

Allotments – Halton

Background

When the Rothschild estate was sold to the war department in 1919 all the land went to the then War Department, now MOD. The growth of a normal 'civilian' village from ad hoc sales of bits of land has resulted in a community of over 300 dwellings and over 900 people. Unfortunately having no available land and being surrounded by MOD land, means the existing community has no playing fields (despite being surrounded by them), no village green and no allotments.

Our hope is that this dearth of community assets will be addressed during the closure of RAF Halton both for the existing community and the new community. Our meeting with the Minister led us to believe this would be addressed during the planning phase. I believe it would be sensible to start this process now and get agreement so that it is integrated into the master planning is being developed.

Proposal

This proposal addresses one of the community assets we are missing – allotments. In simple terms we are asking the DIO/MOD to provide a plot of land for allotments. These would be for the existing community and the future community arising from the 1000+ dwellings arising from the closure.

Benefits

In this instance having an existing allotment society (sponsored by the Parish Council) which could establish itself and welcome the new community as they move in would be a great benefit. By creating a social network (the allotment society) which would welcome new members of the community and enable them to socialise with the existing community and newcomers it could become a powerful tool in creating a sense of neighbourliness, a village identity and a coherent community.

We currently have a suppressed demand for allotments from the existing community, which is currently not being met or satisfied by surrounding parishes. The demand for allotments from the new community may be higher than would normally be expected due to the reuse of the barrack buildings as apartments/flats.

In addition it will help the climate change debate by reducing food miles, and it will also help keep the community more active by providing an additional form of exercise.

This would be an excellent use of green belt land that may not be amenable to building new dwellings and would preserve the openness of the overall site.

From the local community point of view it will meet an unfilled need today, and demonstrate that their concerns and welfare are being taken into account by the DIO.

Timing

While one may well believe this could wait until all the houses are built, we believe this would be wrong. There are several reasons why we think this should be done sooner rather than just wait.

- The situation we face is that we go from a functioning airbase to nothing. We would like to try and moderate that impact on the community by putting as many things in place as possible before that happens. This would help cushion the transition impact.
- Secondly offering something to the existing community early, upfront and tangible is a real bonus. This would demonstrate that the DIO are committed to look after the community and help build trust and community acceptance to the changes being imposed on them.
- Thirdly it allows us to build the parish's community capacity to be able to offer something as new home owners arrive.
- Finally starting 'small' for the existing community will allow us to sort the processes out bring a local benefit. Then sizing it for future growth will help the process of community integration.

Therefore what we are asking for is a piece of land transferred to the Parish Council to start the process. The Parish Council would start using a small part of the land to establish the initial allotment holders, establish a functioning allotment sub commitment and work out any process wrinkles. The balance of the land would be let out for grazing or hay until people start moving into the new dwellings.

Legal

The Parish Council has the responsibility for allotments within the boundaries of Halton parish. If an allotment authority is of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments in its area, it is required under Section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, to provide a sufficient number of allotments and to let them to persons residing in its area who want them.

Written representations may be made to the local authority on the need for allotments by any 6 residents on the electoral register or persons liable to pay council tax, and the local authority must take those representations into account (section 23(2) of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908). The Council must assess whether there is a demand for allotments in their area. If the council decides that there is a demand for allotments; they have a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of plots. In terms of the duty to provide under section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 there is no time limit for provision once it has been established that there is a demand.

If the council has no spare land for allotments they could make an application for compulsory hiring under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908. However, if the DIO would be willing to release some of RAF Halton's land ahead of its closure, this would deliver a solution to the problem.'

If we wish to create a new allotment site, the first thing that we need to know is whether the land that has been identified for the new site is currently agricultural land or not. We believe all MOD land is classed as non-agricultural and therefore under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, we will need to seek planning permission to use the land as allotments. Equally important is that allotments can easily be located within green belt land. Therefore the legal constraints on development within the green belt land would make use as an allotment an attractive alternative use of the land.

Size – Site and individual allotments

There is no legal national minimum provision standard, but councils do have to audit allotments, set standards of provision, and assess their actual provision against these standards as part of Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17).

Most allotment strategies quote the 1969 Thorpe Report which recommends a minimum provision equivalent to 15 per 1,000 households, but this is not legally binding.

It is estimated that since 1969 some 30% of the then available allotments land has been lost irrevocably. Hence, the NSALG recommends that the irreducible minimum provision today should be 20 standard (300 sq. yd) plots per 1,000 households.

Benchmarking

If we look at Wendover they have 3 different allotment sites

Aylesbury Road – 95 plots run by the Wendover Ashbrook Allotment assoc.

London Road – 25 plots run by Wendover Parish Council

Hogtrough Lane – 39? plots run by Wendover Parish Council

A total of 159 plots for a population of 8334 population or 19 plots per thousand. In terms of dwellings that is 3341 dwellings or 47 per thousand. Although not all these are standard sized plots but smaller

Given that we will have a higher number of flats/apartments than normal then using the 20 plots per 1000 residents would be fairly conservative. We have the following situation.

Today's position – 330 dwellings	7 plots
Extra 1000 dwellings per VALP	20 plots
More Houses/contingency say	10 plots (allotments need to be away from specimen trees)

There is no legal minimum size for an allotment. The [Allotments Act 1922](#) defines 'allotment gardens' as 'an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetables and fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family'. (Section 22). It is generally accepted that the average plot is 300 square yards or 250 square metres.

According to the National Allotments Society -

An acre of land can house 12-15 standard sized plots comfortably, with enough room for haulage ways and

footpaths. To enable access for wheelchair users all paths should be no less than 1.5 metres wide preferably measuring 1.7 metres to allow for a wheelchair and ambulant person to travel side-by-side.

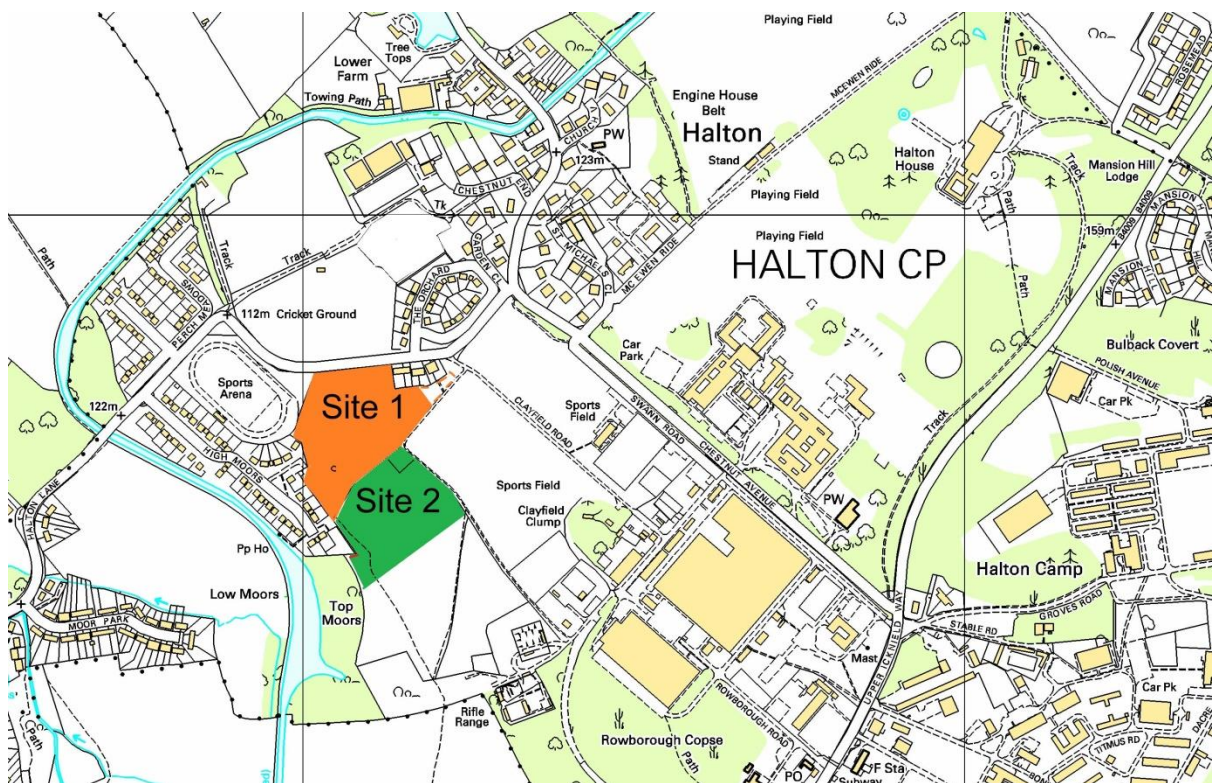
Therefore we would need a piece of land which is about 2.5 acres, although initially it would start a lot smaller.

Location

One of the key elements is that all allotment holders in Halton are together in one place to enable social networking and help create a sense of a common identity. Therefore we believe we need one fairly central area for the allotments. Having distributed and separate locations across Halton will not work. In terms of community building it would be self defeating (at least initially) and stop the necessary social networking we are hoping to get out of this initiative.

Therefore the location needs to be somewhere between Upper Icknield Way and the Wendover Arm Canal. This would be a central position between houses/dwellings on main site, new dwellings off Chestnut Avenue, the 'old village' and the service housing.

There a couple of potential sites



These are not ranked in any specific order.

Site ONE. This is the land between the stadium and the row of houses opposite the orchard. It has several advantages to Site ONE.

- It is large enough
- allows vehicle access via Clayfield road
- Depending on where the other community facilities of a village green/park and playing field are located then it could make for some useful synergies. If the village green was between the Nuffield pavilion and Halton lane, and the sports field next to it , then by having a play area for kids situated behind the houses on Halton lane it would serve families who either come to watch/participate in local sports or wish to dig their allotment.

Site TWO. This is where there was a paddock located between High Moors and the sports fields.

- certainly large enough
- vehicle access via Clayfield road

Summary

We believe the proposal to make land available now to start an allotment and establish the structure and framework has merit. We would like this to be factored into the master planning now as the planning progresses. We have identified two potential sites without the detailed knowledge of the evolving masterplan but believe one of these locations should work. In addition we would like to progress this idea before the Camp closure so that we have the necessary atructure in place and provide a benefit to the existing community.

We are looking forward to your response.