

Allotments a Community Resource – Karen Kenny’s Presentation to DEF 21st January 2010

An allotment garden in 1908, the year of the all important Allotment and Smallholdings Act, was considered to be the answer to many social ills including poor health, excessive drinking and low life expectancy,. There was a great need for fresh affordable food. The UK’s health was never better than during the Dig For Victory campaign in the second world war. This was directly associated with the amount of fresh seasonal, local food available during this time.

Today it is much the same we have all manner of issues which the allotment addresses we can tick many of the governments green issues. The value of Allotmenting to our health both physical and mental and to our environment and , not least, in this changing world, our contribution to lowering our carbon footprint.

Crops being grown today are changing with the environment, and the increase of ethnic diversity. Many crops are being grown in this country for the first time. Allotment gardeners are always eager to try new crops.

In the International society we now live in we are a model of community integration, allotments provide healthy fresh local food, often allotment holders provide surplus food to projects in their vicinity to local schools , hospice and other projects. Allotments address the carbon footprint of food miles both nationally (less food needing to be imported and transported) and locally (less trips to the supermarket for food shopping)

Apart from the carbon emissions of transport to and from supermarkets the amount of packaging we are saving has a considerable impact on landfill, and recycling. Vegetables we grow don’t come from the ground with packaging attached!!!

Thus once again we are reducing the carbon footprint in the manufacture of the packaging and the carbon foot print of the recycling of the packaging. For let us not forget that recycling also has quite a large carbon footprint of it’s own! It is always better to reduce so there is less to recycle. Let alone the reduction of waste to landfill

.Allotments are havens of biodiversity many sites of which are sanctuaries for endangered species. which further enhances the educational value of the sites, and enable them to be well utilised for local schools and groups of all sorts both children and adults.

There are many diverse projects that take place on allotments for which much funding is available once a site is established, these ensure opportunities for all.

Educationally allotments have much to offer. Many schools projects take place on allotments, where maths, science, art , physics etc can all be utilised and learned as well as observation of wildlife and the growing of food and flowers.

Social inclusion is important to allotments and there are many diverse projects for those with both physical and mental disabilities, as well as projects which target the socially disadvantaged . People with learning difficulties, with low self esteem who may have been excluded from schools and the work place. Gardening has long been associated with the relief of stress and instrumental in the building of self esteem in society, thus playing its part in the welfare of the whole community.

Today the allotment site is a powerhouse of diversity. Whole families from the toddlers right up to and including Granny and Granddad are enjoying working together. All sections of Society from the unemployed to the professional, all races and religions all levels of ability.

It is the one place where personal differences play no part, everyone is a gardener and it is amazing how this produces a happy community.

No longer the elite cloth capped allotmenteer in a closed environment but a multinational community inviting everyone to share their fortune and skills with regular open days held , where skills are learnt and shared. Fresh surplus produce is sold to the local community for funds, Gardeners can take the opportunity to share in the low cost of seeds and garden sundries sourced by the Association.

The sites themselves are no longer ‘shanty towns’ of lopsided sheds, but model sites with model facilities. Toilets for all, disabled access, off road car parking, raised beds for those with mobility challenges, communal sheds, and communal poly tunnels, tidy paths and haulage ways, tidy bays for the delivery of manure etc. Often there are floral gardens at the site entrances.

The modern tenancies do not allow for sites to become ‘run down’ and the management of sites is often in the hands of the tenants who make sure the tenancies are adhered to .

Some may say that this is a fad and will soon pass. However the 'climate' is changing and will remain so. The energy industry and the cost of decreasing supplies of oil and hence fuel will impact on the cost of food miles and of transport in general. More people will be turning to locally produced food and entertainment. People are more concerned with the environment and the use of pesticides in food having an effect on their health ,in their carbon footprint , and the need for good healthy exercise.

There is and will be more increased leisure time both now and in the future, the unemployed will always be with us and those unable to work for health reasons. Allotments can play a vital part in the relief of stress in these situations we find that a person unable to work for whatever reason and feels that he or she cannot contribute to the family's welfare often becomes depressed and resorts to medication. When encouraged to take on an allotment which keeps them in contact with people and gives them a healthy lifestyle while producing food for the table does much to allay these feelings.

Allotments Are the Answer!

Here then is an example of a simple and multi purpose solution contributing greatly to the governments and indeed the countries local food, health, social inclusion, education, biodiversity, waste reduction, carbon footprints and sustainability issues.

The largest barrier to this is the lack of support in the planning departments and the severe lack of funding. For decades now the local government and planners have gnawed away at this valuable resource selling off allotments to make way for housing developments which lead to an increased demand for allotments, few had previously promoted ,and maintained these sites leading to dereliction by design. Then monies from the sales eagerly absorbed into the central pot and very little if any being utilized for the improvements to any (if any) remaining sites. Whilst one recognizes the need for housing surely this should not be at the expense of a most valuable resource for the local population denying many of them the right to grow their own food, for the housing developed in the past few decades has not made much provision in the way of growing space afforded in the way of reasonable sized gardens.

The use of 106 planning gain has and should be used in the future when planning new developments for every new development creates demand for allotments for the provision of locally sourced food re the governments own words. For food security in the future.

The use of PPG 17 should also be noted for allotments fulfil almost everyone of the criteria of PPG17

National Planning Policies

Assessments Of Needs And Opportunities

1. To ensure effective planning for open space, sport and recreation it is essential that the needs of local communities are known. Local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities. Assessments will normally be undertaken at district level, although assessments of strategic facilities should be undertaken at regional or sub-regional levels.
2. As a minimum, assessments of need should cover the differing and distinctive needs of the population for open space and built sports and recreational facilities (as outlined in the [annex](#)). The needs of those working in and visiting areas, as well as residents should also be included.
3. Local authorities should also undertake audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities, the use made of existing facilities, access in terms of location and costs (such as charges) and opportunities for new open space and facilities (see endnote 1). Audits should consider both the quantitative and the qualitative elements of open space, sports and recreational facilities . Audits of quality will be particularly important as they will allow local authorities to identify potential for increased use through better design, management and maintenance.
4. Assessments and audits will allow local authorities to identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas. They form the starting point for establishing an effective strategy for open space, sport and recreation at the local level (tied into the local authority's Community Strategy), and for effective planning through the development of appropriate policies in plans.
5. Good quality assessments and audits, leading to clear strategies supported by effective planning policies, will provide vital tools for resolving the potential conflicts that arise between different uses and users of open space, sports and recreational facilities. The Government expects all local authorities to carry out assessments of needs and audits of open space and

sports and recreational facilities in accordance with the paragraphs above. Good practice guidance (see endnote 2) being published in tandem with this PPG provides more detailed advice on how to undertake these assessments and audits.

Setting Local Standards

6. The Government believes that open space standards are best set locally. National standards cannot cater for local circumstances, such as differing demographic profiles and the extent of existing built development in an area.

7. Local authorities should use the information gained from their assessments of needs and opportunities to set locally derived standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas. Local standards should include:

- i. quantitative elements (how much new provision may be needed);
- ii. a qualitative component (against which to measure the need for enhancement of existing facilities); and
- iii. accessibility (including distance thresholds and consideration of the cost of using a facility).

8. Setting robust local standards based on assessments of need and audits of existing facilities will form the basis for redressing quantitative and qualitative deficiencies through the planning process. Standards should be included in development plans.

9. Assessing needs and opportunities: A companion guide to PPG17 provides further guidance on setting local standards for open space, sport and recreation.

Maintaining An Adequate Supply Of Open Space And Sports And Recreational Facilities

10. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space or the buildings and land to be surplus to requirements. For open space, 'surplus to requirements' should include consideration of all the functions that open space can perform. Not all open space, sport and recreational land and buildings are of equal merit and some may be available for alternative uses. In the absence of a robust and up-to-date assessment by a local authority, an applicant for planning permission may seek to demonstrate through an independent assessment that the land or buildings are surplus to requirements. Developers will need to consult the local community and demonstrate that their proposals are widely supported by them. Paragraph 15 below applies in respect of any planning applications involving playing fields.

11. Open space and sports and recreational facilities that are of high quality, or of particular value to a local community, should be recognised and given protection by local authorities through appropriate policies in plans. Areas of particular quality may include

- iii. areas of open space that particularly benefit wildlife and biodiversity.

12. Development of open space, sports or recreational facilities may provide an opportunity for local authorities to remedy deficiencies in provision. For example, where a local authority has identified a surplus in one type of open space or sports and recreational facility but a deficit in another type, planning conditions or obligations may be used to secure part of the development site for the type of open space or sports and recreational facility that is in deficit.

14. Parks, recreation grounds, playing fields and allotments must not be regarded as 'previously-developed land', as defined in annex C of PPG3. Even where land does fall within the definition of 'previously-developed', its existing and potential value for recreation and other purposes should be properly assessed before development is considered.

- iii. promote better use of open spaces and sports and recreational facilities, by the use of good design to reduce crime.

20. In identifying where to locate new areas of open space, sports and recreational facilities, local authorities should:

- i. promote accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, and ensure that facilities are accessible for people with disabilities;

vii. carefully consider security and personal safety, especially for children;

ix. consider the scope for using any surplus land for open space, sport or recreational use, weighing this against alternative uses;

x. assess the impact of new facilities on social inclusion; and

Planning obligations (see paragraph 33 below) should be used where appropriate to seek increased provision of open spaces and local sports and recreational facilities, and the enhancement of existing facilities

24. In planning for new open spaces and in assessing planning applications for development, local authorities should seek opportunities to improve the local open space network, to create public open space from vacant land, and to incorporate open space within new development on previously-used land. They should also consider whether use can be made of land which is otherwise unsuitable for development, or procure public use of privately owned areas of land or sports facilities.

30. Planning permission should be granted in Green Belts for proposals to establish or to modernise essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation where the openness of the Green Belt is maintained. Development should be the minimum necessary and non-essential facilities (eg additional function rooms or indoor leisure) should be treated as inappropriate development. Very special circumstances which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt will need to be demonstrated if such inappropriate development is to be permitted.

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vii. allotments, community gardens, and city (urban) farms;

3. Local authorities should also recognise that most areas of open space can perform multiple functions. They should take account of the various functions of open space when applying the policies in this document. These include:

iii. promoting health and well-being: providing opportunities to people of all ages for informal recreation, or to walk, cycle or ride within parks and open spaces or along paths, bridleways and canal banks. Allotments may provide physical exercise and other health benefits;

iv. havens and habitats for flora and fauna: sites may also have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another and may contribute towards achieving objectives set out in local biodiversity action plans;

v. as a community resource: as a place for congregating and for holding community events,