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Summary

A study was carried out to investigate the quality and running of the management at Moorside Allotments. This was achieved mainly with the support of the Allotment Association Committee and the tenants. The results indicated that Moorside Allotments is an active community managed by a committed association where tenants are experienced growers who are, overall, satisfied with the management. The study revealed a rising interest in organic growing and wildlife, as well as certain issues to address, such as a lack of available plots, and problems caused by floods and vandalism.

1.0 Terms of Reference

- 1.1 This report will investigate how the Allotment Association of Moorside is run by the Association Committee.
- 1.2 An analysis of plot holders' profiles, experience, involvement in activities and motivations for growing will be conducted.
- 1.3 The current rules, recently adopted, and their effects on site running will be studied.
- 1.4 The collective services provided and the degree of satisfaction of tenants will be analysed, with special attention paid to means of communication.
- 1.5 This will be complemented by an overarching view of Newcastle Allotment Associations.

2.0 Procedures

- 2.1 An interview with the Chairman, Peter Whewell, and the Trading Hut Manager, Sue Pownall, was conducted aiming to identify the main concerns and opportunities for improvement at Moorside. This information was taken into account in preparing a questionnaire.
- 2.2 Fieldwork was carried out, consisting of several walks and informal conversations at different times and days of the week, jointly with the distribution of the questionnaire.
- 2.3 The questionnaire was organised in 4 main sections: tenants' profile, the rules, facilities and communication. (See Appendix 1).
- 2.4 Once the results were analysed, further interviews with the Committee members were conducted to contrast the findings and ensure feasible recommendations.
- 2.5 Some external referencing was done to obtain information about the city's Allotment Working Group, the benefits of growing, allotment vandalism and plot demand, in order to have a complete picture. (See References).

3.0 Findings

- 3.1 In 1999 Newcastle City Council disbanded the Allotments Sub-Committee and handed the running of its sites to a newly elected Allotments Working Group with the support and advice of the authority's allotments officer. All eight members of the working group are active plot holders who serve in a voluntary unpaid capacity. The chairman of Moorside Allotments, Peter Whewell, is a member of the working group. The group manages 62 sites in the city which have a total of 2,316 plots.
- 3.1.1 Allotment groups say maintaining a plot is good for health, good for the environment as it allows people to grow their food locally, and good for forging communities as people make friends on their allotments. Having more green spaces in cities also provides a haven for wildlife to thrive.
- 3.1.2 In Newcastle there are 766 people waiting for allotment plots.
- 3.1.3 In a survey done recently by the city's Allotment Working Group, 16% of residents interviewed said they would be interested in having an allotment, although at the moment there are only seven plots for every thousand people in the city.
- 3.1.4 In recent years hundreds of plots have been axed as the Freeman of the City ordered the land to be returned for grazing, though the city council has no powers to stop this.
- 3.1.5 At Moorside there are 30 people on the waiting list, meaning a wait of about five years for an allotment. Less than 10 years ago there were vacancies. Peter Whewell, chairman of Moorside Allotments in Fenham, presented a petition to Newcastle City Council in November asking officers to find more land to be used as allotments and community gardens.
- 3.2 The Moorside Allotments Committee meets 12 times a year, and its ten members spend an average of 20 hours per month in their tasks. This is significant because the budget obtained from tenants by the annual subscription is poor. The City Council allocates a budget for maintenance, but other funding for further improvements is obtained by fundraising and awards. This entails an active search and constant applications, jointly with the support of plot holders.

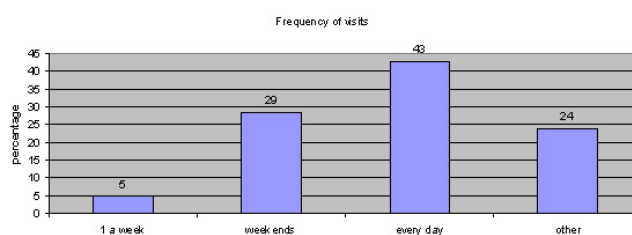
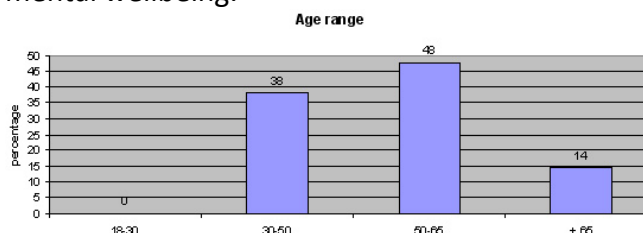
3.3 2009 performance in awards and grants by Moorside Allotments:

- City Allotment Competition: first place in full plot with glass; most Wildlife-friendly plot; second in best large allotment site; third place in full plot without glass.
- City Show: 16 first prizes; 18 second prizes; 16 third prizes; 11 fourth prizes.
- Comfrey Project, Guardian Charity Award for 2009.
- City Council grant for printing the new constitution, adopted in 2009.
- Northumberland Wildlife Trust grant for putting a new wildlife friendly security hedge along the east boundary.
- Muckle Solicitors grant for paving and ramps up to toilet block.
- Northumberland Wildlife Trust grant for bee conservation.

3.4 The lower areas of Moorside Allotment are suffering of flooding in high rain periods. To address the issue a budget of £14.000 is needed to build a drainage system. The Committee is working to obtain a grant for it.

3.5 The main concern of tenants is vandalism. The Committee has organised regular night patrols by the local police to dissuade vandals. New fencing has been erected to prevent it. A CCTV security system is being considered.

3.6 Growers' profile: 21 out of 100 Allotment Members answered the questionnaire, which represents 21% of the tenants. There are no plot holders younger than 30 years. The main age range is between 30 and 65. The growers are very experienced. 38% have had an allotment before, and they have been in Moorside an average of 9 years. Their motivations and preferences in growing are totally diverse (see Appendix 2 column AD), although many comments point out the wide benefits of growing and gardening, such as socialising, natural lifestyle, organic produce and mental wellbeing.



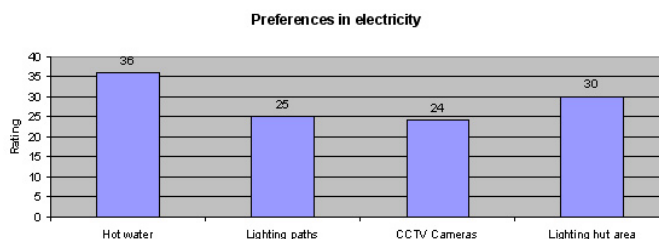
3.7 Opinion about the Rules

- 30% especially agree with rule no. 8, which prevent dogs staying permanently at the site.
- 48% don't disagree with any rule, and 48% disagree with rule no. 12, which bans bonfires from March to November.
- 71% think it is not necessary to add any rule. The rest suggest more control in land cultivation, green house erection and nuisance.
- 38% noticed improvements with the adoption of the new Constitution in January 2009. However, it is not clear whether these improvements are directly related to the rules.

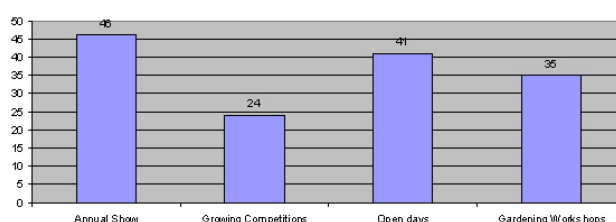
3.8 Trading Hut

- 62% buy some of the products, but only 24% buy the majority of what is available.
- The users are mainly satisfied with the prices and opening hours.
- 29% would buy organic products, as long as they were offered for a reasonable price.

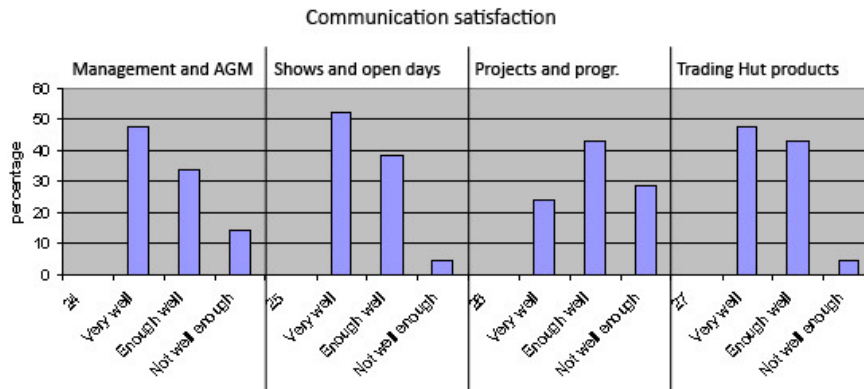
3.9 Despite watering being only occasionally needed, 81% of growers would prioritise a water tap for each plot rather than electricity. The first is seen as a convenient facility, whereas the latter is considered by some tenants to be inconsistent wity the idea of contact with nature and peace.



3.10 Regarding activities, 81% affirm that they are interested in them, and 48% is willing to spend time in preparations. With regard to rating activities, it should be noted that 33% of the answers have been discarded because the questions were not completely filled in and these could therefore distort the results. The rest of the answers indicate that the Annual Show is clearly the most popular activity, followed by Open days.



3.11 The majority of Moorsiders are satisfied with means of communication. On average, 87% consider that are very well or well enough informed about management, activities, programmes and trading products. Specifically, they are particularly satisfied with activities and trading products, whereas 29% consider that they are not informed enough about programmes.



3.12 67% of users get information from the website, but a significant 38% use the notice board. 76% of Moorsiders prefer to contact personally when they need to talk with Committee members or other growers. Specifically, preferences for contacting the Committee compared to other tenants shows a slight difference. For the first, 48% prefer using the internet, whereas for the latter 86% opt for finding them at the site.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 It is difficult to obtain a plot tenancy, and this is likely to become worse for two reasons:
- The land available for that use is more likely to decrease than increase.
 - The demand is expected to rise.
- 4.2 The Association Committee is active and deeply involved inside and outside Moorside, as can be seen by hours of dedication, grants awarded, activities organised and programmes run.
- 4.3 The tenants are experienced and happy to be here. Although they mainly came due to proximity, the majority are interested in activities and many of them are willing to help. However, they also point out clearly the value of a nuisance free, children safe, natural peaceful space.
- 4.4 Tenants find the rules sensible and adequate, except the bonfire ban which seems to be too inflexible. Their main concerns are flooding problems and vandalism. The first needs the budget to be addressed, the latter can be reduced but not entirely solved.
- 4.5 A considerable group of Moorsiders would like to go organic, but the selling quantities of the Trading Hut are not enough to offer reasonable prices.
- 4.6 There is a strong interest in preserving wildlife and natural lifestyle as much as possible. As captured in communication preferences, internet is a necessary tool, but Moorsiders prefer personal contact or the notice board.
- 4.7 Charity projects and programmes need to gain visibility at the site.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 Moorside Committee should continue to join efforts with City's Allotments Working Group to find a solution for the lack of plots. An extension of Moorside would be advisable.
- 5.2 Considering huge waiting lists and shortage of land, rules about cultivation should be enforced to ensure that all the plots are fully used and well maintained.
- 5.3 A revision of the bonfire ban should be considered. Some exceptional circumstances might be arise when the ban can be revoked, such as when a new tenant needs to clean the plot, or when there is a change in the weather.
- 5.4 Thorned hedges could be planted around the site fences, in order to obtain three benefits:
 - Edible fruits, such as gooseberries.
 - Fostering of wildlife.
 - Deterring vandalism.
- 5.5 The City's Allotments Working Group could be the vehicle to negotiate better prices for organic products, joining the demands of all Newcastle allotments in collective orders.
- 5.6 The website should be maintained as the formal means of communication and presentation of Moorside. However, other alternative systems could be encouraged, such as:
 - A notice board for charity projects and programmes maintained by themselves, and probably a section on the website, to let the tenants know easily what is going on.
 - An internal post system to exchange seeds and tools. Letters and newsletters could be organised and distributed.
- 5.7 Regarding the satisfaction of tenants, services offered and issues tackled, Moorside Committee should keep working in the same direction in site management.

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7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 Questionnaire formats

Appendix 2 Summary of responses

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2

