



# West Lothian Allotment Strategy

## Report



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

West Lothian Council (NETs & Land Services) have prepared this Allotment Strategy in order to help address the growing need for allotments and to improve the delivery of services to members of the community, by facilitating and enabling communities to actively manage and participate in allotment gardening.

This strategy provides a mechanism to deliver long term, sustainable improvements to existing and new allotment gardens across West Lothian. Over the next five years a programme and a budget is required to be provided to support allotment gardening in West Lothian.

The strategy outlines a management approach that should deliver best value to the council and all residents who live within West Lothian. West Lothian Council will support the establishment of formally constituted allotment associations for both new and existing allotment gardens. These associations will independently manage their respective allotment gardens addressing all day-to-day issues relating to tenants, leases, rent collection, finance, maintenance and enforcement. West Lothian Council will in return facilitate and support each association to ensure a high quality and accountable management service is delivered to the community of West Lothian.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Allotment gardens play a unique role within communities, facilitating the delivery of sustainable, wide ranging benefits through hands on cultivation and food awareness. Allotments provide opportunities to socialise, exercise and harvest fresh fruit and vegetables that benefit healthy living, active lifestyles, help promote social inclusion and support local biodiversity and nature conservation.

The potential of allotments to support such benefits has been recognised at both a national and local level in Scottish Government policy and policies of West Lothian Council and Community partners. West Lothian Council positively endorse the benefits of allotments and the capacity they offer to support West Lothian's Community and Development Plans and the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement.

West Lothian Council's Open Space Strategy seeks to ensure all open spaces are helping to deliver areas that function under their intended purpose and deliver meaningful benefits to local communities in accord with the guidance in Scottish Planning Policy 11 (SPP 11) produced by the Scottish Executive. The West Lothian Open Space Strategy looks to support and facilitate allotments across the Council in a strategic manner that meets local sustainable needs.

### **1.1 Need for the Strategy**

The Scottish Government in Planning and Open Space Planning Advice Note 65 (PAN65, May 2008) provides a new and specific category 'Allotments and Community Growing Spaces' recognising their important role in open space planning. In encouraging a strategic view of open space provision, the Government is looking to local authorities to ensure that current and future open space needs, including allotments, are addressed. PAN65 recognises that allotments form an important part of open space that is demand-led, highlighting the need for consultation to establish local needs.

Allotments within West Lothian have experienced, for an extended period of time, a level of decline that has resulted in a potential lack of allotment plots and a level of deterioration to the condition of those remaining allotment gardens. This is in part as a result of a lack of specific policy and sustainable management and previously little or no recorded demand.

Over recent years local community interest, linked in part to health and lifestyle awareness and perhaps more recently to economic circumstances, have generated an increased interest and potential demand for allotment gardens across West Lothian most noticeably in the larger settlement and more urban areas.

The Allotment Strategy seeks to address in a strategic sense how best the Council and Community Partners eg NHS, allotment associations, Private Land Owners etc., can respond to both national policy and local interest. This proposed approach would be by virtue of developing a long term sustainable plan for allotment provision across the district using a partnership approach.

### **1.2 Objectives**

West Lothian Council (NETs & Land Services) have prepared this Allotment Strategy as part of the Council's Open Space Strategy in order to help address the growing demand for allotments. It is also to improve the delivery of services to communities by facilitating and enabling communities to actively participate in the benefits associated with allotment gardening.

This Allotment Strategy sets out the Council's proposals and intention to:

- support a clear strategy on the delivery of allotments
- better understand how allotments are addressed as a part of the wider Open Space provision and delivery of open space services
- better understand the levels of sustainable demand for allotments and growing spaces across the Council area
- address the demand for new provision and the upgrading or amendment to management arrangements of existing allotments
- support Community-Led allotment gardens
- support best practice and help enable local communities, allotment associations and other stakeholder groups to take a more active management role

The strategy will enable and guide the development of a robust, cost effective management structure, which will enhance allotment provision over the period of 2009 – 2014 with a review every 5 years as part of the Open Space Strategy.

In addition to meeting the requirements of local and national policy, this strategy also fulfils the Council's obligations set down in the Allotments (Scotland) Act and the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act.

### **1.3 Aims**

West Lothian Council is seeking to embrace community participation and act as a facilitator in the management of allotment gardens. This approach is considered to be the most favourable way of benefiting society through improvements in both community cohesion, and ensuring that the Council can promote an efficient service, whilst at the same time limiting the requirement for resources.

To ensure a sustainable, long-term future for WLC's allotment strategy it will:

- set out the policy and legislative obligations required of the Council;
- review 'best practice', national standards and advice and ascertain the current situation of allotment provision in West Lothian;
- assimilate key issues and plans arising from consultations with key stakeholders;
- set standards for the provision of allotments and service across West Lothian;
- address the demand for allotments through various mechanisms;
- increase the benefits derived from allotments; and
- facilitate the annual return of allotment information required to fulfil the councils legal obligations.

The allotment strategy will be integrated into the remit of the Council's NETs & Land Services Unit. In implementing the strategy a service will be developed in which people can expect:

- new opportunities for individuals and communities wishing to be involved in the cultivation of allotments;
- facilitation and encouragement of active participation and use, including associations to develop self management;
- efficient and effective allotment self-administration;
- effective and appropriate allocation of resources;
- fair, open and equitable treatment, and safe tenure;
- facilitate and encourage good access, good security, well maintained haulage ways and pathways, adequate water provision, and action to address abandoned and neglected plots;
- fair charges and rents.

#### **1.4 Working Group & Stakeholders**

An important element of this strategy exercise is consultation with key stakeholders who hold, or are likely to hold, a vested interest in West Lothian's allotment gardens. A Working Group will need to be established to support this Allotment Strategy and facilitate the implementation of the strategies actions.

The Working Group should comprise the groups noted below but may be re-structured as necessary to ensure its continuing effectiveness and ensure various groups are equitably represented:

- West Lothian Council
- Deans Meadows Allotments
- Winchburgh Allotments – Hopetoun Estates
- Bridgend Allotments
- Linlithgow and District Allotments Society (LADAS)
- Other groups and individuals as appropriate

Consultation has been undertaken at a number of stages through the development of this strategy, key concerns and issues raised during the consultation exercise are reflected throughout this report and summarised in Appendix 1.



## **2.0 HISTORIC CONTEXT & STRATEGIC VALUE**

### **2.1 Context**

Allotments were originally provided as land put aside to enable families to grow their own food and supplement their diets, during the late 1800's. Since this time both the provision and demand of allotments has fluctuated with prevailing social and economic conditions. Between the 1920-1945 allotments helped overcome economic deprivation and food shortages with the number of plots in the UK reaching approximately 1.5million during the Second World War and the Dig for Victory campaign. During this time allotments were estimated to offer a production rate of close to 3million tonnes of fruit and vegetables a year. Post war years saw the popularity of allotments decline, largely due to greater national prosperity, with allotment numbers stabilising during the 1980-1990's.

Changing attitudes and a growing environmental awareness linked to quality of life has witnessed an increased awareness over the provenance of food, its agricultural treatment and the natural environment with a resultant increase in the popularity of allotments.

In Scotland understanding the changing levels of demand has been made difficult due to a lack of national data with allotments often classed by Local Authorities alongside other green spaces including parks, gardens and cemeteries. This is changing as authorities complete detailed Open Space Audits in accord with SPP11.

A 1999 survey by The Food Trust of Scotland estimated 4,000 to 4,500 allotment plots were in operation, two thirds of which were provided in the four cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. This figure is down from the peak of 70,000 plots in Scotland during the Second World War which is mainly attributed to the allotments either reverting to their former use or being lost to housing or commercial development. A second more comprehensive survey, carried out by the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society in 2007, indicated an increase in recorded allotment sites with the total number of individual plots estimated at 6,300.

### **2.2 Strategic Value of Allotments**

Allotments are recognised for their ability to facilitate and contribute to a wide spectrum of national and local plans and policies that support the move towards sustainable development (see Appendix 2 – Policy & Legislation)

Allotment gardening is an enjoyable, engaging activity that supports and sustains community activity and can meaningfully address economic deprivation and support more active communities and well-being. Community, social inclusion and solidarity, healthy living, lifelong learning, green space provision, biodiversity and recycling are all important benefits associated with thriving allotments. Allotments are important for good and low cost food production; they are havens for wildlife and provide valuable recreational opportunities involving healthy activity and social contact as detailed below.



### *Social Benefits*

- **Healthy Living** – Allotments provide the opportunity for year-round physical exercise and social interaction whilst producing fresh fruit and vegetables which help improve lifestyle qualities, reflecting the ideals of sustainability and well being, not only do these benefit the plot holder but also family and friends. Additionally, the NHS has developed connections with local allotment sites where GPs prescribe patients to take up a plot with the intention of them benefiting from the associated social interaction and exercise;
- **Social Interaction** – Allotments foster community development and cohesiveness. Examples include allotment associations that show a commitment to their communities through organising open days and social events; those who tend to allotments often establish a community of people who interact, a benefit to everyone on site, in particular for individuals who would otherwise be isolated including the elderly, unemployed or those with mental ill health; and
- **Education** – Sites enable the local community to learn and develop new life skills. In particular, many allotments now reserve plots specifically for schools or youth/ adult training schemes. Additionally, allotments are a good example of the principles of sustainable waste management.

### *Environmental Benefits*

- **Biodiversity** – The natural allotment characteristics and gardening practices used within allotment sites plays a significantly active role in protecting and promoting biodiversity. The majority of fruiting trees, shrubs and vegetation commonly found on allotment sites depend on insect pollination whilst, at the same time, offering foraging and roosting habitat suitable for a wide variety of birds and mammals. Combined with organic practices commonly employed by plot holders, allotments can support a significant ecosystem, with particular benefit in built up areas where there may otherwise be an absence of cultivated green space;
- **Environment** – Allotments can result in a reduction in levels of energy and material consumption used for processing, packaging and distributing food, reducing food-miles and bringing organic and non-industrialised food production to communities without penalty of cost or choice. Recycling of materials, composting, community resource sharing all bring benefits for reduced environmental waste and lower emissions.
- **Sustainability** – Allotments make a contribution to sustainability by promoting and facilitating the opportunities to act locally and better appreciate and understand our environmental and the impact and implications of lifestyle choices. Allotments help to promote a range of sustainable activities including composting, rain water harvesting and organic cultivation.

### *Economic Benefits*

- **Productive Activity** – Allotments provide for food production offering opportunity for personal and group production of low cost fresh food and vegetables with economic, social and environmental benefits. Productive activity assists the non-productive/under-employed and unemployed to take more active roles and offers carers, voluntary and support sectors new additional routes for engagement and supports peer working and collaboration across a broad social mix.

### 3.0 WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL ALLOTMENTS STRATEGY

The Allotments Strategy sets down a framework for the Council, to improve and enhance allotment provision and service. A baseline has been established which provides information on the current condition of allotments and the level of provision across West Lothian (see Appendix 3). This establishes the benchmark for monitoring the progress of the strategy.

A key element of the strategy is active engagement with the community and support to enable allotment associations to take day-to-day management and control of their allotments, improve allotment quality and provision and extend the benefits of participation into the wider community.

The strategy is built upon four key themes:

- **To Engage and Consult with Community Interests**
- **To Respond to Sustainable Long Term Allotment Demand**
- **To Support and Facilitate Community Allotment Run Services**
- **To Encourage and Promote Environmental Sustainability**

Each of the themes is based upon the strategic objectives and will seek to address contemporary allotment management best practice.

### 3.1 STRATEGY– TO ENGAGE AND CONSULT WITH COMMUNITY INTERESTS

Allotments are essentially a community resource typically managed by allotment associations for the benefits of their members, which are in many areas supported through the local authority. West Lothian Council are keen to support allotment associations and help to bring the benefits and opportunity for food self-production and allotment gardening to as wide a number of active participants as possible.

The Council believes sustainable management of allotments is best delivered through partnership working with formally constituted allotment associations and other stakeholders and relevant bodies. The Council will work with local communities to support the formation of allotment associations based on existing and planned allotment provision and to work with local groups to establish open, inclusive access across the community.

#### 3.1.1 Encouraging Consultation

In order to address increasing levels of demand it is important to raise awareness and understanding. Information on all aspects including waiting list figures, allotment open/ training days and good practice gardening guides will all help to maintain motivation and encourage new members (see Appendix 4 for suitable content to be included within a good practice guide). Promotional initiatives are key to good communication and can often be organised by allotment members themselves, as they are best placed to act as champions of allotments within the community.

##### **Strategic Proposal 1:**

*The Council will engage with the public and allotment interests on the Allotment Strategy and seek to secure support for the promotion of new facilities and encourage greater levels of interest and participation in conjunction with allotment associations.*

#### 3.1.2 Allotment Associations

Allotment associations are formally constituted bodies and are key to developing the devolved management approach. Importantly associations offer members of the local community to take ownership of their local allotment garden and manage the day to day administration and maintenance. This helps create a sense of ownership and pride amongst the community, whilst stimulating further investment and interest in allotments. The extent to which associations are formed will depend on the willingness of local volunteers to offer their time and expertise. A sensitive approach is necessary to encourage and support the development of associations.

Establishment of associations allows for the development of an enthusiastic and willing network within the community. The strategy will seek to embrace this resource, organising, through the Steering Group, outlets for the promotion and championing of allotments within the community, by members of the community. Forging partnerships with organisations and charities and attendance of Galas by association members would provide an outlet to demonstrate the benefits including healthy eating and lifestyle changes an allotment plot can offer.

The responsibilities of allotment associations and a draft allotments constitution are provided in Appendix 7.

##### **Strategic Proposal 2:**

*The Council will encourage where possible the establishment of an allotment association for each allotment garden.*

### 3.1.3 Allotment Working Group

An Allotment Working Group is proposed to represent all allotment associations and provide a forum for the associations and key stakeholder groups with the Council. This group would:

- Hold bi-annual forum meetings with the associations to consider the delivery of allotments and discuss issues of mutual interest;
- Coordinate activity between associations and the Council including publicity, allotment waiting lists, allotment availability and issues relating to management;
- Promote consultation and public engagement such as open days/ events where allotment information can be disseminated;

The Allotment Working Group will act to share knowledge between experts and ploholders and facilitate the progression of this strategy in a structured manner.

#### ***Strategic Proposal 3:***

*To improve administration and efficiency and encourage the sharing of knowledge and skills the Council will encourage the development of a single West Lothian Allotments Working Group including representatives from all allotment associations.*



## **3.2 STRATEGY – TO RESPOND TO SUSTAINABLE LONG TERM DEMAND**

### **3.2.1 Reviewing and Assessing Demand**

West Lothian Council has no detailed figures on current allotment demand across the 6 main traditional towns, other smaller towns and larger villages. Neither are there any agreed national levels of provision to judge what should be provided. Many allotment strategies make reference to historic guidelines or precedent experience advising a provision of between 3 and 7 plots per 1,000 population. A survey of Allotments, Community Gardens and City Farms, for the Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) showed that the English average provision is at the higher end of this level, but with high regional differences. No information is available for Scotland.

Based on a median level and a potential target level of 5 per 1,000 population based on the population of West Lothian (population 167,000) this would equate to 835 plots and based on West Lothian's 6 main traditional towns (pop. 110,000) 550 plots. There is no current evidence that this level of demand exists and provision for allotments should, as recommended in PAN 65 be demand driven. Current provision in West Lothian is estimated at 30 - 35 plots across the whole Council area.

Across West Lothian there has been a recent increase in the number of residents showing an interest in allotment gardening. Evidence of current levels of demand include:

- Linlithgow & District Allotment Society (LADAS) – 100+ people have registered their interest with this society and LADAS made a representation to WLC to make provision for a new allotment garden in Linlithgow September 2008.
- Murieston Community Council – Representation to WLC to make provision for a new allotment garden in Livingston May 2009 and for the Council to undertake consultation in order to gauge the level of local demand.
- Three Allotment Sites currently exist with a combined capacity of 30-35 plots servicing a largely central West Lothian area including Livingston.
  - Deans Meadows Allotments:
    - Council owned land. Managed by charity Allotment Association. 21 plots available (combination of ½ and full plots).
  - Winchburgh Allotments:
    - Privately owned and run by Hopetoun Estates. 10 plots available with a current waiting list ~20 people.
  - Bridgend Allotments:
    - Owned by Rosebery Estates. 12 plots leased by WLC.

In addition to these figures, it is expected that a significant additional level of latent demand exists, which has not previously been researched for the West Lothian area. Using local anecdotal experience offers an alternative route to reviewing potential long term demand.

Linlithgow, population 13,500, has 100+ people registered (0.74% of Linlithgow population) with LADAS who show an interest in either having a plot or being involved with an allotment. Using these figures as a simplified gauge of overall allotment interest within West Lothian would at this time be unrepresentative. However a latent assumption of 0.001- 0.0015% of the traditional towns population might be anticipated to consider an interest in allotment gardening sufficient to register with an allotment society or association. This level would be extremely low by city / large town precedent but may offer a simple working assumption for West Lothian and a starting point for considering medium to long term provision. Assuming 0.001-0.0015% and based on the population of West Lothian (pop. 167,000) this would equate to 167-251 plots over a possible 5 year period. However it would appear to be more prudent to look at using the 167 figure thereby allowing for 85 plots to aim at addressing known demand with a possible 82 plots likely to be generated over the next few years. These plots may potentially be provided by new development initiatives through the planning process.

Responding to demand in a strategic manner suggests addressing the locations of highest demand and these can be anticipated to be the largest population centres and/or those with higher housing densities and those centres with active allotment associations. These include Livingston, Linlithgow, Bathgate, Broxburn, Whitburn and Armadale. Consideration of the level of accessibility of new allotment sites to these local communities must also be a priority, to seek as wide an audience as possible.

### 3.2.2 Responding to Demand

In considering the provision of allotments, the increase in demand and interest in allotments, West Lothian Council's Property Management & Development Service has identified a list of 18 potential sites throughout the Council area. These sites would seek to be developed, if suitable, into allotment gardens comprising plots of variable sizes to flexibly accommodate the requirements of a wide range of prospective allotment holders and the physical restrictions of individual sites. Proposed sizes determined to be the most appropriate for West Lothian include:

- **starter plots** – small plots (75m<sup>2</sup>) aimed to encourage potential plot holders who may not want or have the time to manage a large plot, or who would like a 'taster' plot to discover what allotment holding entails.
- **medium plots** – still a relatively small plot at 150m<sup>2</sup> compared to the traditional size of 250m<sup>2</sup>. This size is considered the most appropriate in terms of a more manageable sized area to cultivate and the amount of produce. Additionally this smaller size allows more plots per area of land to be established to accommodate a greater number of plot holders.
- **large plots** – these larger plots of 200-300m<sup>2</sup> accommodate educational and community initiatives. Designed to support groups of people that may share and manage the plot together. The number of these large plots per allotment would depend upon the size, accessibility and proximity of the garden to the community or supporting organisation.

West Lothian Council will seek to facilitate and support new sites working closely with Community Planning Partners and the development sector through the Core Development Areas and using mechanisms such as developer agreements. Potential future allotment garden sites have been provisionally assessed for their technical suitability but as yet exclude any detailed demand assessment or consideration of deliverability.

The Allotment Strategy would seek to promote a progressive policy towards allotment provision and secure a significant year-on-year increase in allotment plots that is advanced in parallel with demand and offering a geographical spread initially across the 6 main towns.

***Strategic Proposal 4:***

*West Lothian implements a policy of facilitating and supporting new allotments across the Council area offering an increase provision year-on-year during the initial strategy period 2009-201were resources permit.*





### 3.3 STRATEGY - TO SUPPORT AND FACILITATE QUALITY ALLOTMENT SERVICES

West Lothian Council intends within its Allotment Strategy to extend community participation and act as a facilitator in the management of its allotment gardens and allotments service promoting site self management through allotment associations. Support for allotment associations will be provided by improving the appearance and availability of allotments and working with local communities, stakeholders, community partners and the associations themselves to promote good and best practice and effective communication and service delivery.

#### 3.3.1 Strategic Management

A number of strategic management options exist, and depending on available resources, the scale and number of allotments and the level of public or private participation, each option has individual advantages and disadvantages. In line with the Council's commitment to develop a management method where they act as a facilitator, the devolved management approach will be developed. This approach is the most accommodating and the mechanism by which best value will be achieved through standardisation and efficiency. Appendix 6 describes the different management approaches, including the devolved management method.

##### ***Strategic Proposal 5:***

*To achieve devolved allotment administration standards, West Lothian Council will work with allotment associations to standardise their allotment management model across West Lothian to reflect the devolved management approach.*

#### 3.3.2 Lease & Tenancy Agreements

WLC will seek to manage and support individual allotment associations through contractual lease agreements, which will stipulate the responsibilities and roles of each association, including the organisation of tenancy agreements (as described below), maintenance and finances. This will enable WLC to oversee the management of the Allotment Strategy and maintain accurate records of allotment provision throughout the Council area for ongoing review.

##### ***Lease to the Association (lease for the whole site)***

In order for WLC to support and encourage the development of allotment associations, reasonable/ affordable lease charges for allotment sites should be set, especially to assist the association in accommodating any losses in rental income when plots are left vacant. Affordable lease charges will enable associations to both cover their outgoings and reinvest surplus monies, received from the rent of plots, back into the maintenance and management of the garden.

##### ***Tenancy Agreement (between the allotment association and plot holder)***

WLC is responsible for the registration and recording of allotment tenants as set out in the Allotments (Scotland) Act. A tenancy agreement is a formal document which covers issues such as payment of rent, sub-letting, maintenance of plots and buildings. These agreements also provide the necessary information required of the council records. A draft Tenancy Agreement is provided in Appendix 8.

As mentioned above and to develop a long term sustainable allotment service, the Council will develop a generic Tenancy Agreement and seek to delegate the responsibility of undertaking all administration relating to distribution, signing, collation and reporting of plot holder tenancy agreements to allotment associations.

### **Strategic Proposal 6:**

*West Lothian Council will:*

- *support allotment associations on detailed management and leasing arrangements*
- *ensure reasonable lease charges are set and regularly reviewed to provide fair and sustainable leasing terms to allotment associations.*
- *prepare a standard tenancy agreement document to be distributed to each individual allotment association. The associations will ensure each plotholder signs this agreement.*
- *ensure accurate allotment records are maintained by delegating responsibility to allotment associations to record and report annually to WLC on occupancy rates and accounts. Subject to WLC ownership responsibility.*

### **3.3.3 Allotment Rents**

Allotments require consistent levels of funding to invest in continual maintenance and management of existing sites and development of new sites. The strategy has identified a number of improvements and actions that will require new levels of funding including significant improvements in material assets, administration and communication. The investment in allotments with only very limited rent returns make it imperative that they are properly managed. In determining allotment rents the Council will consider:

- the nature, quality and cost of facilities provided
- expenditure on promotion and administration
- the present levels of rent and its historic tradition
- the likely effect of rent on plot take up

Rents depend on the size of plots and the number of facilities and services provided (as described in the allotment hierarchy in Appendix 5) but will not be excessive. Excessively high costs would discourage uptake of allotments by the most vulnerable groups in society, who stand to benefit the most from sustainable, affordable supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables, and the other benefits of allotment gardening.

Indicative plot rentals for the initial period of 2009 – 2010 are provided in the following table.

Size of Allotment	Type of Plot	Size of Plots (m <sup>2</sup> )	Indicative Rent (£/annum)
Size A – 1-20 plots Small gardens with provision of basic facilities	Starter Plots	75	£25
	Medium Plots	150	£35
	Large (community) Plots	200-300	£75
Size B – 20+ plots Relatively large allotments providing a range of facilities including mains water.	Starter Plots	75	£30
	Medium Plots	150	£45
	Large (community) Plots	200-300	£95

### **Funding**

The Council will pursue and seek to encourage allotment associations to bid for alternative streams of funding including sponsorship/ partnership from local organisations, Section 75 Agreements, fundraising events and external funding or grants which can often be applied for to fund specific improvement projects. The success of this search for new funding will depend largely on the Allotment Working Group's ability to facilitate such bids.

### **Strategic Proposal 7:**

*The Council will actively support and encourage mechanisms or initiatives to gain additional external funding for allotment gardens.*

### 3.3.4 Design & Facility Provision

Quality allotments with appropriate security, ancillary facilities and services are vital in attracting new users and ensuring that sites operate at capacity. Additionally, security and access are often of significant importance not only to allotment holders, who spend large amounts of time on site, but also to potential new allotment gardeners. Security can offer a sense of safety for site users and may encourage a more diverse spectrum of the local population including families, the elderly and vulnerable people.

Thriving allotments can attribute their success to good design and facility provision, whereby considerate landscaping has created a community garden, by ensuring basic principles of a functioning allotment are provided. The overall aim is to draw people in by making them feel welcome.

Appendix 5 outlines a mechanism for providing facilities and amenities to allotments in relation to their size and provides a breakdown of the key elements which make a successful allotment site.

*Strategic Proposal 8:*

*WLC will improve facility provision and consider all necessary design principles when considering proposals for new allotment gardens to ensure allotments are welcoming and functional.*

### 3.3.5 Maintenance

The condition of existing allotment capacity in West Lothian varies widely between registered allotment gardens. Some are not used for their intended purpose while others are derelict and overgrown. Overgrown, weed ridden and unkempt allotments are a significant barrier to allotment uptake. Regular maintenance of facilities and vacant plots avoids not only varying standards between allotment gardens but also repair backlogs, loss of functionality and general neglect.

*Strategic Proposal 9:*

*WLC will, encourage development of existing and new allotments and establish an effective maintenance regime across all allotment gardens to ensure they remain in an acceptable, welcoming and inclusive condition. Overall, an aesthetic and functional improvement will be experienced.*



### **3.4 STRATEGY - TO ENCOURAGE AND PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Allotments provide a valuable network of green space which is of particular importance in developed areas where houses have small gardens and access to green space is limited. Across the UK, their importance as wildlife habitats is recognised in the designation of some allotments as wildlife sites or community nature reserves. In addition, allotments enable a reduction in carbon emissions as locally grown and harvested fruit and vegetables reduces reliance upon commercial fresh food and vegetables. Thus reducing 'food miles', processing and storage CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, supporting the principles outlined in the proactive Scottish Government Climate Change (Scotland) Bill.

As part of this strategy the Council will identify potential sites to develop as new allotment gardens and which of the existing will be improved over the course of the next five years. For sites identified as priorities for allotment development, consideration will be paid to habitat within the allotment garden in the form of native trees, shrubs and hedges.

#### **Strategic Proposal 10:**

*Environmental sustainability is a cross-cutting theme, which runs through the Council's plans and policies. The Council is therefore committed to ensure that areas of land devoted to allotment gardens are managed in a manner which enhances community sustainability and supports local biodiversity. In addition, the strategy seeks to embrace opportunities that will educate and encourage a move towards sustainable methods of gardening, recycling and water consumption.*

#### **3.4.1 Biodiversity**

Allotments offer significant opportunity to promote local biodiversity and ensure open spaces are managed to support key target species and offer habitat for endangered species particularly breeding birds. In line with the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 this Allotments Strategy seeks to '*further the conservation of biodiversity*' within West Lothian.

Allotments also provide the opportunity to educate and stimulate the learning of new life skills. Practices which benefit the environment are equally important to habitat creation and conservation. The diversity within allotments will help in demonstrating the important principles of sustainable gardening, through, for example, the links between the use of pesticides and the immediate effect on biodiversity on site.

Encouraging positive management for biodiversity with allotment associations and promoting dialogue between members and the Council's LBAP Officer will help meet the requirements set out within the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

#### **Strategic Proposal 11:**

*Supporting delivery of biodiversity targets within allotments and through allotment associations.*

#### **3.4.2 Composting**

Composting vegetative waste within allotment gardens is a simple yet effective method for reducing the quantities of waste, creating a free source of organic fertiliser and soil conditioner and providing a habitat for a number of species of invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals.

#### **Strategic Proposal 12:**

*Actively promote, support and ensure the development and maintenance of, allotment composting facilities for each allotment garden.*



## 4.0 THE ACTION PLAN

A series of 30 actions are detailed in response to each of the Council's four themes. These actions will act as a plan to guide the Council and Working Group through the process of managing and implementing the strategy over the next 5 years.

TO ENGAGE & CONSULT WITH COMMUNITY INTERESTS	
<i>Strategic Proposal 1 – The Council will engage with the public and allotment interests on the Allotment Strategy and seek to secure support for the promotion of new facilities and encourage greater levels of interest and participation in conjunction with allotment associations.</i>	
Action 1	<p>Ensure effective communication and improvement in customer services through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing a working group from allotment association representatives</li> <li>Actively supporting the Allotment Working Group to communicate with allotment associations and tenants</li> <li>Supporting and recognising site representatives</li> <li>Improving the quality of customer service through identifying lead contact at WLC.</li> </ul>
Action 2	<p>Maintaining records on local demand for new allotment plots through implementing promotional initiatives that emphasise benefits, including for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A West Lothian Council website link with allotment updates (i.e. details of waiting lists and, tenancy agreements);</li> <li>Public notice boards on site;</li> <li>Publication of an Allotment Good Practice Guide for distribution amongst existing and prospective plot holders. Including the following topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site safety</li> <li>Description of good practice in terms of plot cultivation and site management</li> <li>References for further information</li> <li>Contacts for the site association and an explanation of their role</li> <li>Requirements of the lease, inspection arrangements and the procedures for termination.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Action 3	WLC will support and facilitate events which encourage engagement and consultation
Action 4	Develop a consistent approach to engaging with new and existing partnership organisations and initiatives and actively explore avenues for establishing potential partners.
<i>Strategic Proposal 2 – The Council will encourage where possible the establishment of an allotment association for each allotment garden</i>	
Action 4	Prepare a generic Allotment Association Constitution for new and existing allotment associations.
Action 5	Actively encourage and facilitate the formation of allotment associations and partnerships across the council area. Through initiatives such as web based forums that support a network of people and organisations to enable the sharing of knowledge, formation of groups and the development of associations.
<i>Strategic Proposal 3 – To improve administration and efficiency and encourage the sharing of knowledge and skills the Council will encourage the development of a single West Lothian Allotments Working Group including representatives from all allotment associations.</i>	
Action 6	Facilitate the establishment of an Allotment Working Group and continue to support its activities.



TO RESPOND TO SUSTAINABLE LONG TERM DEMAND	
<b>Strategic Proposal 4</b> – <i>West Lothian implements a policy of facilitating and supporting new allotments across the Council area offering an increase in provision year-on-year during the initial strategy period 2009-2014 where resources permit</i>	
Action 7	To set and retain a figure for allotment provision across West Lothian (considering the need to reduce travel distances between residential locations and allotment sites)
Action 8	To ensure new/ revised Structure and Local Plans consider allotment provision and protection
Action 9	To consider all applications for new allotment gardens.
Action 10	To monitor the level of latent demand for allotments throughout West Lothian

TO SUPPORT & FACILITATE ALLOTMENT SERVICES	
<b>Strategic Proposal 5</b> – <i>To achieve devolved allotment administration standards, West Lothian Council will work with allotment associations to standardise their allotment management model across West Lothian to reflect the devolved management approach.</i>	
Action 11	Standardise the allotment management model across the authority to reflect the devolved management approach.
<b>Strategic Proposal 6</b> – <i>West Lothian Council will:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>support allotment associations on detailed management and leasing arrangements</i></li> <li>▪ <i>ensure reasonable lease charges are set and regularly reviewed to provide fair and sustainable leasing terms to allotment associations.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>prepare a standard tenancy agreement document to be distributed to each individual allotment association. The associations will ensure each plot holder signs this agreement.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>ensure accurate allotment records are maintained by delegating responsibility to allotment associations to record and report annually to WLC on occupancy rates and accounts, subject to WLC ownership.</i></li> </ul>	
Action 12	Lease charges will be reviewed and appropriate charges set to reflect individual circumstances.
Action 13	Develop a clear and succinct Allotment Tenancy Agreement for distribution to managing allotment associations. Ensure associations report annually to WLC on occupancy rates and financial accounts were applicable.
Action 14	Encourage allotment associations to effectively collect rents and promptly re-allocate vacant plots. This will assist in increasing revenue, the latter by increasing the proportion of plots in cultivation.
Action 15	To digitise allotment records of sites into GIS mapping.

<b>Strategic Proposal 7</b> – <i>The Council will actively support and encourage mechanisms or initiatives to gain additional external funding for allotment gardens.</i>	
Action 17	Encourage associations to run allotment fundraising events to support their future investments.

<b>Strategic Proposal 8</b> – WLC will improve facility provision and consider all necessary design principles when considering proposals for new allotment gardens to ensure allotments are welcoming and functional.	
Action 19	All allotment gardens will be designated as either a Local or Town allotment to apply standards (as described in Appendix 5). Minimum allotment design requirements and standards for both hierarchical types will then be established and applied to all council allotments.

<b>Strategic Proposal 9</b> – WLC will, encourage development of new and existing allotments and establish an effective maintenance regime across all allotment gardens to ensure they remain in an acceptable, welcoming and inclusive condition. Overall, an aesthetic and functional improvement will be experienced.	
Action 20	Assist in the assessment of suitable sites for allotment garden in accord with sustainable demand
Action 21	Encourage allotment associations to manage allotments effectively and engage with local voluntary organisations that may be able to offer a low cost maintenance.
Action 22	Individual associations will be encouraged to undertake annual inspections of each site to identify underutilisation and or maintenance issues

TO ENCOURAGE AND PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	
<b>Strategic Proposal 10</b> - Environmental sustainability is a cross-cutting theme which runs through WLC's plans and policies. The Council is therefore committed to ensure that areas of land devoted to allotment gardens are managed in a manner which enhances their biodiversity. In addition, the strategy seeks to embrace opportunities that will educate and encourage a move towards sustainable methods of gardening, recycling and water consumption.	
Action 23	Encourage natural features and native vegetation and habitats to be maintained and integrated into existing and new gardens.

<b>Strategic Proposal 11</b> – Supporting delivery of biodiversity targets within allotments and through allotment associations.	
Action 25	Encourage and (where possible) support good environmental practice including organic alternatives to fertilisers and pesticides. This will include technical advice and assistance with composting techniques and organisation (e.g. communal composting).
Action 26	Seek to develop face to face support and demonstration projects, drawing where possible on the expertise of allotment plot holders and possibly local initiatives and organisations.

<b>Strategic Proposal 12</b> – Actively promote, support and ensure the development and maintenance of, allotment composting facilities for each allotment garden.	
Action 27	Provide technical advice and financial support for materials to construct and maintain composting compartments. Ensure composting is actively encouraged and explained through inclusion in good practice guides and promotional materials.

#### 4.1 IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & REVIEW

Upon adoption of the Allotment Strategy West Lothian Council will strive to successfully implement the proposed actions.

In order to ensure the Strategy is consistently improving both allotment services and facilities across the council area, an appropriate review and monitoring schedule should be established. Progress can be established through review of the key actions of the Allotment Strategy on an annual basis and the Strategy as a whole should be reviewed every 5 years.

IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & REVIEW	
Action 28	WLC will adopt the Allotment Strategy and implement the proposed key actions over the course of the next 5 years
Action 29	WLC will monitor the progress of the Strategy's key actions on an annual basis
Action 30	A review of the Allotment Strategy will be undertaken every 5 years