

Draft Policy on Community Gardens for Dun Laoghaire Rathdown

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that Allotment and Community gardening is a healthy pastime that can make a valuable contribution to community development, positive social interaction, environmental awareness and education. Allotments typically have been in greatest demand in times of economic downturn however there is also a greater awareness of food quality and many people seek to have sources of food which are grown without recourse to chemicals or fertilisers.

This report has been prepared in response to requests for the Council to support the desire for Community Gardens. It seeks to clarify the difference between allotments and Community gardens as well as setting guidelines and requirements for the establishment of new Community gardens.

While allotments are somewhat common in Ireland, Community gardens are not and historically have developed as community-managed projects in response to a lack of green space in urban conurbations in Britain, Canada and the United States. This tradition typically involves the cleaning up of abandoned vacant spaces and turning them into productive gardens. Such projects are often subsidised by local businesses, whether through the provision of funds, or materials such as seeds, tools or fencing.

For our part, the Council will work with interested groups to assist the development of community gardens and commit to helping groups resource information and locate suitable sites in the County.

Allotment and Community Gardens may be provided on lands owned by a local authority, a private individual/company, lands owned by educational establishments, religious Orders or other institutions.

If it is determined that a local authority lands are the only suitable site for a garden, the policy also recognizes the need to ascertain if there is neighbourhood support for the project. This is consistent with the process used for all such land use development projects.

Policy Context

In a policy context the main legislative basis for County Councils evolves from, Section 67 of the Local Government Act which states:

'a local authority may take such measures, engage in such activities or do such things as it considers necessary or desirable to promote the interests of the local community in relation to a range of specified matters, including allotments, fairs and markets, and related amenities, facilities and services.'

Allotments

Allotments are characterised by a concentration in one place of several land parcels that are assigned to and cultivated by individuals or families.

At Goatstown, the Parks Service manage allotments which are provided on lands reserved for the construction of the Eastern Bye-pass road. The number of new plot holders in 2011 has increased by 22 to cater for the increased interest in allotment gardening and it is envisaged that another 30 will be accommodated before the end of 2011 from a waiting list. The individual size of plots range between 40 and 200

square meters. The individual gardeners are organised in an allotment association which represents the needs of the plot holders. The individual plot holders however have a permit agreement with the Council which ensures compliance with the conditions of permit.

Any resident of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown is eligible to apply for these allotments to allotments@dlrcoco.ie and plots are allocated from a single waiting list.

Community Gardens

In contrast, Community gardens have more of a focus on communal gardening and are open to residents of a defined area. A Community garden therefore is a single piece of land gardened collectively by a group of people. Some gardens are grown with everyone working together, others are split into clearly divided plots, each managed by a different gardener (or group or family).

Community Garden supporters would maintain that in order for the gardens to be tended and developed and maintained to a high standard, it is crucial that the plot holders live in the community where they have easy access to the garden.

While food production is central to many Community Gardens, not all have vegetables as a main focus. Restoration of natural areas and planting 'flower' gardens can be open for consideration, as can "art" gardens. Gardens could have several different planting elements, such as small orchards, herbs or to attract butterflies.

In 2010 at Shanganagh Cliffs, Rathsallagh an area of 'backland' formerly zoned for housing was allocated to a RAPID project for development as a Community Garden to support community development. This site had been the source of on-going complaint by residents because of anti-social activity. While the garden is only in place for a year it is clear that it has eliminated anti-social activity and created a new focus and interest for families in the estate.

Smaller Community Gardens are also in place at Meadowlands/Fitzgerald Park, Mountown and Sallynoggin within the grounds of the Community Centre.

A community group will obviously require the agreement of the landowner in the case of a desired site being privately owned, school grounds or in other institutional use. If there is a desire amongst a community to develop a Community Garden utilising an area of local authority land which is determined to be derelict; under utilised and/or lands which are considered to be a focus for anti-social activity, the Council will support this objective (provided that the costs of site preparation, water supply etc are not excessive) and the following conditions will apply:

1. There needs to be clear evidence of community support. A community consultation process may be required to assess neighbourhood support for the garden.
2. The garden is developed at no cost to the Council, except that prior to the first season, the Council will prepare the site for planting by removing grass and cultivating the soil (the essence of any Community Garden is the members of the community doing the work themselves!).
3. A garden site plan must be drawn up and approved by the Parks Service. The plan must include the layout of the plots and indicate any proposed structures

or fences.

4. A non-profit club must be established and agree to develop and operate the gardens according to a licence. Management responsibilities, user fees and access procedures would be agreed as part of the licence.
5. The term of the licence will not exceed 4 years 9 months. This ensures that the Council has the ability to regularly review these operations to ensure that they are being administered in the public interest.
6. Allotments of space must be made from a waiting list based on a defined geographical area, on a first come first served basis. This condition is to insure that the allotments are made on a fair and equitable basis. The waiting list will be maintained by each club.
7. The non-profit club must adhere to all conditions and maintenance standards set by the Council.
8. Where a Community garden is to be developed in a public open space, no barriers to general public access to the site can be created. The gardens must not appear to be an exclusive area where the public is made to feel unwelcome.

L.Moore, Senior Parks Superintendent. June 2011.