

DEPUTATION FOUR
LEEDS AND DISTRICT GARDENERS' FEDERATION

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Could you please make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and could you please begin by introducing yourself and also your colleague. Thank you.

MR I WOOD: Thank you, my dear Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors. I am Ian Wood, I am the Chairman of the Leeds and District Gardeners' Federation. The gentleman to my left is Phil Gomersall, he is the Publicity Officer of the Leeds and District Gardeners' Federation. Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to talk about allotments in Leeds.

I would like to make a couple of points to begin with. Allotments are good for gardeners and good for communities. We believe that allotments are good for gardeners because they encourage fresh air and exercise, provide fresh and healthy food for the gardeners, create a sense of belonging amongst gardeners and provide opportunities – important opportunities - to socialise.

We believe they are good for communities because they are a valued resource in their communities, like schools and health centres and so on; they provide a community focus bringing together a wide variety of ages, ethnic communities, both genders together to work productively; they provide a family focus increasingly as well. The age profile of gardeners is coming down in allotment terms. On my own site where I have my plot, over 50% of the gardeners are under 60 and come with their children, so this stereotype of gardeners all being over 60 with flat caps and keeping ferrets is not right.

Leeds City Council's Parks and Countryside section and our organisation, the Leeds and District Gardeners Federation are striving to promote, protect and preserve this city's wonderful allotment heritage (and it is a wonderful allotment heritage and it is a historical allotment heritage we have got in this city). We have been doing since 1988 when our Federation was instrumental in bringing self-management to Leeds allotments and as a result 65% of the allotments in Leeds are self-managed – not run directly by the Council but self-managed by local committees – and that saves the Council literally thousands of pounds and thousands of pounds in staff time.

Recently we have worked together with Parks and Countryside to run a training course to encourage the remaining city-controlled sites to become self-managed and to improve the management skills of the existing management committees.

We believe self-management of allotments is good and it is worth bearing in mind that Leeds is a leading Authority nationally in this sense. We believe self-management is good because it reduces Council's costs (properly managed sites are cost neutral to the council); it empowers local people; the management of a site is more efficient if it is self-managed; and the local pride that self-management engenders results in a more productive and a better looking allotment site. Self-management also enables the allotment sites to bid for funds which the Council could not bid for in its own right if the Council does not run the site.

If you compare that to a situation such as in Sheffield where all the sites in Sheffield are run by the City Council, the city Council there is facing having to imposed 100%-plus rent increases on allotmenters because they are bearing the cost of the allotment provision entirely by the Council. That is not the situation in Leeds. As I said before, 65% of provision in Leeds is self-managed.

There is presently a huge for allotments in Leeds. There are around 1,500 on waiting lists and this situation, we feel, would not have arisen if planning in the city for new development had specifically included allotment sites in the planning proposals. I cannot remember – and I challenge anybody else to remember – when was the last time a new allotment site was created in the city?

Present trends seem to favour so-called community gardens. The argument is that multiple-user projects like community gardens involve outside charitable organisations that can attract outside funding. As quick fix that might work in the medium to short term, but in the long term it is very expensive for the Council and it can generally be financially non-sustainable. The vast majority of people do not want to work in a community garden, they want their own plot to grow their own food.

Self managed allotment sites can also attract outside funding and unlike community gardens, after initial set up costs have been taken into account, self-managed sites are more or less self sufficient and cost neutral to the Council.

Plot holders' wider family and friends usually benefit from the fresh produce, reduced food miles, green spaces that break up housing projects and an increase in wildlife and improving the bio-diversity.

Allotment gardening, we believe, is the only activity offering recreation to the people of all genders, all ethnic communities and all abilities working together and supporting each other. I do not think there is very much other provision in the city that does that.

Relaxation of the planning laws, as you will be aware, has opened the door even wider for developers intent on making money and this has put allotments in Leeds under a real threat. Rothwell is currently a prime example of this. Two sites have been sold, over a hundred years of allotment heritage is going down the drain as we speak, and there is a possible loss to the community of a fantastic community asset. At Rothwell's recently sold Reservoir and Victoria Pit sites...

THE LORD MAYOR: Ian, you have come technically to the end of your time, so could you just summarise very briefly your final point?

MR I WOOD: Thank you; two quick points. At Rothwell's Reservoir and Victoria Pit sites you have got families with over fifty years of continuous history working the same plot and that has been taken away from them.

We would like to argue very strongly that the Council takes allotment sites and puts them on the Register of Community Assets. Thank you very much indeed. *(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor James Lewis.

COUNCILLOR J LEWIS: Thank you, Lord Mayor, I move that the matter be referred to Executive Board for further consideration.

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: I second, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All those in favour? *(A vote was taken)* CARRIED.

Ian, thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Thank you very much and good afternoon. *(Applause)*