

## ODFAA lease paper for ALM meeting 25 September 2018

*Blue Italic denotes a statement or a request for information/Red Italics are questions*

### Background

The legal agreement that governs the relationship between Oxford City Council and Allotment Associations expires in March 2021. The process of negotiating its replacement is underway. ODFAA is co-ordinating and representing the interests of its member Associations. A timetable for the negotiation was published and circulated to member Associations in January 2018. See Appendix 1.

This document is for ODFAA member Associations /OCC sites. It provides

- context on the negotiation
- sets out ODFAA's position where clear
- highlights areas where Association input is needed
- recommend actions Associations need to take to prepare for the future

### Lease or not?

There is some debate as to whether we have leases or a right / license to rent. In 2009 renewal of a lease to take on Cripsey Island, Cripsey Meadow Allotments Association was required by OCC to pay for and apply to register its lease with the Land Registry. The Land Registry refused this registration as whilst "they accepted that the prescribed clauses are set out in the introduction to the lease and that there is reference in the body of the lease to that word, the agreement is entitled on the front 'Tenancy Agreement' and there is no mention anywhere of a demise". There was, in their view, nothing to support the creation of a lease. Their conclusion was that the arrangement was simply akin to a licence to occupy property, in return for the payment of a rent, presented as a lease to give it greater formality".

ODFAA have recommended for some years not using terms like 'leases' and 'tenants' in any of the Association agreements with plot holders - under a 'licence' it would not be legally possible to confer such rights? The word Agreement is used in this document.

*ODFAA needs to clarify the nature of the agreement and its legal implications re. landlord/tenant relationship and responsibilities?*

### Allotments Nationally

In Appendix 2

### Allotments in Oxford

In 2001, 72.40 hectares were recorded as devoted to Oxford allotments. In 2018, its 34 member Associations reported to ODFAA about 2,500 plots (10 pole or 250sqm equivalent) in good use and about 2,477 members. Since 2007, ODFAA has compiled an annual spreadsheet of data on membership, plots, availability, clearance, toilets, paths, gates, parking, facilities, condition, cost, composting, water piped and harvested, management of waste and trees.

As waiting lists became an issue, Associations managed their sites by auditing to ensure they are well used and have, over time, reduced 'multi plot holders' to more manageable and fair allocations. Most Oxford the sites do not have waiting lists of any length, as new applicants can be accommodated within normal turnover. A few vacant plots are used communally, for example as picnic areas, to help to make sites more family-friendly and encourage a spirit of co-operation.

The below table illustrates 1) that the provision of allotments per 1,000 of population in Oxford is relatively generous and 2) that the cost per 10 pole plot is relatively low. The latter can be partly accounted for by Oxford's very high volunteer input.

Council Population/plot figures were taken from a 2011 allotment survey of allotment provision. Costs per 10 pole plots are from 2014 web/telephone contacts.

	2013 population	No. of sites	No. of plots	No. of plots per 1000	Cost per 10 pole plot
Bath & NE Somerset C	175,500	23	1120	6	£84.30
Brighton & Hove CC	273,000	38	3051	12	£75
Bristol CC	428,100	81	2383	5	£75
Enfield	313,900	35	2812	9	£95
Hounslow	254,900	30	1903	7	65
Richmond-upon-Thames	187,500	24	1955	10	£142
Swindon BC	209,700	26	1208	6	£49.50
York City C	197,800	17	1500	7	£60
Oxford 2014	151,905	36	2700	18	£27
<i>Oxford 2018</i>	<i>168,900</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>2700</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>£32</i>

The table also illustrates Oxford's growing population. It is set to continue to grow. We note plans for Oxford North, with a high proportion of flats and few gardens, contain no provision for allotment space. Please participate in to the consultation.

ODFAA are asking OCC to clarify how spending on allotments compares with other council spending per capita on things like play areas, parks, leisure, sport, community centres, health, fitness, leisure, green miles...i.e. other areas to do with green spaces, community and well-being. ODFAA will continue to stress that that planning policies must look to provide and protect a good allotment provision. Oxford has won the Acland Trophy 8 or 9 times

### **OCC Political and Strategic context**

Oxford City Council's Budget Book used to state that it supports allotments, recognizing their 'contribution to reducing Oxford's carbon footprint by producing an estimated 500 tonnes of vegetables to the value of £1.25 million each year' and 'providing opportunities to improve mental and physical well-being, as well as encouraging physical activity and better diet by supporting 36 popular allotments across the city' (NB *There are 35 not 36 open sites*).

The City Council's Green Spaces document references an Allotment Strategy 'to be done in 2017'. None exists.

Many Councillors over the years have had, or do have, allotments. They have had warm words for them. However, over the past 12 years, we have had five Councillors with responsibility for the allotment portfolio, all of whom have met with ODFAA armed with little or no knowledge of allotments. They have usually only attended a meeting or two. In June 2018, Cllr Louise Upton took on the allotment portfolio.

**ODFAA would welcome more political engagement and a published strategy to ensure Oxford's allotments are protected and thrive for the next 21 years.**

## OCC Allotment Management and Oversight

Our present and previous (1986 and 1994) Agreements, devolve site management to Associations. OCC have stated that they intend to continue with this. It is acknowledged as good practice.

Devolved management clearly reduces the burden of administration and maintenance responsibilities for the Authority. It has proved a good route to engage local communities in the management/regeneration of important environmental assets. This has allowed (or forced, some would say) some associations to take under-utilised sites and turn them around. In Oxford, over the past 14 years, one site has moved from being the most neglected in the city to one of the best. This has been with some allotment grant money and councillor support but also a large amount of external funding. For plot holders, devolution can bring more responsive management on a day-to-day basis, pride in improvements to the site, and opportunities for volunteers to bring their skills and expertise to a new challenge, particularly when they are in retirement.

Devolved management can be pursued to varying degrees. In Oxford, we sit somewhere between 'delegation' and 'semi-autonomy'. Delegation means a properly constituted allotment association accepts formal responsibility for a range of duties **under licence from the local authority**, under financial arrangements that 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 overheads such as water, and undertake all legal formalities. Semi-autonomy means that the allotment association leases the site from the council, arranges tenancy agreements and reinvests revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repair and capital items.

**Do Associations feel that the current level of delegation is suitable or should ODFAA be negotiating a change to semi autonomy i.e. Greater delegation.**

In all the Local Authority generally retains the right to review agreements at periodic intervals and should have a budget for oversight and strategic functions. In Oxford, this oversight role is presently not defined.

**ODFAA are asking for clarification of OCC's oversight role.**

In 2016, we were informed that there was to be a full condition survey of OCC allotments, and surveyors would need site access. The resulting survey, which we had first sight of in August 2018, simply locates the site and view from the gate. There is no inspection nor detail.

**The Local Authority should have baseline data, and some means of evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of its allotment provision.**

Within OCC, organisational responsibility for allotments has moved around. Presently, allotments reside in Direct Services, which means they are not accounted in the Budget Book.

OCC's time for involvement in allotments has been reduced over the lifetime of the current Agreement. Previously, Allotment Officers and whole Committees were devoted to them, until the end of the 1990s. In 2001 there was a full-time officer (who also managed Oxford in Bloom). He left in 2007 and by 2013 the Parks employee responsible stated that based on his responsibilities and working week of 20 days a month he planned to spend 10% of his time dealing with allotments i.e. 2 days a month. Consequently, he said he was looking forward to visiting every site and expected to do a cycle of all sites in 3 years. This never happened.

The time spent since 2008 comprises mostly Stuart Fitzsimmons (SF) now Parks & Open Spaces Service Manager, used to be Parks and Open Spaces Manager, attending 4 then 3 Allotment

Liaison Meetings (usually 1 hr), 4 ODFAA/OCC Committee meetings (1-2 hours), helping resolve conflicts on individual sites, managing the Allotment budget and processing grants. We recall 6 difficulties over this time have needed OCC involvement to resolve.

SF is presently managing oversight and the budget for allotments, as he has done for the past 10 years. In previous years one of the Parks team has been allocated this responsibility. He is doing it himself as the Agreement renewals inevitably need his experience and involvement. ODFAA were confused recently when SF stated, "that the Allotments had no staffing time allocated" and he has stated "we repeatedly get scrutiny over the lack of investment in Allotments" and that "more time and money are invested into Allotments than the figures you see in the Allotment budget".

ODFAA is asking OCC to identify/ clarify staff time, resources and budget for the management and oversight of allotments.

ODFAA are asking OCC where we are in terms of management and the officer time (in Parks, Direct Services, Estates' should be identified and costed. It cannot be done 'as a favour'.

### **Public Finances and the need for Associations to Pay More**

In 2006 to 2008 the City Council was able to fund a major project of allotment re-fencing/providing new noticeboards was agreed with a fantastic capital fund of 450,000. This was not complete due to rising prices. Fencing was funded by further capital fund of £61,000 in 2016. This total of £501,000 capital funding made a dramatic difference to all associations.

Oxford City Council future planning assumes that Formula Grant will be cut by an estimated 53.60% and that, by April 2020, 'revenue support grant will be reduced to zero.' ODFAA recognises the financial challenges facing local authorities, understands that capital for maintenance and improvements is scarce and sources for Local Authority funding are limited.

ODFAA acknowledges that plot holders will need to pay more in membership to manage and maintain sites. Will sites need to pay more in rent to contribute to a larger allotment budget i.e. money managed by OCC?

### **A note on allotment land disposal as a potential source of income**

The government guide, 'Growing in the Community' recommends that if there is a genuine surplus of allotment land and those prospective tenants who desire allotments have access to good quality allotment plots then it is not unreasonable to put that land to other uses. Ideally it should be possible to return the land to use as allotments if demand exists at some time in the future.

Consideration should therefore be given first to alternative green, community-oriented uses, such as community gardens, community orchards, community nature reserves. These alternatives can serve a complementary role when integrated into an underused site.

In some local authorities, e.g. Bristol and Birmingham, an allotment rejuvenation strategy has been partly financed through funds generated by the rationalisation and disposal of sites. However, this can only work where the allotment provision exceeds any conceivable expansion in demand.

In Oxford, ODFAA and Allotment Liaison Meetings supported the release of long term unused statutory allotment land at East Minchery Farm, parts of Barton Fields and Horspath. We were informed there were no 'capital receipts' for these. These releases have resulted in improvement planned for Barton Fields and the retention of a very small site in Denny Gardens, which has had a chequered start and is still awaiting the formation of an association and occupation. There are still three statutory allotment sites unused but two belong to colleges and the third, Ingle Close, is very small.

Note that the largest site in the city is underused and may have potential as a source of income. This site is not a member of ODFAA. ODFAA believes none of its member sites have potential for raising capital

[ODFAA is asking for a clear map of statutory designated land alongside with allotment site marked and identified so that we are clear about where sites have secretary of state protection.](#)

### **ODFAA and Allotment Associations**

All Association administration, apart from OCC processing the annual grant applications and allotment budget are covered by voluntary allotment committees and ODFAA. These c.150 volunteers commit many hours per week to their sites and rarely figure in OCC reporting.

34 of the 35 working sites across the city are ODFAA members. Associations contribute ODFAA membership fees of 40p per member annually. This pays for ODFAA events and support and has also paid for site signage.

ODFAA organises Allotment Liaison meetings so that association representatives can share and develop their management of sites. We understand that the best safeguard for an existing allotment site is for the plots to be fully tenanted and well looked after. This makes it much easier for planners (and plot holders) to make a case for the retention of allotments.

ODFAA supports organisations and will act as an invited arbitrator where necessary on any internal allotment disputes, where agreed by both parties. They are not responsible for handling public complaints.

In some authorities **an allotment charter** has proved an effective way of communicating policy in a succinct and simple manner. It also provides an opportunity for the council to state its commitment to the allotment service. In 2013, ODFAA worked with the Parks Officer then responsible to produce a one-page allotment charter to clarify the relationship. It was reviewed in 2016 but presently it does not reflect recent developments in OCC organisation.

[Oxford's Allotment Charter needs updating.](#)

### **Allotment Rents and the Basis for Charges**

6 of OCCs 36 sites are on non-OCC land but 2 of these pay rent into the council. 29 pay rent annually to OCC as landowner. One site, Ingle close is disused. Since 2015 this allotment rent money has been ring-fenced within OCC, augmented by income from other uses of sites (electricity stations?). It is ploughed back into allotments as

- the reactive maintenance budget. This is the maintenance budget which OCC control. It can be and has been used to cover some long-term maintenance issues. Work should be reported to Allotment Liaison Meetings. Some expenditure has not been reported until after the event. Budget income and spending has proved difficult to come by. SF recently supplied figures for three years, 2015 to 2018
- grants which are available to all allotments (including sites on non-OCC land) Most of the grant requests we get from Associations, except from small sites, are for projects that could probably be managed within their own resources. ODFAA have copies of some awarded grants back to 2008.
- competition budget £987
- insurance presently of £80 per site

Non-OCC sites pay rent to their respective landowners. To date, it has been ODFAA's policy to enable these sites to access all the above budgets even though they have not contributed to them, because we were supported major clearances to bring sites and plots back into operation. Future arrangements and costs are under review.

ODFAA will ask the Council to give a written commitment that its 2015 undertaking to ring-fence the allotment budget and dedicate it to allotments will continue.

Over 1000 of the plot provision in Oxford sits in the Flood plain. Councillors gave these sites compensation after the 2007 floods and agreed a continued rent discount of 5%?

ODFAA recommend that the current rent discount for flooding continues in the future.

Each Association determines its own plot holder rent/member fees. Many have increased over the past 10 years as Associations have begun to manage sites more actively (a few already look too low). In the context of the continued squeeze on public finances, if they wish to maintain and develop their sites, Associations will probably need to increase their rent/fees further. Long-term Site Management Plans and associated financial planning will enable sites to be even more attuned to managing their own resources and enable informed dialogue with their members.

Do Associations agree with ODFAA's conclusion regarding the likelihood that plot holder rent/ membership fees will need to increase?

ODFAA recommend that Associations undertake budget planning to cover the period of the new Agreement. Rising costs are likely to make longer-term estimates less accurate, but a 5-year asset, maintenance plan is a start. The information ODFAA recently requested from Associations (data sheet) should help.

ODFAA intends to request from OCC analysis of OCC's maintenance spending for at least the past 7 years (i.e. since the last review) as a reference for Associations to develop their financial plans.

A condition survey should be the start of a new lease. so that all are aware of what they are taking on. ODFAA intends to ask OCC to fund such a survey and have it carried out.

### **A possible breakdown of 2018 allotment spend**

11.468k income from site rent+ 8,000 from other allotment land users e.g. electricity stations  
23k capital funding (500,000 /21)

Plot holders 2477 x average plot fee 32 =79,264 – site rents 11,468 =67,796

**Overall annual allotment funding 19k+23K +67,796 =109,796**

This does not include OCC spend on management and oversight (which is their responsibility for funding) or Association volunteers managing sites. Assuming no big capital funding in future, associations need to at least augment their income to make up for its loss.

E.G. A site of 100 members with an additional maintenance cost of £50,000 over 21 yrs., would need to charge an extra £24 per member per year.

### **Disparities in rent per hectare and site area records**

ODFAA negotiated the allotment site rent for all in 2015. Previous rent reviews did not successfully address the disparities in price per hectare which had over the years with no recorded reason. The 2015 rent review acknowledged that another round of adjustments is necessary. We have a table of 2015 rent adjustments. Unlike 2015, it could be possible to reduce some of the rents (if deemed too high) coincident with the new Agreement.

In the 2015 review many sites queried their recorded hectare figure. Where the site rent is based on area it must be checked and agreed.

ODFAA will request that OCC undertake to collect accurate records of site areas and continue the work on parity per hectare.

Presently rents are reviewed every 7 years.

### **Differential rent according to services or site characteristics?**

It has been suggested by SF over the past few years that there might be differential site rents based on services provided in the past. For example, OCC installed water on some sites in the 60s, some association sheds between the 60s/80s, and one metalled road. Should these sites pay more?

Should sites with liabilities such as trees and ditches pay less?

ODFAA believes the fairest way to apportion rent is per hectare, with some consideration for trees?  
See below

### **Tree Maintenance – whose job is it and how is it paid for**

Presently tree work is paid for from the reactive maintenance budget but, it seems, reluctantly and with huge amounts Association effort to pin down. Generally, it is not done to the satisfaction of Associations. Barton Fields, Kestrel Crescent, Cutteslowe, Fairacres, Eden Drive, John Garne Way, Old Marston Mill Lane, (non-OCC), Pullen Lane, Osney Twenty Pound Meadow, Town Furze, Trap Grounds and Van Diemens Lane have all reported trouble with trees in their annual ODFAA returns.

The issue of trees, in and around allotments is complex, involving on-site trees, boundary trees and trees on adjacent land. Sites with trees have the mixed blessing of managing them for their own and the 'public good'. The latter can be at variance with the needs of allotments. Lack of adjacent tree management can seriously affect the function and security of the site. Trees always win in the competition for water and nutrients so affect the ability of statutory designated allotment land to be productive. Excessive tree size can seriously cut out the light, water and nutrients. Overhanging trees reduce viability of plots. Trees in and over ditches make them accessible and reduce flow. Delayed tree work can cause costly site damage.

Many Associations report that trees have suffered from long term lack of management. Managing trees seems to have defeated the purses of a Local Authority. Is it possible that voluntary organisations and allotment members will fare better?

In the past, Parks Tree Officers have stated in Allotment meetings that the tree policy applies to all Oxford trees, which is why, when dealing with trees on allotment sites, we have been told we have to consult OCC. Recently it has been stated that 'The Tree Policy', is the policy for trees the Council is responsible for and these are not allotment trees.

*SF re trees Allotments are complicated when it comes to the trees. Where the lease states the trees are still the responsibility of the Council; we manage them as per the Councils Tree Policy. This in turn means trees are surveyed every 3 years and mapped. Where the trees are the responsibility of the Allotment Association under the terms of the lease they are not strictly speaking covered by the Tree Policy. However, as I have often said the Allotment Associations are run by volunteers and I don't want individuals putting themselves at risk trying to undertake tree work. Therefore, I have always asked the Associations contact us if they have issues with their trees, we will inspect them and undertake any necessary work at a small cost. I have also asked our Tree Surveyors to routinely add Allotments to their surveying schedule. This in effect means*

*that the clear majority of trees on sites where the trees are the Associations responsibility have been surveyed and mapped.*

Allotment Associations do not seem to be at liberty to manage their trees or influence the management of trees on their boundary, as neighbours usually can with respect to overhanging. The special needs of land for growing do not appear to be primary. Clearly, we all must consider context, greater public good, city views and green lungs and the juxtaposition of private and public realm. However, presently, the allotment budget pays for maintenance of adjacent trees not on allotment ground, e.g. Port Meadow trees next to Trap Grounds and Fiddlers Bow trees next to Cripsey Meadow. This is due to allotments calling for such work to enable their designated function. Thus, allotments are paying for work that is in the public realm.

No one wants to chop down trees but the expense of managing them can be onerous. Exceptionally the existing Cripsey Meadow Agreement has a tree clause which states OCC manage the trees as deemed necessary. This is not in any other Agreements. Cripsey has a tree management plan agreed with OCC (which took 5 years of meetings) to replace a previous one which was not kept to. It seems Trap Grounds also had a management plan which has not been kept. Other Associations have reported similar experiences.

ODFAA understands that demand for tree maintenance far exceeds capacity. Therefore additional funds need to be found. Given the state of public finances it is realistic this should come from associations.

Who should do the work? Should the allotment rent to the council go up to accommodate this work? If this is purely an Association responsibility, should they be able to appoint other contractors or, as the allotment charter states, commission at an in-house price from OCC? If other contractors doing tree work have to go through OCC (as in the past?)

Should sites with trees pay more for the privilege/liability? If so how much. Per tree? If this is a cost only borne by associations with trees or adjacent trees this will mean variations in membership costs and payment made by some plot holders to support the public realm. Not all sites have trees...but then not all sites have piped water, sheds, toilets installed either?

Would this be a better to focus the allotment budget on this?

However work is paid for, whether by the allotment budget or associations', we need specific skilled surveys and information regarding costs / availability and assurance that work will be done.

Whether this responsibility finally rests with OCC or allotment associations, or both, Associations will need to have clearer information to work out our future costs to members. To sign Agreements responsibly, we all need to be aware of the cost implications and of the time and resources available so that we can, if necessary, plan over time and increase allotment members payments to cover the cost.

ODFAA have asked for any existing allotment tree surveys and a pollarding/coppicing schedule that will allow allotment committees to understand costs related to tree maintenance, including regular condition surveys. Many of the trees are willow and must be regularly pollarded or coppiced. The number of trees has increased due to previous cracking and layering.

## **Ditch and Stream management**

The satisfactory management of ditches and streams is beyond both Local Authority and Environment Agency capability, so any expectation that ditches and streams should be an Association responsibility is unreasonable.

ODFAA do not recommend that any Association responsibility for the management of ditches and streams. This should be the responsibility of the riparian landowner

## **Association Trustees**

In response to wide dissatisfaction voiced at Allotment Liaison Meetings about the use of the term 'Trustee' and the lack of clarity as to meaning, responsibilities etc, OCC have agreed

- to the signing of the new Agreements by 'signatories'
- that these should be senior officers of Associations so that contacts remain up to date.
- to cap Allotment Association liability to a limit equal to the assets of the Association.
- to include OCC contacts and a form in the Agreement, for notifying when Association officers change.

Do Associations agree that this change in terminology and capping of liability will resolve volunteer reservations?

## **Insurance**

Allotment site insurance (started in 2003) in the name of the ODFAA member and this is the insurance alluded to in OCC leases. The policy is paid for by ODFAA and, in line with the terms of the leases, this is refunded by OCC. We are advised it offers additional protection for Associations and it is being used by ODFAA member associations that are not on OCC land.

The Zurich policy is renewed each May for those associations with ODFAA membership. This insurance is for ODFAA members only. ODFAA subscription fees of 40p per member come to ODFAA and total just over £1000, not the allotment budget.

The allotment budget pays £80 per site insurance fee. Non-OCC sites do not contribute to this nor the grant pot. The insurance has gone up since 2007 from £600 to £2,359 and is expected to rise again next year

ODFAA is awaiting a meeting with OCC to discuss insurance. Renewal with Zurich is ridiculous!

## **Appendix 1 ODFAA / OCC Lease review Schedule**

Proposed Action framework for lease review negotiated by OCC and ODFAA

Year / ODFAA meeting / key dates	Action check list	Responsibilities
2018 January	Lease process outlined. Reps to identify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parts of the lease/rules that don't work.</li> <li>• parts of lease/rules that are ok,</li> <li>• parts of lease/rules that are not understood.</li> </ul>	Lead at Jan mtg by WSS and SF. Field secretaries to source answers for April/Sept mtg.
2018 April-August	Field secretaries to return information ODFAA meet property & parks to identify extra info needed and have it ready for field secs to take away at Sept mtg. Discussion at ALM	ODFAA collate responses ready to meet OCC during summer 2018 Property and Parks identify basic format
2018 September	Field secs to research any extra information needed. Discussion at ALM, idea of final format?	ODFAA and SF report to mtg on progress and bring immediate issues for resolution
2019 January	First draft of leases presented for reps to take away and respond	ODFAA OCC AAs
2019 April	Second draft of leases	OCC ODFAA AAs
2019 September	Leases out to all to give 6 months prior to signing period.	ODFAA OCC AAs
2020 January	Leases ready to sign following six month consultation period. Sign at/following association AGMs in 2020	AAs
2020 April	Lease signing	AAs
2020 September	Lease signing by end of year	AAs
2021 January	Lease complete	
<b>2021 MARCH</b>	<b>NEW LEASE STARTS</b>	
2021 September	1 <sup>st</sup> rent due under new lease	

## Appendix 2 Allotments Nationally

Allotments play a unique role in communities. They have enjoyed special protection in law for a century. The first Allotments Act was passed in 1908 when local authorities were duty-bound to provide allotments for their residents if they consider there is a demand, and they should also provide enough plots.

There are no formal national standards for provision; provision should reflect local demands. It was recommended, in 1998 and again in 2012 in the localism act, that a target level of provision be set in an allotment strategy, as well as in relevant planning documents, and that the allotment manager(s) work towards achieving that target. Provision refers not just to the number of plots, which may vary in size, but also to aspects of the quality of the land and infrastructure.

Allotments play a vital role in connecting people to the process of food production, enabling them to grow fresh food, whilst reducing food miles. They

- improve the environment, can be better supporters of wildlife than parks and preserve rare and unique varieties.
- provide opportunities to be active, meet others, share knowledge, information and food.
- are a productive means for achieving healthy exercise in the open air,
- are a resource for people with disabilities if there is appropriate infrastructure,
- help with improving mental health as the therapeutic effects of gardening are now embedded in many treatments for depression
- offer a venue for the achievement of 'social inclusion', as communities of interest bringing a wide range of people, with lots of different gardening traditions/cultures, together. Whilst they were historically seen as a preserve of the working classes and the elderly, the demographic is now much more diverse.

Allotments have changed a lot over the last 11 years. They became more popular due to austerity cuts, rising interest in organic food, low carbon local food production, sustainability and interest in the environment as well as healthy mental and physical exercise. The traditional role of allotments being used supplement family income has probably decreased but it is an important factor in the local food movement. There are now as many, if not more, women plot holders, and the sites represent, in part, the diverse communities they serve.