

## CITY OF PLYMOUTH

**Subject:** Allotments Service Overview

**Committee:** Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Date:** 15 November 2010

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Michael Leaves

**CMT Member:** Director for Community Services

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**Key Decision:** No.

**Ref:**

**Part:** I

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### **Executive Summary:**

The attached report is an overview of allotments within the City, current provision, future provision, projects and plans.

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### **Corporate Plan 2010 – 2013 as amended by the four priorities for the City and Council**

Plymouth's vision for 2020 - city-wide priorities:

A Healthy City: People are leading healthier lives than today  
Vulnerable and older people are leading more independent lives

A Safe and Strong City: All communities are truly empowered, valued and engaged

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### **Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land**

N/A at this stage

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### **Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management, Equalities Impact Assessment, etc.**

N/A at this stage.

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### **Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:**

That the report is noted by Customers and Communities OSP.

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### **Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:**

N/A

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### **Background papers:**

Report attached.

**Sign off:** comment must be sought from those whose area of responsibility may be affected by the decision, as follows (insert initials of Finance and Legal reps, and of HR, Corporate Property, IT and Strat. Proc. as appropriate):

Fin	TO	Leg	N/A	HR	N/A	Corp Prop	N/A	IT	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating SMT Member											

## 1. Introduction

Today people have an allotment mainly because they enjoy gardening and want to eat fresh, healthy food, often organically grown. In Plymouth at present there are just under 1400 allotment tenants on a total of 32 sites city wide.

Our allotments are tenanted by a wide cross section of our communities. Groups of friends and neighbours are also being encouraged to take up allotment plots. Teenagers are becoming interested and young children are often seen helping their parents and grandparents to cultivate, which all bodes well for the future.

Allotment gardening is a growing passion for many people in Plymouth. People from all walks of life, ages and ambitions take on an allotment every year. With increasing public interest in growing their own foodstuffs, whether it is using organic methods or using a more conventional approach allotments offer us a chance to grow our own food.

They also provide us with the opportunity to be out in the open, learning about cultivation, providing social opportunities, a sense of community through sharing growing experiences and ideas.

Allotments in Plymouth can also be a particularly good way to observe local wildlife e.g. birds, butterflies and insects. They also provide wonderful habitats for animals in areas where there is little green space.

There are 32 allotment sites in Plymouth, each with different facilities. Some sites have an allotment association, which is a committee made up of tenants who work together and with us to look after and improve their site and seek funding. Some sites have a trading hut, which is a building used by the site committee to store things like tools, seeds for allotment holders to purchase at discounted prices and often also serves as a meeting place. Some sites have plots for schools, community groups or those with special needs. Extra facilities include parking and toilets which are available on some sites.

## 2. Costs

### Allotments budget

The allotment budget is set centrally and combined with private and commercial rents is used to fund the daily maintenance of each site and officer salaries (approx 3 x FTE). There is a noticeable increase in the budget between 2008/2009 2009/2010 due to the development of Knowle Avenue Allotment Site.

Year	Full year budget
2007/2008	£44,738
2008/2009	£57,605
2009/2010	£84,799

### Charges to the tenants

A full plot costs £31.00 per annum and a half plot costs £15.50 per annum. All tenants must also pay an initial £5 for their key to the site (there is a £5 replacement fee for lost keys). Water charges are shared equally by all tenants on each site. These vary between sites and the charges range between £0.46 is the lowest charge for a half plot and £13.76 is the highest annual charge. We advocate a fair usage policy and all allotment plot holders sign up to this when taking on their tenancy.

The table below illustrates the income generated over the past 3 years through private and commercial rental and other income from key charges, plot clearances and rotovation.

Year	Private Rental income (inc element of water bills)	Commercial Rent	Other income (key charges, clearances & rotovation)
2007/2008	£29,724	£3,119	£1,175
2008/2009	£31,202	£3,427	£1,715
2009/2010	£27,125	£3,128	£1,310

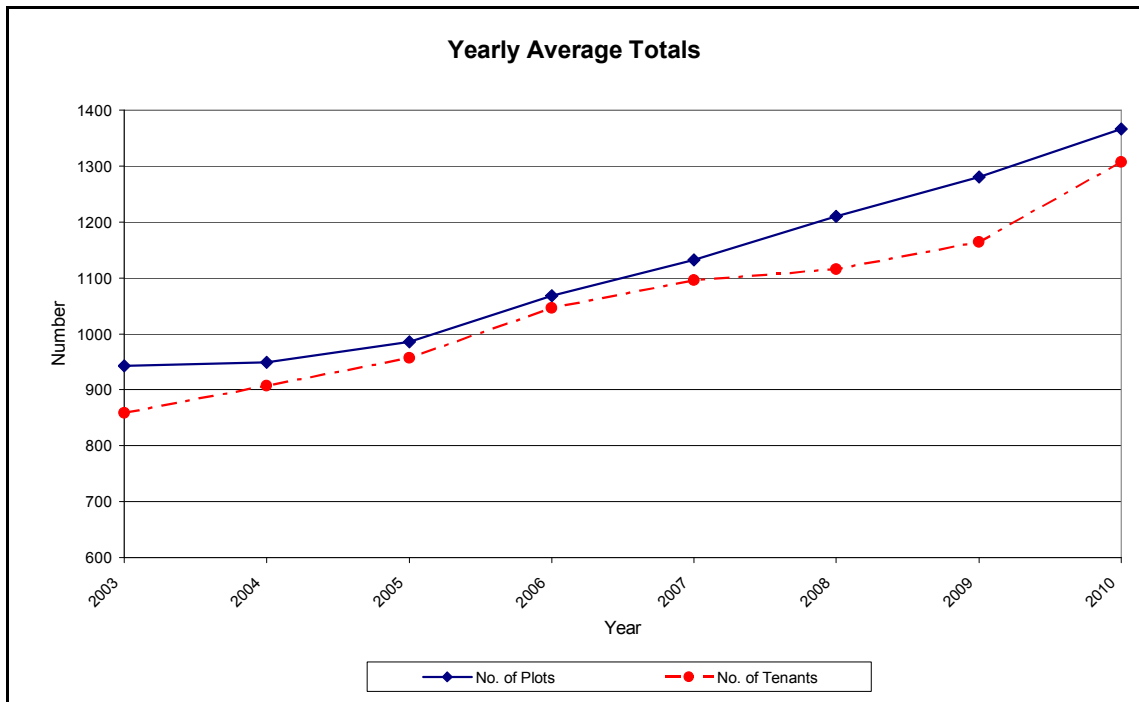
### Providing a higher quality service

To provide our allotment tenants with a higher quality of service and to provide a fast and efficient response to maintenance and repair issues, we recruited a dedicated Allotments Handyman in 2005. This has proved highly successful in that the process of plot reletting has now been streamlined and site security issues dealt with proactively. This has subsequently reduced tenant complaints and incidents of vandalism due to a high visibility presence on the allotment sites.

## **3. Allotment tenancy**

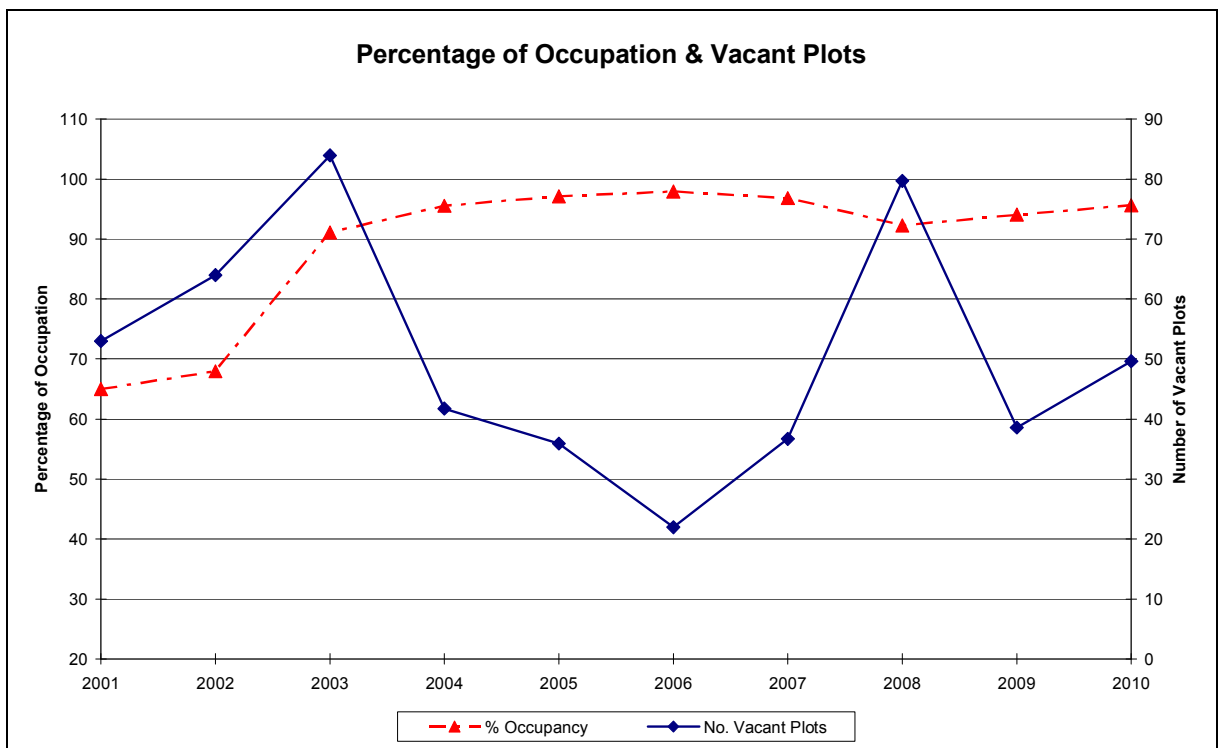
### Occupancy

For the past 8 years, we have been running at over 90% occupancy and currently have 96% occupancy on the sites. Occupancy is never at 100% because of the turn around time taken to end tenancies and prepare for new tenants.



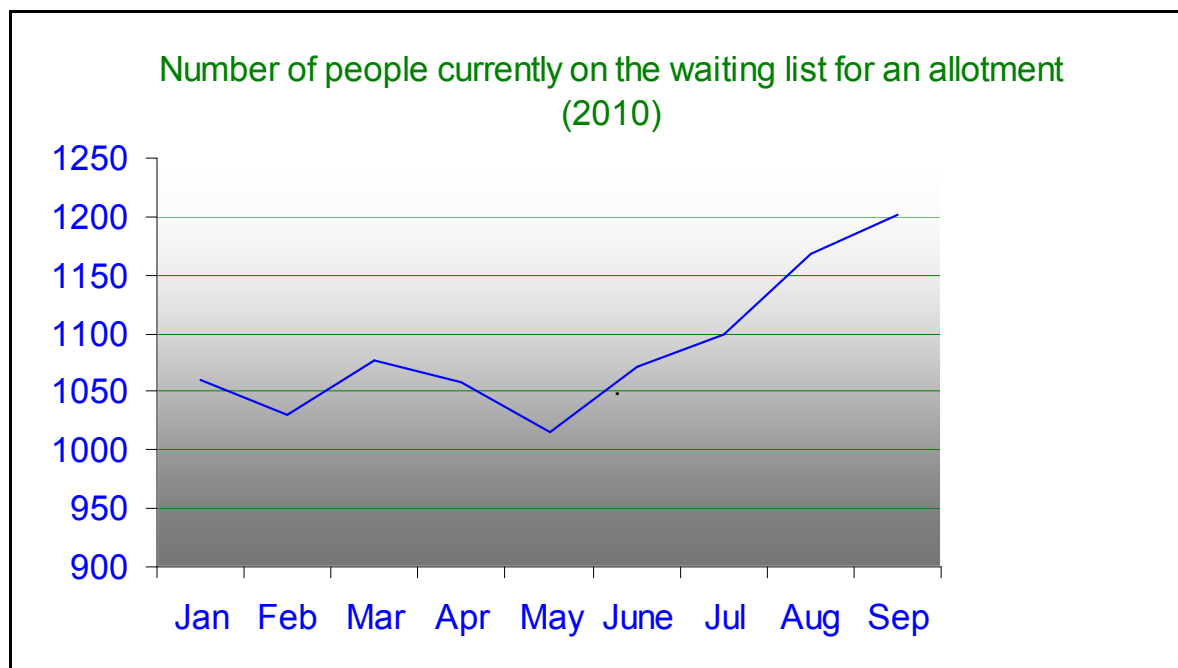
The number of available plots and number of tenants has increased proportionally over the past 8 years as illustrated above.

The graph below gives a good illustration of how the relationship between the percentage of occupancy and number of vacant plots is inversely proportional in that as the percentage of occupancy increases, so the number of vacant plots decreases.



### Allotment Waiting List

Plymouth has nearly 1400 current allotment tenants in Plymouth, this graph below shows that as of September 2010 we have 1201 people on the waiting list for an allotment.



### Allotment associations

There are 13 allotment associations running in Plymouth covering 14 allotment sites. These are run by volunteers and we arrange quarterly meeting with the association representatives to give an overview of the service and to update them on any issues and also to give the associations a platform to talk to each other and to air their views and issues. Each association promotes itself on their own sites and joining the association is not mandatory if a tenant takes an allotment on the site. Five Allotment Associations also run trading huts on their sites; they are all staffed by volunteers. This allows growers to purchase basic supplies or order seeds and to exchange knowledge. These trading huts are not exclusive to allotment association members.

Trading Huts are available on the following sites – Blunts Lane (Derriford), Brockley Road (Laira), Swarthmore (Central Park), Stoggy Lane (Plympton) and West Park Terrace (West Park).

## **4. Recent Projects**

### Regeneration of existing sites

Since taking on the allotments service, Parks Services have undertaken regeneration of the following sites:

Site	Resulting No. of tenants
Mays and Frys	41
Embankment Road resolving contamination situation.	40
Swarthmore	21
Penlee	16
Derwent Avenue	9
Knowle Avenue	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>167</b>

#### Increasing Accessibility

In order for the allotments service to increase it's accessibility to all areas of the community, in the past 5 years or so, we have undertaken a series of adaptations on suitable sites including; raised beds, car parking closer to the sites, gravel and tarmac pathways and handrails on steeper paths and steps.

#### Knowle Avenue Allotment Site

This is Plymouth's newest allotment site it has approximately 40 allotment plots and one school plot. These have been available from April 2010. One third of the site has been leased to Wolseley Trust for the use of a social enterprise partnership project. The partnership project key stakeholders are PLUS, Wolseley Trust and Plymouth City Council. PLUS is a social enterprise that offers a range of training and recruitment services, and also direct employment in their own manufacturing and mobility equipment businesses.

The aim of this new project is to create a local market garden, training centre for PLUS clients, a community growing scheme and an opportunity for local residents to learn about growing. The project will comprise of initiatives such as raised beds, composting toilets, a training centre, woodland walk and poly tunnels.

#### 'Diggin It'

'Diggin It' is lottery funding scheme based at Penlee Allotments in the Stoke Ward of Plymouth. It's main aim is to help get socially disadvantaged and vulnerable people back into society by providing horticultural training and qualifications in a safe, trusting, familiar environment where social and life skills can be built and developed to aid people to build personal confidence and move onwards and upwards with their lives.

The project also works with schools taking groups of children and providing horticultural and botanical education linked in with the current curriculum. Facilities and initiatives on the site include; raised beds, poly tunnels, fruit trees and cut flowers, a farm shop, outdoor classroom, composting toilet, wildlife pond and bee hives. The project has recently been awarded further funding to enhance its outreach programme. The aim is to promote the project to more schools and to enhance classroom learning with outdoor experience. They also offer teacher training and inset day packages.

#### Half sized plots instead of full size plots

We were finding the traditional large allotment was too much for people and they were unable to keep on top of cultivation and lots of people were handing back their plots. In 2003 the allotment service ran a pilot to introduce half plots with the aim of reducing the waiting list and enabling more people to grow their own food. This pilot has since been expanded due to customer feedback and demand to incorporate all sites and any newly vacated full size plots are now turned into two half plots. We have received very positive feedback from our new tenants over the plot size and the day to day management of this. Typically a half plot measures 128 square metres.

#### Website update

The website has recently been updated with a comprehensive map that highlights the location in the city of all of our sites. Information on all of the sites and a 'Frequently Asked Questions' page has been included to ensure that website users and local residents can access information readily.

### **5. Future Projects**

#### Central Park Action Plan

Amendments to some of the allotment sites within Central Park are currently being consulted on as part of the wider improvements to Central Park. The consultation is being led by Planning Services and the master plan has recently gone public with consultation dates for residents to feedback on the plans are scheduled during the end of October and November.

#### Allotment Strategy

Parks Services are programmed to produce an Allotments Strategy to build on the aims and objectives listed in the adopted Green Space Strategy. In this we will be looking at the key stakeholder views and align the service and strategy with best practice along with users needs. This is scheduled for 2012.

### **6. Funding**

#### Section 106

Allotments are listed as part of the green space tariff in the section 106 developer contributions within the Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document. These funds can be used for capital investments to help develop new site or improve the capacity and function of existing sites.

#### Capital receipts from sale of land

These are small in number. Recently a small amount of allotment land had been sold as part of Gdynia Way transport scheme expansion project and a capital receipt has been received to be used in the allotments service. These funds can be used for capital investments to help develop new sites or improve the capacity and function of existing sites.

## **7. Benchmarking**

Parks Services regularly benchmarks the allotment service against other authorities to ensure it is delivering an excellent service and to also adopt current best practices. Annex 1 is an example of our benchmarking against Cardiff City Council undertaken during August 2010.