

Summary of Allotment Demand and Provision 2005-2014

2005: Background to the Allotment Strategy 2005-2015

In 2005, when the allotment strategy 2005-2015 was written, Cheltenham Borough Council had approximately 437 *tenanted* allotment plots, representing 70% of the number of plots under CBC management. Demand had been low for many years.

Two sites were earmarked for disposal. Hayden Two (with only 4 tenants remaining) was to become a community garden and permission had been obtained from the Secretary of State to dispose of Hesters Way site (with no tenants). Some of the proceeds of sale had been earmarked for an Allotments Improvement Programme to make the remaining allotments more attractive to families (signage, toilets, upgraded facilities and infrastructure etc).

There was an uneven distribution of demand, with some sites in the south of Cheltenham having waiting lists and others in the north having vacant plots. Overall there was a surplus of allotments.

In 2005, there were 85 applications for a Cheltenham Borough Council allotment.

2006 – 2009: Increase in Allotment Demand and Resulting New Provision

Shortly thereafter, there was a significant revival in interest in allotment gardening.

In 2006 and 2007, there were 150 and 170 new applications for allotments respectively. By 2008, this had risen to 312.

By 2008, it looked likely that a long-discussed sale of derelict allotment land at Midwinter would go ahead and funds could be released from the proceeds of sale to fund new allotment provision.

Matters proceeded slowly while the waiting lists continued to grow at a significant rate. In 2009, there were a further 227 applications and an additional 210 in 2010. (In total, Cheltenham Borough Council received 1265 applications for an allotment between 2006 and 2011.)

Site improvements for the Midwinter allotment site (funded via the Allotments Improvement Programme) were postponed until such time as the derelict land was sold and the whole area redeveloped: Midwinter improvements would be funded out of future proceeds of sale (i.e. the Midwinter receipt). This released some funds to address the immediate issue: the hundreds of people waiting for an allotment.

Hayden Two was re-allocated and renovated as an allotment site and field drains were installed over a flood-prone and derelict area of the Midwinter site. In total, in the region of 140 new allotments were set up at the Hayden Two and Midwinter

sites. Additional plots were created by dividing some of the larger allotments to cater for the emerging demand for smaller plots.

2010 – 2012: Development of Midwinter area

By 2010, Cheltenham Borough Council had 725 tenanted allotments (up from 437 in 2005) but there were still 465 people on waiting lists. With a turnover rate of 20% per annum, this meant that 145 plots would become available each year but with the application rates considerably higher, the waiting lists continued to grow.

The sale of land at Midwinter proceeded, along with proposals to set aside some of the proceeds of sale for additional allotment provision. At the time, the Bloor development required the relocation of some allotments lost on the site onto the Elmfield Playing Field (which would be moved). It was estimated that £800,000 would be required for new allotment provision overall (additional plot provision for Cheltenham, the development of Elmfield Playing Field into allotments and the relocation of the playing field and associated costs).

Subsequent strong local opposition prompted a re-think, although there remains a planning condition on the land to the extent that if allotment demand reaches a certain level, development of the playing field for allotments could proceed in a phased manner.

A piece of land at Priors Farm was suggested as an alternative location for the statutory designation (to replace the designation on Elmfield) and the Cheltenham & District Allotment Holders' Association indicated that they would be open to exploring this as an alternative location, especially as the 200+ plots at the Midwinter site seemed to be sufficient to meet local demand.

2013: Further Developments in Allotment Provision and Demand

A subsequent consultation in the Priors area in 2013 resulted in 80 people expressing initial interest in having an allotment in the proposed location, with significant support for the proposal and a low level of local concern or opposition.

Also in 2013, the Council formally set aside £600,000 from the proceeds of the Midwinter land specifically for new allotment provision (the amount estimated for the provision of 290 new allotments).

With take up of allotments from the waiting list not always 100% and with 20% turnover of plots per year, the Council would need to be assured of sustained future demand in the Priors area before looking to develop an allotment site. The additional housing development on the former GCHQ site is likely to generate additional demand for allotments in the area.

Also in 2013, the Council undertook to update the waiting lists for allotments to ascertain whether all applicants, some of whom had been waiting for 4 or 5 years, were still looking to have an allotment. With many people having moved or having

acquired an allotment elsewhere (or their circumstances having otherwise changed), the waiting list was reduced to approximately 300 applicants for which Cheltenham Borough Council would have a statutory responsibility for allotment provision.

In terms of continued demand for allotments, in 2012 and 2013, annual demand dropped back to 147 and 161, which was broadly equivalent to the turnover rate. This meant that Cheltenham Borough Council was closer to having a sustainable number of allotments required to meet demand. However, with 300 people on the list, many would still be waiting a number of years for an allotment.

The disparity between the north and the south of the Borough remained, with 245 people waiting for sites in the south of the Borough and a five year wait, compared with only 55 on the lists for the sites in the north (the latter representing a wait of a 6months or less).

In 2013, applicants in the south of the Borough who were deemed unlikely to get a plot at their preferred site for at least two years were approached to see whether they would want to take up the offer of an allotment in the north of the borough where they would be able to have a plot immediately.

A very small number took up the offer but overall it did not have an impact on the disparity of the wait between north and south of the Borough and the conclusion reached was that the majority of residents would not be willing to travel any significant distance to an allotment site, even if the alternative was a wait of 5 years or more for a plot.

This supported the quest for additional allotment provision in the south of Cheltenham, particularly through the planning process, with the planning application for development in Leckhampton being an example.

2014 and onwards: Next Steps

With a new allotment strategy due in 2015, a more in depth analysis of the changing scene for allotments will be required. With demand rising and falling from year to year, the Council may look to see how a more flexible approach can be achieved.

Original estimates of additional plot numbers required may be revised, with a continued focus on the geographic variation of demand.

Further residential development in the Cheltenham area may provide additional opportunities for allotment provision, both in terms of supporting a sustainable demand for plots and in terms of the green space provision for new developments.

The Green Space Development Team is already working more closely with the planning department and in discussion with developers. In 2013, 12 mini allotments opened in the grounds of a new care home facility in Windsor Street. Funded by the developer and adjacent to the Care Home car park, these plots are now all in use. They remain the property of the Care Home and are leased to local residents.