

## Fact Sheet

### Widening the benefits of allotments

Details of organisations mentioned in this factsheet are listed in *Useful Contacts*. For more information on the projects mentioned in the case studies, contact ARI. Some of the suggestions in this factsheet may require a change of formal Land Use under the Allotments Acts. Consult your allotment authority before starting a new project. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners can provide legal advice about the Allotments Acts. See ARI factsheet *Project Allotment*.

- 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.

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. The Landfill Communities Fund 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

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



St Anns Allotments, Nottingham

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





presence can deter vandals and provide extra surveillance, and some plottolders 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 plotholder(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. An increasing number of allotment sites are now included in the National Gardens Scheme (NGS) and they are popular with visitors. To find out more about the scheme and for details of your local NGS contact, see the National Gardens Scheme website ([www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)).

### 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.

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.

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.

Plotholders 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 plotholders.

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.

**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.

**St Anns Allotments, Nottingham**, a private site with over 300 plots, developed a community orchard in 2001 from several overgrown plots. It is now a lively hub of educational and community life. They run an innovative outdoor learning programme with local schools and community organisations including gardening, construction, management of the environment and arts and crafts.





Studio3Arts and Keats Avenue Allotment

*Children and BTCV volunteers working on an arts project together*

**Cardiff MIND** run an allotment project, which promotes health living. It gives people with mental health issues the opportunity to meet up in a relaxed friendly environment, and to take responsibility for their own plot.

**Sefton Park Allotments, Liverpool** has developed a plot in partnership with charity Local Solutions, providing certified training for people with a range of needs and ages, including stroke victims and wheelchair users. It includes mini plots with greenhouses and areas for communal use and training. They obtained funding to create a fully accessible plot, including wheelchair ramps to the entrance and training areas, improved toilet facilities and raised working areas.

They work in partnership with another local charity, The Family Refugee Support Project, and have developed a communal plot for local migrant families. The plot is specifically for mothers and children who are able to have professional counselling in peaceful, non-threatening surroundings.

They also have funding to develop an allotment for school children, working alongside the Community Cohesion Officer attached to a local school.

**Walnut Avenue Allotment Association, Bury** work with Social Services to provide an allotment for adults with

physical and mental health issues, with some clients visiting up to three times a week. They also have a community allotment which is used regularly by a group of nursery age children and mothers, and a group of disabled children who visit from a local respite centre.

**Moulsecoombe Forest Garden and Wildlife Project** works with a real mix of people, including volunteer students from the universities, adult groups with learning difficulties, team building groups from local companies and cooking groups, to name a few.



**Our vision is to  
increase allotment  
uptake by individuals  
and groups**

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## Gardens

A section of unlettable plots, e.g. plots that flood or are shaded, could be developed into a flower garden or wildlife area with public access.

Contact the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (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 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 ([www.sensorytrust.org.uk](http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk)) or Thrive ([www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk)) 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 ([www.wildlifetrusts.org](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org)) or Natural England for advice on wildlife gardens ([www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)). Natural England's website includes a wildlife guide ([www.naturalengland.org.uk/advice/wildlifegardening](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/advice/wildlifegardening)). 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 plotholders providing occasional support, e.g. in the form of summer watering or gardening expertise.

It is important that the other plotholders 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*.