

**North Hertfordshire
District Council**

**Allotments
Action Plan
(2010 – 2014)**



An Action Plan of the
Green Space Management Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Allotments Action Plan, a document integral to the Green Space Management Strategy, is to form a structured approach to the ongoing provision of allotments managed by North Hertfordshire District Council within the District.

In 2004 North Hertfordshire District Council adopted the Allotments Strategy (2004-10) which led to a five year programme of investment in the District Council's allotments. With the adoption of the Green Space Management Strategy as an overarching process, now is a good time to review our allotments provision.

This Action plan contains new revenue growth over four years commencing in 20011/12 totalling £34,000.

LOCAL CONTEXT

North Hertfordshire District Council manages and maintains 12 allotment sites in North Herts.

Other providers in the district are Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Royston Town Council, Hertfordshire County Council, North Hertfordshire Homes and Parish Councils.

The Allotments Strategy 2004 -10 highlighted long term decline in the popularity of allotments and identified rationalisation and the need to investigate alternative horticultural uses for the sites. It also argued the need for investment to sustain sites to an acceptable customer standard.

During the term of the strategy, demand for allotments nationally has made a u-turn and currently demand is at an unprecedented level with waiting lists on all but one of the sites.

Management activity is now concerned with alleviating waiting lists. Processes have been introduced to sustain supply and demand at a reasonable level. Plots have been subdivided when they become vacant thereby doubling the number of plots in the long term. Non-cultivation checks have become more stringent to reduce the number of non-performing tenants and downsizing has actively been encouraged. These approaches have helped but not solved the situation and it is apparent that more allotments are and will be required in the mid-term alongside future growth of our towns

The options are-

1. to reintroduce allotment land for new tenants that has not been utilised for some time (i.e. has become too overgrown to realistically offer to new tenants)
2. to rent more land

However, there is currently no funding stream for either of these two options.

3. to attain more allotment provision through the planning system in the case of new developments (i.e. through planning obligations to

contribute towards expansion or improvements of existing allotment sites Or to be included as part of large scale housing developments schemes such as West of A1(M) at Stevenage or North East Stevenage expansion.)

4. What about partnership working and recognising the importance of other allotment providers in ensuring that allotments are maintained and accessible?

Baldock

Baldock has two active NHDC allotment sites –

Baldock	ownership	condition	access	plots	waiting*	expansion
Clothall	HCC	good	poor	91	22	None
North Road	NHDC	good	fair	69	14	15 derelict plots could be re-opened at est. cost of £4000
Clare Crescent	NHDC	v. poor	v. poor	1	0	See below**

* as of Aug 2009

** Clare Crescent is a small site formally managed and maintained by North Hertfordshire District Council Housing Services. Now under NHDC ownership. Not promoted at present because there are no facilities and the site is basically landlocked with only difficult pedestrian access.

Hitchin

Hitchin has four NHDC allotment sites –

Hitchin	ownership	condition	access	plots	waiting*	expansion
Burford	NHDC	fair	fair	49	30	Some space available on site but would need extensive removal of shrub/woodland
Old Hale Way	NHDC	good	fair	152	52	No available space on site, renting of adjacent field has been declined by landowner
Pirton Road	Private Landowner	good	v. poor	30	18***	Renting of further land has been declined by landowner
Ransoms	NHDC	good	good	30	24***	None

* as of Aug 2009

***Waiting lists for Ransoms and Pirton Road are currently closed to new applicants due to high demand.

Letchworth

Letchworth has six NHDC allotment sites –

Hitchin	ownership	condition	access	plots	waiting*	expansion
Hillbrow	LGCHF	v. poor	fair	14	0	Recently re-opened.
Norton	LGCHF	good	good	94	10	20 derelict plots could be re-opened with an est. investment of £5000
Pryor Way	LGCHF	good	fair	36	5	15 derelict plots could be re-opened with an est. investment of £4000
Radburn	NHDC	good	good	19	12	None
Runnalow	LGCHF	good	fair	82	8	None
Wilbury	LGCHF	good	good	73	26	None

* as of Aug 2009

FINANCE

An annual maintenance budget of £10,200 in total for the 12 allotment sites is allocated to upkeep roadways, fencing, taps, underground water-pipes, rubbish clearance, signage, fencing, gates, padlocks and trees etc.

£2,200 of this is given in grant form to the Baldock Association as devolved maintenance responsibilities for Clothall and North Road.

An extra £1,000 is part of the Grounds Maintenance Contract to carry out regular grass-cutting and hedge-cutting of communal areas of the sites.

Water charges are a separate undefined budget amounting to about £2,400 in a normal year.

The free clearance and rotavation service to new allotment tenants was withdrawn and budgets accordingly reduced in 1998, plots are therefore now offered 'sold as seen' which generates a number of complaints and ill-feeling.

Budgets have been unaltered since 1998.

This level of maintenance spending is becoming increasingly inadequate for the long-term investment of the service and fails to meet user expectations.

The Allotments Strategy 2004-10 identified and realised a Capital Investment Programme of over £80,000 in a five-year period. However, continued investment in the infrastructure of the allotment sites increases the risk to the Authority of non-compliance of leaseholder responsibilities and litigation from tenants and members of the public.

DEVOLVED MANAGEMENT

Devolved management schemes can benefit both local authorities and their allotment tenants. The local authority can make savings with a reduced burden of administration, customer liaison and maintenance responsibilities. Plotters can achieve a sense of pride and ownership of the allotment site enhancing its environment and reducing such problems as theft and anti-social behaviour from outsiders. They have a stake in the future development of the site and have opportunities to bring their own skills and expertise to new challenges in what is for many their retirement years. They also have greater opportunities to obtain funding from other sources apart from the Council.

The report 'Future for Allotments' stated "There is little doubt that, when successfully implemented, self management schemes ensure greater control of a site by allotment holders and tend to work to the benefit of the site."

However, it is recognised that not all associations may be able or willing to take on all the function of devolved management. Therefore a phased approach needs to be adopted which is appropriate to individual associations.

The involvement of allotment plotters in the management of their site can be categorised as follows -

Dependence

Neither plotters nor associations play any part in allotment site management beyond exchange of information, perhaps through a representative.

Participation

Plotters informally accept responsibility for minor maintenance works, and some mechanism may exist (such as an allotments forum) for the views of plotters or site representatives to be canvassed on capital expenditure and repairs.

Delegation

A properly constituted allotment association accepts formal responsibility for a range of duties under license from the local authority, under financial arrangements which release a proportion of rental income for this purpose. For example, the association may arrange tenancies, collect rents and carry out regular maintenance duties, but leave the local authority to carry out repairs, pay for the overheads such as water, and undertake all legal formalities.

Semi-autonomy

The allotment association leases the site from the council, arranges tenancy agreements and reinvests revenue on maintenance, repair and capital items. The council reserves the right to review the lease at periodic intervals and has defined oversight and strategic functions. Associations which have implemented fully accountable schemes for devolved management straddle the boundary between the allotment and community gardening movements.

Autonomy

Any existing allotment sites are sold to allotment associations or organised groups who take on the provision and management of allotments in their entirety.

Currently, Baldock Allotments & Leisure Gardeners Association have a devolved maintenance grant arrangement for the two Baldock Allotment sites. Enquiries from other local associations and interested groups in devolved management arrangements would be facilitated.

ACTION PLAN

(A Green Space Management Strategy Objective Point 21)

The following investment is suggested to sustain allotment infrastructure and alleviate waiting lists.

Site	Action	Value	Year
North Road	Creation of 15 new plots within the site boundary	£4,000	2012/13
Burford Way	Re-metal roadway	£8,000	2014/15
Pirton Road	Construct accessible pathway	£4,000	2012/13
Ransoms	Tree pollarding	£4,000	2013/14
Hillbrow	Tarmac car parking	£5,000	2013/14
Norton	Create 20 new plots within the site boundary	£5,000	2011/12
Pryor Way	Create 15 new plots within the site boundary	£4,000	2011/12
Total		£34,000	

Totals

2011/12.....£9,000
2012/13.....£8,000
2013/14.....£9,000
2014/15.....£8,000
Total£34,000

Investigations will be made to source any external funding opportunities.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Disability Discrimination Act (D.D.A) 2004 Part 3: The aim of the D.D.A is to enable those with all kinds of disabilities the same access to goods, services, employment etc as those without a disability. Part 3 of the Act requires reasonable adjustments to physical features to remove barriers to services. The Act covers public services and allotment sites will need to conform to the act.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (2000) Planning Policy Guidance note 3. (PPG3) Housing: The Government urges Local Authorities to increase the density of residential developments. This often has the effect of reducing the size of gardens provided for private dwellings which underlines the importance of adequate provision for allotment gardens.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Section 17: Local Authorities now have a duty to consider crime prevention and community safety in most of the decisions that they make.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974: This is a major item of legislation, which covers health and safety on outdoor green space. Sections 3 & 4 of the Act place a clear responsibility on a Council to ensure as far as is reasonable practicable, the health and safety of those who use all their facilities.

The Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984: Under the 1957 Act a Council which provides outdoor green space has a duty to ensure that lawful visitors are kept reasonably safe whilst using facilities. A Council also has a limited duty under the 1984 Act to ensure the safety of trespassers.

The Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977: This Act limits the extent to which civil liability can be avoided.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR): Under these regulations there is an obligation to report certain accidents occurring at outdoor green space to the Health & Safety Executive.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990: This legislation empowers Local Authorities to deal with nuisance from land if it is considered that it amounts to a nuisance at law. A statutory nuisance is difficult to define concisely, but it generally describes an unlawful activity that causes a substantial, material and unreasonable interference with a resident's occupation of their property.

The Smallholdings and Allotment Act, 1908: This legislation replaces any earlier allotment laws. It outlines the local Authority's duty of provision including Compulsory Purchase.

The Allotments Act, 1922, the Allotments Act, 1925, Allotments Act, 1950: All refine the 1908 Act in security of tenure, Local Authority responsibilities, regulations, rights and privileges for tenants and compensation of termination of tenancy.

The Town & Country Planning Act, 1947: Removes the obligation by Local Authorities to reserve land for allotments in local plans.

1972 Local Government Act: Removes the obligation by Local Authorities to appoint allotment committees (1925 Act).

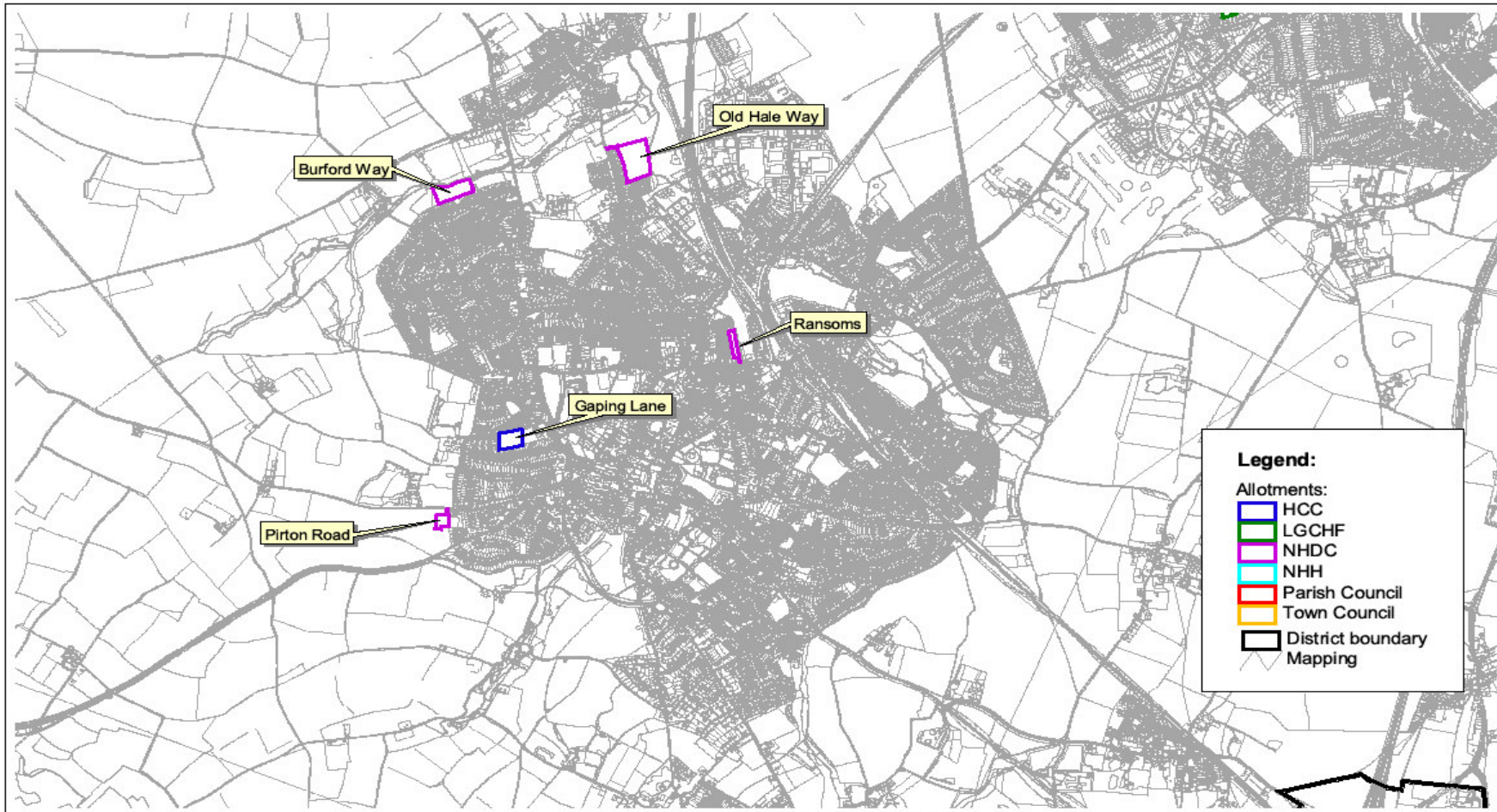
1980 Local Government Planning and Land Act: Removes the obligation by Local Authorities to keep separate allotment accounts and statistical information

ALLOTMENT LOCATION MAPS

North Hertfordshire District Council

Hitchin Allotments

NHDC - Allotment Strategy



Scale 1 : 20,000

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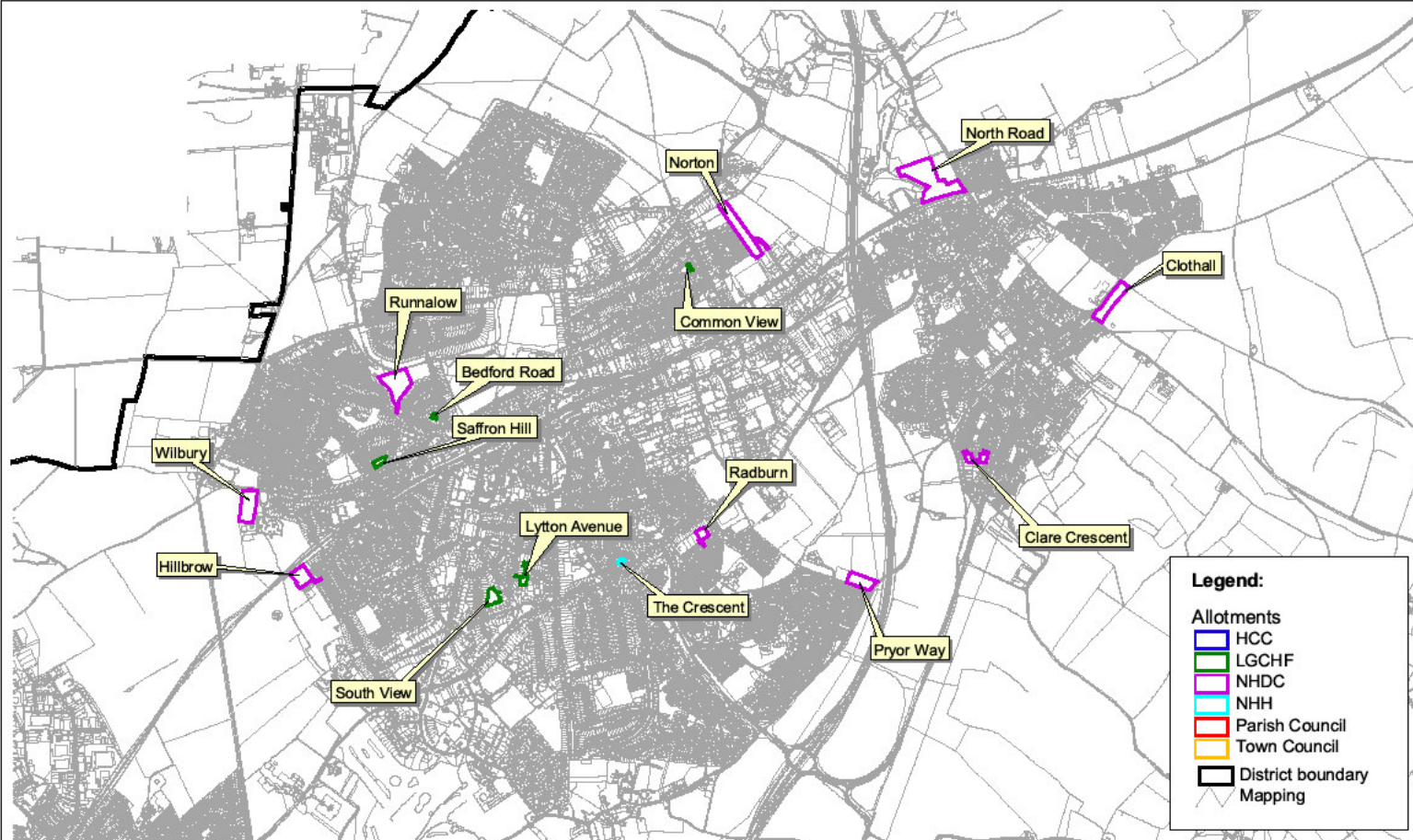
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Letchworth and Baldock allotments

NHDC - Allotment Strategy



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