**Report to Policy and Resources Committee 11/12/24**

**Allotments and Community Gardening in Abergavenny: Update and next steps.**

Background: In 2020 Abergavenny Town Council acknowledged its responsibilities as an allotment authority to work towards identifying and meeting local needs for land for people to grow their own food, and since has conducted a public survey and needs assessment. This year, the Allotments and Community Growing Subgroup of Town Councillors has re-formed, widening its membership to include the County Council’s Sustainable Food Engagement Officer, representatives of Llantilio Pertholey Community Council, the Abergavenny Allotment Society who run the County Council’s site at Llanfoist and inviting involvement from local growing groups.

As a result, a number of options have been explored, with the long term aim of having sites around the town where people can grow food, either on individual plots or together, and a visit has been made to the Llanfihangel Crucorney Allotment Plot.

Part of a site on the western edge of Abergavenny has been offered for community growing use by the landowner. The offer discussed is for a long-term lease at nominal rent to establish 10-15 small growing plots, with shared storage for tools. In principle, part of the Welsh Government’s annual allocation of funding for allotments could be made available to establish the site, for instance providing anti-rabbit fencing, shared storage, water supply or collection.

In order to take the project forward, a trusted organisation would need to take on the lease, manage the funding and gather applications from interested plotholders, with the aim that the plotholders would eventually manage the site as a collective.

The subgroup and MCC officers have discussed the project with the Abergavenny Allotments Society, Abergavenny and Area Community Orchards and Gardens CIC and Abergavenny Community Centre. Members of all three groups which currently manage sites are supportive of the project, offering assistance and expertise, but there is currently no capacity to take on legal responsibility for the project.

If the Town Council were to take the lead on the project, the next steps would be:

* Agree heads of terms with the landowner for the lease using the template supplied by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens Community Land Advisory Service (CLAS).
* Confirm formally that no elements of the project require planning permission (a schematic site plan is in preparation by a local architect on a voluntary basis and advice has been given by CLAS)
* Work with the County Council’s Sustainable Food Engagement Officer to invite interest from local residents who live within walking distance and who are on the allotments waiting lists, and to agree an allocations process.
* Establish any long-term running costs and how these can be covered by charges.

**Capacity of the Town Council to support growing projects across Abergavenny.**

One of the concerns expressed by councillors is about the capacity of the extremely busy Town Council staff team to support community growing projects including the above. The Town Council is currently involved in conversations with ABUHB around establishing a partnership for community use on the Nevill Hall hospital site, and the Placemaking process is identifying ‘underloved’ green spaces in the town. We are aware that the tremendous success of Abergavenny in Bloom and the beauty of Linda Vista Gardens, Bailey Park and Castle Meadows are dependent on the dedication of volunteers who are small in number and advancing in age. An option to address this would be to seek Lottery or other funding for a part-time Community Growing Co-ordinator, preferably over 2-3 years, with the task of recruiting and supporting volunteers in the town for new and existing projects and facilitating sustainable skill sharing, together with funding for ancillary costs in the establishment of the new site.

**Recommendations**

* That the Town Council agrees in principle to be the lead body in establishing a new community growing site as set out above, and authorises staff and the working group to agree lease and funding terms to be brought back to the next meeting for approval.
* That the Town Council and MCC officers work together to establish the level of interest from potential plotholders living close to the site through contacting people on the list and public engagement.
* That the Town Council submits a two-year Lottery Awards for All bid for funding for a Community Growing Co-ordinator and ancillary costs.