

Allotments and Community Gardens in Abergavenny

Purpose

At the People & Communities Committee meeting on 4th March 2020, it was agreed that a sub group would be set up to investigate further the matter of potentially providing allotments in Abergavenny. The sub group comprises of Cllrs Burch, Jones, Morgan and D Simcock. This report is their summary of background information and suggested way forward.

Background

Allotments are legally defined areas of land leased to an individual for the purpose of growing fruit and vegetables, generally for their own household consumption. 10 poles is the accepted size of an allotment, the equivalent of 250 square metres or about the size of a doubles tennis court. The history of allotments dates back to mediaeval strip farming, and areas of land allocated to villagers post enclosures. The various acts of parliament between 1908 and 1950 relating to allotments sought to ensure that people had the ability to feed their families by having access to land to grow food. Latterly, allotments have been regarded as more important for health, social and leisure activity.

In Wales, both Town or Community and Unitary Councils have the power and duty to provide allotments where there is demand, in line with the various allotment acts dating back to 1908.

The legislation imposes a duty to provide allotment gardens if the demand is unsatisfied. However, it does not provide details on how to quantify demand. Councils have the power to acquire land, freehold or leasehold, by agreement or, if necessary, by compulsion, or may lease land for the same purpose. According to the Welsh Government guidance issued in 2018, all allotment authorities should have an allotment strategy and publish it on their website.

The Monmouthshire Open Space Study notes that local authorities are required to provide allotments for their residents if they consider there is demand under section 23 of the 1908 Allotments Act (as amended). The study recommends a spatial standard of 0.25 hectares of allotment space (10 standard plots) per 1,000 population. This would equate to 3.13 hectares (125 standard plots) for Abergavenny town, and rates the Llanfoist site as being broadly adequate for the projected population of Llanfoist, and not for the town as whole.

Current Position

The Abergavenny area has one allotment site, at Llanfoist, owned by MCC and run in partnership with the Llanfoist Allotments Association. There are also sites at Crickhowell (Powys County Council), Llangattock (Allotment Association) and Llanfihangel Crucorney (run by Allotment Association leased from landowner). Elsewhere in Monmouthshire, there are allotments run by Caldicot Town Council, Raglan Community Council, Rogiet Community Council, Magor and Undy Community Council, Usk Town Council, and Monmouthshire County Council.

Community gardens are areas of land gardened collectively, by a group of individuals acting together to grow fruit, flowers or vegetables with the aim of sharing produce and enjoyment. There is no specific legislation around this as there is with allotments. Monmouthshire Council was the first in Wales to adopt a specific policy and license that allows the use of small bits of council owned land to grow food on for anyone in the community. There are community gardens at Abergavenny Community Centre, the Laurie Jones Community Orchard (run by Abergavenny Community Orchards and Gardens CIC and leased from MCC, and land at Mardy Park used by the Growing Spaces charity. There are also a number of 'incredible edible' beds around the town, established by AACOG and gardened by local residents.

Llanfoist Allotment Association rents the Llanfoist site from MCC and is responsible for managing it. The length of the waiting list is uncertain since lockdown, (it is generally held by the MCC Hub) but there is generally at least a two year wait for a plot. The 35 full size plots have been divided to reduce

the waiting time. The site has been allotments since 1915, and is 1.6 acres (0.65 hectares) in size. Plotholders travel from Abergavenny, Llanfoist, Gilwern, Govilon and Mardy by car, bike or on foot.

The site has been earmarked for an extension to the Llanfoist cemetery, and the Association have been given various dates between 2025 and 2030 as the likely end of their lease. MCC have acknowledged their obligation to find an alternative site, with the current alternative located near the Household Recycling Centre. There are no plans by MCC to provide a site in Abergavenny Town. MCC has offered to assist in the search for land in Abergavenny as they have some landholdings in the town.

Identifying demand

In addition to the requirement for MCC to replace the Llanfoist site if the cemetery is to be expanded, there is anecdotal evidence of demand for allotments in the waiting list, in the growing interest in food growing, and in the numbers of people who have recently joined local online gardening groups during lockdown in order to start growing their own food.

Suggested actions:

1. Consult using social media and email surveys with existing and new gardening groups to establish the level of latent demand (ie people who want to grow food, lack space to do so but are not on the allotment waiting list)
2. Identify possible space within the LDP and support the Allotment Society in their representations.
3. Identify possible opportunities for permanent or temporary sites in the town.
4. Work with Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens to carry out feasibility studies on any site under consideration.
5. Draft public notice seeking candidate sites - for publication via Abergavenny Chronicle & town council notice boards.
6. Draft an allotments strategy for the Town Council, which includes options for the purchase of land, and preferred management options for sites. Consider whether it would make sense to develop a joint strategy with Llantilio Pertholey and Llanfoist Community Councils.
7. The Town Council to arrange a meeting of different parties (physical or virtual) to seek their input and help with identifying sites. Suggested organisations would be MCC, Allotment Society, Housing Associations, large private landowners.
8. To commission a study to identify need and if appropriate to identify sites and assign costs to bring them into use as allotments or community gardens