

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 22 October 2024

Report Title

Allotments Self-Management Update 2024

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Andrew Bramidge, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report provides the Improving Places Select Commission with an update on the progress towards the self-management of allotments in Rotherham, through:

- An update on the finalisation of the lease between the Rotherham Allotments Alliance (RAA) Ltd and the Council, and
- Progress of the work of Rotherham Allotment Alliance as set out in their Annual Report for 2023

Recommendations

Improving Places Select Commission is asked to note the contents of the RAA report and progress towards the lease and comment on any arising issues.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 – RAA Annual Report 2023
Appendix 2 – Carbon Impact Assessment Form

Background Papers

Improving Places Select Commission - Allotments Self-Managements Update 2022

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Allotments Self-Management Update 2024

1. Background

- 1.1 At the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision-Making meeting on the 9th July 2018, Members agreed to adopt a new vision and specification for allotments in which the Borough Council approved the transfer of the majority of Council-owned allotments to a new borough wide self-management body and to establish a Community Benefit Society for this purpose.
- 1.2 Following the transfer of the allotment management responsibility to the Rotherham Allotments Alliance (Ltd) (RAA) from 1st January 2020, updates have been provided to Improving Places Select Commission, the most recent being 13th December 2022.
- 1.3 Officers were asked to provide a further update which was originally to take place in March 2024 to coincide with the publication of the RAA Annual Report. This was subsequently rescheduled to October.

2. Key Issues

RAA Annual Report

- 2.1 The RAA provided its annual report to calendar year end, to the Council in line with its service level agreement requirements. The 2023 annual report is attached at appendix one.
 - 2.1.1 A summary of the key achievements and areas for improvement identified in the latest RAA annual report are as follows:
 - 2.1.2 Key Achievements:
 - Site Occupancy Key Performance Indicator: An impressive average of 95% occupancy across allotment sites, with many sites achieving 100% occupancy. This reflects strong community interest and utilisation of allotment spaces.
 - Engagement Initiatives: The introduction of society and tenant forum meetings has fostered better communication and collaboration between tenants and the RAA.
 - Community Outreach: The RAA's presence at the Rotherham Show received positive feedback, enhancing community visibility and engagement.
 - Leadership Development: Key roles within the RAA have been filled, strengthening the governance and operational capacity of the organisation.
 - 2.1.3 Areas for Improvement:
 - Infrastructure Investment: There is a need for investment to improve allotment infrastructure, including pathways and shared areas, as well as to increase the number of lettable plots. Enhancing

infrastructure will not only improve accessibility but also the overall experience for allotment holders.

- Stakeholder Engagement: Further engagement with society and tenant groups is necessary to enhance representation and ensure that diverse voices within the community are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

Progress on the Community Asset Transfer of Allotment Sites

- 2.2 Since the last IPSC report on 13th December 2022, progress has continued with the head lease and sub leases from the Borough Council to the RAA. It is recognised that the whole process has taken longer than expected due to unexpected complications in relation to deeds. There are some issues yet to be resolved in relation to Hartley Lane Allotment site.
- 2.2.1 All other issues previously reported have been resolved including the handover of the control of tenancies for animal grazing plots from the Council's Estates section to the RAA. The income generated from these plots since January 2020 has been reconciled and passed to the RAA.
- 2.2.2 Following the resolution of the issues at Hartley Lane there is an expectation that the lease will be finalised in early 2025. Positively, the management and operation of the allotments has not been affected by the delay and the RAA and Council officers have worked to ensure that the spirit of the transfer arrangement has been upheld.

Allotment Administrator

- 2.3 An Allotment Administrator has been seconded to the RAA from the Council. This was initially for a 15-month period but has now become a permanent agreement. All costs relating to this post are repaid to the Council by the RAA.

Service Level Agreement (SLA)

- 2.4 The RAA SLA and associated Key Performance Indicators (performance against these detailed in the annual report) has been in place since January 2020. The term of the SLA has now expired, therefore this has been updated and will be signed by both parties once the lease has been completed. This new SLA is expected to run for 5 years at which point it will be reviewed.

Capital Investment

- 2.5 Under the arrangement agreed in 2020 as part of the transfer of management, an allocation of £100,000 Capital funding was provided to improve several allotment sites for the benefit of their tenants. This funding was managed by the Council's Green Spaces team with RAA identifying works and making requests against this fund as appropriate. This capital investment is now complete.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 This is an update report. Members are asked to note progress made and comment on any issues arising.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 This is an update report. There is no proposal for consultation.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 This report is for information only.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, which is for information only. The allotments are operating on a self-financing basis. Costs for the seconded Allotments Assistant are recharged to the RAA and are funded by income collected by the RAA. The approved capital budget of £100k to provide infrastructure improvements has now been spent.
- 6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The Council, through the Green Spaces service, retains a legacy role as the Statutory Allotments Authority function under the Allotments Act. This function cannot be transferred to the RAA and must remain with the Local Authority in non-parish areas.
- 7.2 Other than the above there are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 Human Resources must be consulted for advice on any potential implications of staffing.
- 8.2 All relevant consultation with trade unions and staff should be undertaken before the decision-making report is submitted. Views received should be summarised in the report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 While the minimum age requirement for holding an allotment is 18, the RAA recognises the importance of engaging with children and young people in gardening and horticultural activities. By fostering early interest in these areas, the RAA will cultivate a sense of responsibility, environmental stewardship and community involvement among younger generations.

9.2 The RAA will explore the desirability of creating inclusive allotment initiatives specially tailored to meet the needs of Vulnerable Adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The RAA has an Equality, Diversity, Social and Child Protection policy which is provided on their website and the content of this policy is currently being updated.

10.2 The Rotherham Allotment Alliance is committed within its own company rules to the following statement: "The Rotherham Allotments Alliance will provide, promote and develop allotments in Rotherham so that they offer people of all backgrounds and abilities opportunities to enjoy gardening in safe, secure, accessible and environmentally sustainable surroundings. In doing so, it will make efficient use of available resources to ensure that the service is financially self-sufficient whilst remaining affordable to those who want to use it."

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 The management and operation of allotments play a critical role in the Council's target to be net carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030 and the aim for the entire borough of Rotherham to achieve the same status by 2040, as they contribute to carbon sequestration, biodiversity enhancement, and the promotion of sustainable practices.

11.2 The ability to grow food locally and the community of food sharing for surplus produce, which is formed around allotments, will all contribute to an overall reduction in food miles and food waste.

11.3 Consultation with the Climate Change Team has taken place and a Carbon Impact Assessment has been completed which can be found at Appendix two.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 None

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Legal Risks

- Risk: Potential legal challenges related to the transfer of the allotment management responsibilities or disputes over leases, particularly concerning missing deeds or unregistered land.
- Mitigation: Ensure comprehensive legal reviews are conducted prior to finalising any agreements. Maintaining open communication with legal and the RAA to address emerging issues promptly will help minimise this risk.

13.2 Financial Risks

- Risk: The RAA may face financial challenges if income from allotment rentals does not meet expectations or if costs exceed budgeted amounts.
- Mitigation: Conduct regular financial monitoring and analysis to identify trends and adjust financial forecasts and budgets as necessary.

13.3 Community Engagement Risks

- Risk: A lack of engagement from the community may lead to dissatisfaction or reduced participation in allotment activities.
- Mitigation: Foster community involvement by gaining feedback from allotment holders and local residents. Organise community events and workshops to promote the benefits of allotment gardening and encourage wider participation.

13.4 Human Resource Risks

- Risk: Dependence on a small number of staff or volunteers can lead to burnout or turnover, affecting the operation of the RAA.
- Mitigation: Develop a succession plan to ensure continuity in leadership and operations. Encourage volunteer participation and provide training to ensure a broader base of support for the RAA's activities.

13.5 Access and Inclusion Risks

- Risk: Failure to ensure that allotments are accessible and inclusive for all community members, particularly those with disabilities or from marginalised groups.
- Mitigation: Conduct accessibility audits of allotment sites and implement necessary improvements. Engage with diverse community groups to ensure that allotments meet the needs of all potential users.

Accountable Officer(s)

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