

The Welsh Assembly Government Strategic Approach

In its previous Report the then Committee made a number of helpful recommendations to assist with allotment provision across Wales.

These recommendations need to be reviewed to

- ascertain the progress made with their implementation
- identify how these results have been disseminated to the allotment community in Wales
- monitor how these results have had a change in policy at a Local Authority level
- identify, in cases of no results, how this has occurred
- make the necessary resources available for the previous Recommendations to be implemented, if that is required by the current Committee

Since 2010 there has been a far greater emphasis on the Environment and ways in which national and local communities can work together to offset the effects of climate change and mass industrialisation e.g. the anti-plastics movement (Welsh Assembly Government, Rhiwbina residents).

This emphasis has also resulted in a far greater demand for allotments and local growing spaces with a concomitant desire in many cases for greater autonomy and control over their growing space.

Suggestion

That the Committee map, across Wales, the demand for Sites to be Self Governing cf. Community Asset Transfer. And also cf. in Scotland - the right to purchase any assets of community interest. There to be cast iron safeguards against any such transferred allotment land being sold on or privatised.

The Approach taken by Local Authorities

I am an allotment tenant an allotment Site in North Cardiff (Llandaff North) and, together with 27 other allotment sites city wide, we come under the jurisdiction of Cardiff Council as land owners. As a Locally Managed Site we have entered into a legal contract with the Council (Local Management Agreement) in which each signatory (Cardiff Council and Llandaff North Allotment Association) has agreed to fulfil certain obligations. In return for our side of the Contract we receive a percentage of the annual rental monies (decided by the Council).

It is with regret that, notwithstanding repeated requests from our Association officers, the contractual obligations of the Council are seldom fulfilled and, when they are, it is only after numerous applications via telephone and written requests. Whilst we understand and sympathise with lack of resources we are at pains to understand how contractual obligations can be ignored, especially when they relate to Health & Safety issues e.g the removal of asbestos from Sites.

Suggestions

That the Committee ascertain the number of Allotment Officers across Wales to:

- identify their job specifications, duties and responsibilities
- ask for specific difficulties they may encounter in pursuance of their role
- identify examples of best practice and ways in which they can be shared
- consider the establishment of a co-ordinated body of Allotment Officers across Wales

The previous Committee recommended (Recommendation 10) that Section 106 monies could be used to improve allotment provision. These monies would make a huge difference to current Sites and the formation of new ones and I urge the Committee to investigate this issue further. Bringing this to the attention of Assembly Members would help to raise the issue when Planning Permissions are being sought.

Suggestion

That the Committee actively investigate the use of Section 106 monies for allotment improvement and development.

The personal circumstances of individual plot holders can change, often unexpectedly, often through natural ageing. Therefore, we have a regular changeover of tenancies. The Site Secretary has a clear understanding of who holds each tenancy, however this does not always accord with the understanding of the Council. This inevitably causes extra work and often unnecessary stress for all concerned. It would be helpful if there could be a more accurate and up to date method of correlating waiting lists and current tenancies. (Recommendation 2, 2010 Report) This could also be useful to people who wish to transfer to another area.

Suggestion

That the Committee identify those software programmes that would give the most up to date and accurate information re plot tenancies and ascertain any difficulties in the implementation and usage of these programmes.

The socio-economic group of allotment users is broad and difficult to quantify. It is true that many allotmenters have access to their own transport. However, allotments are often let to people who have decided to rely solely on public transport, for environment & economic reasons. We are also aware of current traffic congestion and the concerns about air quality as a result of engine emissions. Reducing the use of cars would not only benefit the wider community but also reduce the incidence of vehicles on Sites.

Suggestions

That local councils ensure a bus route passes each allotment Site with a designated bus stop as near to the main Site entrance as possible.

That the Welsh Assembly Government monitor any reduction in bus provision across Wales and take into account the consequential effects of any such reductions with regard to access to allotments.

How we can maximise the health, community and environmental benefits of allotments and community growing.

On our Site we have initiated the following:

- an allotment shop which opens two days a week, staffed by volunteers. This provides a centre where the allotment community can meet and have refreshments, swap growing tips and advice and offer items for use on individual plots.
- a regular newsletter which informs our allotment community of current Committee decisions and items of interest as well as giving notice of the AGM
- regular volunteer sessions to clear derelict plots or parts of the Site that have become overgrown
- a bio-diversity officer who:
 - writes a regular newsletter about wildlife on Site
 - organises pond dipping events for children and their adults
 - arranges Diversity days in partnership with Urban buzz and the RSPB
 - makes applications to environmental organisations for their support and acknowledgement. We currently hold a Green Flag Award for our commitment to the environment and are Gold Award winners in the Wales in Bloom competition.
- a programme of seed sowing and cultivation of plants for people who do not have the expertise or resources to achieve this
- social events during the growing year so that plot holders can meet together e.g. tomato tasting session

We have a regular presence at the Llandaff North Summer Festival and our representatives are present at other events in the local Community e.g. Julie Morgan's Environment Seminar and subsequent Loneliness Conference.

We endeavour to share our knowledge and spare plants whenever and wherever possible so that the benefits of allotment growing and participation can be passed to the next generation. We regard allotments as vitally necessary to the general health and well-being of our community, providing an enviable range of skills, health and social benefits.

We aim, in every possible way, to put these aims into practice being realistic within the limits of our time and resources!

Lynne Lewis (February 2019)

Cc Julie Morgan AM, Anna McMorrin MP, Cllr. Dilwar Ali