

# Allotments

Their provision, protection and potential improvement

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## Contents

Introduction .....	4
A brief history of allotments .....	5
Why allotments? .....	6
Health benefits.....	6
Environmental benefits.....	7
<b>Summary</b> .....	8
The allotments .....	9
Legal introduction .....	9
Legal limitations .....	10
<b>Areas for Improvement</b> .....	11
Where they are .....	12
<b>Areas for Improvement</b> .....	12
Provision and cost .....	13
Plot size .....	15
Cost .....	15
Facilities and accessibility .....	16
<b>Areas for Improvement</b> .....	17
How to get an allotment & waiting lists .....	17
<b>Areas for Improvement</b> .....	18
<b>Summary</b> .....	18
Allotment users.....	19
Allotment societies .....	19
Who uses allotments?.....	19
Maintenance of use .....	20
<b>Areas for Improvement</b> .....	21
<b>Summary</b> .....	21
Going forward .....	22
Parliamentary mentions .....	22
Previous advice and reports .....	23
Planning policy .....	24
<b>Areas for Improvement</b> .....	25
Motivating governmental action .....	25
Land conversion .....	26

Reuse of private land .....	26
Brownfield land .....	27
Alternative uses .....	28
Identifying suitable land.....	28
Previous land use schemes .....	28
<b>Areas for Improvement</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Case study .....	30
Sheffield allotments .....	30
Unusual allotment cases .....	34
Conclusion and recommendations .....	35
Stakeholders and societies to be aware of .....	36

## Introduction

This report focuses on allotments and their provision in the UK with a view to investigate whether their numbers can be increased. According to the Ordnance Survey, there are 12,107 allotment and community garden sites across England (11,207), Scotland (268) and Wales (632) making up 135 km<sup>2</sup> of land.<sup>1</sup> That's an average of 11,151 m<sup>2</sup> per site across Great Britain. Within the last 15 years demand for a plot has had a small renaissance with increased diversity of plot holders greatly increasing waiting lists.<sup>2</sup> With a wealth of benefits to personal health, community well-being and to the environment, there is every incentive to encourage their further provision and use, and to keep protecting those that already exist.

This report will look at a brief history of allotments, their current status of provision and usage, as well as who uses them and why. From there I will summarise the potential areas for improvement and how increasing the number of plots could be implemented. I have provided examples where possible, but these are far from exhaustive representations of the broad spectrum of allotment provisions.

All external documents referenced can be provided alongside this report.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/blog/2017/08/find-nearest-allotment-nationalallotmentweek-open-data/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hortweek.com/councils-seek-allotment-sites-meet-surge-demand/article/791765>

## A brief history of allotments

Allotments are an ancient tradition in the UK and across Europe and, in the UK, are still measured in the ancient measurement of poles or rods (one being approx. 5 meters or 5.5 yards). The oldest known allotments to still exist in the UK, created in 1809, are the Great Somerford Free Gardens in Wiltshire which provided the local poor with land to cultivate some produce after grazing rights were removed through the Enclosure Acts.<sup>3</sup> Relieving poverty in rural areas was the main aim of allotments – which were originally for grazing livestock as well as growing vegetables – provided by philanthropic Victorians throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Allotments Act of 1887 and Smallholding and Allotments Act of 1907, the latter still being in action, finally made it compulsory for local authorities to provide allotments if six or more residents expressed demand.

Inner city allotments were originally ‘pleasure gardens’ for middle class city dwellers and would often have brick summerhouses, such as those in Hill Close Gardens in Warwick which now have listed status.<sup>4</sup> Allotments for food production took over as the norm as Victorian houses were generally built with their own gardens.<sup>5</sup> According to a census in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the average allotment owner was male, 39 years of age and had a family of four.

During World War I, allotment usage increased 3-fold as derelict land was used to supply the country with food. Between the Wars, land that had been requisitioned was returned to owners and allotments subsequently declined. The Second World War saw an extra half million plots created and the Government’s ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign has since reached iconic status. This included the claim that a 10-rod plot would provide vegetables for a family of five for 8 months of the year.<sup>3</sup> After World War II, allotments again decreased from their peak at 1.5 million plots as land was again returned, rationing was phased out and food became cheaper.

Renewed interest in growing on an allotment has been limited since then; some interest around the 70s television programme *The Good Life* and more recently, Channel 4’s *River Cottage* and other television chefs renewed interest in ‘grow-your-own’. However, the last 15 years have shown a more significant increase in demand with reports in 2009 suggesting a 40-year waiting list in Camden. Since this peak in waiting lists, demand has remained high but steady as I will go on to detail.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/4967971/Englands-oldest-allotments-celebrate-200-years.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://hillclosegardens.com/the-gardens/the-story-of-hill-close/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.learningwithexperts.com/gardening/blog/the-history-of-allotments>

## Why allotments?

There is a wealth of evidence that suggests being an allotment holder is beneficial to well-being and contributes to a healthier environment. The evidence is wide-ranging and all-encompassing; below is a snapshot of that which is documented.

### Health benefits

Gardening in allotments has been shown to provide gentle to moderate exercise, fulfilling government recommendations for exercise.<sup>6</sup> Exercising in nature is particularly beneficial as it aids stress reduction, enhances physical stress recovery (making it restorative), stress buffering, social exposure and connection. Exposure to nature is known to be beneficial to mental health but active rather than passive interaction further increases the positive effects of natural exposure.<sup>7</sup>

The stress-reducing effects of gardening have been proven through reduced salivary cortisol levels as well as self-assessment. These benefits may be particularly poignant for older generations as reduced stress levels decrease the chances of later life depression. Not only this but allotment gardening appears to be particularly beneficial to older gardeners' health and well-being, with older gardeners reporting more beneficial effects than younger gardeners. They are also more likely to use their allotment for food growing purposes, thereby benefitting from homegrown food more than their younger counterparts.<sup>5,6</sup>

The highly social aspect of communal gardening also brings its own benefits. Not only is social interaction and support linked to resilience against stress, lower mortality and higher quality of life but also counteracts the widespread loneliness in older generations.<sup>6,8</sup> With an aging population and, resultantly, increasingly greater pressure on health resources, the vast benefits to the older generation through gardening should not be minimised.

However, allotment gardening is not confined to older generations; recent surges in allotment popularity have greatly increased diversity in the ethnic, socio-demographic make-up of allotment holders; there have been reports that more women and more minorities were taking up allotments.<sup>9,10</sup> Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests that interest in gardening and allotments starts young<sup>11</sup>, further suggesting that an age diversity in allotment gardeners fosters healthy habits in younger generations. The potential for intergenerational social opportunities here is great and may provide greater benefits than just those associated with gardening; knowledge sharing, psychological benefits and mood enhancing to name a few. Gardening is accessible to everyone of any demographic and, due to its benefits, could thereby reduce health inequalities across income groups.

The rehabilitative potential of gardening has also encouraged charities such as Thrive, which specialises in providing positive changes to people with ill-health and disabilities, even offering online courses and qualifications.<sup>12</sup> In the same vein, refugees have been offered therapy through allotment

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<sup>6</sup> van den Berg et al 2010. *Allotment gardening and health: a comparative survey among allotment gardeners and their neighbours without an allotment*, Environmental Health 9;74

<sup>7</sup> Hawkins et al 2011. *Allotment Gardening and Other Leisure Activities for Stress Reduction and Healthy Aging*, HortTechnology 21(5);577-585

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/loneliness-research/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hortweek.com/councils-seek-allotment-sites-meet-surge-demand/article/791765>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/838b6026-b688-11e8-b3ef-799c8613f4a1>

<sup>11</sup> Acton 2011. *Allotment Gardens: A Reflection of History, Heritage, Community and Self*, 21;46-58

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thrive.org.uk/>



gardening in Manchester which links in with both anecdotal and qualitative data on gardening's mental health benefits.<sup>13</sup>

The advantages of encouraging gardening of any sort cannot be argued enough in the case for mental health provision. With evidence suggesting that a love of gardening on an allotment is a lifelong hobby, this seems to be a prime opportunity for bettering mental health, particularly when fostered in younger people. Indeed, mental health is disproportionately a greater issue in the young and the mental health epidemic (for it is at epidemic levels) is still not being curbed.<sup>14</sup> Continuing to foster a lifelong hobby in younger generations may aid to battle mental health, as well as physical, issues throughout their lives.

### Environmental benefits

The environmental benefits to holding an allotment are a factor in increasingly younger people taking them up; reducing plastic packaging, the rise of veganism, and concern for the environment and chemical use in farming are some of those factors.<sup>15</sup> Fostering self-sustainability in particular reduces food miles, mitigating environmental impact and providing a cost-effective way to eat organically.<sup>16</sup>

Seed-swapping, encouraged in many allotments and further encouraging community cohesion, has been suggested to be essential for plant health and diversity maintenance.<sup>17</sup> The diversity of plants grown also encourages wildlife, including bees and other pollinators, and maintains soil qualities to a much greater extent than conventional agriculture. They provide much needed ecosystem service by increasing biodiversity, particularly in urban areas with very low greenspace numbers.<sup>18</sup> This biodiversity is likely to be furthered by diversity in allotment growers who will have a variety of tastes and needs, planting more varied fruits and vegetables than a single demographic traditionally would.

Creating greenspaces not only has an individual benefit but also one on the community. Neglected land has a negative impact on a community and its rejuvenation benefits both the land's users and the community as a whole. It has been suggested that allotment creation could be a welcome way to bring neglected Church land into reuse to benefit the wider community and their outlook on the land.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-manchester-41506980/manchester-allotment-offers-refugees-therapy-and-happiness>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-41125009>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/838b6026-b688-11e8-b3ef-799c8613f4a1>

<sup>16</sup> Speak et al 2015. *Allotment gardens and parks: Provision of ecosystem services with an emphasis on biodiversity*, Urban Forestry & Urban Greening 14;772-781

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-42341876>

<sup>18</sup> Speak et al 2015. *Allotment gardens and parks: Provision of ecosystem services with an emphasis on biodiversity*, Urban Forestry & Urban Greening 14;772-781

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/13/stuck-on-an-allotment-waiting-list-your-prayers-could-be-answered/>

## Summary

Allotment gardening has been shown to provide multiple benefits to the site holder, including:

- Moderate exercise
- Access to nature
- Social interaction opportunities with diverse people
- Intergenerational interaction
- Reduced food miles
- Encourages sustainability and self-sufficiency
- Multiple positive environmental benefits for wildlife and plants



## The allotments

Allotments are widespread across the UK and are generally provided by local authorities. This provision is a legal obligation and allotments enjoy some legal protection, although I will go on to explore legislative limitations.

### Legal introduction

As described in the Brief History section, allotments were provided to the poor after the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Enclosure Acts removed their right to land for grazing and food production and the rapid industrialisation that subsequently followed. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 obliges local authorities to provide allotments to meet apparent demand if six or more residents declare a need, which remains in force today.

The Allotment Act 1925 defines allotment gardens as not exceeding 40 poles (approx. 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, a quarter acre) and as being wholly or mainly to produce vegetable or fruit crops for personal consumption. This may seem large for a single plot holder or one family, but it would have originally been to allow for the grazing of animals as well as vegetable and fruit production. These stipulations are realistically only enforced by allotment societies (and by council inspections where societies do not exist) which impose their own rules on their allotment holders. The standard size, for example, is generally only 10 poles or 250 m<sup>2</sup> (see below).

The 1925 Act (section 8) also specifically stipulates that allotment land disposal must have ministerial consent from the Secretary of State for the Environment and they must be satisfied that adequate provision will be made for displaced allotment holders or that is unnecessary or reasonably impractical. This applies to statutory allotments – those permanently designated as allotments and owned by the councils – but also land intended for garden or farm cultivation up to 5 acres large.<sup>20</sup>

The Allotments Act 1950 further clarified that rent should be set at a rate that ‘a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay’. This is, of course, open to interpretation and has been used as the basis for court cases against council allotment rent increases. By only referring to garden allotments, the 1950 Act also removed the obligation of local authorities to provide farm allotments for the rural poor, increasingly adding to the middle-class, urban-dwelling stereotype of an allotment holder.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced neighbourhood planning schemes that allowed allotment site identification and protection within a Local Plan. If any sites are put up for disposal, the planning authorities must take into account the Local or Neighbourhood Plan. The Act allows listing allotments as an ‘Asset of Community Value’, adding a right for the community to bid for it before its disposal.<sup>21</sup>

The Government’s National Planning Policy Framework and their publication *Allotment disposal guidance: Safeguards and alternatives* (January 2014) both recognise the importance of, and benefits that allotments provide. The latter provides more specific guidance on allotment disposal for the use of the Secretary of State in providing ministerial consent on top of section 8 of the 1925 Act. They must be satisfied that “adequate provision will be made for allotment holders displaced by the action of the local authority or that such provision is unnecessary or not reasonably practicable”.

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<sup>20</sup> Parliamentary Note on Allotments 2012, found at:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN00887#fullreport>

<sup>21</sup> Parliamentary Note on Allotments 2012, found at:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN00887#fullreport>

## Scotland

The definition of an allotment is much like that described above. Although Scotland has different Acts concerning allotments, the obligations are much the same although a relevant Scottish Minister is responsible for agreeing to disposal. Interestingly, the Scottish Government has an obligation to maintain a register of allotments as well as associated records of expenditure and rental rates. Local Authorities also have the power to use unoccupied land and can apply for a compulsory purchase order for suitable land in order to produce allotments.<sup>22</sup>

The Scottish government, unlike in the rest of the UK, aims to keep waiting lists reduced; the number of people on the waiting lists must be half of the current number of allotments provided in any specific area and potential plot holders should not be on waiting lists for more than five years. This, however, has not successfully increased the number of allotments across the country. The BBC reported in Sept 2018 that for the 1,552 allotments in Edinburgh, 2,697 were on waiting lists with some waiting over 10 years. Edinburgh Council cited expensive land and the need to establish support around land for community use as preventing them from reaching their required target.<sup>23</sup>

## Northern Ireland

There are no statutory obligations applied to Northern Irish councils to provide allotments and very few do.<sup>24</sup>

### Legal limitations

The Allotment Acts do not provide a minimum standard, meaning that allotment sites vary greatly in the facilities provided with some reportedly not even having a water tap.<sup>25</sup> They also specify no time limit for provision so that councils can indefinitely put off providing any allotments, let alone meeting demand. There is a clear lack of incentive for councils to meet higher levels of demand for allotments.

The London Government Act 1963 removed the obligation for local governments to provide allotments in (inner) London boroughs, meaning that London is a unique case and councils are exempt from the Allotment Acts' obligations.<sup>26</sup>

The 1925 Act means that ministerial consent is needed for authorities to be able to dispose of allotment sites. According to Freedom of Information requests, 194 out of 198 cases (98%) were approved between 2007 and 2014.<sup>27</sup> More recently, 26 out of 49 (53%) were approved between January 2017 and January 2019.<sup>28</sup> The specifics of these requests were not detailed but the need for land for redevelopment is clear. Some of these allotments may have been abandoned and disposal allowed more suitable development but with a definitive lack in suitable land for housing, well-situated allotment sites may be redevelopment more efficiently than other, slightly less suitable land.

The additional guidance for disposal to clarify Section 8 of the 1925 Act, *Allotment disposal guidance: Safeguards and alternatives* (January 2014), is limited as it is only policy guidance. The Secretary of

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<sup>22</sup> SAGS Briefing Paper: Allotment Law in Scotland (see Resources)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-45496574>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/environment/northern-ireland-councils-could-soon-be-forced-to-provide-allotments-28721040.html>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/838b6026-b688-11e8-b3ef-799c8613f4a1>; Hansard October 2012 mention (see Parliamentary mentions section)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.mondaq.com/uk/x/790846/Building+Construction/Allotments+And+Their+Protection>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/gardening-blog/2017/jan/04/can-self-management-safeguard-future-allotments-plot-holders>

<sup>28</sup> FOI request found at

[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/allotment\\_deregulation\\_decisions\\_2#incoming-1326351](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/allotment_deregulation_decisions_2#incoming-1326351)

State has the power to grant disposal to authorities under ‘exceptional circumstances’ at their discretion; “in exceptional circumstances, the Secretary of State may be content to grant consent for disposal where the statutory criteria, but not all the criteria in the policy guidance, are satisfied”.

- Watford Borough Council was granted ministerial consent in 2013 to dispose of 31 well-cultivated and productive plots at the Farm Terrace allotment site that dated back to 1882. Financial compensation and alternative plot locations were offered to displaced plot holders. The application of ‘exceptional circumstances’ was challenged in court by an allotment holder, but the Court ruled in favour of the Minister’s decision as the redevelopment (to include a school and a hospital) was deemed to provide much wider benefits to the community as a whole. Of note is that the allotment site’s land was not necessary for the development but facilitated building works. Additionally, it could be argued that ‘exceptional circumstances’ could be applied to any potential redevelopment, making any allotment site vulnerable.<sup>29,30</sup>

The Localism Act provides communities with the right to earmark land for specific uses and to protect and maintain Assets of Community Value for five years at a time. This allows the community six months to raise capital before the land owner can sell the land. However, this has not automatically maintained their right in practice.

- Ribble Valley Council granted privately owned allotments the listing as an Asset of Community Value. This was overturned in Court as the surrounding planned development site made the allotment’s use impractical and was therefore not able to realistically continue providing a community any value for the next 5 years.<sup>31</sup>

In a similar vein, the NSALG recommends that allotments be placed into a local council’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy so that the Council recognises allotments’ importance in their health benefits.

While the Government’s rhetoric is generally that protective legislation will not be removed, nothing is said about matching demand for allotments. Not much headway has been made for change despite guidance being issued.

### Areas for Improvement

- No time provision or limit on waiting lists (except in Scotland) exists and may be necessary to incentivise an increase in statutory allotment numbers.
- Understanding why councils across the country dispose of allotments may aid in their protection; a national long-term audit may be necessary.
- Given the vast benefits to health that allotments provide, they should form part of every council’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/litigation-and-enforcement/400-litigation-news/32146-four-year-battle-over-allotments-ends-after-judge-rejects-challenge-to-appropriation>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.blakemorgan.co.uk/training-knowledge/features-and-articles/allotments-and-development/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.out-law.com/en/articles/2017/april/tribunal-judge-overturns-listing-of-allotment-site-as-an-asset-of-community-value/>

## Where they are

Allotments can be found across the country and are mapped on Ordnance Survey maps under their Greenspace layer tool (coloured in brown). Some council websites display maps of allotments within their borough/city, such as Newcastle City Council.<sup>32</sup>

Due to their varied provision (see next section) no complete data detailing the location to all UK allotments exists other than collections of links to relevant authorities responsible for providing them. WhatShed.co.uk are currently conducting a national allotment survey of statutory allotments provided in England and Wales. The data as of November 2018 is displayed on the next page in their infographic but is still broad and non-specific.<sup>33</sup>

The All About Allotments website provides an extensive list of links to allotment societies and council allotment webpages divided up into geographical region.<sup>34</sup>

## Areas for Improvement

- No thorough audit of all allotment locations, for both statutory and private, has been achieved. This would be an asset to better understanding how any area differs from another and to identify, tailor and implement the best strategies for management of sites.

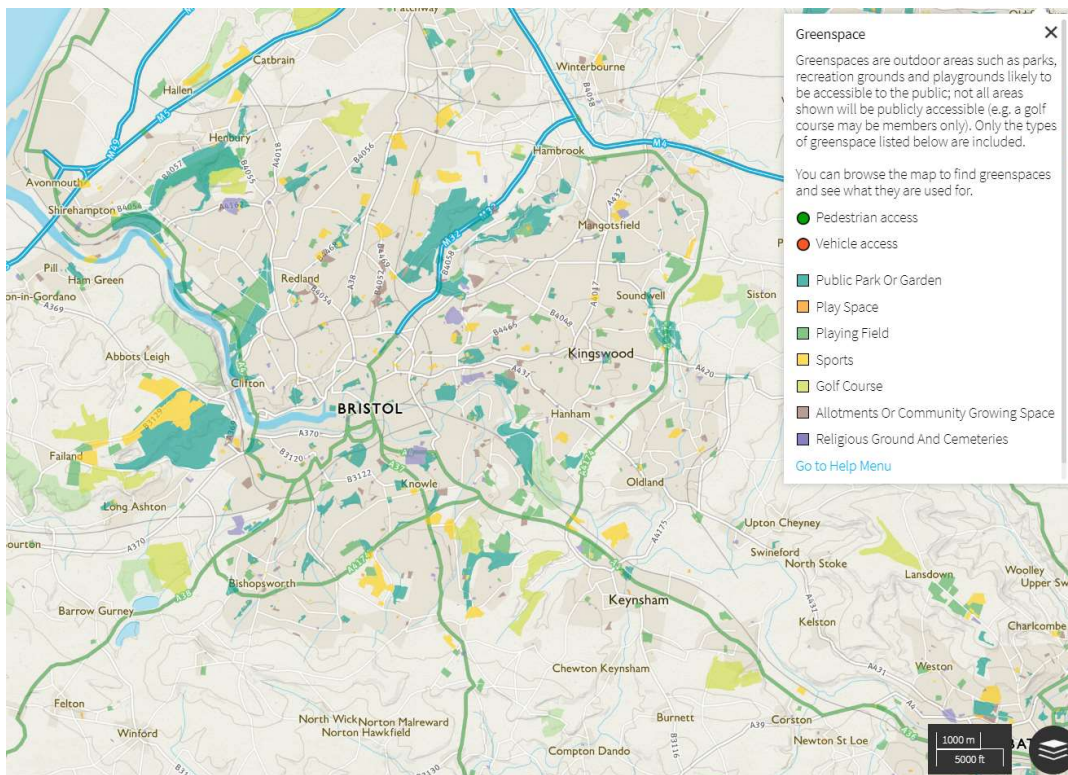


Figure 1 - Ordnance Survey map with the Greenspace layer enabled to demonstrate the number of allotment sites provided in and around Bristol

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/wwwfileroot/benefits-and-council-tax/allotments\\_leaflet.pdf](https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/wwwfileroot/benefits-and-council-tax/allotments_leaflet.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <https://whatshed.co.uk/list-local-authority-owned-allotments/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.allaboutallotments.co.uk/>



# THE WHATSHED.CO.UK NATIONAL ALLOTMENT SURVEY

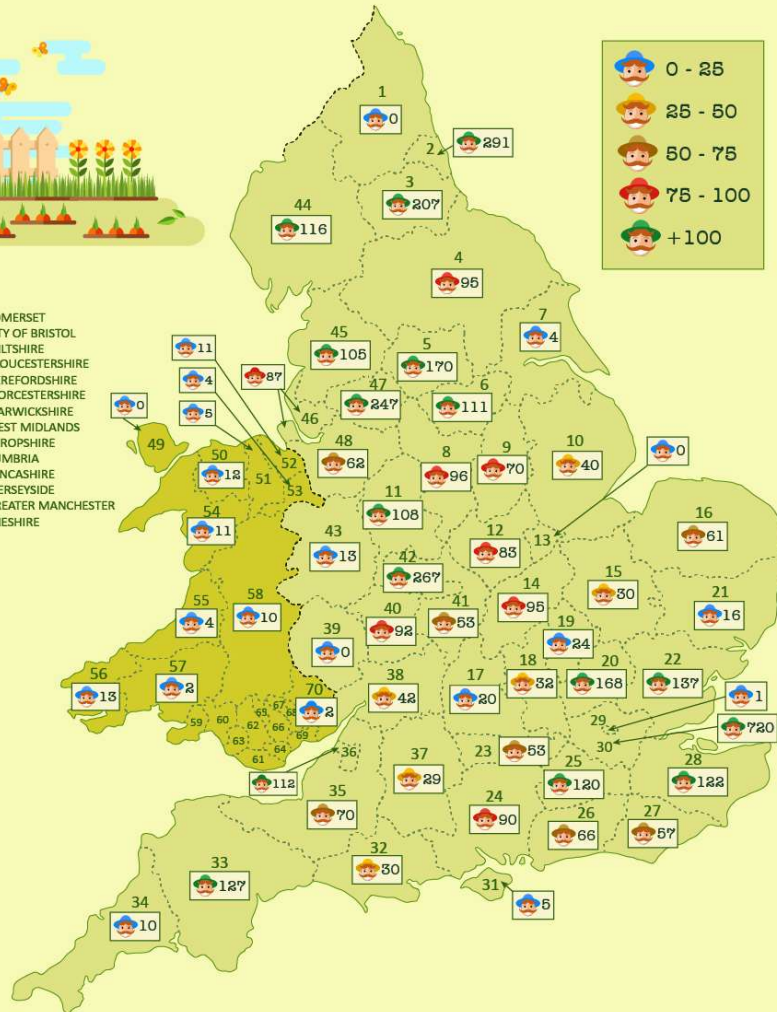
## A COUNTY MAP OF LOCAL AUTHORITY OWNED ALLOTMENTS



### ENGLAND

1. NORTHUMBERLAND
2. TYNE AND WEAR
3. COUNTY DURHAM
4. NORTH YORKSHIRE
5. WEST YORKSHIRE
6. SOUTH YORKSHIRE
7. EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE
8. DERBYSHIRE
9. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
10. LINCOLNSHIRE
11. STAFFORDSHIRE
12. LEICESTERSHIRE
13. RUTLAND
14. NORTH HAMPTONSHIRE
15. CAMBRIDGESHIRE
16. NORFOLK
17. OXFORDSHIRE
18. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
19. BEDFORDSHIRE
20. HERTFORDSHIRE
21. SUFFOLK
22. ESSEX
23. BERKSHIRE
24. HAMPSHIRE
25. SURREY
26. WEST SUSSEX
27. EAST SUSSEX
28. KENT
29. CITY OF LONDON
30. GREATER LONDON
31. ISLE OF WIGHT
32. DORSET
33. DEVON
34. CORNWALL

35. SOMERSET
36. CITY OF BRISTOL
37. WILTSHIRE
38. GLOUCESTERSHIRE
39. HEREFORDSHIRE
40. WORCESTERSHIRE
41. WARWICKSHIRE
42. WEST MIDLANDS
43. SHROPSHIRE
44. CUMBRIA
45. LANCASHIRE
46. MERSEYSIDE
47. GREATER MANCHESTER
48. CHESHIRE



### WALES

49. ISLE OF ANGLESEY
50. CONWY
51. DENBIGHSHIRE
52. FLINTSHIRE
53. WREXHAM
54. GWYNEDD
55. CEREDIGION
56. PEMBROKESHIRE
57. CARMARTHENSHIRE
58. POWYS
70. MONMOUTHSHIRE

### SOUTH WALES

59. SWANSEA
60. NEATH PORT TALBOT
61. VALE OF GLAMORGAN
62. RHONDDA CYNON TAFF
63. BRIDGEND
64. CARDIFF
65. MERTHYR TYDFIL
66. CAERPHILLY
67. BLAENAU GWENT
68. TORFAEN
69. NEWPORT



### TOTAL NUMBER OF ALLOTMENTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

4,921

SOURCE: ALL DATA USED IS THE RESULT OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY WHATSHED.CO.UK

### Provision and cost

Provision of allotments varies with local authorities having a responsibility to provide them if demand exists in England and Wales (see below for details across the UK) but many hand over a large portion of their management and maintenance to the specific allotment society. Since legislation on allotments varies across the UK, there is no regulation across the UK in their provision and

management styles depend on what is deemed to suit each site best. A few examples of management style:

**Self-management/devolved management:** The allotment society leases land from the Council (generally at a reduced price) or other landowner and organises everything from the waiting list and plot allocation to site events and facility maintenance. This relies on hands-on volunteers which is not suitable for every site but is advantageous to the councils in question as it requires less work and resources from them.

- Each of the 44 allotment sites in Barnet (North London) are self-managed by 37 societies since they signed contracts with Barnet Council in 2013. This provides them with greater control over their sites' costs, waiting lists, funding grant applications and financing communal projects through events.<sup>35,36</sup>

N.b. the National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens (NSALG) provides advice and sponsorship for societies wishing to become incorporated and gain limited liability status which may be advantageous when signing longer leases.<sup>37</sup>

**Council management:** The degree to which councils are involved in management varies and some combination of self-management and council-managed is common at specific sites and across boroughs generally. Council management requires more resources of them such as a council allotment officer, site maintenance of perimeter fences and gates, and administrative maintenance of tenancies.

- St Helens (Merseyside) has three self-managed allotment sites and the other 15 are council-run. St Helens Council has strict rules regarding use of their allotment sites and conduct quarterly plot inspections to check for compliance.<sup>38</sup> Societies will also have rules, but this example demonstrates the less hands-on and less present approach of council management.

**Private allotments:** These are allotments provided by private landowners (or charities) other than the council.

- The Church of England is unique in owning land in most neighbourhoods across the country. Some churches have provided allotments for the community on their land, encouraging people to discover gardening, to increase multifaith interaction and community inclusivity.<sup>39,40</sup>
- Ealing Dean Allotments are run by their allotment society but owned in trust by Pathways, a housing charity.<sup>41</sup>
- Ards Allotments Co. are private allotments in Newtownards, Northern Ireland, providing a space for individual allotment holders to grow their own produce.<sup>42</sup>
- The National Trust provides allotments with many in a community model. These used to be advertised on LandShare but since the scheme's closure, it is unclear where/how they are advertised without direct communication.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.barnetalotments.org.uk/>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.finchleyhorticulturalsociety.org.uk/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/allotments-management/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/environmental-services/parks-and-open-spaces/allotments/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/13/stuck-on-an-allotment-waiting-list-your-prayers-could-be-answered/>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.thestlukescentresouthend.org.uk/allotment-project/4567516225>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.ealingdean.co.uk/about-ealing-dean-allotment-society>

<sup>42</sup> <http://ardsallotments.com/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/allotments-and-growing-spaces>

## Plot size

The (ancient) standard plot size is 10 poles or rods which is approx. equal to 250 m<sup>2</sup> or a full-sized doubles tennis court. These are thought to be big enough to supply produce for 9 months a year for a family of five. The standard for each allotment site is dependent on the society and demand in that area. Plots in Hackney, for example, come as half the traditionally standard size, so 5 poles.

Half size plots are common place across allotment sites. Decreasing allotment sizes has the benefit of increasing available plot sizes (and is therefore deployed as a tactic to reduce waiting lists) and making a plot appear more manageable to inexperienced plot sizes, especially younger plot holders.<sup>44</sup> However, it also reduces the available growing space for produce and sparked outrage when Charlie Dimmock, of the gardening makeover show *Ground Force*, suggested that plots be halved or even quartered to increase supply.<sup>45</sup>

When creating an allotment site, space for paths that can comfortably accommodate wheelchairs and wheelbarrows must also be a consideration. Smaller and raised beds may need proportionately more space than larger plots to allow for more path space surrounding them.

## Cost

As above, the law states that rent rates must be 'reasonable', which is of course highly subjective. Cost varies across the country depending on size and facilities provided and maintained through collected. Most councils/allotment societies will show their pricings on their websites and some examples are given below but the NSALG estimates that most plots cost between £25 and £125 a year to rent.

- Wandsworth council determines costs per rod whereas Hackney council as a set price for a plot (halved for a half plot). This further suggests that plot provisions are highly variable and may even be flexible in some places (if determined per rod).

Many sites offer a concessions plot rent rate which encourages the less able and the elderly to benefit from the many advantages that allotment gardening provides just as much as more able holders (see Benefits section).

Increasing rents of many allotment sites has become more common, making holding an allotment less affordable for many gardeners.

- Proposed 700 and 1000 per cent rent rate increases in northeast Lincolnshire in 2004/2005 was extreme enough to receive attention in the Commons (see Parliamentary mentions section). The proposed increases were successfully lobbied against by the community.
- Leeds City Council also attempted to increase rent prices due to a reduced budget between 2012 and 2014. but this was deemed unlawful in court, although the Court held that the Council were not required to subsidise them.<sup>46</sup> Some sort of valuation method for councils to utilise may be necessary to prevent this occurring in the future.

The easiest and most immediate way to prevent rent increases such as these could be through a clause on rent increase and rent notices in tenancy agreements. This is, of course, subject to negotiation and may not be easily implementable in council-managed allotments. Society-run sites might be in better position to negotiate with their landlord.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/838b6026-b688-11e8-b3ef-799c8613f4a1>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2015/aug/18/allotments-big-charlie-dimmock-quartered-plots>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.weightmans.com/insights/allotment-rents-increase-unlawful/>



An interactive map showing rent, rent increases and waiting list lengths between 2008 and 2011 can be found on the Guardian website at the link below. Although dated and lacking a significant amount of data, it provides examples of the state of some councils' allotments in those 3 years.

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/interactive/2011/nov/10/allotments-rents-waiting-list-england>

#### Facilities and accessibility

Due to the lack of central regulation around allotment provision, facilities and the extent of accessibility vary greatly. Some allotments fail even to have basic needs for gardening such as a water tap.<sup>47</sup>

**Toilets** are also an issue; they are expensive to build, greater numbers of female plot holders may increase their demand and they prevent longer stints of gardening going uninterrupted. Their provision may also encourage less able plot holders to take up gardening. There is no obligation from the landowner or site manager to provide one so many go without.<sup>48</sup>

Council allotment sites are usually **fenced with lockable gates**. Each allotment holder has a key and this, alongside boundary maintenance generally, forms part of the site's maintenance costs.

**Road access and parking** are not always guaranteed but can be checked via the allotment society or council websites and on Ordnance Survey maps. Lack of road access may make allotment holding less accessible to many users, especially in underserved areas where holders must travel from further away or those who wish to bring larger gardening materials or equipment.

**Wheelchair friendly access** is facilitated by level and pathed paths with vehicular access to the site.

- Brighton and Hove City Council have a separate application process for users with physical impairments. Three of the council's 37 allotment sites have smaller and raised beds specifically for those with physical disabilities that are particularly accessible with taps within 5 m, vehicular access within 50 m and surrounding level paving.<sup>49</sup>

Plots with **raised beds** are also common within allotment sites. These enable less able plot holders better/easier access to the soil and smaller plots may be suitable for these users too.

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/838b6026-b688-11e8-b3ef-799c8613f4a1>; Hansard January 2012 (Lords)

<sup>48</sup> APSE State of the Market Survey 2018

<sup>49</sup> <https://new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/allotments/get-allotment/get-accessible-allotment>

## Areas for Improvement

- Increasing **easy and near access** to allotments to reduce underservicing to communities where supply does not meet demand.
- Access to **facilities such as toilets** should be a mandatory requirement for allotments with consideration given to disabled access too; plenty of options can be found online with varying specifications and price tags which should make finding a suitable variant for specific sites accomplishable.
- **Road access and parking** would be ideal but difficult to provide to sites that are already established but do not have them, and they should therefore be a consideration for new sites.
- Some sort of **valuation method** may be necessary to work out 'reasonable' rent prices and increases (with comparison to other authorities' rents) and specification that the relevant allotment society/holders should be consulted. All authorities should have to take into account the Allotment Acts and guidance on a specific procedure should be produced.

## How to get an allotment & waiting lists

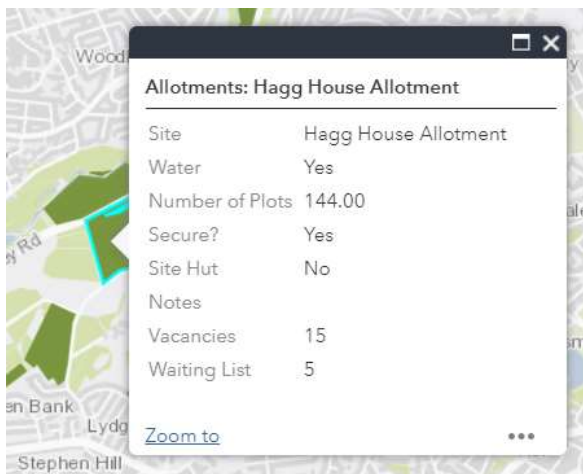


Figure 2 - Sheffield Council website interactive allotment map

Applying for an allotment generally entails expressing an interest through the relevant council website or an email to an allotment society. Allotment vacancies will be advertised on said webpages and on the NSALG website.<sup>50</sup>

Many allotment sites have waiting lists due to their high demand, although this is location dependent. Due to the variation in allotment site management, some waiting lists will be managed by the relevant allotment societies rather than the council itself.

Some councils provide indicators of usage through their allotment webpages which all councils managing allotments should be encouraged to do.

- Sheffield City Council's website shows an interactive map detailing the number of vacancies and people on waiting lists (differing plot requirements mean not all vacancies are filled despite waiting list numbers).<sup>51</sup>

Demand and, therefore, waiting lists lengths vary. Reports suggest they are particularly high in city centres where open greenspaces are rarer. In 2009 reports showed Camden to have the highest waiting list (approx. 40 years) than anywhere else in the country.<sup>52</sup> In 2013, the NSALG found that on average there were 52 people waiting for every 100 plots across the UK. The NSALG have said waiting lists are currently steady.<sup>53</sup>

The NSALG used to produce waiting list surveys every other year in conjunction with the University of Derby, but due to low response rates to the 300+ Freedom of Information requests sent, the findings were disproportionately limited in their accuracy for work put in. The most recent similar survey was

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/about-us/vacancies/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/allotments>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/5422485/Allotment-waiting-lists-reach-up-to-40-years.html>

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication

a *State of the Market* report carried out by the Association for Public Service Excellence (ASPE). Again, the low response rate reduces its reliability but the findings from 140 responses show that between 6 and 18 months is the most common average wait for potential allotment holders and that only 5% of respondents could guarantee a plot within 3 months.

### Areas for Improvement

- Again, no reliable national statistics exist on waiting lists and a more detailed audit than previous surveys may be required to assess waiting times across the country.

### Summary

- Legislation differs slightly across the UK and providing allotments is not a requirement in Northern Ireland.
- Legislation specifying waiting list limitations are not enough to increase council-provided allotment site numbers in practice (see Scottish example).
- Legislation is designed to protect allotment sites from disposal but has its limitations.
- Disposal requires ministerial consent and their satisfaction that realistic alternatives are provided if possible.
- Exceptional circumstances for disposal can be granted at the Minister's discretion.
- A range of management styles for allotments exist with variation in the extent of involvement of the local authorities.
- Plot size varies depending on the site, but the traditional size is approx. 250 m<sup>2</sup>, a doubles tennis court.
- Cost varies greatly and increasing rent prices are a threat to many plot holders.
- There is no regulation of facilities or accessibility in allotment site provision.
- Application for an allotment varies depending on management style of allotments.
- Waiting lists vary and are dependent on location.

## Allotment users

This section looks at those who use allotments, including site societies and their activities.

### Allotment societies

As discussed in the Provision and cost section, allotment societies differ in the extent to which they manage their own site/have responsibility over their own site. Regardless, allotment societies strengthen the community ties between allotment holders and helped initiatives such as allotment festivals be set up. These in turn strengthen the allotment ties to the community, garnering their essential support in maintaining them.<sup>54</sup>

The **National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens** (NSALG) promotes the interests and rights of allotments and allotment holders across communities in the UK.<sup>55</sup> They provide advice and guidance to allotment holders through their regional managers and allotment societies are therefore encouraged to register with them. The NSALG provides a wealth of invaluable resources on their website for allotment users and allotment societies.

The NSALG is also part of the **International Office of Allotments and Leisure Gardens**, a non-profit associated with 2 million allotments and leisure gardens across Japan and 12 European countries.<sup>56</sup> The International Office awards diplomas every year for gardens and allotments focussing on four areas: ecological gardening, innovative activities and social activities. The 'Golden Rose' is a medal specifically for public officials and institutions that have made a significant contribution to furthering the allotment and leisure garden movement. See the NSALG website's International Allotment Movement section for each category's criteria.<sup>57</sup>

### Who uses allotments?

The traditional view of the typical allotment user is male, white, middle-classed and retired. However, the recent surge in popularity has diversified the demographic of allotment holders. As mentioned, a much greater age range and diversity in sex and ethnicity have bolstered demand.

- The Royal Borough of Greenwich state on their website that their plot holders come from at least 26 ethnic backgrounds and their ages range from 18 to 87.<sup>58</sup>

Due to no government department being directly responsible for allotments and the variety of borough-specific management systems for allotments (see Provision and cost), gathering reliable statistics on allotment holder demographics is difficult. Response rates for Freedom of Information requests in previous allotment surveys have been on the low side, making the reliability of that data questionable as can be seen in the NSALG waiting list surveys before 2013.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/news-events-campaigns/protect-your-plots/>

<sup>55</sup> National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens, <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/>

<sup>56</sup> Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux, [http://www.jardins-familiaux.org/e\\_start.html](http://www.jardins-familiaux.org/e_start.html)

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/about-us/international-allotment-movement/>

<sup>58</sup> [https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200227/allotments/830/looking\\_for\\_an\\_allotment](https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200227/allotments/830/looking_for_an_allotment)

## Maintenance of use

Research by Acton (2011) reported that, despite all the benefits of allotment gardening, the most common anecdotal reason for holding an allotment was simply because it was an enjoyable hobby.<sup>59</sup> Engaging as many people as possible in allotment gardening is therefore the best way to maintain public interest in allotments. However, maintaining allotment use is not just about those holding an allotment but the surrounding community too. Community lobbying has proven essential in maintaining allotments as well as providing new allotments.

- Allotments in Bedale, North Yorkshire, credit their recent 2,000-strong petition to local business and community support, hoping it will encourage the West Yorkshire and Dales Diocese decision to change their plans for sale and redevelopment.<sup>60</sup>

Engaging the community can be done through allotment open days and allotment festivals such as those held annually in National Allotments Week across the UK.<sup>61</sup> This not only increases the wider community's interest in the allotment site but also engages them with their local community to fight loneliness and exposes them to the benefits of interaction with greenspaces (see Benefits).

The rehabilitative potential of gardening (mentioned in the Benefits section) should also not be underestimated. Providing those with mental and physical health issues to experience the benefits of gardening, like the Thrive charity and opportunities for refugees in Manchester, could nurture the establishment of a lifelong hobby.<sup>62,63</sup>

Maintaining interest by appealing to younger generations is another potentially successful strategy. Some allotments are associated with schools or schools have their own on-site plots. With anecdotal evidence that a love of gardening starts young and the potential for intergenerational and inter-demographic interaction, campaigns such as the Royal Horticultural Society's Campaign for School Gardening should be wholeheartedly supported.<sup>64</sup>

- Berrywood Primary School in Southampton created a Green Heroes to increase children's understanding of sustainability and the environmental impact they have.<sup>65</sup>
- St Margaret's School for Girls, Aberdeen, demonstrated how little is needed to get started in gardening by beginning on a classroom windowsill. Growing vegetables provided the girls with hands on experience of food production and healthy eating – some of them had never tried a cucumber before.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Acton 2011. *Allotment Gardens: A Reflection of History, Heritage, Community and Self*, 21;46-58

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11493835.petition-calls-for-allotments-to-stay/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenstovisit/11002278/National-Allotments-Week-the-best-allotment-open-days.html>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.thrive.org.uk/>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-manchester-41506980/manchester-allotment-offers-refugees-therapy-and-happiness>

<sup>64</sup> <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk>

<sup>65</sup> <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/school-stories/Berrywood-Primary-School>

<sup>66</sup> <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/school-stories/St-Margaret-s-School-for-Girls>

### Areas for Improvement

- All allotment societies should register with the NSALG to benefit from their help and advice.
- **Increasing the diversity** of allotment holders can be initiated through projects focussing on rehabilitation and therapy, as well as the possibility for intergenerational interactions with a view to **foster allotment gardening interests in younger generations**.
- Allotment activities encouraging **community engagement** should be the focus of all allotment societies!

### Summary

Allotment societies provide a wider purpose than simply organising the waiting list and transfer of plots on a site, as mentioned in Provision and Cost. The NSALG holds an important role in supporting and guiding these individual allotment societies.

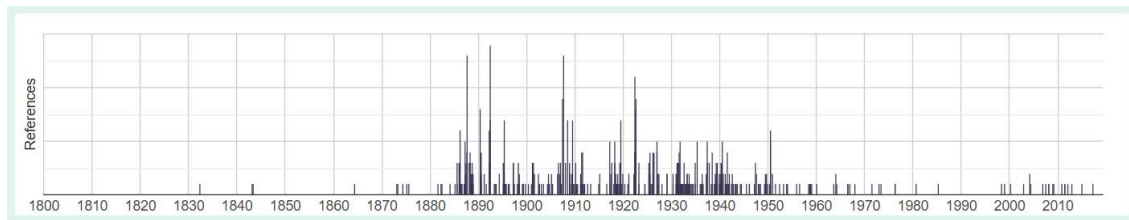
A range of people utilise allotments and not always as an allotment holder nor for the reasons described in the Benefits section. Engaging the community has added long-term, benefits to both the allotment site and those interacting with the site.

## Going forward

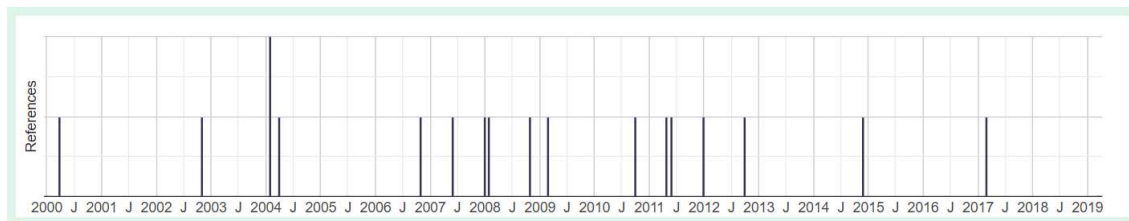
This report has so far looked at allotment provision and who uses those sites. Overall, to meet demand, more allotments sites need to be created/provided. This section discusses how this may be achieved as well as past governmental interest to identify areas for improvement in statutory and private provision.

## Parliamentary mentions

See the section on protection for an overview on the existing legal protection and legislation surrounding allotments. As can be seen in Graph 1, the Parliamentary mentions have dropped substantially since mid-century. More recently, the resurgence in allotment interest within the last 15 years has had only limited impact on Parliamentary debate and interest. It is important to remember that the focus of Parliament does not mirror the level of public interest.



Graph 1: Parliamentary mentions throughout Hansard records in both Houses (bold graph lines represent 5 mentions)



Graph 2: Parliamentary mentions since 2000 in both Houses (bold graph lines represent 1 mention)

Graph 2 shows the mentions since 2000, the majority of which were in the House of Lords. Those of note include (colours indicate relevant political affiliation):

February 2004, Commons – **Shona McIsaac**, Cleethorpes

- Report of **increased rent prices** (by 700 in 2004 and 1,000 per cent in 2005) in North-East Lincolnshire without consultation of local community. Objections caused the Council to reduce the increase to 150%.

November 2006, Lords – **Lord Borrie**, **Lord Skelmersdale**, **Lord Whitty**, **Lord Greaves**

- Lord Borrie argued that allotments should form part of the **government's policy in battling obesity** and should therefore **not be limited to local government** interests and Lord Skelmersdale pointed out that obesity is predominantly and under-30s disease. The response agreed to allotment holding's benefits and that the **average allotment holder's age was decreasing**.
- Lord Whitty pointed out that areas under **planning stress** do not adhere to Government advice/guidance on allotments.



- Lord Greaves asked whether grants would be made available to parish councils to overcome **initially high expenditure of providing allotments**. No definitive answer provided.

February 2008, Commons – [Tony Baldry](#), Banbury

- Introduction of a **Bill on allotments** to encourage local authorities to make provision for allotments and for them to encourage developers to provide allotments in planning applications.

November 2008, Commons – [John Leech](#), Manchester, Withington

- Discussion of allotment provision with the suggestion that **by not responding to demand, local authorities are in breach of their statutory duty** to provide allotments. Examples were also given of councils not using land effectively and the suggestions made that **money made** from the sale of former allotment sites by councils should be **reinvested** in allotment provision.

June 2011, Lords – [Baroness Sharples](#), [Lord Greaves](#)

- Baroness Sharples’ request regarding governmental support for allotments was answered with reference to the Localism Bill (Localism Act 2011).
- Again, the point of capital funding for initial expenditure for allotment provision was raised by Lord Greaves.

October 2012, Lords – [Baroness Sharples](#)

- Garden Share schemes and private land or overlarge gardens being leased were suggested by... as a way to increase land availability.

N.b. The Allotments (Planning) Bill 2007-08 put forward by Tony Baldry never got to a second reading. It was sponsored by Tony Baldry, Ben Chapman, Robert Key, Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. David Wilshire, Mr. David Marshall and Jeremy Corbyn.<sup>67</sup>

*“You will get a graveyard plot before an allotment”*

— Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Damer, 2008 (it should be pointed out that this was at the peak of allotment waiting lists and that most waiting lists have now steadied out)

### Previous advice and reports

The Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs 1998 report, *The Future of Allotments*, provided multiple recommendations for allotment provision and policy. Some were addressed through planning policy guidelines and allotment disposal guidance subsequently produced (see next section) but many were not implemented. These included:

- “For the long-term protection of allotments, we believe that allotments legislation must be overhauled. We conclude that the Government should issue a Green Paper as soon as is practicable and commission a research study to consult with the various interested parties and develop a consolidating piece of legislation which simplifies, updates and enhances existing allotments legislation.” – Paragraph 29
- The recommendation that plots should be allowed for flower growing and that sites should be able to sell surplus produce, both of which are prohibited through the 1925 Act.

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<sup>67</sup> <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/allotmentsplanning.html>

- The observation that local authorities' action on allotment provision was highly varied: "some authorities pursue an active approach to maintaining vibrant and fully-occupied allotment sites whilst others appear at best lethargic and at worst to be instrumental in encouraging the decline of interest in allotments." – Paragraph 40
- The recommendation that local authorities publish provision statistics annually to include full explanations of any decline and that the Government maintains a database of provision on a national level for assessment of effectiveness.
- Standardisation of facilities provided should be encouraged.
- A Best Practice regime should be drawn up and implemented by councils and advertised in gardening media (magazines and programmes).
- That allotment provision is a national issue while provision rate is a local issue; the Government should recognise its role in encouraging/incentivising allotment promotion.
- "Our recommendations include changes in legislation, policy and practice. We consider that the force of these measures will be lost if a piecemeal approach is adopted to their implementation. Only if the recommendations are introduced as a package will the Future for Allotments be assured." – Paragraph 116

London Assembly's Environment Committee Report, *A Lot to Lose: London's disappearing allotments* (October 2006) recommendations:

- Boroughs should share information to allow allotments to be made available and advertised across boroughs to meet demand across London.
- Allotment associations should be listed on council websites as points of contact.
- S016 agreements should be employed to persuade high density housing developers to allocate allotment land use.
- Non-statutory allotment redevelopment should follow similar guidelines in land disposal as councils do (comparable land offered to displaced plot holders).

Privately, the Campaign to Protect Rural England also commissioned a report on allotments in Greater London in 2012. Some of the suggested next steps are listed although it is unclear the extent to which they have been implemented:

- Compilation of local authorities' plans and strategies on open spaces, biodiversity etc. would allow comparisons to be made and improvements suggested.
- Ecological allotment surroundings mapping – provide idea of which environments allotments normally reside in, surrounding rights of way and surrounding land use.
- Research into issues with theft and vandalism?

## Planning policy

Planning policy guidance (PPG) and statements (PPS) documents were mentioned multiple times by both Houses and created in response to some of the Select Committees recommendations and MPs calls for clarification on allotments. These policy guidances have been issued to allow for greenspace creation and maintenance (including allotments) and are detailed below.

**PPS3** – regards housing policy. States that the availability of green and open spaces should be considerations in deciding on the quality of a proposed build. Housing density policies are also left at the local authority's discretion.

**PPG17** – regards greenspaces directly. Provides guidance on the importance of open and greenspaces, encouraging planning policies that promote their provision and use. It is up to local authorities to correctly audit and assess the need for local recreational greenspaces (incl. allotments) as per the devolution of governmental responsibility.

N.b. Allotments are not considered to be previously developed land.

**Section 106** – planning obligations under Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 106. Focuses on site specific mitigation of the impact of development, i.e. developer contributions or ‘planning gain’. It can also restrict the specific use of, or activities on the land and is enforceable by the authority. This section includes the need to fulfil affordable housing obligations.<sup>68</sup>

These documents only provide policy advice and are therefore not necessarily adhered to by stressed boroughs, as mentioned by Lord Whitty in the House of Lords in November 2006 (see above). They have repeatedly been referred to by the Government in response to questions regarding their intention to remove any protective legislation in place, or introduction of any further incentive for councils to provide more allotments. Essentially, the Government’s rhetoric is that they have already acted to encourage more allotments through planning policies and the Localism Act despite local authorities being able to bypass their recommendations.

*“Our guidance on open spaces supports the legal framework, and in 2002 we sought to strengthen protection. In 1998, a Select Committee inquiry into allotments concluded that the criteria for assessing the disposal of statutory allotments were too weak. As a consequence, they were strengthened and reinforced in 2002 by the revised planning policy guidance note 17 to ensure that the community’s need for the allotment in question would be taken into account, and that it would be considered surplus to need. That has had the impact of slowing down the loss of allotments. So, there was legislation in 1908 and 1925, a Select Committee report in 1998 and Government guidance in 2002, and far fewer allotments have been lost as a result.”*

— Sadiq Khan, Under Secretary for Communities and Local Government, 2008

### Areas for Improvement

- Advice from previous reports on the state of allotments has lacked implementation but should remain considerations in future improvements.
- Policy guidance documents supplement the allotment legislation in provision and disposal but still provide little incentive to push councils into action on site provision and regulated maintenance.
- The Government fails to recognise that incentivising allotment provision should be a national issue rather than a devolved local one.
- More pressure should be placed on local authorities and, in turn, developers to implement planning policies regarding green and open spaces to fulfil the planning policies potential in changing land use.

### Motivating governmental action

Despite the myriad of benefits associated with allotment gardening, their provision far from reaches demand with consistently long waiting lists, underusage and threats of closure. Essentially, providing allotments needs to become more attractive to the Government at both national and local levels.

These changes generally require innovative thinking in (local) governmental departments in order to be implemented. Too often this thinking is lacking due to time, resource and commitment constraints, inability to see an overarching bigger picture, etc. Ensuring implementation of these types of creative

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<sup>68</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-topics/infrastructure/s106-obligations-overview>

solutions therefore falls to third parties who have more time and motivation to improve systems and services. Alternatively, if overarching national legislation existed, some improvements may be able to be implemented across the UK.

Campaigning and lobbying strategies could include the point raised by Lord Borrie in 2006 (see Parliamentary mentions) and the 1998 Select Committee's opinion on allotment-associated health benefits being a national issue. Health is a matter for the national government and the NHS, and by showcasing the direct benefits on health of allotment gardening, 'social prescribing' by doctors could begin to include gardening and holding an allotment. This also ties in with instilling greater awareness of food and health education, a major tactic already being by the government for tackling childhood obesity and associated diseases.<sup>69</sup>

To make allotment sites more attractive to local authorities, site needs could be used to combine and thereby limit council resources. Bristol City council offers leases to allotment sites with vehicular access for composting instead of disposing of them through landfill.

It should be noted that these recommendations on governmental action only affect statutory allotments. Private land use is discussed below.

### Land conversion

Changing land use to create more allotments would be the most effective way to cater towards demand. Underused land exists across the country and, although much may be prime for development opportunities, much will currently not be under development.

In Scotland, Glasgow City Council started a project called Stalled Spaces in 2011. This scheme negotiates temporary re-use of land ('stalled' sites) owned by both the Council and privately to be used for community-benefitting projects, including community gardens. Some projects were focussed on specific areas: Barras Market Area and, more recently, areas along the canal.<sup>70</sup> A map detailing past projects can be found on their website. Although temporary, this type of project has been highly successful in reutilising 25 ha of vacant land for community use and in attracting half a million pounds total in funding, six times the Council's and Glasgow Housing Association's initial investment. This demonstrates the potential of land reuse in community projects, at the very least in Scotland.

Providing land for non-temporary allotments, however, will require **more permanent agreements** as cultivation takes time particularly from scratch, produce is seasonal, and allotments are designed to provide food on a long-term basis.

Councils have been persuaded to lease more land to create a new allotment site, such as in Nottingham in 2009 via petition.<sup>71</sup> This example demonstrates that lobbying local authorities can work but that action is up to passionate and community-minded residents or a third-party organisation. Due to lack of resources, many councils will not have the ability to provide work into land conversion (temporary or not) like the Stalled Spaces project in Glasgow.

### Reuse of private land

Private land ownership accounts for a vast proportion of land available. The New Local Government Network (NLGN) has suggested that medium term leases of private individual holdings could be

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<sup>69</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/stalledspaces>

<sup>71</sup> New Local Government Network *Can You Dig It?* 2012

considered for community leasing. Due to the level of private landownership in the UK, this could hold great potential for viable allotment land solutions. Some incentive may be necessary or preferable to encourage private leases for community use; while land caretaking through allotment sites may be enough for some landowners, the NLGN has suggested tax breaks (such as through tax credits) to offset potential losses and encourage socially responsible community leasing.<sup>72</sup>

Privately run allotments such as those provided by the National Trust and the Church of England are still under threat from redevelopment, but the government currently does not incentivise private provision, as mentioned. This means that communities are unequally provided for depending on whether non-statutory allotments exist and the extent of council provision. As an example, the Church of England has previously sold off allotments in King's Somborne, Hampshire, and in Wellsbourne, Warwickshire for housing despite allotment holders protests.<sup>73,74</sup> This indicates that the Government cannot rely on private allotments to plug the gaps in supply of plots as the private provision varies much like the statutory provision. Again, funding for initial procurement is an issue here and has been mentioned by Lord Greaves in the House of Lords (see Parliamentary mentions) as a barrier for third sector allotment provision.

### Brownfield land

Brownfield land is any land that has seen previous development and regeneration of underused examples has the potential to be beneficial to both the local community and the government. Brownfield land is most often referred to in the context of reaching government targets for housing, but its regeneration could also improve a community's outlook on their local environment, making it more attractive and more social (if used for a community purpose). Generally, it will already have desired infrastructure due to previous use, will be in sought-after urban areas and its redevelopment would reduce redevelopment of the Green Belt.<sup>75</sup>

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has already been campaigning for brownfield land use as housing. However, much of it is unsuitable because it is still in use, has no planning permission for redevelopment, or requires substantial 'treatment', i.e. demolition, levelling, decontamination etc.<sup>76</sup> This also thereby provides barriers towards redevelopment as greenspaces.

This being said, CPRE has also identified (through council brownfield registers) that the amount of brownfield land has been underestimated by the government and that much of the land with planning permission does not start redevelopment within 5 years, creating a 'stalled' space.<sup>77</sup> These could create an opportunity like that of the Stalled Spaces in Glasgow. In this case, community gardens rather than allotments may be a more practical and appropriate application.

N.b. Conversion of agricultural land would be most advantageous as would not require planning permission to create an allotment site.

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<sup>72</sup> New Local Government Network *Can You Dig It?* 2012

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/18-january/news/uk/reader-angry-at-church-plans-for-sale-of-allotments>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-40513188/church-plans-to-sell-wellesbourne-allotments>

<sup>75</sup> CPRE *State of Brownfield* 2018 report

<sup>76</sup> CPRE *State of Brownfield* 2018 report

<sup>77</sup> CPRE *State of Brownfield* 2018 report

### Alternative uses

Conversion of land to allotment sites may not be suitable for every piece of land, as mentioned above. Community gardens may therefore be a more viable option for some areas of land. While they lack the personal side of gardening in your own allotment, they still provide many of the benefits that allotment gardeners gain including social interaction, a sense of accomplishment and many physical health benefits. Where providing more allotments is difficult, community gardens may be a viable compromise. In fact, some evidence suggests over 65s would prefer communal gardening over individual gardening and this may be a suitable option to engage older generations in gardening for the first time while also encouraging intergenerational interaction.<sup>78</sup>

Although this does not directly increase the supply of allotment sites available it may increase interest in gardening in general, allowing more people to experience the benefits of (social) gardening and encouraging them to seek out a plot. Increasing demand this way may also lead to more pressure put on local authorities by the community to increase allotment supply.

### Identifying suitable land

Criteria should be created to aid identification of land that would be suitable for conversion into allotments. These should give consideration to road access (and parking), facilitation of path and raised bed creation, and whether the surrounding area is underserved by allotments. These should be based on examples of successful case studies (see Cast Study) and be specific to individual areas to best serve the community, which is the main reason for their devolved responsibility. It is important that these are flexible to account for individuality of areas and that the NSALG are consulted for best practice and logistical advice.

### Previous land use schemes

Of note should be previous schemes that have aimed to revitalise land use and the allotment movement.

**Landshare** – a scheme set up by Hugh Fearnly-Whittingstall to encourage sharing of spare, underused land for the purpose of growing produce. It was set up in 2009, had 22,000 sign ups within its first few weeks and was used by people and organisations, such as the National Trust, to advertise land pockets for other’s use and enjoyment. By March 2016 the scheme had lost momentum and was closed, following a change in trend from homegrown to ‘foodie’.<sup>79,80</sup>

**Allotments Regeneration Initiative** – aimed to increase the uptake and regeneration of allotments which, by 2012 appeared to have been successful as waiting lists were at an all-time high. The scheme attracted a great deal of funding but has been closed since 2012 and any remaining services have now been transferred to the NSALG.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Milligan et al 2004. Cultivating Health: Therapeutic Landscapes and Older People in Northern England, *Social Science and Medicine*, 58;1781-93.

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.hortweek.com/fearnley-whittingstalls-landshare-scheme-shuts/retail/article/1385607>

<sup>80</sup> <http://tlio.org.uk/land-share-hugh-fearnly-whittingstall/>

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.hortweek.com/allotments-regeneration-initiative-fold-reaching-natural-conclusion/parks-and-gardens/article/1153952>

### Areas for Improvement

- Private landlords could be encouraged to provide underused land for community leasing.
- Introducing funding grants specifically for the initial expenditure of setting up allotment sites may encourage more organisations (such as the Church of England and charities) to acquire and create allotment sites.
- Brownfield registers should be utilised not just for housing development opportunities but greenspace redevelopment.

### Summary

- Both Houses of Parliament hardly debate allotments despite the surge in popularity and waiting lists and threats to their provision.
- The Government has no plans to remove statutory protections for allotments.
- Planning policies have been put in place in response to need for guidance in allotment provision and disposal. These are not necessarily always adhered to by local authorities.
- Since brownfield land appears to have been underestimated by the government, there is potential here for land conversion to greenspaces such as allotments.
- Opportunity for innovative land reuse seems to be both necessary but is specific to certain areas.
- Previous land sharing schemes have existing but have been short lived, leaving reliance on new allotment sites to fulfil allotment demand.



## Case study

This section details first a specific city (Sheffield) with allotments and how they are provided, as well as an unusual allotment case. The case study shows how communication between local authorities and allotment societies can be facilitated in an urban environment to provide a considerable number of allotment sites. A longitudinal case study of successful implementation of improvements at every level may also form essential evidence for lobbying government on relevant issues in the future.

### Sheffield allotments

Sheffield is the 6<sup>th</sup> greenest city in the UK, just below Greater London.<sup>82</sup> The Council provides and maintains over 3000 plots across 70 sites including plots designed to be more accessible for those with disabilities, whether this requires wheelchair access or raised beds. Prices are dependent on the plot size, but concession prices are available for specific benefits, for pensioners and for students at varying rates (up to 75%). There are also 8 privately managed allotments (unclear whether these are devolved management and owned by the council or entirely private) and 6 community allotments for those who require more guidance and/or assistance.

Sheffield is an excellent example of a city in which the Council and allotment societies/holders have managed to work together. The Sheffield Allotment Federation joins the city's allotment societies and, with a member of each society, attends regular Allotment Advisory Group meetings with Sheffield City Council.<sup>83</sup> Such cooperation is invaluable both for community input and the promotion of both parties' interests.

Opposite is a map showing the land cover of Sheffield taken from a Land Cover Atlas of the UK.<sup>84</sup> The city is unusual in that its district contains National Park area (brown) although, when compared to the allotment map provided by the Council on the following page, it is clear that allotment sites are much closer to the outskirts on the city than the protected National Park area.

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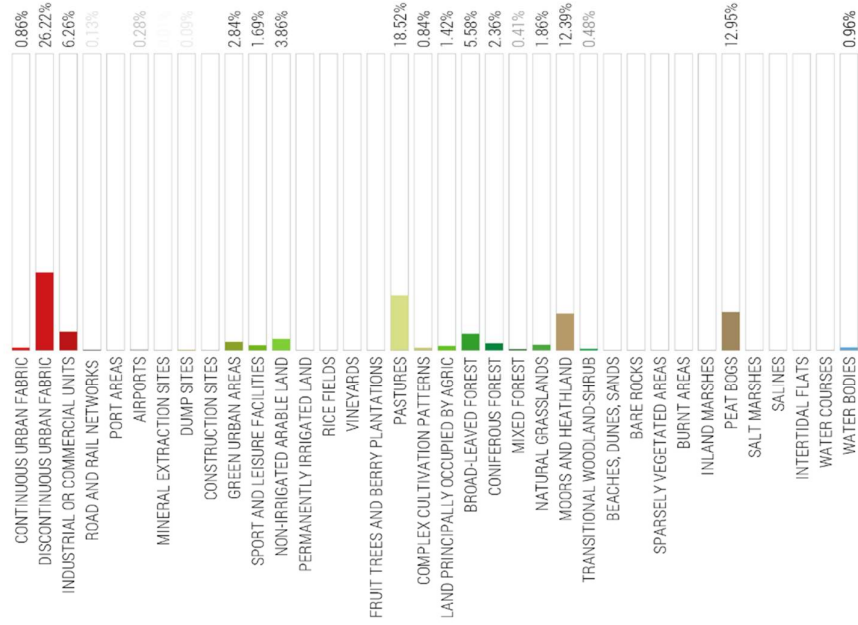
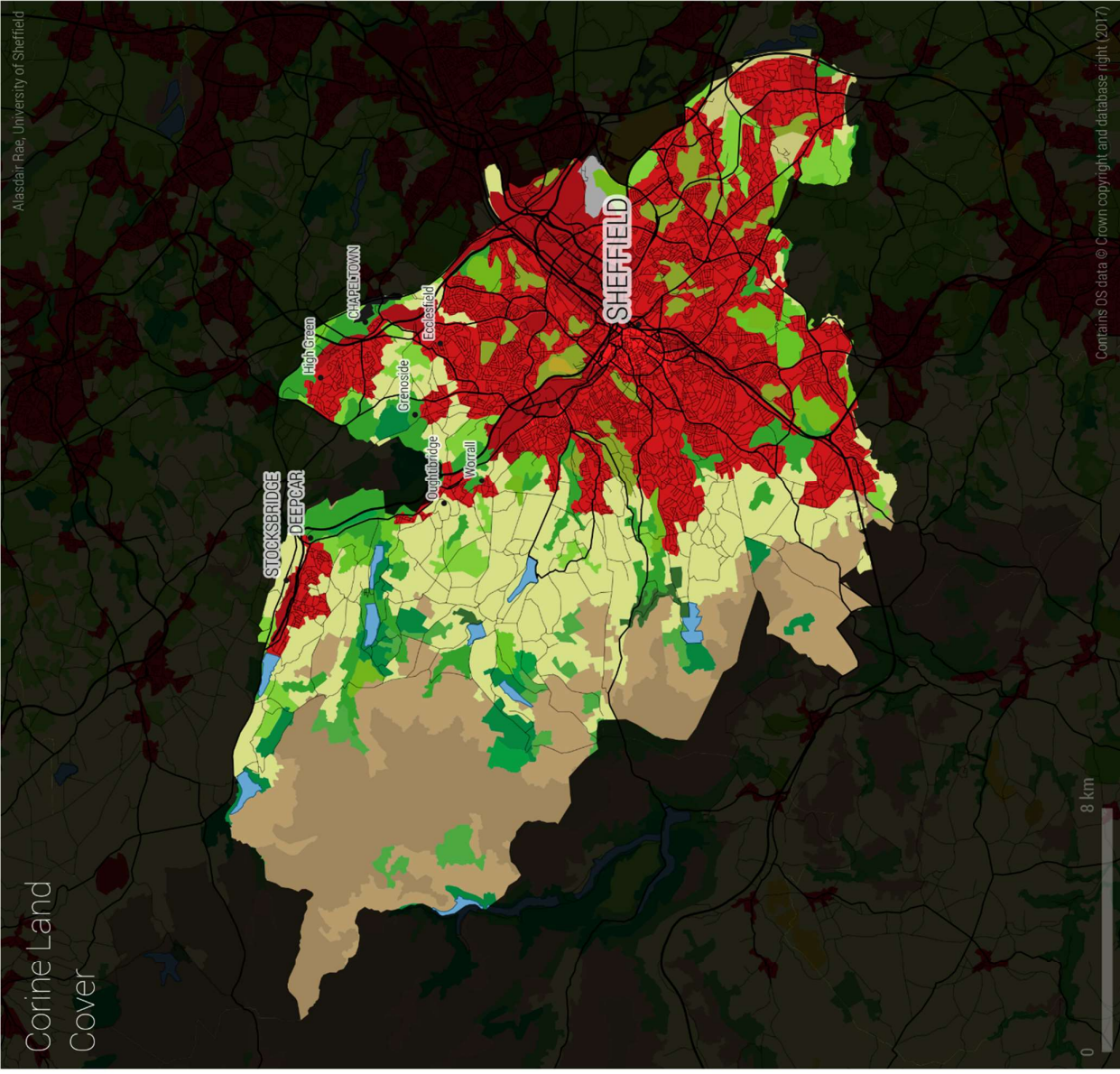
<sup>82</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/gallery/2017/jan/05/green-space-uk-largest-cities-mapped>

<sup>83</sup> <https://sa-federation.co.uk/>

<sup>84</sup> Rae, Alasdair (2017): A Land Cover Atlas of the United Kingdom (Maps). figshare. Fileset. Found at: <https://doi.org/10.15131/shef.data.5219956.v1>

# Sheffield

Corine Land Cover



Corine Data, 2012; copyright rests with the European Commission

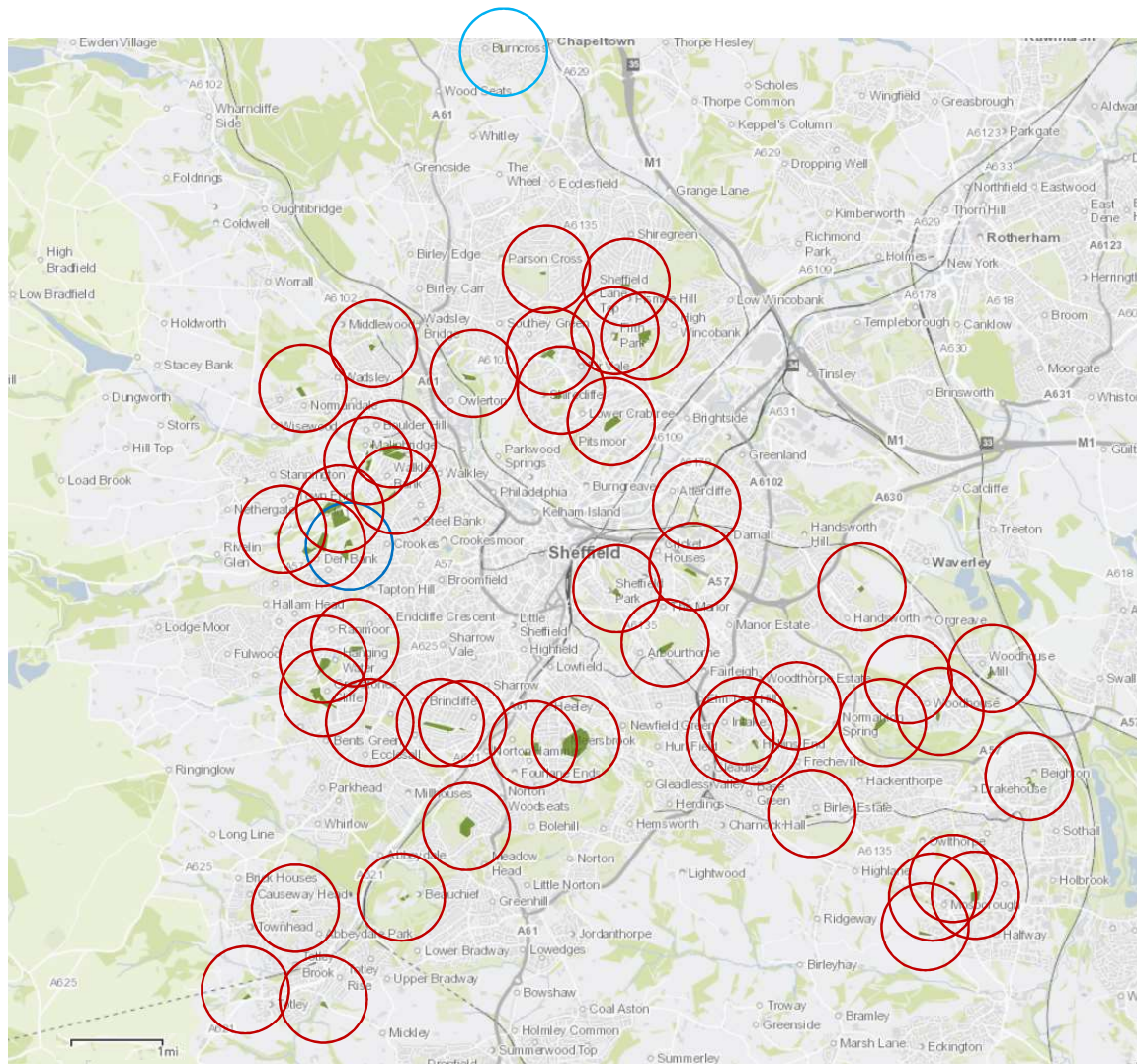


Figure 3 - Taken from the Sheffield City Council allotment webpage and their interactive map with additional circles indicating 1-mile radius or approx. 15 mins walk. Blue circles indicate allotments examined in more detail below. Allotment sites that neighbour each other within close proximity are represented within the same circle.

Using the interactive map on the Sheffield City Council website's allotment page provides additional information on specific allotment sites so is recommended in addition to using the above map, showing allotment site locations, as a reference.

Certain areas are better serviced by allotments than others, with a few pockets of concentration in the west, north and southeast. Despite this, the large proportion of greenspaces and the proximity to the Peak District National Park (northwest of the city, off the map) puts a lot of the city's area highly area within a few miles of greenspace.

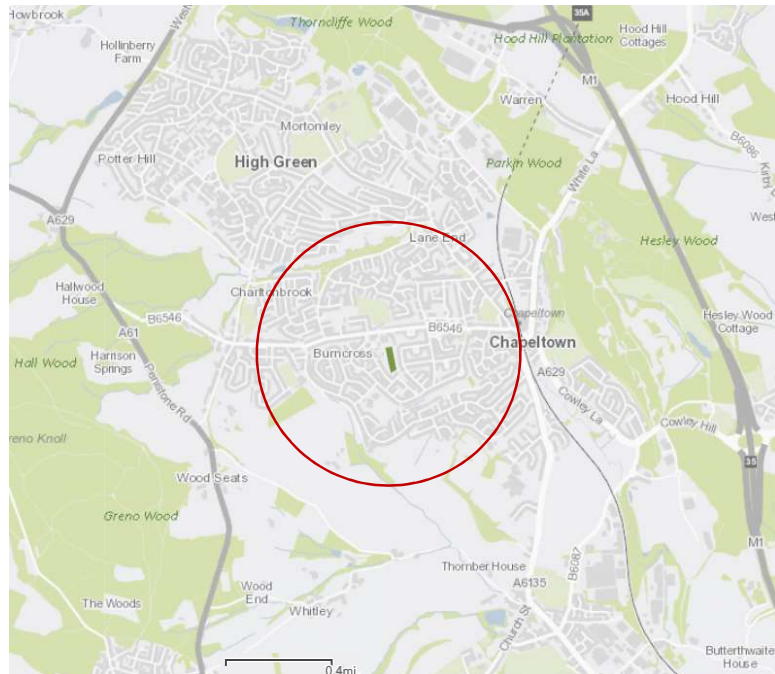




Figure 4 - Circle represents 1-mile radius of allotment site (approx. 15 mins walk).

Looking at some of the allotments more closely, Crookes Marsh Lane Allotments is an allotment site in a residential area west of the city centre well-served by allotments with four other allotment sites (355 plots total) within 1 mile. It has 44 plots, water supply, is secure, has no site hut and 31 people on the waiting list. This is within the densest area of allotments on the map of Sheffield allotment sites. The largely green area surrounding the allotment site may demonstrate why this area was turned into allotments.

The Burncross Allotment Site is the northernmost site provided by Sheffield City Council and the furthest from any other site. It has 33 plots with 17 people on the waiting list, secure fencing and a water supply but no communal site hut. Interestingly, the demand here seems to be comparatively lower to that in the more densely service area examined above with the number of people on the waiting lists being 50 and 70% of the number of plots at each site respectively.



Sheffield City provides an example of a green city with near access to greenspace and a substantial number of allotments. Despite this, waiting lists are still apparent at multiple sites (see Sheffield City Council website’s interactive map for specifics) and more

could be done to increase the number provided. It is worth noting that alternatives, such as allotment cooperatives and community allotments also exist but the private and third sectors could, it seems, still find opportunity to provide more resources and sites to reduce waiting lists and pressure on these statutory sites detailed through various means.

### Unusual allotment cases

As previously stated, allotments are an ancient form of providing food and gardening pleasure. There are cases of historical allotments, detailed below, that are of particular cultural worth and should be noted out of interest in their establishment and history.

#### **St Ann's Allotments**

Some of the oldest and largest allotment collections in the world, the 670 plots over 75 acres were established in the 1830s within 2 km of Nottingham city centre. They are both Grade II listed and a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, containing 19<sup>th</sup> Century summerhouses, glasshouses and other outbuildings. A £4.5 million restoration has been achieved over the last 10 years such that their neglect at the end of last century has been entirely reversed and they are now a thriving, highly biodiverse community with an 18-month waiting list.<sup>85</sup> These are run by The Renewal Trust and their listed status is likely to greatly aid their protection on top of the legislative protection provided to statutory allotments.

#### **Hill Close Gardens**

Another example of Grade II listed Victorian gardens are Hill Close Gardens in Warwick. These have also restored and retained multiple original summerhouses originally for the Victorian middle class to relax in away from their urban home. The visitors centre recounts their history and offers tours of the sixteen hedged pleasure gardens. These are not strictly allotments any longer as they are more communal and have retained their leisure garden roots, but the support for their maintenance demonstrates the public interest in communal gardening and historical greenspace maintenance.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> <http://renewaltrust.co.uk/what-we-do/st-anns-allotments/>

<sup>86</sup> <http://hillclosegardens.com/support-us/>

## Conclusion and recommendations

Allotment gardening has been shown to provide benefits in everything from physical and mental wellbeing, particularly in the elderly, an effective method for living sustainably and reducing environmental impact, while also having the potential for better intergenerational interaction. For these reasons they should be recognised as a substantial contributor to healthy living by the NHS, GPs and governmental health and wellbeing strategies. Projects and initiatives that encourage involvement of a diverse mix of gardeners and plot holders will enable the benefits to be spread across communities and societal divisions potentially for a lifetime.

Allotments are an old tradition in the UK, dating back centuries to philanthropic land provision. They are legally protected under several Allotment Acts from last century and supplemented by policy guidance documents that facilitate greenspace creation in new developments and provide advice on good practice in their disposal. These do not, however, provide any time limit within which local authorities must fulfil their statutory duty to provide allotments if there is demand. No guidance, other than in Scotland, is provided for waiting list lengths. It seems that very little incentive exists for councils to provide more plots, especially when housing shortages and a lack of resources are pressing issues. More pressure should be placed on local authorities and, in turn, developers to implement planning policies regarding green and open spaces to fulfil the planning policies potential in changing land use. Private landowners should also be encouraged to provide community-leased land and follow the National Trust's example. Providing grants for initial expenditure for third sector organisations may be necessary.

The law on rental rates is also vague and subjective. The Government should provide a guiding valuation method and best practice guidelines for rent changes which local authorities should implement. It should also be common practice for the authorities to consult the NSALG's advice.

To identify improvement opportunities in allotment provision and the variation in demand and supply, a thorough audit of both private and statutory allotments will be necessary. Differences in management and allotment activities represent the variety that exists across the country, meaning that success will be highly dependent on what works best for the local environment. However, facilities should be better regulated than the very patchy current provision with a water and toilet availability being the norm. Equally, new allotments should be created with consideration to accessibility to reduce underservicing of local communities.

Overall there remains demand for allotments. These are not centrally regulated making improvements across the country trickier. There is most definitely space to be filled in provision which may have to be done by the third sector while continuing to support campaigns for increased greenspaces such as allotments.

## Stakeholders and societies to be aware of

**National Society for Allotments and Leisure Gardens (NSALG):** <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/>

**Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE):** <https://www.cpre.org.uk/>

All About Allotments website: <https://www.allaboutallotments.co.uk/>

Allot More Allotments campaign: [http://www.allotmoreallotments.org.uk/about\\_us.htm](http://www.allotmoreallotments.org.uk/about_us.htm)

National and Local Government Network (NLGN): <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/>

Scottish Allotment Gardens Society (SAGS): <http://www.sags.org.uk/>

Social Farms and Gardens: <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/>