LANCASTER DISTRICT

Allotment Review

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Cover photo: A sunny day on a typical allotment

Executive Summary

This report is a review of allotments across Lancaster District. It was undertaken between September 2023 and April 2024 by a freelance researcher with support from FoodFutures and Lancaster City Council. It summarises the findings of the research and presents recommendations for supporting allotments to thrive across the District going forward.

The review examined allotment sites within the Lancaster District Political Boundary (City Council-, Town-, and Parish-owned sites, Diocese and privately owned sites). The scope of the review can be summarised as examining:

- National and local legislation around allotments and allotment provision.
- How allotments contribute to the City Council's strategic priorities.
- Who provides allotments in the district.
- Site characteristics – including locations, number, and size of plots (individual and shared community space) and facilities on allotments.
- How allotments are used – including land management practices (organic/non-organic), what is grown, where produce goes, and how this contributes to food security locally.
- Governance and decision-making processes – including what is going well/not going well.
- Biodiversity on allotments and climate resilience.
- Demand for allotments – including waiting lists.
- Training and other needs of plot holders and committee members.
- Other community-led food growing models in the district.
- Visions for the future on individual plots, on allotment sites, and for allotments across the district.
- How to support allotments in the district going forward.

The last review of allotment sites in Lancaster District was a needs assessment of the then 12 Lancaster City Council-owned sites in 2007. This was followed by a report in 2010 with a proposed strategy for City Council allotments, including allotment leases (and Service Level Agreements). This is the first review that has looked at all allotments across Lancaster District (not just those provided by the City Council).

Data within this report has been gathered through online questionnaires to allotment plot holders; visits to allotment sites across the district; interviews and meetings with a range of stakeholders and experts; community conversations; allotment events; and research.

Twenty-five allotment sites were identified as part of the review. These are provided by Lancaster City Council (15 sites), one of which is on a long-term lease to a Parish Council; four additional sites are provided by Town and Parish Councils across the district, five sites are under private provision, and one site is on land owned by the Diocese. As many sites as possible were contacted and visited as part of this review.

Survey response rates varied across the allotment sites, with single figure responses to the online survey on some sites compared to nearly a 25% response rate on one larger site. No information was gathered from four sites in the review, due to difficulties contacting them and one site choosing not to take part.

The review highlights how allotment sites vary significantly, from small sites in rural areas (the smallest visited has 10 plots) to large City Council sites in Lancaster, with over 100 plots. Lancaster has the highest number of allotment sites which are all provided by the City Council. They vary in facilities, including water provision, whether there are communal sheds and polytunnels/greenhouses and tools to use, toilets and social spaces, communal fruit trees and wildlife areas.

Waiting lists vary across the district: from single figures on some smaller sites to 250 on Fairfield allotments in Lancaster (which has approximately 120 plots). Waiting times for a plot can be from a few months to over five years. Most allotments are now splitting full plots into halves and on some sites into quarter or small starter plots in response. Rents vary from £35-£80 annually for a full plot and £20-£40 annually for half a plot.

Allotments are managed in different ways. All the City Council sites (except Over Kellet, which is leased to the Parish Council) are self-managed (devolved management), through an allotment association and committee. These sites are responsible for their own day-to-day issues, including managing their waiting lists, plot inspections, and any conflict/disputes, as well as maintenance of the site and income/finances (including setting the rent for plots). Town and Parish Council sites are generally managed directly by the council through the clerk. They manage the day-to-day issues, including plot inspections and conflict/dispute resolution, as well as site maintenance and plot rentals (setting and receiving the rents). Most private sites included in this report are managed directly by the landowner.

The review found that site committees work in different ways, with some being more active in areas such as communication across their site (plot holders/committees), the health of their decision-making processes (including clarity and transparency around decisions) and some being in a stronger financial position than others.

Allotments across the district are highly valued by the people that use them. As well as providing a space to grow fruit and vegetables, they bring benefits far beyond this. They improve mental and physical health, offer access to a green space and nature, are places to be with or around others as well as be in your own space. They are also rich habitats that support wildlife e.g. plants, insects, birds, and small mammals, and many plot holders mentioned supporting this biodiversity aspect of allotment sites.

The review's recommendations are based on its findings and are aimed at supporting allotments into the future. The key recommendations include:

- Lancaster City Council actively engages with the ten allotment sites that have their leases (and Service Level Agreements) due for renewal in March 2025. This should include providing the sites with information about the lease renewal and what is needed in preparation for this. Ongoing support needs to be provided, including legal consultation around the leases and options for different legal structures, with a named council lead appointed to steer and monitor this process.
- Lancaster City Council explores any possible options for setting up a non-recurring 'allotment fund' at the time of the lease renewal for urgent maintenance work on its sites. This would ensure that sites are able to continue under a devolved management model, particularly sites with high maintenance costs and/or small sites that can only generate a small income from rents.
- The Lancaster City Council allotment webpage is updated, and a separate independent Lancaster District allotment website is created to become the main hub for allotment information across the district for council and private allotments.

- **Increase provision of allotment sites across the district, with an "Allotment Champion" on the council's planning committee and through active use of policies in the Development Management Development Plan Document (DM DPD)[1] of the local plan.**
Provision could be increased by:

  - Use of underused/disused land or appropriate brownfield sites for new allotments by City, Town, and Parish councils.
  - Increased provision of allotment sites by private landowners, with support and advice from existing sites.
  - Encouraging other anchor institutions, such as NHS trusts and universities to deliver new allotments sites.

- **Allotment sites consider:**

  - Creating a dedicated 'communications lead' role on committees to strengthen communication on/across sites.
  - Sites provide their name and contact information at gates/entrances.
  - Reviewing what can be done to improve accessibility; both physical improvements and general support and involvement in the site, including mentorship/buddy systems and a welcome pack for new plot holders containing site information, how the site is run, committee structure and roles/responsibilities, volunteering opportunities, site rules, decision making, and conflict resolution processes. Suggest offering this to existing plot holders who may not be aware of all of this information.
  - Increasing rainwater harvesting where possible.

- **Using UK Shared Prosperity Funding, LESS (Lancaster District) should implement priority triaining as identified in the report.**

- **The City Council and FoodFutures should explore options for creating and funding an Allotment Development Worker role across the district to enhance the existing allotment sites and allotment network.**

Going forward in 2024:

The City Council may want to prioritise the recommendations around the lease renewal process and explore any possibilities to support sites with a non-recurring 'allotment fund' as part of the lease renewal. Using UK Shared Prosperity Funding, LESS (Lancaster District) should implement priority training as identified in the report. Longer term, Councils (City, Town, Parish), private landowners and other agencies should explore the options for creating new allotment sites. The City Council and FoodFutures should explore options for creating and funding an Allotment Development Worker role across the district to enhance the existing allotment sites and allotment network.

Summary of recommendations

Below is a summarised version of the recommendations contained throughout this report.

For the full text and rationale behind each recommendation, please see the appropriate heading in the 'Findings'' section. Recommendations are found at the end of each topic section, along with 'Other ideas/good practice' that have come out from data gathered.

Recommendations for Lancaster City Council

How allotments fit within strategic documents

- The City Council should continue to ensure that allotments remain a priority and strengthen their visibility within strategic documents.

Lease renewal

- As a priority, the City Council needs to contact the ten allotment associations whose leases are due for renewal in March 2025. An initial position statement could provide reassurance, explain the process, and provide associations with information (particularly around trustees) and possible actions to take before 2025.
- Communication with allotment associations should be coordinated, to ensure that all sites receive the same information.
- The lease renewal process needs to be actively facilitated and monitored by the City Council including appointing a named lead for coordination, supporting the provision of information about new leases (implications/liabilities) and information about different legal structures which associations may want to consider. This requires involvement of the City Council and an independent solicitor.

Finances

- Explore any possible options for setting up an 'allotment fund' at the time of the lease renewal for City Council owned sites to apply to for urgent maintenance work. This could enable certain City Council owned sites to continue under the devolved model of self-management.
- Review the Service Level Agreements (SLA) between the City Council and each allotment site alongside the lease renewal process.

Allotment Communication

- Update the City Council's allotment webpage.
- Create an 'allotment' button on the 'Contact Your Council' webpage to streamline enquiries.
- Create a clear communication strategy (within the Service Level Agreements) for two-way communication with allotment associations.

Creating new allotments

- Create an 'Allotments Champion' on the planning committee to advocate for allotments on all applicable planning applications.
- Planning Officers to make active use of the policies relating to allotments in the Development Management Development Plan Document (DM DPD) of the Local Plan, to push for new allotment provision within larger planning developments and/or off-site financial support from smaller developments.

Recommendations for all Councils (City, Town, and Parish) in Lancaster District

The value of allotments

- Lancaster City Council, Town and Parish councils continue to recognise allotments as a way to address numerous policy benefits, including offering communities closer connection to their food production, access to fresh nutritious food and green space, mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits, and environmental and biodiversity benefits.

How allotments fit into strategic documents

- Town and Parish councils should ensure that the benefits/value of allotments are recognised within their strategic documents and priorities and promote allotments in areas where they are not already doing so.

Creating new allotments

- Given the high demand for allotment space, the City Council, Town, and Parish councils should provide disused or underused land or appropriate brownfield sites for new allotments. Sites may be identified under the ongoing Open Space Study that is being conducted by Lancaster City Council.
- Where possible new sites are created, they should be designed with a water supply, either mains water and/or substantial rainwater harvesting, plus a social space for plot holders to use.

Recommendations for private landowners, allotment associations, and community groups

The value of allotments

- Private landowners, allotment associations and community groups continue to recognise the huge benefits of allotments (far beyond fruit and vegetable production) and utilise these to look further afield for funding opportunities or to establish links into a wider community network and increase security of tenure on some sites.

Creating new allotments

- Issue a call out to landowners, through the FoodFutures network to see if any are willing to set up a new allotment site. They could be connected to other private allotment sites for advice and support.
- Where possible, new sites are designed with a water supply, either mains water and/or substantial rainwater harvesting, plus a social space for plot holders to use.

Recommendations for allotment sites

Lease renewal (for ten City Council owned sites)

- For allotment associations considering options for their legal structures, consider incorporation as Co-operative Societies (the National Allotment Society – NSALG has a model).

Allotment communication

- Having a dedicated 'communications lead' could help sites to communicate with plot holders and share information easily – within and across allotment sites.
- Offer multiple communication channels (e.g. emails, notice boards, social media, WhatsApp) to ensure that information is accessible and spread as widely as possible. This is particularly important on bigger allotment sites.
- Sites display their name and contact details at the site entrance.

Allotment structures and decision-making processes

- Information about committee roles/responsibilities, meetings and rules, decision making, and conflict resolution processes are included in a "Welcome pack" to new plot holders and made available to existing members too.
- Where appropriate, share committee/management team minutes and actions with plot holders.

Facilities on allotment sites

- Increase rainwater harvesting – where possible.

Accessibility on allotment sites

- Allotment sites review if anything can be done to improve accessibility (both physical improvements and support systems/mentorship for new plot holders and aspiring committee members).

Starting on an allotment

- Provide a 'Welcome Pack' for new plot holders.

Volunteering and involvement

- Information about volunteering/committee roles is included in the 'Welcome Pack' to new plot holders (especially on devolved sites).
- Create committee member role descriptions – to help explain roles to plot holders, increase interest, and advertise positions.
- Offer training on specific subjects around committee participation (especially on devolved sites).

Finances

- Establish links with Lancaster City Council's Community Connectors and Lancaster District CVS and FoodFutures – for support and fundraising opportunities.

Recommendations for others

Allotment development worker role

- Create an independent Allotment Development Worker Role to support present and future allotments to thrive across the District. This role should work on the recommendations within this report and take a lead in holding an overview of the allotment network.

Allotment communication

- Create a new allotment website – as a central source of allotment information for Lancaster District.

Training needs

- Share information about existing training opportunities with allotment sites.
- Establish training on specific subjects, identified within the report, for plot holders and committee/management teams.

Creating new allotments

- Encourage other anchor institutions, such as NHS trusts, universities, schools, and churches/the Diocese to set up and run new allotments sites or community gardens.
- Work with Lancashire Local Nature Partnership to identify and make accessible space for new allotments within Lancaster District.
- Where possible, new sites are designed with a water supply, either mains water and/or substantial rainwater harvesting, plus a social space for plot holders to use.

The value of allotments

- Given the undisputed health benefits of allotments, allotment provision is suggested in the regional public health strategy and integrated into its local delivery.

Food security and allotments

- Increase the number of allotment sites across the district, to help increase people's access to land and local fresh fruits and vegetables and strengthen local food security and sovereignty.

Allotments for the future

- Develop a district-wide strategy for supporting allotments that draws on recommendations and findings from this report.

Important Note:

When reading the report, please bear in mind that it represents the findings from only those who took part. The Allotment Review Survey was completed by around 15% of plot holders in the district (the exact number of allotment plots in the district is not known). Not all allotment sites took part in the survey (either out of choice or no contact details were available at the time). Responses to the Allotment Review Survey were received from 16 sites, with the numbers of respondents varying from one plot holder on four allotment sites, to over 30 plot holders on another site (approximately 25% of plot holders on that site). As the Allotment Review Survey was shared in many ways (e.g. directly to allotment sites, through the LESS website, social media channels, and local newspapers), it is difficult to know how people accessed the survey and also why response rates were so variable. Nine allotment sites did not participate in the survey or were not approached (no contact details being available at the time).

Data in the report has not generally been presented on an individual site-by-site basis (apart from factual information). Instead, the broader and more common issues mentioned across sites have been presented.

Introduction

What is an allotment?

The Allotment Act of 1922 defines the term 'allotment garden' as "an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family'"[2]

40 poles is equivalent to 1,210 square yards or 1,012 square metres which is approximately a ¼ of an acre of land (¼ of a standard football pitch).

Although the sizes of allotment plots offered to plot holders has reduced considerably on most sites both nationally and locally since 1922, the description of an allotment remains important, as it defines what an allotment can be used for. Provided allotments are used mainly for growing vegetables or fruit, some of a plot can also be used for growing flowers, as a leisure area or for keeping small livestock (if allowed) and surplus produce can be shared with others.[3]

Setting the national context: the history of allotments

The history of modern allotments in the UK is rooted in the history of land use and land ownership. Before the Enclosure Acts in England (early 1600s), farmland was organised into a large number of narrow strips around a village/manor. Tenants rented and worked a number of separate strips, with poorer families living on their strips in return for cultivating land for the lord of the manor. This was called the open field system. Some land was categorised as 'common' or 'waste' land – this land usually had little or no value as a farm strip due to its size, location, or poor quality. People had certain rights to this land for pasture, grazing livestock and gathering fuel. 'Waste' land was often farmed by landless peasants.

The Enclosure Acts lead to huge changes in land ownership and farming practices. The open field system of agriculture was gradually abolished and new large field systems were established and roads were built. Land ownership was reallocated, and common land/waste land was enclosed, denying many people access to traditional grazing rights, the ability to grow food and gather fuel. People were forced off the land, lost their livelihoods, and many moved into large towns and cities.

In the 1800s, the pace of land enclosures quickened dramatically, fuelled by advances in agricultural knowledge and practices. Some social reformers and landowners at the time started to push to provide 'labouring classes' with a portion of land, recognising that hunger was not the fault of the hungry and increased poverty was causing crime, civil unrest, and could lead to a breakdown in social order.

In 1845, The General Enclosure Act required that land be set aside for the landless poor in the form of 'field gardens' of up to a quarter of an acre. Although the Act failed to provide much land for the use of the poor, it is considered to be the beginnings of the allotment system today.

It is also around this time that urban allotments were beginning to emerge, an example being the 'guinea gardens' developed on the outskirts of Birmingham. Privately owned land was rented to people for one guinea a year. These eventually disappeared as the city spread and the land was used for other purposes.

In 1887, The Allotment Act obliged local authorities to provide allotments if there was a demand, however revision was needed to strengthen the act as there was resistance to comply. In 1908, The Smallholding and Allotment Act imposed responsibilities on parish, urban district, and borough councils to provide allotments. This was the first 'statutory' allotment act which required local authorities to supply allotments if they were demanded.

By 1913, there were an estimated 600,000 allotments in England and Wales and, by 1918, this had risen to 1,500,000. One source of suitable land for allotments was land owned by the railway companies, as this land generally was not large enough for general agricultural use. This explains why some allotments today are alongside railway lines. After the First World War, some allotment land was lost with the increased needs for housing. Demand for allotments remained high however, partly due to returning servicemen and the difficulties they faced returning into civilian life.

Legislation around allotments was further strengthened in 1925, with the Allotments Act establishing 'statutory' allotments; land purchased specifically for allotments by local authorities could not be sold off or converted to another use without Ministerial Consent, known as Section 8 orders. This legislation also required that allotments be considered in town planning schemes.

Allotments not only provided access to food growing, but were considered as a productive use of time, keeping the poor away from the 'evils of drink' and providing wholesome food for a workforce housed in tenements and high-density terraced housing without gardens. In industrial towns and cities, people needed to have consistent workforces, so part of the rationale for allotments was to try and make sure that the workforce was not only healthier and had better food, but also more reliable.

During the Second World War, the pressure for food production was even greater than in the First World War. With the 'dig for victory' campaign, allotments were very intensively used, the government issued lots of advice about how to maximise yields and public parks, playing fields and even back gardens were dug up for food production.

After the war, with more and more demands for building land, the Allotments Advisory Body was re-established and, in 1949, recommended a scale of provision of four acres of allotments per 1,000 head of population. This resulted in the Allotments Act of 1950, which restated the requirement that local authorities should have a duty to provide garden allotments.

It is from this period onwards that allotments seem to have gone into decline, with numbers and possibly interest in allotments falling. This period coincided with the consumer boom of the late 1950s. Wartime rationing was phased out and the first supermarkets opened in London. There were big consumer boosts and an upsurge in production and purchases of domestic products such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and cars. Growing your own food was possibly seen as something of the past and a way of life not needed in the 'modern world' where physical hard work was decreasing. Lots of local authorities disposed of allotments at this time, building houses or selling allotment land off. Many allotment sites became neglected and under used, making them less desirable and so demand fell even more.

The TV series 'The Good Life' in the late 1970s is attributed to creating a huge upsurge and interest in self-sufficiency and home food production once again. Many abandoned allotment sites and plots were occupied again, however the number of allotment plots overall in England had fallen dramatically to around 300,000 from their heyday during the two world wars of around 1,500,000 plots.

More recent concerns about consumer food scares, chemical usage and genetic modification, climate change, and recently the cost-of-living crisis and Covid restrictions may also have contributed to an increase in present demand for allotments and a rise in the number of people on waiting lists. Changes in family structures, house building practices, and affordability of homes may also be a factor. Many people live in rented accommodation, house share, or live in houses with no, or a very small garden space. This is where we are today. The demand for allotments by far outstrips supply across the country.[4,5,6]

Summer allotment.

Key allotment legislation

The table below shows the principal allotment legislation affecting allotments since the 1900s.

Table 1

Key Allotment Legislation[7]

Act and Date	Relevance
Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908	Consolidated all previous legislation and laid down the basis for all subsequent legislation. Placed a duty on local authorities to provide sufficient allotments, according to demand. Also makes provision for local authorities to purchase compulsorily land to provide allotments.
Land Settlement Facilities Act 1919	Opened up allotments to all, not just 'the labouring population'. Section 22 enables an allotment authority to provide allotments on land that was being held for other purposes (e.g. cemetery expansion).
Allotments Act 1922	Limited the size of an allotment to one-quarter of an acre and specified that it should be used mostly for growing fruit and vegetables. It also protected tenants by laying down periods of notice, ensuring compensation for termination of tenancies, and compelled most allotment authorities to set up allotment committees.
Allotments Act 1925	Required local authorities to recognise the need for allotments in any town planning development. It established 'statutory' allotments which a local authority could not sell or convert to other purposes without Ministerial consent.
Allotments Act 1950	Made improved provisions for compensation and tenancy rights. It also confined local authorities' obligation to provide 'allotment gardens' only.

Note: The 1925 Allotment Act does not provide the same level of protection for land that was originally acquired for another purpose (not allotments from the outset). These allotments are classed as 'temporary' even if they have been used for allotments for many years. The Future of Allotments Inquiry Report (1998)[8] recommended that land that has been used as allotments for over 30 years should be designated as 'statutory allotments' if possible. Although the law has not been changed to allow for this, there is nothing stopping landowners (e.g. councils) doing this voluntarily. Private allotment sites have the same legal status as 'temporary allotments'.

Lancaster District's allotments: history and previous reports

Following desk-based research, two previous reports/ reviews of allotments in Lancaster District were found online (published in 2007 and 2010). Both of these looked at sites owned by Lancaster City Council only. They are:

1 'Allotment Management in Lancaster District'", written in July 2007 by Mark Davies[9]

The purpose of the report was to provide a needs assessment of the then 12 allotment sites owned by Lancaster City Council, including an analysis of the current arrangements and options for suitable management arrangements for the future. It was commissioned by the Association of Lancaster and Morecambe Allotments (ALMA); this organisation no longer exists.

2 'The Final Report of the Allotment Task Group', written in January 2010[10]

The Allotments Task Group was triggered in 2008 by the impending City Council allotment lease renewals. The report proposed a new Allotments Strategy,[11] a revised management model for leases and Service Level Agreements and a suggested process for securing land for new allotment sites (City Council or Parish Council).

This 2024 Allotment Review report is the first one to look at all allotment sites across the district regardless of landowners and provision, be that City Council, Town and Parish Council, Diocese, or privately owned.

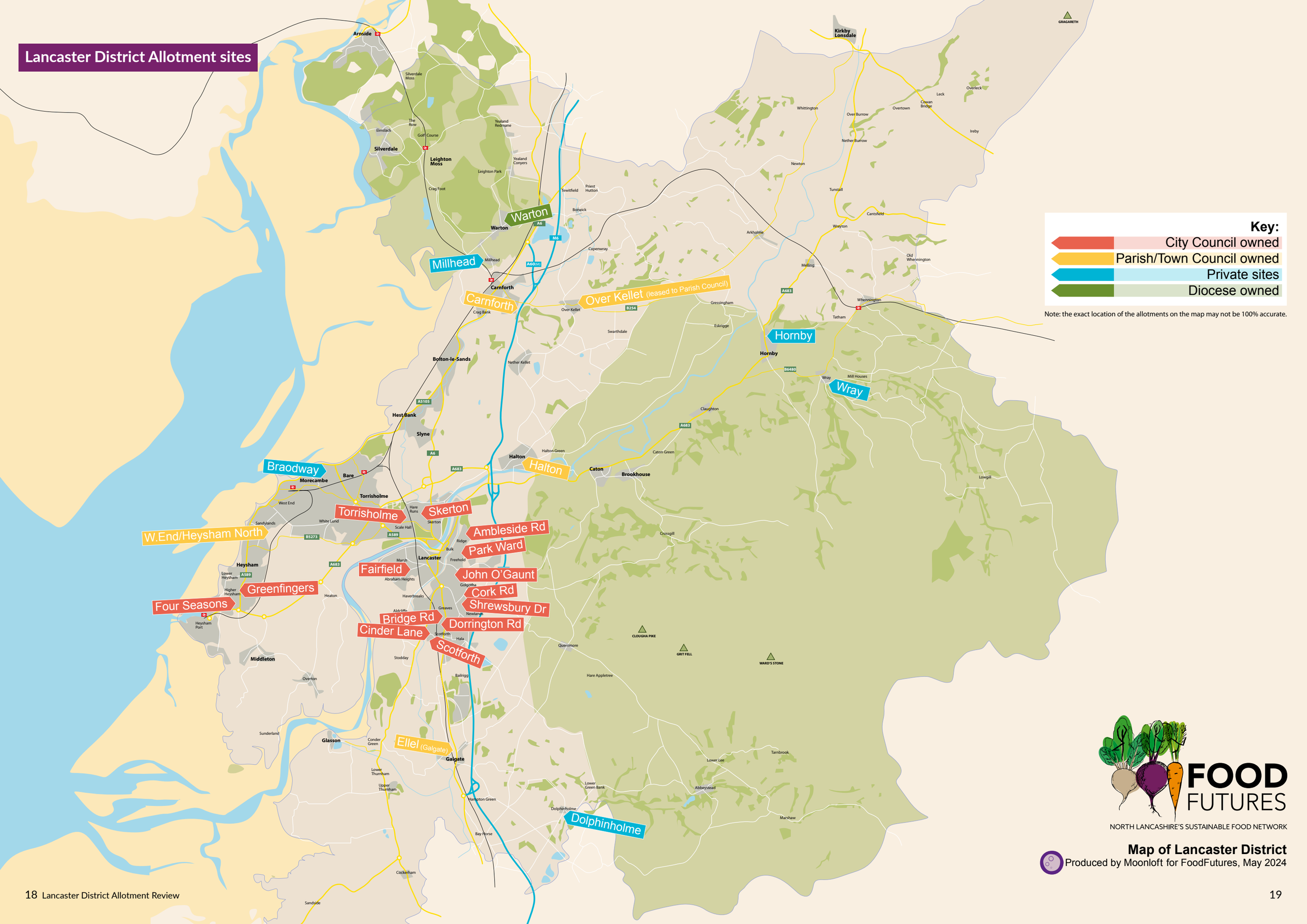
Lancaster District's allotments today

25 allotment sites were identified in Lancaster District as part of the Allotment Review, see the map overleaf.

Freshly picked rainbow chard.

Note: The name "Greenfingers" has been used for an allotment site in Heysham as this is the name commonly used (it is also known as Daisy Bank allotments).

Lancaster District Allotment sites



FOOD FUTURES
NORTH LANCASHIRE'S SUSTAINABLE FOOD NETWORK

Map of Lancaster District
Produced by Moonloft for FoodFutures, May 2024

The land for these is owned by:

- Lancaster City Council (15 sites). One of these sites (Over Kellet allotments), is on a long-term lease to the Parish Council.
- Parish Councils and Morecambe Town Council (4 sites).
- Private (5 sites) e.g. owned and run by farming families or others, such as the Duchy of Lancaster.
- The Diocese (church) owned land (1 site).

Note: For the purpose of this report, Over Kellet allotments is considered to be Parish Council owned.

The table below shows some general information about the allotments in the district. The smallest sites (where plot numbers are known) are Over Kellet Allotments (10 plots) and Bridge Road Allotments (11 ½). The largest sites are Cork Road Allotments (100+) and Fairfield Allotments (120+). Most allotment sites are now splitting larger plots in half, particularly on City Council sites with long waiting lists. Waiting list numbers vary considerably and some sites have at times closed their lists to new applications.

Note: The definition of 'a plot' (full, half, quarter) for this report is down to each allotment site, so actual sizes of plots may vary across sites.

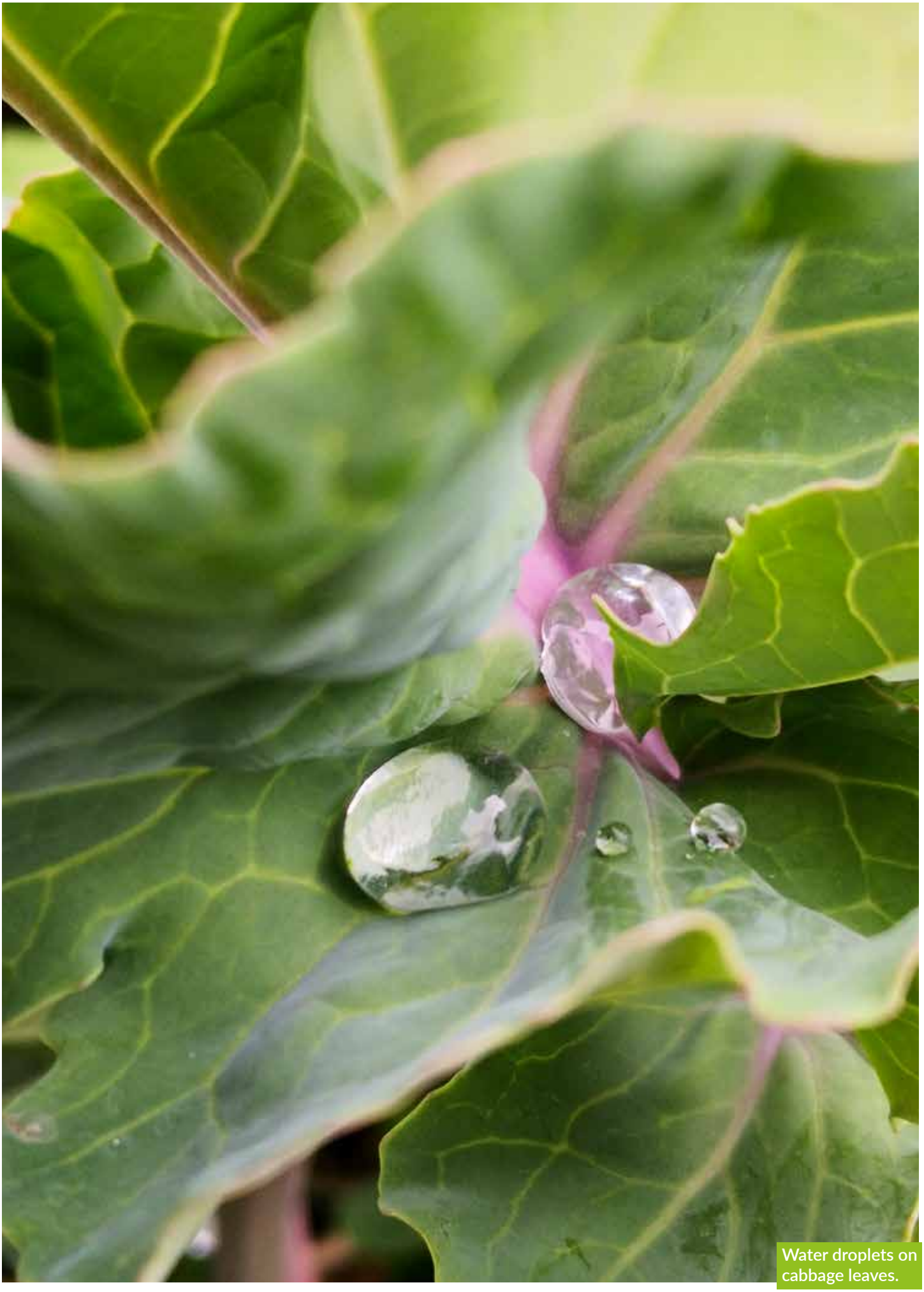
Note: The figures presented in Table 2 are, in most cases, approximates as sometimes varying figures were given by committee members on the same site, or plots were being split into smaller ones, so the numbers of plots changes. Waiting-list figures change as they are updated, or people are allocated a plot.

Table 2

Allotment sites in Lancaster District

Allotments in South Lancaster				
Name of the site	Land owned by	Management	Approximate number of plots in total (full, half, quarter)	Approximate waiting list numbers (December 2023)
Bridge Road Allotments	Lancaster City Council (LCC)	Committee structure	11 ½ plots	20+
Cinder Lane Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	35 plots	10+
Cork Road Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	Over 100 plots	80+
Dorrington Road Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	80 plots	80+
Fairfield Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	120 plots	250+
John O'Gaunt Allotments	LCC	Small committee	50+ plots	30+
Park Ward Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	78 plots	30+
Scotforth Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	Not available at time of writing	Not available
Shrewsbury Drive Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	50+ plots	50+ on list and emails

Allotments in North Lancaster				
Name of the site	Land owned by	Management	Approximate number of plots in total (full, half, quarter)	Approximate waiting list numbers (December 2023)
Ambleside Road Allotments	Lancaster City Council (LCC)	Committee structure	36 plots	Single figures
Skerton Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	50+ plots	Not recorded
Torrisholme Road Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	65 plots	20+
Allotments in Heysham area				
Four Seasons Allotments	LCC	Committee structure	40 plots	Not recorded
Daisy Bank Allotments (Greenfingers)	LCC	Committee structure	70 plots	50+
West End and Heysham North	Morecambe Town Council	Committee structure	60 plots and 20 raised beds	20+
Other Allotments				
Broadway Allotments – Morecambe	Private	Not available at time of writing	Not available at time of writing	Not available at time of writing
Carnforth Allotments – Carnforth	Carnforth Town Council	Town council	32 plots	20+
Dolphinholme Allotments – Dolphinholme	Duchy of Lancaster	Not available at time of writing	Not available at time of writing	Not available at time of writing
Ellel/Galgate Allotments – Galgate	Parish Council	Self-managed with plot holder coordination	30 plots	10+
Halton Allotments – Halton	Parish Council	Parish Council	34 plots	Not recorded
Hornby Allotments – Hornby	Private	Not available at time of writing	Not available at time of writing (small site)	Not available at time of writing
Millhead Allotments – Millhead	Private	Landowner	22 plots	Single figures
Over Kellet Allotments – Over Kellet	LCC – leased to the Parish Council	Self-managed with treasurer and secretary	10 plots	Single figures
Warton Allotments – Warton	Diocese	Self-managed with plot holder coordination	20 plots	Single figures
Wray Allotments – Wray	Private	Self-managed with plot holder coordination with landower	20 plots	Single figures



Water droplets on cabbage leaves.

Findings from the Allotment Review

Findings are presented under topic headings, which relate to the original scoping document. Recommendations and ideas are provided at the end of each topic section.

Note: Due to the huge volume of data that was collected, it has not been possible to present it all in the report. A lot of data has been summarised and key issues presented. It has also not been possible to provide figures/percentages with all the findings (due to time constraints when analysing the volume of data collected).

The value of allotments from a strategic and community perspective

The value of allotments

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Please briefly describe why you have an allotment?**
- **What benefits does your allotment bring to you/your family?**

The most common reason given for having an allotment was "to grow vegetables and fruit" (which is in line with the primary definition of an allotment, in the Allotment Act of 1922). A couple of quotes from respondents illustrate this primary reason:

> *"I love growing plants and food for my family."*

Brassicas in winter - a quieter time on allotments.

"I enjoy growing vegetables and fruit and our north-facing garden is unsuitable."

An abundance of summer flowers and vegetables.

Alongside the above, some people also mentioned the traceability of their food – knowing how it's been grown, being grown 'organically' (without the use of pesticides and chemicals), the fact that it can be freshly picked, and with very few travel miles involved.

Nearly all the respondents in the survey described additional benefits of having an allotment. The most commonly mentioned are the first two below:

- For wellbeing, mental and physical health (including exercise).
- Getting outside and having a link with nature.
- Having a "green space of my own" – people mentioned having a yard or living in a house without a garden.
- To do something for nature – promote biodiversity and wildlife.
- Being part of a social community.
- Working with a partner/friend – time together.
- Having a solitary space – peace and quiet.
- Helping with the cost of living by growing your own.
- Intergenerational aspects of allotments – families mentioned sharing and teaching their children about fruit and vegetable growing, seasonal foods, and connecting with nature. Some adults described being introduced to allotments as a child themselves by a parent or grandparent and continuing that connection.

Some selected quotes sum up the responses above:

"Amazing benefits, we get to hang out on our plot and feel the benefits of having a garden, seeing the change in seasons … the joy it gives me to grow my own produce with my husband and kids. Also, for the community that comes with it."

"I live in a small terrace with a yard. The allotment is everything to me, allowing me to grow a lot of my own food, get closer to nature, and be part of a community."

Spring - just getting started for the year.

"It's a space for me, to give me space and time for my mental health and a place that I can do my bit to help nature and follow my gardening dreams."

In summary

The benefits and values of allotments stretch far beyond their face (and historical) value as spaces for growing fruit and vegetables for people. They offer a range of additional and diverse benefits to people, communities, and nature.

The broad value of allotments is currently recognised in the Lancaster City Council 'Local Plan for Lancaster District'.[12]

> **Local Food Growing & Allotments – Page 93**
>
> **11.9** Allotments are an important element of open space and offer a significant range of benefits for people, communities and environments. They provide recreational value to their users, support local biodiversity, contribute toward the urban landscape, contribute to the physical and mental well-being of their user, provide the opportunity to grow fresh produce and contribute toward a healthy lifestyle that is active, sustainable and socially inclusive.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Lancaster City Council, Town and Parish councils continue to recognise allotments as a way to address numerous policy benefits including offering communities closer connection to their food production, access to fresh nutritious food and green space, mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits, and environmental and biodiversity benefits.

Given the undisputed health benefits of allotments, it is recommended that allotment provision is explicitly suggested in the regional public health strategy and be integrated into the local delivery of that strategy.

Private landowners, allotment associations, and community groups continue to recognise the huge benefits of allotments (far beyond fruit and vegetable production) and utilise these to look further afield for funding opportunities or to establish links into a wider community network. This could also help increase the security of tenure for some sites.

How allotments fit into Lancaster City Council's strategic priorities

Allotments are not specifically mentioned in Lancaster City's Council Plan 2024-2027.[13] The plan sets out the strategic ambitions of the city council. They are designed to be flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of the district. While allotments are not specifically named, they do align well into several priority policies (page 25) including:

1.3 Climate Resilience

Supporting our communities to grow more food, be resilient to flooding, and adapt to the wider impacts of climate change.

2.1 Social Use of Resources

Using our land, property, finance, and procurement to benefit local communities and encouraging residents, businesses, organisations, and anchor institutions to do the same.

2.5 Inclusive Ownership

Promoting business ownership models that empower the local workforce, such as co-operatives, social enterprises, and community ownership. (Note: When thinking about allotments, this policy could support their provision through different models in the future, e.g. as social enterprises).

3.4 Community Engagement

Ensuring local communities are active, engaged, involved, and connected.

3.5 Reducing Inequality and promote wellbeing

Developing a healthy living strategy to support wellbeing. Tackling discrimination and reducing inequality, including food and energy poverty.

Allotments are mentioned in other strategic council documents:

- Peoples Jury on Climate Change Report (2020): Recommendation 8: To support and expand the provision of allotments. The People's Jury sets out recommendations from citizens on how the council should respond to the climate emergency. This document helps shape the actions that the council is taking on addressing the climate crisis.
- The Local Plan for Lancaster District 2011-2031 DM DPD: Supports the provision of new allotments through planning. This strategic document sets the policy requirements for all new development across the district.
- The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy,[14] Supports allotments as 'green spaces' which help to mitigate against climate change (page 91) and reduce food insecurity and improve health (page 97). See text below:

Green spaces can provide opportunities for food growing, so that people can enjoy locally sourced homegrown produce, reducing food miles to help mitigate against impacts of climate change (page 91).

Strong linkages exist between the provision/accessibility of green spaces and population density, food insecurity and health. The findings indicate that where there is less available green space, this has a negative impact upon these socio-economic factors (page 97).

One of the aspirations for the future in the strategy is "creating and designating new green spaces (i.e. for food growing)" on Page 125.

As allotments are embedded firmly in several key documents for the City Council, they have the full support of the council to thrive and expand in the future.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Lancaster City Council should continue to ensure that allotments remain a priority and strengthen their visibility within strategic documents.

Town and Parish councils should ensure that the benefits/value of allotments are recognised within their strategic documents and priorities and promote allotments in areas where they are not already doing so.

New neighbourhood plans should place an emphasis on allotment provision.

Pottery plaque celebrating allotments.

Food security and allotments

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- During the summer months (June/July/August 2023), approximately what percentage of your household fruit and vegetables did you get from your allotment (fresh or frozen)?
- During the winter months (Dec/Jan/Feb 2022), approximately what percentage of your fruit and vegetables did you get from your allotment (fresh or frozen)?
- How many people live in your household?

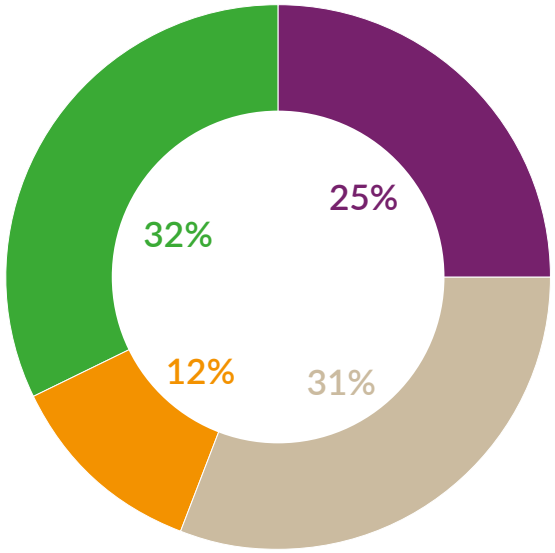
168 plot holders responded to these questions. 74 respondents (44%), said that their allotment provided between 51% and 100% of their fruit and vegetables in summer 2023 (June/July/August), shown in Chart 1.

In the Winter months not surprisingly, this percentage was reduced, however nearly ⅓ of respondents (32%) were still getting over 25% of their fruit and vegetables from their allotment produce, shown in Chart 2.

Chart 1

Percentage of fruit and vegetables from allotments during the summer months

During the summer months (June/July/August 2023), approximately what percentage of your household fruit and vegetables did you get from your allotment?

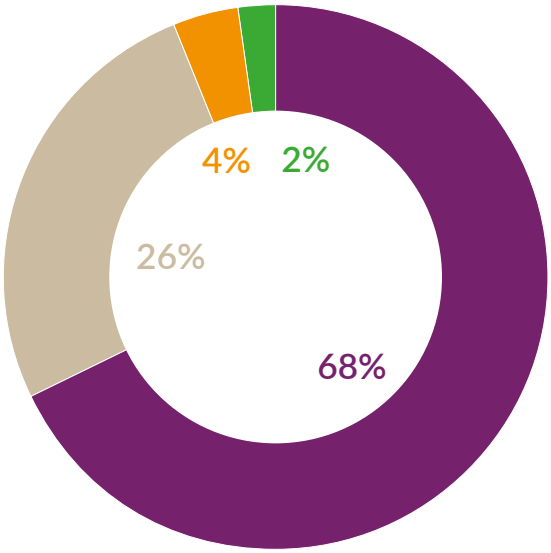


0-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-100%

Chart 2

Percentage of fruit and vegetables from allotments during winter months

During the winter months (Dec/Jan/Feb 2022), approximately what percentage of your household fruit and vegetables did you get from your allotment?



0-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-100%

The responses, although subjective, do show that allotments provide a significant amount of fruit/vegetables for plot holders and their families. Potentially they could provide more, with training and support, e.g. all-year-round growing.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Increasing the number of allotment sites across the district will increase people's access to local fresh fruits and/or vegetables and help to strengthen local food security.

Offer training to plot holders, e.g. all-year-round growing has been identified as a training need (see Training needs of plot holders and committees section).

IDEAS

Sites run skill-share sessions, where plot holders share ideas, skills, and tips around specific topics, e.g. preserving and storage of produce.

Claver Hill skill share.

Biodiversity and climate resilience

Biodiversity on allotments

Allotments are widely acknowledged as contributing to biodiversity and are of great value as natural green spaces for flora and fauna.[15,16] They offer habitats and food sources for wildlife and act as corridors for species to move through in the landscape.[17]

A piece of research published by the Cambridge Natural History Society (2019-2021) on one allotment in Stapleford, Nottinghamshire recorded more than 100 different species, with over 50 plant (wildflower) species, 13 beetle and 16 lepidoptera species (insects such as moths and butterflies) on an allotment measuring 7m x 40m and an area of uncultivated ground.[18]

During site visits to 21 allotments, a record was kept as to the range of plants and wildlife present or reported as seen (see Appendix for what was recorded). Note: most site visits took place over the Winter months, so there were fewer plants and wildlife (e.g. birds and insects) to be seen than at other times of year.

The findings, in summary, show that:

- **Allotment sites contain a wide range of cultivated and native plants/bushes and trees, including annual vegetables, soft fruits, fruit bushes and fruit trees, herbs, common insect-attracting annuals such as calendula, nasturtiums, and sunflowers, as well as ornamental plants and shrubs.**
- **Some sites have non-fruiting trees, and many sites have hedges (around boundaries or individual plots) both native (e.g. hawthorn, hazel, elder and ivy) and non-native (e.g. privet). Hedges offer habitats and a range of food sources for insects, birds, and mammals.**
- **Most sites allow small ponds on individual plots and many plots during site visits, showed the remains (seedheads) of insect-attracting annual flowers.**
- **Some sites have 'wildlife areas' designed in, which have been planted with insect-attracting plants, sometimes a pond, log piles, insect hotels, and bird boxes.**
- **A small number of sites have a communal orchard or fruit area.**

Many garden birds were recorded (using an ID app) or seen on sites, including blackbirds, magpies, starlings, pigeons, jackdaws, robins, house sparrows, goldfinches, long tailed tits, coal tits, blue tits, dunnock, and goldcrest. Bird boxes were seen on some individual plots. One site said it had seen a barn owl passing over and another site a sparrow hawk.

All sites said that there were plenty of insects in the better weather – commonly mentioned were butterflies and bees. Lots of sites mentioned having amphibians – frogs and newts particularly – and mammals such as hedgehogs, mice, rats, sometimes foxes, rabbits, and occasionally deer were seen.

As well as offering habitats for wildlife within the boundaries of each allotment, sites sit within the larger landscape. Some sites are rural and bordered with woodland or fields and some sites are within residential areas/more industrial settings with houses and gardens, and larger buildings, e.g. schools and carparks. Allotments therefore offer valuable 'stopping off' points for species passing through these landscapes.

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Are there any things that you are doing on your plot to promote biodiversity/encourage wildlife and wildflowers?**

The majority of respondents showed great awareness of biodiversity and how they promote this on their plots (161 responses). Amongst the wide range of practices mentioned, the most common were:

- Growing wildflowers and insect-attracting plants.
- Having wildlife ponds.
- Leaving areas for wildlife, e.g. leaving areas of longer grass, not cutting back seedheads.
- Providing wildlife habitats such as log/stick piles, bug hotels, bird boxes, and hedgehog houses.
- Companion planting to bring in beneficial insects.
- 'No dig' method of gardening (minimum soil disturbance).
- Growing organically – not using chemicals or pesticides.

Some quotes to illustrate this:

Lavender in flower, fantastic for insects.

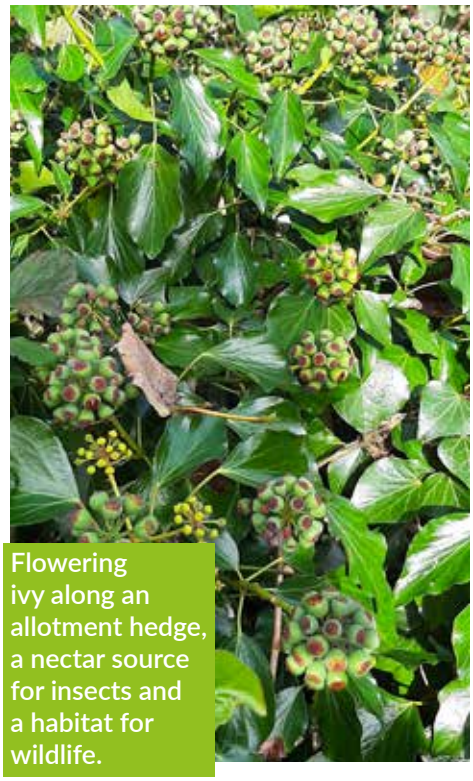
"Leave wild areas around my plot, I grow wildflowers in one of my beds each year."

Sunflower, great nectar source for bees.

"Grow lots of pollinator plants."

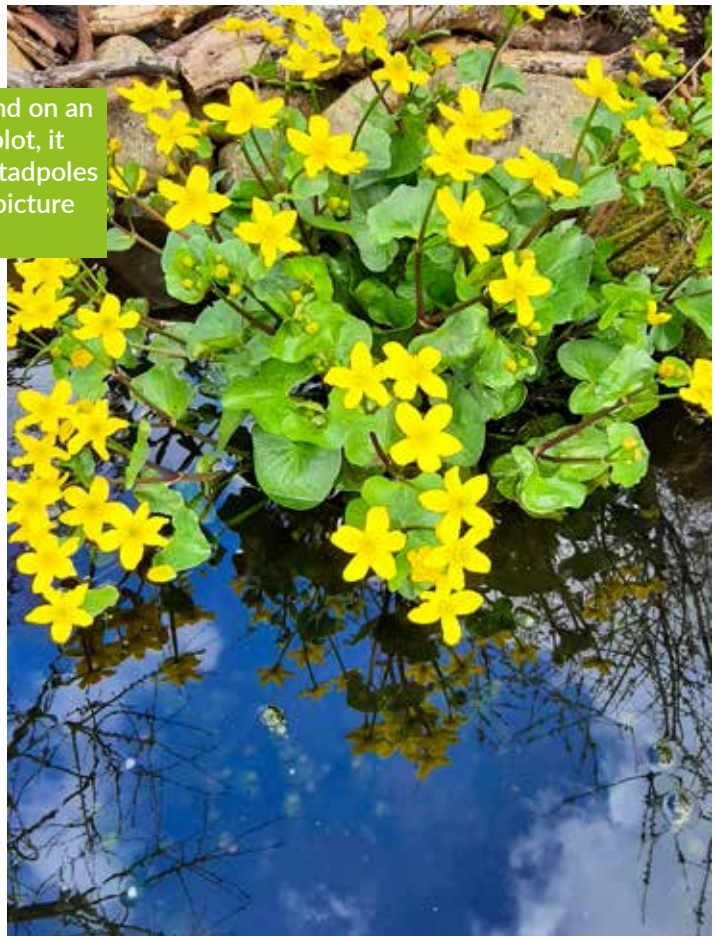
"Organic, no-dig. Planted flowering shrubs for pollinators. Leave plot/site boundary area undisturbed."

Seed heads of sunflowers left for birds in the autumn/winter.



Flowering ivy along an allotment hedge, a nectar source for insects and a habitat for wildlife.

"Grow flowers and keep area for nettles and weeds."



A small pond on an allotment plot, it was full of tadpoles when this picture was taken.

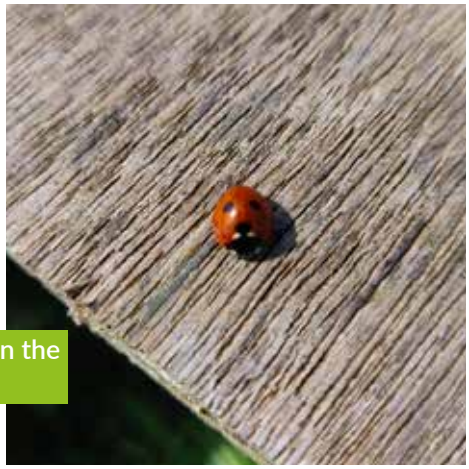
"Wildlife corner (piled up weeds/sticks, etc) pond, organic, growing flowers alongside veg."

A few respondents also mentioned the conflict they experience when instructed by a site committee to cut back 'weeds', something which they feel is beneficial for wildlife and supports biodiversity on site.

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Committees/management teams: Do you know if any surveys have been done to measure the biodiversity (such as plants, fungi, insects, birds, mammals) on the site?**

Only one site out of 16 reported having had a survey done – a bat survey on Bridge Road in Lancaster.



Ladybird in the sunshine.

Climate Resilience on allotment sites

The Allotment Review survey asked:

- **What, if anything, is your allotment site doing to build its resilience to the changing climate and weather patterns in the UK (e.g. hotter/drier springs; wetter summers; more extreme weather events such as intense rainfalls and potential flooding)?**
- **Do you have rainwater collection butts on your plot/plots?**

Only 34 people (out of 197) responded to the question about what their site is doing to build resilience to the changing climate and weather patterns in the UK. Rainwater harvesting and awareness of water use was by far the most commonly mentioned action. A few respondents mentioned mulching to reduce water loss or 'no dig' methods as a way to minimise water usage, plus growing more drought-resistant varieties of crops.

Many respondents answered "I don't know". A few respondents felt that there are not many things that can be done or that "nothing" was being done at the moment (other than water awareness).

Some quotes to illustrate this:

"No dig definitely helps, and we have increased the number of water butts on our plot but, even so, we ran out during this year's dry early summer, so I'm grateful that there is mains water as well."

"Nothing, though a few allotmenteers are beginning to talk about it."

When asked about water butts, 157 plot holders (81%) have water butts on their plots. 5% said "no", 3% said on some of my plots but not all, 11% did not respond. Water butts (either communal and/or individual) were seen on all site visits.

As part of the community conversations, attendees were invited to respond to the question:

- **What can be done site-wide to respond to climate change?**

The following responses were shared:

- Information, events, and education – e.g. raising awareness about different ways of gardening with less soil disturbance, using compost and mulches to garden with less water, how to garden in a drought.
- Saving water/improved access to water.
- Community composting schemes.
- More pollinating plants and biodiversity awareness.
- Solar panels on sheds.
- Carpooling schemes.

IDEAS

Wildlife/biodiversity organisations partner with allotments across the district and run biodiversity surveys. Evidencing increased biodiversity in allotment spaces can support future funding and the provision of allotments in the district. The university environmental department could partner on this work. It could lead to the creation of a biodiversity management plan for a whole site.

Raise awareness around what can be done to build climate resilience on allotment sites/plots e.g. water management, seed saving, diversity of planting, crop protection. This could be done through training opportunities and as a resource on the new allotment website for the District (referred to in the Allotment communication section).

An insect hotel in a communal orchard on an allotment site.

Demand for allotments (waiting lists)

There is a huge demand for allotment plots within Lancaster District. Data from the Allotment Survey and site visits shows:

- There are approximately 980 allotment plots (full, half, quarter, and starter plots) on 21 allotment sites in the district. Figures for the remaining four sites were not available, so the actual number of plots will be higher.
- At the end of December 2023, there were approximately 655 people on waiting lists on 15 allotment sites in the district. Figures for the remaining ten sites were not available, so the actual number waiting will be higher.
- Figures from the Allotment Review Survey shows that of the 46 people on waiting lists who responded, 42% had been waiting for 1-2 years, 23% had been waiting for 3-5 years, and 6% over five years.
- Waiting list sizes vary significantly across sites, from single figures on five sites to over 250 people on one site (Fairfield Allotments). Their website states "you are not likely to get a plot for at least five years, probably much longer".[19]

There are many possible reasons why waiting lists vary so much across sites, such as:

- Sites have different population densities and housing types around them, so demand will vary between rural and urban sites.
- Some sites are better known and/or are more visible.
- Sites have different facilities so, where there is a choice, this may affect applications.
- A couple of private sites/Parish sites said they offer sites to those in their village or within the Parish only.
- Sites can close their waiting lists (not accept any new applications), so people may apply to another site.

Management of waiting lists

- Every allotment site manages their own waiting list, via the committee/management team or landowner directly.
- During site visits, most sites said they are splitting full-sized plots into half plots to reduce the waiting list, to offer people a more manageable/realistic sized plot, and to help ensure more people are able to maintain their plots.
- All committee members/management teams (who replied to the Allotment Review Survey) said they offer people a plot in the order that they are on the waiting list. The person at the top of the list is offered an available plot first and they then work down.
- Several sites said that sometimes they contact people on the waiting list only to find that they have already been offered a plot elsewhere/have moved away/lost interest/or are unable to manage a plot due to health issues (by the time a plot is available on their site).

- A couple of sites said that they contact existing plot holders to ask if anyone wants to downsize or upsize (to the equivalent of full plot if their present plot is well maintained), before contacting people on the waiting list.
- Updating the waiting list is done regularly ("every couple of months", "monthly", "last week", "this week") by nearly all the sites. Members from two sites said it has been done "this year" or "yearly".
- The allotment page on the City Council website states that eight sites have their application lists 'open', three sites have their application lists 'closed' and nine sites have nothing noted. This information is not up to date and could affect whether people apply to certain sites or not. It is the only central location for finding out where allotments are located in the district and the contact details for them.
- There is nothing stopping people from applying to as many sites as they want to (of the sites accepting applications). This obviously increases someone's chances of getting a plot even if it is not their first choice of site. This may inflate the waiting list numbers.

Nationally:

In October 2023, there were 157,820 people waiting for a local authority allotment in England. A rise of 81% in 12 years.[20]

The number of people on local authority waiting lists for over 18 months has increased from 34% in 2021 to 58% in 2023 despite local authorities splitting plots to create more smaller ones.[21]

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide and create new allotments sites, particularly in urban areas where the waiting lists are greatest or in villages without allotments.

Other Ideas

Provide some general information about waiting lists per site on the independent allotment website and/or council website – people may want to think about this in terms of where they apply.

For more ideas, see Having multiple plots section.

Creating new allotment sites

There is no national specification regarding the number of allotments that should be provided by councils, however the 1908 Small Holdings and Allotment Act places a duty on councils to provide allotments if there is a demand. In Lancaster District, the 25 allotment sites present are provided by a combination of the City Council (14), Parish/Town Council (5), private landowners (5), and the Diocese (1).

Three new City Council allotment sites have been developed in the last ten years. These are Ambleside Road and Cinder Lane (both in Lancaster) and Four Seasons (in Heysham), creating just over 100 new plots (either full, half, or quarter/starter plots). Information about new Parish/Town and private allotments was not asked for.

Waiting lists are long on most sites in the district, with a minimum figure of 655 waiting across 15 sites where the data was available (of 25 sites). It is possible that some of these applications are duplicates, as there is nothing stopping people from applying to more than one site. It should also be noted that waiting lists represent only those people who have applied for an allotment. Interest in allotments may be higher, but due to long waiting lists, closed lists, or not having any nearby allotments, people may decide not to apply.

Most people who responded to the allotment survey had been waiting between 1-2 years for an allotment. Fairfield allotments have a waiting list of at least five years (on their website).[22]

Council-owned sites

Creating new allotment sites was one recommendation in 'The Lancaster District Climate Change People's Jury Report' (2020) – prioritised as the 8th recommendation of 25 (see box below).[23] This goes alongside raising awareness that residents can request allotments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOOD/FARMING AND WASTE/RECYCLING. (Page 28)

Make it easier for people to grow their own food. Allotments and food growing spaces serve to both address climate change, promote sustainable living and many other issues faced by our community, i.e. growing as a tool for community-based improvements – social cohesion, mental and physical wellbeing, as well as using allotment/growing to address food waste through composting.

a) Conduct a survey/audit of land which is suitable for crops, vegetables, fruit growing and for small mixed farms. Also identify land available for tree planting, hedge rows and wild meadows.

b) The council should firstly open more allotments and growing space and secondly raise awareness that residents can request more allotments.

c) Additional land for allotments/community growing areas should be identified and large private landowners encouraged or incentivised to release such land.

Requesting Allotments

The Small Holdings and Allotments Act (1908) places a duty on councils to provide allotment provision. If six or more people make a formal request, then councils must consider this. The legislation, which still applies today, does not however impose a timeframe on Councils for any new provision.

Lancaster City Council has not developed any new allotment sites since the Lancaster district Climate Change People's Jury recommendations (2020). The Allotment Review did not ask whether any formal requests for allotments have been received under the 1908 Allotments Act.

The Local Plan for Lancaster 2011-2031

Lancaster District has an up-to-date Local Plan which the City Council formally adopted on 29th July 2020. The Local Plan for Lancaster sets out how local development needs will be met, which land should be protected, and provides a framework to determine local planning applications.

Supporting the protection and improvement of existing allotments as well as provision of new allotment sites is specifically mentioned within the Development Management Development Plan Document (DM DPD) of the Local Plan, which focuses on planning policies and guidance for considering planning applications.[24] See text below:

Policy DM43 Green Infrastructure

Relevant Policy Text

Allotment Provision

Existing allotments, which are recognised to have significant value to the local community will be protected and, where appropriate, improved. The Council will support the provision of new allotment facilities and other food growing places where opportunities arise and a clear need is demonstrated via local evidence.

Relevant Supporting Text

11.10 There are currently 21 allotment sites within the district, providing approximately 19 hectares of land for the growing of food. Despite this provision, there remains a waiting list and the demand for allotment sites continues to increase, with the greatest levels of both supply and demand in the Lancaster area.

11.11 From a planning perspective, the Council will address such demand through new development, in particular larger development proposals that will be able to accommodate provision for new allotments and community growing spaces.

11.12 In light of the recognised need for additional provision of allotments across Lancaster, innovative approaches to increasing provision should be considered, including links and partnerships with local schools where opportunities to do so exist. The value of allotments as a social opportunity and an alternative option for exercise is recognised by the Council. The location of allotments at schools should be investigated as a potential solution to the provision of new facilities, particularly in rural locations.

See pages 91-94.

Policy DM57: Health and Wellbeing

Relevant Policy Text

In order to promote health and well-being across the social gradient the Council will expect proposals to:

VI. Protect, increase and enhance open space provision, allotments and food growing schemes, biodiversity and nature conservation assets and the provision of children's play facilities.

See page 125.

Policy DM58: Infrastructure Delivery and Funding

Relevant Policy Text

Development proposals and infrastructure provision will be coordinated to ensure that growth within the district is supported, where necessary, by the provision of infrastructure, services and facilities that are required to maintain and enhance the quality of life and responds to the needs of local people, the local environment, and the local economy.

Relevant Supporting Text

15.11 There are a range of infrastructure requirements that may be necessary to ensure that development is acceptable in planning terms, Table 15.1 below sets out potential types of infrastructure that should be considered (although this should not be considered as an exhaustive list).

See page 129.

Adequate Highways Access & Capacity	GP Surgeries
Education provision	Hospitals
Nursery Schools	Ambulance Services
Clean Water Supply	Adult Social Care
Adequate Wastewater Capacity	Fire, Police and Rescue Services
Suitable Drainage Systems	High Speed Internet Access
Energy Supply	Children's Play Areas and Equipment
Cycling and Walking Facilities	Sports Facilities
Public Transport	Supported Accommodation
Car parking	Open Spaces and Park
Electric Vehicle Charging Points	Social and Community Facilities
Waste Management and Disposal	Allotments
Libraries	Natural and Semi-Natural Green Spaces
Cemeteries and Churchyards	Landscaping
Flood Defences and Drainage Infrastructure	Replacement / New Habitat

Table 15.1: List of Infrastructure that may be secured through CIL or Planning Obligations to make development acceptable and/or meet Local Plan objectives.

Appendix D: Open Space Standards and Requirements

Relevant Text

D.6 The thresholds for on-site provision of each type of open space are based on the future population of a development that will generate a sufficient area for a particular type of open space to be provided on-site. In the case of large-scale residential developments, it is expected that open space requirements are provided on-site, and it is important that this is considered within the preparation of a planning application. Large residential sites will have a critical mass of population and should provide all required types of open space on-site. Where on-site sports pitches are being provided, they should be accompanied by appropriate changing rooms and car parking facilities. In the case of large sites, only in exceptional circumstances will off-site provision be considered as an appropriate means of providing open space and therefore any proposals for off-site provision must be robustly justified.

TYPE OF OPEN SPACE	DWELLING NUMBER THRESHOLDS FOR ON-SITE PROVISION
Parks and Gardens	350
Accessible Natural Green Space	200
Equipped Play Areas (Children up to 12yrs)	35
Young Persons Provision	150
Amenity Green Space	10
Outdoor Sports Facilities	250
Allotments	500

Table D.1: Thresholds for the Provision of On-Site Open Spaces

D.11 There may be exceptional cases where it would be preferable to focus on the enhancement of an existing area instead of providing new open space on-site. This would be discussed at the pre-application stage with the Council on a case-by-case basis, based on the particular circumstances of the site and the character of the development proposal. Financial contributions will be used to provide or enhance facilities that are within an acceptable distance of the application site. The required thresholds for contributions in lieu of on-site provision are set out in Table D.2.

TYPE OF OPEN SPACE	DWELLING NUMBER THRESHOLDS FOR OFF-SITE PROVISION
Parks and Gardens	**RURAL:** <5 – 499 **URBAN:** <10 – 499
Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space	No contribution in lieu of on-site provision required
Equipped Play Areas (Children up to 12yrs)	**RURAL:** 5 – 34 **URBAN:** 10 – 499
Young Persons Play Provision	**RURAL:** <5 – 149 **URBAN:** <5 – 499
Amenity Green Space	No contribution in lieu of on-site provision required as this space should be provided on-site
Outdoor Sports Facilities	**RURAL:** <5 – 249 **URBAN:** <10 – 249
Allotments	No contribution in lieu of on-site provision required

Table D.2: Thresholds for the Provision of Financial Contributions in Lieu of On-Site Provision

See pages 159-160.

This planning framework can be used to support the provision of new allotments in new developments and in partnerships with other service providers.

Important to note is that Lancaster City Council is in the post-hearing stage of reviewing their adopted Local Plan as part of a Climate Emergency Local Plan Review (CELPR). The Council expects to adopt this new local plan over the course of 2024. The CELPR retains all policies related to allotments in the adopted plan, however it reduces the dwelling number thresholds for onsite provision from 500 to 400 dwellings. It also adds a requirement for new off-site provision or enhancement to existing allotments for developments between 40-399 units for urban locations and 50-399 dwellings for rural locations.

Provision of new allotments by other landowners

New allotment sites can also be provided by other landowners, including privately.

Case study within Lancaster District

Wray village allotments were established 12 years ago by a member of a local farming family, who saw the need for allotments within the village. These now provide 20 plots, which are rented out and are all in use.

Case study within East Yorkshire

Molescroft Farm Estate, East Yorkshire have diversified and added private allotments onto their land as an extra income stream and to increase footfall and awareness of the family farm.

A view from Wray allotments.

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Apart from any waiting lists at your allotment site, do you know any specific areas within Lancaster District where there is a high demand for allotments that has not been met?**

A similar question was asked at the Lancaster Potato Day event and in a central email to Ward Councillors. Areas identified were the Marsh area in Lancaster, West Lancaster – Marsh/Abraham Heights/Aldcliffe, Fairfield, Park Ward, Cork Road, Bowerham, Scotforth, Caton, Halton, Wray, Hornby, Central Morecambe, Broadway, and Carnforth.

A lot of answers said "everywhere" or "all allotment sites have long waiting lists".

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the high demand for allotment space, Parish councils, Town councils, and the City Council should provide disused or underused land or appropriate brownfield sites for new allotments. Sites may be identified under the ongoing Open Space Study that is being conducted by Lancaster City Council.

Create an 'Allotments Champion' on the planning committee in the City Council to advocate for allotments on all applicable planning applications.

Planning Officers to make active use of the policies relating to allotments in the DM DPD of the Local Plan, to push for new allotment provision within larger planning developments and/or off-site financial support from smaller developments. This could be used to purchase land for new sites/develop unused land or support existing allotments to improve and expand.

Encourage other anchor institutions, such as NHS trusts, universities, schools, and churches/the Diocese to deliver new allotments sites.

Work with Lancashire Local Nature Partnership to identify and make accessible space for new allotments within Lancaster District. They can encourage local developers and landowners to offer space for allotments as part of their biodiversity offsetting on under/unused pockets of their land.

Through the FoodFutures network, issue a call out to landowners to see if any are willing to set up an allotment site on their land. They could be connected to other private allotment sites to share advice and learning around how to support this.

Raise awareness that residents can ask for allotments (under the 1908 Allotments Act), picking up on the recommendation in the People's Jury on Climate Change report.

Other community growing projects in Lancaster District

Allotments are not the only model for providing food-growing spaces. Lancaster District has a variety of community food-growing projects, examples of which include:

- Claver Hill in Lancaster'[25]
- Scotch Quarry in Lancaster[26]
- Grow Caton in Caton
- Where The Wildings Are. A LESS and FoodFutures project that "seeks to turn educational establishments across Lancaster and Morecambe Bay into hubs that reverse climate change, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity".[27]

Nationally, there are a huge number and variety of community food-growing projects. Websites such as 'Incredible Edibles'[28] and 'Good to Grow'[29] provide overviews, maps, and contact details for many community food-growing projects, linking them together and providing a platform for support and information.

Community composting at Scotch Quarry, Lancaster.

Case Study: Claver Hill in Lancaster

Claver Hill came out of Transition City Lancaster's food group. It started in 2013, on land that had been bought by two active members of the group. It has since been bought by the community and is going through the process of being set up as a Charitable Trust.

Claver Hill aerial view.

Its Mission Statement is to: "create an inclusive and cooperative environment that allows for people, plants, and wildlife to flourish together. We will cultivate and celebrate the creativity and skills of all members and openly welcome new people to grow and share together".

Current projects that are active on the site include:

- Spud club.
- Nature Trail.
- Beekeepers and flower garden.
- Lancaster Seed Library.
- Natural Dyes Group.
- Global Link refugee and asylum project.
- Claver Hill tree nursery and coppicing group.
- Claver Hill now hosts Lancaster's annual Potato Day.
- Super club and fermenting informal groups.
- Compost demonstration and community composting.

How it runs:

Claver Hill has a Memorandum of Understanding that all groups who come on site must agree to. Each project on site then elects a representative to attend Claver Hill committee meetings. The committee meets every two months and is responsible for overseeing site-wide management, finance, health and safety, legal issues, and anything else that affects the whole site.

Spud Club:

Spud Club is the closest project to an allotment site; however, this is a community-grown horticulture project. No one person has their own plot. It started as 29 no-dig vegetable beds and has now expanded into 70+ beds that are cared for by approximately 40 regular Spud Club members. There are Spud Club meetings and monthly walk arounds to identify jobs and to shape the growing plan. Jobs/tasks are written up on a white board and shared via a WhatsApp channel. When people show up, they decide together what they work on. Tools and equipment are shared, alongside compost, water, and skills. Produce is picked by members on a trust basis or, when there is a lot of picking, a group will pick and then this harvest will be shared between people on the day. Surplus is shared with preserve and jam makers, the fermenting group as well as with local community groups, including Eggcup and the Ridge community centre. Food from the site is cooked during social events on site.

Spud club members at work at Claver Hill.

Communication within Claver Hill:

- Claver Hill produces a quarterly newsletter that shares information from all projects.
- There is also a shared WhatsApp Group and a site notice board.
- Whiteboards are used for tasks for the site as a whole.
- There's a Facebook page for Spud Club and Claver Hill.
- Website for Claver Hill.
- Monthly meetings/walk around for Spud Club.
- Annual General Meeting for the site as a whole.
- Projects meet on their own terms/frequency.
- Claver Hill committee meetings every 2 months.
- Occasional site-wide workdays.
- Annual open day.

In 2023, Claver Hill celebrated its 10th birthday.

Claver Hill Natural Flood Management scheme.

Case Study: Grow Caton – Caton Village

Started a couple of years ago, Grow Caton is all about building community within the village around local food growing and sharing. It is informal and there are no specific projects, but individuals who share their skills and enthusiasm.

"We share ideas, we share produce, we share seedlings, we swap, we come up with ideas."

There has been fruit tree planting, fruit tree pruning (skill sharing), a stall at the Caton Gala, a surplus stall in the village and informal garden sharing (growing and sharing fruit and vegetables in garden spaces). There is a WhatsApp group and news about Grow Caton is posted in the Village Newsletter.

Vegetables growing in a back garden.

Community growing projects rely on people coming together with a shared interest. They aim to build a network of other supporters who also get involved and contribute. Unlike allotments with individual plots, these projects often have a shared vision around inspiring change, sharing and learning new skills, working with others, and empowering people. Like allotments, they take enthusiasm, energy, commitment and time, particularly to achieve change and to grow food.

Community food-growing projects co-exist alongside allotments and represent an alternative model which can give people different options for accessing land to grow food and a local community. They are different to allotment sites in many respects and their approach will not suit everyone. Traditional allotments and community food-growing projects are very much complimentary.

IDEAS:

Create a new allotment website for the District that provides information about allotment sites and community growing spaces – drawing on the best of both systems.

Claver Hill workshop.

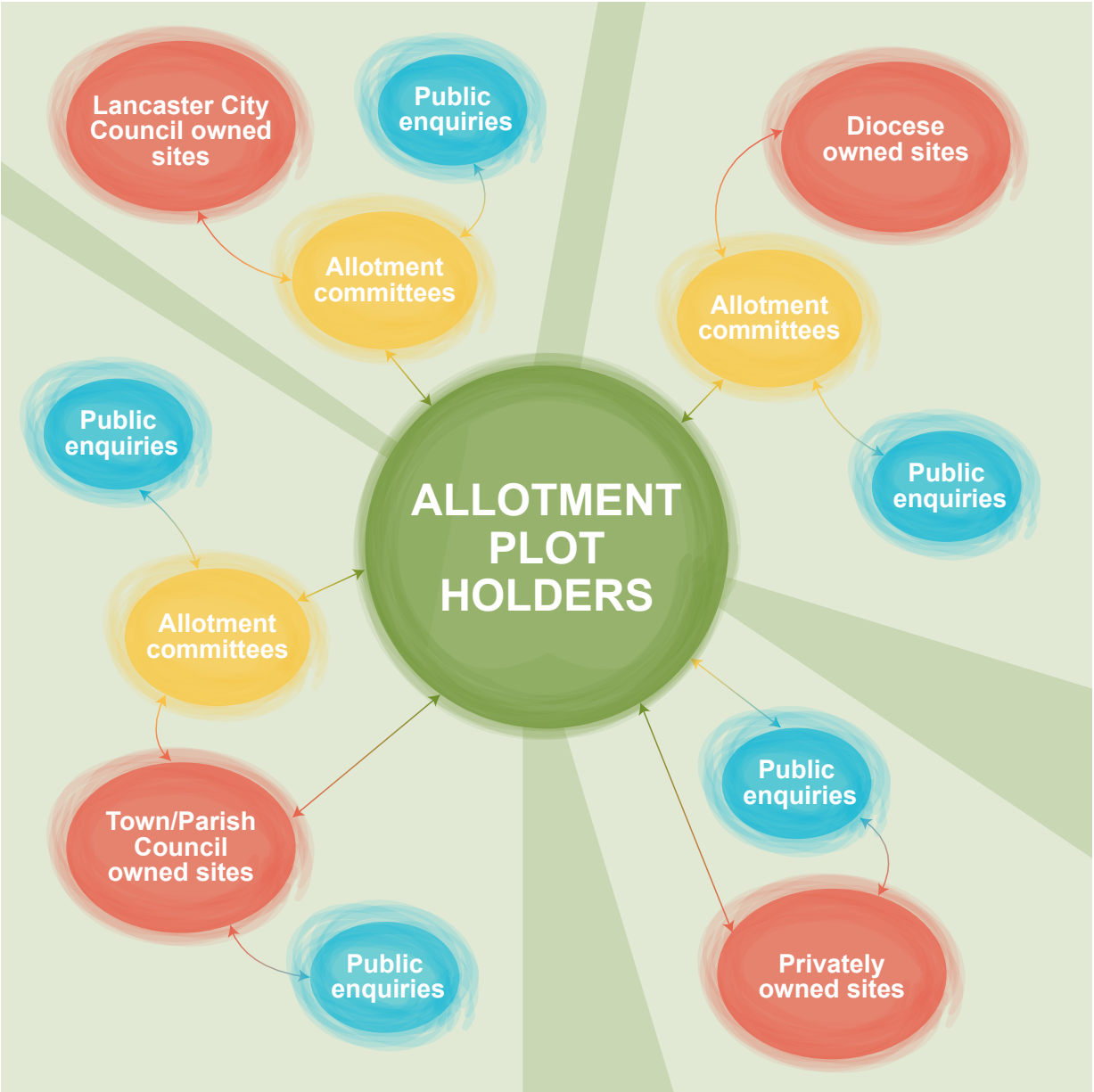
Allotment structures and communication processes

Allotment communication

Within allotments, communication occurs at different levels and through different channels, see Diagram 1 (below).

Diagram 1

Illustration of common communication that occurs on/with allotment sites



Communication between plot holders, and between plot holders and the site committee/management team, Parish/Town clerk or private landowner

The Allotment Review Survey asked the following question to plot holders and committee members:

- **Is there an official allotment wide system/platform for plot holders to share information and if so, what is it?**
- **How does the committee/management team get in touch with plot holders for sharing group information across your allotment site?**

Responses were received from plot holders/committee members across 20 allotment sites (out of 25). Of these sites, most responded that they use a range of different communication methods to communicate amongst themselves and also for the committee/management team to get in touch with plot holders.

The most commonly used method was email (used by 19 out of 20 sites), with 16 sites mentioning having a physical notice/message board on site. Using Facebook was mentioned on 12 of the sites, plus WhatsApp, Slack, and text messages on some sites.

A small number of respondents (14) commented that they don't use social media (such as Facebook and Slack) or said it is not well used on their sites.

Letters were mentioned as being important for communicating with plot holders who don't have access to a computer. Letters were also used as a follow up to an email (if acknowledgement from a plot holder was required) and to ensure that information was received, e.g. 'warning/notice letters'.

Communication between allotment committees and Lancaster City Council (on Lancaster City-owned sites)

Within the City Council at present, there is no one person who deals with or oversees allotments. The role of the Allotment Officer no longer exists. Questions and issues raised by allotment sites are fielded by staff within the Public Realm department. Issues are then passed to other departments such as the legal team. With no one person responsible for overseeing/following up on communications, delays can occur, or communication can get missed within busy work schedules.

Over recent years, the City Council has been involved in a small number of more serious issues on allotment sites, which have involved solicitors, advice from the National Allotment Society, and in some cases the involvement of the police.

During visits to allotment sites, six City Council-owned sites mentioned problems they have experienced communicating with the council. These included:

- **Knowing how/who to contact in the council – not having a named person/department to contact over an issue or knowing what the system is to use in the first instance.**
- **Long time delays in receiving a response – which was mentioned as causing committee members a lot of stress whilst awaiting a reply, e.g. over boundary disputes, maintenance issues, bullying/harassment claims, or eviction problems.**
- **Not receiving a response or acknowledgement that an email/information had been received.**

Communication between allotment sites

There is no formal communication system between any allotment sites in the district. During site visits, a few sites said that they know someone on a committee at another site and get in touch informally if they need to. Some sites expressed an interest in sharing more with other sites, e.g. how they run, what they do differently, etc) although this was not asked as a specific question in the review.

How do people get in touch with allotment sites

The place that holds information about most of the allotment sites in the district, is the Lancaster City Council allotment webpage: www.lancaster.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces/allotments.

This gives the names, location and contact details for most of the sites, as well as some basic information e.g. if the waiting list is open/closed, the number of plots, whether livestock can be kept and who manages the site. This is the only central location for finding out about where allotments are and how to get in touch with them.

Not all allotment sites are on the City Council's website. A few private allotment sites (during the Allotment Review) said they do not want to be put on the website as they feel that they get enough interest as they are. At the time of writing this report, some of the details for allotment sites on the webpage were incorrect. It is unclear how these get checked/updated and by whom.

Seven allotment sites display their name and/or contact details near their entrance gates, so people walking past can see this and get in touch directly. The remainder of the sites do not display anything about themselves to the public.

Examples of allotment site signage, Cork Road allotments, Four Seasons allotments and Cinder Lane allotments.

Communicating with all allotment sites

During the Allotment Review it was challenging to locate and get in touch with all the allotment sites for the reasons above. One allotment site chose not to take part in the review and some sites did not respond initially. This caused delays and uncertainty if emails had been received or not.

All sites (whose details were correct), were asked if they would be willing to forward information/surveys, etc to plot holders and, if they were willing, what is the best way to do this. Nearly all sites provided an email address to use. One site (Halton) suggested posters are put up on site, although this is not practical in terms of travel to the site. On one private site, plot holders were asked to provide their contact details to the Allotment Review if they were interested in receiving information/training opportunities, etc. No one from that site responded.

It has been difficult to know if this system for passing information/surveys to plot holders is working on all sites. Going on feedback from plot holders at Allotment Review events and response rates from surveys, it may be that some sites are more able/keen to pass on informaton to plot holders. It is also possible that email address may be incorrect/out of date so plot holders don't receive information.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Within allotment sites

Having a dedicated 'communications lead' (someone with good IT skills/social media understanding) could help sites (particularly larger ones) to communicate with plot holders and share information easily within a site and across sites.

Using multiple communication channels (e.g. emails, notice boards, social media, WhatsApp) is the best way to ensure that information is spread as widely as possible and people are included. This is particularly important on bigger allotment sites.

Sites should display their name and contact details at their site entrance, so anyone interested can get in touch.

For Lancaster City Council

Update the City Council's allotment webpage with:

- The correct contact details, site names, plot numbers, and whether the waiting list is open or closed.
- Include a map of where allotment sites are in the district (not just text descriptions).

A lot of the information to do this is held within the Allotment Review data and could be done in coordination with the City Council as part of the ongoing support for allotments recommendation (UKSPF funding).

Create an 'allotment' button on the 'Contact Your Council' webpage on the City Council's website to streamline enquiries.

Have a clear communication strategy (updated in the Service Level Agreements) for communication between the City Council and council allotments sites (including how to get in touch and who to contact, acknowledgement and response times).

» OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a new allotment website for Lancaster District

A central information hub for people wanting to find out about allotments, a resource for plot holders and for allotment sites to share resources, information, and link up.

Public face of the website:

The website could provide information about allotment sites across the district, including a short allotment profile (provided by each site), a map, location, and contact details.

It could also be used to share training and funding opportunities that may be of interest to sites/plot holders and host/signpost site 'welcome packs'.

Private face of the website:

Part of the site could be used for storing and sharing information between sites, including pro-forma templates, site rules and policies, and funding application examples. It could be used as a forum for sites to ask questions and share information.

Allotment sites could have access to update their own information directly, or this could be done as part of the Allotment Development Worker Role.

Other Ideas

Host an allotment festival:

To celebrate allotments across the district and facilitate networking and knowledge sharing. This could be run in a similar way to the 'open gardens' scheme or allotment stalls could come together in a central location.

Allotment visits between sites:

To look around other sites, get ideas, share information, and meet up with other people from different sites.

How to find out about allotments and apply for one

The only central source of information/contact details for allotments is the City Council's allotment webpage: www.lancaster.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces/allotments. This does not cover all sites in the district (some allotment sites do not want their details on the website) and, at the time of this report, not all the information/contact details displayed are up to date.

When searching online to find allotments in the district (other than using the City Councils webpage), only a small number of sites for the following details were found:

Five allotment sites have their own websites, and some sites have Facebook Pages. Generally, Town and Parish Council sites are mentioned within the main council websites. Carnforth allotments have a detailed webpage on the Town Council site. A search on Google Maps located only six allotment sites in the district (March 2024).

All allotments in the review have an application process, ranging from an expression of interest to providing some background about what someone is looking for (e.g. size of plot, special requirements) and any previous experience. Applications for an allotment are made to each site directly and applicants then go on the waiting list for a plot.

It is interesting to note from the allotment survey, that of those on waiting lists at the moment, 33 people (82%), said they have applied to a particular allotment because it is "nearest/closest to their home" or "within walking distance". This would indicate that location is an important factor in making the decision about which site/sites to apply for.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Update Lancaster City Council's allotment webpage (as recommended in Allotment communication section).

Create a new allotment website for the District (as recommended in Allotment communication section).

Allotment structures and decision-making processes

The Allotment Review Survey for both plot holders and committee members asked a range of questions around site-wide governance and decision-making processes. These questions and findings have been grouped together and presented below.

Note: These questions were designed early on in the Allotment Review process before the varieties of different allotment structures across the District came to light, so the questions are generic and may not be appropriate or easy to respond to from all sites. City Council sites are devolved and have a committee structure, most Parish/Town sites are managed directly by the council but not all (a couple have committees) and the private sites included in the study vary from one that is managed directly by the landowner's family, to one that has plot-holder involvement, to one that has a small committee. It is therefore challenging to present this data.

Questions asked:

- **How many people are on the committee/management team and why did you join?**

Allotment sites that responded had an average of seven committee members per site, but this figure ranged widely from one person (e.g. on sites that are managed by a parish clerk or privately), to 19 committee members on one of Lancaster's smallest sites.

Reasons shared for joining a committee were varied and reflected the individual context of each site. Some people said they volunteered and quite a few said they were asked/persuaded to volunteer because no one else was. A couple of respondents stated that previous committees were struggling or resigned so they felt obliged to volunteer.

Some quotes below illustrate these points:

"No one else wanted to and I had some relevant experience and a bit of time."

"Volunteered as no one willing to stand"

Yellow courgettes.

"Volunteered as little interest."

"I was asked to stand for this role by other people and had recently given up a role chairing a different group (not an allotment) and felt I had time. I was elected at the AGM."

"Because the old committee team all resigned."

- **Describe the current management structure for the site, and the official decision-making process?**

Current management structure

Most council sites that responded said they had a constitution and/or Lancaster City Council rules that lay out decision-making processes and require key roles to be elected to the committee at an Annual General Meeting (AGM), e.g. a chairperson, a treasurer, and a secretary. Some sites have also created additional support roles to distribute more responsibilities, e.g. social secretary and communication lead.

How decisions are made

The most commonly mentioned decision-making processes were:

- Discussion at committee meetings.
- Discussion/raise an issue with a committee member (in person, via email/ WhatsApp/Slack).
- Discussion at the AGM – this was mentioned by some respondents in situations where a vote may possibly be needed.
- Contact with Parish clerk/council meeting.

11% of respondents (23 out of 197) said they didn't know or were unsure of the process. 22% of respondents (46) chose not to reply.

Where the entire decision-making process was described (using the example of an idea from a plot holder), the process described on City Council sites was similar:

1. **Share the idea with a committee member (via email, WhatsApp, Slack, or in person chat).**
2. **This is then raised at a committee meeting.**
3. **Any decision is then shared either with the individual or publicly.**

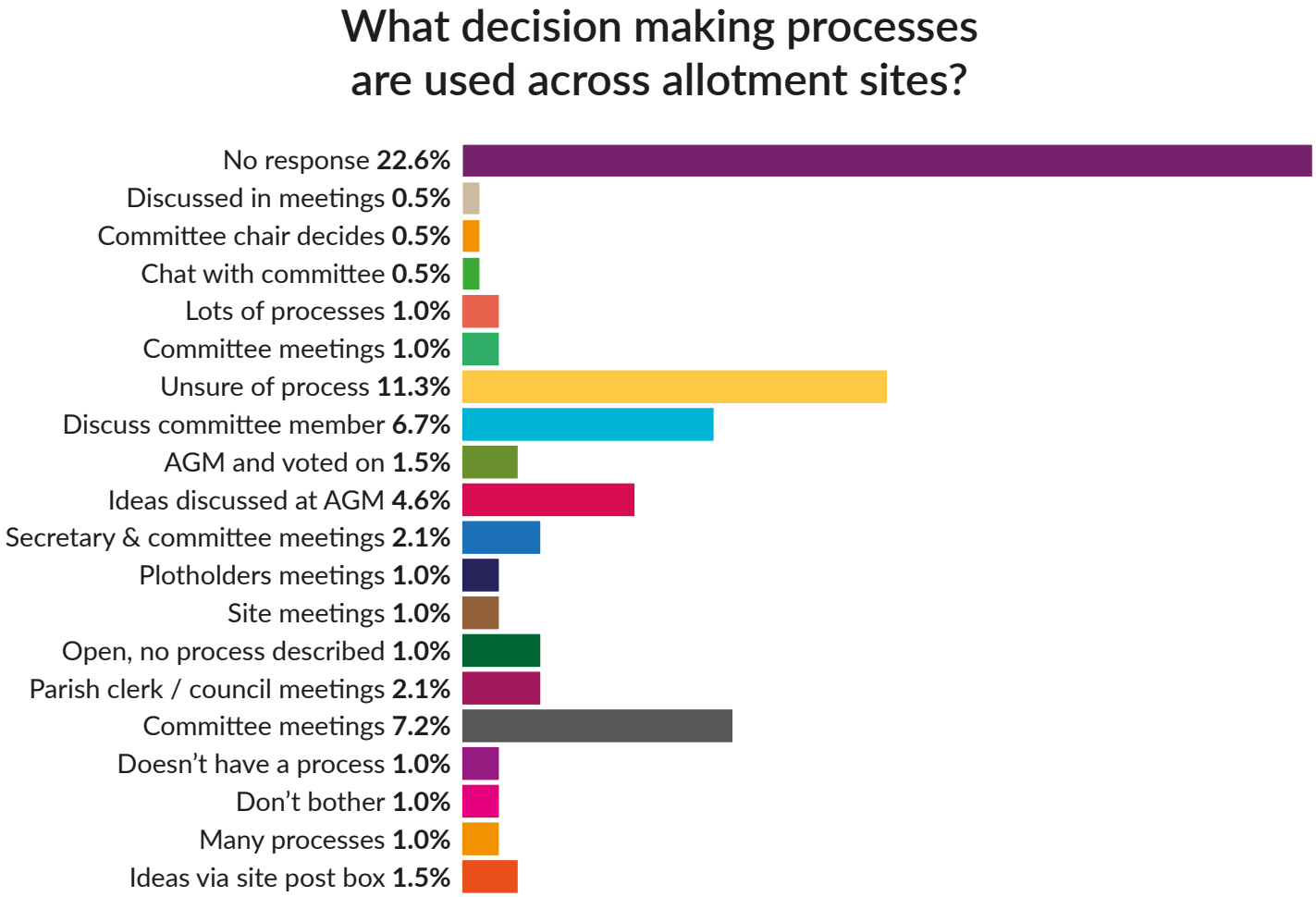
4 For a bigger idea or one that affects the whole site, these ideas usually go to the AGMs for discussion.

A small number of respondents mentioned slow decision-making processes, not receiving feedback, or perceived unfair decision-making processes on their sites.

The answers provided around decision-making processes were often not consistent within sites and sometimes within committees, which could suggest lack of clarity around decision-making processes on some sites. Some of this variation in respondents' answers is shown in the text in Chart 3 (below).

Chart 3

Illustrates some of the responses about decision making processes (not all mentioned are listed)



- **Are there regular meetings between the plot holders and the committee/management team? What is involved with these meetings?**

The frequency of committee meetings, and the frequency of plot holder/committee meetings varies from site to site.

Committee meetings:

Some committees meet monthly, others stated three, four or five times a year. Most sites that responded also had ad hoc meetings, or discussions via email or WhatsApp as needed, between formal meetings. Only a couple of sites said they shared their committee meeting dates and decisions with plot holders, e.g. on-site notice boards.

Meetings between plot holders and the committee/management team:

74 survey respondents (42%) said there are (or, in one case, there was "sort of") regular meetings between plot holders and committee/management team members. In most cases this regular meeting is the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Informal meetings in between AGMs were mentioned, such as during plot inspections, work days or socials. Only three sites said they hosted more frequent plot-holder meetings.

Note: From the responses received to this question, it is unclear how respondents interpreted the phrase "Are there regular meetings". Most respondents described the AGM as a regular meeting; however, it is possible that some respondents may not consider a yearly meeting as 'regular' and therefore answered "No, there are no regular meetings".

Some sites do not hold meetings between plot holders and the committee/management team or landowner, however, as stated in the Note above, allotment sites have different management structures and therefore may not need/require meetings. Some sites said that meetings had been tried in the past, but these were not well attended.

For sites that are required to hold AGMs (City Council sites) some were described as very formal and did not include space for open plot-holder discussions. Others shared a typical meeting structure that included formal business alongside more open space for discussion, as highlighted by the example below.

One site's typical AGM agenda:

- Go through minutes of the last meeting.
- Report on previous year's goals met or not.
- Number on waiting list, number of vacant plots.
- Finances: go through accounts/budget report.
- Agree rents.
- What's new, what's changing, plot plans, maintenance, any other issues.
- Any other business.
- Questions from the floor.

- **As a plot holder, when did you last attend a meeting between plot holders and your committee/management team?**

When plot holders were asked about when they last attended a meeting with the committee/management team, approximately:

- 9% said within the last 6 months or less.
- 19% said within the last year.
- 14% had not attended one for two or more years.
- 14% said they had never attended a meeting.
- 43% did not respond to this question.

Only 28% of respondents (of 197) said they had been to a meeting in the last year.

- **What is going well with the management of the site? And what not so well?**

In regard to what is working well with committees and site management, comments included:

- Clear governance.
- People getting on well.
- New people joining a site or the committee.
- People being friendly and willing to offer support.
- No disputes with plot holders.
- Sites being sensitive to plot holders and not too overbearing.
- Being financially resilient.
- Sites caring for the environment and being sensitive to nature.
- People continuing to be involved despite disputes/challenges.

In terms of what is not going well, responses can be summed up as the following:

- Internal disputes within committees that make it difficult for plot holders.
- Information flows not working well between committee members and plot holders.
- Committees not following their agreed decision-making processes.
- Some committees needing new energy but have struggled to recruit.
- On some sites there are a variety of views on the role and purpose of allotments, which can make it difficult to get agreement on actions that need to be carried out, e.g. nature reserve versus traditional food-growing space.
- Unclear as to who is responsible for bigger maintenance jobs.
- Sites struggling to afford and keep up with maintenance work.

Support for committee members/management team

The allotment survey asked the following questions around support:

- **As a committee/management team member, do you feel that you get the support that you need in your role from ... the landowner, other members of the committee, and plot holders?**
- **As a committee/management team member, do you know who/where to get support and advice from (outside of your own allotment members) if needed?**

The following responses were received:

- **Support from the landowner**
  Only four committee members out of 27 said "yes" to feeling supported by their site's landowner, with nine committee members answering "no" to this question. The remaining committee members said they were unsure, or did not respond.
- **Support from other committee members**
  Of the committee members that responded, all felt supported by other members of the committee with the exception of two respondents (on different sites) who were unsure.
- **Support from plot holders**
  Most respondents said they feel supported by plot holders in their committee role. Four people were unsure, and one person said "no".

When committee/management team members were asked about where to get support from outside of their allotment site, the following organisations were named by 11 respondents:

- National Allotment Society.
- Lancaster City Council in general and specifically Council estates officers, Councillor cabinet member with responsibility for allotments.
- Parish Council.
- Lancashire County Council.
- A solicitor/barrister.
- LESS.
- Google search to see what other allotments have done.

The remaining 16 respondents either said they didn't know (8) or didn't respond (8).

Conflict resolution processes

The Allotment Review Survey asked a couple of questions around common challenges and conflict resolution processes:

- **What is your process for dealing with disputes that emerge on your site? (asked to plot holders and committee/management team members).**
- **What are the most common issues that you have to deal with (over the last five years)? (asked to committee/management team members).**
- **As a committee member/management team member, what are the most challenging issues that you have to deal with (over the last five years)?**

From the responses received, most sites have a process in place for dealing with disputes (usually within the site rules) however, not all plot holders on these sites were necessarily aware of this process. On some sites where a high percentage of respondents were aware of the dispute process, this seemed to be linked to the site having or having recently had a major dispute.

A small number of sites did not appear to have a process for dealing with disputes in place, did not respond, or didn't know what their process was.

Where conflict resolution processes were explained, they appeared fairly similar across sites: try to resolve the issue informally between plot holders, involve a committee member if needed and if it escalates, involve the council or an external mediator. For parish run sites, the parish clerk was the first point of call.

Regarding issues that committee/management teams have dealt with, the most common ones were:

- Plot holders not maintaining their plots.
- Members not following site rules (for example giving a plot to a friend).
- Inter-relational issues within committee members/between plot holders and neighbours.
- Site and boundary maintenance issues and disputes.
- Managing the waiting list.
- Tree maintenance.
- Fundraising and financial management.
- Security issues and theft.
- Dogs on site.
- Water issues (costs, leaks, or lack of water).

For a couple of sites, vehicle access for deliveries or movement of deliveries across a site (due to its topography) was also a challenge.

Of these challenges, the most difficult identified related to boundary/fencing/tree maintenance; maintenance of the waiting list and complaints received around this; interpersonal disputes; making judgements about good or bad use of the plots; and the upcoming lease renewal.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

For sites with committees, include information about committee roles and responsibilities, meetings, site rules, decision making and conflict resolution processes in a 'Welcome pack' for new plot holders and consider making this information available to current plot holders. This could help offer clarity and transparency around these areas and provide an opportunity for these areas to be reviewed and updated. Core information (templates) for this could be coordinated as part of the Allotment Development Worker role and made available on the new allotment website for the District.

Other ideas

Where appropriate, committees consider sharing meeting agendas and minutes with plot holders – to increase transparency and understanding of the role of allotment committees and give an overview of site issues.

Allotment committees consider creating other support roles (beyond secretary, treasurer, and chairperson) that could help distribute more tasks and improve information flows, engagement, and support across sites. This could include for example a communication lead, fundraisers, social secretary, and mentors for new plot holders.

Offer skill sharing around committee experience – to share ideas, offer support, and encourage more involvement and discussion around issues.

Finances

The Allotment Review Survey asked a series of questions to both plot holders and committees/management teams about allotment finances.

Plot holders' questions included:

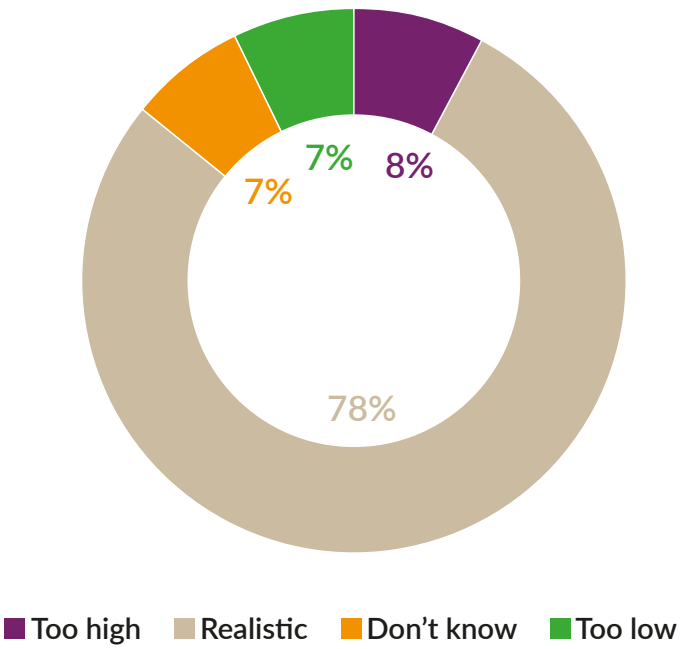
- For your allotment plot, the facilities on site and reasons why you have an allotment; do you think that the present rental fees are ... realistic, too low, too high?
- Would you be willing to pay more in rent for the plot/plots you have?

Most plot holders (78%) said they think the rental fees are realistic as highlighted in Chart 4.

Chart 4

Plot holders' thoughts about rental charges (197 responses)

For your allotment plot,
do you think that the present rental fees are...



A small number of respondents said that they could not afford to pay more, or that higher rents could exclude other people.

A few quotes illustrate this:

"I couldn't afford the site if it was any more. It has cost me a lot to set the plot up."

"I am on a limited state pension, it's what I can afford. I would not like to see them any higher."

"Very affordable for me, but appreciate may not be the case for others and it is important to keep costs down so people are not excluded."

8% of respondents felt the rental fees were too high, with common reasons given for this being:

- Lack of facilities – mains water and communal facilities were mentioned.
- Comparison with other allotment sites.
- Not using any of the facilities on site.

A couple of quotes illustrate this:

"We don't have many community facilities on site."

"We rent half a plot, and I know other people locally who rent full plots for the same amount as us. We don't use the facilities."

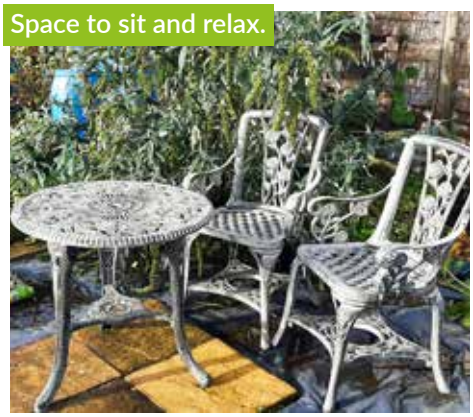
7% of respondents said they thought the fees were too low, reasons being:

- Undervalues allotments and what you get.
- Sites have done a lot of maintenance and this needs to be covered.

A couple of quotes to illustrate this:

"It's an absolute bargain! Would be prepared to pay more."

Runner beans plants just planted out.



Space to sit and relax.

"Allotments are undervalued."

Committee members/management team questions included:

- What is the annual rent for – full, half, quarter, starter plot?
- In your opinion, do the annual plot fees that are charged cover the cost of maintaining and upgrading the site?
- If 'no' how is this shortfall going to be managed over the next five years?
- Apart from income from membership of your allotment association and rent (from plot holders), do you have any other sources of income for use across the site?
- If 'yes' what?

What is the annual rent for a full, half, quarter, starter plot?

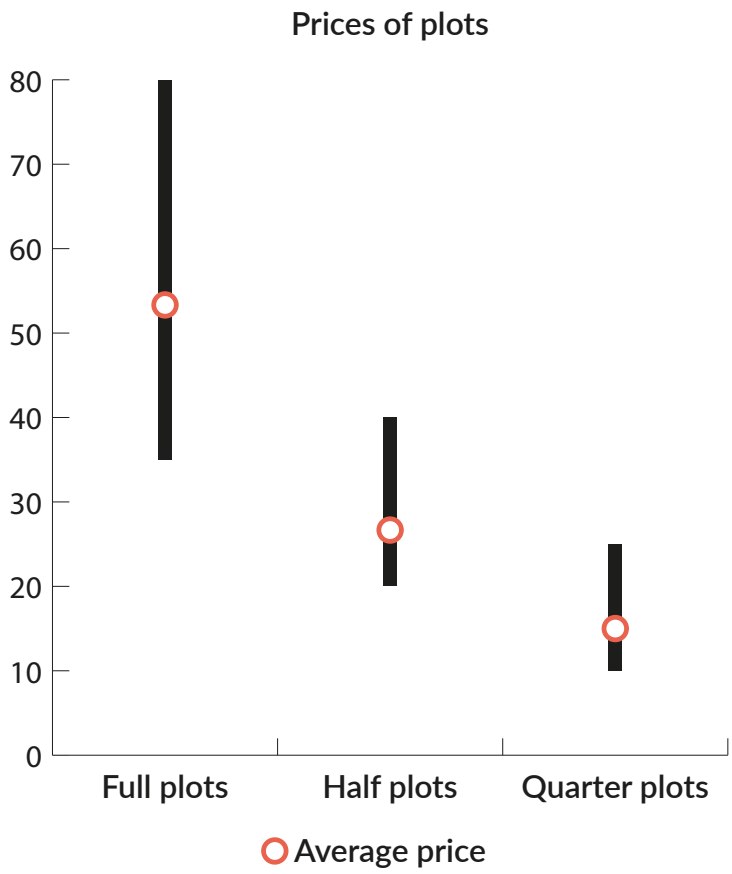
Members from 15 allotment committees/management teams replied to the survey.

As highlighted in Chart 5, the results show that rental charges vary across allotment sites. Some sites, such as the City Council-owned sites, set their own rents individually. On some sites, such as private or Parish Council sites the rent is set by the landowner/ Parish council.

The range of prices across the sites are shown in the chart 5, with the average price for a full, half and quarter plot shown by a red dot.

Chart 5

Plot rental charges across allotment sites



Carnforth Town Council has recently introduced a system for rental charges based on the precise size of each plot (0.25p per m2). This is not shown on the chart and is the only allotment site in the district that uses this system.

Do site fees cover maintenance and costs of developing the site?

Four sites said that they have sufficient funds for maintenance and costs related to the development of their site.

Six sites said that the rental fees are not sufficient to cover both site maintenance and developments, e.g. upgrading facilities, providing raised beds.

Five sites were unsure or have differing opinions from committee/management team members.

Of the 15 sites who responded, 12 are City Council-owned sites (which are self-governed and manage their own finances) and the remaining three sites were private, Town Council-owned, and one was owned by the Diocese but managed by a committee on the site.

How is any shortfall going to be managed over the next five years?

Of the sites that responded:

- Three sites said they will apply for grants or fundraise to cover shortfalls.
- One site said it will be completely stuck if the boundary wall/fencing needs repair.
- One site said it is awaiting the Allotment Review and proposals by the City Council to address underfunding, as it is a small site and therefore receives a small income from plot rents.

Other source of income on sites currently:

Four sites said they get some additional income (other than rent from plot holders) from:

- Grants for one-off projects.
- Annual plant sales.
- Income from open day refreshments.
- Donations from plot holders who can afford to pay more than their plot fee.
- Seed schemes.

One site said that shortfalls cannot always be met by grants and sometimes allotments don't meet the criteria for funders.

In summary

Most sites rely on rental income from plot holders only and this varies significantly depending on the size of the site. Many sites have a shortfall between current income and ongoing/expected maintenance costs. All City Council-owned sites (under a devolved management model) are responsible for maintenance issues, including fences, walls and hedges, and trees, as well as facilities on site. As professional services may be needed for some maintenance work, e.g. tree surgery, this can be extremely costly. Two City Council sites said that maintenance costs were a major worry, and they feel that they cannot afford any of the big maintenance work that needs doing on their sites.

A lot of City Council-owned sites and a couple of other sites, said that they commonly rely on volunteer plot holders for maintenance work, but this can only be for smaller jobs.

The City Council focus group meeting

A focus group meeting with Lancaster City Council highlighted severe funding difficulties within the Council at present, including funding cuts, job losses and a serious lack of resources. It is hard to imagine the City Council will be in a position to support allotments financially unless there is increased investment in local authorities and allotments are provided for within this.

Community conversations

As part of the community conversations, people were invited to write comments on the question:

- **How can we tackle the issue that most plot holders think the rental fees are realistic, but on a lot of sites this isn't enough to cover the maintenance or development costs?**

The most common responses received were:

- Fundraising, e.g. grants and events on site (open days, plant sales).
- Having a sliding scale of rental fees or an extra optional donation if plot holders can afford it.
- Increased volunteering opportunities to keep costs down.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Council explore any possibilities for setting up an 'allotment fund' at the time of the lease renewal for City Council-owned sites to apply to, for urgent maintenance work. A fund was established previously when the devolved management model was adopted. For certain City Council-owned sites, this could enable them to continue under this model into the future.

Review the Service Level Agreements (SLA) between the City Council and each allotment site alongside the lease renewal process. This should review whether it is working in its present form for all sites (particularly smaller sites or sites with particularly challenging maintenance and associated costs, e.g. walls, poor boundary fencing).

Establish links between Lancaster City Council's Community Connectors, Lancaster District CVS, FoodFutures and allotment sites – for support around possible fundraising opportunities. This could be done as an online event or information sent to associations.

Other ideas

It is important to ask if allotment sites are charging an appropriate/realistic rent given the maintenance work they are required to oversee – particularly on City Council-owned sites.

Allotments consider a sliding scale of rents and/or optional donation, so that people can pay more/donate if they want to – although this may only bring in a small amount of additional income.

Allotment sites share information about, and support others with, fundraising – this could be done via the independent allotment website, with examples of potential funders, funding applications, wording to use, templates, how to run a fundraising event or crowdfunder, etc.

Allotment sites consider running regular/annual fundraising/social events to supplement their plot rental income.

Allotments consider crowdfunding options and corporate sponsorship opportunities for one-off bits of work.

Embed a fundraiser role into committee structures and/or call for fundraising volunteers. Sites may have plot holders with fundraising skills who can offer support.

Allotment lease renewal (Lancaster City Council sites)

Fourteen Lancaster City Council allotment sites are managed under a 'devolved model', sometimes called self-management/self-managed. One additional allotment site, Over Kellet allotments, is owned by the City Council but leased to the Parish Council, which manages the site.

Each of the 14 allotment sites has been leased to an allotment association and is managed/run by members via a committee, made up of plot holders. Each site also has a service level agreement (SLA) with the City Council, which lays out who is responsible for what, such as the day-to-day management of the site, maintenance, administration, insurance, finances, dispute resolution, and health and safety.

Devolved management gives each allotment association independence, e.g. to self manage, charge appropriate rents and develop facilities on site, so long as the site is meeting the requirements of its lease and SLA. This model has, in some cases, placed a large financial and managerial burden on some sites, particularly those with high maintenance costs or serious conflict resolution issues. It also means that the council is removed from allotment management and consequently has no overview of what is happening on/across sites. There is no longer an allotment officer role within the City Council – someone who previously would have been responsible for managing the sites directly.

The present leases are for 15 years. Ten out of 14 Lancaster City Council allotment sites have their leases (alongside the SLAs) up for renewal at the end of March 2025.

Four Lancaster City Council allotment sites have their leases due for renewal from 2027 onwards: Ambleside Road (2035), Cinder Lane (2037), Four Seasons (2031), and Greenfingers (2027).

As the original leases were signed nearly 15 years ago, on many sites the people involved in the original lease process are no longer present on the allotment sites today. Members of the current allotment committees may have no knowledge of the previous lease process or what needs to be done around renewing them.

During site visits, six allotment sites raised the subject of their upcoming lease renewal, with sites wanting to know what needs to be done about this in preparation for 2025. The following concerns were raised by some of these sites around the issue of trustees (who signed the original leases):

- Not knowing whether there are trustees on their lease.
- Not knowing who the trustees are.
- Lost contact with the trustees (moved away or died).
- Liability issues of the present trustees and concerns about new leases and the liabilities if trustees sign them.

Feedback from Committees

As part of the Allotment Review, an email was sent to the City Council allotment sites, asking them some questions around preparing for their lease renewal; their understanding of their present lease in terms of trustees and liabilities; what information/support they need and any concerns they have.

Six sites responded with a range of replies as follows:

- A couple of sites said that they didn't want/see any need for any particular changes.
- One site said it doesn't have trustees on their present lease and said it didn't want to take on any more responsibility.
- A couple of sites mentioned getting insurance for trustees to protect them.
- Several sites suggested a coordinated approach to the lease renewal process, so the council communicates with all the allotments at the same time, the assumption being that the City Council takes the lead as the "responsible landlord."
- One site said it has been trying to contact the council about what needs to be done around renewing the lease for over a year.
- One site suggested bringing the allotment trustees together to share thoughts/ information.

The lease renewal process is an opportunity for allotment associations and the City Council to come together and start talking about leases/options and the present Service Level Agreements. It is an opportunity for allotment associations to consider whether they want to make any changes as to how they run/their legal structures.

The impression given during this Allotment Review is that sites are quite different in approach, understanding, and what they may or may not want going forwards. For example, some sites are very concerned about the lease renewal, particularly around having trustees on a lease and their liabilities, while one site said it doesn't have trustees on it's lease and doesn't see the need for any changes. The range of positions, approaches and capacity within allotment sites may have implications for the renewal process, particularly as not all associations may want to do the same thing. Some sites may choose to look at their legal structures, others may not.

During the community conversations, people were asked:

- **Who should be involved in the lease renewal on your site?**

All the answers given can be summed up as "everyone" or "as many plot holders as possible". It was also suggested that legal advice is needed.

Quite a lot of concern and anxiety was raised during the community conversations about the upcoming lease renewals. When asked what support and training is needed, the following suggestions were made:

- Independent legal advice to understand the lease and legal side, e.g. responsibilities, options.
- Need to understand what is involved in the lease-renewal process.
- How to find out if the existing lease has trustees.
- Clarity from Lancaster City Council about what it can offer, what needs to be done.
- Need clarity on the statutory protection of individual sites.
- Lease templates with explanations.
- Simple, informal dialogue-type format.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication with allotment associations should be coordinated, to ensure that all sites receive the same information.

The City Council contacts the ten allotment associations as a priority (those with their leases due for renewal in 2025), to start a process of consultation. A position statement from the council would be extremely helpful to start with, including:

- **Reassuring the allotment sites about their immediate future come March 2025.**
- **Explaining what the council is/will be doing about renewing the leases and Service Level Agreements – processes/timeline.**
- **Providing the associations with suggested actions that they may want to take in preparation for March 2025 – particularly in relation to trustees on present leases.**

Information and independent legal advice be made available to allotment associations to support the lease renewal process, including understanding the new leases (implications/protection from any liabilities) and options for different legal structures which some associations may want to consider. This could be provided as an information session open to all allotments, with both a City Council and independent solicitor present to explain/answer questions about leases and a session on legal structures for associations, supported/funded in part by the City Council and partly from funds from the Allotment Review (UKSPF).

The lease renewal process needs to be actively facilitated and monitored by the City Council by appointing a named lead. Sites may progress at different speeds and allowances need to be made for this, so that they feel supported and not pressured to make decisions.

For allotment associations that are considering options for their legal structures, consider incorporation as co-operative societies (the National Allotment Society – NSALG has a model). This would remove the need to keep track of Trustees, as the Allotment Society would be the tenant rather than the Trustees of the current unincorporated societies. (This recommendation comes from Mark Simmonds of Co-op Culture, a development support adviser to co-operatives and community businesses, who has supported many allotment societies around their governance and structure).

Other ideas

For allotments that may be considering setting up a separate legal structure, hold an information session with representatives from an allotment/allotments in the district who have done this, to answer questions and share what was involved for them.

Allotment associations may want to contact the National Allotment Society (NSALG) for information/resources and support.

Allotment infrastructures and communities

Facilities and restrictions on allotments

Facilities

The facilities on allotment sites for plot holders to use, varies significantly and depends on many factors including the ownership/management of the land, the size of the site, location and topography, the space available (particularly for structures), the history of each site and development over time, financial considerations, access issues, planning restrictions/site rules and time/energy.

The table below shows the site facilities across 21 allotment sites in Lancaster district.

Table 3

Facilities on allotment sites

FACILITIES	NUMBER OF SITES WITH THIS PRESENT
Access to mains water	13 sites (the remaining 8 sites rely on rainwater harvesting – communally or individually)
Access to communal rainwater harvesting from structures	10 sites (some of these sites also have mains water)
Communal polytunnel/greenhouse that can be used by plot holders	8 sites
Compost Toilet	5 sites (no sites have mains water toilets)
Communal tools to use/equipment to borrow or hire, e.g. strimmers/hedge cutters	10 sites
Access to communal manure and/or compost, and/or woodchip	14 sites
Swap area, e.g. plants, seeds, tools, equipment, plant pots (items left for free)	11 sites
Communal seed buying by placing a large seed order together and getting a discount	6 sites use this scheme

Additional facilities mentioned were a shop for buying compost and allotment supplies; a social space; a pizza oven; a hot composting system (newly started); and communal cold composting.

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Is there anything that you would like to see/have/do across the site which is not there at present?**

The most commonly mentioned things were:

- Access to water (15 responses), particularly mains water but also increased rainwater harvesting. During site visits some sites said they were concerned about their water bills (metered water), or their communal rainwater harvesting was not sufficient during the summer on sites with no mains water. 81% of plot holders said they have water butts on their allotment plots. Access to more water butts was mentioned when plot holders were asked what they are doing on their plots/sites to build climate resilience.

"We have increased the number of water butts on our plot but, even so, we ran out during this year's dry early summer, so I'm grateful that there is mains water as well."

Communal rainwater harvesting tanks.

Mains water supply.

- The provision of a toilet (12 responses). Some of these respondents also raised the question as to who would be responsible for cleaning/maintaining a compost toilet if there was one.
- Access to manure/compost/wood chip.

Other improvements/facilities mentioned were:

- Improved security to reduce theft of tools.
- Improved boundary fencing and gates (also linked to security).
- More raised beds for people who are less physically able.
- Access to shredders/strimmers/mowers. Shredders were mentioned for dealing with woody prunings/helping the composting process.
- Access to power on site for charging battery tools.

Communal hand tools for use by plotholders.

Restrictions

- Keeping poultry/pigeons and/or bees.

When asked in the allotment survey, seven sites said they allow poultry/pigeons and/or bees to be kept. One site said they are thinking about allowing bees. Eight sites said they did not allow poultry/pigeons and/or bees to be kept.

During site visits poultry/pigeons and/or bees were seen on six allotments. Some sites have specific plots reserved for livestock and other sites allow livestock to be kept within an existing fruit and vegetable growing plot.

- Use of pesticides and other chemicals on site.

No allotment sites defined themselves as 'organic' sites (i.e. not allowing the use of pesticides or other chemicals). During site visits, a lot of sites said they discourage the use of pesticides and other chemicals, although they were not asked how this was done.

From the responses to the allotment survey, there appears to be uncertainty amongst plot holders as to whether pesticides and other chemicals can be used on their sites. Responses of "yes", "no" and "don't know" were given within the same site for most of the sites (although the numbers of responses from some sites was extremely low, so it's difficult to get a sense as to what this means).

- Bonfires – At least 10 sites allow bonfires (getting the majority of "yes" answers from a site). Only Torrisholme Road allotments had a very clear "no" response (from nine respondents with one "don't know"). The response rate was extremely low from nine sites, so no conclusions can be drawn. From site visits, most bonfires are held on individual plots (rather than in a communal area). Bonfires often have restrictions on them, e.g. only when the wind is blowing away from neighbouring houses.
- Restrictions on planting trees – From the allotment survey, 13 out of 16 sites said that the height of fruit trees is restricted or that fruit trees can now only be grown on dwarfing rootstocks (which restricts the height that they can grow). One site said that bamboo is not allowed to be planted.

Some sites have large established trees on them (both fruit and non-fruiting), which may now be difficult and costly for plot holders and/or committee/management teams to deal with. These may have been planted or left to grow when allotment rules were different, or sites were less well used and monitored.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Sites increase rainwater harvesting – where possible – particularly on any communal structures.

Other Ideas

- **Allotments could have a basic allotment profile on the independent allotment website.**

This profile could provide some basic facility information about each site, e.g. water provision, presence of a toilet, any access issues, topography of the site. It could also include any restrictions, e.g. livestock.

- **Established allotment sites considered examining their site rules around the use of chemical/pesticides. New allotment sites include clear guidance on the use/or not of chemicals/ pesticides in their site rules.**

Facilities to make hot drinks.

Accessibility on allotments

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Do you think that your site needs any improvements to make it more accessible, e.g. for people with a disability/limited mobility, people from different ethnicities, different economic backgrounds, families, people with limited growing experience?**
- **If you answered "yes" to the above question, what improvements do you think could be made?**

Around 70 (35%) of the 197 respondents said they thought there is something that can be done, although some respondents recognised the limitations on their site for developing these ideas, including the cost and maintenance issues and site location (illustrated in the quotes below):

"The nature of the site means it's hard for people with limited mobility and we can't really improve that."

"Accessibility. Due to location ... cannot see how."

"We have discussed how we could potentially use a small unused area for small micro-plots, but the cost seems prohibitive for the perceived gain."

Of the measures mentioned to improve accessibility, the most frequent suggestions were around improving the physical accessibility of sites, with ideas such as:

- More raised beds for people with mobility/health issues.
- Improved access for wheelchairs, mobility scooters, and pushchairs/prams.
- Better paths/path surfaces to make sites more accessible.
- Smaller plots which are easier to maintain/more realistic.
- Improved drainage on boggy sites, so more of the site is accessible.
- Access to a toilet.

Six out of 30 respondents from Fairfield Allotments said that an area of raised beds is being created for people with disabilities/less able. Responses from six other sites mentioned "downsizing", "single beds can be rented", "renting ½ or ¼ plots" and "raised beds" were options on their sites, although numbers responding from these sites was small.

Many of these suggestions were also shared by plot holders when asked about how they will manage their own plots in the next ten years (see Visions for allotment futures section).

Of the measures shared to widen the diversity amongst allotment plot holders, the most frequently mentioned was:

- Support for new plot holders in the form of mentoring and buddy systems, with a small number of respondents mentioning training for new plot holders. These ideas are covered in more detail in the Starting on an allotment section.

A few plot holders suggested:

- More support for people on low incomes to make allotments accessible, for example, through offering bulk buying options and shared tools. This suggestion also came up in one of the community conversations.

"Making it financially easier for people on low incomes, having a mentoring scheme to help less confident people join."

- Having a more personalised approach to supporting individual plot holders who struggle with mental health issues. A couple of respondents mentioned difficulties joining in with work days or attending social events as a result.

"I hate the communal days where we all have to help … I want to help but I'd rather do my hours alone"

A couple of respondents said they knew of previous plot holders who had mental health or physical health issues and the respondents felt they had been "forced" to give up their plots (no other context was given).

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Allotment sites review if anything can be done to improve accessibility, both physical improvements and support systems/mentorship for new plot holders.

Other ideas

- **Creating an area of raised beds** – for people with health or mobility issues.
- **Offering some smaller plots, e.g. quarter plots, for those starting out or downsizing.**
- **Adding accessibility information in allotment profiles on the independent allotment website.**
- **Creating a community plot** – for people who want to work together with others on the allotment site. This is possibly an option for plot holders who don't feel they can continue to manage a plot by themselves or for people with no previous experience of vegetable growing who have applied for a plot of their own.
- **Getting more community groups/outside organisations involved with allotment sites** – through work days, events, or community plots.
- **'Exit form' for plot holders giving up/leaving a site to complete** – asking about reasons for leaving. This could provide useful information for sites.

Starting on an allotment

The Allotment Review Survey asked plot holders:

- **Is there any official mentorship or support system for new plot holders?**
  - 61% of respondents (120 out of 197 replies) said there is no official system on their site.
  - 31% of respondents (59 out of 197 replies) said that they did not know or did not reply.
  - 8% of respondents (15 people) made comments or said "yes".

Some comments are shown in the text box below:

"Written guidance has just been developed for new plot holders This is a new development for us."

"We had a committee member drop by to give us some advice. But it was not ongoing mentorship."

Rows of young beetroot plants.

"A letter of introduction and guidance."

"There are always people available on the site to help you."

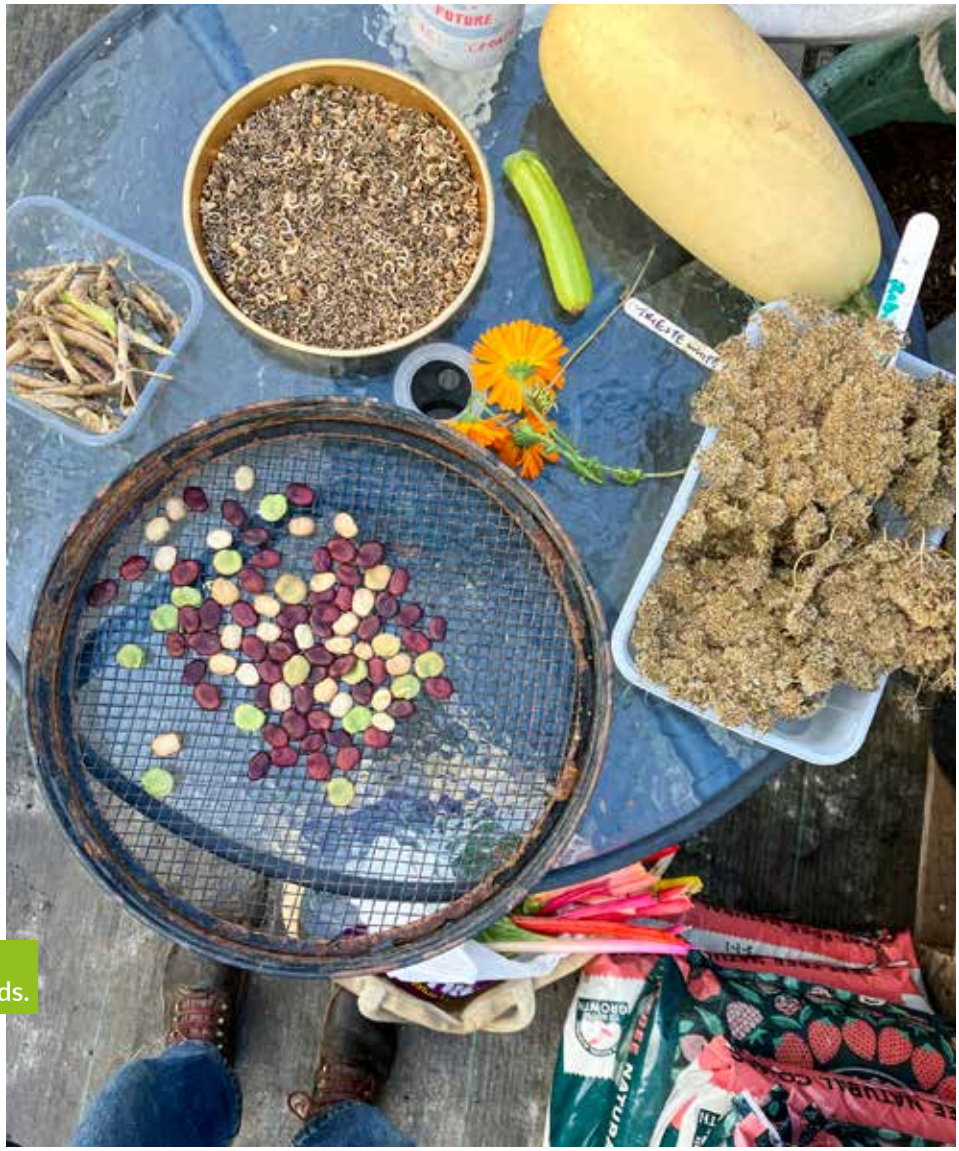
Seed saving workshop at Claver Hill.

"We have lots of people who are complete beginners and although we do not have an official mentoring program, we are all nice and help each other out."

Nineteen plot holders (10% of respondents) suggested having a mentorship/buddy system, when they were asked about how to improve accessibility. This was the most frequent suggestion other than making structural improvements.

The following quotes illustrate this suggestion.

> *"We could do much more to help new plot holders as many people take on a plot then give it up within a year … I think a mentoring/buddy system would identify training needs, offer support, and identify concerns that may be rectified rather than the person leaving the plot."*



Drying and sorting seeds.

An allotment in spring time.

"Induction when new allotmenteers arrive. Some basic training or buddying."

"I think possibly a mentoring scheme for those who are new to growing should be in place, or maybe a city-based series of workshops for potential allotmenteers offered."

A small number of allotment sites offer a 'starter plot system' for new plot holders. These plots are small in size and/or are raised beds where plot holders start off. If they are able to manage these, they are then offered a larger plot (usually a half a plot) when one becomes available.

One site said that they used to do this but found that people did not want to move off their starter plot if they had crops planted and would therefore need to start again elsewhere.

The Allotment Review Survey asked people on waiting lists:

- How confident do you feel that you could manage a plot on an allotment site?
- Is there anything that would help you to feel more confident when you start?

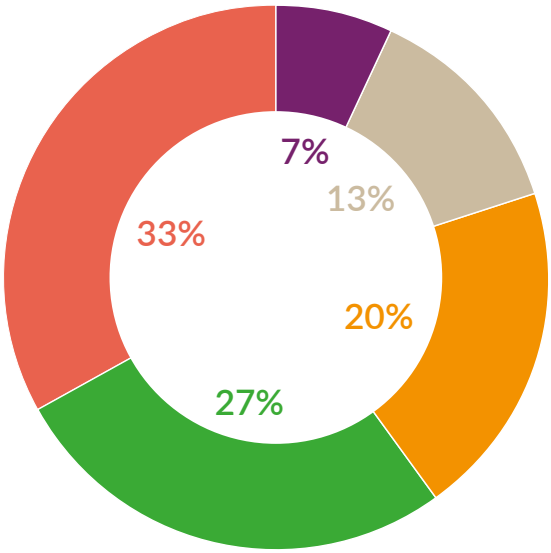
46 people on waiting lists for allotments in the district responded to the survey, with 90% saying that they have previous growing experience.

The pie chart below shows the confidence levels that respondents felt to manage a plot (1=not confident, 5=very confident)

Chart 6

How confident people on waiting lists feel to manage an allotment plot.

How confident do you feel to manage an allotment?



Range: Not confident = 1 2 3 4 5 = Very confident

It is interesting to note that despite 90% of respondents saying that they had previous food-growing experience, only 60% of people said that they felt confident or very confident to manage a plot.

When asked what would help people to feel more confident, the most common responses were:

- Receiving friendly advice.
- Knowledge sharing.
- Help and support from neighbours, plot holders, and committee members.

Other specific ideas mentioned were:

- Having some general site information and rules.
- Information about how to start on a plot.
- Introduction course/workshops and training.
- Seasonal planting ideas.
- Suggestions of jobs to do.
- Book/resource suggestions.

Some quotes that illustrate this include:

"A supportive committee and a structure for sharing advice, spare produce, and seeds."

"Just friendly people and shared knowledge."

"... just knowing where to start with laying beds out, etc. An introduction course would be fabulous, but I would still be happy to give it a go."

Other responses were concerned with practical issues such as: access to water, woodchip/manure, seeds, tools and tool storage, easy access to the site (don't drive), not starting with an overgrown plot, help to access a greenhouse, information about the soil.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide a 'Welcome Pack' for new plot holders containing information about the site; site values, how the site is run (e.g. devolved management), committee structure and roles (if present), volunteering, rules and decision-making processes, communication channels and details, facilities, seasonal jobs to do (or links to helpful websites), how to get help/support. A template could be created for sites to adapt (available on the independent allotment website).

Other ideas

- **Create an official mentorship/buddy system for new plot holders.**
- **Offer starter plots or ¼ plots for new plot holders** – for a probationary period, e.g. one growing season.
- **Work alongside other plot holders/communal starter plot.**

Peas and beans.

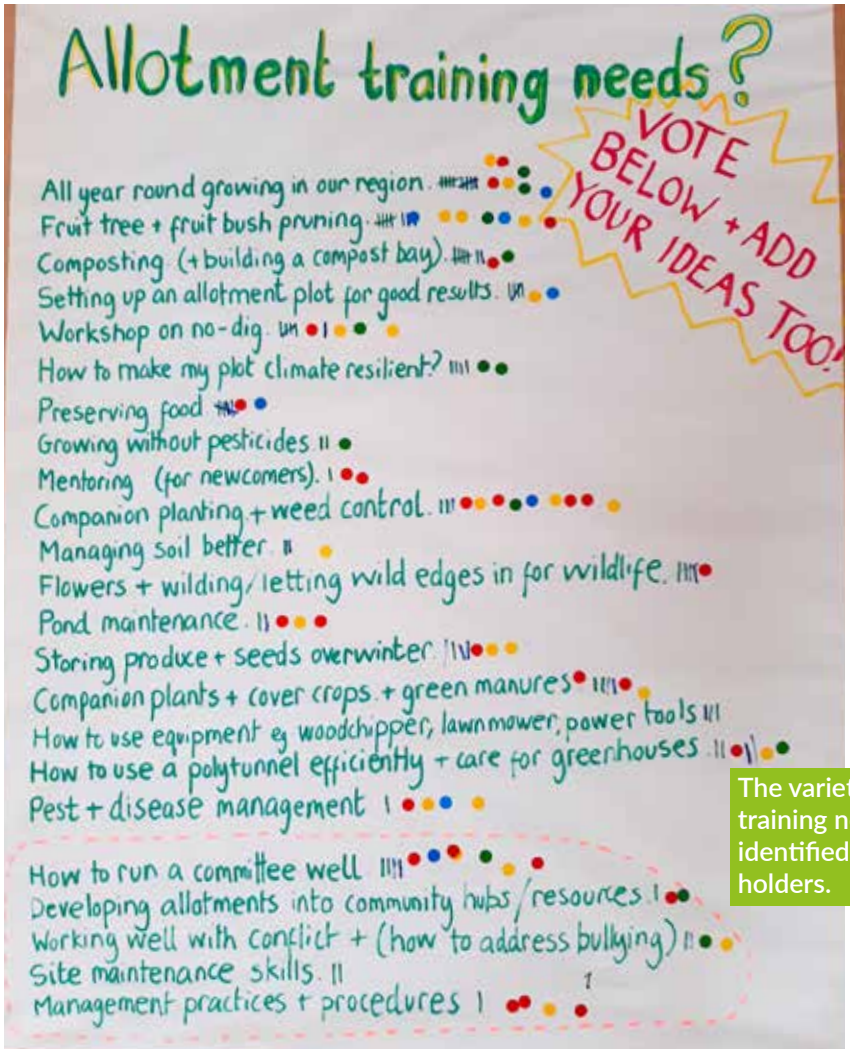
Training needs of plot holders and committees

The Allotment Review Survey asked a series of questions to plot holders and committee members/management teams about training:

- **Do you have any particular training needs which would help you to improve how you manage your own plot?**
- **Do you know of any training needs that have been identified by plot holders on your site? (asked of committee/management team members)**
- **Does your site run any training for plot holders?**
- **As a committee/management team member, do you feel you need any training to carry out your role fully?**

Training for plot holders

Over 20 different training needs were mentioned by plot holders (see photo below). This board was taken to the four community conversations and at an Allotment Review Stall at Potato Day in Lancaster to capture additional ideas and numbers interested.



The variety of training needs identified by plot holders.

The top four training needs requested were on the following practical subjects:

- How to grow all year round in this region (21 plot holders voted for this).
- Fruit tree and fruit bush pruning (16 votes).
- Companion planting and weed control (12 votes).
- Workshop on 'no-dig' gardening techniques (10 votes).

The need for management related training was also identified by a small number of plot holders (8 responses) with suggestions for training in:

- How to run a committee.
- Management practices and procedures.
- Dealing effectively with bullying/harassment.
- Managing conflict and site maintenance skills.

Training for Committee/Management Team Members

When committee/management team members were asked if they felt they needed any training to carry out their role fully, only three out of 27 respondents replied "yes". The following topics were requested:

- Grant applications.
- Property law.
- Allotment law.
- Committee member training/being on a committee.

The need for training around effective committee membership/roles was highlighted in another part of the survey, in response to questions about how to encourage more people to get involved on committees (see Involvement and volunteering on sites section). A couple of quotes below illustrate this point:

"How to run an effective committee would be wonderful, especially in helping more people to put their names forward."

"Committee training would help the existing committee run more effectively and might encourage others to join."

When asked if training was provided on site, none of the allotment sites said they offer any regular or formal training. A few respondents said that there was ad-hoc training:

"Only on specific issues related to essential health and safety, e.g. using a communal strimmer."

"Defibrillator training."

"I do training in coppicing/ hedge laying when needed."

Some responses mentioned that skills and knowledge could be shared on site by/ amongst plot holders. Some sites said that this happens informally at present.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Share information about existing training with allotment sites, e.g. training opportunities through the FoodFutures network or Claver Hill. This could be done by allotments signing up to the FoodFutures newsletter or via the independent allotment website and coordinated as part of the Allotment Development Worker role (see Allotment development worker role section).

Establish training on specific subjects for plot holders and committee/management teams – supported by the remaining UKSPF funding from the Allotment Review. Other possible sources for provision could be through the FoodFutures network and inclusion as part of the Allotment Development Worker role.

Other ideas

- **Sites offer their own 'in-house' training or skill-sharing opportunities for plot holders.**
- **Site visits to other allotments/community growing projects for specific training and skill sharing**, e.g. community composting, hot composting, coppicing, pruning. This could be done as part of the funding from the Allotment Review.

Shared community spaces and community-run plots

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **The committee/management team: Are there any communally run plots or plots used by community groups/outside organisations?**
- **Plot holders: Are there any shared community growing spaces on your site which a plot holder could be involved in, if they are unable to continue on an individual plot?**

Eleven allotment sites said they rent plots to individuals only. Five allotment sites said they rent a plot or plots to community groups/outside organisations. These sites are shown in the table below.

Table 4:

Allotment sites which rent plots to community groups/outside organisations

ALLOTMENT SITE	COMMUNITY RUN PLOTS/PLOTS USED BY COMMUNITY GROUPS/OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS
Ambleside Road	Cancer care, Red Rose Recovery, Lancaster Men's Hub, Ukrainian Refugees, Cubs' work parties for badges
Cork Road (1 committee member)	Bee Plot, Bespoke Training Design
Cork Road (1 committee member)	BDA (no details given of what these initials stand for)
Dorrington Road	Headway
Fairfield	Steiner School
Greenfingers (1 committee member)	The Bay – a blueprint for recovery
Greenfingers (1 committee member)	Changing to a community group associated with Eden

There were mixed responses about whether there are any shared community growing spaces on sites for plot holders who are unable to continue on an individual plot. Answers of “yes” “no” and “don’t know” were given by respondents within the same sites. This may be down to individual interpretations of ‘shared community growing spaces’ and may also reflect plot holders' knowledge of their own site.

“Communal polytunnels” were mentioned as shared community growing spaces by a couple of sites, although no details were given as to what this meant and how plot holders can get involved in these communal spaces.

Involvement with “site maintenance”, “orchard”, “flower beds” and “wildlife area” were also mentioned by four sites, as a way for people to get involved in shared spaces on site.

In summary

No allotments mentioned any firm arrangements for plot holders if they become less able to look after their plots. ‘Downsizing’ (i.e. reducing the size of your plot) was the most common answer, reducing a full to ½ plot. A few sites mentioned having ¼ plots available or raised beds.

IDEAS

Sites offer ¼ plots for plot holders who want to downsize (see Accessibility on allotments section).

Sites provide an area of raised beds for plot holders where possible (see Accessibility on allotments section).

Create a communally run plot – using a model such as the Spud Club at Claver Hill.

Poached egg plant flowering around currants.

Involvement and volunteering on sites

Practical Volunteering on Site

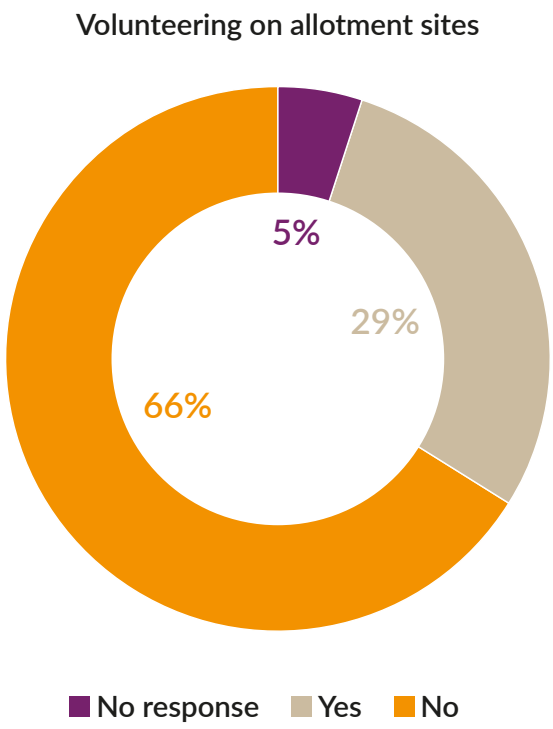
The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Do you volunteer on any community-run plots on your allotment site/care for any communal space on site? Please specify.**

57 respondents (29%) said that they volunteer on their allotment site, 130 people said they do not (see Chart 7 below).

Chart 7

Percentage volunteering on allotment sites (total responses 197)



Ornamental alliums add colour in May.

Of the 57 people who said that they volunteer, 34 gave details of what they do. These are listed in order of most frequently mentioned:

- Help with community work days across the site/communal facilities.
- Mowing the grass in communal areas/paths.
- Maintaining the facilities.
- Care for communal planting areas/community garden.
- Helping with the newly set up community composting area (Fairfield allotments).
- Help hedge cutting.
- Help clearing vacant plots before new plot holders start.
- Litter picking on the site.

During site visits, it was frequently mentioned that the “same people” generally volunteer on work days (on sites that held these) and that the burden of site work is not shared equally amongst plot holders. Two sites said they offer a rent-free/reduced-rent plot for specific volunteers who do the majority of the regular site maintenance, e.g. grass mowing.

A lot of sites (particularly City Council sites) mentioned being heavily reliant on volunteers for practical maintenance tasks, such as mowing/strimming of paths and communal areas, hedge cutting, maintaining boundary fencing, and helping to clear vacant plots. Volunteer plot holders not only offer their labour for free, which keeps maintenance costs down: but on some sites, they can access materials for a site such as cheaper building supplies or manure/woodchip via their friends/family or work contacts.

Volunteering for a committee/management team role (on sites that have committees)

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Have you previously held a committee/management team role?**
- **If "yes", what role, for how long, and why did you stop?**
- **Have you ever considered joining the committee/management team?**
- **If "yes" what if anything has stopped you from joining?**

Just under 20% of respondents said they had held a committee/management position in the past (a few on other sites). Commonly cited reasons for stepping down included:

- Serious disputes/conflict with plot holders or amongst committee members.
- Breakdowns in the decision-making processes.
- Lack of support and guidance from the City Council (particularly around conflict).
- Too busy.
- Moved away.
- Done enough.

Some quotes from previous committee members include:

"There was a terrible dispute between the then chair and other team members. I was not involved, and it put me off forever."

"Committee member, Chair for a while. I stopped because I became too busy with other activities."

"I realised it affected the therapeutic benefits of being an allotment holder!"

When asked if plot holders have ever considered joining the committee/management team 42 respondents (24.7%) said they had considered this, 100 respondents said no

(58.8%) and 28 people did not answer this question (16.5%).

Reasons for not acting on this interest included:

- Lack of time/other commitments.
- Lack of confidence.
- Lack of clarity in committee roles and purpose.
- Problems (including bullying/intimidation) and conflict within the present committee or between the committee and plot holders.
- Not liking someone on the present committee.
- Not feeling that their contribution would be valued/lack of willingness to change anything.

The quotes below illustrate these feelings:

"Time away, lack of useful skills, commitments elsewhere."

"Not yet, wait until I'm retired."

"Lack of clarity about the role, relationship with the council and the extent of personal/collective liability."

"I can't cope with meetings. I've been on committees before, and they always have a toxic element. People always fall out. I struggle with people having conflicts with each other."

"I tried to make some suggestions,

but it seemed obvious they weren't open to doing things differently."

"Poor relationship with current chair."

Apple blossom.

During the community conversations, attendees were asked for their thoughts to the question:

- **What can be done to support 'healthy' committees that plot holders want to join?**

The most common suggestions shared were:

- Providing more information about what committees do such as the roles, the rules, how long people can stand on committees for.
- Sharing information more frequently with plot holders (not just at the AGM), e.g. what is going on around the site and what decisions need to be made/have been made, as a way to raise awareness and get people interested in getting involved on the site. Suggested methods for doing this were through newsletters, minutes, and waiting-list information being made available.

There was also acknowledgement that getting people involved in any committee can be challenging, not just on allotments committees.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Information about volunteering/committee roles is included in the 'Welcome pack' to new plot holders (especially on devolved sites which rely on plot).

Create committee member role descriptions (including responsibilities) – to help advertise and explain roles. This could be done as part of the Allotment Development Worker role and made available to sites on the independent allotment website.

Offer training on specific subjects around committee participation (as identified in Training needs of plot holders and committees **section).**

Other ideas

Undertake a voluntary skills audit of existing plot holders – to find out what skills plot holders have, what time they can offer and in what areas, e.g. IT skills, communication, fundraising experience, committee experience, building skills, mentorship and training experience, horticultural skills/training, design and photography skills (e.g. for website, newsletters, signage). This could identify other ways in which plot holders may want to get involved on their site, without taking on a committee member role.

Support and mentorship for plot holders interested in a committee role – to gain supported experience in the role.

Consider a maximum period of time for committee members to hold a role or possibly rotating roles.

Link the Annual General Meeting on sites with a social element (e.g. food/drinks) to get more people connected with each other and the site.

Social events on allotments

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Does your site run any social events for plot holders?**

The results show that most allotment sites don't run specific social events (19 sites responded).

Of the five sites where specific social events were mentioned, this included BBQs, a potluck meal, Spring/Summer open days, plant sale, Halloween/pumpkin events, and coffee mornings.

Some respondents mentioned 'work days' and/or the Annual General Meeting as an opportunity to socialise with other plot holders.

Two sites said that they had tried social events in the past, but these were not well supported.

"Social events were tried in the past but were never well attended."

Covid restrictions were also mentioned as a time when social events didn't happen or got cancelled.

During site visits, a few sites mentioned having a social/recreation/wildlife area on site so plot holders could gather together. Not all sites have or can have this due to their existing layout/practicalities of their sites/finances; so spaces for people to gather together can be limited or not possible on some sites.

Plot holders valued the social side of having an allotment, however, this may be down to individual friendships/relationships on site, rather than as more organised/larger group activities.

Bumble bee on chives.

Natural Dyes workshop at Claver Hill.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

New sites are designed from the outset with a social space/spaces for plot holders to use. Creating a space for socialising makes it easier to happen and also provides space for other things to happen on sites, e.g. events/training, etc.

Other ideas

- **Existing sites consider creating a social space.**
- **A social element is built around Annual General Meetings.**
- **Holding an allotment festival.**

Allotment surplus and abundance

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Are you able to use/distribute all the produce that comes from your allotment plot?**
- **What do you do with any surplus from your allotment plot?**

161 (82%) of plot holders who replied said that they are able to use/distribute all the produce that comes from their plots. Only 13 people (6.5%) said that they could not use/distribute all their produce. 25 people (12.5%) did not respond to this question.

Most plot holders (142) said that they give surplus produce to:

- friends/family (110)
- give away or swap (20)
- give to other plot holders (9)
- give to work colleagues (3).

Of the 161 respondents who replied to the survey, 41 people (25%), said they freeze/dry/pickle/bottle any surplus and some of these also said they give surplus away.

16 respondents said their produce is donated or sold for charity either on the allotment site, given to Eggcup or a local food club, or fruit given to Claver Hill for juicing (a local community-growing project).

Three plot holders across three sites mentioned the need for harvesting communal fruit trees:

"We need to do something about this, especially apples on communal fruit trees."

Apple harvest.

The Allotment Review Survey also asked:

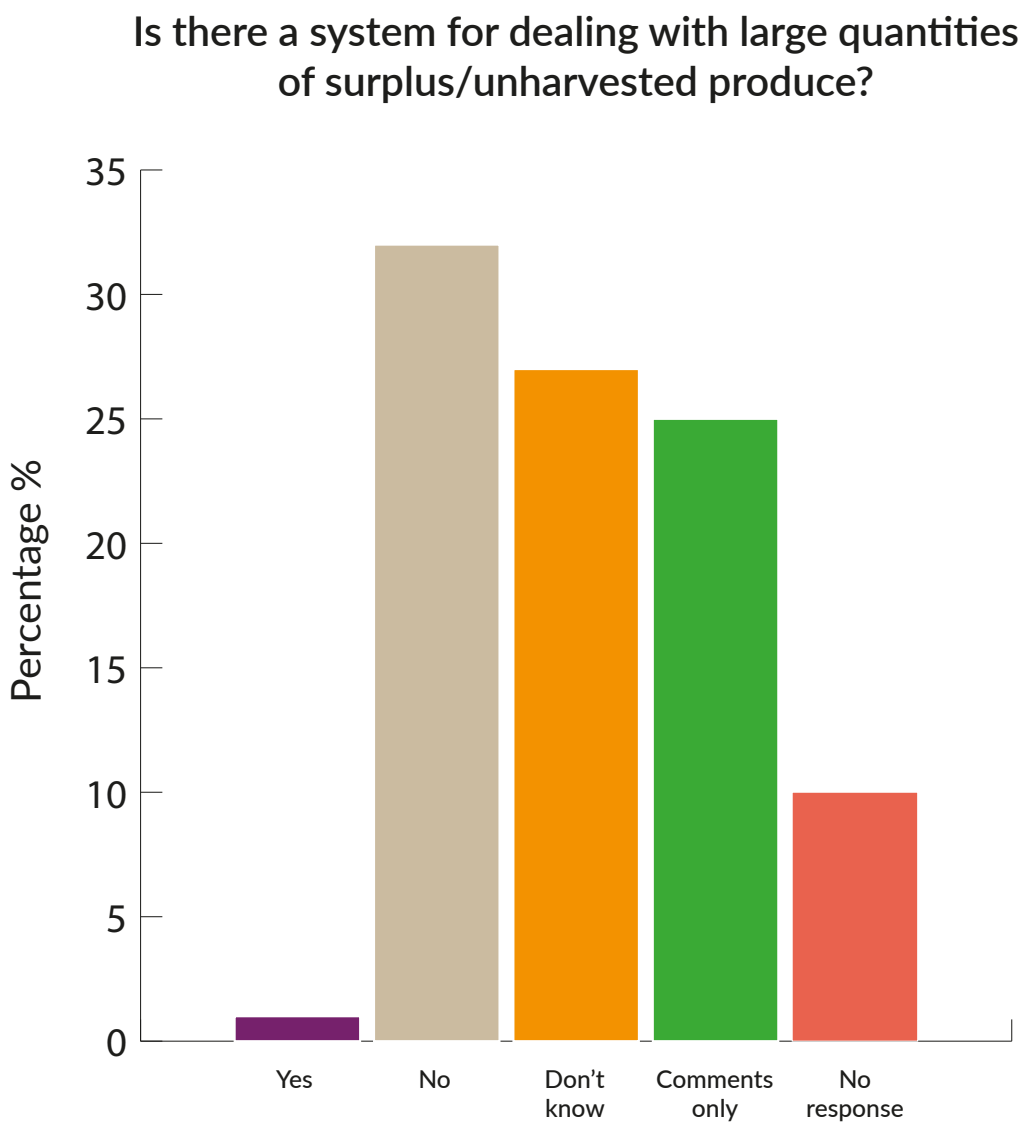
- **Is there a system/process across the allotment site (all the plots) for dealing with large quantities of surplus or produce that isn't harvested?**
- **Have you/would you get involved in a system for dealing with large quantities of surplus produce?**

Only two people said there was a system on their site for dealing with large quantities of surplus or produce that isn't harvested, but neither respondent said what this is.

Chart 8, below, shows the percentage responses to the first question.

Chart 8

Is there a system on your allotment site for dealing with surplus/abundance



Of the comments made, a lot mentioned the systems individuals already use for distributing their surplus, e.g. “surplus box outside the gate for people to take”, “leave for people to take”, “sold in surplus sale.”

Several comments mentioned not having a system on site, or not having a site-wide system:

“No official system on the site, it is down to individuals to arrange for this.”

“There is still produce that is never harvested on some plots and there is no mechanism to get that used.”

An abundance of allotment produce (beans, tomatoes and spring onions).

"No formal process but individual plot holders do donate their produce to food banks, local good causes, etc."

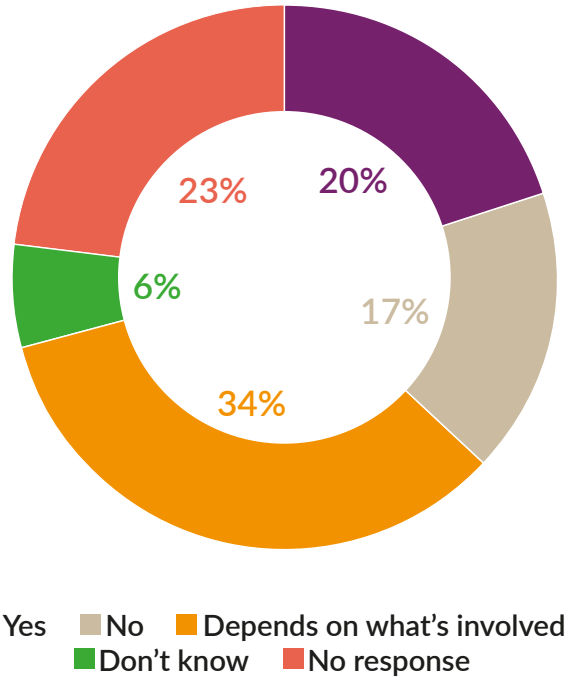
Seasonal surplus of tomatoes, salads and raspberries.

When plot holders were asked if they would get involved in a system for dealing with large quantities of surplus produce, the responses were mixed. 40 respondents said "yes", 30 said "no", 60 said "depends on what's involved", 12 said "don't know", and 46 gave no response (see chart 9 below).

Chart 9

How willing are plot holders to get involved with a system for dealing with surplus produce?

Would you get involved in a system for dealing with large scale surplus produce on your site?



When plot holders were asked to explain their answers, their comments were categorised into the following areas:

a) Plot holders don't have much surplus or don't see much surplus on the site. This ties into the previous responses about what plot holders do with their surplus.

"Don't have enough surplus to participate really."

"I don't think there is a large surplus of produce."

b) They don't have time/capacity to set up a site-wide system themselves.

"No time."

"I'd have to be clear about how much time and energy it would take."

"Managing a plot is enough for me."

c) Plot holders would use a system if it was easy, reliable, and set up already.

"If a system was set up, I would help."

"I would if something was set up."

"Would provide surplus crops. Would not want to get involved with organisation."

"I don't have a lot of time to put effort into doing something extra ... so the system would need to be easy."

d) Practical issues were mentioned.

"I think there would be a lot of practical problems to overcome (storage, collection and distribution quality/hygiene)."

"Organising, collecting, distributing?"

Plot holders who said where they would like the surplus to go, all mentioned to a food charity/to help people on low incomes.

In summary

- No allotments have a site-wide system for dealing with surplus produce.
- Most individual plot holders distribute their surpluses themselves.
- Plot holders had mixed feelings about getting involved in a site-wide surplus distribution system. Most comments were around lack of time to set this up or using it only if it was set up already/easy to use/practical.

IDEAS

Start a conversation with allotment sites and existing projects that deal with surplus food (e.g. The Gleaning Network, local food clubs, FoodFutures) – to explore what systems are in place already for picking/collecting/distributing fresh surplus and whether links can be made with individual sites.

Consider asking a food club representative to join/come along to their nearest allotment committee/management team – to establish a link locally that shares a two-way flow of information and supports distributing fresh surplus food to those that need it.

A plum harvest.

Having multiple plots

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Do you have more than one plot on the site?**
- **Do you have plots on other allotment sites in Lancaster District?**

28 respondents (14%) said that they have more than one allotment plot on their site, however people were not asked why this was, e.g. two half plots (that make a whole plot) or a plot for livestock and one for fruit/veg. During site visits it was mentioned on one site, that, up until recently, having an allotment was not so popular, so some older plot holders took on several plots that were not in use and have kept these going.

Nine respondents (4%) said that they have a plot on another site, but the reason for this was not asked. During conversations at Lancaster Potato Day, a couple of individual plot holders said that they had plots on other sites, as they had moved to a site closer to where they live, but wanted to keep the old plot as they know the community/have invested in the plot/were involved in the management of the original site.

Sites were not asked if their rules allow plot holders to have multiple plots although interpretation of this may be different now that full plots are commonly being split into halves (someone wanting a full plot could have two separate half plots on the site).

Sites were not asked if there is a question in their application process to find out if people have a plot already elsewhere, and what they are intending to do about this and/or asking them to give this up.

Although the number of plot holders with multiple plots is relatively small, bearing in mind the long waiting lists for plots across the district, it does raise the question: is it appropriate for people to have several plots (in excess of a full plot) or plots on several sites?

» RECOMMENDATION

Site rules include a restriction on people from having an allotment plot elsewhere from now. This could be determined during the application process.

Limit allotment plot holders to the equivalent of one full plot on a site from now (livestock plots could be considered separately).

Plot inspections

There were no specific questions asked about plot inspections in the Allotment Review Survey however, during site visits, some of the challenges with carrying out plot inspections were mentioned from quite a few sites. Some respondents also made comments about this within the survey.

During site visits, most sites said there is a process for checking that plots are being used and maintained sufficiently. This is done by plot inspections – walking around the site by committee members/landowner or representatives to assess how well each plot is being used and looked after. If a plot is considered to be neglected, then the plot holder is contacted and usually asked to improve their plot within a specified time frame, with follow-up inspections and further contact if required. After that, sites may issue a warning letter and finally a notice to quit if a plot is not assessed as being used/ maintained sufficiently.

Making the decision about what is 'acceptable' in terms of plot use and maintenance is down to whoever does the plot inspections. Some sites are more/less strict with plot inspection standards than others. Some sites said that having a certain "percentage area under cultivation for fruit and vegetables" is a requirement within their allotment rules. This can help when doing site inspections, as it gives people a benchmark to use for their decision making. A couple of sites mentioned some of the additional benefits that allotments bring to plot holders (e.g. improved mental health) and these factors were also considered when looking at the state of some plots. Quite a few sites said that allowances were made for plot holders if something unexpected happens and they are informed about this, e.g. ill health/family issues.

Issues with 'neglected plots'

Some sites mentioned how quickly plots can become overgrown if they are not cultivated, which can cause extra work/problems for the next person taking over the plot. Some sites also said that it is unfair on those who are on the waiting list if plots are not being used sufficiently by present tenants and have become 'neglected'. Sometimes plot holders on neighbouring plots make comments about "poorly managed plots" or concerns about weeds spreading.

Some sites mentioned difficulties deciding whether a plot is being sufficiently used, particularly when some work has been started, e.g. vegetables planted, but then nothing has been done for quite some time. Different gardening styles such as 'no-dig', 'wildlife gardening' and 'forest gardening' were mentioned on some sites as causing particular problems when assessing cultivation on plots, as opposed to traditional digging and linear planting of individual crops.

The Allotment Review survey did not ask plot holders for their perspectives, although a few comments were given in other sections of the survey about pressures to have plots looking a certain way, such as:

> *"Less pressure for the allotment to look a certain way, i.e. removing rotten wood, keeping grass mowed."*

> *"There seems to be a lot of interest in how productive a plot 'appears', rather than the learning or processes that are happening. A more welcoming approach, especially if plot holders are learning would be beneficial."*

During the community conversations, people were invited to write their comments on the following question:

- **How can sites balance plot inspections (how flexibly plots are accessed) with the need/ pressure to manage waiting lists?**

The most common responses were:

- Having a centralised waiting list to provide transparency about waiting list management and enable people to be matched with a plot across sites. No details were given as to how this could be done and who could manage this.

Other answers covered areas such as:

- Having several people making the decision about what is a 'good enough' standard for a plot.
- Support/help for new plot holders and an understanding that people can ask for help/advice if they are struggling.
- Having smaller, more manageable, plots.

IDEAS

Carry out site inspections as a group, to share the decision-making process and get a wider range of perspectives.

Mentorship/buddy systems for new plot holders – to offer support.

Allotments for the future

Allotment development worker role

» RECOMMENDATION

Create an independent Allotment Development Worker Role to support present and future allotments to thrive across the District; to work on the recommendations within this report; and take a lead in holding an overview of the allotment network.

A clear, well-thought-through job description would be needed to ensure clarity of purpose. The role could be supported by LESS, but funding would need to be found.

Visions for allotment futures

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **If you continue to manage your own individual plot in ten years' time (when you are ten years older), what will it look like/be like?**

Generally, replies to this question fell into the following categories:

- As it is now, no changes are needed.
- Improved facilities, e.g. new sheds, greenhouses, and sitting areas.
- Improved knowledge and skill, e.g. to be more productive, use 'no dig' methods.
- More manageable with ageing and climate change.

Some quotes about ageing:

"Easier to manage as I am ageing."

"More raised beds to make it easier. More wildlife-friendly areas."

"Manageable as I would be 70 and would be looking towards raised beds. I'd like to see a community spirit."

"More focus on perennial plants, fruit in particular as less labour intensive."

A surplus of damsons.

Some quotes about climate adaptations:

"More fruit, as fruit is more resistant to climate change: also, it's less work and saves me more money."

"Hopefully, I can go on more permaculture courses so that my site will be climate resilient and be better in terms of soil health."

"More streamlined to grow exactly what works for the soil/climate and what we actually need."

Young stalks of early rhubarb.

Some respondents envisioned their fruit trees and fruit bushes maturing which they said they looked forward to. A few plot holders lamented that they would have to give up their plot in ten years. Some said that they would need help to continue on their plots in ten years' time.

Given the enormous range of benefits that allotments bring, it is not surprising that people want to continue on them for as long as possible and may have concerns about how to do this. A quote to illustrate this:

"At the moment, if you give up your plot due to health problems there is no option to stay involved with the site. This strikes me as very sad, particularly if people have gardened there for many years."

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Please share your vision for your allotment site in ten years' time (how it could be run and what it could be like/look like)?**

Most respondents (143 = 72%) shared their vision for their allotment site. The most commonly expressed themes were:

- Having improved facilities and sharing across the site.

Some quotes to illustrate this:

"A composting loo would be helpful. Maybe more shared on-site facilities."

"Fence to reduce vandalism. Access to water other than self-collected rain."

"Would like more communal resources, e.g. shared polytunnels, tool share, bulk delivery of wood chips/ manure to the site for all plot holders to access."

"Better use of resources so we have a shared shed with tools for people to borrow rather than everyone buying a strimmer, etc."

"A mentoring and knowledge/ skill-sharing system. Surplus and supplies sharing arrangements."

- Concerns for the longer-term future of the site, particularly in relation to council budgets and the possibility of selling off allotment sites. Some quotes to illustrate this:

"Protecting the site from closure from the council."

"I hope it is still there and hasn't disappeared to build more houses."

"I would be pleased if we can just carry on as we are, so many get sold off."

- **Having well-managed plots, more accessible plots, and more support/diversity, particularly for new plot holders.**

Some quotes to illustrate this:

"All plots well managed and productive, lots more accessible raised beds, keep building on the diversity of plot-holders, more communal work, plant, seed and seedling sharing."

Broad bean seeds.

"Would like to see people take more time to maintain plots. Lots of weeds which spread quickly and make the job harder to do. New members don't appreciate how much work needs to go into a plot."

"Full use of plots – and greater support for new plot holders."

"More active. well-managed plots. More diversity of tenants – ethnic and also class... younger plot holders."

- **Opportunities for more social connections and building more community connections were mentioned.**

Some quotes to illustrate this:

"Community area and the occasional social."

"There needs to be a better community management approach where we have better facilities such as a communal space where we can chat, share ideas, make hot drinks."

"More connections with local communities. More social interaction with members onsite."

"Could have a community area to teach people how to grow. Have schools involved to teach them about how things grow and what is healthy."

- Sites are fine as they are and don't need anything else in the future.

Some quotes to illustrate this:

> *"I love it how it is."*

> *"I would have no problem with the site being run and existing unchanged in the future."*

Water butts and compost bays.

> *"I think it is great as it is."*

When plot holders were asked what is needed to achieve their visions for their site in ten years, answers included:

- Better finances, funding, and resources to undertake projects.
- More input and support from the council, particularly with funding.
- More volunteers/involvement from plot holders particularly younger (fitter) plot holders and plot holders with more time.
- More people/different people on committees, particularly younger members.
- More communication and listening between plot holders and committee members.
- Monitoring committees and keeping things in line, possibly from outside of the site.
- Mentorship/buddy systems to support new plot holders.
- Training for new plot holders.
- Encourage local communities and charities to get involved.
- More visibility of allotments and what they do, and where they are, so they are valued more.

The Allotment Review Survey asked:

- **Please describe what your vision is for allotments sites across Lancaster District in ten years' time (what they could be like together).**

More than half of the people who responded envisaged increased provision of allotment sites as a future vision (90 out 197 responses = 46%).

Some quotes illustrate this:

"More sites than there are, as there are always people on long waiting lists to get a site."

"Hope there'll be more allotments for people who would like one."

A sunny day in winter.

"I think there should be double the number of sites available. It is heartbreaking that people have to wait so long for access to land."

More connections between allotment sites was mentioned, with opportunities for shared training, sharing of resources, experience, and support.

"I'd love it if representatives from each site got together to discuss stuff, both good and bad."

"Regular meetings or contact with all committee members on allotment sites to share and pool ideas and resources."

"Speak to each other, including sharing waiting lists so that people living nearest to a site get a plot there."

"A larger community linked up to share ideas, training, facilities."

Allotments being seen as community assets/collective spaces/community hubs was mentioned, although what these ideas actually meant to respondents was not described.

"Real community hubs where everyone is welcome, LOADS of food is produced, and wildlife can thrive in the same space!"

"We could be more coordinated about seeing them as a community asset (though I think there always needs to be space for people to do their own thing)."

A very small number of plot holders specifically stated they wanted allotments to be stress-free places that are free from any bullying, harassment, and being told what to do by others.

Suggestions of how to achieve the visions for allotments across the district in ten years included:

- More land made available for allotments.
- More investment and support from councils to develop more sites and support less-thriving sites.
- Communication and discussion between allotment sites.
- Creating a development strategy and plan for each site to help identify and focus its priorities.
- Holding an Allotment festival.
- Open Allotment Days with walks between allotment sites.

While many respondents supported more connection between allotment sites, a small number of people endorsed the current independence and autonomy of each allotment site to be maintained.

Summary of allotment visioning

The following vision for Lancaster District's allotments was created from the responses to all the questions above and shared for comments during the community conversations.

> *"The year is 2035 and allotments across Lancaster District are thriving. There are many more allotment sites across the district, and they are better connected and accessible for a range of abilities. There are age-proofed plots (with more raised beds, sharing schemes, and wheelchair accessible areas). More experienced allotment folk mentor newcomers and new growers, and surplus produce is shared with those who need it (food banks and food clubs). Sites are diverse, climate resilient and autonomous, but they are better connected across the district with open days, an allotment festival, skill shares, equipment sharing and bulk ordering, and training. There is better representation on allotment sites and committees and tasks are more distributed, with people holding roles that fit with their skills, interests, and time. There is training available for new or aspiring committee members and new food growers and preservers. There are functional support processes for any conflicts that emerge. Allotments are spaces for solitude, relaxing, and socialising, and they are managed in a supportive and kind way.*

This vision was used at the start of the four community conversations and the City Council focus group meeting, to help participants imagine how allotments in the district could be in the future. This vision was supported by all attendees and may be a helpful start for agreeing a collective vision that shapes a district-wide strategy for supporting allotments going forwards.

At the Lancaster City Council Focus Group meeting, attendees were asked their reactions to the shared vision for District allotments in the future. They were also asked what support and resources there are to support this.

All council attendees (10 people) were positive towards the shared vision, a couple of quotes illustrate this:

> *"This vision sounds fantastic and exactly what we would want."*

> *"Inclusivity, forward thinking, all-encompassing."*

Three said it was a good ideal, however resources (including staff time) and funding would be needed to achieve this. One person did not comment.

When asked what people saw their role to be within this vision, responses included:

- Facilitation/enabling and supporting others to achieve this.
- Expertise and support with legal agreements, governance, and lease arrangements.
- Support with external funding applications.
- Support to build connections across groups.
- Pushing for policy change and cheer leading the ideas.
- Support through the ongoing Open Space Study.

When asked about support needs and resources, replies included:

- Not having sufficient time to do this work or not doing existing work in order to provide the support described to allotments.
- Additional resources with the right expertise needed.
- Support with brokering agreements and dealing with the numerous aspects or allotments and their development.
- A clear remit from the City Council as to its role beyond that of a landlord.
- Many people commented that given the financial difficulties and constraints for the council at present, it is difficult to see how any financial/resource commitments can be made for the next ten years.

» RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a district-wide strategy for supporting allotment futures and the visions shared.[30]

A mix of herbs and insect attracting flowers.

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Appendix

Scope of the review

The Lancaster District Allotment Review was completed over eight months (September 2023-April 2024) by a freelance researcher employed by LESS (LESS UK – Promoting Sustainable Living) and with support from the FoodFutures coordinator. Two additional researchers helped analyse the survey data.

The review covers allotment sites within the Lancaster District Political Boundary (both City Council, Town and Parish owned sites and privately owned sites).

For each allotment site the following was explored:

- Site characteristics and how they are currently used.
- Governance and decision-making processes.
- Health of the site's community.
- Land management processes (e.g. organic/non-organic and shared/community spaces).
- Climate resilience and biodiversity.
- Number and size of plots.
- What's grown and where produce goes.
- Waiting list size.
- How the allotment site contributes to food security locally.
- Any other organisations collaborating with the site.
- What is going well.
- What is not going well.
- Training and other needs of plot holders and committee members.
- Visions for the site for the next 10 years and what is needed to get there,

In between allotment sites the review explored:

- Where are there areas of high demand but no allotments?
- Are there cases where people have multiple allotment plots across several sites, including on sites with big waiting lists?
- To what extent are allotments contributing to the council's strategic priorities and are there opportunities for better alignment?
- What other community-led food growing models are there in the district (other than allotments)? How do these compare and what appetite is there for adopting these models?

The review also looked at National legislation around allotment provision and resources that are available to support and develop allotments going forward.

Details of the methodology

Data for the review was gathered in the following ways:

- An online allotment survey was distributed to allotment plot holders, allotment committee members/management teams and people on waiting lists or interested in allotments/community food growing. 197 responses were received from plot holders (some of whom may also be committee members), 27 responses were received from committee members to specific committee/management questions, 46 responses were received from people on waiting lists/interested in allotments or community food growing.
- Twenty allotment site visits were carried out, using a checklist of questions including site topography, what is grown, communal facilities/services, security issues/concerns, access issues, and questions about biodiversity.
- Eleven individual interviews were carried out, including with a previous Chief Executive of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, with a local parish councillor, a development support adviser to co-operatives and community businesses, a solicitor, an allotment officer (for a neighbouring district) and a former allotment committee member in the district. Topics covered included: the history of allotments within the UK and Lancaster District, governance and legal structures, the role of the allotment officer, private allotment provision in the district, and alternative community food-growing projects.
- Email questions were sent to representatives of Claver Hill Community Food Project for information around how the project runs; ward councillors were asked about areas of high demand for allotments; ten Lancaster City Council-owned allotments sites (those with leases due for renewal in 2025) were asked about their lease renewal and support needs around this.
- Four "Community Conversations" were held in February 2024 (three in person in Lancaster, Morecambe, and Carnforth, and one online). They explored in more depth some of the findings from the Allotment Review Survey. 28 people attended in total.
- An online City Council Focus Group was held in February 2024, with key staff who have involvement/interest/an overview of the City Council allotments. The meeting explored visions for allotments in the future and the resources available to support this to happen. 10 people attended and an additional online reply was received from one person who had been unable to attend.
- An Allotment Review stall (at Lancaster Potato Day) asked questions about unmet need for allotments and training needs of plot holders.
- Visits to two community food-growing projects in the district were carried out – at Claver Hill and Scotch Quarry.
- Online research and background reading was also carried out.

Biodiversity Monitoring

What was done on site (using a checklist):

- Recording of cultivated plants, fruit bushes, and fruit trees on sites.
- Noting common wild flowers/plants.
- Recording the presence of insect-attracting plants on site, seed heads left for wildlife, berried shrubs.
- Recording native hedging and trees on site and on boundaries.
- Recording non-native hedging on site and on boundaries.
- Recording the presence of created wildlife areas or areas left for wildlife.
- Recording the presence of ponds/natural water sources.
- Recording the presence of dead hedges/log piles/insect hotels/bird boxes and other boxes.
- Recording birdsong to identify birds, using an app (this was done when the weather permitted).
- Questions were asked about wildlife seen, including mammals, amphibians, birds, and insects.

Addendum

The Lancaster District Allotment Review report is correct at the time of printing (3 June 2024). It is, however, a live document. As its recommendations and ideas are explored, developed and implemented, learnings and approaches and the state of allotments will evolve.

On 3 June 2024 an initial discussion was held with members from Lancaster City Council prior to the Allotment Review public launch event on 9 June 2024. During this meeting the City Council emphasised the need for the Service Level Agreements to be renewed as part of the lease renewal process and that as part of this process, governance and decision making processes and responsibilities need to be clarified.

The City Council also suggested the aspiration for a collaborative network of allotment sites to form, with the possibility of this holding a coordination function in the future.

LANCASTER DISTRICT

Allotment Review