



Food For Thought

A Food Growing and Allotments Strategy for the London Borough of Brent



**“To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is
to forget ourselves”.**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)

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Section 1: Introduction

“Allotments have a vital role in connecting people to the process of food production, enabling them to grow fresh, cheap food, whilst reducing food miles. They help to improve the environment, support new plant development and preserve rare and unique varieties. At the same time they provide opportunities to be active, meet other people, and share knowledge, information and food”

**Cllr Paul Bettison, chairman, Local Government Association (LGA)
Environment Board- ‘Growing in the Community’ (2nd Edition 2009)**

An allotment garden (or plot) is defined in the Allotments Act of 1922 as ‘a piece of land which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family’. The current legislative provisions are contained in the Small Holdings and Allotment Acts 1908 and the Allotments Acts 1922-1950.

The council has a statutory duty to provide allotment plots if it believes that there is a demand from borough residents. Section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 puts the council under a duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments and to let those allotments to persons resident in the borough. Inner London boroughs have a discretionary power, rather than a duty, to provide allotments under section 55 of the Local Government Act 1963 and two of Brent’s neighbouring authorities do not provide allotments.

The council has powers to improve, maintain and manage allotments and the legislation does not set minimum standards. Since these are discretionary powers and not duties each individual authority can decide how to use these powers and what proportion of its resources to allocate to the service.

Allotments have played an important part in British cultural life for over a hundred and fifty years. For the large majority of this time they were hugely popular and in high demand, prior to a general decline in interest becoming evident towards the end of the twentieth century. The resulting decrease in demand for plots led to the disposal of surplus allotment sites prior to the resurgence of interest in food growing. In line with the national context, the majority of allotments in Brent were created from the 1920s onwards, a time of rapid urbanisation, with a reduction in sites taking place in the 1980s and 1990s. However, in recent years the council has invested considerable capital funding in improving sites and has created an Allotments Officer post.

The strong revival of interest in the culture of ‘growing your own’¹ is linked to the increasing popularity of eating healthy food and taking regular physical exercise. A combination of increasingly small private gardens, popular cooking and gardening

1 Growing in the Community Report (Second Edition) – Local Government Association (LGA) 2009

programmes and media coverage of organics, food miles (the distance that food travels before it gets to the table) and diet, have combined to create a renewed and increased demand for allotments and food growing provision. A significant feature of this demand is that it is being generated by a wider representation of the community than has been the case in previous years.

The Local Government Association (LGA) predicts that there will be an on-going increase in demand for allotment provision in future years with a widening diversification in the profile of plot holders. In particular, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in the number of female plot holders and that there will be more people under the age of fifty taking on new plots.

In Brent this prediction is borne out when comparing the profile of waiting list applicants with the profile of current allotment holders. Additionally, more people are likely to garden with their family and friends and may not require the larger size of plots currently in use. To meet this renewed demand and to ensure the efficient and cost effective management and administration of the service, it is essential that Brent Council has a clear strategic vision for future allotment and food growing provision in the borough.

Food growing has the potential to benefit all parts of the community and addresses the key aspects of wellbeing – social, economic and environmental. It can enable the council and partner organisations, e.g. housing associations and schools, to achieve a range of key objectives, from health and wellbeing, through to the green agenda and community cohesion. Nationally, over 70% of the population believe that spending time in their gardens is important for their quality of life. Yet many people, particularly flat dwellers, are often denied a space to grow their own fruit and vegetables. Allotments and food growing spaces are a vital resource to prevent exclusion for some parts of the community from the opportunities that people with gardens enjoy.

It is clearly proven that people who live in London have a strong interest and heritage in food growing. 30,000 people in the capital rent allotments to grow vegetables and fruit, while 14% of households grow vegetables in their garden². In addition to allotments, as of July 2012, there were an estimated forty nine independent food growing sites in Brent. Twenty seven of these sites were registered as part of Capital Growth, a partnership initiative between London Food Link, the Mayor of London and the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund. It provides an umbrella framework for communal food growing schemes and offers advice and funding opportunities to scheme members.

Approximately 20% of biodiversity by land area in Brent is represented via its gardens and allotments and there are a number of active environmental groups with an interest in food growing issues. These include the Brent Sustainability Forum, Transition Town schemes, Barnhill Conservation Group, Brent's Capital Growth schemes, and Brent Friends of the Earth. The Welsh Harp Environmental Education

² London Food Strategy -

http://www.sustainweb.org/londonfoodlink/Work_with_London_boroughs/

Centre is a key resource location and organisations such as Brent Housing Associations and Registered Social Landlords are actively engaged with the environmental agenda.

The scope of the strategy unites allotment and food growing provision in Brent under a single vision, set of objectives and action plan. It encompasses all allotment sites under the land management of London Borough of Brent, i.e. the twenty one sites managed directly by the council and the one independently administered by Old Kenton Lane Allotments Association. It also embraces the interlinked issue of food growing and the identification of alternate growing sites. Additionally it seeks to identify the impacts of climate change and the requirement to adapt to these impacts.

It is intended to act as a road map from the starting point of 'where are we now?' to determining 'where do we want to be?' and 'how do we get there?' to the final destination of 'how will we know when we have arrived?' It seeks to establish what is currently done well, what needs to be reviewed, objectives and opportunities for future development and how performance will be measured.

The strategy has been produced following detailed desk research, best practice visits, a questionnaire survey of plot holders and waiting list applicants, and interviews with key stakeholders prior to a formal twelve week public consultation programme. This facilitated the assessment of attitudes to existing services and amenities, and the identification of challenges, opportunities and priorities, to inform a unified approach to the development of food growing provision which is accessible to everyone in Brent.

Section 2: Benefits of Food Growing

Allotments came into being to provide individuals and families with the opportunity to grow their own food but are now recognised as providing added advantages in the wider context of health and wellbeing. There are also a number of environmental and social benefits that apply widely across the community and support the council's corporate objectives for sustainable development and health improvements.

Following analysis of a number of key national, regional and local policy documents the following benefits have been identified as being central to the development of a strategy for Brent. Further information on the specific policies and strategies is available in Appendix 2.

The following case studies have been highlighted as examples of best practice by the Local Government Authority (LGA), Food Vision, Allotments Regeneration Initiative and the National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG).

1. Supplying a sustainable source of food

Increasing public awareness about food and how it is grown and made can encourage people to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables. Environmental benefits can be achieved by reducing food miles through providing a local source of food which

- Doesn't have to be transported over great distances
- Is often free from chemicals
- Encourages the composting of green waste
- May offer dietary benefits at lower costs to people on low incomes with poor access to store-bought produce.

Case study 1: Supplying local food to a food access project in East London

Community Food Enterprise (CFE) is a social enterprise that works to make healthy fresh produce available to all members of their community in and around Newham in East London. It runs a food distribution depot, supplies food co-ops, schools and breakfast clubs with fresh produce and works on a range of educational activities to address social deprivation and health inequalities. In 2006, when CFE's work was independently evaluated, it was supplying (across many outlets and marketing activities) around 25,000 customers through social food outlets such as food co-ops, delivering 100,000 pieces of fruit to workplaces, and 200,000 pieces of fruit to primary school children.

2. Improving health and wellbeing

Food growing offers an excellent opportunity of healthy physical recreation for people of all backgrounds. It is increasingly being recognised for its therapeutic value, to the extent that in some areas it is being prescribed as a treatment for stress

by GPs. Given the increasing density of urban development and the predicted growth of Brent's population and households, opportunities to enjoy quiet relaxation and physical activity in a creative way are likely to grow in importance.

Allotments are achieving increasing recognition as a resource for people who consider they have a disability. Infrastructure improvements such as raised beds have been successful in improving access to gardening for people with physical disabilities. They also play a significant role in the context of mental health with the general therapeutic effects that allotment gardeners have always valued now becoming embedded in the broader health agenda for treating depression.

Case Study 2: Bridgend Allotment Community Health Inclusion Project - Edinburgh City Council

Bridgend Allotment Community Health Inclusion Project (BACHIP) encourages people with mental health issues to connect with physical activity, healthy eating, outdoor life and mixing with other people through the medium of gardening. This is delivered through a drop-in service (city-wide) and outreach service in South East Edinburgh. Cooking sessions have become a regular event, with the atmosphere reported as being happy and relaxed.

The project seeks to promote a holistic approach to health through the practical and companionable work involved in creating a garden. For example, older people can escape the loneliness of social isolation, children and young people and children can find role models and surrogate grandparents, whilst people lacking confidence due to illness can perhaps regain their esteem and a sense of well-being.

<http://www.edspace.org.uk/default.asp?page=22&sid=370>

3. Acting as a valued community resource

Food growing can bring people together from all parts of the community through a shared interest. For example, it is an environment which can foster mentoring relationships with more experienced gardeners passing on their knowledge to younger or less experienced people. Allotment sites often bring together people from a wide variety of social backgrounds and gardening activity naturally lends itself to creating an environment of co-operation and social interaction.

The community benefits of food growing can be extended through, for example, open-days and annual fairs where locally grown produce can be sold. Links with local groups and schools can further increase the value of allotments as a community resource. If food growing schemes continue to grow in importance it is possible that problems with security and vandalism could decrease within localities.

Case Study 3: William Saville and Dunbar House Community Allotment –London Borough of Brent

The garden is located between two Brent Housing Partnership tower blocks in Carlton Vale. The space was developed as a communal garden for the residents of the blocks in 2000. The garden then fell into disuse and had not been used as a growing site for several years. The space consists of 17 beds and several fruit trees.

In April 2011, the [Transition Town group Kilburn to Kensal Rise](http://tkensaltokilburn.ning.com/group/williamdunbarsavillehouseallotment) adopted the space as a potential food growing site. The aim of the project was to work with residents of the blocks and social housing tenants in South Kilburn on communal food growing. A number of beds have been cleared and a variety of fruit and vegetables are now grown and shared amongst tenants. The project has brought together people from different backgrounds and enabled mentoring relationships to develop.

<http://tkensaltokilburn.ning.com/group/williamdunbarsavillehouseallotment>

<http://tkensaltokilburn.ning.com/events/william-dunbarsaville-house>

4. Allotments and food growing as an educational tool

There is huge scope for schools to link up with allotments and food growing organisations to utilise the skills of plot holders in projects, thus fostering improved social interaction across different generations. It is widely recognised that there is a strong need for children to be taught about where food comes from and the contribution of fruit and vegetables towards a healthy lifestyle. School based projects offer an ideal opportunity to do this as food growing can be linked to cookery within the structure of the educational curriculum.

Such projects offer a way to capitalise on a child's enthusiasm for gardening to increase their interest in core curriculum subjects such as Science, Geography, History and English.

Case Study 4: Salusbury Primary School Green Space – London Borough of Brent

Salusbury Primary School has created wildlife sensitive areas alongside growing space for fruit and vegetables, whilst still giving full access to pupils during the school day. The school took over land between the school building and the former Paddington Cemetery after the idea for an outdoor space was suggested by parents who with the support of governors helped to raise money after holding a special 'dig day'. This initiative is led by lead pupils and staff from the school's gardening group who actively encourage participation. The improvements that have been made have established the project as the environmental focus of the school which has served as a case study for visits from other schools. The site has become an important part of the green corridor and provides a feeding station and a bird hide to monitor different species.

www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7570312212

5. Delivering a resource for improving biodiversity

Informal woodland, long grass, hedges, and streams enable wildlife to thrive in food growing areas. Plants provide a varied habitat for flora and fauna while compost and woodpiles are habitats for wildlife. Many sites are located close to open or unused land, serving as important links in green corridors running through urban areas.

Case Study 5: The Lewes Organic Allotment – East Sussex

The Lewes Organic Allotment site now hosts a number of workshops and programmes managed by the Common Cause Co-operative including:

- **Lottie Project for schoolchildren:** an environmental and food growing initiative with fortnightly workshops where pupils have repeat visits. Sessions fit the seasons and children prepare land, sow seedlings and observe growing cycles.
- **The Fresh Ideas Network:** a Big Lottery funded community project to make healthy local food more accessible and affordable to communities particularly in disadvantaged areas.
- **Biodiversity Project:** on site sessions and workshops including accredited training in organic horticulture, fruit tree planting and management and species monitoring.

<http://www.commoncause.org.uk/>

6. Establishing a link between gardening and engagement with the arts

Food growing brings together people from different cultural backgrounds whose knowledge of gardening can be shared. The benefits of allotments in promoting well-being and community cohesion are recognised in Brent's Cultural Strategy and could be celebrated through open days and the work of artists in residence.

Collaboration between allotment services, individual site associations and the creative sector has produced some wonderful celebrations of allotment culture in recent years. This trend was started by the Uplands Allotments Association in Handsworth, Birmingham, which hosted an arts and allotments festival in 1998 featuring food, music and poetry from around the world.

Case Study 6: Bow Arts and Abbey Community Gardens Project – East London

Devised by Bow Arts artists Karen Guthrie & Nina Pope as a horticultural and social experiment offering a new kind of community garden by inviting anyone to participate in the communal growing and harvesting of vegetables and flowers.

The contemporary garden design centres on formal raised beds arranged in a flag-like layout. Rather than people claiming individual plots; they experiment with one shared resource and distribute the produce amongst regular gardeners and through an honesty stall. Free garden club sessions take place from March to October and artists hold workshops and other art associated events on site.

http://www.abbeygardens.org/?page_id=7

<http://www.somewhere.org.uk/whatwilltheharvestbe/>

7. Providing open space amenities for all residents

Open space has become of great intrinsic importance within localities as the intensity of development increases in response to a growing population and the demand for more living accommodation. In Brent flats comprised 90% of new homes built in 2010/11 and many homes don't have garden space. The potential exists, if they are promoted through strategies and partnership agreements, for allotments and community gardens to become important recreational assets and open space amenities for all residents and particularly for those without gardens.

There is a need to inform residents how to access land (permanent and temporary) and the process for getting agreement to use it. Boroughs can assist by identifying suitable land and making it available to local communities. The London Plan³ states that boroughs "should identify potential spaces that could be used for commercial food production or for community gardening" and that "innovative approaches to the provision of spaces may need to be followed; these could include the use of green roofs". It also states that "use of land for growing food will be encouraged nearer to urban communities via such mechanisms as Capital Growth."

In Brent's case new permanent sites won't be developed in the short term but there are likely to be a number of options for temporary food growing sites. In preparing the borough's Development Plan it is intended that the council will seek the inclusion of space for community gardening as part of appropriate large schemes.

Case Study 7: Capital Growth Scheme - London Borough of Camden

Capital Growth is a partnership initiative between London Food Link, the Mayor of London and the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund. The scheme aims to create 2012 new community food growing spaces across London by the end of 2012. It offers practical help, grants, training and support to groups wanting to establish food growing projects as well as advice to landowners.

Camden's Capital Growth scheme has been running since 2009 and the partnership includes the NHS and 150 businesses. Camden initially had a target of 65 sites but now have 105 sites with much variety including several raised beds schemes in public open space. One of the aims of the project is to encourage people who are interested in allotments or who are on long allotment waiting lists to start their own food-growing projects on unused land, or to get involved with community spaces that already exist.

<http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/leisure/outdoor-camden/allotments/allotments.en>

<http://www.capitalgrowth.org/>

3 <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/londonplan>

8. Contributing to climate change and energy reduction objectives

Growing food for local consumption considerably reduces the energy used in processing and distribution, allowing a reduction in individual and community carbon footprints. It also helps to reduce packaging and subsequent landfill.

It is estimated that 6.3 million tonnes of packaging comes into British homes every year at a cost of £450 for the average family⁴. Allotments and community gardens are places where a culture of recycling is prevalent and allotment holders are accustomed to composting vegetable waste to reuse to fertilise next year's potatoes, thus helping to mitigate against climate change. As climate change causes further environmental damage, and global populations increase, it is predicted that world food supplies will be threatened and allotments as a source of food security will become as important as they were in the World Wars.

Brent's Green Charter brings together all the work the council is doing to improve, enhance and protect the environment and asks those who live, work or study in the borough to be more sustainable in their way of life. It also makes suggestions how this can be achieved [http://www.brent.gov.uk/directorate.nsf/Files/LBBA-172/\\$FILE/Green%20Charter%202011_v1.pdf](http://www.brent.gov.uk/directorate.nsf/Files/LBBA-172/$FILE/Green%20Charter%202011_v1.pdf)

Food growing sites can help people adapt to climate change both in the context of "grow your own" and through the production of green energy.

Case Study 8: Eco- Projects

At the innovative Narborough & Littlehorpe allotments site in Leicestershire, small grants have been obtained to fund solar panels which provide hot water to a small kitchen and wash hand basin in the disabled toilet. Space heating and lighting for the building and workshop is provided by bio-mass stove burning wood pellets from local coppices and a bio-diesel generator.

<http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/regeneration-in-action/east-midlands-mainmenu-108/196-narborough-and-littlehorpe-leisure-gardeners-association>

Other examples are

- Members of an allotment group in Levenshulme, Manchester have unveiled an innovative way to inspire the local community to live greener lives. The roof top garden at Acorn Close Allotments helps to educate the local community about nature and reducing the effects of climate chan. It also teaches a strong sustainability message by providing fresh food, including herbs and spices which will be eaten by the community. <http://www.redroseforest.co.uk/web/content/view/264/454/>
- Wind turbines have been installed on a community meeting space building on allotments in Watford and at Spa Hill allotments in Croydon. <http://www.spahill.org.uk/turbine1.html>

4.National Government paper '[Can you dig it? Meeting Community Demand for Allotments](#)' - September 2009

Section 3: Current Allotment Management and Food Growing Provision in Brent

Brent Council directly manages twenty one of the allotment sites in the borough. Old Kenton Lane is self-managed with a constituted committee responsible for the site's operational management, including grounds maintenance and waiting list administration.

For the council managed sites, tenants have responsibility for their plots and for their site as outlined in the tenancy agreement. Most sites have an elected Site Representative who acts as a link between the plot holders and the council. In some cases Site Representatives co-manage the waiting list with the council's Allotments Officer and check on plots where non cultivation is an issue.

The total area of the twenty two sites is 18.2 hectares. Within this area the total space devoted to allotment plots is 14.29 hectares, while infrastructure, e.g. access paths, boundaries, toilets and trading huts, occupies 3.91 hectares. The infrastructure areas therefore comprise approximately 21% of the total area.

The council uses an IT system to administer the twenty one sites it manages. The database is updated continuously and the data used to inform this strategy was extracted at the beginning of July 2012.

There are 955 council managed plots registered on the management database and 183 plots at Old Kenton Lane, making a total of 1138 plots in Brent. There has been agreement to expand the provision of allotments at Gladstone Park should a development opportunity become available at Elms Gardens. As of July 2012, 96% of the council managed plots were either let to tenants or under offer to applicants as part of the reletting process. 99% of plots at Old Kenton Lane were let to tenants.

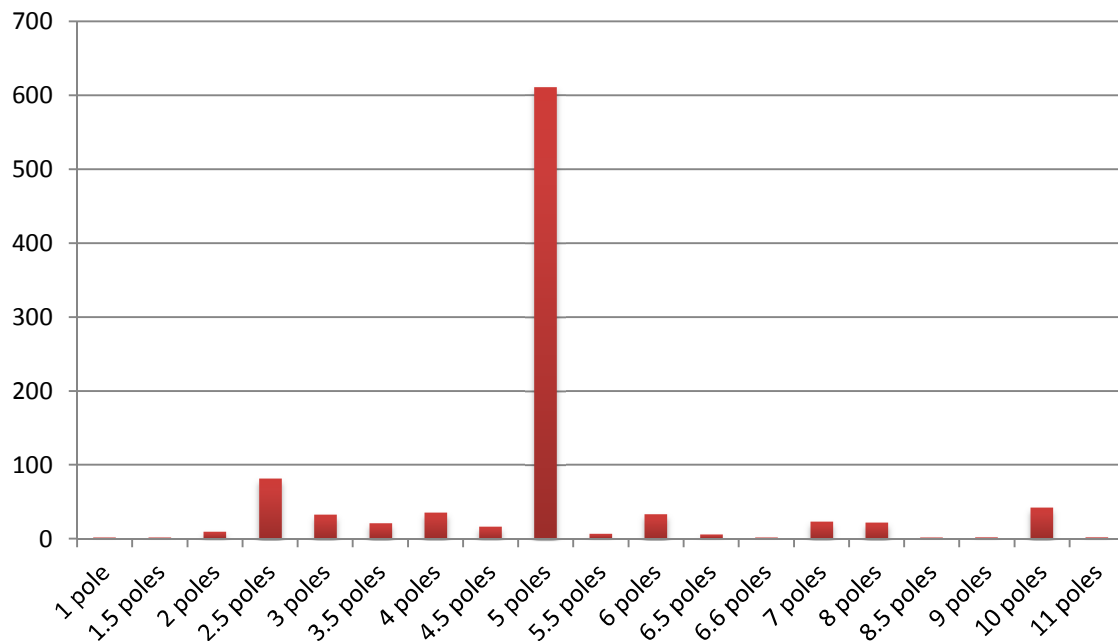
In addition, the council provides 103 separate shed plots, approximately 3 metres by 2 metres in area, 60% of which let as of July 2012. A high proportion of the vacant sheds are in poor condition and a number of let sheds require remedial work.

Analysis of plot sizes and the equivalent area in poles (a traditional measuring system for allotments) revealed that there are 4,735 poles across the 21 council managed sites. The average plot size is 5 poles (126 square metres) in size and 74% of plots are between 4 to 6 poles in size.

The size of allotment plots in Brent vary greatly with nineteen size classes of plots available at the council managed allotment sites ranging from 1 pole to 11 poles in size.

The chart below provides the number and sizes of allotments plots currently available.

Numbers and Sizes of Allotment Plots



Definition of poles

Allotments are traditionally measured in 'poles' though the term varies in different areas of the country and other measurements may also be used.

1 pole = 25.29 square metres

A 5-pole allotment is approximately 126 square metres, while a 10-pole plot is approximately 250 square metres.

Old Kenton Lane Allotments

At Old Kenton Lane there are 183 five-pole allotment plots, with 151 registered individual plot holders. Sixty per cent of plot holders are male and 40 per cent are female. A high proportion of the males are of pensionable age, whereas the female allotment holders tend to be younger. The majority of plot holders are Brent residents with a few from Camden, Harrow, and Kensington and Chelsea. There is a waiting list of 38 individuals, and a maximum waiting time of four years. The level of non-cultivation is low at only one or two plots.

The council has overall responsibility for the management of the allotments service, with the principal functions of its remit being:

- To manage, administer and develop a quality allotment service
- To give advice and support to allotment tenants, site representatives and allotment associations
- To give advice and support to encourage food growing projects
- To encourage and promote the use of allotments and food growing opportunities as a means to developing a more active lifestyle.

Tenancy Agreement

Tenancy agreements typically include obligations to keep the plot clean, free from weeds, in a good state of fertility and cultivated regularly. There are subjective elements which make a practical definition of non-cultivation difficult. The LGA recommends that, as a minimum, plots must be cultivated so as not to interfere in a material way with the enjoyment of other tenants. Key elements should include:

- Removal of weed seed-heads before the seed has set.
- Control of pernicious weeds, such as those that spread through the extension of roots or by generating new plants from growing tips in contact with the soil.
- Removal of long grass or detritus that is likely to harbour slugs and snails
- Keeping paths free of hazards and ensuring grass paths are trimmed.

It is useful to set standards for the proportion of the land put to use in the production of fruit and vegetables, and for the maintenance of residual areas.

The current Brent tenancy agreement dates from the 1970s and requires updating. A number of authorities have taken the opportunity to simplify the wording of their documentation as part of their review of tenancy agreements

Waiting List Management

Whilst the 1990s was a time of low waiting lists with a large numbers of vacant plots, the situation has since reversed. A huge increase in demand has been a national trend, and in Brent the council has invested considerable capital funding in improving sites and has created the post of Allotments Officer.

A national survey of waiting lists was conducted by Transition Town West Kirby in conjunction with the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners⁵ in 2011 of all 323 English principal authorities. The response rate was 100%. It was found that 214 (66%) of the authorities held waiting list data and this data was for a total of 3,546 allotment sites (averaging 17 sites per council.) These sites contained 152,442 plots (averaging 43 plots per site) and the waiting lists for these plots totalled 86,787

5 http://www.transitiontownwestkirby.org.uk/files/ttwk_nsalg_survey_2011.pdf

people, representing an average of 57 people waiting for every 100 plots. In the Brent context, there are currently 24 people waiting for every 100 plots.

Compared to the corresponding survey a year previously, the average waiting list has reduced slightly from 59 to 57 people waiting per 100 plots. A total of 35 new allotment sites were brought into use by 31 councils.

Terminations of tenancy agreements can be brought about by a range of circumstances including on request from a tenant, following the death of a tenant, non payment of fees or as a result of a breach of the tenancy agreement such as non-cultivation of plots.

Site Representatives notify the council of plots that are not being maintained. If a plot falls below the 50% cultivation level or appears not to have not been gardened for some time a Notice of Non Cultivation will be placed on it. If there is no response within 14 days, a re-inspection will be arranged, and if the plot is still not cultivated a further non- cultivation or notice to quit will be issued. If there has not been a response after 30 days the tenancy is terminated.

Upon vacancy, a plot is offered to the next person on the list for that site. They are given two weeks to respond and, if they accept the offer of the allotment plot, their name is removed from the entire waiting list. If they decline the plot, their name is removed from the list for that site, and the allotment is offered to the next person on that list. People who decline an allotment at one site remain on the waiting list for other sites unless otherwise notified.

As part of the consultation all 570 waiting list applicants were asked to complete a questionnaire in November 2011 and to confirm they wished to remain on the waiting list. As of July 2012 there were 268 applicants on the waiting list, representing a reduction of over 50% from 2011. This was largely due to the removal of applicants who were no longer interested in renting a plot or who had moved out of the area.

The average turnover rate (based on 2010 and 2011 figures) is 10% or 88 plots a year. If this trend continues the current waiting list should be accommodated in approximately 3 years. However, as the waiting lists operate primarily on a site basis, with some cross-over due to second and third preferences, not everyone who is offered a plot takes it up. This could mean some vacant plots remaining at less popular sites while applicants wait for vacancies at other sites. Conversely, turnover is less at some popular sites, while the waiting lists are longer. At Tenterden Close the longest wait is currently 19 months, while at Furness Road it is 78 months.

In summary, waiting list times are significantly impacted by the management of non-cultivation, and the measures taken to free-up and allocate space that is not being properly used. These issues are expanded on, alongside practical examples of good practice, in the Allotment Regeneration Initiative (ARI) factsheet *Managing Non-Cultivation*. Other ways of improving waiting times include limiting new applicants to one plot per person and giving priority to borough residents over non-residents.

http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/documents/Other_ARI_factsheets/managingnoncultivation2011.pdf

Site Management and user involvement

Responsibilities of plot holders are set out in the tenancy agreement, as are the broad responsibilities of the local authority. General reporting and liaison with plot holders is undertaken by elected Site Representatives. There were fourteen representatives in position and seven vacancies as of January 2012.

The Brent Allotments Forum was constituted in 2003, with its main purpose being to prioritise future capital works and to improve communication between plot holders and the council. The Forum currently meets four times a year and is open to any allotment tenant. A council officer attends to provide a quarterly service update.

Income and Expenditure

This section provides an overview of income and expenditure, fees and charges concession management and funding opportunities. Appendix 4 gives more detail on fees and charges.

Item	April 2011 – March 2012
Revenue expenditure made up of:	£24,486.49
Contract Works	£4,929.00
Water: supply	£8,789.62
Water: maintenance	£1,165.00
Waste removal	£4,340.00
Tree works and Control of Japanese knotweed	Included in 'Contracts Works'
Software systems including training	£2,985.00
Electricity	£ 404.75
Miscellaneous	£1,873.12
Staffing costs	£37,651
Total expenditure	£62,137.49
Income	£33,411
Balance of Income over Expenditure	(28,726.49)

The above figures do not include payroll, HR, office accommodation, IT, travel costs grounds maintenance, capital expenditure or land costs. Old Kenton Lane is not included in the analysis. Water supply averages out at approximately £2 per pole or £10 for a 5 pole plot, not including the costs of maintaining pipework and taps.

The overall rate of subsidy is approximately 86%. Taking income from all allotments the average income is £7.06 per pole or £35.28 for a five-pole allotment. The cost of providing the allotment averages at £13.12 per pole or £65.62 per 5-pole allotment. The subsidy on the average 5-pole allotment is £30.34 per annum.

Fees and Charges

Brent allotment charges for 2012/13 are £78.75 for 126.5m² (five poles) and £157.50 for 253m² (ten poles) per annum. Concessions receive a 50% discount on the first five poles reducing the cost to £39.40. Any further poles are charged at the normal rate. Concessions are identified as people who are of pensionable retirement age, registered disabled or unemployed.

The table below shows the fees and charges of neighbouring boroughs for 2012/2013, with Brent having the highest fees. On a London wide basis Brent is the fourth most expensive borough with Greenwich the most expensive at £100 for 5 poles and £200 for 10 poles. The median cost for a 5 and 10 pole plot in London is £48.83 and £97.68 per annum.

Neighbouring Borough Charges 2012/2013

	Borough	Standard charge 2012/13		Concession charge 2012/13	
		5 poles	10 poles	5 poles	10 poles
Neighbouring authorities	Barnet	£37.10	£74.20	£18.55	£37.10
	Brent	£78.75	£157.50	£39.40	£118
	Camden	£46.50	£78.00	£30.00	£52.50
	Ealing	£68.40	£136.80	£34.20	£68.40
	Hammersmith and Fulham	£18.92	£37.86	£11.79	£23.57
	Harrow	£31.20	£62.40	£15.60	£31.20
	Kensington and Chelsea*	*	*	*	*
	Westminster*	*	*	*	*

*- do not have an allotment service

Concession Management 2012/2013

Analysis of concession arrangements across 26 London boroughs (omitting boroughs that do not provide an allotment service or whose provision is administered by the Allotments Association) revealed that there is no uniform approach.

Some authorities are considering the removal of the concession for new plot holders on the basis of age e.g. pensionable retired for 2013 -14 and to focus the eligibility criteria on those experiencing financial hardship and claiming benefits such as income support, disability allowance, job seekers allowance (income based), guaranteed pension credit or working tax credit.

Subsidy Reduction

In looking at ways of increasing income and reducing subsidy levels, allotment authorities generally give consideration to the following:

- Mechanisms for debt collection
- Improving vacancy turnaround times
- Reducing water bills
- Removing underused shed plots
- Reviewing the charging policy, particularly concession arrangements. In reviewing the policy the following issues are generally taken into consideration:
 - long-term financial sustainability
 - the nature, quality and cost of facilities provided (and desired);
 - expenditure on promotion and administration;
 - the present level of rent
 - the likely effect of further rent levels on plot take-up.

Other Funding Sources

Funding for specific projects or equipment may be found from a number of sources.

Funding for new sites can be secured through Section 106 (due to be replaced by the Community Infrastructure Levy) and agreements with developers.

Other types of funding are only available to associations and community organisations and will require that general charitable objectives be met. Ancillary benefits from funded projects (such as improvements to access and security) can help improve the site as a whole, and enhance the enjoyment of all plot holders.

Research indicates that the Allotment Associations and plot holders that have been most successful in accessing funding and support in kind have done so from a variety of sources. This is based on the principle that small amounts can add up to a sum that can transform a site while allotment associations can be at a disadvantage compared to e.g. health projects in the case of large, one off funding opportunities.

Specific and wide-ranging advice on fundraising for allotments is available in the ARI information pack 'A Guide to Fundraising for Allotment Associations', which is available as a free download from the ARI website at www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari.

For additional advice on national and local sources of grant funding, as well as training and support in completing applications, the local office of the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) should be the first port of call. (www.navca.org.uk).

Up-to-date information on grants available to charities and community groups can also be accessed through dedicated funding websites:

GRANT finder: www.grantfinder.co.uk

Funder Finder: www.funderfinder.org.uk

Independent Food Growing

In addition to allotments, as of July 2012 there were 49 independent food growing sites in the borough, 27 of which were registered as Capital Growth schemes. These differ from allotments in several respects and are communal in their approach with the team sharing a plot or plots. Sites are non-statutory and may have short term tenure of land, often on small areas of public or private land, e.g. school grounds, housing estates, commercial organisations. The number of Capital Growth schemes is below the London average of 53 sites per borough but there is potential to increase take up, particularly school schemes. Council officers are exploring opportunities for community food gardens including provision at Elms Gardens. Where community groups are seeking to set up new sites, Brent Council's Environmental Health team can provide advice on the potential health of soils.

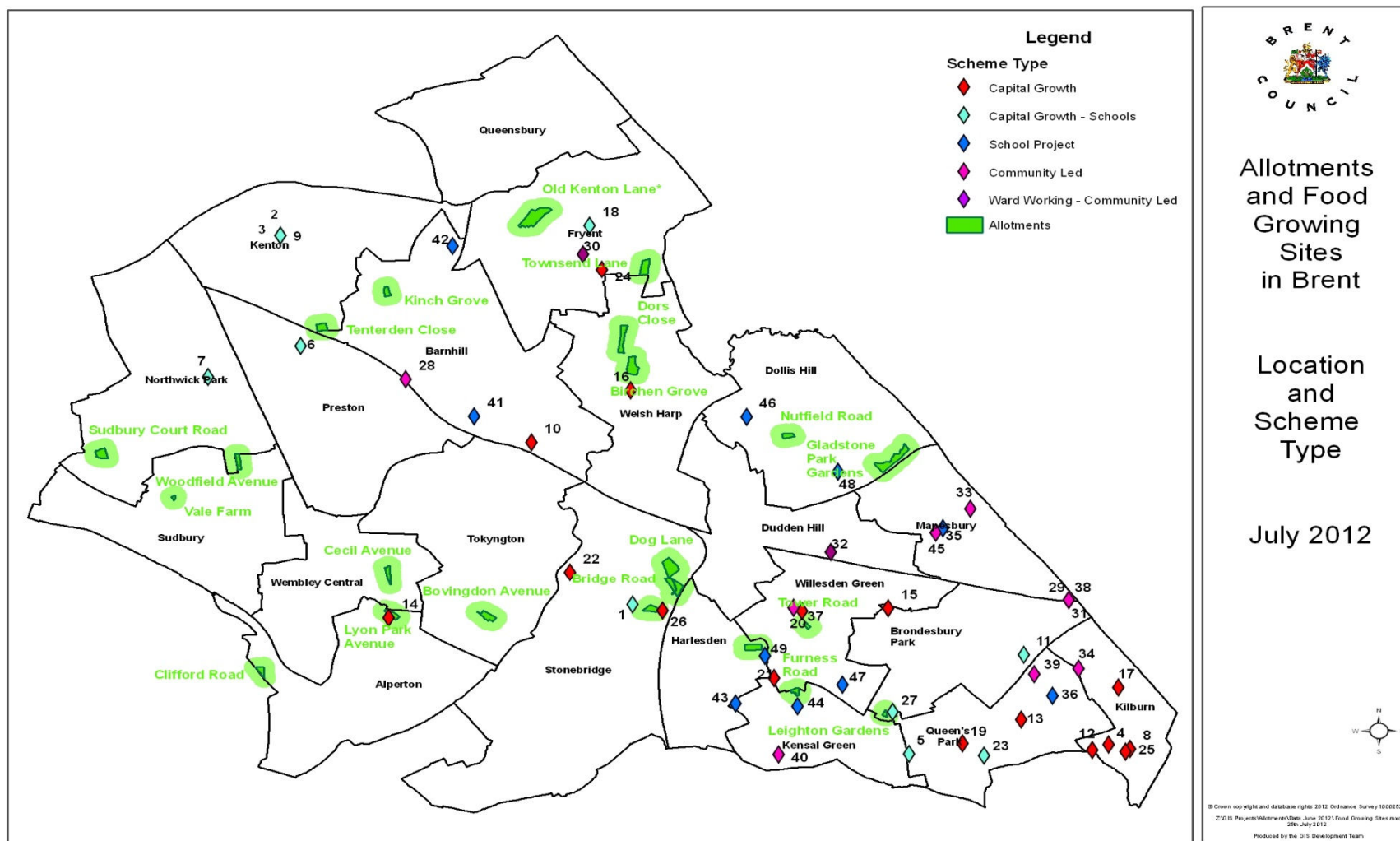
Environmental Health Advice- Temporary Food Growing Space

Being a London Borough, much of Brent has been developed and redeveloped over the last 100 years. Land has often changed in use from industrial to residential or open space. As such, areas of open space that may be identified for future allotment use may consist of ground that is both physically and chemically unsuitable for growing vegetables. To assess the feasibility of future food growing spaces, contact should be made with the council which holds information on historic land use and contaminated land. A soil investigation which includes an assessment of the risks to human health from soil contaminants may be necessary. Advice on soil quality should also be sought if a 'shed plot' is to be turned into an allotment plot.

Demand and Supply

Analysis of the geographical distribution of allotment and food growing provision in Brent highlights the following:

- Queensbury, Kenton and Preston in the north and Queens Park, Mapesbury, Brondesbury Park and Dudden Hill in the south don't have allotment sites.
- There are 13 allotment sites in the north of the borough compared to 9 in the more densely populated south of the borough.
- There is a high concentration of food growing schemes in the south of the borough.
- Analysis of waiting list applicants by postcode showed that 43% of demand was from residents in NW10 (a district which stretches south of the borough boundary), a further 15% from NW2 and 7% from NW6. On this basis demand is particularly strong in the NW10 area and from the south of Brent.
- By contrast the central postcode area of HA9 accounted for 11% of the demand, NW9 for 7% and HA0 for 6%. Approximately 90% of the total demand was from within Brent.



A full list of the 49 food growing sites is included within Appendix 1

Section 4: Allotments User and Waiting List Applicant Profiles

Introduction

Demographic and equalities monitoring data from the survey of plot holders and waiting list applicants was used to create a current and future user profile.

250 responses were received from plot holders across all 21 sites managed by the Council, a response rate of 28%. 265 responses were received from waiting list applicants and this total represented 100% of the revised waiting list.

Race

- 63% of plot holder respondents identified themselves as White of which 13% identified as White Irish and 19% White Other. This compares to 67% of waiting list applicants, of which 10% identified as White Irish and 17% as White Other. A high percentage of the White Other group from both current holders and waiting list applicants identified themselves as Eastern European, a culture with a strong food growing tradition.
- Two clearly identified pattern changes are where 23% and 7% of plot holders identified as Black and Asian respectively compared to 11% and 12% on the waiting list. In a wider borough context, Brent has the largest proportion of ethnic minorities in London with 71 %⁶ of the population from an ethnic group other than White British.
- Research will need to be undertaken to ascertain why the race profile of plot holders and waiting list applicants is not reflective of the borough profile.

Age

- 53% of plot holders are aged 65 plus, compared with 10% of the waiting list.
- The waiting list profile is more reflective of the borough wide picture with 33% of residents aged 20-39 and 36% are aged 40-59.
- The age profile of allotment holders is always likely to be higher than the waiting list profile as people move up age brackets while tending plots for often upwards of 10,15, or 20 years.

Gender

- 60% of current plot holders are male and 40% female.
- 54% of waiting list applicants are female and 46% male.
- In previous years the majority of plot holders were older men but this has changed locally and nationally due to the increasing popularity of the “grow your own” culture and schemes such as Transition Town.

⁶ Census 2001

Faith

- 59% of plot holders are Christian compared to 45% on the waiting list, 1% are Hindu as compared to 5% and 5% are Muslim as compared to 6%.
- The borough profile shows that 48% of the borough population are Christian which does reflect usage but there is significant variance in the case of the Hindu and Muslim faiths (17% and 12% of the population respectively)

Disability

- 24% of plot holders and 15% of waiting list applicants consider themselves to have a disability, of which 75% and 62% respectively consider that their disability affects their daily life.
- 15.6% of residents state that they have a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability, which limits the amount of daily activity they can do.

Sexual orientation

- 72% of plot holders are heterosexual compared to 77% on the waiting list.
- 2% are lesbian compared to 1%, 0% are gay compared to 2% and 4% are bisexual compared to 3%.
- A borough profile for this equality strand is currently being developed.

Employment Status

- 30% of plot holders are in full or part time employment compared to 57% of waiting list applicants.
- 56% of holders are pensioners compared to 14% of applicants
- 4% of holders are unemployed, compared with 10% of applicants. Brent's unemployment rate has been steadily increasing since April 2008, and at 9.6% is marginally above the London average.

Waiting List times

- 64% of current holders had to wait less than a year to be allocated a plot whereas 78% of people on the waiting list have been waiting for a year or more to date.
- 20% of current holders had to wait for over 2 years to be allocated a plot whereas 49% of applicants have been waiting for two years or more to date.

Concessions and Benefits

- 46% of plot holders receive a concession on their allotment fees.
- Only 19% of plot holders indicated that they receive a benefit though it is possible that some respondents chose not to answer this question. 38% of those that indicated they do receive a benefit receive pension credits.

Usage and intended usage patterns

- 96% of plot holders visit their allotment at least once a week.
- 56% of plot holders live less than one mile from their allotment, 19% live 1-2 miles, 20% live 2-5 miles and only 5% live over 5 miles.
- 50% of plot holders travel to their allotment by car or by bus whereas only 35% of people on the waiting list intend to use one of these methods, with 18% intending to cycle.
- 46% of plot holders garden their allotment alone compared to an intended 22% of waiting list applicants.
- 82% of plot holders and 80% of applicants cite growing fruit and vegetables as the main reason for having an allotment or wanting an allotment
- 7% of plot holders cited no garden as the main reason for having an allotment compared to 12% of applicants.
- 55% of plot holders cited healthy eating and exercise

Geographical Distribution

88% of current allotment tenancies are held by Brent residents. Of 942 tenancies, the local authority area of residence is known for 919. Of these 811 are from Brent (88%), with the remainder from Westminster 33 (4%), Ealing 19 (2%), Barnet 16 (2%), Camden 15 (2%) and others from Harrow, Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hackney, Kingston upon Thames, Hounslow, Three Rivers District, Hertsmere District, and Watford District.

An estimated combined total of 10-12% cent of current holders and waiting list applicants reside outside of the borough, with a high proportion living near the boundary with Brent and near to allotments within Brent.

The extent to which Brent residents have allotment plots in neighbouring boroughs or other local authority areas is not known but anecdotal evidence suggests that some Brent residents do have plots in neighbouring boroughs.

Section 5: Consultation methodology and findings

A two stage consultation process was undertaken; a first stage to gather feedback and data to inform the production of the draft strategy, followed by a full public and stakeholder consultation on the draft strategy and action plan.

Stage One Consultation Summary

Current allotment plot holders in the 21 Brent managed sites were asked to take part in a questionnaire survey to enable the council to

- Find out about their experience of being a plot holder and how they currently gardened their plots
- Gather their views on priorities for the management of the sites and the future development of allotment provision in the borough.
- Collect detailed equalities and demographic data to provide a comprehensive profile of current users of the service.

250 responses were received from across all sites, a return rate of 33%. Gladstone Park Gardens, Tenterden Close, Townsend Lane, Birchen Grove, Sudbury Court Road, Dog Lane and Longstone Avenue accounted for 54% of responses.

65% of respondents agreed that current fees represented good value for money.

49% reported that their plots had been subject to theft or vandalism.

62% confirmed that they knew their site representatives while 13% didn't have a representative. Overseeing site management, communicating with tenants, and liaising with the council were seen as being the main duties of a site representative.

27% indicated that they would be interested in exploring the self-management option, 40% were not interested and 32% didn't know. 13% of respondents would consider taking up a position in a self-managed arrangement.

46% agreed with the proposal to halve allotment plots in size upon vacancy, 21% neither agreed nor disagreed and 33% strongly disagreed.

Importance of on-site facilities and features ranked in order of preference

Site security	98%
Site cleanliness	97%
Composting	93%
Ground conditions	92%
Reduce use of pesticides	90%
Toilets	88%
Biodiversity and wildlife	82%
Reduced water consumption	71%
Grass cutting	68%

Satisfaction with service provision ranked by level of satisfaction

Provision of water on sites	79%
Maintenance of boundary fences and walls	65%
Maintenance of boundary hedges	53%
Maintenance of paths and tracks	51%
How complaints and queries are dealt with by the council	36%
Disabled access	34%
How overgrown and vacant plots are handled	27%

Suggested Improvements to the Allotment Service – most comments received

Comments by grouping	No.
Provide more plots/smaller plots/shared plots/ limit of one plot per person	15
Tighter controls on non-cultivation of plots	24
Speed up clearance and reallocation of vacant plots	21
Improved security/fencing/walls/CCTV	27
Improved cleanliness - rubbish collection/ permits/recycling/skip provision	19
Provision of toilets	34
Improved maintenance of pathways	14

Waiting List applicants were asked to take part in a questionnaire survey to confirm they wished to remain on the waiting list and also to enable the council to

- Manage the waiting list more efficiently through the collation of updated waiting list preferences and intended patterns of use.
- Gather their views on the future development of allotment provision.
- Collect detailed equalities and demographic data to provide a profile of future users of the service in comparison with current plot holders.

265 responses were received, representing a 44% response rate from all applicants prior to the revision of the waiting list.

79% agreed with the proposal to reduce plot sizes. 43% would like a 3-4 pole plot, 43% would like a 5 pole and the remaining 10% would prefer a 10 pole. This statistic could be linked with the fact that a higher percentage of applicants are younger and in full-time employment.

71% of applicants strongly agreed with Brent residents being given priority over non-residents and 15% strongly disagree compared to 54% and 24% of allotment plot holders.

67% of both plot holders and waiting list applicants agreed that the current 50% level of required cultivation is about right.

31% of respondents would be prepared to travel less than 1 mile, 35% 1-2 miles, 20% 2-5 miles and 5% over 5 miles and this links with the fact that a higher % of waiting list applicants are in full time employment.

Whilst, the waiting list applicant profile is more reflective of the borough wide picture; there is still low usage amongst the 16-24 and 25-34 year age groups, older females and members of the Asian community.

Findings from the survey identified the barriers to the use by older females as site locations, plot sizes, security, and toilet facilities. The main barriers to greater use by young people were negative perceptions of outdoor activities, other priorities, peer pressure and a dependency on the involvement of adults.

Old Kenton Lane Allotments Association

The chair of the association of the one self-managed site in Brent was asked to complete a questionnaire to enable the council to

- Receive confirmation of general site management practice and gather feedback on ideas for future service provision
- Collect detailed equalities and demographic data.

The feedback received highlighted that a closer working relationship with the council would be beneficial in a number of ways, in particular

- Identifying and implementing infrastructure improvements
- Establishing mechanisms for security and maintenance.
- Support with preparing and submitting funding applications
- Developing a combined events programme

Stakeholder consultation

Consultation interviews were held with stakeholders identified as having a key role to play in the development of allotment and food growing provision.

- Brent Council service areas - Regeneration and Major Projects, Planning, Customer and Community Engagement, Children and Families, Arts, Environmental Health.
- Brent Housing Associations and Registered Social Landlords
- NHS Brent
- Brent Allotments Forum and Brent Sustainability Forum
- Capital Growth focus group

The key findings from the these interviews are listed below

- Although options for new permanent allotment sites are likely to be limited in the medium to long term, there will be significant opportunities for the provision of temporary food growing sites and not only limited to land in council ownership. It is envisaged that the Wembley and South Kilburn areas in particular will offer temporary options for food growing for periods of up to five years in advance of the roll out of regeneration projects. The expansion of existing green spaces features prominently in the Wembley Area Action Plan which will form part of the Local Development Framework.
- The relationship between Site Representatives, the Brent Allotments Forum and council officers can be developed to enhance the management and development of sites. It would be beneficial to review the role and duties of Site Representatives and council officers could adopt a more proactive approach to engaging with the Forum as a sounding board for proposed service developments.
- Ward working funding may be available for allotments and food growing projects. Queensbury and Sudbury have been identified as priority areas in this context in addition to Wembley and South Kilburn. Consideration should be given to providing raised bed schemes in areas with a lack of alternative food growing spaces e.g. Eton Grove and Grove Park.
- There is potential for closer collaboration between the council and Capital Growth schemes particularly with temporary open space, facilities for waiting list applicants and cooperation on funding applications. A link between Capital Growth and the Brent Sustainability Forum is already in place and there is potential to strengthen this relationship in the context of the Green Charter's commitment to sustainable food and purchasing.
- Brent's Environmental Health service can offer an advisory support role for Capital Growth schemes e.g. checking for any soil contamination issues on potential new sites.
- Approximately two thirds of Brent's population are not eating the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables. The Services to Schools team are working with Brent NHS to identify the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people. 89% of schools in the borough have participated in the Healthy Schools Scheme and food growing can play a significant part in meeting the objectives of the Brent Obesity Strategy.
- Food growing can offer opportunities for the arts community in Brent to host creative workshops for activities such as shed decoration and improving entrance ways. Similarly, arts venues across the borough may be able to include the option of small food growing spaces e.g. at the new Willesden Green Centre scheduled to open in 2014. In some London boroughs the Vacant Lots project has identified neglected spaces, e.g. surrounding housing estates that can be adapted for food growing purposes.

Stage Two Consultation Summary

The three-month consultation period on the draft strategy ran from 12 March - 31 May 2012. It was undertaken through:

- An online questionnaire with paper copies available on request
- Officer attendance at Area Consultative and Service User Forums
- Three informal drop-in sessions for plot holders and waiting list applicants
- Meetings with the Brent Allotments Forum and Site Representatives

Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire was available on the Consultation Tracker throughout the consultation period with paper copies distributed at all meetings and also available on request. The aim of the survey was to elicit feedback on the draft strategy and, in particular, the vision, objectives and action plan, from stakeholders and residents.

38 completed questionnaires were submitted; 24 electronically and 14 in paper format. Although this was a slightly lower than anticipated response, the draft strategy reflected the feedback received from 515 questionnaires submitted during the first stage of the consultation. 73% of responses received were from current allotment holders.

95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the vision of the draft strategy while agreement for each of the three draft objectives ranged from 90% to 97%.

92% and 90% of respondents agreed that the draft strategy and action plan respectively covered the key issues relating to food growing and allotment provision in Brent.

83 additional comments were received from an estimated 25 respondents and the full list of comments and responses are listed in Appendix 3. Several comments echoed those received during the first stage of the consultation, particularly around site maintenance and recycling, the role of site representatives and improved communication. A number of comments requested that the emphasis on sustainability and biodiversity should be further strengthened.

Where relevant and appropriate the strategy and action plan have been revised to reflect the comments received.

Service User Consultative Forums

Service User Consultative Forums (SUCFs) encourage the users to have a say about the service they receive. The forums focus on specific groups of users including Black and Minority Ethnic communities, people with disabilities, pensioners and the Brent Youth Parliament. Over 80 people attended the meetings at which the strategy proposals were outlined.

Area Consultative Forums

Council officers attended all five Area Consultative Forums which offer residents, businesses and community representatives the opportunity to have their say on services provided by the council and other agencies. Chaired by a Councillor, each forum meeting is held on a weekday evening and is open to everyone.

Approximately 270 residents attended the forums to hear about the strategy and about how they could provide feedback.

Drop-in sessions

Approximately 80 people attended three late afternoon drop-in sessions, two primarily aimed at allotment holders and one for waiting list applicants. The purpose of the sessions was to ensure that the key issues had been addressed in the draft strategy.

Challenges and Opportunities

The two stage consultation programme reached an impressive number of allotment plot holders, waiting list applicants and stakeholders via a range of formats. Over 550 people completed a questionnaire at some point during the process and approximately 430 people attended a meeting or forum where the strategy was discussed. Additionally separate meetings were held with the Brent Allotments Forum and Site Representatives.

In summary, the following key challenges and opportunities were identified during the consultation as being central to the future development of allotment and food growing provision in Brent:

- Review the tenancy agreement for allotment plot holders and closely monitor its administration post implementation
- Rigorously enforce non-cultivation criteria and improve turnaround time for the letting of vacant plots
- Clarify the role of site representatives and the Brent Allotments Forum as part of establishing a protocol for effective communication between plot holders, site representatives and the council
- Enhance site security and ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to deal with theft and vandalism issues
- Improve site and boundary maintenance and site accessibility in both a general and disability capacity
- Review the administration of refuse and recycling facilities, supporting green recycling where possible
- Ensure that adequate and cost effective water supply arrangements are in place at all sites
- Undertake a full audit of sites in cooperation with site representatives

- Make provision for associated funding to be set aside for the future development of allotment sites
- Improve site facilities through the attainment of external funding and revenue neutral budgeting
- Maximise the use of the electronic allotments management system to streamline and improve the administration of the service
- Promote the benefits of organic gardening, sustainable food supplies and sustainable land use and wildlife in line with the council's Green Charter
- Develop partnership working and promote the wider benefits of food growing to schools, social housing, health providers and arts organisations to raise awareness, increase capacity and establish a network of advocates
- Explore opportunities to establish new or temporary food growing sites particularly, though not exclusively, in the Wembley and South Kilburn areas
- Investigate the potential for the provision of raised bed schemes in areas which are identified as having an inadequate number of allotment sites and alternative food spaces.

A detailed listing of consultation feedback is available on the council's Consultation Portal <http://brent-consult.objective.co.uk/portal>

Section 6: Vision and Objectives

Vision

The vision of the Food Growing and Allotments Strategy is to provide a range of food growing opportunities accessible to all parts of the community and to promote the benefits of a healthy lifestyle within a greener borough.

Objectives

1. **To provide** efficiently managed allotment sites that offer good value for money and are accessible to all.
2. **To develop** and broaden the range of food growing opportunities available through increased partnership working.
3. **To promote** the benefits of food growing as part of a healthy lifestyle within a greener borough.

The objectives will be delivered within existing revenue budgets. Actions requiring investment will be progressed as and when funding is available.

Objective 1: To provide efficiently managed allotment sites that offer good value for money and are accessible to all.

- Undertaking a comprehensive audit of sites to review the current level of provision at each site and recommend actions required to rectify any issues that have been identified. A programme of agreed cost effective actions and improvements will be collated as an outcome of the audit.
- Maintaining and improving the infrastructure, facilities and quality of sites and ensuring that they provide value for money and are welcoming and accessible to all users. Site infrastructure is of paramount importance to plot holders, particularly with regard to effective mechanisms being in place for security and day to day management arrangements. Accessibility can be improved for all users through a more rigorous approach to site maintenance while improved disabled access needs to be given consideration.
- Reviewing the tenancy agreement and applying and monitoring the revised conditions of tenancy. This will include the management of non-cultivation criteria, water provision and rental arrangements amongst a wide range of conditions, many of which were identified as requiring clarification through the consultation process.
- Ensuring that adequate financial provision is made for current and future delivery of services and budgets are robustly managed. Any required site improvements will have to be implemented within the existing Sports and Parks revenue budget, or by obtaining internal and external funding. It is

envisaged that some external funding opportunities will be available directly to plot holders and that the Allotments Officer will be able to liaise with site representatives and plot holders on the submission of applications. In line with advice received from the council's Property and Asset Management service, it will be necessary to set aside associated funding against the future development of allotment sites to cover legal charges and other costs.

- Reviewing fees and charges on an annual basis in keeping with council procedure while also benchmarking with other local authorities and closely monitoring subsidy levels. Criteria for concession arrangements and differential charging options for residents and non residents will be included within the scope of the review process.
- Establishing a streamlined administration process and communication protocol. This will include simplifying the management of the waiting list and the reletting process for vacant plots, clarifying the role of site representatives and the Brent Allotments Forum, and establishing guidelines for communications between the council and individual plot holders.
- Improving waiting list times by reletting vacant plots more swiftly, splitting larger plots upon vacancy where relevant and monitoring waiting list preferences on at least an annual basis. All new applicants will be limited to one plot per person until further notice and waiting list priority will be given to Brent residents.
- Exploring possibilities for increasing the number of sites that are self-managed. Only one site is currently self-managed but consultation showed that there is potential for exploring this option in more detail and that some plot holders would be interested in taking up a position such as treasurer or secretary under a self-managed arrangement.
- Reviewing existing provision, undertaking a needs analysis and identifying potential areas for future allotment and food growing sites. Given that, at least in the short term, the availability of new permanent sites is likely to be limited, options for temporary or meanwhile provision will need to be explored in key regeneration areas and across the borough generally. Increased temporary provision will need to be achieved through partnership working with robust service level agreements in place where appropriate.

Objective 2: To develop and broaden the range of food growing opportunities available through increased partnership working.

- Extending the provision of temporary or meanwhile food growing sites and opportunities through closer joined up working with a range of council and external partners. Temporary food growing space is generally defined as land that is cultivated by a community group in an interim period before the land is further developed. It is estimated that the average length of an interim period is approximately five years.

- Maximising the potential for temporary provision that the council's regeneration programme will offer, particularly in the Wembley and South Kilburn areas. The relevance and importance of food growing spaces will feature in the Wembley Area Action Plan which will form part of the Local Development Framework.
- Working with local members of the Capital Growth scheme and the Brent Sustainability Forum to provide an umbrella structure for the coordination of food growing spaces and initiatives across Brent. This will include the utilisation of raised beds in areas where soil contamination may be an issue. The council's Environmental Health service will provide advice and support to Capital Growth members where relevant
- Liaising with Transition Town Kensal to Kilburn , Transition Willesden, and the wider Transition network to encourage local communities to engage with food growing as part of making a wider commitment to improving their environment.
- Linking with the arts and creative sector to explore the potential for providing growing spaces in cultural venues and in neglected neighbourhood spaces along the lines of the Vacant Lots project. Additionally, consideration should be given to working with local artists to improve site facilities and features.
- Utilising the council's ward working funding where it can be demonstrated that a food growing project will have a wide community impact and will offer good value for money.
- Securing additional external funding through the submission of grant applications and participation in national and regional initiatives which have attached funding opportunities.

Objective 3: To promote the benefits of food growing as part of a healthy lifestyle within a greener borough.

- Reinforcing the commitment of the council's Green Charter to improve the provision of sustainable food and sustainable land use and wildlife, thereby encouraging biodiversity and conservation. The charter asks residents to eat freshly prepared fruit and vegetables, think about growing their own food, avoid highly processed ready meals, and consider sustainability when buying food (food miles, farming arrangements.) Allotments provide valuable habitat for a variety of species and there is potential for the improved management of natural features of allotments and to secure funding for biodiversity projects to create nature areas. Plot holders will be encouraged to grow food organically which will reduce the overall use of pesticides, artificial fertilisers and peat. Recycling and composting methods will be reviewed to ensure that sustainable practices are in place.
- Highlighting the benefits that food growing can provide as part of a healthy lifestyle. These include its contribution towards achieving a good diet, regular

participation in physical activity and the therapeutic value in the context of physical and mental wellbeing. With approximately two thirds of Brent's population not eating the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables and over 50% not taking part in physical exercise, food growing can play a crucial role in key public health programmes. NHS Brent and the Services to Schools Team are tackling obesity through a number of initiatives which can be linked with the promotion and development of allotments and food growing. The health sector has a key role to play via health checks and initiatives such as Let's Get Moving.

- Contributing to economic and social wellbeing by providing the opportunity for people to source high quality, low cost food in a friendly environment which can be enjoyed by people of all backgrounds. Allotments and food growing initiatives offer good value for money and the opportunity to meet a diverse range of people from different cultures and age groups. These benefits can be emphasised particularly through ward working, and via the Brent Housing Partnership, housing associations and registered social landlords.
- Educating children and young people on environmental issues, both in the classroom and at food growing sites. Plant growth, land use, composting, recycling, soils, organic gardening and local sustainable development can all be taught to ensure a fuller understanding of the benefits of food growing. Some allotment sites in Brent already offer plots for educational purposes and this can be extended as part of strengthening links with schools and other learning providers. Reducing food miles, cutting energy, water conservation and reducing waste are all key sustainability goals which can be communicated as part of the promotion of the benefits of food growing.

Monitoring and Review

Annual monitoring and review of the action plan will be undertaken to measure the effectiveness of the strategy implementation. Lead officers and designated partners will be responsible for delivering and tracking progress on their respective actions and taking corrective action as required.

Allotment Site Representatives, the Brent Allotments Forum, the Brent Sustainability Forum and food growing organisations will be encouraged to include appropriate review functions as part of their meeting agendas.

In addition to the action plan there are a number of performance criteria that can be used to benchmark against other local authorities. These are detailed in Appendix 7 and include allotment provision, letting efficiency, waiting lists, subsidies, and user satisfaction.

The council uses the total number of allotments and the number of allotments as a key performance indicator and allotment sites that are within Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation are monitored within the NI197 Improving Biodiversity indicator.

List of Appendices

- 1. Profile Mapping**
- 2. Legislation and Key Policies**
- 3. Allotment Fees and Charges**
- 4. Action Plan**



**Environment and Neighbourhood Services
London Borough of Brent**