

North Hertfordshire  
District Council

# A Guide to the Benefits of Allotments

A companion document to the  
Green Space Management Strategy

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, common land began to be enclosed by noblemen keen to demonstrate their wealth and political power. Small feudal farming strips were replaced with deer parks, sheep pasture and large scale agriculture. The disenfranchised poor were 'allotted' areas of land to make a subsistence living, usually on ground not worthy enough for anything else. Land enclosures by Act of Parliament accelerated during the Agricultural Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The mass migration of the labouring classes from country to town during the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to further expansion of allotment grounds within urban societies, providing fresh food for the poor and open-air experience for industrial workers. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, better transportation, mechanisation of farming and changes in lifestyle as well as the stigma of allotments being only for the poor, allotment gardening declined rapidly in numbers of people taking part and area of land under cultivation. There was a brief resurgence during and after the 1st World War, the "Dig for Victory" campaign during the 2nd World War and the self-sufficiency ideal during the 1970's. In 1964, the Labour administration commissioned the Harry Thorpe Committee of Inquiry into Allotments looking at what allotments had become in the post war years and their future. Its main recommendation was that allotments should no longer be regarded as having economic importance and be referred to as "leisure gardens". Government did not act upon the report and allotments were sidelined. Legal protection for allotments has slowly been eroded since the 1950 Act and pressures for building land has led to development increasingly being the fate of unused and unloved allotment sites. At the present time, although allotment land is still being lost, there is acceptance that allotment gardening has benefits in providing healthy exercise for an increasingly obese population. Concerns about Genetically Modified crops, excessive use of chemicals and health scares in the food chain has led to a rise in popularity of allotment gardening once again. Allotment sites are seen as environmental enclaves in an urban environment and gardening as therapeutic to a number of physical, mental and social problems. After many years of decline, the last 5-6 years has seen unprecedented demand of allotments with waiting lists a regular feature across the country. Promotion is no longer a major priority but acquisition of new sites and management of waiting lists is the most important activity.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS**

The SWOT Analysis looks at realities and potential of Allotment provision.

| <b>Strengths</b>   | <b>Weaknesses</b>  |
|--|--|
| Healthy exercise<br>Alleviates social, economic, ethnic exclusion<br>Enthusiastic local & national associations<br>Wildlife refuges<br>High occupancy of sites | Poor public image<br>Low political priority<br>Lack of long term investment<br>Predominately male over 50's<br>Accessibility for disadvantaged<br>Inherited locations and layout |
| <b>Opportunities</b>   | <b>Threats</b>   |
| Promote as healthy leisure activity  | Residential development  |

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|---|--|
| External funding for environmental, ecological projects<br>Engage healthcare institutions<br>Encourage involvement from Associations<br>Encourage family usage<br>Marketing | Public apathy<br>Reduced funding<br>Lack of political support<br>Not fulfilling user expectation |
|---|--|

Although Allotment gardening suffers from a poor public image and low political priority in terms of financial investment; the proponents are highly enthusiastic both locally and nationally on the benefits. Central government has come to the conclusion that allotment gardening can be used to alleviate a number of modern day problems such as habitat destruction and reductions in biodiversity, as well as a plethora of health and lifestyle failings. However, this must be accompanied by capital investment creating long term facilities in tune with modern user expectation.

### **PEST ANALYSIS**

The PEST Analysis looks at Political, Economic, Social and Technological influences concerning Allotment provision by North Hertfordshire District Council.

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|---|---|
| <b>Political</b>  | <b>Economic</b>   |
| Councils involvement in allotment provision<br>Central government awareness of environmental, ecological benefits                                     | Pressure from residential development<br>Food transportation costs<br>Council finances<br>Marketing<br>Rents policy<br>Supermarket domination |
| <b>Social</b>   | <b>Technological</b>  |
| Increasing obesity in population<br>Physical inactivity of population<br>Mental health care<br>Social isolation<br>Personal safety, crime & vandalism | Genetically modified crops<br>Chemical usage in agriculture<br>Information Technology<br>Standardisation of Supermarket produce               |

The PEST Analysis clearly shows the dangers to the allotment service but also the direction for future investment and effort. A sound financial basis and political commitment is required to take advantage of the opportunities to address public concerns of a social, lifestyle and scientific nature.