

Allotment Update



**Environment
and Sustainable
Communities OSC**

Purpose and Outline of Presentation

Seek (reaffirm) your views on service development which respond to ESCOSC recommendations from January 2020

- Reminder of allotment provision in County Durham
- Recap on the original recommendations from ESCOSC.
- What has happened since then, including investments.
- Potential safeguards, to respond to concerns expressed.
- Next steps, incorporating views from ESCOSC

Introduction

Definition: Land for an individual to mainly or wholly grow fruit and vegetables for their own family.

Important; health, community, cost of living. Waiting list over 2,300 (increased with covid).

Statutory basis: Legal requirement (lowest tier of Local Government) to provide where demand exists. Protection for designated allotments, requiring SoS approval for disposal.

Inherited at LGR (from Districts): 166 sites , 4000 plots

Mixed management approach: direct letting (102 sites, 995 plots) through Allotment Associations (55 sites 2,429 plots).

Town and Parishes – an additional 44 sites.

Mixed Use – majority are used for cultivation, some sites are gardens, garages, grazing and other uses.

Comprehensive review by ESCOSC concluded in January 2020 with report to Cabinet.



ESCOSC Recommendations to Cabinet 2020



- Large animals (horses, pigs) no longer permitted on allotment plots, with a transition period of 5 years to be adopted.
- All DCC directly managed allotment sites in the county are managed by one DCC service team (currently 2 sites are managed by Corporate Property and land, the remainder DCC Allotment Service). ✓
- To undertake a complete review of allotment sites that are not used for purpose (some for instance are garage sites, gardens, grazing paddocks). **Part**
- To encourage establishment of allotment associations where appropriate to take over day to day management and control. ✓
- Undertake discussions with Town and Parish Councils that have expressed an interest in taking over the management of allotment sites. ✓
- That subject to legal advice, reconsider the process for the allocation of plots to co-workers within the proposed policy by acknowledging their previous contributions whilst not registered furthermore there is a need to actively publicise the need for co-workers to register. ✓
- That should there be demand, the Council considers the feasibility of providing smaller sized allotment plots where appropriate. ✓
- That the Council considers undertaking a rental review of all DCC allotment sites **Planned**

Reaction to the Report to Cabinet

- Concerns expressed about large animals no longer permitted.
“Horses are my life”
- Feeling expressed by some Associations *“One size doesn’t fit all”*
- Concern from some Associations on loss of flexibility and empowerment.
- Feedback that some controls eg waste on site may be too prescriptive.
- Cabinet position at time to take stock of ESCOSC and Feedback
- Covid Impact.

So what has been done since then?

- Smaller plots when opportunity arose (ESCOSC Recommendation).
- Promoting the Co-Workers Register (ESCOSC Recommendation).
- No new plots with animals allowed – natural reduction when tenancy finishes on a plot (consistent ESCOSC).
- Audit of sites to understand the different uses (consistent ESCOSC)
- Engagement with Towns and Parish Councils (ESCOSC recommendation)
- Investment in Team – 4 new Members of staff and 3 person practical action team (fencing, pathways, restoring plots, fly-tipping).
- Consideration of potential safeguards responding to concerns.
- Fires on allotments an issue – controls incorporated in Tenancy Agreements.
- Developed plans for new small grant scheme to support Associations.

Impact of Investments

Recultivation for letting



 **Allotments** 

-  Fresh Air
-  Exercise
-  Gardening Skills

 

-  Low Cost Food
-  Meet New Friends

A number of plots now available for immediate allocation.

 

Email: allotments@durham.gov.uk
Or call 03000 264376



Suggested Safeguards from Scrutiny Report

- If they are accepted in full, the following safeguards for large animals are suggested:
 - Exclude sites that are not allotments (eg grazing paddocks).
 - Give powers to Associations to make exceptions in conjunction with the Council.
 - Where relevant exclude perimeters of existing sites , which is generally where the animals are kept. When the tenant leaves – return to cultivation.
 - Would involve increased welfare checks (ESCOSC Recommendation)
- Proposals communicated to Associations and Tenant including exclusions.
- New Tenancy Agreements issued to reflect the above.
- Transition period for all changes.

Conclusion and Considerations

- Many of the original ESCOSC Recommendations were uncontentious and progress has been made in furtherance of them.
- Safeguards (including exclusions) and transition plans have been devised for large animals and other changes in new tenancy agreements.
- In addition the service has invested in new staff to allow greater presence and support on sites, and better standards. They are also consistent with ESCOSC recommendations for improvement.

Suggested Next Steps

- Report to Cabinet, implementing ESCOSC recommendations with safeguards and *incorporating feedback from today*.
- Engage with Associations and Tenants highlighting safeguards.
- Launch a new small grant scheme for allotment improvements and supporting more Associations.
- Renew engagement with Towns and Parish Councils regarding potential Transfer.
- Whilst greater controls for fires included in tenancy agreements, this issue needs wider review and further engagement.