

KINGS HILL PARISH COUNCIL ALLOTMENT STRATEGY

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1. Purpose of the Strategy

This allotment strategy has been developed for the allotment site provided by Kings Hill Parish Council.

The overall objectives of this strategy are to increase the ability and opportunity for people to cultivate allotment plots in Kings Hill Parish. The strategy seeks through its initiatives to optimise the use of allotments for existing and potential plot holders, identifying needs and meet demand. All initiatives contained in this document are considered in the context of other Parish Council strategies, policies and objectives.

This document provides a framework for the next five years to develop and manage allotments in partnership with 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

The provision of allotments by local authorities is a statutory duty. Kings Hill 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

Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space within the urban environment. They contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom.

Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land, and some householders have no individual garden. Allotments provide an opportunity to adjust this imbalance.

3. Current Provision

The Site:- Kings Hill Parish Council operates one allotment site at Kings Hill Sports Park. The site is divided into plots of 63 sq. m and provides 75 plots.

Management:- The allotment site is currently managed on behalf of the Parish Council, by the Chief Facility Officer. Staff costs for managing the allotment site are met from the Parish Council's general staffing budget with site inspection mileage expenses met from the allotment rental income. The Chief Facility Officer deals with the day to day administration of the Allotments, including:

- Collecting and administrating 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 water meter readings
- Maintaining Allotment Notice Board

A Welcome Pack and Health & Safety Guidance Notes have been drawn up and agreed by the Parish Council. This explains the rules in the Tenancy Agreement and what can and cannot be done on the site, along with details of site management and contact details.

Liaison with tenants:- The Parish Council will be holding an annual meeting of its tenants, giving tenants and councillors the opportunity to discuss matters of common interest.

3. Current Provision

Self management:- There is at present no element of self management of the 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.

The tenancy agreement stipulates that allotment holders manage the paths adjacent to their plots however the council has decided that paid employees of the council now mow and trim these areas. Allotment Interest Group:- The Parish Council supports the establishment of an allotment group. The main purposes of an Allotment Group are:

- To promote the interest of allotment holders
- Organise bulk purchase of compost/manure
- To provide an independent forum for discussion and dissemination of information
- Offer tips on cultivation and promote good practice
- Encourage initiatives to protect members from theft, damage and trespass
- Access sources of funding for improvements to the site

Please contact the Parish Council for details of how to join the Allotment Interest Group.

site management:- In addition to arranging for cutting of grass along paths and weed spraying of inland roadway two times annually, the Parish Council also considers the maintenance needs of the site. The Parish Council are responsible for maintaining all perimeter fences, gates and allotment notice board. There is a mains water supply with five standpipes each with two taps. This supply is provided to enable plot holders to fill water containers.

4. Demand for Allotments.

In July 2019, 100% of allotment plots were let, with a waiting list of 12 people. Potential tenants are added to the waiting list by date of application made to the Parish Council, but tenancies will be offered according to the criteria detailed in Section 5.

In order to ensure allotment holders are keeping to the terms of the tenancy agreement the following inspection schedule will be carried out:

The plot of a new allotment holder shall be checked for reasonable weed control after one month of signing their agreement.

The standard inspection regime shall be as follows:

- April – to check that weeds on the plot are under reasonable control;
- May – check for overgrowth and that the plot is cultivated ready for crops;
- June - inspection for agreed ratio;
- July – inspected against all aspects of tenancy agreement;
- August – inspection before rent renewals against all aspects of tenancy agreement
- October – last inspection against all aspects of tenancy agreement

5. Target Areas of the Strategy

- Ensuring sufficient Allotments
- Promoting Allotment Gardening
- Encouraging sustainability
- Providing good administration
- Maintaining adequate resources

Ensuring Sufficient Allotments:- It is the policy of the Parish Council to continue to meet its legal obligation to provide allotments in Kings Hill, for residents of Kings Hill Parish.

The Parish Council owns no land but leases the existing allotment site within Kings Hill Sports Park. It is not anticipated that the Parish Council will terminate the existing lease within the five year period covered by this strategy. The aim therefore is to maximise the use of the existing site.

Once this strategy document is formally adopted by the Parish Council it is the Parish Council's policy to accept the new applications for allotments only from persons resident in Kings Hill Parish.

If there are no Kings Hill Residents on the waiting list for an Allotment then the Parish Council may consider offering a further plot to any existing tenants if the plot has been vacant for 3 months or longer.

5. Target Areas of the Strategy

Promoting Allotment Gardening:- It is the Parish Council's policy to promote allotment gardening.

Details of the Allotment site appear on the Parish Council Web site. Articles about the allotments are included in the Parish Council newsletter from time to time. These may also be displayed on the Parish Council's Allotment Notice Board. The Parish Council's social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter will also be used to promote allotment gardening.

To investigate what support could be provided to new tenants e.g. mentors, to reduce early drop-out. Consider a community plot run by the Parish Council which allows volunteers to get a taste of allotment gardening without having to commit to a full plot initially.

Our Welcome Pack should encourage organic gardening but not forbid pesticides.

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 when known 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, and national Society of Allotment Gardeners etc.

To reduce maintenance and improve bio-diversity by making use of unlettable plots and planting to encourage wildlife.

5. Target Areas of the Strategy

To minimise water use by monitoring water meter readings frequently to allow exceptional use/leaks to be detected, and encourage use of organic mulches to conserve soil moisture. Use of rainwater capture by individual plot holders to be encouraged where practicable.

To ensure that all allotment rents and fees continue to be collected in a timely manner and administered with this strategy.

To encourage the formation of a Kings Hill Allotment group, 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 Group to undertake beneficial activities, such as bulk buying of compost.

When established and running smoothly, to investigate the possibility of the Allotment Group taking over the day to day management of the Allotment site on behalf of the Parish Council.

5. Target Areas of the Strategy

At present the rental income from the site does cover the running costs but with major capital costs having to be met from the council's general reserves.

The Parish Council needs to balance the benefits of the allotments provision against the cost to the residents of Kings Hill via the Council tax precept. It is the long term aim of the Parish Council to make the allotment site self-financing.

The level of rent & plot deposits is considered annually and any changes are introduced in time for renewals on 29 September.

In addition to the above there may be opportunities to obtain some external funding through Government and Lottery Grants, but it is felt that this type of funding would be more likely to be made available to self managing Allotment groups rather than the Parish Council.

The Parish Council aims to make any allotment sites self financing and to review rents and control expenditure to this end.

