

FINGAL ALLOTMENT STRATEGY

March 2012



Comhairle Contae Fhine Gall
Fingal County Council

FINGAL ALLOTMENT STRATEGY

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1.0 Introduction:



Allotments represent an important element of Green Infrastructure in Fingal. The tradition of allotments in Ireland goes back to early 20th century. The Vacant Land Cultivation Society (VLCS) established the first allotment sites in Dublin city, in January 1910. The plan, as Michael Cullen writes in his thesis, ‘Uncovering the plot: Investigating Urban Agriculture in Dublin’, was to “help supplement the diets and incomes” of the city’s poorest, some of whom were living in tenement conditions with 4-5 families to a house. In 1917 The Dublin Corporation, by direction of The Local Government Board for Ireland, set up a Land Cultivation Committee to provide allotments aimed at increasing food supplies as a war measure.

The introduction of the Local Authorities (Allotment) Act 1926 highlighted the importance of allotments. This Act identified an allotment as a piece of land intended to be let for cultivation by an individual for the production of vegetables mainly for consumption by himself and his family. This act further included a clause which allowed local authorities to lease land to voluntary associations interested in the allotment movement.

The allotment movement was driven by the United Irish Plottolders Union, who later became the Irish Allotment Holders Association. Their work focused on finding suitable land convenient to allotment holders. The allotment movement at the end of the 1930’s consisted of employed, unemployed and retired men as well as their families working on their allotments. A boost in the numbers came in 1939 when local governments and the Department of agriculture began allocating new allotment areas to deal with the food shortages as a result of World War II. After the war the land used for purposes of allotments was reclaimed for

the expansion of the city and its suburbs.

An article in 1952 of the Irish Times finds the levels of allotments at 1,200. However, the popularity of allotments since has fluctuated. In recent years there has been an upsurge in demand. Allotment gardening provides an opportunity for an active healthy lifestyle which reflects the ideals of well-being and sustainability. Allotments also have a role to play in the protection and promotion of biodiversity.

Currently there are more than 600 allotments provided by Fingal County Council in the Fingal area. These are located at three sites: Powerstown in Dublin 15, Turvey in Donabate and Skerries. The provision of approximately 200 more allotments at Balbriggan shall be coming on-stream shortly. Additional privately run allotments are also operating throughout Fingal.

A strategic approach is required to address the increasing demand and to ensure the benefits of allotment gardening are properly recognised and available to all.

This strategy seeks to improve the quality and quantity of allotments in the Fingal area and to provide support for the development of allotments by identifying ways to give more people the opportunity to grow their own food and promoting other food growing initiatives. All initiatives contained in this strategy are considered in the context of other council strategies, policies and objectives.

This document provides a framework in line with the County Development Plan to develop and manage allotments in partnership with the users.

2.0 Legislation & Policy:



2.1 Historical Reference

The provision of allotments was, historically, the remit of the Local Authority. The first piece of legislation relating to the provision of allotments was the Local Authorities (Allotment) Act 1926. This identified an allotment as a piece of land intended to be let for cultivation by an individual for the production of vegetables mainly for consumption by himself and his family. This act included a clause which allowed local authorities to lease land to voluntary associations interested in the provision of allotments.

The Allotment Act of 1926 was replaced by the Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Amendment 1934 whereby the amendment made provisions to accommodate approved unemployed persons at new or existing sites.

The Town and Regional Planning Act was adopted in 1934. This Act noted that the provision may be made by the local authorities to provide land for allotments. In 1963 the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act was passed. This act repealed the earlier Town Planning Acts and made no mention of the provision of allotments.

2.2 Current Legislation

Under the Planning & Development Act 2010, an allotment means an area of land comprising not more than 1,000 square metres let or available for letting to and cultivation by one or more than one person who is a member of the local community and lives adjacent or near to the allotment, for the purpose of the production of vegetables or fruit mainly for consumption by the person or a member of his or her family.

The Planning & Development Act also allows for a local authority to indicate in a Development Plan an

intention to reserve land for use and cultivation as allotments and regulating, promoting, facilitating or controlling the provision of land for that use.

Fingal County Development Plan

Chapter 3 – Green Infrastructure, states:

Objective GI27

“Provide opportunities for food production through allotments or community gardens in new green infrastructure proposals where appropriate.”

Chapter 8 – Rural Fingal, notes the informal horticulture sector within Fingal has the strategic role of allowing families to provide for their own needs, and promoting hobby growing to feed into the informal food sector which may be marketed through licensed local markets. The increasing density of urban housing has reduced the opportunity to grow fruit and vegetables within private rear gardens. In this context, the Council will seek to provide opportunities for allotments within the Greenbelts adjacent to built up areas. Three allotment schemes are currently in place in Powerstown, Dublin 15, Turvey, Donabate and Skerries. New opportunities will be sought for the Balbriggan/Skerries, Rush and Malahide/Baldoyle areas. Furthermore, the Council endeavours to facilitate well managed new allotment schemes on private lands.

Objective GB04

“Promote the provision of allotments within the rural areas of the County especially within the Greenbelt, which have good access from the built-up and residential areas.”

3.0 Strategy – Vision, Key Policies & Objectives



The purpose of this strategy is to provide a mechanism to improve the quality and quantity of allotments in the Fingal area and to provide support for the development of allotments by identifying ways to give more people the opportunity to grow their own food and promoting other food growing initiatives.

3.1 Vision

Fingal County Council seeks to provide allotments being managed and developed in a way that all sections of the community can realise their horticultural potential, and that the service is developed to encourage sustainability. Allotments will also play a part as habitats in urban green corridors to enhance biodiversity, but acknowledge, that the prime purpose of allotments is to grow food.

Fingal County Council seeks to provide allotments which promote social inclusion and cohesiveness, where people from all levels of society can meet, enjoy a common activity and exchange ideas in a pleasant and welcoming setting.

Fingal County Council aspires to provide an allotment to anyone who wants one and will charge a fair rent for each plot.

3.2 Key Policies

- Policy 1:** Ensure sufficient provision of allotments
- Policy 2:** Ensure good administration
- Policy 3:** Provide high quality allotments
- Policy 4:** Ensure environmentally sustainable allotments
- Policy 5:** Secure resources

Policy 1: Ensure sufficient provision of allotments

In relation to the provision of allotments, there is no standard figure in Ireland. However, in the UK most allotment strategies quote the 1969 Thorpe Report, which recommends a minimum provision equivalent of 15 allotments per 1,000 households. This is the standard to which Fingal County Council shall aspire.

Council Owned Land

A search for potential allotment sites is ongoing in the Fingal County Council area.

Objective 1: Identify potential allotment sites on council owned land.

Objective 2: Carry out community consultation for potential allotment sites to support the design process.

Objective 3: Explore all opportunities for external funding to aid the construction of new allotments.

Community groups and/or voluntary organisations may be interested in taking the lead on the development of an allotment site. Where funding has been obtained and an allotment site designed planning permission will be applied for.

Objective 4: Produce a template lease agreement for the use of Council owned land for allotments and/or food growing initiatives by a community organisation.

Where this is the case a lease must be drawn up between a constituted group and the Council. To ease this process a simple template for a lease agreement will be created.

3.0 Strategy – Vision, Key Policies & Objectives



Publicly owned allotments are a temporary and occasional use of land in the ownership of Fingal County Council. Land is not purchased for the specific use as allotments. Given the development of council owned allotments is generally considered a temporary provision, the following considerations apply:

- Leases shall be time-limited and all tenants shall be aware that when redevelopment proposals came forward the site shall have to be vacated
- Growing methods may need to be adapted to site conditions.

Other publicly owned land

Fingal County Council will support the development of allotments on other publicly owned land.

Private landowners

The private provision of allotments is an important element to meeting the demand for allotments. Private landowners may be interested in developing their land for allotments.

Objective 5: The Council will support private landowners looking to develop allotments or food growing spaces by providing advice and promoting initiatives to those on the allotment waiting list.

Where private land is developed for housing, consideration should be given to the provision of allotments or communal food growing areas. All future Local Area Plans shall encourage the provision of allotments.

Policy 2: Ensure good administration

Currently there are no national regulations in relation to the development and administration of allotments. The need for good records and management is essential for the efficient running of the sites and the development of a partnership approach to management.

Allotment Management

Objective 6: Fingal County Council will support and encourage plot holders to create formally organised site associations. A template constitution will be developed.

Objective 7: Set up a liaison group for allotment management groups and site representatives to allow the dissemination of information on training, events and others.

An examination of existing allotments indicates that the best allotment sites tend to be those that have an active management committee. Informative notice boards, clean and tidy entrances and communal huts (where appropriate) all demonstrate this. Fingal County Council encourages the creation of formally organised management committees for a number of reasons. In particular they can access a variety of funding sources. To help allotment management teams in becoming established and to ensure they are run properly, Fingal County Council will supply sample constitutions and other appropriate advice. A sample constitution is attached on Appendix B. Fingal County Council will seek to set up a liaison group between the management committees for sharing best practice and exchanging information. An informal networking group will also be established where information on training, funding and events is circulated to interested groups in the county.

3.0 Strategy – Vision, Key Policies & Objectives



Fingal County Council actively encourages devolved management. So where the majority of the plot holders on the site are in favour of having this, it will be permitted. Devolved status shall be reviewed by the Council regularly and may be rescinded if Council policies and/or site management requirements are not being met.

Mentoring and training

The retention of new plot holders is a high priority for the Council. Fingal County Council will encourage plot holders and management teams to develop mentoring schemes at their sites.

Policy 3: Provide high quality allotments

All Council allotments have running water, footpaths and most are secured with appropriate fencing.

Design standards for new allotment sites

Objective 8: Apply design standards to all new allotment sites.

Objective 9: Provision for the less able-bodied should be prioritised on the basis of demand.

With the creation of a new allotment site there is an opportunity to provide high quality allotments from the outset. Design standards will ensure there is a consistent, best practice, approach taken to all new sites in the county. A degree of flexibility will be required, and the final design of any new allotment site will be guided by the requirements of the local community and the size of the land being developed.

Soil conditions:

Soil tests and historical research should be undertaken to assess the suitability of new allotments for food growing so all new sites will have appropriate growing medium.

Site security:

Sites should be fenced, with strong and durable material, and at least 2m high. Fencing is required to protect against vandals and grazing animals. Where possible native hedging and climbing plants should be used to soften boundaries, provide screening and shelter and support wildlife. Fencing may not be required in some community led projects. This will be considered on a site by site basis.

Access:

Adequate provision shall be made to facilitate access to/from allotments by persons with disabilities. Vehicular access and parking shall be provided at all allotment sites. Mobility impaired ploholders shall be facilitated in whatever means possible.

Plot size:

3 no. allotment sizes are available at Fingal County Council owned sites. These are 5m x 10m, 10m x 10m and 20m x 10m.

Communal Sheds / Storage Facilities:

Such facilities should be provided. This shall be considered on a site-by-site basis.

Water Provision / Water Conservation:

Water should be supplied from an onsite well where possible.

Toilets:

Toilet facilities will be considered for provision in consultation with the management committee / private provider.

Signage:

All sites will have notice boards for the display of information.

3.0 Strategy – Vision, Key Policies & Objectives



Areas for Biodiversity:

All sites should have native trees and shrubs, wild areas and native hedge and climbing species around boundaries. The actual area left for biodiversity will be dependant on the size of the allotment site. Where possible ponds will be created within the biodiversity area. This will bring added benefits of pest control by invertebrates and amphibians.

Policy 4: Ensure environmentally sustainable allotments

Allotment sites provide an increasingly valuable and noticeable area of green space, as gardens continue to reduce in size. However, the security needs and restricted access arrangements of allotments mean that they cannot be a substitute for public open space.

Within the cultivated area of allotments, principles of sustainable gardening are relevant. Many plot holders are very skilled and knowledgeable on issues of sustainability. Fingal County Council has a commitment to minimise the use of pesticides (this includes insecticides, fungicides and weed killers). However this commitment will be approached by persuasion not coercion through rules and regulations, except where an area of plots is designated for 'organic' use.

Biodiversity

Objective 10: At new sites biodiversity will be encouraged as a fundamental objective, with native trees and shrubs used within the site and also planted around the edges.

Allotments are important urban habitats for wildlife as they provide food, shelter and breeding sites. They also provide an important link for wildlife with other

green spaces in the area. This can be enhanced by the use of native hedge and climbing species around site boundaries. As well as shelter for wildlife it gives visual interest. Areas within allotment sites/plots left to 'go wild' also provide a great habitat for wildlife – trees within these areas are also of benefit.

What can be done at allotment sites to enhance them further for wildlife, by planting native boundaries or leaving areas uncultivated, will vary from site to site. For example some smaller sites may struggle to find the room to leave wilder areas.

When new allotment sites are established biodiversity will be a fundamental part of the design, with native trees and shrubs used within the site and also around the edges.

Policy 5: Secure resources

Fingal County Council provides resources to maintain and administer its publically provided allotments. This will be done a cost-neutral basis with income from allotment letting being used to off-set the costs of maintaining and further developing publically provided allotments in the Fingal area. Other resources are often secured to establish new allotment sites or fund major improvements.

Currently rents for Fingal County Council provided allotments are determined by the size of the allotment and are set as follows: €50 - for a 5m x 10m plot, €100 for a 10m x 10m plot and €200 - for a 20m x 10m plot. These prices shall be reviewed regularly.

Objective 11: Inform allotment holders of the rental changes.

3.0 Strategy – Vision, & Key Policies & Objectives

Allotment site associations may be successful in obtaining small grants for communal huts, communal composting bins, training courses, etc. In addition, small amounts of money for the site have been raised at open days from the sale of surplus produce and again this is welcomed, although the sale of produce for personal gain is not permitted.

Objective 12: Circulate information on funding opportunities to allotment committees.

Objective 13: Provide advice and support on funding applications.



4.0 Conclusion

This Allotment Strategy highlights the broad policies and objectives which Fingal County Council aims to deliver.

This strategy shall be reconsidered in line with the Fingal County Development Plan.

The attached appendices include the Fingal County Council Protocol for publically owned allotments and a template constitution for Allotment Committees.





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