



Fact Sheet

Widening the benefits of allotments

Details of organisations mentioned in this factsheet are listed in *Useful Contacts*.

To widen the benefits of allotments, there will have to be compromises made by both the ploholders and the committee; you don't get money for nothing! If you are not happy or able to make the compromises, forget about applying for grants now.

There are two ways of widening the benefits of allotments:

- increasing access to the public, through educational trails, community gardens or buildings, and
- providing services, in the form of training and therapeutic gardening.

These may require upgrading of existing facilities, e.g. toilets, shelter, improved haulingways, car parking, notice boards, landscaping and clearance works.

Gardening groups may also require secure tool storage, improved water facilities, polytunnels, disability access plots, a gardening library and improved security.



One way to widen the benefits of allotments is to provide community buildings – in this case a 'crafts shed'

Many facilities will have a direct benefit to ploholders as well, so flag this up to members that raise objections to increased access.

Increasing access to the public

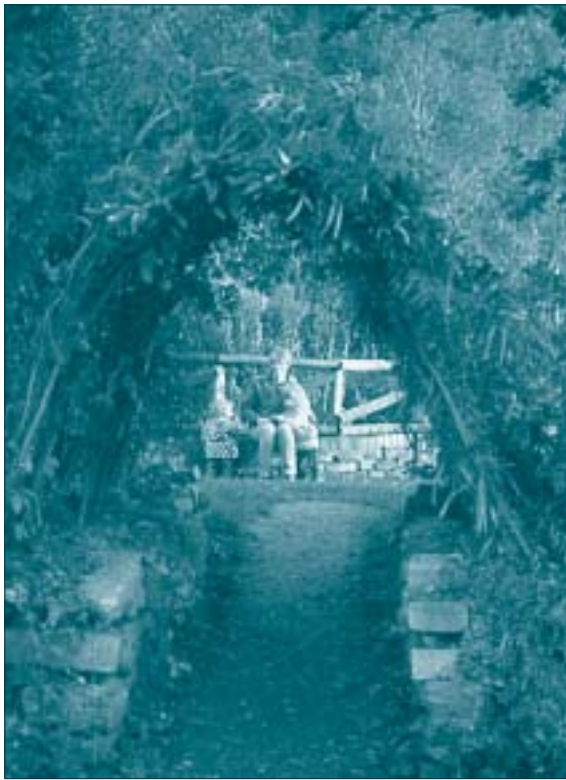
A number of grant bodies are negative about allotments because they regard the fences around sites as excluding other people in the community. Landfill Tax Credit Schemes and other 'open space' grant schemes state that you must provide a public amenity that can be accessed by the public – usually on a 'drop in' basis and usually on two days of the week or more.

Many ploholders believe that allotments must be fenced and locked, to keep out the vandals and thieves. Some allotments have public footpaths however and still survive, vandals can often get over the fence (and enjoy the challenge) and fences may provide the cover for thieves to do their work undetected.

Increasing access to the public may decrease ploholders' privacy and fouling by dogs or damage by vandals. On the up side, it may attract more ploholders (another revenue raiser), the extra presence can deter vandals and provide extra surveillance, and some ploholders may welcome more social interaction and public appreciation of their gardening skills.

Allotment access can be controlled in the same way as a park, whereby an appointed ploholder(s) (either those who visit the site frequently or a rota system) opens and closes the site at a specific time (e.g. 10am to 5pm or just weekends).





A well-maintained allotment site can offer the public an opportunity to explore, appreciate and learn about gardening from an intriguing and diverse range of working examples. Four allotment sites were included in the National Gardens Scheme in 2004 and were very popular with visitors.

Educational trails

An educational and visual walking trail could be built into the design of the allotments, to enhance the public's experience. This is an under-used area in grant applications, which could actually make a project more fundable because it is innovative.

One method is to plant and plan the borders of plots adjoining public access routes. Additional benefits of gentle exercise and sociability could also be flagged up in a grant proposal. There are also the educational benefits of chatting with experienced gardeners, and interpretation boards could be provided.

At **Archfield Allotments, London**, the public footpath running down the middle of the allotments is a popular route for Jewish families enjoying a Sunday stroll, a development welcomed by the association.

Plot holders may well be prepared to give up the first two feet of their plot to flowers or fruit, if it contributes to overall site improvements. Dwarf fruit trees could be planted in these borders, to create an orchard permissible under allotment law and provide a degree of privacy to plot holders.

The **May Lane Allotments, Birmingham** holds an annual competition for the best plot border facing the main access route. As a result, the route is lined with entertaining sculptures, rockeries and impressive floral displays.

Leeds Organic Growers planted a wildlife walk through Headingly Station Allotments, with native hedging and nature sculptures.

Moulsecoombe Allotments, Brighton planted a trail of fruit bushes that children are free to 'graze' on whilst following the trail. Children are provided with baskets for picking fruit.

The downside of this concept is, of course, the distraction for busy gardeners, especially as visitors are most likely to come on a dry day, when gardeners have lots to do on the plot. Use of the educational trail could be kept to certain times of day or specific, more 'communal' parts of the site. There may be a risk of visitors straying into 'private' areas.

Gardens

A section of unlettable plots, e.g. plots that are unsuitable for food growing, could be developed into a flower garden or wildlife area with public access. Contact FCFCG for the Community Garden Starter Pack and other publications.

Themed gardens can provide added interest, e.g. a garden of dye plants or a medieval kitchen garden, or herb gardens and fruit bushes for an edible element.

Gardens are always therapeutic but disabled people and their carers may particularly appreciate the added social benefits of a garden on a busy site. If you

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Studio3Arts and Keats Avenue Allotment

Children and BTCV volunteers working on an arts project together

Community Campus '87 Ltd, Cleveland are converting derelict plots into vegetable beds, a wildlife garden, outdoor craft area, raised beds, composting area, plant propagation area and toilets. Once capital works are completed the site will offer training to young people and organic produce will supply a local lunch club.

North Lincolnshire SOVA Volunteer Scheme are renovating a double plot to offer training to referrals from the local youth offending team.

Sefton Park Allotments, Liverpool are developing an educational plot in partnership with the charity 'Local Solutions', providing certified training for people with a range of needs and ages, from stroke victims to wheelchair users. The resultant plot will have mini-plots with greenhouses for older gardeners and areas for communal use and training.

Three Rivers Learning Forum, Hertfordshire are setting up a community gardening project, promoting use of allotments by offering training to residents who have little or no gardening experience. They will run a series of taster sessions, short courses and 5-week courses on plots across 9 allotments in the district.

Cardiff MIND, as part of the 'Mind-Diggers' project, which set up gardening training opportunities for people with mental health problems, Cardiff MIND are renovating a plot to provide a training facility with polytunnel, fencing, pagoda and shed.

Walnut Avenue Allotment Association, Bury offer NVQs in horticulture (Level 1 and Level 2) to people with a spectrum of learning difficulties.

Pilkington Allotment Society, St Helens have a schools allotment with polytunnel and toddlers plot in partnership with SureStart, and plots for a local day centre for disabled people.

Bullroyd Allotments Association, Bradford are employing a gardening tutor, with knowledge of minority languages, to run short courses for new gardeners (free of charge). Also offering plot clearance; promotional leaflets; composting toilet; seeds, tools and compost for tutored groups.

Leyburn Road Allotments, Blackburn's 'Dads Dig' project is organised by SureStart for fathers of single parent families to socialise with their children. There is also a 'green gym' on the site, providing gentle exercise through gardening to people wanting to increase their fitness levels, and a schools educational plot.



wish to consider people with special needs in the design of your garden, e.g. by including plants valued for their texture and scent or providing access to people with disabilities, contact The Sensory Trust or Thrive and see ARI factsheet *Allotments for All*.

The garden could provide extra educational, visual and wildlife benefits if you plant borders of flowers that attract beneficial insects or the creation of habitats such as a pond or meadow. Contact your local wildlife trust or English Nature for advice on wildlife gardens. Hazel and willow coppice can provide useful bean poles and windbreak material for allotment holders.

Buildings with public access

Meeting rooms are more likely to be eligible for grants if they provide some benefits to the wider community, e.g. if made available to other community groups for hire at a reasonable rate (which can also provide some funds). Meeting huts may also provide shelter and a hot drink for visitors (which may be another fundraiser), and further information about the site in the form of photos or information panels.

Providing services to people in the community

An increasing number of groups are taking on allotment plots and gaining specific benefits in the form of training and informal learning, sociable interaction or therapy.

Setting up such projects can be a lengthy process and requires the sustained involvement and commitment, sometimes of several project leaders. Projects often



require ongoing grant funding and may falter when all obvious grant sources have been exhausted.

Generally it is the group, not the association, who take overall responsibility for the project, with the other ploholders providing occasional support, e.g. in the form of summer watering or gardening expertise.

It is important that the other ploholders are kept informed of project developments and their concerns taken into consideration.

For more information see ARI factsheet *Project Allotment* and the *Good Sites Guide*.



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