



ALLOTMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Allotments are an important community facility and can provide a valuable habitat for many native plants and animals, especially in urban areas where green space may be limited. Often with overgrown plots as well as cultivated plots, compost heaps, grass areas, sheds and boundary trees or hedgerows, they can attract a variety of birds, invertebrates and mammals. In particular many insects, spiders and invertebrates thrive in areas of 'weedy' vegetation such as vacant plots, and because this type of habitat has been virtually eliminated from farmland these corners of urban areas can have an unexpectedly high wildlife value. 'Minibeasts', such as millipedes and woodlice, and weed seeds are a valuable food source for some bird species, including sparrows and finches, which are becoming much less common on intensively cultivated land.



Allotment project SMBC

Sympathetic maintenance regimes can maximise the benefit of boundary hedgerows and tree belts whilst vacant plots can be managed to increase the growth of wildflowers. In addition well-tended plots often act as seed banks for rare vegetable species with seed being collected and resown, while the Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA), now 'Garden Organic', is encouraging people to grow more traditional native vegetables by making seed available through its heritage seed library.

Currently there is over 13,000ha of allotment land in the UK and evidence from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners shows that the average allotment site has up to 30% more wildlife diversity than a typical urban park. In Solihull, for example, most allotment sites are associated with adjacent public open space making them part of important wildlife corridors, linking areas of green space within the urban environment. Being managed primarily for recreation and amenity, allotments can be termed 'managed green space', along with other areas including town parks, playing fields, cemeteries and school grounds.

As long as plot holders and allotment associations comply with their tenancy agreements they have control over planting, cultivation and maintenance regimes, all of which can impact on the potential for allotments to contribute towards biodiversity and Local Agenda 21 priorities.

2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS	Target
A. To protect, enhance and promote the biodiversity already within allotment gardens.	2004-2015
B. To promote maintenance of / improvement of condition and habitat expansion where possible, paying particular attention to treatment of boundaries and vacant plots.	2004-2015
C. To develop a database of allotments undertaking positive habitat management including wildlife records.	by end of 2005
D. To promote allotments to schools and community groups as an outdoor classroom and emphasise their value as community gardens.	by 2006
E. To continue to encourage and promote organic gardening, recycling and composting, as well as the health and social benefits of having an allotment.	2004-2015

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Parks & Public Open Spaces
- Gardens
- School Grounds
- Scrub & Carr
- Lowland Grassland (all types)
- Hedgerows

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Song Thrush

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

There are no specific national objectives or targets for allotments. This habitat falls under the UK BAP broad habitat type of Built up Areas and Gardens.

4. CURRENT STATUS

The Habitat Biodiversity Audit (2001) states that there are approximately 215ha of allotments within the county.

- Coventry has 100ha with 2750 plots on 53 sites.
- Warwick District has more than 20 allotment sites in the towns and villages.

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

- Nuneaton and Bedworth BC has 26 allotments covering 31ha. With the Parks, the maintenance of this “green lung” is not a statutory obligation but is a Council priority for which we should all be thankful. (NBBC, Pride in Our Parks, c2005)
- Solihull MBC is responsible for 13 allotment sites covering 12.28ha (30.28 acres) with 376 plots for cultivation. In addition there are 6 allotment sites managed by parish councils in the northern and more rural areas of the Borough.

4.1 Legal Status

The law relating to allotments is embodied in various Allotment Acts introduced between 1908 and 1950. It was the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, which established the framework for the modern allotments system, and since this date Council's have had a statutory duty to provide allotment gardens sufficient to meet demand.

Allotment authorities may acquire land by agreement or compulsory purchase for the purpose of providing allotments, this land is then protected by law and can not be sold or disposed of for any other purpose without consent from the Secretary of State (Allotment Act 1925).

The Local Government Act 1972 amended allotment legislation in a number of matters of detail, including removing the requirement for Local Authorities to establish allotments committees. Other Acts such as the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 have also impacted upon allotments.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- **How allotments are used** – this includes methods by which plots are cultivated and maintained, as well as how boundaries, communal areas and vacant plots are managed.
- **Planning controls and political issues** – can influence policies for future use and development.
- **Level of funding** – budgets available for site improvements and projects are often limited.
- **Lease and tenancy agreements** – these may impose certain restrictions on use, cultivation, crop type and structures that can be erected e.g. sheds. Keeping of bees and livestock is also restricted in many areas.
- **Lease and tenancy agreements** – influences number of vacant plots and level of maintenance.
- **Use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers** – in particular these affect wildflowers and reduce invertebrate populations, many of which are important predator or pollinator species.
- **Use of peat**– this is not sustainable practise as it destroys habitats elsewhere.
- **Planting of non-native plants** – for some plants this will inhibit the development of allotments as an important genetic resource for the conservation of rare species.

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

Solihull's Best Value Review of Allotments, completed in 2001, recognises that provision in the northern areas of the Borough in relation to the population is sparse. Although traditionally fewer requests for new allotment sites have been received in these areas in view of the Council's commitment to Healthy Living a review in relation to provision is needed. The Council, as partners in Solihull's Health Improvement Programme (A Healthier Solihull), recognises the contribution allotments can make towards healthy lifestyles by providing fresh organic food along with opportunities for fitness and exercise, in turn helping to prevent ill health. Solihull MBC is committed to continuously improving the conditions of allotment sites and the framework for this is set out in the Council's Allotments Charter, which was adopted in 1999. The provision of allotments is in accordance with the Council's support for sustainability and the ageing population, as well as for healthy lifestyles. There is potential for allotment holders to work more closely with Local Agenda 21 Groups on sustainable topics such as organic gardening, recycling and preserving local heritage. Other initiatives include:

- The Kingshurst Project is developing part of an allotment site that is disused into a community garden with a horticultural training and education facility, the whole site being accessible to all. Features will include a wildlife garden with pond and meadow area. The work is being substantially funded by the Allotments Regeneration Initiative, and the Council's Green Scheme are partners in the project.
- A disabled demonstration garden constructed with help from the Council's Green Scheme was opened in May 2004 at Ralph Road Allotments. A disused plot was transformed to make allotment gardening more accessible to people with impaired mobility and a range of disabilities.
- Old bedding plants and autumn leaves from the Council's parks and highways are taken to allotment sites for composting.
- In Solihull Allotment Development is supported by the provision of advice and assistance from the Council's Allotments Officer, Green Scheme and Ecologist.
- Additional funding for future projects to help deliver BAP targets is being investigated with sources including the Allotment Regeneration Initiative being considered.
- Children from Blossomfield Infant School spend 2 days each year at Ralph Road Allotments to support classroom activities. The first visit is spent planting potatoes and sowing peas and the second visit is to harvest the crops.
- Regular stall held at Shirley Farmers Market to raise awareness.

Warwick has an Action 21 Allotments Link Project. This project has been set up to support allotment societies and promote allotments. It is run by Action 21, Warwick District's Agenda 21 initiative (WDC website 2005).

- Action 21 Ltd. Food Group encourages the growing, cooking and eating of fresh, locally grown food, organic where possible, and GMO-free by all sections of the community through promoting allotments.
- The 'Food for All' initiative is designed to encourage people from 'unlikely' areas to grow their own food, with help and advice from the more experienced.
- Demonstration allotment sites for organic gardening in the Heart of England

Rugby Borough Council's Parks & Cemeteries Section of Leisure Services Division currently manage and maintains 6 Allotment Sites within the urban area, providing 326 plots, of which over 260 are tenanted (May 2004) providing a tenancy rate of 83%. The Parks section is always keen to develop partnership schemes on its allotments of which it currently has three; Eastlands School Allotment Project, Sustainable Allotments Project Learning and the Disability Project. (RBC, website, 2005).

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust have and continue to provide advice and help on various allotment projects, such as the Hillfields project run by the WWT in Coventry, with the Asian Mental Health Project. Here a small organic allotment has been created out of a former derelict site and is used as a therapy garden providing fresh food, exercise and relaxation.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Designate all qualifying allotments as SINC's.	WSP	HBA WWT LAs	2008	A, C
PL2. Ensure a biodiversity statement is contained in all strategies and publicity relating to allotments.	LBAPSG	WWT LAs	2010	A
PL3. Review allotment provision and geographic distribution; ensure that future developments include provision for allotment gardening and write a Strategy for Allotments where nature conservation is integrated with crop production.	LBAPSG	AS LAs HBA	2006	B, E

PL4. Review and standardise tenancy agreements and develop partnerships with other council's.	LBAPSG	AS LAs	2005	B
PL5 . Encourage the adoption of a policy discouraging the use of molluscides on land controlled by local authorities e.g. parks, allotments.	WBRC	WWT LAs NE	2006	A
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Develop and implement 'Master Plans' for allotments and record information on a database.	LBAPSG	WWT LAs	2008	B, C
SM2. Encourage planting and management of native hedgerows and trees and growing of local fruit and traditional crops on plots.	AS	WWT LAs	2005	A, B
SM3. Employ nature conservation techniques to increase biodiversity.	AS	LAs WWT	2005	A, E
Advisory				
A1. Produce and circulate a leaflet covering gardening tips and advice with opportunities for promoting environmentally friendly gardening.	WWT	LAs AS	2005	A, B, E
A2. Encourage gardeners to conserve the gene pool by planting native varieties, including traditional vegetables, and when practical to collect seeds for sowing next year.	AS	WWT LAs	2005	A
A3. Encourage visits to demonstration allotment sites run by Coventry and Heart of England Organic Gardeners Associations, Garden Organic, etc.	AS	LAs	2005	E
A4. Use allotments as venues for demonstration community composting schemes	AS	LAs GO Community Groups	By 2006	D, E
A5. Target allotment holders and gardeners for campaign to discourage use of slug pellets.	WRBC	LAs NE GCs GO	2006	A
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Develop an easy to use biodiversity survey form and circulate to allotment holders to complete themselves.	WWT	LAs HBA	2005	A, C

Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Update publicity including information on Council's website, leaflets and posters. Produce a leaflet for all plot holders.	LBAPSG	AS WWT LAs	2005	All aims
CP2. Discuss wildlife friendly gardening with allotment representatives at Allotment Working Party Meetings and develop demonstration gardens in unused areas.	AS	LAs	2005	A, B, E
CP3. Encourage sponsorship and seek external funding to develop and promote projects	AS	LAs	2005	D
CP4. Promote allotments as a social and healthy pastime, emphasising their value for organic fresh food production, community gardens and wildlife.	AS	LAs WWT	2005	D, E
CP5. Encourage more schools and community groups to do work on allotment sites, highlighting links with the National Curriculum. Develop schools project run by COGA at Garden Organic..	AS	LAs WWT	2005	D
CP6. Develop further links with Farmers Markets.	AS	LAs	2005	E

Abbreviations: AS – Allotment Societies, HBA - Habitat Biodiversity Audit, GO – Garden Organic, LAs - Local Authorities, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Steering Group, NE – Natural England, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WSP – Wildlife Sites Project, WWT - Warwickshire Wildlife Trust,

7. REFERENCES (see LBAP Bibliography web page)

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate Links web page for links to web sites)

UK Urban Biodiversity Action Plan no.754

UK Built-up Areas & Gardens Biodiversity Action Plan no. 62

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

National Society for Allotment & Leisure Gardeners

Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Britain in Bloom: www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom

'Garden Organic' (formerly Henry Doubleday Research Association) produces leaflets on: *soil care, making leaf mould, seed saving, growing organic herbs, growing organic vegetables from seed, disease and pest free vegetable growing, flying pests, slug*

control. Obtainable from Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry, Warwickshire, CV8 3LG.
Tel: 024 76 303517 or email: enquiry@hdra.org.uk

Heart of England Organic Gardeners (HEOG), 6 Waverley Road, Kenilworth, CV8 1JN
Tel. 01926 852135 email: "info@heog.org.uk"

Coventry Organic Gardeners Association (COGA), c/o Garden Organic

Natural England (2004) Many leaflets including: *Composting and peat-free gardening, Garden ponds and boggy areas: havens for wildlife, Mammals in your garden, Wildlife on Allotments*. Free from the NE Enquiry Service, tel. 01733 455101 or email: enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

9. CONTACTS

Solihull: ereed@solihull.gov.uk

Action 21 Ltd. - Judy Steele: judy@dmac.co.uk