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Allotment Strategy

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1 PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

- 1.1 This allotment strategy has been developed for allotment sites provided by Eckington Parish Council (either directly or through devolved management), not for privately owned sites.
- 1.2 The overall objective of this strategy is to increase the ability and opportunity for people to cultivate allotment plots in the parish of Eckington. The strategy seeks through its targets and initiatives to optimise the use of allotments for existing and potential plot holders, identify needs and meet demand. All initiatives contained in this document are considered in the context of other Parish Council strategies, policies and objectives.
- 1.3 This document provides a framework for the next five years to develop and manage allotments in partnership with the users, and provides a focus on five main target areas.
 - Ensuring sufficient allotments
 - Promoting allotment gardening
 - Encouraging sustainability
 - Providing good administration
 - Maintaining adequate resources

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The provision of allotments by local authorities is a statutory duty. Eckington Parish Council will continue to provide and promote allotments not only because of this statutory requirement but because allotment gardening can make a valuable contribution to the Parish's sustainability by providing health, social, economic and environmental benefits. These can be summarised as
 - Low cost fresh food production for the family
 - Promotion of healthy affordable diets
 - Healthy recreational activity
 - The opportunity to maintain and develop skills
 - Social contact and as a contribution to community spirit
 - Better partnership working
- 2.2 Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space within the urban environment. They contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom as well as being highly beneficial to the wildlife of the area.
- 2.3 Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land, and some householders have no individual garden. These circumstances disproportionately disadvantage those on lower incomes. Allotments provide an opportunity to adjust this imbalance.
- 2.4 The high value/low cost benefits are readily available to all, but most importantly, those who find themselves socially or physically disadvantaged.

3 CURRENT PROVISION

3.1 The Sites

Eckington Parish Council operates 4 allotment sites within the parish.

In addition to growing food, a number of allotments are used (partially) for livestock. The keeping of any livestock on the Council's allotments requires prior approval from the Council

3.1.1 School Street, Eckington

Number : The site is divided into 29 plots of varying sizes

Water Supply Arrangements: Individual Meters will be provided on request and the water used charged to the allotment holder

3.1.2 Ducksett Lane, Eckington

Number: The site is divided into 36 plots of varying sizes

Water Supply Arrangements: There are 2 standpipes for all to use and usage is charged to all tenants

3.1.3 Lansbury Road, Eckington

Number : The site is divided into 28 plots of varying sizes

Water Supply Arrangements: There is no water connection at this site

3.1.4 Marsh Lane

Number: The site is divided into 14 plots of varying sizes

Water Supply Arrangements: There is no water connection at this site

3.2 Management

The Allotments are currently overseen by the Parish Council's Open Spaces Committee and are currently managed on behalf of the Parish Council, by the Parish Clerk and the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO). Staff costs for managing the allotment site are met from the Parish Council's general staffing budget. The Parish Clerk and RFO deal with day to day administration of the Allotments, including:

- Collecting and administering rents
- Administering tenancies
- Letting plots and new tenancy agreements
- Enquiries from prospective tenants including site visits
- Inspecting individual plots on a regular basis
- Resolving disputes and dealing with complaints
- Arranging day to day maintenance of the site
- Managing alterations and improvement works
- Checking the water meter

3.3 Liaison with tenants

The Parish Council will hold a meeting at least annually with all of its tenants, giving tenants and councillors the opportunity to discuss matters of common interest.

3.4 Self management

There is at present no element of self management of any site, however it is the policy of the Parish Council to encourage allotment holders to participate in the running of the site, and ultimately to self manage the site.

3.5 Allotment Association

The Parish Council supports the establishment of an association for tenants of its allotments. The main purposes of an Allotment Association would be:

- To promote the interests of plot holders
- To organise bulk purchase of compost and manure
- To provide an independent forum for discussion and dissemination of information
- To offer tips on cultivation and promote good practice.
- To encourage initiatives to protect members from theft, damage and trespass.
- To access sources of funding for improvements to the site ie compost toilet

3.6 Site Maintenance

In addition to arranging for the cutting of grass, the Parish Council also considers the maintenance needs of the sites.

4 DEMAND FOR ALLOTMENTS

In January 2015, 100% of allotment plots were let, with a waiting list of 67 people. In future all new tenants will only be offered one plot. Existing tenants with multiple plots will be allowed to continue until a change of tenancy.

Potential tenants are added to the waiting list on a first come, first served basis, but tenancies will be offered according to the criteria detailed in section 5.1.

The waiting list will be updated on a 3 year rolling programme.

5 TARGET AREAS OF THE STRATEGY

- Ensuring sufficient Allotments
- Promoting Allotment Gardening
- Encouraging sustainability
- Providing Good administration
- Maintaining Adequate Resources

5.1 Ensuring Sufficient Allotments

It is the Policy of the Parish Council to continue to meet its legal obligation to provide allotments in Eckington, for the residents of Eckington Parish.

It is not currently anticipated that the Parish Council will either sell the sites it owns or buy additional sites. The Parish Council recognises that the Lansbury Road site is leased from North East Derbyshire District Council with 18 years remaining on the current lease. Further, the Ducksett Lane site is leased from Sitwell Estates on a 12-month notice basis.

The current aim therefore is to maximise the use of the existing sites (see also Paragraph 4 above)

The Parish Council currently only accepts onto the allotments' waiting list tenants who reside in the Parish of Eckington and continue to reside in the Parish throughout their tenancy. However, the Parish Council may exceptionally accept applications from registered voluntary and community groups for the tenancy of an allotment, where the proposed use is beneficial to the residents of Eckington.

If there are no Eckington parish residents on the waiting list for an allotment then the Parish Council may consider offering the vacant allotment to a non resident of Eckington parish if the plot has been vacant for 3 months or longer.

5.2 Promoting Allotment Gardening

Current position

It is the Parish Council's policy to promote allotment gardening. Details of the Allotment sites appear on the Parish Council's Website. Articles about the allotments are included in the Parish Council newsletter from time to time, along with details of the cost of rental of plots. These may also be displayed on Parish Council noticeboards.

Proposals:

- Consider ways to improve communication with tenants including at least one meeting with tenants per year
- Consider increased use of email communication with tenants
- Promote use of half size plots to new tenants with no previous allotment experience
- Investigate what support could be provided to new tenants e.g. mentors, to reduce early drop-out rate
- Consider a community plot run by a registered voluntary or community group which allows volunteers to get a taste of allotment gardening without having to commit to a full plot initially

5.3 Encouraging Sustainability

Current position

The Parish Council encourages organic gardening but does not forbid legal pesticides. The use of water butts is also encouraged and butts will be provided at cost to all allotment holders who request one.

Proposals

- To encourage and where possible support good environmental practice including use of organic alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides.
- To make available to plot holders information on withdrawal of certain pesticides.
- To promote composting, no dig techniques and similar alternative methods.
- To encourage plot holders to draw on expertise already available including RHS , Henry Doubleday Research Association, National Society of Allotment Gardeners etc.
- To consider opportunities for improved wildlife habitats, such as hedge planting, lace-wing and ladybird overwintering shelters.
- To reduce maintenance and improve bio-diversity by making use of any unlettable plots, if any, and planting to encourage wildlife.
- To consider planting poorly drained or shaded plots with hazel which could be coppiced for use by plot holders – this will reduce maintenance costs and also provide shelter and encourage wildlife onto the site
- To minimise water use (where supplied) by encouraging the use of organic mulches to conserve soil moisture.
- To investigate and promote recycling on the site.
- To encourage educational visits

5.4 Providing Good Administration

Current position

To ensure that all allotment rents and fees continue to be collected in a timely manner and administered with this strategy and to also ensure that the Tenancy Agreement is fit for purpose.

Proposals

- To circulate to all plot holders an annual financial report showing all income from the allotments and all expenditure by the Parish Council on the Allotment site.
- To review the Tenancy Agreement
- To encourage the formation of site Allotment Associations, the purpose of which would be initially to provide a useful forum for plot holders and a contact point with plot holders for the Parish Council. Once operating to encourage the Allotment Association to undertake beneficial activities, such as bulk buying of compost. When established and running smoothly, to investigate the possibility of the Allotment Association taking over day to day management of the Allotment site on behalf of the Parish Council.
- To monitor the demographics of allotment holders to ensure that the Council is aware of any potential underrepresentation and, if felt appropriate, to proactively encourage interest from underrepresented groups.

5.5 Maintaining Adequate Resources

Current Position

At present the rental income from the site does not cover running costs with major capital costs having to be met from Parish Council General Reserves. The wages cost of the Parish Clerk's and RFO's time spent on allotment administration is also met from the Parish Council's staffing budget and not from rental income.

The Parish Council needs to balance the benefits of the allotments' provision against the cost to the residents of Eckington via the Council tax precept.

It is the long term aim of the Parish Council to make the allotment sites self-financing.

The level of rents, key and plot deposits plus any concessionary schemes is considered annually and any changes are introduced in time for renewals on 1 October.

Proposals

- In addition to the above there may be opportunities to obtain some external funding through Government, EU and Lottery Grants, but it is felt that this type of funding would be more likely to be made available to a self managing Allotment Association rather than the Parish Council itself.
- The Parish Council aims to make any allotment sites self financing and to review rents and control expenditure to this end. In future all new tenants will only be offered one plot. Where existing tenants have multiple plots this will be allowed to continue until a change of tenancy. The Parish Council policy is to make each vacated plot sufficiently attractive for letting, which could at one extreme include the use of external contractors to clear a plot, at the other, it could include offer of a rent free period to compensate the new tenants for having to clear the plot.