

ALLOTMENTS

BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW



2006/07

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1. INTRODUCTION

For the Best Value service review of Allotments, Members endorsed the decision to use an external 'Challenge' Panel to work alongside the Council's officers and Members at the commencement of the review. It was considered that such an approach would result in a more rigorous examination of the Council's service.

The Review Panel has met on several occasions between September 2006 and April 2007 and has consisted of the following personnel:

- ◆ Alison Pirouet - Councillor, Chesham Town Council
- ◆ Bill Richards – Town Clerk, Chesham Town Council
- ◆ Kathryn Graves – Policy & Projects Officer, Chesham Town Council
- ◆ Bob Ayres – Parks & Premises Manager, Chesham Town Council
- ◆ Sue Hinkly – Community Services Administrator, Amersham Town Council
- ◆ Trevor Pilling – Wilkins Kennedy & Partners
- ◆ Vince Crompton – Chesham Allotments Group Chairman
- ◆ Brian Shrieve – Chesham Allotment Holder

The mixture of service providers and users has played an important role in drawing together a coherent plan to develop 'continuous improvement' for the Allotments.

2. THE CURRENT SERVICE

i. Definition of Service

The Council's service objective is to provide high quality allotments working in partnership with the Allotments Group (a group consisting of Members and allotment holders).

Section 22 of the 1922 Allotments Act 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."

ii. What is the Service?

The Council manages 227 plots on 3 sites located at Asheridge Road (45 plots), Amersham Road (6 plots) and Cameron Road (176 plots). The allotments at Cameron Road and Asheridge Road are statutory, i.e. the allotments cannot be sold without the consent of the Secretary of State (Allotments Act 1925, Section 8). The Amersham Road allotments are non-statutory.

It should be noted that there are three further non-statutory allotment sites in Chesham that are operated by different service providers; the George Piggin allotments on Wey Lane, the Bois Moor Road allotments owned and managed by the Duke of Bedford Trust and the Moor Road allotments which are owned by a private company.

iii. What are the Specific Aims of the Service?

The aim of the service is to provide allotments for Chesham residents in accordance with Section 23 of the Small Holdings Allotments Act of 1908, which requires a local Council to provide allotment gardens for personal cultivation where it is of the opinion that a demand exists in the parish. Moreover, under that Section, a local Council must take into consideration any written representations for the provision of allotments made to it by any six parliamentary electors or council taxpayers resident in the parish.

iv. Cost and Unit Data

With effect from 1 October 2006 the rent per pole per annum is:

<u>Allotment Site</u>	<u>Charge per Pole</u>
Asheridge Road/Bellington Road	£3.00
Cameron Road	£2.00
Amersham Road	£3.00

A rebate of 50% of the standard rent may be claimed by any Tenant on reaching the age of 60 in the financial year for which rent is due.

3. CHALLENGE

“Challenge” is central to Best Value. The basis consists of:

- Why the service is provided
- What the service provides
- How the service is provided

i. Why the Service is Provided

Section 23 of the Small Holdings Allotments Act of 1908 requires local councils to provide allotment gardens for personal cultivation where it is of the opinion that a demand exists in the parish.

The Challenge Panel agreed that the full occupancy of the Council's sites and the existence of waiting lists demonstrated a clear demand for allotments in the parish and that the Town Council therefore has a legal obligation to provide allotments in Chesham.

ii. What the Service Provides

The total number of lettable plots is as follows:

LOCATION	NO. OF PLOTS
Amersham Road	6
Asheridge Road	45
Cameron Road	176
Total No. of Lettable Plots	227

Currently, allotments management consists of the following:

- The Parks and Premises Manager liaises with his team to ensure regular grass cutting and cultivation
- The Manager liaises with contractors on an *ad hoc* basis for additional grass cutting, cultivation and general clearing works
- The Manager liaises with the Allotments Group to implement improvement measures if deemed appropriate
- Health and safety checks of allotments (including disabled provision if appropriate)
- Twice yearly inspections in partnership with the Allotments Group

Officers at the Town Hall undertake the general administration of the allotments. The Council issues formal tenancy agreements based on the guidelines issued by the

National Association of Local Councils. The tenancy agreement was last updated in October 2006.

The Challenge Panel visited the Cameron Road and Asheridge Road allotments sites to ensure they were familiar with the current facilities.

The Challenge Panel considered whether the above components of the service should continue to be provided by the Town Council.

The Challenge Panel was satisfied overall with the existing service provision, but made a number of recommendations regarding specific aspects of the service. (Please see Section 7)

iii. How the Service is Provided

The Parks and Premises Manager and his staff carry out the day-to-day supervision and management of the three allotment sites, working in partnership with the Allotments Group who advise and recommend on improvements.

Officers at the Town Council undertake the administration, including setting up new tenancies, managing waiting lists, rent collection and issuing reminders of rent renewals and notices to quit. Notices requesting rents are posted on allotment gates at the end of September. Tenants then pay their annual rent in cash at the Town Hall, by cheque at the Town Hall or through the post. Reminder letters are sent out after more than a month has passed. The reminder letter gives the tenant the option to sign a vacating form and quit their plot, or pay the rent within 40 days. Failing this, they will face eviction.

The Challenge Panel considered whether the service should continue to be provided through the existing arrangements.

The Challenge Panel was satisfied with the existing system of management, supervision and maintenance provided by the Council's Parks and Premises team, in liaison with the Allotments Group.

The Challenge Panel also expressed its satisfaction with the administration service provided by the staff at the Town Hall. However, the Panel agreed that it would be appropriate to investigate whether the efficiency of the rental collection system could be improved by collecting rents by Direct Debit or Standing Order.

4. CONSULT

Consultation with service users, partners and the town residents is essential to run an effective service.

On-going consultation takes place between officers and the Allotments Group who represent the tenants. The Allotments Group currently meets approximately six times per year and is represented by four Members (there are currently two vacancies). Two open meetings for all allotment holders (including an Annual General Meeting) are scheduled per year. The minutes from meetings of the Allotments Group are presented to the Town Council's Recreation and the Arts Committee.

"The Grower" is a newsletter distributed to all allotment tenants. The newsletter is published by the Allotments Group four times per year. "The Grower" includes information from the Council, along with cultivation tips, recipes and news from the Allotments Group.

A link exists between the Town Council website and a separate website maintained by the Allotments Group. This website displays information about the Council's allotment sites, how to rent an allotment, archives of the Grower and information on the Allotments Group.

General information is also made available to tenants by posting notices on all entrances to the allotments sites. Town Hall contact information is available on the allotments signs, the Allotments Group website and in "The Grower".

A key recommendation that came from the Best Value Service Review of Democratic Services and Corporate Management was to carry out targeted consultation with key groups in the town on the services the Council provides. The door-to-door Residents' Survey that was carried out in February 2005 collated data on allotment usage and satisfaction with the allotments. The survey is currently repeated every five years.

The Challenge Panel considered whether the existing methods and frequency of consultation were effective.

The Challenge Panel agreed that the current methods and frequency of consultation were appropriate. However, to provide further data for the purposes of this Review, the Panel decided to consult with allotments tenants using a paper survey, which ran between 27 October 2006 and 12 January 2007. The results of the survey were used by the Panel to develop improvement measures for the service.

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

i. 2005 Door-to-Door Residents' Survey

The survey was sent to 8683 households on 3 February 2005, with a deadline of 10 March 2005. A total of 2314 surveys was returned, giving a response rate of 27%.

Please see Appendix 2 for the allotments questions included in the survey.

1. 71% of respondents were aware that the Council had allotments available for rent and 3% rented an allotment.
2. With regards to site facilities, Cameron Road received the highest satisfaction ratings, 44% regarding it as 'Good' or 'Excellent' and 43% as 'Satisfactory'. 39% regarded Asheridge Road as 'Good' or 'Excellent' and 35% as 'Satisfactory'. The lowest satisfaction rating was received for Amersham Road's facilities, with 38% of tenants regarding it as 'Poor'.

ii. 2006-2007 Allotment Tenants' Survey

A survey consisting of 19 questions, plus room for additional comments, was sent to all 158 tenants. A total of 44 surveys were returned, giving a response rate of 28%.

Please see Appendix 3 for the survey. A summary of the survey results is listed below (please note that percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number, so overall figures may be greater or less than 100% by 1%). Please see Appendix 4 for the full results.

1. 78% of tenants who replied rated the overall allotment service as 'Good' or 'Excellent', with 18% rating it as 'Satisfactory' and 5% as 'Poor'.

The level of satisfaction varied between the 3 sites: 100% of respondents from Amersham Road regarded the service as 'Good' or 'Excellent' and no respondents from either Amersham Road or Cameron Road regarded the service as 'Poor'. At Asheridge Road, however, 22% of respondents rated the service as 'Poor'.

2. The administration supplied by the Town Hall staff was rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent' by 55% of respondents, as 'Satisfactory' by 41% and 'Poor' by 5%.
3. 0% of respondents believed that the rent charged for plots was too expensive. 23% regarded it as 'Cheap' and 77% said it was 'About right'.
4. 52% of Cameron Road respondents felt that parking facilities at Cameron Road were 'Poor', 41% 'Satisfactory' and 7% 'Good'. Of these, 71% regularly use a car to get to the Cameron Road allotments, 58% living more than 5 minutes from their plot (although only 6% live more than 10 minutes away).
5. 100% of Amersham Road respondents felt that the site's gates/entrances were 'Good' or 'Excellent'. At Cameron Road, this figure was 52%, the remaining 48% regarding them as 'Satisfactory'. However, at Asheridge Road, 33% rated the gates/entrances as 'Poor', 56% as 'Satisfactory' and 11% as 'Good'. 56% rated the security at Asheridge Road as 'Poor'.
6. 100% of Amersham Road respondents felt that the access paths in-between plots were 'Good' or 'Excellent'. At Cameron Road, 53% ranked them as 'Satisfactory', 30% as 'Good' and 17% as 'Poor'. At Asheridge Road, the majority (44%) regarded them as 'Poor', 33% as 'Satisfactory' and 22% as 'Good'.
7. The majority of respondents at Asheridge Road and Cameron Road felt that water tap provision was 'Good' or 'Excellent' (55% at both sites), although 22% at Asheridge Road rated them as 'Poor'. 74% of tenants from all sites agreed with the Council's policy banning direct watering using hosepipes.

8. Across the sites, the majority of respondents felt that there were no problems with the standard of facilities, maintenance, availability of information, access to the sites, getting around the sites, or security.
9. Vandalism/Graffiti was felt to be a 'Slight problem' by 45% of respondents overall, breaking down into 100% of respondents at Amersham Road, 56% at Asheridge Road and 40% at Cameron Road.
10. Litter was regarded as a 'Slight problem' by 44% of Asheridge Road respondents, and as a 'Serious problem' by 22%.
11. Drainage was rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent' by 70%. Soil quality was felt to be 'Satisfactory' by 61% and 'Good' or 'Excellent' by the remaining 39%.
12. Whilst 'The Grower' was regarded as 'Good' or 'Excellent' by 83%, 69% were not aware of the Allotments Group website and 82% had never used it (only 40% of respondents said they did not have internet access). Of those who used the site, the majority (60%) used it a few times a year and no-one used it more than once a month.
13. 'Exercise and relaxation' was the aspect of the allotments enjoyed by most tenants (91%), followed by the opportunity to 'meet other tenants' (66%).
14. Whilst the additional comments by respondents were diverse, the following were received from more than one respondent:

Cameron Road:

- i. Insufficient car-parking
- ii. Turning circle needed at the top of the site
- iii. Paper from recycling centre blows onto the site

Asheridge Road:

- i. Biannual skips wanted for non-compostable waste
- ii. Hedge maintenance required
- iii. Site is accessible to vandals

ANALYSIS

The results of the 2005 Residents' Survey showed a relatively high awareness of the allotments service provided by the Council.

The responses indicated a fairly substantial level of dissatisfaction with the facilities at the Amersham Road site, 38% regarding them as 'Poor'. This situation has greatly improved, as the gates/entrances, access paths, drainage and soil quality were ranked as 'Satisfactory', 'Good', or 'Excellent' by 100% of Amersham Road respondents in the 2006-07 survey.

The results from the 2006-07 Tenants' Survey show that the majority of users are satisfied with the current service and the amount of rent they pay.

However, it is apparent that the level of satisfaction is lower for Asheridge Road tenants than elsewhere. Issues of concern at Asheridge Road are: the level of security provided by gates and fencing; the accessibility of the paths between plots; vandalism; and litter. A substantial percentage (22%) of tenants there are also dissatisfied with the current water tap provision. On this basis, the Panel discussed specific actions to improve Asheridge Road facilities, including path improvements and water provision.

The main problem raised at Cameron Road is the lack of adequate car parking. Whilst the Town Council is keen to promote environmentally sustainable transport to the allotments, it is recognised that the sites must allow car parking for the elderly and disabled, and that tenants will on occasion need to use their cars to transport goods to and from the sites. The Panel therefore felt it appropriate to give consideration to means by which the car parking facilities could be improved.

Vandalism/graffiti was identified as a problem at all three sites and the Panel agreed that mechanisms to combat this should be considered.

Tenants at both Asheridge and Cameron Road sites referred to the difficulties they experienced in getting rid of non-compostable waste and the Panel debated the provision of skips for waste disposal at Cameron Road and Asheridge Road.

Satisfaction with the availability of information in general and in particular with the "The Grower", a conventional newsletter, was high. However, there was low awareness of the Allotments Group website, even amongst respondents who use the internet. Greater publicity may be required to increase the uptake of this less traditional method of communication. The low frequency with which users return to the site may suggest that it is perceived as somewhat static in content.

5. COMPARE

The Challenge Panel's comparisons with other service providers were undertaken on two levels. On the first level, the Panel decided to visit four allotments sites; two run by town councils, one by a London Borough Council and one by an allotments society, on behalf of a town council. The purpose of these site visits was to compare the services provided, particularly in regard to adopting examples of good practice. On a second level, the Panel compared facilities, charges, usage data, income and expenditure with other Best Value Councils, to ascertain whether Chesham Town Council was comparable to these authorities.

'Compare' is not only about external comparisons, but also comparing in-house performance year-on-year and seeking continuous improvement. The Council operates its own local indicators that form part of the annual Best Value Performance Plan and are listed as Appendix 5.

i. SITE VISITS

The Panel visited allotments at Aylesbury, Beaconsfield, Northolt and Amersham. The site visit reports are included in this section.

Site Visit to Aylesbury Town Council Allotments – 26 October 2006

Present: Keith Turner (Allotments Officer, Aylesbury Town Council), Jackie Jarvis (Secretary, Aylesbury Gardening Society), Lynne Webb (Administration, Aylesbury Town Council), Bob Ayres, Cllr Alison Pirouet, Kathryn Graves.

Keith Turner (KT) handed out copies of the following:

- Overview of Aylesbury Town Allotments
- Aylesbury Town Council's (ATC) Allotment Tenancy Agreement
- Copies of standard letters concerning key provision, voluntary tenancy termination (plus form), inspection letters (including enforced termination of tenancy).
- Typical work schedule
- Application form for Allotment Tenancy
- Beginner's Guide to Allotment Gardening
- Introduction to Aylesbury Gardening Society
- Vegetable Sowing Calendar
- Composting Guide
- Allotments Health & Safety Guide
- Farm Manure notice

Staff

Keith Turner has been in post (which is part-time) for 3 months. The post of Allotments Officer was created in 2003. There are no manual staff employed by ATC (they do not currently have responsibility for cemeteries or parks) and contractors are used for work on the sites. (It is, however, thought that ATC will take on the cemetery by April 2007, and so will then take on a labour force that will also work on the allotments).

Regeneration

Since 2003, work has concentrated on bringing the allotments up to a reasonable standard. There has been significant investment in site security, e.g. gates and fences. There are currently approximately 50 plots that are non-workable due to factors such as the presence of trees, builders' rubble, etc. All sites have lockable gates, although there have been problems with tenants breaking locks and removing gates.

The three largest sites of Aylesbury's six are up to standard, but the three smaller sites still have issues, e.g. some such as Bedgrove require re-plotting. It is expected that there will be a regeneration budget for the next two years to get all the sites up to standard. If some of the plots require a lot of input to regenerate them, it may be decided to convert them into biodiversity areas.

The sites have maps of the plot layout on signs at the entrances to the sites.

Inspections and Evictions

An inspection policy is in place. If a plot has not been worked within a six-week period over the growing season, the tenant is written to. If the tenant does not contact ATC within 30 days, or the plot remains unworked, the tenancy is terminated. ATC has conducted about 40 evictions this year, as there is a substantial waiting list, and ATC wants to avoid sites getting into such poor condition that they would need rotavating.

Charges, Administration, Policies & Tenancy Agreement

Tenancy agreements are renewed annually (29 September).

ATC doesn't have anything equating to Chesham's policy on chemicals in open spaces, but the Gardening Society does try to guide tenants towards organic methods.

Currently ATC do not take a deposit from their tenants and consequently have a lot of difficulty in getting keys returned when tenancies have terminated. They are considering the idea of taking a fairly substantial deposit (e.g. £30) if a plot was rotavated prior to letting, with the intention of keeping the deposit if the plot is in a poor condition at the end of the tenancy.

ATC use the RBS allotments software (<http://www.rbs-solutions.com/Homepage.aspx?id=112>) to administer the allotments. This enables them to generate standard application packs, monitor rent payments, etc. Lynne said that the system was very useful, although it has a few glitches, but she felt that an experienced Excel user could probably achieve similar results without the need for dedicated software. The software costs £245, with an optional 1 day of training (additional cost £250), plus a £50 annual maintenance fee.

Data taken from ATC's website

(<http://www.aylesburytowncouncil.gov.uk/infopage.asp?infoid=694>) indicate that in the year ending March 2005, ATC spent £51,101 and in the year ending March 2006, ATC spent £36,298 on the allotments. Income from the allotments was £6,903 in 2005 and £7220 in 2006.

Tenants

The tenants are ethnically diverse, with a significant number of Asian allotment holders, as well as Caribbean, Italian and Polish tenants. ATC has not undertaken any promotion of the allotments to ethnic minority groups.

Plot sizes are being reduced to 2-5 pole plots to accommodate a new breed of time-constrained tenants. This is also enabling the waiting list to be reduced.

Communication

A 6-monthly newsletter is produced and is also published on the web, e.g. <http://www.aylesburytowncouncil.gov.uk/download/news%20letter%20.pdf>.

The officer's report is also published on the web, e.g.

<http://www.aylesburytowncouncil.gov.uk/infopage.asp?infoid=664>

Aylesbury Gardening Society

Allotment tenants receive free membership of the Gardening Society for one year. Members of the Society are available for advice at the sites on Sundays.

The Society can provide assistance for people who want to rotavate their plot.

The Society has a shop that is open every Sunday (money is paid to the Council for holding the shop, and the Society helped with site security, paying for the gates to one site).

The Society runs allotment competitions at the beginning of June and end of August.

Asbestos and Waste

There is a small amount of white asbestos on the sites. KT bags this up himself and takes it to a licensed tip.

Lots of tenants bring rubbish on to the sites, which is a problem that needs tackling, as ATC has to bring skips in to remove it.

Water

Hosepipes are completely banned and water is provided to all sites by troughs. ATC are investigating water-saving measures, such as water butts to try and reduce the costs of supplying water. One idea is to give a discount to tenants who install water butts where they have sheds.

Disabled Access

There are no disabled-access plots on any of the sites.

VISIT TO CROWN LEYS ALLOTMENT SITE

This site is one of the smaller sites in Aylesbury, with about 80 plots (the largest has about 197). A portion of this allotment site was sold off for housing and some of the money was invested into the remainder of the site. As a result, the site boasts ornamental fencing, electronic gates, pedestrian gates, a standard shed on almost every plot (maintained by ATC), a toilet, a club room, a main hard surface allowing vehicles to be driven into the site, and a parking area. This site is significantly more expensive to rent than the others (£16 for a 5-pole-plot, compared to £9 elsewhere) because of the level of facilities provided.

Despite the level of security, thefts and vandalism still occur.

Tenants cut their own verges. The remaining areas are cut thirteen times a year by contractors (CH Grounds from Chesham).

Hedge trimming is conducted only once every three years to maintain habitat for beneficial wildlife (and it reduces costs). This is done in a cyclical manner to ensure that only part of the hedge is trimmed in any one year. ATC are also looking into installing bird and bat boxes to enhance biodiversity.

VISIT TO ARDENHAM LANE

There is insufficient parking near to Ardenham Lane, and no dedicated parking.

A substantial area is currently not used as plots, as the District Council (when in charge of the allotments) had dug out "moats" to try to stop troublemakers accessing the site, rather than installing fencing. ATC are considering whether to fill in and regenerate the plots, or convert it into a biodiversity area.

There are also some drainage problems on this site.

This site does not have most of the facilities that Crown Leys has, i.e. no ATC-provided sheds, no toilet or club room and no hard surfaces for vehicular access.

Site Visit to Berkhamsted Town Council Allotments – 2 November 2006

Present: Bruce Jones (Sunnyside Allotments Society Chairman), Bob Ayres, Cllr Alison Pirouet, Kathryn Graves, Trevor Pilling, Vince Crompton.

General Site Information

The Sunnyside Allotments in Berkhamsted (off Ivy House Lane) are statutory allotments, split into two sections. The site is managed by the Sunnyside Allotments Society, but owned by Berkhamsted Town Council. There are 152 plots. At the start of 2006, there were a number of vacant plots, but there is now 100% occupancy and a small waiting list. The allotment is situated on a south-facing slope and free car parking is available.

There are strips of communal land along the front of the allotments, which are used for compost heaps.

There is very little vandalism because of the site's relatively isolated location, but the Society has a good relationship with the local police and is involved in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. There has been no need for locks on the gates to the allotments and on one side of the site there is a public right of way. The Society encourages the presence of non-tenants on the site, as they want there to be a positive image of the allotments throughout the community. The Society also has links with other community groups. For example, the local Baptist Church Toddler Group is invited onto the site and local artists are encouraged to display their works at the site on Open Day. The Society tries to increase its visibility in the community by holding stalls at local fetes.

During the 1990s there were a considerable number of vacancies on part of the site. As a consequence, part of the site was let to the Sunnyside Rural Trust, which is a charity, in 1995. Trees have been planted on this land. Bruce Jones is keen to see this land back in use as allotments in light of the increased demand.

Allotment Strategy

The Chairman is in the process of encouraging Berkhamsted Town Council to adopt an allotment strategy that defines the Council's vision for its allotments. "Growing In The Community" was recommended as a good guidance text for developing an allotment strategy. (Reference: Growing In The Community: a good practice guide for the management of allotments. D. Crouch, J. Sempik, R. Wiltshire. ISBN 184049 204 X. Published by Local Government Authority, 2001)

Administration, Policies, Charges & Tenancy Agreement

The Chairman organises the lettings and waiting list, and does the administration, although Berkhamsted Town Council then formalises the lettings. The Chairman authorises applications for sheds and greenhouses. He also collects the rent, issues tenancy agreements, allocates tenants to plots and sends out advisory notices supplied by the Council.

There is an Allotments Management Team (AMT), which is composed of members of the Council and allotment representatives. The allotment representatives tend to take on the role of unofficial allotment managers. Maintenance work, such as mowing and plumbing is administered by Berkhamsted Council, and the work is conducted by contractors. Where there is expertise amongst the tenants, the work can be conducted by the Society, e.g. the Society laid water pipes through the site from the water tanks.

There has been heavy promotion of the allotment sites.

The majority of plots are 10-pole plots, costing £13.40. There are a few five-pole plots, but in the chairman's experience, tenants usually find that these are not large enough.

Rents are increased in-line with the Retail Price Index, although the Chairman feels that the rental charges need to be looked at more thoroughly with reference to the costs entailed in running the site.

Previously tenants did not have to be Berkhamsted residents, but now there is 100% occupancy it is felt appropriate that new tenants should only come from Berkhamsted.

Inspections and Evictions

Inspections are conducted and evictions do take place. This system is in the process of being tightened up now there is 100% occupancy. At present, the Chairman speaks informally to tenants who are not cultivating their plots and will then wait for a couple of months before getting the Council involved if a plot is still not being worked, although this depends upon the level of demand for plots at the time.

Tenants

An increasing number of tenants are young women with families.

Communication

The Boards at the site contain a lot of information, such as contact phone numbers, regulations on bonfires and watering, and sources of goods, such as polythene.

Sunnyside Allotment Society

Every tenant is a member of the Society, membership to obtain full benefits costs £2.

The Society largely paid for the creation of paths at the site.

There is a recreational area on the site, with benches in a covered area. There is also a summer house and tea hut, with cooking facilities. It is felt that this area contributes to the community feeling on the site.

The Allotments Society Committee is heavily involved in all aspects of the site and works hard to communicate with all tenants to ensure they know what's going on at the site, e.g. if someone is having difficulty keeping up with cultivating their plot, etc. Committee members expressed the view that it can be difficult to find volunteers for the Committee.

The Society has its own website and produces a printed calendar that contains cultivation tips and recipes.

Allotments produce is sold on the Open Days. During the rest of the year a system of an honesty box is employed.

Pests & Pest Control

Rabbits and muntjac deer are present on the allotments, as it is situated in a rural location.

The Society strongly encourages an organic approach to cultivation, but there is no written policy on chemical use.

Wildlife

There are some “wild” plots on the site, but it is intended to review these in light of the increased demand for plots. It is queried whether wildlife plots are needed as the site is in a rural setting. In general the site is intended to be “untidy” rather than a very formal, rigidly maintained site.

Domesticated Animals

A chicken is kept on site in a run, and a rota has been established for her care.

Water

Tenants are not encouraged to use hosepipes, although they are allowed to use hosepipes to siphon water from the water tank into water butts.

Toilet

There is a toilet on the site, which is linked to a main sewer that runs along the bottom of the site. It cost £2500 to install the toilet and the materials used were mainly second-hand and free-of-charge (such as ply board salvaged from a building site). Plumbing was performed by skilled tenants and physical labour provided by other tenants.

Anyone who wants to use the facilities is added to the toilet-cleaning rota.

The toilet is locked at night using a combination lock.

Site Visit to Northolt Oldfield Allotments – 10 November 2006

Present: Steve Cole (Allotments Manager, Ealing Borough Council), Bob Ayres, Kathryn Graves, Vince Crompton.

Ealing Borough Allotments

The Borough's Allotments, of which the Oldfield Allotments is one, have an overall occupancy rate of 85%. The allotments have double the number of tenants they had 3 years ago. Hammersmith, a Borough with no allotments, is located to the East of the Borough, so there is considerable demand for allotments in the East of Ealing, some of which now have waiting lists. There are more vacancies in plots in the West of the Borough. The Borough Council are considering whether to review their policy of allowing out-of-borough tenants; options under consideration are doubling the charge for out-of-borough tenants, banning out-of-borough tenants altogether, or giving preference to in-borough tenants.

The allotments are not currently being promoted, as it is felt that word of mouth is the most effective means of advertising. Steve Cole handles approximately 40-50 calls per day from existing and prospective tenants, and is planning to launch a new website to tackle some of the most common enquiries. The Ealing Borough Council website does provide some information on the allotments, along with a downloadable PDF of an Allotment Gardening Guide http://www.ealing.gov.uk/ealing3/export/sites/ealingweb/services/environment/allotments/allotments_documents/gardening_guide.pdf, which is also made available to tenants in hard copy format.

General Site Information

There is on-road parking available outside the site.

The site has approximately 100 plots, with grass paths in between the plots.

There is a trading hut on site and this is operated by the allotments association.

Site Security

The site is protected by razor wire and palisade fencing with anti-climb paint. The gates are locked at all times. Steve Cole, however, feels that the palisade fencing can reduce visibility on site and is very expensive and would prefer to see thorny hedging employed.

Administration, Policies, Maintenance, Charges & Tenancy Agreement

Whilst Steve Cole is the manager of the 45 allotment sites owned by Ealing Borough Council, each site has a local volunteer site manager. There are only 5 London Boroughs with full-time allotments managers. Some Boroughs contract their management work out to their service contractors, but a downside to this system is the fact that the contractors are not subject to performance indicators or financial targets and as such there is less accountability.

The local managers collect the rent, which gives them an opportunity to meet the tenants and discuss any problems that they may be having. On the larger sites in the Borough, there will be 2-3 local managers per site. They have 15% of the rent to spend on improvements to the site, e.g. purchasing strimmers and mowers.

Steve Cole is very keen to get the tenants involved in taking responsibility for their site. He runs volunteer work parties for hedge maintenance, paths, redoing sections of the water supply, etc. and he says that this helps the tenants to take ownership of

the site. Steve Cole comes to the site himself a couple of times a year in order to conduct maintenance. On days where working parties conduct maintenance, BBQs are held afterwards to encourage tenants to socialise.

In a project started in 2006, entitled "Community Payback", Ealing Borough Council identifies environmental improvements on the allotments and works with the Police and Probation Service to have young probationers work on the site, providing free labour. This is felt to be a successful scheme with a good response from the youths and is felt to help reduce fear of crime in the area. The Probation Service deals with the health & safety issues and conducts its own risk assessments. The largest problem associated with this project is in sourcing toilets nearby.

Whilst Ealing Borough does not hold Open Days on the allotment sites yet, Steve Cole does get people on the waiting list for a site to spend part of a day working on the general maintenance of the site, and then get them to choose their plot. He feels that this helps them to take ownership of the site.

The charges for the Borough's sites for 2006/2007 are:

£5.84 per pole for basic sites that have no water supply
£7.26 per pole for standard sites
£8.50 per pole for sites with toilets (because of the sewerage charge)

50% concession is given to those who are:

- on a state pension
- on disability allowance
- unemployed
- on income support
- full time students

These concessions are going to be reviewed.

Inspections and Evictions

The volunteer site manager does have the power to evict tenants, but Steve Cole as the overall Allotments Manager can evict tenants if required. Currently a letter is sent out once a year if plots are not being cultivated, but with increased levels of occupancy, this system is being tightened up.

Tenants

Approximately half of the tenants are of retirement age, but there has been a recent trend of young women and couples with young families taking on plots. There are a number of different nationalities of tenants, including Portuguese, West Indian, Polish and Chinese people. There has been little sharing of cultivation know-how between the cultures, although there is some sharing of produce.

Pest Control

Organic cultivation is promoted, but there are no rules on pesticide use.

Wildlife

An oak tree is present on the site. As this encourages wildlife, the plot that it is located in has been given over to wildlife and a picnic area, which is intended to enhance the community spirit on the site. Other sites within the Borough have wildlife plots and community orchards. Where plots are deemed not workable, wildlife ponds are established. Steve Cole works with Countryside Rangers on issues such as hedgerow management.

Water

There is a temporary hosepipe ban on the site because of the drought over the summer, but it is thought that this ban will become permanent. Following the introduction of the ban, there was a massive reduction in water use. Tenants were still able to cultivate their produce successfully, but a number of tenants did complain about the ban.

Steve Cole feels it is important to let the tenants know how much money is spent on supplying water to the site, so that they are aware that they have a choice; if water usage is reduced and less money therefore spent on water, more money will be available for improving other services on the site.

Water butts have been obtained free of charge from companies as scrap material. The companies wash out the plastic containers and Steve Cole collects them. Maintenance contractors are used to distribute the butts to the Borough's allotment sites. Butts are encouraged as a means of collecting rainwater from the roofs of sheds, or for filling up by hosepipe.

Other water-saving techniques are used, e.g. geotextiles and woodchip.

Soil Protection

Green manures are used on plots in order to protect the soil from compaction and also from UV radiation, which breaks down humus. Two species used are crimson clover and *Phacelia*. To kick-start their use, the Council has provided the seed, which is dug-in in the spring, free of charge, but in return wants to obtain feedback from the tenants on how successful the green manuring has been. The initial outlay was £150 for 1000 packets of seed. The intention is to supply the seed for sale in the trading huts to encourage trade, which has been in decline.

Toilet

Steve Cole feels that standard, plumbed-in toilets are problematic on allotments sites and would like to see them removed. There is a composting toilet on another Ealing Borough Council site and he says that this has worked very well. This toilet cost approximately £7000-£8000, although he feels that it needn't have been so expensive. The toilet is fitted with a ramp for disabled access. The following were stated as requirements for a compost toilet:

- the use of a five-pole plot given over to growing flowers that can be used as the destination for the toilet waste.
- an addition to the tenancy agreement to stipulate that the tenant must agree to the toilet cleaning rota and participate in annual maintenance in accordance with the specific requirements of a composting toilet.

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative was suggested as a useful source of information on toilets for allotments.

Disability Access

Provision for the disabled is being increased. Raised beds have been built by the allotments community using scaffold boards and located near the allotment entrance. There is also provision for tool storage and shelter. As yet, there are no wheelchair users as tenants and these plots are currently largely used by older people.

Steve Cole noted that a walled garden site solely for use by disabled people was established in Sutton, consisting only of raised beds. However, demand for this facility decreased substantially after only one year.

Communication

Steve Cole is currently considering the production of a generic publication on allotments (including guidance and advice) that could be adopted by local authorities, branded as their own, and provided to tenants.

Site Visit to Amersham Town Council Allotments – 16 November 2006

Present: Sue Hinkly (Amersham Town Council), Bob Ayres, Kathryn Graves.

Amersham Town Council is currently responsible for 120 plots across the town.

Pyghtle Allotments

This site has lockable gates to prevent travellers from camping on the site. The site has a car park and cars can be driven up to plots, which is felt to be particularly beneficial for elderly tenants.

The site has 50 plots, which can be split. There is currently a waiting list for this site.

Sheds are allowed on this site, up to a size of 8' by 8'. Lock-up tool boxes are also present on some plots. There is a communal shed on site for storing spare tools.

The site benefits from broad paths, which makes grass cutting and maintenance relatively easy.

Excess produce is made available in a cold frame on the site. There is a scheme to involve local school children; the children make scarecrows that are sold to tenants and the money is donated to charity.

Woodside Road Allotments

This site has a lockable gate and a small car park. There is unlocked pedestrian access to the site. A small amount of vandalism has been experienced on this site.

The site has 50 plots, some of which are split in half. There is a waiting list for this site.

There is a Council shed on site, which allows storage for the Amersham Allotment Holders Association. There is a Council notice board on the shed.

The site has a chemical toilet, which is maintained by the Chair of the Amersham Allotment Holders Association. The toilet costs £600 for a 6-month rental.

The Woodside Road site has 3 water tanks. The water main is only 0.5" diameter, which limits the delivery of water to the taps if more than one is in use at any time.

White Lion Road Allotments

This site had been shut down when interest in allotments dwindled and there were no tenants. The site became run-down. This was exacerbated by the presence of a footpath that runs through the middle of the site and is used throughout the week as a route to school for children (the site is unlocked). There was a lot of vandalism, e.g. the tap has been fitted with a key to prevent it being left running deliberately. However, the site has now been re-opened because of the demand for plots. There is less of a problem now with vandalism, but there is a lot of litter, fly-tipping and dog-fouling (dog walkers use the site and there is no dog waste bin on site because of the maintenance cost). There is a sign up prohibiting dog fouling.

A large amount of the site has not yet been regenerated and is currently given over to grass. Currently there are 22 operational plots on the site.

There is only one tap, located at one end of the site, which means that people are reluctant to take on plots at the other end of the site. People are also reluctant to take on a new plot here, because they will have to rotavate it themselves.

The site has a small car park.

The existing tenants have not shown an interest in organising and running the site.

Maintenance

The Town Council's grounds staff mow the grass. Tenants maintain hedges themselves.

Administration

Administration is performed by Amersham Town Council.

Inspections and Evictions

There is an informal system of inspections. Site representatives monitor the state of the plots and the Council will send letters to tenants whose plots are not in a satisfactory condition.

Tenants

There are an increasing number of young people taking on plots.

Amersham Allotment Holders Association

Membership costs £1 per annum.

There is an annual newsletter and one gathering per year, although the Association has not been very successful in garnering support from tenants for social events on the allotments.

Items such as fertiliser, canes and slug pellets are bought in bulk by the Association and are available for sale to members. The sales hut is open once a month on a Sunday from Easter to October.

Water

Hosepipes can only be used for filling water butts. The water taps are turned on in April. Tenants have asked for more taps and tanks at the Woodside Road and Pyghtle sites.

Disabled Access

There are two disabled-access raised plots at the White Lion Road site, but these have never been occupied.

Pests

Pheasants and pigeons are present at the Pyghtle site.

Rats are present on the Woodside Road site, which is likely to be linked to the fact that some residents dump their household waste on their plots. Rat control using bait is not allowed because of the risk of exposure to rat poison on a public site.

Charges

The rental charges for these 4 service providers are compared with the charges at Chesham in the below table:

Sites:	Charges per pole:	Concessions
Chesham	Amersham Rd: £3.00 Asheridge Rd: £3.00 Cameron Rd: £2.00	50% rebate for over 60s
Aylesbury	Crown Leys: £3.20 Others: £1.80	
Berkhamsted	Sunnyside: £1.34	
Ealing Borough Sites (including Northolt)	No Water: £5.84 Standard: £7.26 With Toilet: £8.50	50% concession for those on state pension, with a disability, unemployed, on income support and full-time students (under review).
Amersham	£3.60	

Following the site visits, the Challenge Panel agreed the following:

Chesham's allotments service provides good value for money and that the Council should:

Consider an increase in rental charges to enable improvements to the on-site facilities.

Consider the use of thorny hedging to improve site security and enhance biodiversity at Asheridge Road.

Investigate water-saving measures, such as the promotion of water butts.

Consider the provision of toilet facilities at the Cameron Road site.

Consider whether self-governance of the allotments by the Allotments Group would be feasible or desirable for Chesham.

ii. COMPARISON WITH OTHER BEST VALUE COUNCILS

A questionnaire comprising 10 questions was sent to the 40 other Best Value Town and Parish Councils. In total, 13 replies were received. Please see Appendix 6 for the collated results. The following are noteworthy points:

1. Chesham has a comparatively large allotment provision. Only Seaham and Newbury have a higher number of plots.
2. Chesham has a relatively high level of annual expenditure, with only Lewes and Huntingdon spending more.
3. The rental charges at Chesham are competitive in comparison with the 12 councils. Only one other council (Hatfield) stated that they had a discount for OAPs.
4. Despite having the third largest plot provision, Chesham is fifth in terms of the

size of its budgeted income from allotments.

5. Only Bodmin provides a toilet facility (a portaloo) and this is one of their major areas of expenditure.
6. The majority of councils either prohibit the use of hosepipes entirely, or place restrictions upon their use.

Following an analysis by the Challenge Panel of the data from the other Best Value Town and Parish Councils, the Panel agreed that:

The existing allotment service provided by Chesham Town Council compared favourably with the other service providers.

6. COMPETE

The Panel considered whether it would be possible or desirable for any other body to take over the running of the Council's allotments sites. The results of the Best Value Group questionnaire showed that 8 councils ran their own allotments and the remaining 5 councils' allotments were run by allotments associations. The Panel agreed that the Allotments Group would be the only group that might be in a position to administer the allotments. The site visit to the Sunnyside Allotments in Berkhamsted provided an opportunity to establish how such an arrangement operates in practice and the level of work involved for the self-governing group.

Following discussion, the Panel agreed that:

It would not be logistically possible for any other body to take over the running of the Council's allotment sites.

7. IMPROVEMENT MEASURES

Having rigorously considered the 4 'C's of Best Value and particularly the main issues pertinent to this service, the Panel has put forward a number of suggestions for an action plan designed to lead to continuous improvement. All of the below were debated and the Panel decided upon which should be progressed and recommended to Council for adoption.

PROPOSAL	RECOMMEND FOR ADOPTION ?
Enable rents to be collected by Standing Order or Direct Debit	NO. The Panel ascertained that using Direct Debit would still require administration at the Town Hall, as the Direct Debits would have to be initiated by the Council. The Council would also have to pay bank charges. Whilst Standing Orders do not require administration by the Council, nor would bank charges be payable, Standing Orders are for fixed amounts meaning that tenants would have to alter them annually in line with rent increases. The Panel felt, therefore, that neither Direct Debits nor Standing Orders would be feasible.
Council to decide upon a small increase in allotment rents at all sites.	YES.
Investigate the use of thorny hedging at Asheridge Road to improve security and enhance biodiversity.	YES.
Investigate increasing gate and fence heights at Asheridge Road to increase security.	YES.
Works to improve the condition of the central path at Asheridge Road.	YES.
Increase the provision of water taps at Asheridge Road.	NO. The Panel agreed it was more sustainable to promote water conservation and increased water efficiency.
Investigate sourcing water butts for reduced-price provision to tenants.	YES.
Provision of toilet facilities at Cameron Road.	NO. The Panel agreed that information on different toilet types and costs should be provided to the Council for its deliberation.
Increase parking provision at Cameron Road.	NO. The Panel felt it would be inappropriate for the Council to support an increase in non-sustainable transport to allotment sites, in view of its Environmental Policy.
Investigate the provision of dedicated parking for the disabled/elderly at Cameron Road.	YES – although the impact of an 18-month experimental road traffic order on parking at Cameron Road should be taken into consideration.
Actively engage the Police and PCSOs to help tackle vandalism on allotments.	YES.
Increase awareness amongst young people	YES.

of the existence of allotments and their purpose, in order to reduce vandalism.	
Council supply skips for non-compostable waste.	NO. The Panel felt that skips would be used for general dumping by tenants and non-tenants, and that tenants (like householders) should be responsible for their own waste.
Skips for non-compostable waste to be organised by the Allotments Group.	YES. In consultation with allotments holders, it was agreed that skips could be organised by the Allotments Group and funded through contributions from those tenants who wish to use them.
Publicise the Allotments Group website to increase usage.	YES.
Broaden the range of discounts available to include more groups than the over-60s, e.g. the unemployed, students, etc.	NO. The Panel felt that greater publicity of the existing 50% discount for the over-60s would be more beneficial.
Increased publicity of the 50% discount for the over-60s.	YES.
Self-governance of the allotments by the Allotments Group.	NO. The Panel agreed that the Allotments Group did not currently have the membership required to enable them to run the allotments.

8. FIVE YEAR ACTION PLAN

2007-2008

- Investigate sourcing water butts for reduced-price provision to tenants.
- Provide information on toilet types and costs to the Council for consideration of provision.
- Publicise the Allotments Group website to increase usage.
- Actively engage the Police and Police Community Support Officers to help tackle vandalism on allotments.
- Implement small increase in allotment rents.

2008-2009

- Investigate the use of thorny hedging at Asheridge Road to improve security and enhance biodiversity.
- Increase awareness among young people of the existence of allotments and their purpose in order to reduce vandalism.
- Increase publicity of the 50% discount for the over-60s.

2009-2010

- Implement works to increase gate and fence heights at Asheridge Road to increase security.

2010-2011

- Implement works to improve the condition of the central path at Asheridge Road.

2011-2012

- Investigate the provision of dedicated parking for the disabled/elderly at Cameron Road (subject to the outcomes of the experimental road traffic order).

APPENDIX 1

BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW - BASELINE DOCUMENT

ALLOTMENTS 2006/07

1. Definition of Service

The Council's service objective is to provide high quality allotments working in partnership with the allotment group (a group consisting of Members and allotment holders).

2. What is the Service?

The Council manages 227 plots split across 3 sites located at Asheridge Road, Amersham Road and Cameron Road.

3. What are the Specific Aims of the Service?

To provide allotments for residents of the town in accordance with Section 23 of the Small Holdings Allotments Act 1908, which requires a local Council to provide allotment gardens for personal cultivation where it is of the opinion that a demand exists in the parish. Moreover, under that Section, a local Council must take into consideration any written representations for the provision of allotments made to it by any six parliamentary electors or council tax payers resident in the parish.

4. How is the Service Delivered?

The basic administration and collection of allotment rents is undertaken by staff at the Town Council. The Council issues formal tenancy agreements based on the guidelines issued by the National Association of Local Councils (an updated tenancy agreement is now issued to new allotment holders and will be issued to all existing allotment holders in October 2006). The day-to-day supervision and management of the three allotment sites is undertaken by the Parks and Premises Manager and his staff working closely with the allotment group who advise and recommend on improvements.

5. What does the Service Consist of?

The total number of lettable plots is as follows:

LOCATION	NO. OF PLOTS
Amersham Road	6
Asheridge Road	45
Cameron Road	176
Total No. of Lettable Plots	227

The allotments are maintained by the Parks and Premises Department who undertake the following:

- the Manager liaises with his team to ensure regular grass cutting and cultivation
- the Manager liaises with contractors on an ad hoc basis for additional grass cutting, cultivation and general clearing works
- the Manager liaises with the allotment group to implement improvement measures if deemed appropriate.
- health and safety checks of allotments including disabled provision if appropriate.
- Twice yearly inspections in partnership with the Allotments Group.

The administration team at the Town Hall undertake the general administration, including rent collection, reminders of rent renewals and notices to quit.

6. Cost and Unit Data

With effect from 1 October 2006 the rent per pole per annum will be:

<u>Allotment Site</u>	<u>Charge per Pole</u>
Asheridge Road/Bellingdon Road	£3.00
Cameron Road	£2.00
Amersham Road	£3.00

A rebate of 50% of the standard rent may be claimed by any Tenant on reaching the age of 60 in the financial year for which rent is due.

7. Consultation and Information

On-going consultation takes place between officers and the allotment group who represent the tenants. The Allotment Group currently meet approximately six times per year and are represented by four Members (there is currently one vacancy). Two open meetings for all allotment holders (including an A.G.M.) are scheduled per year.

A link has been created from the Town Council website to a separate website that displays up-to-date information on allotments and vacant plots.

A key recommendation that came from the Best Value Service Review of Democratic Services and Corporate Management, was to carry out targeted consultation with key groups in the town on the services the Council provides. A user feedback questionnaire is currently being designed by the group.

The door-to-door Residents' Survey that was carried out in February 2005 collated data on usage and satisfaction on the allotments. The survey is currently repeated every five years.

APPENDIX 2

Allotments Questions in the 2005 Residents' Survey

Chesham Town Council manages three allotment sites in the town, Asheridge Road, Cameron Road and Amersham Road. This section looks at these three sites.

12. Were you aware that you could rent an allotment from the Town Council? Yes No

13. Do you or a member of your household rent an allotment from the Town Council? (**Tick all that apply**)

- Yes, at Asheridge Road site
- Yes, at Cameron Road site
- Yes, at Amersham Road site
- No Go to Question 15

14. How would you rate the facilities at the site?

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Asheridge Rd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cameron Rd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amersham Rd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX 3



Chesham Town Council Annual Allotment Holders' Survey 2006

Chesham Town Council is one of 41 larger local Town/Parish Councils that are required to meet the government's 'Best Value' legislation. The aim of 'Best Value' is to ensure that service provision is appropriate for the residents of Chesham.

Every five years the Council carries out a door-to-door household residents' survey to assess the Council's services and performance. In-between this time the Council would also like to receive your views on the service it provides. As a Chesham Town Council allotment holder, we would appreciate 5 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire below. We value your comments and suggestions and these will help us to identify where improvements can be made in the future.

We look forward to receiving your completed survey. *Please return it to Chesham Town Council, Town Hall, Chesham, HP5 1DS by FRIDAY 12 JANUARY 2007*

Please complete the survey by placing a in the appropriate box or writing in the space provided.

1. Which site do you rent an allotment at?

- Amersham Road
Asheridge Road
Cameron Road

2. How do you normally get to your allotment?

Walk Car Bicycle Motorbike Bus

Other (please specify):.....

3. How long does it take to get from home to your plot?

Less than 5 minutes 5 – 10 minutes more than 10 minutes

4. What do you MOST enjoy about the allotment site? (Tick all that apply)

Close to home Meet other allotment holders Low rent
Exercise/Relaxation Grow my own crops Other

If Other, please specify:
.....

5. How good are the facilities at the allotment site?

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Car Parking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gates/entrance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access paths in-between plots	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water taps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. How good is the drainage at the allotment site?

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

7. How good is the soil quality at the allotment site?

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

8. Do you agree with the existing water-saving policy that hosepipes can only be used to fill water butts and may not be used to directly water the allotment plots?

Yes No

9. How would you rate the security of the site?

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

10. How would you rate the administration from the Town Hall regarding your allotment?

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

11. How would you rate *The Grower*, the publication produced by the Council's Allotment Group?

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

12. Which features of *The Grower* do you find useful? (Please tick all that apply)

News Cultivation Tips Recipes

13. Are you aware that the Allotments Group has its own website?

Yes No

14. How frequently do you visit the Allotments Group website?

At least once a week At least once a month A few times a year
Once a year Never

If Never, do you have internet access?

Yes No

15. What features of the website do you use?

News & Events The Grower Allotments Group Info Horticultural Society Info
Do not use the site

16. How would you rate the website?

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent Have not seen the site

17. How much do you consider each of the following issues a problem for the allotment site?

	Not a Problem	Slight Problem	Serious Problem
Standard of facilities (e.g. water taps)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vandalism/graffiti	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Litter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to the allotment site	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting around the allotment site (e.g. pathways)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standard of security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. What is your opinion of the annual rent charged for your plot?

Cheap About Right Too Expensive

19. Overall, how would you rate the allotment service provided by Chesham Town Council?

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

Additional Comments

*Thank You for your time in completing this questionnaire
Please return it to Chesham Town Council, Town Hall, Chesham, HP5 1DS
by FRIDAY 12 JANUARY 2007*

APPENDIX 4

Chesham Town Council Allotment Holders' Survey 2006-07 Results

Number of Surveys

Received:

Amersham Road	4
Asheridge Road	9
Cameron Road	31
TOTAL	44

Question One Which site do you rent an allotment at?

Amersham Road	4
Asheridge Road	9
Cameron Road	31

Question Two How do you normally get to your allotment?

(multiple answers possible)

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Walk	1	5	17	23
Car	3	7	22	32
Bicycle	0	0	3	3
Motorbike	0	0	0	0
Bus	0	0	0	0

Question Three How long does it take to get from home to your plot?

(multiple answers possible, dependent on transport used)

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
<5 minutes	1	6	13	20
5-10 minutes	0	2	16	18
>10 minutes	3	1	2	6

Question Four What do you most enjoy about the allotment site?
(Multiple answers possible)

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Close to home	1	6	20	27
Meet other holders	2	7	20	29
Low rent	4	7	13	24
Exercise/Relax	3	7	30	40
Grow own crops	2	8	5	15
Other	1	0	4	5

Others: Advice from other holders
 Love of gardening
 Family atmosphere
 Peace & Quiet
 Fresh Fruit & Vegetables

Question Five How good are the facilities at the allotment site?

Car-Parking *Please note that there are no car parking facilities at Amersham Road*

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	3	15	18
Satisfactory	0	2	12	14
Good	4	3	2	9
Excellent	0	0	0	0

Gates/Entrances

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	3	0	3
Satisfactory	0	5	14	19
Good	3	1	11	15
Excellent	1	0	4	5

Access paths in-between plots

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	4	5	9
Satisfactory	0	3	16	19
Good	3	2	9	14
Excellent	1	0	0	1

Water Taps*Please note there are no taps at Amersham Road*

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	2	2	4
Satisfactory	0	2	12	14
Good	0	4	13	17
Excellent	1	1	4	6

Question Six

How good is the drainage at the allotment site?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	0	3	3
Satisfactory	0	3	7	10
Good	0	5	14	19
Excellent	4	1	6	11

Question Seven

How good is the soil quality at the allotment site?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	0	0	0
Satisfactory	3	6	18	27
Good	1	3	9	13
Excellent	0	0	4	4

Question Eight

Do you agree with the policy preventing hose-pipes from direct watering?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Yes	2	5	24	31
No	0	4	7	11

Question Nine

How would you rate the security of the site?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	5	2	7
Satisfactory	1	3	17	21
Good	3	1	10	14
Excellent	0	0	1	1

Question Ten How would you rate the administration from the Town Hall?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	2	0	2
Satisfactory	0	3	15	18
Good	2	3	11	16
Excellent	2	1	5	8

Question Eleven How would you rate The Grower?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	0	1	1
Satisfactory	0	3	3	6
Good	1	5	20	26
Excellent	2	1	6	9

Question Twelve Which features of The Grower do you find useful?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
News	0	5	26	31
Cultivation Tips	3	6	22	31
Recipes	2	3	12	17

Question Thirteen Are you aware that the Allotments Group has its own website?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Yes	0	1	12	13
No	2	8	19	29

Question Fourteen How frequently do you use the Allotments Group website?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Once a week+	0	0	0	0
Once a month+	0	0	1	1
A few times a year	0	1	2	3
Once a year	0	0	1	1
Never	1	7	15	23

If Never, do you have internet access?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Yes	1	4	13	18
No	0	4	8	12

Question Fifteen What features of the website do you use?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
News & Events	0	1	3	4
The Grower	0	1	1	2
Allotments Group Info	0	0	3	3
Hort Society Info	0	1	3	4
Do not use the site	0	6	14	20

Question Sixteen How would you rate the website?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	0	0	0
Satisfactory	0	0	2	2
Good	0	1	2	3
Excellent	0	0	0	0
Have not seen the site	0	6	15	21

Question Seventeen How much do you consider these to be a problem for the allotment site?

Standard of facilities

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	1	5	24	30
Slight problem	0	3	7	10
Serious problem	1	0	0	1

Maintenance

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	3	5	21	29
Slight problem	0	3	7	10
Serious problem	0	1	3	4

Availability of Info

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	3	6	25	34
Slight problem	0	2	5	7
Serious problem	0	0	0	0

Vandalism/Graffiti

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	0	2	16	18
Slight problem	1	5	12	18
Serious problem	0	2	2	4

Litter

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	3	3	18	24
Slight problem	0	4	12	16
Serious problem	0	2	1	3

Access to the site

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	3	5	23	31
Slight problem	0	3	7	10
Serious problem	0	1	0	1

Getting around the site (e.g. pathways)

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	3	4	16	23
Slight problem	0	2	13	15
Serious problem	0	3	0	3

Standard of security

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Not a problem	0	3	19	22
Slight problem	2	3	10	15
Serious problem	0	3	1	4

Question Eighteen What is your opinion of the annual rent charged for your plot?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Cheap	1	2	7	10
About Right	2	7	24	33
Too Expensive	0	0	0	0

Question Nineteen

Overall, how would you rate the allotment service provided by CTC?

	Amersham Road	Asheridge Road	Cameron Road	Total
Poor	0	2	0	2
Satisfactory	0	3	4	7
Good	1	4	20	25
Excellent	1	0	6	7

Additional Comments

Cameron Road	Frequency of comment
Create more car-parking/There is insufficient parking	3
Need official turning circle at the top of Cameron Road	1
Turning circle at top of Cameron Rd needs to be kept clear of rubbish	1
Paper from recycling bin blows into allotments	2
Higher fencing wanted	1
Annual skip wanted for non-compostable waste	1
Restoration of public footpath from Eskdale to Cameron Road	1
Railway sleepers need replacing	1
Driveways get blocked by manure deliveries	1
Someone allows a dog to run loose and it digs holes in a plot	1
Pro-active chairman is a good source of advice	1
Grass cutting at top end needs to be more frequent	1
Locks can be difficult to open and close	1

Asheridge Road

Skip wanted biannually for non-compostable waste	2
Hedges need maintenance	2
Bellingdon Rd gate very awkward & stiff	1
Grass paths not cut often enough	1
Toilet wanted	1
Willing to have a rent increase if improvements made to site	1
Some gates and parts of fencing make the site easily accessible by vandals	2
Change surfacing of central path	1
Another tap wanted	1
People inherit non-compostable waste on their plots	1

Amersham Road*No comments*

APPENDIX 5

Allotments Performance Indicators from Chesham Town Council's Best Value Performance Plan

Performance Indicator Allotments	Target 2004/05	Actual 2004/05	Target 2005/06	Actual 2005/06	Target 2006/07
Cost to the Council per elector	£0.59	£0.83	£0.66	£0.74	£0.93
Income to the Council per hectare of workable allotment land	£461.42	£543.02	£557.86	£621.66	£612.76
Percentage of uncultivated allotment land	20%	15.8%	15%	2.5%	2.5%
Percentage of respondents to survey indicating that allotments provided by the Town Council are 'satisfactory', 'good' or 'excellent'	N/A	74%	75%	N/A	75%
Frequency of inspection of allotment plots per annum	1	1	2	2	2
Frequency of management of untenanted plots per annum	4	4	4	4	4

As well as the above mentioned performance indicators, the Council has a number of performance standards that are monitored by staff. They include:

- monitoring the number of vacant plots
- monitoring and collecting rent arrears
- maintenance of boundary hedges
- monitoring excessive water consumption caused by leaks and taking corrective action

APPENDIX 6

Allotments Questionnaire sent to the “41 Group” of Best Value Town and Parish Councils

1. How many allotment plots do you have? (Are they standard 10-pole plots?)

Huntingdon

168 on 5 sites, the majority of these are standard 10 poles although we have split some down to 5 and even 2 poles to encourage take up which has proved extremely popular.

Stratton St. Margaret

On one site the plots are 5 pole and there are 48 plots, rental is £18 per year. The sizes vary on the other site and therefore the rental also varies, 53 plots in total.

Bodmin

16 allotment plots, some subdivided into half plots, plus 10 community gardens.

Lewes

6 sites - total 180 plots - originally "standard" rod/perch/pole measures, but now vary widely as they have been both sub-divided and merged over many years.

Chippenham

We measure our allotments in lugs (1 lug = 2 sq yds). We have a total of 1319 lugs broken down predominantly into 5 or 10 lug allotments.

Bilbrook

23 (300 sq yards)

Barnstaple

The council has 4 sites with a total of 182 plots, at the moment the plots are measured in land yards ranging from 4 - 10, but from the 1 April 2007 all plots will be measured in metric.

Seaham

82 plots over 7 sites and a further 369 plots rented and managed by 6 Allotment Associations.

Lichfield

150 plots which are standard 10-pole plots.

Newbury

We own 5 sites and rent another. We have about 400 tenants. Plots are all sizes from 2 to 10 poles. Some tenants have multiple plots.

Hatfield

We have 92 x 5 pole plots. We took the decision to change them all to 5 pole as people were struggling to maintain their 10 poles.

Bicester

Five sites with approximately 121 plots (some of these have been split into half plots). One site has been closed for several years and is due to be reopened this autumn.

Chesham

227 plots on 3 sites; largely 10 pole plots, but some 5 pole plots and a few that are smaller.

2. What rental do you charge per pole for your allotment plots? (If you charge different prices at different sites, I would be interested to know the different charges and the reason for the difference.)

Huntingdon

Half Plot (5 poles) £9.00
10 Pole (Basic) Plot £16.50
Smaller Plot £15.50
Larger Plot £17.50

Stratton St. Margaret

5 pole = £18, for plots of varying sizes prices range from £8.80 to £32.

Bodmin

£18 per plot per year - £9 per half plot.

Lewes

£3 per rod.

Chippenham

£4.55 per lug.

Bilbrook

£15

Barnstaple

We charge £1.85 per land yard at present, but when it is transferred into metric we will be charging 10p per square metre.

Seaham

£23 per plot.

Lichfield

£27.50

Newbury

Standard charge – was £3.75 per pole, just increased for next year to £4 per pole.

Hatfield

£14 for a 5 pole plot (50% reduction for OAPs).

Bicester

Charges are different for each site, due to the size of plots and locations. Charges are between £10 and £20 per annum, although this is currently being reviewed.

Chesham

£3.00 per pole at two sites, £2.00 per pole at a site with poorer soil quality. A 50% discount is available for people aged 60 and over.

3. What is your budgeted expenditure on allotments for 2006/07?

Huntingdon

Net Expenditure Requirement for 2006/7 is £23,333.

Stratton St. Margaret

£3,000

Bodmin

£1,730

Lewes

£18,625

Chippenham

£14,811

Bilbrook

£1,000

Barnstaple

The allotment budget for 2006/07 was £8,200. Normally it is less than this but £6,000 was put into allotment improvements as the council is currently carrying out its five-year plan to bring the allotments up to a good standard.

Seaham

£3,220

Lichfield

£0

Newbury

£500 on rent for the site we rent, £1,250 for water, £10,000 for general maintenance, £2,600 for rat control. We are already overspent this year – due to water demand, and all sites at max capacity = more maintenance.

Hatfield

£7,410

Bicester

£2850

Chesham

£16,785

4. What are your major areas of expenditure, e.g. water rates, staff costs, etc.

Huntingdon

Staffing costs (Grounds maintenance)	£11,795
Central Admin Support Costs	£2,149
Share of Depot Costs	£8,085
Repairs & Maintenance	£1,000
Waste Disposal (hire of skips)	£600
Water Charges	£850
Newsletter & best kept competition	£540
Share of Insurance Costs	£439
Software Maintenance support costs	£275
General	£200
TOTAL	£25,933

Stratton St. Margaret

Water rates, grass cutting of main path, waste disposal is the most expensive because of the increase in land fill charges. We tried communal compost bins, but these just got abused with all sorts of waste being put in them.

Bodmin

Major areas of expenditure are portaloo and pest control (moles).

Lewes

Staff costs £12525, Premises £5250, Supplies & Services £850.

Chippenham

Supplies/maintenance and salaries.

Bilbrook

Water charges & fencing repairs.

Barnstaple

Improvements = £6,000, Water = £1,200 and Maintenance 1,000.

Seaham

Water rates.

Lichfield

N/A

Newbury

We employ a contractor to maintain the allotments – about £700 per month.

Hatfield

Grounds maintenance staff - £4,650
Repairs & maintenance (contractors) - £800

Bicester

Maintenance – fencing, etc.

Chesham

2006 figures:	
Parks & Premises Staff:	£4256
Depot Overheads:	£3560
Administrative Staff:	£2670
Administrative Overheads:	£1441
Contractors' Fees:	£1200
Fencing:	£727

Water Rates:	£460
Grounds Maintenance:	£236
Sundry Expenses:	£188
Postage:	£26
Equipment Maintenance:	£23
Stationery	£3

5. What is your budgeted income from the allotments for 2006/07?

Huntingdon

£2,000

Stratton St. Margaret

£1,600

Bodmin

£325

Lewes

£3,700

Chippenham

£5,029

Bilbrook

£345

Barnstaple

Budget income for 2006/07 was £2,000 generated via rents.

Seaham

£2,895

Lichfield

£830

Newbury

£9,100

Hatfield

£950

Chesham

£2,065

6. Are the allotments managed by the Town/Parish Council, or are they managed by an allotments group/society?

Huntingdon

Sole management by Huntingdon Town Council, although we are exploring self management. We have appointed representatives on all sites who liaise with the office when there are issues or matters of concern. This works well.

Tavistock

Run by an allotments association since April 2000.

Stratton St. Margaret

By the Parish Council.

Bodmin

By an allotment association.

Lewes

Managed by the Town Council (attempts to encourage formation of site-based or town-wide Society structure never quite come-off).

Chippenham

By Allotments Society.

Bilbrook

By Parish Council.

Barnstaple

The 4 allotment sites are managed by the Town Council. Last year the tenants setup their own Allotment Association, which works with the Town Council.

Seaham

6 sites are managed by Allotment Associations who collect the rent from tenants and pay their relevant water bills.

Lichfield

By an allotments society on a block 7 year tenancy, who are responsible for the repairs, maintenance, water costs, etc.

Newbury

Managed by us, via an officer who does all the admin and a steward at each site who is our local rep and also a tenant.

Hatfield

Managed by us but trying to start an Allotment Holders Association as this is one of our Performance Indicators for 2006/07.

Bicester

Managed by Town Council.

Chesham

Managed by the Town Council, who work with a tenants' Allotments Group which includes Councillors as members.

7. How do you consult with your allotment tenants?

Huntingdon

4 newsletters each year, Annual Allotments Forum with guest speaker and presentation of awards. This is very well attended; we had over 40 tenants last year! We have recently introduced quarterly tenants meetings again these are proving to be very popular.

Stratton St. Margaret

By Annual Allotment Evening, Bi-Annual survey.

Bodmin

Via the Allotment and Community Gardens Association and Liaison Meetings between Chairman of Properties and Town Clerk (or Deputy) and Chairman and Secretary of the Allotments Association (just introduced and quarterly at first – similar meetings with other groups are that after initial burst of activity can make do with 6-monthly meetings to 'touch base' and talk through any issues.)

Lewes

Consultations are by meeting/correspondence and/or routine contact by our Town Ranger.

Chippenham

By management meetings.

Bilbrook

By letter.

Barnstaple

We meet regularly with the Allotment Association Committee who feed through the concerns of all tenants. The Council undertakes an annual Allotment Competition and holds an evening presentation night. All tenants are invited, this gives the council the opportunity to give updates regarding the allotments.

Seaham

Letters to home addresses held on file.

Lichfield

Allotment Society deals with tenants.

Newbury

Mailshots, individual letters /e-mails, via noticeboard at each site, via stewards, and via stewards meeting once every 6 months.

Hatfield

Through meetings, by annual survey, by letter & by phone.

Bicester

Through allotment association and letters to tenants.

Chesham

Newsletters produced by the Allotments Group 4 times a year; an Allotments Group AGM; the Allotments Group website; notices on allotments gates; by letter; as part of the town survey conducted every 5 years.

8. Are the allotments fully tenanted, and if so, do you have a waiting list?

Huntingdon

We have 3 vacant plots at present all on offer and we have a waiting list.

Stratton St. Margaret

Yes and we have a waiting list.

Bodmin

Yes – fully tenanted and there are a few people on the waiting list.

Lewes

All plots currently let, waiting lists for all sites.

Chippenham

No – there are 19 lugs spare.

Bilbrook

Yes, 2 waiting.

Barnstaple

One of the aims of the 5 year improvement plan was to ensure that all plots were tenanted. The Council is now in its second year and this aim has been successful. The Council has separate waiting lists for each site the highest is 34, the lowest 15.

Seaham

Some sites are fully tenanted and have waiting lists. Other sites have vacant plots but do not have a waiting list.

Lichfield

Waiting list of 70.

Newbury

Waiting list on all sites.

Hatfield

Yes, a waiting list of approx 6 months - 1 year.

Bicester

Waiting lists on all sites.

Chesham

Yes, waiting list of 24.

9. Do you provide any toilet facilities at the allotments? If so, what type of toilet, e.g. a toilet plumbed into the sewerage system, a compost toilet, a portaloo, etc.

Huntingdon

No.

Stratton St. Margaret

No.

Bodmin

Portaloo (costs £1,050 per annum).

Lewes

No sanitation, but we are being asked about possible compost WC at one site.

Chippenham

No.

Bilbrook

No.

Barnstaple

None of the sites have toilet facilities at the moment. The Allotment Association are currently looking into having a compost toilet on each site.

Seaham

No.

Lichfield

No.

Newbury

No.

Hatfield

No.

Bicester

No.

Chesham

No.

10. Do you allow hosepipes to be used on your allotment sites, or do you place any restrictions on their use?

Huntingdon

Hosepipes are strictly prohibited.

Stratton St. Margaret

No but each site has stand pipes, approximately 4 to each site. We also do not allow bonfires or livestock.

Bodmin

Hosepipes are allowed – only restricted if there is a statutory ban (not common in the South West).

Lewes

Hosepipes are allowed, subject to Water Authority restrictions, but actually not practical at most sites. We have standpipes and troughs, etc.

Chippenham

Standpipes on all properties – no restrictions unless water shortage and then administered by allotment society.

Bilbrook

No.

Barnstaple

We allow hosepipes to be used on all sites, there are no restriction at the moment, the water bills are monitored, the council would stipulate a restriction if usage were to increase.

Seaham

There are no restrictions in place with regard to hosepipe bans but if a site has a high water bill, the Council would, and have in the past, switched off the water supply for the winter months.

Lichfield

Don't know.

Newbury

No hosepipes allowed – water available from troughs only. We remove any hosepipe connectors we find.

Hatfield

No hosepipes are allowed as the water pipes are communal and this would restrict access for other plot holders. Though we have had reports of people using hosepipes and try to remind plot holders that it is not allowed.

Bicester

We supply water at each site, but are currently operating under a hosepipe ban.

Chesham

Hosepipes are only allowed for filling water butts, never for directly watering plots. Tenants were asked not to use hosepipes at all during the hosepipe ban (we received contradictory advice from the water company as to whether the hosepipe ban did or did not apply to allotments).