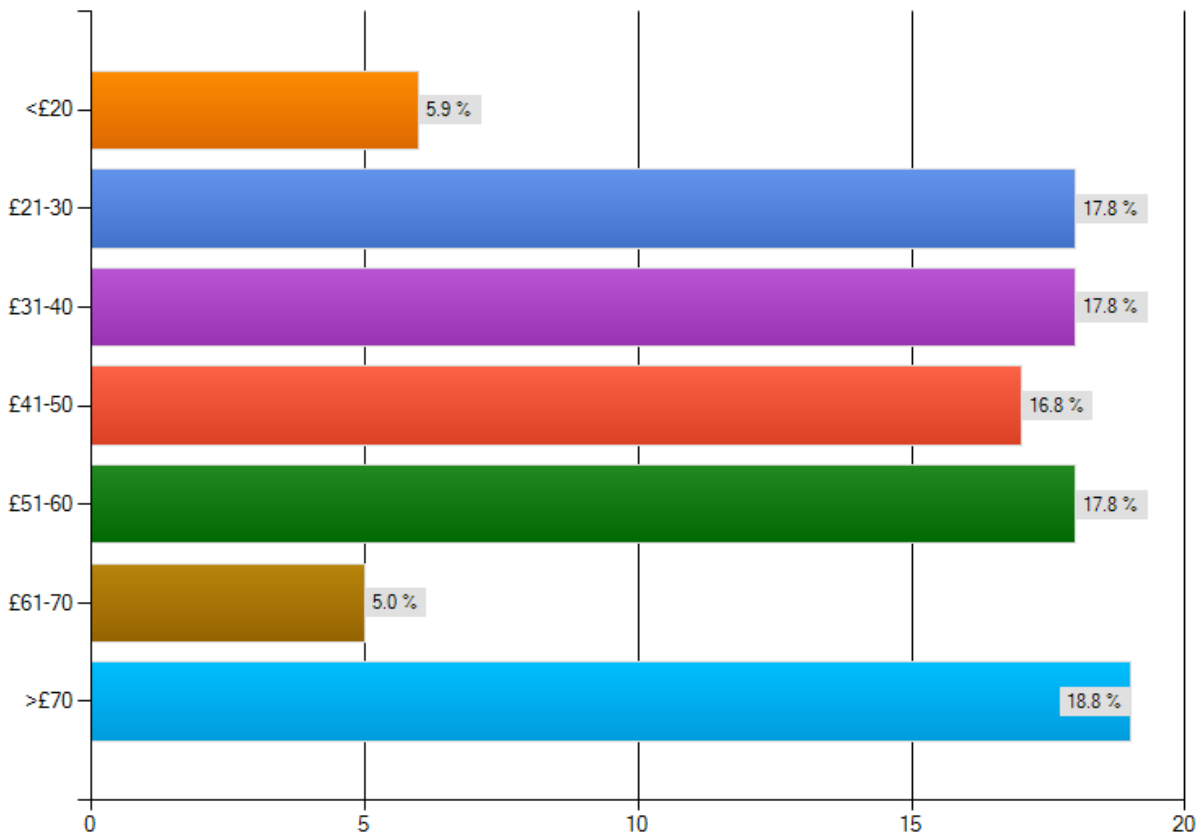


71.3% of respondents are reporting a cost of £31 or above. In comparison, the 2008 survey had reported even though the average cost to rent an allotment in 2008-09 was between £21 and £40, 60% of respondents expected the rent costs for 2009-10 to be above £31.

The 2012 survey asked about previous years increases in the rent of an allotment plot and 45% of respondents stated that there has been an increase in this (beyond an inflationary increase) during the past 2 years.

When respondents were asked about the expected cost per annum to rent an allotment next year (in 2012-13), 76.2% answered that they expected this to be £31 or above and 18.8% answered that this is above £70, representing an overall increase from the current cost paid. The full breakdown is as follows:

Expected cost per annum to rent an allotment plot in 2012-13



The majority (73%) of respondents claimed that the charge is directly related to the area of the allotment (e.g. square meters) and 18% stated that this is standard regardless of the size. There was also a split in the respondents who answered that concessionary prices are offered (65% yes, 35% no). From those who offer concessions, the breakdown is as follows:

- 97% offer discounts for pensioners, over 60's and/or retired people. The majority of these (70%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 71% offer discounts to the unemployed or those on income support. The majority of these (59%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 69% offer discounts to people with disabilities. The majority of these (53%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 29% offer discounts to students. Of these, 26% offer a discount of 20-30% and 32% offer a discount of 40-50%.

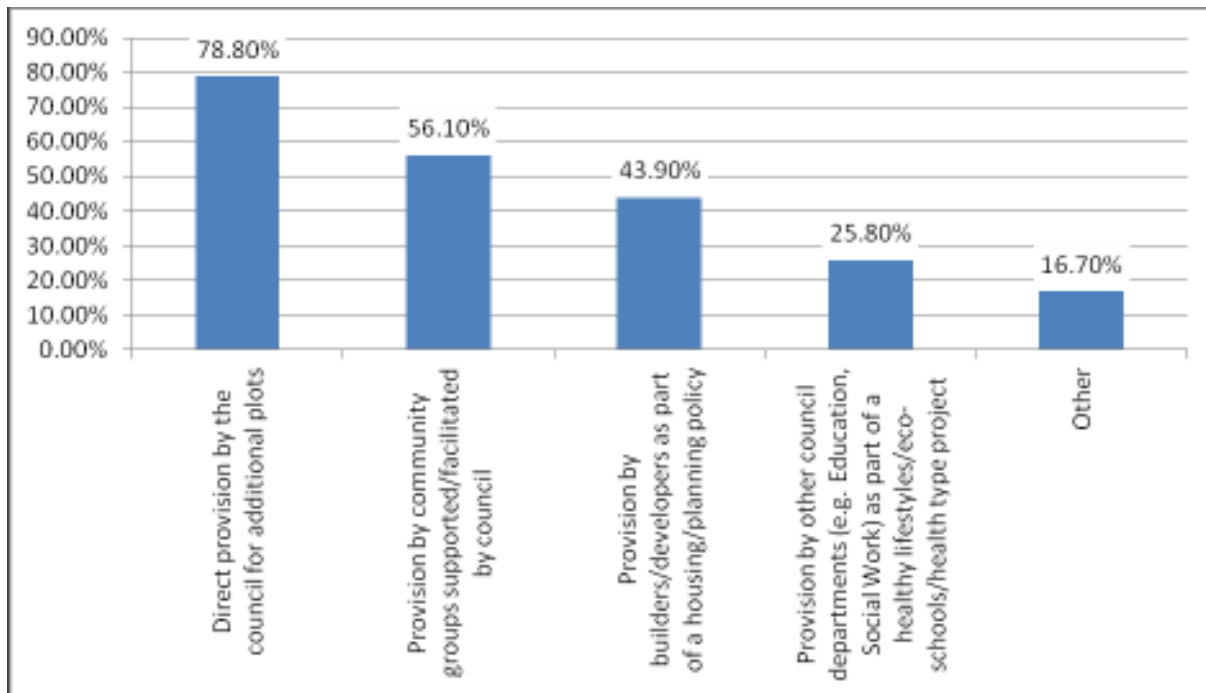
3. Size of allotments

In terms of the size of plots available, 37% stated that they have a standard size for a plot, and out of these, the most common size was 250-299 square meters. When asked for the total number of allotment sites in the local authority, the majority was 1-15 (55%), but this ranged to over 40 (11%). Again, there was a range of responses in terms of allotment plots, with 56% having 750 plots or less, but 5% having over 3,000 plots.

Waiting lists have proved the demand for allotments with 59% of respondents stating that they have 100-600 people on the waiting list for an allotment and 12% claiming over 1,000 people on their waiting list.

4. Future increases in the number of allotments

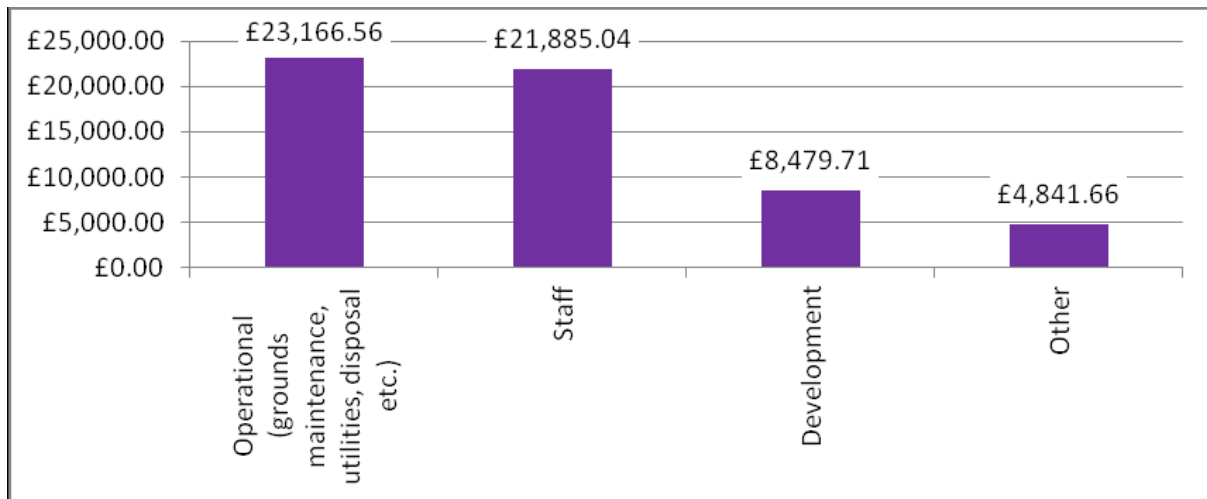
64% of respondents stated that their council plans to increase the number of allotments. From those respondents who stated that the number of allotments is planned to increase, the method of doing this is shown in the diagram below:



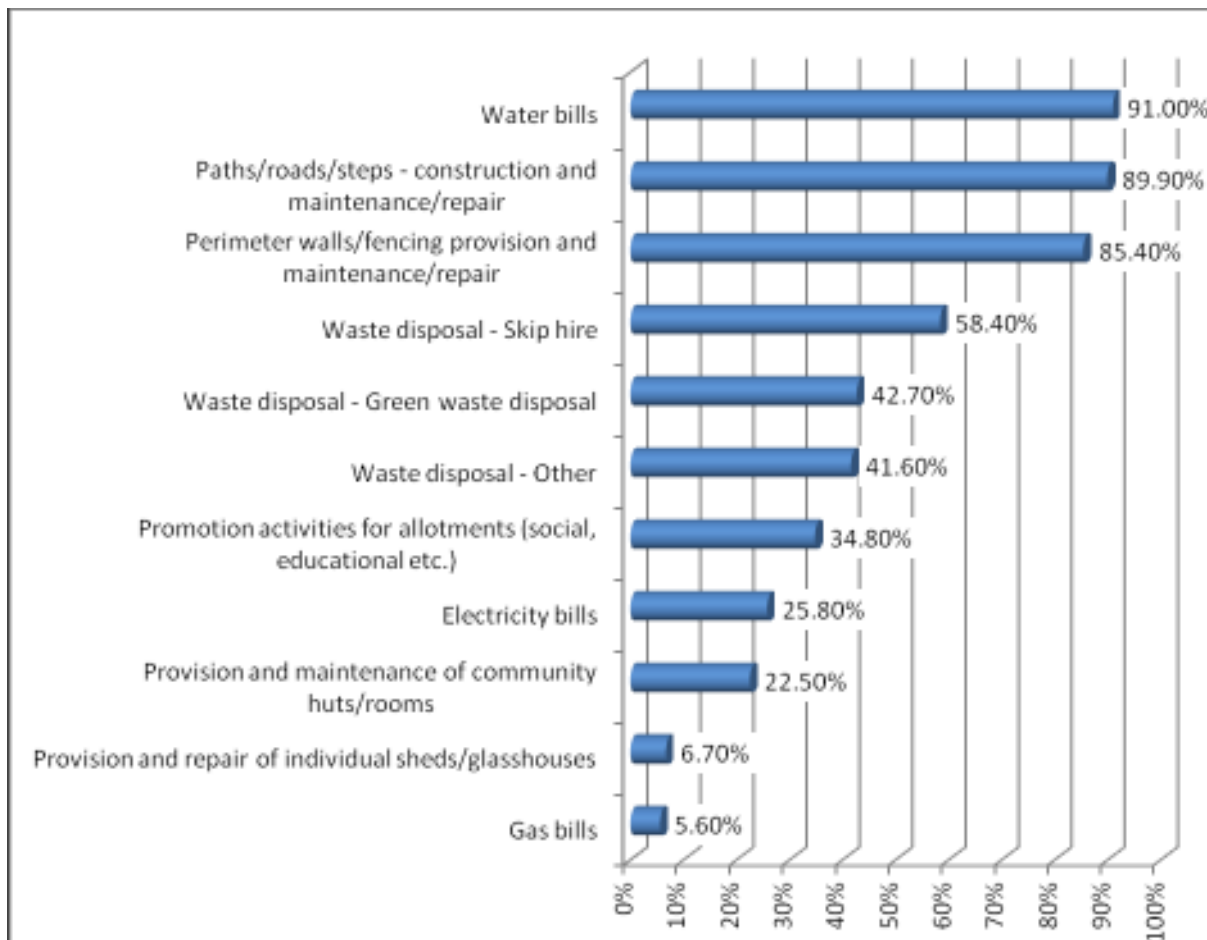
This shows an increase in the proportion provided by community groups supported/facilitated by the council from the survey conducted in 2008 (from 29% in 2008 to 56% in 2012). This may be as a result of 'Big Society' and Localism with a drive for greater involvement of community groups in council services. It may also be a reflection of the reducing budgets for local authority parks services and subsequent reductions in the capacity of managers to take on further responsibilities or assets.

5. Budget for allotments

The average annual budgets for allotments were stated as follows:



The largest difference in the average budgets allocation above compared to the survey results in 2008 is in the area of development; a reduction from an average of £34,373 in 2008 to £8,479 in 2012. This may reflect a focus on maintenance as opposed to developments in allotments as a result of budget reductions in local authorities. Respondents stated that their budgets include responsibility for the following:

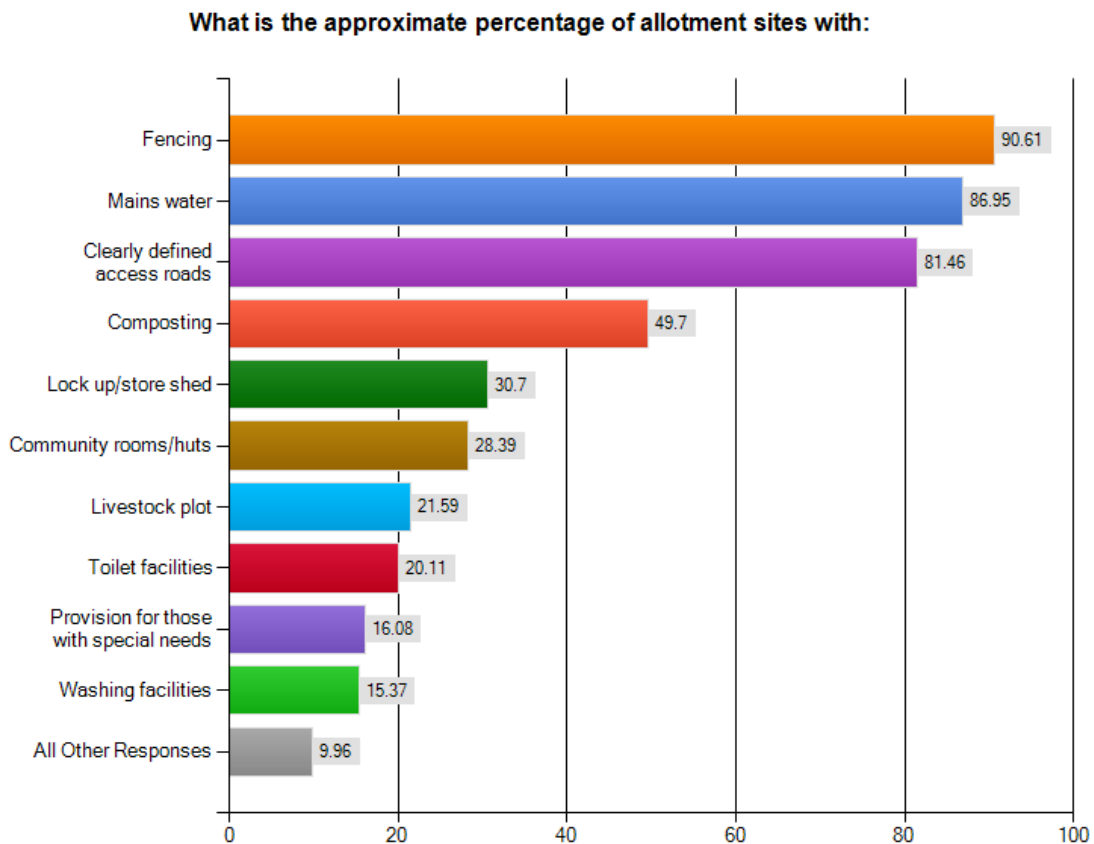


There has been a marked increase in the percentage of authorities whose budgets include water bills (from 83% in 2008 to 91% in 2012) and green waste disposal (from 33% in 2008 to 43% in 2012). There has been a reduction in the percentage of authorities whose budgets include provision and maintenance of community huts/rooms (from 31% in 2008 to 22.5% in 2012).

87% currently subsidise managing allotments (they do not recover full costs from managing these). Of the other respondents, 12% break even and only 1% make a surplus.

6. Facilities at allotment sites

Most allotment sites have the provision of water, fencing and clearly defined access roads. Some allotment sites have other services such as composting, livestock plots, community rooms, lock up/store sheds and toilet facilities. The full breakdown in terms of the average % of allotment sites with other facilities is as follows:



There has been an improvement in the average percentage of allotment sites with composting since 2008 with an increase from 44% in 2008 to 50% in 2012, as well as an increase in the percentage of allotment sites with community rooms/huts (from 23% in 2008 to 28% in 2012) and toilet facilities (from 17% in 2008 to 20% in 2012). The majority of respondents stated that grounds maintenance is carried out at allotment sites as an integral part of grounds maintenance operations/contracts (73%). 56% answered that this is carried out by the plot holders/site association and 21% said that this is carried out as part of rehabilitation programmes (*please note, respondents could choose more than one option on the survey for this answer*).

When asked how grounds maintenance is monitored, the majority stated that this is through inspections/site visits by an allotment officer, council officer or a site representative.

7. Security

Plot holders themselves generally manage the security on allotment sites (67%), with 29% of respondents stating that they don't actively manage security. 7% stated community wardens manage security, 2% stated park rangers and 16% a 'plot watch' scheme or similar. This represents an increase in the percentage of 'plot watch' schemes since the survey was conducted in 2008 from 9% to 16% in 2012 and a reduction in the proportion where security is managed through community wardens and parks rangers. The majority of respondents have an allotment forum, friends group or something similar (67%).

8. Allotment strategy

62% of respondents stated that they have an allotments strategy (which is an increase from 53% when the survey was conducted in 2008) and of the 38% that haven't currently got a strategy in place, 68% stated that the council is planning to develop one within the next 2 years.

54% stated that they are intending to increase the price of allotment plots within the next 2 years and a further 2% within the next 5 years. 34% are reviewing this. There has been a marked increase in the percentage of respondents who are reviewing their prices since the APSE email query was conducted in 2010; from 7% in 2010 to 34% in 2012. This may reflect the financial constraints facing local authority budgets and the need to review prices and charges to reduce dependence on subsidy by the local authority.

Of those who are intending to increase the price of allotment plots, 64% stated that even though they are increasing the price, the council would still have to subsidise the service; 35% stated that this would make the service cost neutral and only 2% stated that this would result in them making a surplus. When the responses to this question are correlated with the responses in section e) '*Budget for allotments*' above, the main change from the current situation is an increase in those councils trying to make the service cost neutral as opposed to an increase in the number of councils trying to achieve a surplus.

Extract from DirectGov: Public Services all in one place

Types of allotment

There are three types of allotment:

- 'Statutory' allotments - these cannot be sold or used for other purposes without the consent of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
- Temporary allotments - these are not protected from disposal and can be sold
- Privately owned land - this can also be let for use as allotments but is not protected from disposal by your local council

What will be provided to you

A whole allotment is approximately 250 square metres. If you think this is too much, ask your provider if you can rent a half plot or share the plot with a friend.

Facilities will vary, but there are some basic things that you can normally expect:

- Safe and secure access for all users (main paths should be kept clear)
- An accessible water supply (the cost is often included in the rent)
- Adequate security measures against vandalism, like good fences and hedges

Some allotment sites may also provide:

- Toilets
- Huts that serve as a meeting place
- Sheds for plot holders (you may be charged extra for these)

Your rights and responsibilities as a plotholder

Your rights and responsibilities are set out in a tenancy agreement with the allotment provider.

As a plotholder, you will be expected to:

- Keep your allotment clean
- Maintain it in a good state of cultivation
- Keep minor paths clear
- Keep children and pets under control

Allotments are normally offered to plotholders on a renewable one-year lease. The agreement will usually set out how the tenancy can be terminated. The allotment provider has to give you 12 months' notice, expiring on or before 6 April or after 29 September in any year.

The allotment provider may also give one month's notice to quit if the rent remains unpaid or if you don't comply with the tenancy terms.

What can I do with my plot?

The main use of allotments is to grow fruit, flowers and vegetables. Depending on your agreement and any other regulations, you may also be able to:

- Keep hens and rabbits
- Keep bees

- Keep certain other livestock
- Build a hut, if one is not provided (it's recommended that you seek planning permission first)
- Build a pond (subject to certain safety restrictions)

What can't I do with my plot?

There are limits to what you can do with your plot. For example you must not:

- Use it for a business or sub-let it (rent it out)
- Let the plot deteriorate
- Use sprinklers overnight or when you are not there
- Use barbed wire in a dangerous way

In addition, bonfires are either banned or subject to strict conditions.

What happens if the local council wants to dispose of the land?

If your local council wants to sell a permanent allotment site, it must have the consent of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

The allotment provider must also fulfill certain conditions, including consulting with ploholders.

If the application is successful, the council has to provide an alternative site. If a statutory allotment provider ends a tenancy, the ploholder is entitled to compensation.

If your allotment is temporary or on privately owned land, then the Secretary of State's consent is not required. However, the allotment authority will usually still need to give you 12 months' notice.