

ALLOTMENT CONSULTATION REPORT NOVEMBER 2020

CONTENTS.

	Page
1. Object of consultation	1
2. Methods of engagement	1
3. Responses - Results	1-5
4. Summary results table	5
5. Conclusions	5-7
6. Self-Management Potential for each site.	7-8
7. Options	8-10
8. Further options, actions, suggestions	10

1. OBJECT

To gauge each allotment sites' appetite and ability to form site associations/societies that could take on aspects of self-management (including site management, grounds maintenance and waste management).

This was set out in letter to all tenants as:

- Self-management of sites: Many other Councils now have agreements with allotment groups to provide management of their own sites, which reduces the cost of administration, increases the sense of community, and often means that tasks are done more efficiently, particularly reallocating plots to new tenants and following up on unmanaged plots. We would like to speak to anyone who would be interested in becoming involved in the management of their site.
- Tenant maintenance of sites: In some areas, allotment holders also carry out grounds maintenance of communal areas on their sites instead of the Council, such as grass cutting of footpaths and cutting of boundary hedges.
- Rubbish removal: The cost of waste removal and disposal is considerable, and a significant saving will be made by removing the rubbish bay facilities from each site. The rubbish in the shared bays is often contaminated and therefore no use for composting, and tippage costs are high. We would like to encourage tenants to compost their green waste on their own plots instead and take other rubbish home

To stimulate interest and debate on the sites about the potential opportunities of on-site collaboration, working in partnership with RBC, or taking over full management responsibility for their site.

To use findings to ascertain what level of self-management is achievable for each site; to develop a programme of site audits and works; and to further plan how to help each site maximise their autonomy.

2. CONSULTATION METHOD

A consultation letter sent to all tenants; emails (inc. information sheet) were sent to tenants with email; explanatory/signposting leaflets were left on 400 plots and sheds; an officer visited each site at least twice to encourage participation and answer queries; the officer was invited to six tenant-arranged site meetings.

Responses were directed to an online consultation survey and/or to the Allotments inbox. Tenants met on site visits were encouraged to discuss the issues with others, and to respond individually and/or as collectives. Tenants were asked to respond on behalf of others who cannot respond electronically.

3. RESPONSES - RESULTS

A total of 452 responses or contacts were received: 197 were via the online survey, 70 via the Allotment inbox, 185 tenants were met on site visits, and a few phone calls were made direct to the Parks Team.

3.1 ONLINE RESPONSES. Total responses 197

Online Q 1. “Would you be interested in being INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT of your site?”

Yes 97. No 99. NA 1. Of written responses about involvement, 86 were expressions of positive intent, 2 were weak, and 5 were against any involvement. **Types of involvement.** Group/Committee/Society 48. Management 10. Admin/Liaison 8. Allocating/Monitoring Plots 21. Meet New Tenants 7. Manual work 14. Waste 6. Need more info 3. Security 1.

Online Q 2. “Would you be willing to CONTRIBUTE TO THE MAINTENANCE of your site?”

Yes 127. No 67. NA 3. Of written responses about contributing to maintenance, 98 included positive intent to contribute, 31 were statements that ‘I keep my plot/paths/area clear myself’ and 11 were strongly against making any further contribution. Of that 11, two stated their age was a limitation and 9 said that the Council alone should deal with trees, hedges, boundaries and on-site roads. **Types of contribution:** I’ll do anything 13. Communal areas 7. Hedge-work 17. Grass cutting 43. Waste/composting 16. Working Party/Groupwork 12. Directed manual labour 5. Helping older tenants 1. Biodiversity action 1. Paying more rent 8. Rework 2. Use of heavy plant 2. Security (combi-locks, key-pads, CCTV)

Online Q 3. “Do you have any other ideas to reduce costs?”

The 129 written responses included 155 positive suggestions and 35 negative observations. **Positive suggestions:** Better allocation/monitoring to maximise income 41. Increase rents/decrease discounts 24. Deposit/Admin Fee 8. Benefits of Self-Management/Groupwork 10. Funding/fund-raising bids/charging for waste disposal 5. Recycling/Waste (advice, facilities, collections) 48. Pre-let plot prep & waste removal 4. Collection of perennial weeds/diseased plants 7. E-communication 4. Water conservation measures 1. Responsible bonfires 4. **Negative comments:** lack of service from RBC 11, RBC to retain major works tasks (boundaries, paths, water, trees) 5, fear of personalities in a committee being unrepresentative and overbearing 2. Cannot comment unless RBC releases budget information for their site 11. Complaints about fly tipping and on-site dumping 6.

Online Q 4. “Do you have any other feedback or comments?”

The prompted many long free text comments that expanded on points already raised such as the need for the Council to reduce the time it takes to clear and relet plots, preferably in partnership with site groups (27). 25 asked for more information about ‘site budgets’ prior to committing further. 13 suggested increased rents, 2 reduced discount levels and 5 opposed any rent rise. 5 were critical of the Council service while 9 asked for increased service input through increased Admin, a dedicated Allotment Supervisor, a Council rep to sit on their committee, support with reaching good governance, to arbitrate in disputes and to tackle problem tenants. Few novel suggestions were made in Waste collections/recycling (23) and site security/fly-tippers (15) comments.

Novel suggestions were the Council using consultation results to inform a new Allotment Strategy and service that prioritises self-management; making all sites statutory; encouraging developers to provide new allotments; considering alternative but still green alternative uses of areas of underused sites.

3.2 EMAIL RESPONSES TO ALLOTMENT INBOX. 130 RESPONDENTS

76 individual emails and 4 group responses (representing 54 tenants) were received. Email responses were longer, more detailed and more strident in positive and negative opinions. Two thirds of respondents asked for more information (about rent levels, ‘allotment budgets’, GDPR, ownership and future ownership of sites) or for site-specific issues to be attended to. Mockbeggars, Scours Lane and Waterloo Meadows

submitted group responses that were supportive of self-management and that included outline action plans. Newcastle Road has done so too after the feedback was analysed.

65 tenants (50% of email respondents) expressed keenness to be involved in self-management.

48 (40%) recognised benefits of self-management, but either could not involve themselves, saw problems with committee accountability, could not identify who would run it, or simply wanted more information before making a firm decision either way.

17 tenants (17%) objected to or so no future for self-management on their sites.

All e-mail respondents have been thanked for their input and asked if they wished to remain in contact with the project as a sounding-board.

Numerous issues raised via e-mail are being treated as service requests by the Parks Service. The service hopes that when tenants receive the finalised Consultation Report, more tenants will be able to decide for or against self-management.

3.3 FEEDBACK FROM SITE VISITS. 183 tenants seen.

The purposes of site visits was to stir tenants up to discuss and debate the consultation with fellow tenants in order to increase the online and email response rates, to show that the Council was investing in the consultation and subsequent service developments. Furthermore, the site visits were used to find out which sites have community characteristics such as an existing site committee and social media networks. The exercise leaned more to making things happen than gathering quantitative data.

42 site visits were carried out by one officer, every site visited at least twice, often on evenings or weekends. 183 tenants were met over just 4 weeks. The officer was invited to 6 tenant- site meetings. The service posted signs encouraged participation on all entry gates, while the officer posted 400 info leaflets on conspicuously tended plots and in shed doors.

Discussions revolved around, A. "what did you read into the consultation and letter", B. comments about the allotment service, C. self-management, D. waste management on site, and E. use of IT. The visiting officer also shared his experience of setting up self-management on his own site outside Reading, along with the benefits arising and challenges overcome.

3.3.1 On site Reaction to the consultation.

13 tenants said they will not respond. Critics said the letter was vague, it was a cost-cutting exercise and that RBC might be pulling the plug on allotments. Some said the exercise was too vague and said the withholding of rent increase levels put their hackles up. However, most said they would respond (including 8 mentions of responding as a group). There is a general understanding about the financial difficulties Councils face. Many tenants were surprised and grateful that RBC had put an officer in the field for the exercise with one saying, "as I can tell others that someone from the Council came out to see us, I reckon it'll double your response numbers". Some identified that RBC budget pressure was the reason for the consultation and that tenants were faced with a choice of 'doing RBC's job or paying more rent'. Even then, some tenants identified that the outcomes would not be this simple either/or, but would be a mix of improved income generation, cost saving and community development. Some felt the consultation to be an opportunity to connect with their fellow tenants for the good of their site, the Council and themselves.

3.3.2 On site Comments about the Allotment Service

A common theme was that RBC does a reasonable job given the circumstances and that allotments are not the highest priority in a Council. Many commented on the 'lack of any service' or felt the sole service running

was that of Parks Admin. Some felt that promoting self-management was solely driven by budget pressure, though some saw self-management as worthwhile on social grounds.

Some felt allotments have been forgotten about yet understood that Covid responses had distracted RBC away from the area. The biggest bones of contention were the number of vacant or untended plots, the encroachment of boundaries leading to lost plots, the behaviour of other tenants, and illegal or inappropriate dumping of household waste in waste-designated or undesignated areas. Some said the service needs to be proactive yet has been barely reactive. The loss of the allotment officer was raised often. Surprisingly, 20 tenants suggested, unprompted, that rents should be increased, or discounts dropped, if income generated was reinvested in allotments. 5 were vehemently opposed to rent rises.

3.3.3 On site Comments on Self-Management

The exercise has stimulated discussion among tenants. Many see value in or support self-management or helping with maintenance. Some suggested that existing Horticultural Associations or Allotment Charities might join in with self-management of their sites. On this theme, Food for Families were most often referenced. Of self-management, a concern was that they could not see who would take the task on, it could easily go wrong, and that self-appointed site 'leaders' might not be representative or accountable.

Higher level self-management proved intimidating, especially on the largest sites, with some asking RBC to help Associations to form, to monitor site governance and assist with funding bids. No tenant expressed an appetite for taking on Council roles like major groundworks or legal processes. Some called for a new Allotment Supervisor to help develop self-management on a site-buy-site basis in a way that suited the needs and capabilities of each site. The irony of asking for more Council investment now was not lost on some, who tended to frame their requests as "invest to save" ideals. Some expected the Council to dictate the level of model of self-management all sites should adopt or provide the preferred template.

There is a strong expectation that the Council will release a site budget before self-management is adopted. The clearest message in this domain was that self-management was conditional on being given a 'clean site' to start with, once again raising the potential early-stage costs of the exercise to the Council.

Finally, some asked if they were expected to take on 'all-or-nothing' and if failure to self-manage would simply mean rent rises. Some requested more time to respond with more detailed proposals, others talked of 'baby-steps' and others saw it is the beginning of a journey to a new way for their sites. The most negative response to the self-management idea was, *"There's absolutely no chance of this site taking it on. Most tenants despair of RBC and wouldn't take on the responsibilities that aren't even being met now. Managing the wait list would be a nasty business and self-management would be an onerous burden poorly executed"*.

3.3.4 On site Comments on Waste Management

Though touched on in point C above, tenants prefer to keep the Council's waste collection service for many reasons, the most important of which is disposal of perennial weeds and diseased plants. The issue of non-tenants accessing sites to fly-tip and of tenants dumping non-green waste on site vexes many. Fly-tipping could be cut through better site security and gate-locking. No one could solve the problem of stopping tenants dumping household waste onto site. A few called for waste bays to be scrapped, though more asked for clearly signed waste bays, periodic skips/collections, and scrap metal collection. One said of on-site waste, *"We are our own worst enemies, some simply don't follow the script"*. Dumping on abandoned plots or site boundaries attracts more waste. Many suggested the solution was a combination of a joint clear-up between tenants and Council, then clear guidance and monitoring by tenants and an allotment supervisor. The issue of waste left behind by ex-tenants could be addressed through charging a deposit refundable if the plot is left in good order.

3.3.5 On site Comments on IT

Of those that expressed a view, 6% cannot carry out web-based transactions or communicate with the Council via e-mail. A common observation was that, “there’s no named person to call, they keep changing staff all the time”. Once again, the loss of the last allotment officer was cited as significant in sentiments of detachment from the landlord.

3.3.6 On site - Other topics raised.

Some site representatives stated they cannot gauge interest in self-management without the Council providing all tenants’ contact details, despite this information being personal data under DPA. To improve communication, 4 sites stated they had started a Tenant WhatsApp group. Sites without notice boards asked for them to be installed. There were complaints made about specific tenants’ behaviour that the service is acting on. A few tenants stated the Council has a Statutory Duty to provide allotments, while one noted the Council has no statutory duty to clear up after bad tenants.

4. SUMMARY RESULTS TABLE

The table below summarises consultation results. Feedback was received from all sites, though not necessarily across all contact types (i.e. Met in person, email, online responses). For example, despite 3 visits each to Emmer Green and Ardler Road, the consultation officer met no tenants at either.

	MET ON SITE		Email replies	Email Prov Con Self-mgt nos	ONLINE REPLIES	ONLINE Question 1. 'Interested in Self-Management?'			ONLINE Question 2. 'Interested in Site-Maintenance?'			Does site have existing Social Media Group?	Does site have an Existing Site Committee?	Site linked to local Horticult Assoc?	Is there a Trading Shed on site?
	A nos	B nos				Q1 YES	Q1 NO	Q1 % YES	Q2 YES	Q2 NO	Q2 % YES				
ARDLER ROAD	0		0	n/a	1	1	0	100	1	0	100	N	N	CHA	N
ASHAMPSTEAD	2		0	n/a	2	1	1	50	1	1	50	?	N	SGA	N
BALMORE	1		3	0	5	4	1	80	4	1	80	?	N	CHA	N
BULMERSHE	25	1	9	4v1	29	13	16	45	18	11	62	Y	Y	ERHA	Y
CAVERSHAM COURT	3		8	2v2	8	1	7	13	6	2	75	?	FCCG?	CHA	N
CIRCUIT LANE	4		1	1v0	6	2	4	33	4	2	67	?	N	SGA	N
COLEY	8		1	1v0	9	5	4	56	7	2	78	?	N	SGA	N
EMMER GREEN	0		6	3v0	15	3	12	20	4	11	27	?	N	CHA	N
GEORGE STREET	2	1	0	na	3	1	2	33	3	0	100	Y	TBA	N	N
GODDARDS FARM	8		5	3v0	10	5	5	50	6	4	60	?	N	N	N
HENLEY ROAD	13	1	10	2v3	20	9	11	45	8	12	40	Y	N	CHA	Y
LOWER SOUTHCOTE	5		3	1v0	9	7	2	78	6	3	67	?	N	SGA	Y
MEADWAY	3		2	0v1	4	1	3	25	3	1	75	?	N	?	N
MOCKBEGGARS	6		6	6v0	4	2	2	50	4	0	100	Y	TBA	N	N
NEWCASTLE ROAD	13	1	2	2v0	7	7	0	100	6	1	86	Y	TBA	N	N
OAKLEY ROAD	1		1	1v0	8	5	3	63	6	2	75	?	N	CHA	Y
OAK TREE ROAD	32	1	14	2v2	17	9	8	53	11	6	65	Y	N	THA	Y
SCOURS LANE	41	1	35	33v2	29	18	11	62	19	10	66	Y	TBA	THA	N
VICTORIA ROAD	2		5	0v5	3	1	2	33	3	0	100	?	N	CHA	N
WATERLOO MEADOWS	8		15	13v1	7	2	5	29	5	2	71	Y	Y	N	N
SITE UNKNOWN			4		1	0	1	0	1	0	100				
	177	6	130	65v17	197	97	100	49%	126	71	64%				

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 About the Consultation. The consultation may have some flaws but was widely welcomed. The decision not to dictate a model proved problematic for some, but others found the Council's non-prescriptive approach allowed for freedom to investigate which level of self-management might work best for them.

It undoubtedly prompted all sites to talk, some set up social media groups and at least 3 to set up a committee. Though limited in timespan and affected by the C-19 regime, the consultation reached the widest audience and garnered an excellent response rate with over 400 contacts/responses plus 400 leaflets distributed on site. Tenants praised the Council for sending an officer to the sites as it *"makes it feel like the Council wants to listen to us"*.

The consultation has helped open communication between landlord and tenant and provides new opportunities for constructive dialogue. Asking tenants to give their emails to the service will help in future communication, including further consultation.

5.2 About Self-Management. Positive feelings towards and appetite for self-management outweighed negatives. 49% of online respondents (11.4% of all tenants) stated a wish to be involved in self-management. In community development terms, starting with anything over 10% of all users wanting to participate is very promising.

The exercise itself has triggered action to form allotment societies on 3 sites and to create social media networks on more. The latter is a necessary precursor to forming a society, especially during C-19 restrictions. Sites that already have representatives might not be the opportunity originally imagined because of mistrust of these existing volunteers and because of concerns that they may want to run the sites along private member's club lines.

While some sites see no opportunity gain in self-management, more said that they would move toward it but only on condition that the Council were to hand over a cleaned up site and carried on with the difficult tasks of major groundworks, legal issues and rent collection. A strong feeling was that the Council should not leave newly-emerging societies to forge their own way without some level of oversight. Also requested were improved staffing resources in the admin and supervisor roles. The investment required for such invest-to-save principles may prove prohibitive. In that case, many tenants identified that the opportunities would come from them starting lower self-management while income would rise through rent increases and a review of discounts.

One element of self-management gaining traction was adopting a partnership approach to identifying and letting of untended or vacant plots. Reluctance to view plot allocation as an early attainable task is founded on the sites' problems with plot numbering and knowing whether a plot is let or just untended.

At the outset, officers wondered whether any community groups such as the Horticultural/Gardeners' Associations would suggest they could act as all or part of self-managed committees. This turned out not to be the case, but the position may change. The potential for groups like Food for Families to take a more strategic or management role was not a rare suggestion.

5.3 About Site Maintenance. Through all response types, the eagerness to take on maintenance tasks was stronger than the appetite for self-management. 11.5% of online responses indicated a will to contribute, and a further 3.6% said their contribution is to keep their own areas tidy. That tenants said that they would volunteer to help on site, but not to sit on a committee, is understandable given that maintenance works are time-limited and do not come with the responsibilities and liabilities required in management committee positions. Tenants asked that the Council remains responsible for major-groundworks and asked that the Council be an active partner in a coordinated programme of joint site maintenance.

5.4 About Cost Reduction. Opposition to rent increases and discount reductions was expected. The overall support for increasing fees was a wholly unexpected outcome. Many drew attention to the profound difficulty councils have in balancing allotment services among other higher priorities since austerity. These and ideas about tenant deposits for the plot and/or keys, and about fee-based waste collection illustrate that some tenants are prepared to contribute in cash what they might not be willing or able to contribute toward self-management or site maintenance. Most suggesting increased fees made their suggestion conditional on the Council improving the service offer, or sometimes actually providing a service. The feeling that the rent covers ground rent with no service is deeply held.

5.5 About Waste-Management. On-site dumping by tenants, fly-tipping, overgrown unlet plots and unkempt occupied plots are the common bugbears of tenants and landlords across the country. Tenants want more secure gates that are easier to use to prevent fly-tippers. They want on-site dumping removed swiftly so it attracts no further dumping. They want vacant plots to be tidied up, numbered, with waste removed (mainly by the Council, though some suggested by tenant bodies) and swiftly offered for rent in good order. And tenants want lacklustre tenants to be given one chance or face eviction. All sites recognised the role tenants can play in this regard, but all assert that the Council’s input remains necessary. More tenants/sites asked for clearly signed separate waste bays with clear instructions that said that waste bays should be removed. The vexing question of bonfires cropped up with a few asking for permission to burn with strict guidelines. Some saw injustice that neighbouring homes could have bonfires while they are not permitted to do so.

5.6 About Electronic Transactions. More comments were made on behalf of those without IT by people with IT than those without. It is no surprise that the Council must continue to allow non-e-transactions for a shrinking number of tenants without IT. Sites asked for notice boards for their and the Council’s use to be erected. The formation of site Societies was identified as an opportunity to keep those without IT connected within the site community.

5.7 Overall Conclusions. The consultation has started a movement on some sites but has generated many questions too. The baby-steps being taken now may falter if the Council takes the consultation results as approval to raise rents without making the required contribution to self-management. Without information and support, sites’ ambitions may wither. The journey to self-management is akin to community development. It rarely works when dictated by authority yet can falter without the support of authority. That the consultation found there is latent potential for a ground-level movement to self-management is unsurprising given the wealth of skills and knowledge that can be found in 850 allotment holders. Harnessing this potential is the key to the Council helping to develop sustainable and competent self-management.

6. SELF-MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL OF EACH SITE

Estimating the appetite of each site for self-management combines quantitative data and more qualitative observations of the consultation officer set out in the table below.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING POTENTIAL FOR SELF-MANAGEMENT OF SITES.
Numbers of respondents via different media by site.
Strength of support for ideas of self-management and site-maintenance by site.
Any existing infrastructure (such as a pre-existent site committee, social media groups, links to area-based Horticultural Associations and the presence of Trading sheds on site).
Sites that submitted detailed proposals or group consultation reports.
Consultation officer opinion informed by dialogue with tenants/groups on site, or via other media. The officer tried to gauge each site’s ‘community connectedness’.

Each site's potential is set out in the table below. Groupings are based on a snap-shot informed by feedback received by October 2020. Groupings may have already changed without the Council being aware.

While the response rate was high, those that responded might not represent the views of all tenants. Even on individual sites, widely divergent views exist. The labels given to each site may not be truly representative and arise at a time when the Covid pandemic has hampered group dialogue, but they form a starting point. This consultation report may serve to encourage sites to draw up their own tenant surveys to better inform decision making so that sites strive towards a level of self-management that suits them.

**SITES ALREADY MOVING TO SELF-MANAGEMENT or EXPRESSING KEENNESS TO DO SO NOW.
Bulmershe. George Street. Mockbeggars. Newcastle Road. Scours Lane. Waterloo Meadows.**

Distinguishing characteristics, include; On-site social media. Already self-managing some aspects of their whole site. Elected or informal committee in place. Pre-existing potential that has increased in the consultation. Submitted detailed suggestions via email and requested further discussion with the Council. Arranged tenant/RBC meetings during consultation period. Existing links to Horticulture Assoc. Presence and potential use of Trading Shed.

SITES EXPRESSING SOME INTEREST IN or NOT COMPLETELY REJECTING SELF-MANAGEMENT, but with RESERVATIONS, and/or THE NEED FOR FURTHER INFORMATION/DISCUSSION, and/or WHOLLY CONDITIONAL ON CONTINUED COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT.

Ardler Road. Ashampstead. Balmore. Coley. Goddards Farm. Henley Road. Lower Southcote. Oakley Road.

Sites with tenants recognising potential, but without a coordinated tenant groundswell pushing hard for self-management. Tenants on these sites are more likely to say, *"It could work, but who is going to do it?"* Some sites with relatively positive feedback, but based on a low response rate, either because of lack of engagement or because of low occupancy rates on sites. Sites stating that a local Horticulture Association are more likely to do it than the tenants. Sites where self-management aspirations are dampened by concerns about the long-term security of the site or by ongoing behaviour of 'problem' tenants. Sites where the difference between responses was widest. Sites requiring RBC groundworks prior to tenants considering self-management.

SITES LEAST POSITIVE ABOUT or MOST AGAINST SELF-MANAGEMENT or WHERE LOW RESPONSE RATES INDICATE THAT THE COUNCIL SHOULD RENEW EFFORTS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO AND ENGAGE WITH TENANTS.

Caversham Court. Circuit Lane. Emmer Green. Meadway. Oak Tree Road. Victoria Road.

The least likely to embrace self-management are those with strong sentiments that they are 'the forgotten site' or that the site is earmarked for redevelopment. Sites that stated the need for more Council service over any other notion. Sites with high vacancy rates and thus a feeling that there are too few tenants to take on responsibilities. Sites where anti-social tenants dampen the enthusiasm of others. Sites where a need for planned and proactive major works (trees, hedges, fences, tracks, water) was identified as a reason for shying away from self-management. Sites where potential will not be evident until further community feedback is sought.

"If RBC can't manage tenants and maintain our sites with all their budgets and staff, what hope has a group of volunteers got?"

"I just want to work my plot in peace. I don't have time, and I can't see anyone else being up for it here. I pay my rent and that is that".

7. OPTIONS

7.1 REDUCE SERVICE PROVISION. Council provides minimal services (lettings, rent collection, site security, trees, roads, water) leaving sites to manage their own waste.

Will damage Council/tenant relations. Energy generated by consultation discussions will be wasted. Sites might not cope with own waste disposal, causing dumping and loss of workable plots to increase to a level where Council would have to invest in disposal. Generates minimal savings, may be not providing a service at all, loss of tenants and difficulties in letting to new tenants.

7.2 DO NOTHING. Leave sites to grow their own self-management and maintenance plans. At the least, encourage site associations to join the National Allotment Society for advice and guidance. Maintain service input and costs.

Sites will not move toward self-management if Council does not support nascent groups, collaborate in a forward strategy and hand over a clear site. Doing nothing may result in loss of some sites impetus for autonomy. If the only outcome of the exercise is that rents are increased, tenant dissatisfaction could manifest in higher vacancy rates and withdrawal of goodwill needed to kick-start and sustain self-management. Will generate no savings in short term

7.3 SITE-BY-SITE APPROACH. Select five sites exhibiting skill and will to self-management as pilots. In partnership with site reps/committee/association, conduct site audit. Audit to include review of rent/discounts; vacancy rates/waiting lists; plot conditions; identify starter bed potential; security; waste disposal (problems, solutions) and recycling opportunities; tenant capacity to handle aspects of management; outstanding major works. Develop collaborative site management plan with agreed targets for reaching agreed level of self-management; provide support for developing communication and governance. Form steering group of reps from pilot sites to share good practice. Steering group assesses cost/benefit of each site and combined project. Share findings with non-pilot sites and invite to join Self-Management project.

Requires Council resource to invest in capital groundworks at outset and to support and monitor development of self-management. Scale and timing of savings arising difficult to gauge as community development generally does not yield savings in early stages. Will generate goodwill that in turn enhances savings on pilot sites, though non-pilot sites may feel left behind. Perhaps include a site with least promise, while investing support service to help non-pilots find their way into forming associations and pushing to self-management.

So that no site is left untended, the usual winter works maintenance at other sites will follow.

7.4 ALL SITES TASK-BY-TASK APPROACH. Select a theme to study and improve across all sites, possibly waste management and recycling linked into plot preparation to enable swift lettings. A problem is that themes are so inter-dependent. Dumping of off-site waste hinges on improved site security and on-site behaviour – on site waste disposal behaviour depends on starting with a clean slate, provision of fool-proof recycling facilities, peer-pressure and pride in site – pride in site is built on a sense of community that comes from good communication, trust and collaboration that arise from allotment societies. So, allied to a theme-based approach across all sites should be sustained effort to coax all sites towards forming societies and accepting self-management responsibilities. Sites already leaning towards self-management will continue their efforts along all other tasks/themes but may prove to be achievers in the task chosen for an all site approach.

As with 7.3, no sites would be left out. Council investment in site clear-ups may persuade unlikely sites to discover an appetite for self-management after all. Recall sites say they would not take on higher level responsibility unless the Council provided a clear site to begin with. Tackling the waste collection requires

initial investment, but if it works well it will derive savings on an expensive task. Different tasks/themes need different types of Council input and support. Waste/recycling being a groundworks issue. Setting up and supporting representative management committees to cover all tasks requires input from staff with community development and strategy skills.

7.5 COMPREHENSIVE SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME. Combines all elements of site-by-site AND task-by-task approaches on the ground, but also includes identifying and making improvements to the service offer in terms of back office functions, communication and planned maintenance. Form and provide secretariat to an Allotment Self-Management Steering Group. Investigate potential organisations willing to take on umbrella management of associations. Include review of rents and discounts.

Clearly the most expensive option that will generate savings by maximising lettings, increasing on-site recycling and so reducing the need for waste collection, building community pride in sites that boosts voluntary contributions. Probably best viewed as a 3- or 5-year project that the Council would have to make front-end investment and ongoing investment of support staff. Supports the Council's Green credentials and community development aspirations.

8. FURTHER OPTIONS, ACTIONS, SUGGESTIONS

1. Follow up all queries arising from the survey including detailed emails submitted. Failure to do so will be a let-down to tenants who tried to engage with the Council.
2. Review rent levels to reflect feedback on highly discounted rents. Remove Passport to Leisure discount and replace with self-certified link to means-tested benefits. Overhaul rent structure to reduce number of rent categories.
3. Open discussions with existing community enterprises that have the skills to help sites develop their self-management aspirations.
4. Consider paying the membership fee for sites wishing to join the National Allotment Society. Sites use the NAS as support service for self-management.
5. Parks Services and Estates/Valuation Team investigate suitable alternative land uses in accordance with the Green Space Strategy for underutilised areas within sites.
6. Develop a new Allotment Strategy in partnership that gives the drive to self-management, service improvement and cost reduction equal priority.
7. Use collaborative site-maintenance as the first step for all sites. There is more interest in site-maintenance than in self-management. Once site-maintenance delivers visible outcomes in partnership, sites may be more open to trying higher level self-management.
8. Review all sites' security set-up, making it easier to use locks. Arrange for change over to combi-locks and system of changing combinations.
9. With Legal Services, review landlord processes for handling non-compliant tenants.
10. Use the wider service's Fundamental Service Review to identify efficiencies in back office functions and to budget for provision of support to Self-Management of allotments, and opportunities for the same in other assets/services.
11. Plan a complete overhaul of Ardlar Road, the site in poorest state and with the longest waiting time.
12. Attempt to improve engagement with sites that had low engagement levels in the consultation period, notably Ashampstead, Emmer Green and Oakley Road.