

# Sustainability Committee

SC(3)-08-10 (p1): 18 March 2010

## **Inquiry into the Provision of Allotments in Wales: Evidence from Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens**

### **Background Information on FCFCG**

The Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens works to represent the interests and views of its members and the movement as a whole to national, regional and international bodies, and to raise the profile of community farming and gardening. It also offers a wide range of services to its membership, including site visits, training, events, newsletters, funding information and much more. Since 1980 member numbers have risen from around 25 to more than 500 groups in 2010, and we currently represent over 1,000 community farms and gardens across the UK.

FCFCG welcomes working in partnership to improve its reach and service delivery, such as through the successful Allotments Regeneration Initiative, which has over 3,500 allotments contacts registered on its database (an estimated 60% of the UK's allotments sites). ARI gives advice and support to anyone working to create and regenerate allotments in the UK

### **'Growing Together in Wales' Programme**

The 'Growing Together in Wales' programme, is a 3 year Big Lottery funded programme that aims to promote, develop and support the community farming and gardening movement in Wales. The programme includes the delivery of regional networking and training events, support and advice through our Fieldworker programme and a travel bursary scheme to enable groups to visit other projects in exchange of best practice. The programme is an opportunity for existing and emerging projects to come together and share their knowledge and experiences and identify future opportunities for the movement in Wales.

The Growing Together in Wales programme has enabled FCFCG to provide support to communities throughout Wales in the setting up and continued development of a wide range of community growing projects, including community farms, community gardens, allotments and schools." "The programme began in 2008 and has witnessed a 600% increase in membership in less than two years, reflecting the rising interest in community growing during this period.

### **Members in Wales.**

There are currently 63 FCFCG members registered in Wales, 22 of which are community groups or organisations that are either looking to establish allotments, have successfully set up non-statutory allotments, sites with individual community growing plots or have established a community gardening project on an existing allotment site. FCFCG has also provided support, networking and training to a number of non-members looking to set up allotments within the community.

This report is an opportunity for us to feedback and raise awareness to the Inquiry on the experiences and current trends we are witnessing within our membership and throughout our networks in Wales.

### **Innovative approaches: Communities establishing allotments in Wales**

During the delivery of this programme in Wales, the interest in 'grow your own' and community growing has dramatically increased and it has become clear that communities have become frustrated with the lack of statutory provision of allotments and have instead sought to establish allotments independently. Communities have approached local land-owners, including farmers, the National Trust, schools and even local village hall committees, and begun the process of establishing new allotment sites within the community.

As a result, a variety of models have emerged, with leases and agreements differing widely. Several community groups have informal agreements with local farmers, with no official lease or rent to pay and provide plots to members of the community at £20 per plot. While others have established more formal agreements with the landowner, with some paying over £1000 per year for rental of the field, with the plot holders paying £120 per annum. In some cases, as in Knucklas, the community has established a community land trust and have purchased land on which they have created a community orchard and allotment, charging plot holders £50 a year. Evidence from the communities suggests that such is the demand and desire for allotments; people are willing to pay higher prices for an allotment and an opportunity to grow their own. The charges also enable the allotment committee to cover additional costs, such as insurance and water provision.

Sizes in plots on these newly created sites have a tendency to be half the size of a standard ten perch plot. In some cases, plot-holders have been provided with quarter size plots. The consensus seems to be that it is better to give more people the opportunity to grow, as opposed to giving less people more space to grow.

### **Evidence of the Wider Benefits**

These new allotment sites and projects tend to have a strong environmental, sustainability and social focus, with many stipulating organic gardening as an obligation into plot-holders' contracts and ensuring that spaces for wildlife, community gardening and social gatherings and celebrations are incorporated into the sites from the very beginning.

The allotments tend to be more community focused than traditional sites. The creation of these new sites has involved the local community coming together to address the local need and demand for allotments, this has helped to encourage a 'self-help' ethos and a sense of community, particularly in rural areas of Wales. Members of the community have attended meetings and volunteer workdays to prepare the site for allotments, therefore creating ownership over the site and re-enforcing this sense of community. Allotments have become a community within themselves, a meeting place bringing together people of different ages, backgrounds and cultures.

Several of these new allotment sites, established by the community have embraced not only sustainability, growing and organic gardening, but also local culture, including art, music, singing, story-telling and poetry, with many of the allotments having their own resident bard. Events held on these allotments give the community an opportunity to celebrate local culture, the seasons and the communities' achievements.

### **Challenges and obstacles faced by communities.**

The creation of these new allotment sites by the community is as a direct consequence of the Local Authority not fulfilling their statutory obligation to provide allotments to meet local demand. It is communities instead, that are addressing this need and provision, but not without challenges and obstacles, some of these include:

Accessing land for allotments / community growing.

Local Authority Estates departments not releasing land for allotments / community growing. Large amounts of land exist within Local Authority areas in Wales, with the Local Authority paying large sums for contractors to mow these areas. This land could be put into use for allotments / community growing at a saving to the Local Authority. There is a concern that Local Authorities are opting out of putting land into use for allotments to avoid being legally tied up as statutory allotments

Inconsistencies in Local Authority Planning Departments, particularly in regards to 'change of use' required from 'Agricultural' to 'Allotments / Community Gardens'. It seems to differ Local Authority to Local Authority and even within the same department.

The Demand and Fees for Planning Applications. In many cases, planners are demanding community groups submit detailed planning applications and are charging £300 per application. The majority of these groups are run voluntarily and have limited if no funds are in effect, fulfilling the Local Authority's statutory obligation.

Soil contamination on potential allotment sites, particularly in the Valleys and urban areas.

Recommendations

Support and Guidance for Local Authorities, particularly planners.

To include awareness -raising of the wider benefits that allotments and community gardens can bring to the community in terms of health, regeneration, the environment, sustainability, education and training.

The LGA Good Practice Guide 'Growing in the Community' (2008) to be made available bi-lingually in Wales as covers many of these issues. Its production was coordinated by FCFCG

Examples of good practice in Local Authorities, Town and Community Councils working with communities to provide allotments. Some excellent examples include Powys CC in Ystradgynlais and Taffs Well Community Council.

Support from Local Authorities for communities setting up allotments, in recognition that communities are helping them to fulfil their statutory obligation

Planning fees waived for community groups setting up allotments and community gardens.

Planning Guidelines for communities setting up allotments / community gardens - Communities need consistency and clarification as to whether allotments and community gardens require planning permission and change of use. This is covered to some extent in the new LGA Guidance 'A Place to Grow' (2010).

Communities compensated for soil contamination ie. Grants that will enable them to overcome this problem and transform the site into production.

Guidelines and support for land-owners in providing allotments for communities, including case-studies and models of good practice.

Support and funding to be made available for communities in establishing allotments and community gardens, including networking and sharing of good practice. Currently provided to some extent by FCFCG and ARI.

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