

ALLOTMENT REVIEW UPDATE

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Wards affected: All High Wycombe Town Wards

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

The Committee is asked to note the findings of the parish review and select an option to recommend to Cabinet as required.

Corporate Implications

1. District and Parish Council are allotment authorities within their areas. Under s.23 of the Small Holding and Allotment Act 1908, Allotment Authorities have a duty to provide sufficient allotments if there is demand for them.
2. Subject to the Allotment Acts, an Allotment Authority can set its own rules on the management of allotments, including designating persons eligible for a plot, notices to be given, size of allotments, conditions under which they can be cultivated and rent to be paid.
3. Only option 2 has financial implications, as this would involve site investigation work at a cost across the two sites totalling £23,000, which would need to be funded from the Special Expenses reserve.

Executive Summary

4. This report looks at allotment provision within the parishes in Wycombe District with a view to identifying the opportunity for people on the current waiting list for an allotment within the unparished area of High Wycombe to be offered an allotment plot outside of the town. It considers the number of sites and plots within each parish, the availability of vacant plots, the length of their waiting lists and time people have to wait. It also looks at whether or not the parishes have plans to extend their provision.

Sustainable Community Strategy / Council Priorities - Implications

5. This links to the Sustainable Community Strategy objective around promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Background and Issues

6. At High Wycombe Town Committee on 21 January 2014 an update on the District Allotment Review was provided. The Committee recommended the following to Cabinet:
 - (i) The 250 square metre plots should be divided in two as they become available and as appropriate;

(ii) The waiting list is to be reviewed on an annual basis and if demand increases review the site appraisals and seek Committee approval for funding when required;

(iii) The Abbey Barn South should provide an additional site to the south of the town as and when the site is developed;

(iv) When the master plans for Ashwells, Terriers, and Abbey Barn North sites are developed, provision for new allotments should be included;

(v) Feasibility work into Desborough Castle and Castlefield Wood options should be agreed, as these appear to be most capable of being progressed and of meeting the demand the town was experiencing. This would require £10,000 funding for Desborough Castle and £13,000 for Castlefield Wood.

7. These recommendations were referred to Cabinet on 3 March 2014, which expressed some concerns regarding the proposal to authorise spending for additional sites before the annual allotment review had been concluded and the allotment need assessed. Cabinet therefore proposed that the recommendations be amended to ensure that the annual allotment review was completed before other sites were considered and that the proposal for the release of funds from Special Expenses Reserve be deferred for a 6 month period. Cabinet thought that some Parish Councils could be in a position to offer spare allotment plots to Wycombe District Council and that this option should be explored.
8. This report looks at allotment provision within the parishes in Wycombe District with a view to identifying the opportunity for people on the current waiting list for an allotment within the unparished area of High Wycombe to be offered an allotment plot outside of the town. It considers the number of sites and plots within each parish, the availability of vacant plots, the length of their waiting lists and time people have to wait. It also looks at whether or not the parishes have plans to extend their provision.

Methodology

9. In order to explore the Cabinet suggestion nearby parishes offering allotments were contacted. These were:
 - Chepping Wycombe Parish Council
 - Downley Parish Council
 - Ellesborough Parish Council
 - Little Marlow Parish Council
 - Piddington and Wheeler End Parish Council
 - Stokenchurch Parish Council
 - West Wycombe Parish Council
 - Wooburn and Bourne End Parish Council
 - Hazlemere Parish Council
 - Hughenden Parish Council
 - Marlow Town Council

- Radnage Parish Council
 - Lane End Parish Council
10. There are privately owned allotment sites in three other parishes but no information was available about their waiting lists. These parishes were:
- Bledlow-cum-Saunderton Parish Council
 - Hedsor Parish Council
 - Great and Little Kimble cum Marsh Parish Council
11. The remaining 12 parishes in the district have no allotment provision.
12. Each parish was asked the following
- 1) How many allotments plots/half plots does the parish have?
 - 2) How many people are currently on the waiting list for an allotment?
 - 3) How long on average do people have to be on the waiting list before a suitable plot becomes available?
 - 4) If there is no waiting list, how many vacant plots are there currently?
 - 5) Are they planning to increase the number of plots in the near future? If yes,
 - (a) Will this be an extension to the current site or the development of a new site?
 - b) How many new plots will be provided?
 - c) What is the proposed timescale?

Allotment provision in Wycombe District

13. Across the district (excluding privately owned allotment sites) there are 28 sites with 1,449 plots varying in size from 87.5 to 500 m². The following table shows the level of provision of allotments in the district by parish.

Parish	Number of sites	Number of plots	Size of plots
Hazlemere	2	67	Full - 21; half - 46
Chepping Wycombe	2	129	74 at Flackwell Heath; 55 at Tylers Green made of half plots and full plots.
Downley	1	32	Full – 20; half - 12
Ellesborough	1	9	Various sizes
Little Marlow	1	55	Various sizes
Piddington & Wheeler End	1	26	Various sizes
Stokenchurch	2	119	Stokenchurch – 47 full, 54 half Water End – 11 full, 7 half
West Wycombe	1	25	Various sizes

Wooburn & Bourne End	2	96	Bourne End = 83 plots of which 10 are full size. The allotment site is a random shape, plots are classed as 'full' and 'half' but they are not to strict specifications. Wooburn = 13 half size.
Hughenden	1	181	All full size
Marlow Town	2	306	Foxes piece = 143 plots (29 are full size); Hanging Hill = 163 plots (39 are full size)
Radnage	1	34	19 full size; 11 half size plots; 4 quarter size plots plus land given over to grazing under licence.
Lane End	3	75	Bunkers Site - 31 full size plots Sandyfield Site - 31 full size plots Chalkyfield Site - 12 full size plots
Wycombe District Council	8	261	Plot sizes vary from 3.5 poles to 10 poles. Full size (i.e. those greater than 5 poles) = 118 and half size (i.e. those 5 poles or less) = 143

Waiting lists

14. The following table shows the current situation regarding waiting lists as of April/May 2014.

Parish	No of vacant plots	Number on the waiting list	Average length of time on the waiting list
Hazlemere	0	5	3 years
Chepping Wycombe	5 (Tylers Green)	0	Varies
Downley	0	20	4 years
Ellesborough	3	0	N/A
Little Marlow	0	2	1 year
Piddington & Wheeler End	0	1	12 - 18 months
Stokenchurch	0	3	1 month – 6 weeks
West Wycombe	0	Few	Short time
Wooburn & Bourne End	0	BE = 23 W = 0	Longest person has been on the list since May 2011

Parish	No of vacant plots	Number on the waiting list	Average length of time on the waiting list
Hughenden	0	0	N/A
Marlow Town	A few (currently being shown to those on waiting list)	6	6 weeks
Radnage	3 half plots	0	N/A
Lane End	0	6	Up to a year
Wycombe District Council	7 x 5 pole plots at Queensway	32 *	1 year

* The waiting list for an allotment in the unparished area of High Wycombe currently stands at 40 but some people are on a number of different waiting lists. In all there are 42 individuals looking for an allotment currently (August 2014). All the ex Bassetsbury Lane allotment holders have been relocated to new sites.

15. As the table demonstrates there were 18 vacant plots as of May 2014 with 98 people on waiting lists for anything from a few weeks to 3 years. It must be noted, however, that this is a 'one point in time' assessment and the situation changes throughout the year.

Plans to increase provision

16. Only Downley Parish Council currently has plans to substantially increase their level of provision of allotment plots. They have agreed with West Wycombe Estate that they can build additional allotments on the Mannings Field Sports & Recreation site. This will provide a further 20 half plots which would cover the number currently on their waiting list.
17. Piddington & Wheeler End have no plans to increase plot numbers unless they have a very large plot vacated which they will then divide into two. If this were to happen they could clear their waiting list.
18. Little Marlow again have no plans to increase plot numbers although they usually divide vacant plots into smaller parts to accommodate those on the waiting list more quickly.
19. Wooburn & Bourne End have no plans to increase provision as they added the Wooburn plots in 2013. They are currently monitoring the demand to see if they need to provide any further plots.
20. In Marlow Town both sites are surrounded by residential dwellings and/or agricultural fields so there is no space to create more plots even if they were needed. Their waiting list is, however, small and they are currently showing people the plots they currently have vacant.

21. Stokenchurch Parish have no plans to increase the number of plots, other than by making a full plot into 2 half plot when appropriate.

Summary

22. Overall the parishes appear to have sufficient allotments to meet their residents' needs. Where there are pressures on the availability of plots the parishes tend to be dividing plots as they become vacant to increase the numbers.
23. There is some spare capacity within the parishes, but numbers are small and they tend only to offer allotments to people living within their parish. Residents from the High Wycombe unparished area who wanted an allotment plot would not necessarily be offered one elsewhere in the district even if one were available, although the parishes do not necessarily prevent people from outside the area putting their names on the waiting lists.

Options

1. To continue to monitor the trend annually in terms of the number of people on the WDC waiting list;
2. To proceed with feasibility studies of Desborough Castle, at a cost of £10,000, and Castlefield Woods, at a cost of £13,000. This would need to be funded from Special Expenses working balances;
3. To wait until the Abbey Barn South development takes place which would provide an additional site to the south of the town.

Conclusions

24. The review of parish allotments shows that there is not a significant volume of surplus capacity available for High Wycombe residents to apply for, where parishes accept non-residents on to waiting lists.

Next Steps

25. These are dependent on the Committee's discussion.

Background Papers

None.