



Royston Town Council

Allotment Strategy



2018 - 2023

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ALLOTMENT STRATEGY 2018 - 2023

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1 PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

1.1 This allotment strategy has been developed for allotment sites provided by Royston Town Council (either directly or through devolved management), not for privately owned sites.

1.2 The overall objective of this strategy is to increase the ability and opportunity for people to cultivate allotment plots in Royston. The strategy seeks through its targets and initiatives to optimise the use of allotments for existing and potential plot holders, identify needs and meet demand.

1.3 This document provides a framework for the next five years to develop and manage allotments in partnership with the users, and provides a focus on five main target areas.

1. Ensuring sufficient allotments
2. Promoting allotment gardening
3. Encouraging sustainability
4. Providing good administration
5. Maintaining adequate resources

2 INTRODUCTION

The provision of allotments by local authorities is a statutory duty. Royston Town Council will continue to provide and promote allotments not only because of this statutory requirement but because allotment gardening can make a valuable contribution to the town's sustainability by providing health, social, economic and environmental benefits. These can be summarised as

- Low cost fresh food production for the family
- Promotion of healthy affordable diets
- Healthy recreational activity
- The opportunity to maintain and develop skills
- Social contact and as a contribution to community spirit
- Better partnership working
- Reduction in food miles

Allotments are a valuable green sustainable open space within the urban environment. They contribute to the retention of traditional skills and wisdom as well as being highly beneficial to the wildlife of the area.

Current house building trends are towards smaller gardens, as pressure increases to optimise building land, and some householders have no individual garden. These circumstances disproportionately disadvantage those on lower incomes. Allotments provide an opportunity to adjust this imbalance.

3 CURRENT PROVISIONS

3.1 The Site

Royston Town Council operates one allotment site at Coombes Hole Royston

The site is currently divided into 125 x 5 rod plots (125 sq m) and 4 x 2 ½ rod plots (62.5 sq m).

The site is accessed by three lockable gates and has secure fencing along the railway boundary and the boundary with Coombes Hole.

There are currently 7 water stand pipes; the use of water is included within the rent. There is a porta-cabin which is used as a club house and a shop, and a storage cabin. There is an electricity supply to the club house.

3.2 Management

The Allotment site is currently managed on behalf of the Town Council by the Town Clerk and Administration Assistant. The Town Clerk and Administration Assistant deal with day to day administration of the Allotments, including:

- Enquiries from prospective tenants
- Waiting list
- Letting of plots and arranging new tenancy agreements
- Collecting and administering rents
- Administering tenancies
- Inspecting individual plots as request by the Allotment Association
- Regular health and safety inspections and general site inspections
- Resolving disputes and dealing with complaints
- Managing alterations and improvement works
- Servicing meetings between RAGA and the Town Council

3.3 Liaison with tenants

Members of the Town Council are invited to attend RAGA's AGM which is held in September each year. This gives tenants and councillors the opportunity to discuss matters of common interest.

3.4 Self management

It is the policy of the Town Council to encourage allotment holders to participate in the running of the site.

3.5 Allotment Association

Plot-holders have formed an association known as Royston Allotment and Gardens Association (RAGA). The Association is affiliated to the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. The Town Council is also a member of this Society. Currently over 80% of plot-holders are members of RAGA. The Association acts in the interests of all plot-holders. The Town Council supports RAGA. The Association works closely with the Council and officers and meets with town council members once a year. The main objectives of RAGA are:

- To promote the interests of plot holders
- Organise bulk purchase of compost, manure and seeds
- Manage a shop on site
- Organise an open day
- To provide an independent forum for discussion and dissemination of information
- Offer tips on cultivation and promote good practice
- Encourage initiatives to protect members from theft, damage and trespass
- Access sources of funding for improvements to the site e.g. compost toilet

3.6 Site Maintenance

With the agreement of the Town Council the Allotment Association carries out much of the day to day maintenance of the site

- Maintaining pathways and hedges
- Inspecting plots on behalf of the council
- Showing prospective tenants plots
- Providing the council with electric and water meter readings
- Maintaining gates and padlocks
- Removing rubbish from vacant plots
- Repairing taps

4 DEMANDS FOR ALLOTMENTS

Royston has lost several allotment sites over the years and now has just the one site. At the same time the number of dwellings in the town has dramatically increased and the average size of garden per dwelling has significantly reduced.

In November 2018, 100% of allotment plots were let, with a waiting list of 79 people. Potential tenants are added to the waiting list on a first come, first served basis. The size of the waiting list varies from time to time but is currently increasing.

4.1 Allocation of Plots

Applicants for plots must reside in Royston to be eligible to join the waiting list. (Act 1908 s.23 (1)). Initially applicants are given one plot of approximately 5 poles. Plot holders who can show that they have maintained their existing allocation to a reasonable standard may apply for a further plot(s) (up to a maximum of 20 poles); such application will be treated in the same way as new applicants so far as the waiting list is concerned.

5 TARGET AREAS OF THE STRATEGY

- Ensuring sufficient allotments
- Promoting allotment gardening
- Encouraging sustainability
- Providing good administration
- Maintaining adequate resources

5.1 Ensuring Sufficient Allotments

The Town Council will endeavour to meet its legal obligation to provide allotments in Royston for the residents of Royston. They will continue to search for suitable available land.

5.2 Promoting Allotment Gardening

It is the Town Council policy to promote allotment gardening. Details of the Allotment site appear on the Town Council Web site. Articles about the allotments are included in the Town Council newsletter from time to time.

5.3 Encouraging Sustainability

The Town Council encourages, and where possible supports, good environmental practice including use of organic alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides.

It supports plans to minimise water usage by monitoring water meter readings frequently to allow exceptional use/leaks to be detected, and encourages use of organic mulches to conserve soil moisture. The use of rainwater captured by individual plot holders is to be encouraged where practicable and it will help promote recycling on the site.

5.4 Providing Good Administration

The Town Council will ensure that all allotment rents and fees continue to be collected in a timely manner and administered with this strategy.

The Town Council will continue to investigate the possibility of the Allotment Association taking over day to day management of the Allotment site on behalf of the Council.

5.5 Maintaining Adequate Resources

The rental income from the site covers running costs with major capital costs having to be met from Town Council General Reserves. A Percentage of the salary costs of the Town Clerk and Administration Assistant's time spent on allotment administration, are met from the rental income. The Town Council needs to balance the benefits of the allotments provision against the cost to the residents of Royston via the Council tax precept. It is the aim of the Town Council to make the allotment site self-financing. The level of rents and any concessionary schemes are considered annually bearing in mind the terms of the tenancy contract and the expenditure on the site. Twelve months' notice is to be given of any increase which then takes place on the 1st January.

The Town Council policy is to make each vacated plot sufficiently attractive for letting. It can include an offer of a rent free period to compensate the new tenants for having to clear the plot.

In addition to the above there may be opportunities to obtain some external funding through Government, EU and Lottery Grants.

The Town Council aims to make its allotment sites self financing and to review rents and control expenditure to this end.

6. Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

The Disability Discrimination Act Part 3 places a responsibility on all providers to make reasonable alterations to services and infrastructures to improve accessibility for all, irrespective of any physical or mental impairment of the user.

The Royston site has access by road for delivery purposes only. Adequate parking is available in Coombes Hole. Access to plots on the two main paths is good for those using wheelchairs but there is no specific provision such as raised beds. If additional land is made available a special plot with raised beds could be included for wheel chair users.

Specific facilities on plots have as yet not been requested by any individual but any special requirements will be accommodated on a case by case basis.