

**AGENDA ITEM:**

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**14 DECEMBER 2004**

# **FINAL REPORT – INVESTIGATION INTO MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL’S ALLOTMENTS SERVICE PROVISION**

### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To present the findings of the Environment Scrutiny Panel following its investigation into Middlesbrough Council’s approach to the service provision of Allotments.

### **INTRODUCTION**

2. Allotments have been part of the fabric of many communities for nearly 100 years. An allotment plot is a small piece of land (approximately 250 square metres in size), generally owned by the local council, which can be rented by a member of the public primarily for the growing of fruit and vegetables.
3. Allotment gardening can be a very rewarding pastime and can make a valuable contribution to the quality of people’s lives in relation to:-
  - (a) Recreational asset for those people with or without gardens;
  - (b) Fresh air and healthy exercise;
  - (c) Healthy diet, affordable source of fruit and vegetables and those wishing to grow vegetables organically which helps address the Government’s drive to

reduce the diseases associated with poor diet in particular obesity and healthy heart related issues;

(d) Social activity bringing together people from all age groups and social backgrounds around a common interest; and

(e) Links with local community groups and schools.

4. Allotments also provide many environmental benefits such as the:-

(a) Provision of valuable green space within towns/cities, making them more environmentally friendly, sustainable and attractive places to live; and the

(b) Provision of varied and valued habitat for wild plants and animals.

### **AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

5. The overall aim of the Scrutiny investigation was to investigate Middlesbrough Council's approach to the Allotments service provision.

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

6. The terms of reference for the Scrutiny investigation were as outlined below:-

(a) To examine the role of Allotments within Middlesbrough in the context of Central Government's sustainable development, community development, healthy living and education objectives;

(b) To examine the current criteria, take up and process of renting an Allotment plot within Middlesbrough;

(c) To examine the financial resources, rental income arrangements and support available to the Allotments service provision within Middlesbrough;

(d) To examine the current maintenance provision for Allotments within Middlesbrough;

(e) To examine the health and safety, security and vandalism associated with Allotments within Middlesbrough;

(f) To examine the advantages and disadvantages of Self-Managed Allotments (an allotment site run by a committee of tenants from the site, who collect the rent, administer the site, let gardens, keep it tidy etc); and

(g) To identify what good practice exists in nearby Local Authorities in relation to the statutory provision of Allotments.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL**

7. The membership of the Panel were as detailed below:-

Councillors Cole (Chair), Clark, Elder, Heath, J A Jones\*, Lancaster, Regan, Rogers (Vice Chair) and K Walker.

(\* - It should be noted that Councillor J A Jones declared a personal prejudicial interest and therefore did not participate in this investigation).

## **METHODS OF INVESTIGATION**

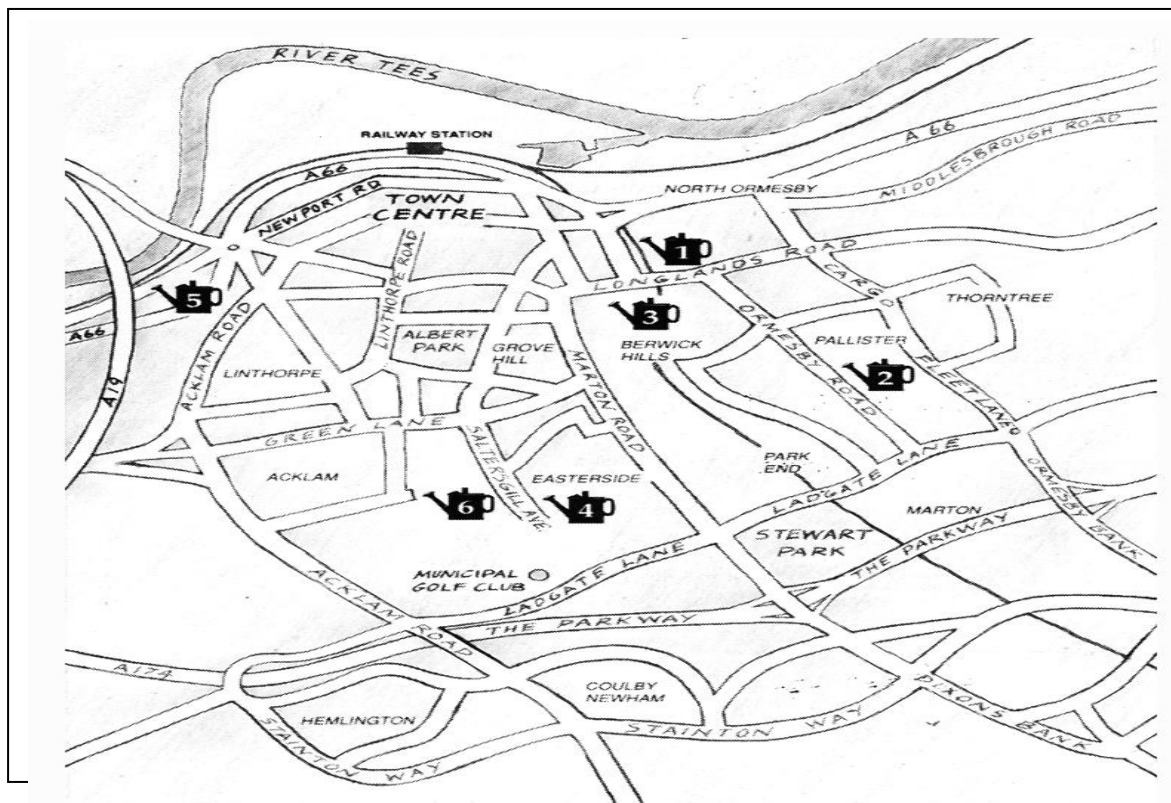
8. Members of the Panel met formally between 21 July 2004 and 23 November 2004 to discuss/receive evidence relating to this investigation and a detailed record of the topics discussed at those meetings are available from the Committee Management System (COMMIS), accessible via the Council's website.
9. A brief summary of the methods of investigation are outlined below:-
- (a) Detailed Officer reports supplemented by verbal evidence;
  - (b) Site Visits to all six Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough (Letita Street, Whitehouse Farm, Berwick Hills, Saltersgill, Town Farm and Beechwood);
  - (c) Evidence received from Allotment Holders across the six Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough;
  - (d) Evidence received from the Authority's Executive Member for the Environment;
  - (e) Site Visit to Darlington Borough Council on 23 September 2004 and Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council on 18 October 2004 to compare Allotment Service provision; and
  - (f) Evidence received from Peter Horrocks, North East representative from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardners Limited.
10. The Panel also obtained various policies and Government guidance documents to assist in the Scrutiny process.

## **FINDINGS**

### **SETTING THE SCENE IN MIDDLESBROUGH**

11. Based on the evidence presented to the Panel, it was evident that there were six Allotment Sites across Middlesbrough, with approximately 1000 individual plots in

total, that the Authority was responsible for as shown on the following map:-



**KEY**

- 1 = Whitehouse Farm Allotment Site (Part-Self Managed Site)
- 2 = Town Farm Allotment Site
- 3 = Berwick Hills Allotment Site
- 4 = Beechwood Allotment Site
- 5 = Letitia Street Allotment Site
- 6 = Saltersgill Allotment Site (Self Managed Site)

12. At the time of the Panel's investigation, statistics presented to the Panel as of 21 July 2004 detailed the number of plots let, together with the number of vacant plots and the waiting list numbers on each of the six Allotment Sites as shown in Table 1:-

**Table 1 – Breakdown of Middlesbrough's Allotment Sites**

Allotment Site	No. of Plots	No. of Plots Let	No. of Vacant Plots	No. on Waiting List
Beechwood	217	117	100	32
Berwick Hills	84	41	43	12
Letitia Street	14	14	0	10
Saltersgill	263	239	6	0
Town Farm	292	217	75	16
Whitehouse Farm	98	91	7	23

13. The Panel was pleased to find that both Letitia Street and Whitehouse Farm Allotment Sites had very few vacant plots. However, particular concern was expressed to the remainder of the Allotment sites which had a large proportion of plot vacancies, possibly due to the actual size of the site and various other factors which were to be explored further during this investigation.
14. Members were also informed that overall the Authority had approximately 87 acres (35 hectares) designated for the use of allotment gardening, with an estimated 27 acres currently being vacant.
15. It was also evident that due to a declining demand and to assist in the management of these sites, that over a period of time some of the larger allotment sites had reduced the number and size of active plots, whilst still remaining as designated allotment areas.
16. Table 2 outlines a further breakdown of the various sites within Middlesbrough in relation to the allotment land usage at individual sites:-

**Table 2 – Land Usage of Middlesbrough Allotment Sites**

<b>Allotment Site</b>	<b>Total Area of Land (Hectares)</b>	<b>Area of Land in Use (Hectares)</b>	<b>Area of Land Vacant (Hectares)</b>	<b>% of Land Not in Use</b>
Beechwood	11.15	6.01	5.14	46%
Berwick Hills	7.32	3.57	3.75	51%
Letitia Street	0.35	0.35	0	0%
Saltersgill	6.7	6.09	0.61	9%
Town Farm	6.65	4.94	1.71	25%
Whitehouse Farm	2.52	2.40	0.12	5%

17. In light of the above breakdown, Members made further enquiries in relation to the high percentage of land not in use at Beechwood and Berwick Hills Allotments Sites.
18. The Panel learnt that the Beechwood Allotment site had over the last 10-15 years been naturally split into two separate areas through general decline. It was found that as plots became empty on the side adjacent to the Beechwood and Easterside Social Club of the site they were re-used as public open space albeit still being technically classed as allotment land (apart from 14 'pigeon plots' which will not be re-let once vacated by long-term tenants who have over the years invested substantially in their plots).

19. The main area of the site is situated adjacent to the Gleneagles Road and measure approximately 6.3 hectares (15.75 acres), although only 100 plots are in use measuring approximately 6.2 acres, leaving almost 9.5 acres of unused allotment land within the fenced area.
20. With regard to the Berwick Hills Allotment site, approximately 5.28 hectares (12.67 acres) had been permanently removed from the 7.32 hectare site and turned into public open space / nature conservation type of habitat due to the site rapidly deteriorating as a result of vandalism and cultural issues. Such action reduced the actual site into 3 smaller distinct areas, measuring just over 2 hectares, to allow easier management of site and the possibility of making the site into 3 individual re-named sites in the foreseeable future.
21. Members of the Panel felt it was crucial to their investigation to familiarise themselves with all six Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough, therefore various site visits were held and are referred to in more detail at a later stage during this report (paragraphs 36-39 refer).

## **THE ROLE OF ALLOTMENTS WITHIN MIDDLESBROUGH**

22. Members were keen to examine the current role of Allotments within Middlesbrough in the context of that of Central Government.
23. The Panel were encouraged to note that the service area responsible for the Allotment provision (and those of devolved Allotments Sites) worked with a range of external organisations including community groups, health organisations and education facilities to facilitate the use of allotments such as:-
  - (a) Community Campus 87 with their comprehensive regeneration scheme to promote social cohesion amongst young people;
  - (b) Beverley School, a special needs school use an allotment as an educational tool;
  - (c) New Deal Initiative to undertake extensive improvements to individual plots; and
  - (d) Asylum Seeker Initiatives.

## **LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

24. Based on the information presented to the Panel, Members were interested to hear that there was various legislation that placed a duty on the Authority to provide Allotments within Middlesbrough as follows:-
  - (a) **The Smallholdings and Allotment Act 1908** - Consolidated all previous legislation and laid down basis for all subsequent legislation. Placed duty on

local authorities to provide sufficient allotments, according to demand. Also makes provision for local authorities to purchase compulsorily land to provide allotments. Established the framework for the modern allotments system;

- (b) **The Allotment Act 1922** - This Act was established to provide allotment tenants with some security of tenure. It also provided tenants with greater compensation at the termination of their tenancy and limited the size of an allotment to one-quarter of an acre, specifying that it should be used mostly for growing fruit and vegetables;
- (c) **The Allotments Act 1925** - Required local authorities to recognise the need for allotments in any town planning development. Established 'statutory' allotments which a local authority could not sell or convert to other purposes without Ministerial consent. This Act was intended to facilitate the acquisition and maintenance of allotments, and to make further provision for the security of tenure for tenants; and
- (d) **The Allotments Act 1950** – This included:-
  - (i) amendment of the provisions relating to rents that may be charged for allotments;
  - (ii) extension of period of notice to quit to 12 months for allotment gardens;
  - (iii) compensation payable to plot holder at whatever season of the year a tenancy terminates;
  - (iv) making plot holders who have allowed their plot to deteriorate through neglect liable to pay compensation on quitting; and
  - (v) allowance of certain forms of livestock (hens and rabbits) to be kept although this can be, in some cases, restricted by local by-laws.
- (e) **Other Legislation** - The Local Government Act 1972 amended the allotments legislation in a number of matters of detail, for example, removing the requirement upon local authorities to establish allotments committees (contained in Section 12 of the Allotments Act 1925). Other Acts which have impacted upon allotments include the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981

25. Members acknowledged the legislation relating to allotments was quite complex and concluded that the areas that were likely to be of most interest to this investigation were as outlined above.

**CRITERIA / PROCESS OF RENTING AN ALLOTMENT PLOT WITHIN MIDDLESBROUGH**

- 26. The Panel learnt that the criteria and process of renting an allotment plot within Middlesbrough was relatively simple in that a member of public would contact the relevant service area of this Authority and be allocated a plot straight away upon completion of an application form. Although, should a plot on a particular site not be available, their name would be added to a waiting list and notified once a plot becomes vacant.
- 27. The conditions of tenancy for an allotment are clearly stated within a tenancy agreement that is issued by the Authority and signed by both parties upon the allocation of an allotment plot.
- 28. In relation to the rental charges for individual Allotment plots, the rent set for the 2004/05 financial year was as outlined in Table 3:-

**Table 3 – Middlesbrough’s Allotment Rental Charges for 2004/05**

<b>PLOT SIZE</b>	<b>STANDARD RATE £</b>	<b>OVER 60’S CONCESSION £</b>
1/8 <sup>th</sup> of an Acre	59.60	29.80
1/16 <sup>th</sup> of an Acre	29.80	14.90
1/32 <sup>rd</sup> of an Acre	22.00	11.00

- 29. In addition to the above, various incentive schemes had been implemented at a reduced rental charge for a two year period to:-
  - (a) people who were unemployed at a cost of £5.00 per a year;
  - (b) new people who had taken new tenancy of a plot at a 50% reduced rate per a year; and to
  - (c) new people taking on new tenancy of an overgrown plot offered at a nominal fee or even free for a period of time.

**SUPPORT, RENTAL INCOME AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN MIDDLESBROUGH**

**Support Arrangements**

- 30. The Panel was informed that the Allotments Service was at present managed through the Open Spaces Division of Streetscene Services, within the Authority’s Environment and Neighbourhood Services Department. Although, prior to April 2004, the service was placed under the responsibility of Leisure Services.



31. Members also sought evidence in relation to the staffing structure to support the day to day operation of the Allotments Service. The Panel was concerned to find that at the time of the Panel's investigation there was no full-time dedicated support, although there was a small team within the Open Spaces Division who provided a small percentage of their time to oversee the Allotment Service as outlined below:-
- (a) Open Spaces Manager with the overall responsibility for the Allotment Service in addition to various other duties; and the
- (b) Environmental Task Force Co-ordinator (temporary post), who temporarily provided a small proportion of time by providing the administrative support to the Allotment Service.
32. It was also evident that prior to the implementation of the New Deal activities, there was a full-time Community Gardening and Allotment Officer who previously managed the various Allotment Sites on a day to day basis but was now currently spending the majority of this time on New Deal issues.

### Rental Income Arrangements / Financial Position

33. Based on the information presented to the Panel, the current budget and rental income for the Allotment Service was as outlined in Table 4 below:-

**Table 4 – 2003/04 Budget Breakdown for the Authority's Allotment Service**

DESCRIPTION	BUDGET (£)
<b>Income –</b> Rents	21,150 projected (Actual approx 12,000)
<b>Expenditure –</b> Water Charges Repairs etc	8,884 18,270
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,004 deficit</b>

34. Members were informed that the maintenance and improvements were carried out by staff and through the annual Allotment budget. However, the Panel were concerned that the current budget for the Allotment Service was overspent by £6,004 and that any additional maintenance work over and above the existing arrangements would need to be identified from other resources.
35. In relation to the rental income, Members were informed that difficulties were encountered by both the Authority and Self-Managed Sites in collecting the yearly rental charges due to sub-letting of plots and tenants who disregard their obligations etc which on occasions resulted in the termination of the tenancy.

36. In addition to the above, it was found that the actual rents received by the Authority was significantly below the anticipated budget, which therefore effected the amount available to carryout improvement works to the Allotment Sites.

### **THE CONDITION OF MIDDLESBROUGH'S ALLOTMENTS (Maintenance, Health and Safety, Security and Vandalism)**

37. The Panel was informed that the majority of the Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough were subject to various degrees of vandalism and concerns were also raised in relation to security and health and safety issues.
38. As a result of this, Members examined all six Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough on 13 August 2004 (Pictures shown below of Panel on Site Visit with Allotment Holders and an example of a well-cultivated Allotment Plot within Middlesbrough).



39. In addition to this, the Panel also sought verbal evidence over a series of meetings from various key witnesses, such as the Authority's Executive Member for Environment, Key Officers of the Authority, the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd regional representative and Allotment Holders within Middlesbrough.
40. Based on the findings of the Site Visit(s) to all six Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough together with the verbal evidence presented to the Panel, Members concluded that:-
- (a) The Authority over the years had a substantial widespread network of Allotment provision throughout the town which had now been narrowed down to six Allotment Sites;
  - (b) Over the years the Authority had endeavoured to provide Allotments at various other locations throughout the town in response to demand ie Hemlington, Whinney Banks and Coulby Newham;

- (c) The Authority did not have an Allotment Strategy, that set out to put in place a framework over a period time to develop and manage allotments in partnership with users and that linked into other council strategies, policies and objectives;
- (d) Site security was an issue of primary importance for all of the six Sites as poor security had lead to vandalism and fly-tipping which resulted in the difficulty of renting out vacant plots (see pictures below);



- (e) Only small scale improvements works had been undertaken and that the majority of larger sites had not received any significant expenditure for a considerable period;
- (f) External funding had been secured from various sources to help improve a number of sites, namely Berwick Hills, Letitia Street (£80,000) and Town Farm Allotment Sites (£10,000);
- (g) The Allotment holders requirements of the upgrading of individual sites varied from site to particular site eg site facilities;
- (h) There was a need to improve the enforcement of the Authority's policy for ploholders not abiding by the rules/procedures eg building inappropriate structures on site, overgrown plots, keeping of animals on non-livestock plots and non-payment of rent;
- (i) Concerns were expressed in relation to the sub-letting of plots without the Authority's knowledge;
- (j) The Authority use to operate a comprehensive refuse collection service which due to lack of funding has now ceased, although New Deal does undertake some form of collection on an irregular basis;
- (k) All sites should have appropriate rubbish collection facilities eg siting of skips on a regular basis that are funded by the Authority;

- (l) All sites had poor entrance signage and lacked notice boards for Council and Association notices (as shown below);



- (m) Consideration should be given to the creation of new sites across Middlesbrough as a by-product of future large-scale developments;
- (n) It was crucial to create a safe and secure environment on all of the allotment sites eg CCTV, Warden patrolled etc;
- (o) The current Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough were generally in the poorest neighbourhoods with poor access;
- (p) Livestock plots should be kept separate from non-livestock sites;
- (q) The majority of the Allotment Sites were protected by a 2 metre high metal palisade fencing, together with lockable steel entrance gates to help prevent unauthorised access, although problems were encountered with keys etc;
- (r) The success of an allotment site depended on the co-operation between plotholders and those responsible for the management of the site;
- (s) Following the disbandment of the Authority's Allotments Sub Committee post local government re-organisation, no replacement mechanism had been established for Allotment Holders to effectively communicate with Elected Members and Officers;
- (t) Smaller sites with few plots were more successful as they were easier to manage more effectively, in particular those of devolved management, therefore rationalisation of some of under-utilised sites should be considered;
- (u) There was a need to make a wider range of plots available to suit different needs and ethics ie people with disabilities, women and family groups;
- (v) It was evident that financial difficulties were encountered in the day to day running costs of the Authority's self-managed sites in relation to reactive and planned work against their actual budget provided to them by the Authority;
- (w) The higher the vacancy rate on sites meant lower income hence the greater the resources needed for weed control, promotion and re-letting; and

- (x) Approximately 50 overgrown individual plots had been cultivated and re-let as a result of the utilisation of the New Deal Initiative;

## **THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SELF-MANAGED ALLOTMENT SITES**

41. Self-management Sites allowed in practice the devolved share of the responsibility for the management of the allotment sites to the actual allotment gardeners themselves, organised usually via a constituted association with an elected committee.
42. The Panel were advised that approximately ten years ago the Authority had offered the self-management opportunity to all six Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough. Since that date, only one of the Authority's six Allotment Sites operated under a system of self-management which was Saltersgill Allotment Site (since 1994).
43. In addition to the Saltersgill Allotment Site, Members were informed that the Whitehouse Farm Allotment Site had recently established an Association with a formally adopted Constitution to access various pots of funding.
44. The Panel found that the Saltersgill Allotment Site had a very good nucleus of highly committed plot holders, clearly showing that the devolved management arrangement worked well due to the considerable efforts of the Committee.
45. It was evident that the Committee managed the day to day operation of the site, carried out routine maintenance work and collected the rent on a yearly basis on behalf of the Authority. In return the Authority provided a small grant allocation for the year to each Committee to carry out such works, although any major work/improvement schemes remained the responsibility of the Authority.
46. Having earlier received evidence from the regional representative from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, it was clearly evident that there were various advantages and disadvantages for self-managed allotment sites as outlined below:-
47. Advantages of Self-Managed Sites -
- (a) A feel-good factor of 'we did it ourselves' raising morale on the site;
  - (b) Promotion of vacant plots can be more effective;
  - (c) Maintenance work carried out more quickly when undertaken by the people who care most about the site;
  - (d) Ability to submit bids for various funding/grants that the Council does not have access to;
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- (e) Allows the association to set the plot rental rate and decide how rental income is spent;
- (f) Cycles of dereliction and under-use can go into reverse, giving plot holders an asset to be proud of;
- (g) Increase the site profile via 'Open Days' to attract new plot holders etc; and
- (h) The option to sell surplus allotment produce.

48. Disadvantages of Self-Managed Sites –

- (a) Implementation at the wrong time, wrong pace or with little support;
- (b) Plot holders stop turning up to meetings resulting in no-one having the to carryout plot inspections, with plots soon becoming abandoned and un-lettable;
- (c) Possibility of the lack of advice and support from the Local Authority;
- (d) The need to deal directly with problematic tenants;
- (e) Insufficient funds/budget to cover the day to day operation/maintenance of the site;
- (f) Possibility of one harassed person ends up trying to cope with all the work required to run the site.

49. In light of the above, the Panel concluded that in order to make devolved managed sites successful, the advantages needed to be maximised and the disadvantages needed to be minimised.

**LOCAL AUTHORITY GOOD PRACTICE**

50. As part of the Panel's remit, consideration was also given to comparing other Local Authorities' Allotments Service provision.

51. In doing so, the Panel visited Darlington Borough Council on 23 September 2004 and Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council on 18 October 2004. In summary it was found:-

(a) That both Local Authorities had:-

- (i) An Allotment Strategy, which provided future direction to the provision of Allotments that identified key partners and focussed resources;

- (ii) Significantly smaller Allotment Sites, enabling them to be managed more effectively;
- (iii) Were also subject to arson and vandalism attacks on a regular basis;
- (iv) Encouraged Devolved management/Self-Managed Allotment Sites; and
- (v) Did not have a dedicated full-time Allotment Officer or an appropriate level of resources to maintain the service provision.

(b) That Stockport MBC's Self-Managed sites:-

- (i) Had accessed various pots of funding and grants that the Authority was unable to access to improve individual sites in relation to raised beds for disabled allotment holders, provision of toilets /shop facilities and the re-surfacing of car park areas etc; and
- (ii) There was a real sense of pride, commitment and enthusiasm for their sites with some holding regular social and fundraising events and weekend trips away.

52. The Panel felt that having compared two different Local Authorities' Allotment Service provisions, that the problems encountered in Middlesbrough were not uncommon.

## CONCLUSION

53. The Panel concluded:

- (a) That it should be recognised that Allotments deliver many direct/in-direct benefits to both the community and the environment such as distinct areas of green space within an urban environment, educational purposes, social wellbeing, bio-diversity and sustainability;
- (b) That given the overall number of allotments within Middlesbrough and the proportion of tenanted and vacant plots, indications are that demand does not currently exceed supply;
- (c) That the Authority's current Allotment Service is not meeting all the requirements of its users, and that the service needs to be developed accordingly;
- (d) That the Allotments within Middlesbrough have had little investment for some time, resulting in deterioration in the condition and appearance of some of the sites and that the Authority cannot realistically meet this commitment alone hence a partnership approach is required;

- (e) That it is recognised that the Authority has limited resources and spending aspirations will need to be reviewed within the overall competing priorities and service delivery pressures throughout the Council. However, within these constraints Members feel that there are opportunities for service improvements within existing resources;
- (f) That there is a need for the Authority to compile and implement an Allotment Strategy to guide the management and development of Allotments within Middlesbrough over an agreed period of time, together with an Action Plan for the upgrading of existing allotments and identification of new sources of external funding;
- (g) That there is a statutory duty to deliver the Allotments Service under the Allotment Act 1950;
- (h) That there is a need for the Authority to re-establish a forum where key Officers, Members and Allotment holders can effectively communicate with each other on a regular basis;
- (i) That a full-time member of staff dedicated to letting and allotment management to ensure the efficient running of the service is essential;
- (j) That there is a need to maximise the occupancy rates of Allotments by providing well appointed and managed sites through robust enforcement procedures;
- (k) That rental charges have been traditionally kept low to enable access for all;
- (l) That there is a strong desire for improvements to site facilities, information and promotional activity;
- (m) That small sites were more successful as they were easier to manage more effectively, in particular those of devolved management, therefore rationalisation of some of under-utilised sites should be increased;
- (n) That devolved management of sites should be encouraged wherever possible, although it was acknowledged that the extent to which management is devolved is likely to proceed at differing rates on sites where circumstances may vary;
- (o) That the detailed written and verbal evidence presented to the Panel was delivered in an open and honest manner, enhancing the transparency of the scrutiny process.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

54. That the Environment Scrutiny Panel has taken evidence from a wide range of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Panel's key recommendations to the Executive are as outlined below:-
- (a) That a Strategy for all of the Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough be developed to cover the next 5 years;
  - (b) That within the proposed Middlesbrough Allotment Strategy, an Improvement Plan be compiled to include:-
    - (i) The improvement of allotment administration ie enforcement, site inspections, terminations and appeals procedures;
    - (ii) Review of security on sites;
    - (iii) Ground maintenance requirements of each individual site;
    - (iv) Rationalisation of under-utilisation of sites/provision of smaller sites; and
    - (v) Review of livestock/non-livestock sites.
  - (c) That an Allotment Steering Group that represents stakeholder interests be established and accept responsibility for taking forward the proposed Allotment Strategy;
  - (d) That the possibility of establishing a dedicated 'Allotment Officer' post and appropriate sources of funding be explored ;
  - (e) That the possibility of developing self-managed sites at Beechwood, Berwick Hills, Letitia Street and Whitehouse Farm be explored;
  - (f) That appropriate support, assistance and financial resources be provided to those sites that wish to move towards self-managed sites;
  - (g) That to assist in raising the profile of Allotments within Middlesbrough, publicity be undertaken on a regular basis;
  - (h) That the revenue budget provision for the Authority's Allotment Service be reviewed during the 2005/06 budget setting process; and
  - (i) That consideration be given to re-establishing a forum where key Officers, Members and Allotment holders can effectively communicate with each other on a regular basis.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

55. The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our investigation. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:-

Councillor Bob Kerr – Middlesbrough Council's Executive Member for the Environment

John Richardson, Mike Wood, Geoff Field, Eddie Jones, Geoff Edwards, Julie Garton – Middlesbrough Council's Environment and Neighbourhood Services

Richard Long and Sue Fox – Middlesbrough Council's Legal and Democratic Services

Councillor Ian Haszeldine, Dennis Watson and Gloria Allan – Darlington Borough Council

Sue Dymond, Norman Hudson and Ian Walmsley – Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Peter Horrocks – National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd

Allotment Holders within Middlesbrough

56. As Chair, I would also like to personally thank the Scrutiny Officer for her help and support with the Panel's work on this Scrutiny topic.

**COUNCILLOR GEOFF COLE  
CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

November 2004

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:

- (a) Remit and Work Programme – Investigation into Middlesbrough Council’s Allotments Services Provision – Report of the Scrutiny Officer to the Environment Scrutiny Panel of 21 July 2004.
- (b) Discussion on the Site Visits to the Six Middlesbrough Allotment Sites – Report of the Scrutiny Officer to the Environment Scrutiny Panel of 20 August 2004.
- (c) Allotment Provision within Middlesbrough – Evidence from the Executive Member for Environment – Report of the Scrutiny Officer to the Environment Scrutiny Panel of 3 September 2004.
- (d) Government Policy on Provision of Allotments – Report of the Policy and Performance Officer from Environment and Neighbourhood Services to the Environment Scrutiny Panel of 3 September 2004.
- (e) Allotments Legislation – Report of the Senior Solicitor, Legal and Democratic Services to the Environment Scrutiny Panel of 3 September 2004.
- (f) Middlesbrough Allotment Provision – Evidence from Middlesbrough Allotment Holders - Report of the Scrutiny Officer to the Environment Scrutiny Panel of 16 September 2004.
- (g) Middlesbrough Allotment Provision – Evidence from a representative from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Limited - Report of the Scrutiny Officer to the Environment Scrutiny Panel of 16 September 2004.
- (h) Various Fact Sheets of the Allotments Regeneration Initiatives.
- (i) Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council’s Best Practice Guide and Local Plan entitled ‘The Future for Stockport’s Allotments – Valuing Allotments’.
- (j) DTLR’s ‘Allotments – A Plot Holders Guide’ – 2001/02.
- (k) The Franchise Company: Middlesbrough Social Enterprise Feasibility Study Report (Community Gardens) – December 2002/January 2003.
- (l) 1997 Report to the Authority’s former Community Development, Libraries and Leisure Committee entitled ‘Hemlington Proposed Allotments Site’.
- (m) Minutes of the Meetings of the Environment Scrutiny Panel held on 21 July 2004, 20 August 2004, 3 September 2004, 16 September 2004, 1 October 2004, 14 October 2004, 5 November 2004 and 23 November 2004.