

# URBAN ALLOTMENT GARDENS GOVERNANCE REGIMES

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## HISTORY AND DEFINITION

Salzburg Summer School – COST Action TU1201

Module 1: Planning and Policy - Section A

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# General Definition

- ❑ An allotment garden is a piece of land; sizes vary but are usually 250 sqm which has been provided by the town/city council for rent.
- ❑ It is used for growing fruit, vegetables and ornamental plants by the plot holder and his/her family.
- ❑ There are also plots that are used for keeping poultry and pigeons and on certain locations for bee-keeping.

# Definition

## England and Wales

□ An allotment garden is defined in Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, CHAPTER 36 and in section 22 of the Act of 1922

"an allotment not exceeding 40 poles (201m) in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetables or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family."



# Definition

## Scotland

- Allotments Acts of 1892, 1922 and 1950 and the Land Settlement Act 1919, “There is no definition of the term "allotment" other than by its size, a person can only be tenant of an allotment or allotments to a maximum total area of one acre
- the 1892 Act envisaged an allotment holder keeping farm animals on the allotment
- The 1922 Act introduced the concept of the allotment garden
  - “This is a smaller area of ground to be used mainly for the cultivation of vegetables for consumption by the allotment holder and his/her family”

# Definition

## Northern Ireland

### □ Allotments Act 1932 CHAPTER 17

- “No allotment shall exceed one-eighth of an acre (506 sqm) in extent
- No person shall become the tenant of more than one allotment under this Act, nor shall any allotment be let to a person who is apart from the provisions of this Act in occupation of land to the extent of one-eighth of an acre or to any greater extent
- In the selection of tenants the local authority shall, as between tenants who are otherwise equally suitable, give preference to applicants who, by reason of unemployment or the number of persons depending upon them, or for other reasons, are in poor circumstances;
- a person shall not, except with the consent in writing of the local authority assign, sub-let or part with the possession of an allotment



# A Brief History of Allotments in England

## □ What is an allotment?

- In the UK, allotments are small parcels of land rented to individuals usually for the purpose of growing food crops. There is no set standard size but the most common plot is 10 poles/rods, an ancient measurement equivalent to 302 square yards or 253 square metres.

## □ Allotment Land Ownership

- The land itself is often owned by local government (parish or town councils) or self-managed and owned by the allotment holders through an association. Some allotments are owned by the Church of England.

# A Brief History of Allotments in England

## cont.

### □ Statutory or Temporary Allotments

- The majority of allotment sites are owned by local authorities and may be termed 'statutory' or 'temporary'
- 'statutory' allotment land is land of which the freehold or very long lease is vested in the allotments authority, and which was either originally purchased for allotments or subsequently appropriated for allotment use.
- 'Temporary' allotment land is rented by an allotments authority or owned by the authority but ultimately destined for some other use.
- The designation of a local authority site as 'temporary' or 'statutory' is particularly important since, under section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925, a local authority must seek permission from the Secretary of State before selling or changing the use of a 'statutory' site.
- The local authority must satisfy the Secretary of State that adequate provision has been made for allotment holders who are displaced by the sale of the site.



# A Brief History of Allotments in England

## cont.

### □ Allotment Rental Costs

- Rental costs vary across the country.
- Some pay as little as £8.00 pa and others £80.00.
- Most tend to be in the region of £20 to £40 pa often with discounts for the unwaged, retired etc.

# A Brief History of Allotments in England cont.

## □ Original Allotments

- Its history goes back over a thousand years to when the Saxons would clear a field from woodland which would be held in common.

## □ 7<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century

- Land was being enclosed and more and more people began to live in cities and large towns.
- This move from a subsistence economy to the more modern industrial system was increasing the numbers of the poor who, without the benefits of a social security system, could literally starve for lack of food or the land on which to grow their own food.



# A Brief History of Allotments in England cont.

- ❑ Enclosures under the public General Enclosure Acts of 1836, 1840 and 1845
  - ❑ By the 19th Century the General Enclosure Acts of 1836 and 1840 made it possible for landowners to enclose land without reference to parliament.
  - ❑ The General Enclosure Act of 1845 and later amendments attempted to provide better protection for the interests of small proprietors and the public. This was enacted in no small part due to fear of civil unrest and revolt and provided for land to be set aside for allotment use.

# A Brief History of Allotments in England cont.

- ❑ The act required that the Commissioners should make provision for the landless poor in the form of "field gardens" limited to a quarter of an acre.
- ❑ The act failed to actually provide much land for the use of the poor. Of the 615,000 acres enclosed only around 2,200 acres were actually to become allotments.
- ❑ The urban allotment development was beginning to emerge, as evidenced by the "guinea gardens" brought into use on the outskirts of Birmingham by the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- ❑ These however gradually disappeared as the outward spread of the city led to them being closed and the land used for building purposes.



# A Brief History of Allotments in England

## cont.

### □ The Allotment Act 1887

- Allotments and Cottage Gardens Compensation for Crops Act 1887 obliged local authorities to provide allotments if there was a demand for them. The local authorities resisted complying with the act and revision was required to strengthen the act.

### □ Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908

- It imposed responsibilities on parish, urban district and borough councils to provide allotments and further legislation consolidated previous acts and resolved various anomalies.
- To the Victorians allotments were a productive use of time keeping the poor away from the evils of drink and providing wholesome food for a workforce housed in tenements and high density terraced housing without gardens.

# A Brief History of Allotments in England

## cont.

### □ The WWI 1914 -1918

- During the First World War Germany's blockade caused food shortages which increased the demand for allotments.
- One source of land suitable for allotments but not large enough for general agricultural use was the land owned by railway companies. These parcels of land were often allotted to the railway workers and this is the reason that you will often see allotments by railway lines today.
- Following the WWI there was a decrease in demand for allotments and this, combined with increased demand for building land for housing reduced the number of allotments.



# A Brief History of Allotments in England cont.

## □ The Second World War

- Britain was faced food shortages because of the blockaded.
- Even public parks were pressed into use for food production.
- The famous '**Dig for Victory**' campaign exhorted and educated the public to produce their own food and save shipping needed for war materials.
- Food rationing kept the demand for allotments and home grown foods high until the end of the war.

# A Brief History of Allotments in England cont.

## □ The Allotment Act 1950

- The result of demands for more and more building land saw the re-establishment of the Allotments Advisory Body which in 1949 recommended a scale of provision of 4 acres per 1,000 head of population. This resulted in the Allotment Act of 1950.

## □ Decline in Allotment Numbers

- Following the peak of 1,400,000 in 1943 there was a sharp decline in allotment provision to around 500,00 in the 1970s.
- The decline continued during the 1970s but at a much slower rate.
- During the 1970s there was a huge upsurge in interest in self-sufficiency and home food production epitomised by the television series *The Good Life* which ran from 1975 to 1978.



# A Brief History of Allotments in England cont.

## □ Current Situation

- By 1996 there were around 297,000 plots available and
- Since then the rate of decline appears to have decreased whilst at the same time there has again been an upsurge of interest in growing food crops.
- Concerns about genetic modification of foodstuffs, chemical pollution and contamination of food and the desire for the freshness are main reasons for increased demand for allotment lands.

Ref. [www.allotment-garden.org](http://www.allotment-garden.org)

# Allotment Gardens' Actors

- City/Town Council, Municipality, Parish
  - Urban planners/designers, policy makers/MPs, allotment officers,
- Allotment Societies
  - National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG)
- Public/private landlords
- Allotment gardeners/plot holders/tenants



# Planning & Management Tools

- Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908  
(CHAPTER 36, section 22 of the Act of 1922)
- Allotment Charter
- Allotment Action Plan
- Allotment Guidelines
- Allotment Disposal Guidance

# Protection

- The provision of allotments is a statutory service for local authorities i.e. City/Town Councils
- Responsibilities of councils are
  - to provide sites that are fit for purpose
  - to advertise allotments
  - provide a tenant agreement with compensation should the council wish to close a site



# Thresholds, standards and expectations

- Local authorities are required to ensure that enough allotment plots are supplied to satisfy demand.
- This requirement is underpinned by the national standard for allotments provision (as recommended by the National Association for Allotments and Leisure Gardeners) which is 15 plots per 1,000 households
- This equates to 1.56sqm/person
- The second factor is determined by how far people have to reasonably travel

- Allotment Charter
- Allotment Action Plan
- Allotment Guidelines



# Conservation Status

- Gardens and allotments as habitats are not covered by legislation. However, some of the species that may use them do have protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act. For example, it is illegal to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built

# Summary of local provision

- The Canterbury District has approximately 61,670 households and 753 allotment plots spread across 14 sites.
- Based on national guidance there is a shortage of approximately 195 plots, with 145 in Whitstable and 50 in Herne Bay. Canterbury City currently has no shortfalls in provision.
- As of January 2013, the number of people on the waiting lists per 100 plots is 10 in Canterbury, 37 in Herne Bay, and 169+ in Whitstable.
- This indicates demand is higher than supply which correlates with the shortage of supply, particularly in Whitstable, which exceeds the national average.
- Waiting list can be unreliable due to people adding their name to several lists, people no longer requiring them and not removing their names, or waiting lists being closed due to demand. However they do remain an indicator of demand.
- Consideration has been given in the draft Local Plan in terms of extending existing sites where possible and catering for new sites in the larger housing developments.



# Opportunities and partnerships

- There are a number of opportunities in enhancing and developing allotments we work in partnership with the Allotment Associations and Allotment forum.
- In addition potential new sites are being allocated in the Local Plan and we are working to ensure a “Canterbury Standard” is adopted by developers in providing new allotment sites.

# Management

There are three allotment management structures within the Canterbury District:

1. Directly managed – the council is responsible for site management including waiting lists, plot inspection, setting and collection of rents and general maintenance.
2. Leased – allotment association manages one or more sites. Association is responsible for managing waiting lists, setting and collection of rents and maintenance. Associations may be responsible for larger maintenance issues and applying for external funding.
3. Partnership – association collects rents of which it keeps 10% for investing in the site. The council is responsible for maintenance although in practice the associations may carry out general day-to-day upkeep.



# Principle allotment legislation

1. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 – placed a duty on authorities to provide sufficient allotments due to demand. It also enables local authorities to purchase land compulsorily in order to provide allotments.
2. The Allotments Act 1922 – provided allotment holders with a security of tenure and greater compensation should their tenancy be terminated. It also specified that plots should be mostly used for growing food.
3. The Allotments Act 1925 – established the need for local authorities to incorporate allotment provision into town planning.
4. The Allotments Act 1950 – made changes to rental charges and introduced a minimum period of notice to quit of 12 months and compensation payable to allotment holders should the land be needed for other purposes by local authorities.



A wire mesh cage is filled with various objects. In the foreground, there are several wooden spools of different sizes, some with multiple holes. A wooden lattice structure is also visible. To the right, there is a ball of white, fibrous material, possibly wool or cotton. The cage is made of a silver-colored wire mesh. The background is a wooden wall.

THANK YOU