

Speech in support of more allotment provision, Wingrove Ward

To Newcastle City Council Wednesday the 4th November 2009.

I am presenting this petition for more allotment provision in Fenham as Chairman of Moorside Allotments on behalf of petitioners on our Moorside waiting list. There are currently 30 persons on our waiting list, meaning that the waiting time is around five years for an allotment. This is a symptom of a citywide problem with rapidly increasing waiting lists meaning that around one thousand people are now waiting for an allotment in Newcastle.

This petition is brought under the Smallholdings and Allotments Act of 1908. The act states that Councils or parishes firstly have a legal obligation to provide a sufficient number of allotments and secondly have an obligation to consider a petition by six electors upon this matter.

I would like to speak briefly about the benefits of allotments under four headings **First good health**. Allotment gardening is hard but rewarding physical work and about a quarter of our gardeners at Moorside are retired and a number are disabled and for many this is their only exercise. allotments are spaces of tranquillity, allowing gardeners to unwind, forget the stresses of modern life and reconnect with the natural world. Our gardeners have a lively interest not just in plants but in the soil, the weather, the seasons, and wildlife.

Secondly sustainability. Our gardeners increasingly want to grow and eat their own fresh and organic fruit and vegetables at low cost. The last four half plots let at Moorside have been to young local families living in houses without gardens who want to move towards food self-sufficiency. Our gardeners are very aware, as they sow and plant, of the

effects of climate change; already our growing season begins two weeks earlier than it used to, and many are concerned this will cause global food shortages in the not too distant future with a pressing need for local food self-sufficiency.

Third a sense of shared community. Allotments are socially inclusive allowing a broad social and ethnic mix. At Moorside we have a primary school plot, plots for the Comfrey Project, which is a gardening project for refugees and asylum seekers, a scout plot and a plot for a carers association. We have an annual show to which the public is invited, open days involving seed and seedling swap days, and a gardening club where our experienced gardeners can hand down gardening knowledge and techniques learned often from their own parents. You would have to say this is civil society at its best.

Fourth allotments contribute to Newcastle's green space policy, its biodiversity policy and its tree strategy. Allotments are havens for wildlife and provide wildlife corridors allowing movement of insects and mammals. They are particularly important in our conservation of endangered species such as song-birds and bees.

Overall allotments contribute enormously to the quality of life for its allotment holders and their families. The council could help sustain this quality by finalising, approving and executing its allotment strategy, which has spent the past five years in draft form. It could help by identifying land that could be used as allotments and community gardens, and it could help by investigating how funding can be raised for more allotment provision

Peter Whewell November 2009