



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KINGSTON
UPON THAMES

Allotment Strategy 2015-2021

Introduction

This 6 year strategy describes the management and development of Kingston Council's allotments. The Strategy covers allotment plots on designated allotment land owned by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (the Council).

Allotments provide the opportunity for many people to engage in a healthy lifestyle all year round. As far back as 1908 Parliament enacted legislation to place a general duty on local authorities to provide allotments for people to grow their own food, and as a result there are a raft of laws that protect the land designated for allotment gardening and the tenure of allotment holders.

Allotment gardening is not however only about food production; it has the capacity to benefit the wider community. It can play a significant role in the protection and promotion of biodiversity, understanding and awareness of composting (diverting waste from landfill) and importantly, provide opportunity for diverse community interaction.

There are 22 allotment sites in Kingston. The management of 10 direct-managed sites lies with the Council's grounds maintenance partners, who act on behalf of the Council. This includes the collection of rent and any planned maintenance.

The remaining 12 sites are voluntary managed by individual committees. The benefits of voluntary managed sites are far ranging, and allow plot holders greater flexibility in managing and developing the site. Each site will have its own particular set of circumstances and challenges, but the model of voluntary managed sites is one that will be encouraged wherever possible.

All sites are supported by the Kingston Federation of Allotment Gardeners (KFAG).

Benefit of allotments

Apart from the physical benefits of allotment gardening the sites form part of the urban open space resource. There are many other benefits that should not be overlooked:

The following is not an exhaustive list:

- a. Create and maintain green 'lungs' in the urban landscape.
- b. Provide opportunities for urban dwellers to learn and experience gardening and horticultural activities.
- c. Provide opportunities for people to undertake activities that are beneficial to physical and mental well being.
- d. Provide opportunities for social inclusion
- e. Contribute to diversion of waste from landfill by composting
- f. Reduces the effect of climate change by decreasing the energy associated with the production of food, best supported if plot holders are within easy walking distance of the site.
- g. Production and delivery of food

- h. Plots contribute toward maintaining biodiversity particularly where plots are maintained using organic methods.

Kingston Federation of Allotment Gardeners (KFAG)

A key organisation in the running of allotment sites in the Borough is the KFAG. The KFAG is a volunteer group of dedicated individuals who have a wealth of knowledge to share with others, and who have done much to raise the profile of allotment gardening in the Borough. The KFAG represents the interests of allotment holders for the majority of both voluntary and directly managed sites by working in partnership with the Council and its grounds maintenance partner.

The KFAG was formally created in 2003, with the encouragement and support of the Council, to promote and encourage allotment gardening in the Borough and to build relationships within and between sites so that ideas and experience can be shared. It aims to provide information, support and advice to sites considering setting up an Allotment Association and to support and facilitate those sites who may wish become voluntary managed (VM), working with RBK to make this happen (*Annex 1 Step By Step Guide To Voluntary Management*)

Some notable achievements facilitated by KFAG since its establishment include 5 new sites becoming voluntary managed, the introduction of Site Liaison Volunteers, negotiations around 'model lease' for VM sites, acceptable standards of cultivation on plots, and revised tenancy agreements for plot holders at Council managed sites.

KFAG is frequently asked to advise allotment managers and users from other boroughs on voluntary management matters, and continues to evolve to support the needs of all Kingston's allotment holders.

Key Principles

To enable sites to be managed in a equitable and safe manner this strategy follows eight key principles:

1. All sites will be encouraged to attain voluntary managed status, where appropriate.
2. To work in partnership with the KFAG to engage stakeholder groups, site liaison volunteers (SLVs) and individuals to develop the whole allotment service.
3. To continue to protect existing statutory sites from development, and seek opportunity for new allotment land through the planning process.
4. All allotment land designated for that purpose will be made as let-table as is possible.
5. To seek to establish and support SLVs at each Council managed site.
6. All waste that can be composted is retained by the allotment tenant on their own plot and composted, or on a community compost plot within the site.
7. In view of the potential for nuisance to neighbours the keeping of livestock will not be encouraged, and only exceptionally permitted by written agreement

8. All workable plots should benefit from a good level of cultivation, and issues of non-cultivation will result in enforcement action, which may ultimately lead to termination in accordance with terms of the tenancy agreement.

Site Liaison Volunteers (SLVs)

It is an aspiration that each Council managed site has a SLV. These are allotment tenants who undertake a number of valuable tasks such as:

- showing potential allotment holders on the waiting list the vacant plots,
- directing potential allotment holders not on the list to the allotment administration,
- identifying non cultivated, tenanted plots,
- notifying of any problems.

SLV's are the "eyes and ears" on the ground at each site and play a vital role in the management of each individual site.

Bonfires and composting

The Council encourages composting where possible and will seek to facilitate this on a site by site basis. Only green woody waste material (not suitable for composting) can be burnt on site, and done so as not to cause a nuisance to neighbours. Bonfires should not be lit on windy days, should be supervised at all times and be properly extinguished and not left to smoulder. Material should be low in moisture content and therefore may need to be left to dry out before burning.

Legal Protection

Allotment sites owned by local authorities can be designated as 'statutory' or 'temporary'. Whilst statutory sites are subject to protection under the Allotments Acts, temporary sites have no security beyond the usual planning system requirement. Building on statutory sites is only allowed when the allotment holders are offered alternative sites and needs consent from the Secretary of State. As a result of these differences the designation of a site is important. All of the allotments sites in Kingston are designated as statutory and thereby benefit from the protection as described below.

Legislation Relating to Allotments

- ***The Small holdings and Allotments Act 1908*** - Repealed and consolidated the previous law and deals almost entirely with the provision of allotments and the compensation payable to tenants on the termination of their tenancies.
- ***The Land Settlement (Facilities) Act 1919*** - Abolished the reference to "labouring population", which had been a previous requisite, and made metropolitan borough councils allotment authorities for the first time.
- ***The Allotments Act 1922*** - Gave a degree of security of tenure to the tenants and improved their rights to compensation on termination for improvements to the land. Limited the size of an individual allotment to one quarter of an acre and specified that they should mostly be used of growing fruits and vegetables.
- ***The Allotments Act 1925*** - Required Town Planning Authorities to give special consideration to the provision of allotments when preparing district town planning schemes. Established statutory allotments which a local authority could not sell or convert to other purposes without Ministerial consent.
- ***The Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1926*** - This was primarily concerned with smallholdings.
- ***The Agricultural Land (Utilisation) Act 1931*** - A measure to relieve unemployment at the time, by encouraging use of allotments and smallholdings.
- ***The Allotments Act 1950*** - Passed as a consequence of the report of the Allotments Advisory Committee, although not all the recommendations were implemented. In particular it improved the security of tenure in respect of allotment gardens and amended the law relating to allotment tenancies. It also restricted the obligations of local authorities in the matter of allotment provision and increased the amount that may be expended out of the rates on allotments.

Other relevant legislation includes the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (influencing forward planning of allotments).

Simple Seven Step Guide to Voluntary Management (VM)

1. Take decision at an Annual General Meeting to pursue VM status. Formally approach Council with that intention.
2. Allotment tenants will in the first instance need to form a Committee of interested plot holders. Typically this will include Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and a grounds manager but list is not exhaustive or limited. The Committee will need to have a good understanding of the benefits of VM.
3. The Committee will then need to create a constitution and become an Association.
4. The Committee will collect rental income from plot holders to run the site and from that income will discharge liabilities under the lease such as paying for water, electricity and certain maintenance (e.g. boundary fences gates, trees and paths management). The remainder should be used to develop the site to the benefit of plot holders. The committee will therefore need to open a bank account and be able to undertake some basic accountancy.
5. Once the basic infrastructure is in place the Committee can start to negotiate a lease agreement with the Council. The lease agreement is usually for a period of 7 years and is subject to an annual rent. In previous years a rent free period has been agreed to enable associations to build some assets for future maintenance costs.
6. View the terms of the model lease and start building an agreement specific to the site.
7. Sign lease and take over management of the site.

KFAG has a range of information and advice to offer associations considering VM.