

Appendix B - ALLOTMENT SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN & CASE STUDIES

1. The National Allotment Society (NSALG) identifies three levels of allotment self-management, though they recognise there are different degrees within and between the levels. In August 2020, just three Reading Borough Council allotment sites carried out any form of Level 1 self-management activities.

1.1 Table 1 below illustrates the characteristics of self-management, the Council's proposed targets, and our assessed position as of February 2022.

Table 1. Levels of Self-Management. Characteristics & current activity on sites
<p>Level 1 Informal Self-Management</p> <p>A Site Liaison Representative (SLR) acts as conduit for site matters and consultations (on capital expenditure, absentee tenants, etc) with plotholders and the Council.</p> <p>The Site Rep/Allotment Society/plot-holders informally take on minor maintenance works.</p> <p>The Site Rep/AllotSoc promotes good gardening and sustainable use of plots on the site, they may administer the waiting list.</p> <p>The AllotSoc has neither financial responsibilities nor written management agreement.</p> <p>The Council aims to help all 20 sites that wish to pursue self-management to reach Level 1 by Autumn 2022</p> <p>Sites with some characteristics of Level 1 self-management in February 2022 are Bulmershe, Emmer Green, Goddards Farm, Henley Road, Lower Southcote (Brunel Road), Meadway, Mockbeggars, Newcastle Road, Oakley Road, Scours Lane, Waterloo Meadows, eleven in all</p>
<p>Level 2 Formal Self-Management</p> <p>AllotSoc accepts formal responsibility for duties including managing the waiting list, plot allocation and supporting new tenants, and rent collection on behalf of the Council.</p> <p>AllotSoc has some powers to raise funds and manage their budget (inc. finance allocated by the landlord), arrange routine maintenance, and take responsibility for water bills.</p> <p>Financial agreements release a proportion of rental income for the site's own self-management plan, leaving the Council to carry out major works and undertake all legal formalities.</p> <p>A written devolved management agreement or license between the AllotSoc and the Council is held. This model requires a formal constitution to establish responsibilities and obligations it will also require a bank account and proper system of cash control and management.</p> <p>The Council aims to help at least 9 sites to carry out some or all falling within Level 2 by Autumn 2022, 12 sites by Spring 2023, and all or as many sites as possible by Winter 2023.</p> <p>Sites with some characteristics of Level 2 self-management in February 2022 are Bulmershe, Goddards Farm, Meadway, Mockbeggars, Newcastle Road, Oakley Road, Scours Lane, Waterloo Meadows, i.e., nine sites.</p>

Level 3 Fully Devolved Self-Management

The AllotSoc leases the site from the council, arranges tenancy agreements, collects rents and reinvests revenue (which it manages) on maintenance, repair, and capital items.

Depending upon the term of the lease, plot-holders may become AllotSoc tenants and not tenants of the Council.

The Council retains defined oversight and strategic functions.

A written devolved management agreement is agreed between the AllotSoc and the Council. It sets out respective rights and responsibilities. The terms of the lease usually involve agreement on the level of Council investment needed to make the site fit for handover to the AllotSoc.

The Council plans to have one site negotiating Level 3 terms of lease by Winter 2022; one site fully devolved by Winter 2023; and 5 sites where fully devolved-self-management is in the pipeline by Winter 2023.

There are currently no sites operating with Level 3 self-management characteristics in February 2022.

2. ALLOTMENT SELF-MANAGEMENT AIMS.

2.1 The Council would welcome, but does not expect, all sites reaching Level 3 (Fully Devolved Self-Management) by winter 2023. The Council recognises that the decision to take on and pace of movement toward self-management depends at least in part on the Council's own level of input to the agenda and on the characteristics of each site. Our targets are therefore incremental as set out in Table 2 below

DATE	SELF-MANAGEMENT TARGETS
Spring 2022	Site Liaison Reps are in place on all 20 sites . 13 of the 20 SLRs are already proving an effective communication channel and are helping each other through the SLR email group.
Summer 2022	Inaugural Reading Allotment SLR Meeting – To launch consultation on Reading Allotments Strategy 2023 (including Self-Management Plan, Site Maintenance Plan, and Tenancy Management Plan). To scope potential Reading Federation of AllotSocs .
Autumn 2022	Level 1 activities are being worked towards or carried out on all 20 sites , of which Level 2 activities are operational OR being developed AND elected Site Committees/AllotSocs are in place on 9 sites . Level 3 or Fully Devolved Self-Management is being developed on 1 site .
Winter 2022	Level 2 activities and an elected Site Committee/AllotSoc on 9 sites . Level 3 proposals being worked on at 3 or more sites . Level 3 negotiation on terms of lease underway on 1 site (aspirational). Reading Federation of AllotSocs formed , comprising at least 15 sites. (aspirational)
Spring 2023	Level 2 activities AND an elected Site Committee/AllotSoc on 12 sites .
Winter 2023	Level 2 activities AND elected Committee/AllotSoc on all or as many sites as possible . Level 3 Fully devolved Self-Management in place on 1 site.

Level 3 being worked toward on **5 sites**.

3. HOW WE PROMOTE AND SUPPORT SELF-MANAGEMENT

3.1 Over the past few years, the Council has been approached by allotments tenants looking for more say in the management of sites, faster turn-around times in letting vacant plots, and different ways of delivering a range of allotments services. Tenant interest in self-management has also been precipitated by meetings with the Allotments Project Officer. Allotments tenants are therefore approaching self-management in different ways.

3.2 While there are very successful community-managed allotments sites all over the country, the Council will not impose a self-management model, opting rather to help sites find the level of self-management with which they are comfortable. The 2020 consultation triggered genuine interest and action in self-management on eight sites. While some then pushed on with their own plans, others lost impetus. The agenda was re-energised in October 2021 through the appointment of the Project Officer, and a reboot of project planning to increase engagement and awareness of self-management potential to the sites.

3.3 Our programme of ‘whole-site overhauls’ has been highly effective in motivating more sites to adopt more roles that are taking them further toward new levels of autonomy. The table below sets out our approach. The Milestones in the Table 3 below demonstrate how we are cultivating interest and energy on sites.

Table 3. Process for Promotion & Support of Self-Management		
STEPS CURRENTLY BEING TAKEN TO PROMOTE SELF-MANAGEMENT ON SITES		
1	RBC collates tenant contact details	Seemingly straight-forward but hampered by own database and recording limitations; by outgoing tenants not informing Council they have given up the plot; by faulty site maps. Mitigation. We will review our own data systems. We are drawing up accurate plot maps with site volunteers.
2	The site collates their own contact list and social media.	Sites starting this in October are hampered by low winter attendance rates of tenants; perceived dangers of GDPR; and lack of volunteers. Mitigation. Meeting turn-out will improve during the summer months. Drawing on advice of the Council’s Information Governance Officer and of the National Allotment Society Regional Rep, sites are learning how to comply with GDPR requirements.
3	Site meeting 1. Between interested plot-holders and APO. A tenant volunteers or is nominated to be the (acting Site Liaison Rep.)	To identify site problems, request for works, and assess appetite and infrastructure needed to start the self-management journey. May also include site walk to mark vacant/untended plots. APO explains and justifies Council’s aspirations; shares ideas about how to develop self-management; collects all site concerns needing action to help site move toward self-management. Discuss site specific, but non-allotment concerns. Discuss siteworks volunteer work-parties; social events; trading posts; allotment coppicing. APO asks site to draw up its own plans for the site (including maintenance, management, biodiversity, recycling, and social events)
MILESTONE.		

Engagement, exchange of ideas, recognition of mutual benefits of self-management are developing, leading to mutual trust. Improved confidence in plot lay-out and tenant details provides the foundation for the site group/SLR to be confident they can communicate with a wide base. The Site Liaison Rep and the APO handle enquiries/concerns and so reduce numbers of calls to Streetscene Team.

Willing tenants become active collaborators in the agenda, sharing their hopes and expectations with the wider tenant group more effectively than the Streetscene Team can.

4	Streetscene Team preparation for whole site overhaul.	Assess feasibility of and schedule works requested; cleanse site waiting list; trace/contact absentee tenants; agree plan with the group; start works. Offer tenancies to those on cleansed waiting list, asking that they be involved in the site's self-management ambitions.
5	Site Meeting 2. Assessing works. Improving confidence in tenant lists. Local Lettings process.	Fine-tuning and trouble-shooting ongoing works; set up communal recycling bays; advise meeting to form an unelected working group that will take the site toward an elected committee/AllotSoc. Site group informs RBC of plots where they have no tenant contact details. APO advises of first self-management activity, Local Lettings, and of GDPR compliance process required. Council helps with GDPR, inc. template Data Sharing Agreement and Local Lettings procedure. Expand on themes in point 3 above.
6	Site Group improves its own information.	Site Group has gathered more tenants' contact details through their own efforts and through Parks Team directing tenants to the group.
7	Joint lettings day	New tenants attend sign-up day agreed and run by site volunteers. Site group show new tenants around, share contact details and pass info to the Council.

MILESTONE.

A clean site, fully let, with new tenants introduced to and linked in with the site group. The site group has better coverage of tenants for communication purposes. The site may have submitted their own site plans/programmes. Fewer tenants are sceptical of the Council's plans and more tenants are more receptive to and engaged in the self-management agenda.

The site group grows in confidence as more tenants are actively collaborate in the plan, and some are beginning to act as directors of their own site's plans for self-management or of their own on-site projects. Sites arrange meetings with the National Allotment Society Regional Rep, using this relationship to develop their plans rather than solely relying on Council input.

STEPS YET TO BE TAKEN TO PROMOTE SELF-MANAGEMENT ON SITES

9	Initial and second site meetings	Six sites have had no initial site meeting. Two are awaiting their second site meeting.
10	Whole site overhauls	Completed on six sites, partially carried out on four, works programmed for this or next winter on six, and has not yet been agreed on four sites.
11	Site Liaison Reps	To be identified on ten sites. All 20 then linked up as SLR Group.
12	Lock/key exchange days.	Underpins Local Lettings and helpful for sites trying to identify who their tenants are. Essential step in taking control of unlawful access

	Site group becomes gatekeeper.	and fly-tipping on sites. Completed on one site, programmed for six sites in summer 2022.
13	Assess site waste & increase on-site recycling.	SLRs and Streetscene Team to assess baseline waste generation; Streetscene to install communal composting bays.
14	Local Lettings	As many sites as possible adopting GDPR-compliant Local Lettings.
15	AllotSocs established	In partnership with National Allotment Society, assist sites to adopt a model constitution for an AllotSoc and elect AllotSoc committees.
16	Devolved management agreement	Template agreements provided to sites with committees/AllotSocs for negotiation. To include division of responsibility between AllotSoc and the Council on matters of Site Maintenance and Tenancy Management.

3.4 Crucial to uptake of self-management is helping the site to identify 10% of their tenant base who are or might become willing to work together for the benefit of other tenants, their site, and the service. To achieve site autonomy, tenants are encouraged from being passive recipients of events, to being active collaborators in the self-management drive, through to becoming directors of their own affairs and resources, This shift in mindset on one site in Reading is illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. From Passive, through Collaborative toward Self-Directing Attitudes in Allotment Self-Management	
2020 Consultation	Mostly passive recipients . 5 tenants express interest in self-management and 6 in site maintenance. One tenant is directing some affairs on site. Active collaboration in self-management does not arise because, “we needed more support from the Council”.
October 2021	Site Meeting. Five tenants express interest in active collaboration , two as Site Liaison Reps. Streetscene Team starts whole-site planning with tenants.
November 2021	Whole-site overhaul underway. Site Meeting. 16 tenants, some of whom were passive recipients , express interest in active collaboration . 4 tenants assume some site responsibilities. Tenants agree to form a working group to work towards electing a Committee and forming an AllotSoc.
January 2022	New tenant sign-up day run by the working group. Some new tenants volunteer to assist the working group. Group asks to run Local Lettings. % of tenants that are passive recipients dropped, active collaborators increased, and the few wanting to be directors of their own site affairs get closer to their aspiration.
February 2022	Site Meeting. Working Group invites NAS Regional Rep to meeting to advise on steps to become formal AllotSoc. Streetscene Team arrange for data sharing to allow working group to manage waiting list and let plots on behalf of RBC. This one activity sees some passive recipients become active collaborators who are best placed to sell the notion of self-management to the wider site.

REFLECTION ON SITE PROGRESS Though labour-intensive, success in the above example illustrates increased levels of **active collaboration**. Failure to engage productively with tenants reinforces scepticism and passive recipience that prevent the site from becoming **directors of their own affairs** and taking on the challenge of self-management.

4. CASE STUDIES.

4.1 Newcastle Road. Redlands Ward.

16 tenants at a site meeting during the 2020 Consultation showed passion for their site and an “expressed keenness to be involved in self-management” among several tenants. Newcastle Road showed good potential to adopt self-management because of existing on-site communication and tenants were taking responsibility to some practical works, such as covering abandoned plots.

In October 2021, the group said they had wanted to investigate self-management further, but had “*drifted, as we were getting little help from the Council*”. However, they had increased their on-site communication and a small group had begun to take more active roles in identifying absentee tenants. They formed the Newcastle Road Allotment Group (NRAG) and agreed a plan of action with the Project Officer. The Council addressed these priorities, to replace the site padlock and keys; to clear and let a problem plot; and to improve fencing to the Cintra Park boundary.

NRAG ran a key-exchange day at which they invited all tenants to share their contact details and join the NRAG; straightened up plot boundaries; cut back an overgrown boundary hedge. NRAG has collated their own tenant list and plot map. These have helped the Council to correct their own records. The Council has also been involved in a tenant-relations issue identified by NRAG.

NRAG are keen to take an active role in letting plots and want to explore self-management further. They have written to say that the Council’s recent efforts have, “*Definitely increased interest in joint management*”, To push on further, they have said need “*ongoing liaison with the Project Officer*” and, “*RBC to work with the NRA to arrange joint-management*”.

Newcastle Road’s 2020 keenness in self-management is increasing because they recognise its benefits, because they have been building on their existing social infrastructure, and because the Council has demonstrated commitment by carrying out site works agreed with the group and has been providing support through the Project Officer.

4.2 Goddards Farm. Whitley ward.

Feedback from the 2020 Consultation indicated the site “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”.

In October 2021, one tenant called Streetscene Team for an urgent meeting. He explained that no progress had been made as tenants saw no value in long-term planning because they had assumed the Council would sell the site for developers. Ironically, it was this perceived threat of redevelopment that sparked this tenant’s wish to act now and save their site. In a 1-to-1 meeting, the tenant explained what he does to tend to the site, what his frustrations are and asked how to go about looking after their own site. He then called a site meeting where tenants and the Project Officer discussed site problems and opportunities, agreed to a site works plan, and explored how to become an allotment society.

The Streetscene Team ran a whole-site overhaul that brought 13 untended plots back into use; created a further 11 new plots; improved site security and access; and works to boundaries. At the next site meeting, the group shared each other’s contact details and agreed to act as a

working group with the aim of “deciding how to become an allotment society”. The group has offered to tend plots for those who have not been well. Volunteers numbered the vacant plots and ran a sign-up day for 20 new tenants. The group feels that on site waste generation is so undesirable that they are starting communal composting bays and intend to act as a zero-waste site. Tenants have expressed an interest in using the vacant Horticulture Shed on site for their AllotSoc business and to start a new Trading Post from.

In working together, the tenants feel they are better equipped to stand-up for their site and to ensure that redevelopment of residential property on Hartland Road will not be to their own detriment. The group identified issues beyond their control that the Council will act on, such as domestic waste being thrown onto the site from neighbouring houses.

The group want to push further towards self-management and have asked for the following from the Council to help them,

- Facilitation of meetings and input from the Council - continuing at least until July/August
- Support to set up an appropriate structure for self-management, with advice and guidance on insurance etc.
- Access to the ‘communal shed’, repair of its guttering, and improvement of the parking spaces
- Council helps to contact tenants who are not yet engaged in this process
- Support to liaise with other allotment sites
- Access to specialist equipment/resources from time to time to keep the site in good order
- Communication on any planning matters that affect our use of the site

From a standing start four months ago, Goddards Farm are now not only expressing keenness in self-management, but they are also investigating it and are trialling aspects of it themselves.

4.3 Scours Lane. Kentwood ward.

Since their strong and organised input to the 2020 Consultation, Scours Lane have been in the vanguard of self-management. They continued to work together and communicated regularly with the Council about their site concerns. By October 2021, their Council Liaison Rep was working closely with the Council, identifying vacant or soon to be vacant plots and greeting prospective tenants.

The newly formed Scours Lane Allotment Group has elected ‘Lane Reps’, formed a Committee, held two productive committee meetings, agreed a site works plan with the Council, improved site waste composting, produced an FAQ sheet for tenants, installed a site notice board, and polled tenants about changing the site padlock. The group identified an unused and overgrown area as having potential to locate starter beds and coordinated a volunteer group to clear the ground in advance of the Council removing heavy waste and setting aside topsoil for the starter beds. The Project Officer has sourced timber for the beds that will be built by volunteers.

Scours Lane are keen to take on local lettings and to help raise awareness of tenancy conditions on behalf of the Council. The recent site-overhaul has seen the Streetscene Team clear and prepare 20+ plots for letting by the group. In advance of works, volunteers are salvaging usable material and clearing vacant plots. A key exchange day will be run by the group.

Scours Lane’s interest in self-management and achievements to date are commendable in-kind contributions that benefit the site and the Council. Their achievements are even more impressive given the large size of the site and the number of ploholders.

5. APPETITE FOR AND PROGRESS TOWARD SELF-MANAGEMENT BY SITE

5.1 Table 5 below assesses enthusiasm and achievement in self-management by site. Self-management progress since October 2021 is based on whether a site has a nominated Site Liaison Rep, has on-site communications in place, has a working group or elected committee active on site. It also includes the subjective opinion of how a site's action feels according to the Allotment Project Officer. Note that there remain six sites where the engagement process has not yet started.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	2020 Interest in Self-Mgt? % of replies	2020 Interest in Site-Maint? % of replies	2020 Social Media on site	Feb-22 Social media on site	2020 Steering Group or Committee on site?	Feb-22 Steering Group or Committee on site?	Feb - 22 Site Liaison Rep?	Self-mgt appetite & progress since Oct 2021 to Feb 2022
ARDLER ROAD	100% of 1	100% of 1	N	N	N	TBA	Y	Not required at present
ASHAMPSTEAD RD	50% of 2	50% of 2	N	Y	N	N	Y	Not required at present
BALMORE	80% of 5	80% of 5	Not known	Y	N	N	Y	1 st meeting March
BULMERSHE	45% of 29	62% of 29	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	To be assessed March
CAVERSHAM COURT	13% of 8	75% of 8	Not known	Not known	Not known	N	Y	To be assessed March
CIRCUIT LANE	33% of 6	67% of 6	N	Y	N	TBA	N	Slightly positive
COLEY	56% of 9	78% of 9	Not known	Not known	N	N	N	To be assessed March
EMMER GREEN	20% of 15	27% of 15	N	Y	N	N	Y	Positive
GEORGE STREET	33% of 3	100% of 3	Y	Y	N	TBA	Y	Positive
GODDARDS FARM	50% of 10	60% of 10	N	Y	N	Y	Y	V Positive
HENLEY ROAD	45% of 20	40% of 20	N	Y	N	TBA	Y	Positive
LOWER SOUTHCOTE	78% of 9	67% of 9	N	Y	N	TBA	Y	Positive
MEADWAY	25% of 4	75% of 4	Not known	Y	N	Y	Y	Positive
MOCKBEGGARS	50% of 4	100% of 4	Y	Y	TBA	Y	Y	V Positive
NEWCASTLE ROAD	100% of 7	86% of 7	Y	Y	TBA	Y	Y	V Positive
OAKLEY ROAD	63% of 8	75% of 8	Not known	Y	N	Y	Y	Positive
OAK TREE ROAD	53% of 17	65% of 17	Y*	Y*	N	N	N	To be assessed April
SCOURS LANE	62% of 29	66% of 29	Y	Y	TBA	Y	Y	V Positive

VICTORIA ROAD	33% of 3	100% of 3	Not known	Not known	N	N	N	To be assessed April
WATERLOO MEADOWS	29% of 7	71% of 7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	V Positive

Key & Notes to Table 5.

Columns A, B, C, E. Statistics from 2020 Allotment Self-Management Consultation.

Column D. Where “Social media on site” aims to provide coverage for whole site, shaded green. If shaded orange or red, social media is being used among different clusters of plot holders on a site without any ‘whole site’ coverage.

Columns E and F. Fully formed Committees exist at Scours Lane and Waterloo Meadows. On other sites shaded green, a steering group is working toward committee status. It is not yet known whether sites shaded orange have working steering groups. The East Reading Horticultural Association (ERHA) runs a Trading Shed on Bulmershe allotments. The ERHA committee carries out some Level 1 self-management activities but there is currently no committee dedicated solely to the interests of Bulmershe allotments. The committee of Caversham Allotment Gardens & Horticultural Association runs a Trading shed on Henley Road allotments, but does not act on behalf of the allotment site itself.

Column H. Sites shaded green are engaged and actively investigating what levels of self-management would work for them and whether to form an Allotment Society. Of those shaded orange Ardler Road (8 plots) said they are too small to consider self-management, Ashampstead Road have said they look after their site already, but do now have a Site Liaison Rep, or are awaiting an initial meeting or need a different approach to engagement.