

ALLOTMENTS IN MANCHESTER

There are over 40 allotments in Manchester, which are ultimately the responsibility of Manchester Leisure, with a dedicated Allotments Manager who is based in Alexandra Park in Moss Side. Much of the day-to-day management of allotments, however, is left in the capable hands of a network of allotment societies, who take care of their own sites.

Association of Manchester Allotments (AMAS)



AMAS was formed in 1993, to support thirty or so allotment societies, which are based on the larger allotments around the City. Each allotment society has a dedicated group of local plot holders who carefully self-manage their sites. All local societies are affiliated to AMAS, and together comprise the district federation of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. AMAS affiliated societies enjoy a large degree of self-management on their sites, taking on new plot holders, collecting rents, supplying keys, organising shop facilities and shows, holding regular meetings, and electing officers and committees to carry out these services.

AMAS officers form the nucleus of a group, which meets regularly with Manchester Leisure as the Allotments Consultation Group (ACG). As such, AMAS has driven a number of initiatives in recent years, including:

- the annual allotments competition
- maintaining the same plot rental charges since 1997
- priority works for allotment sites
- the use of a rotovator to prepare plots for new tenants
- the production and distribution of a colourful advertising brochure
- information on the council web-site
- skip allocation for regular removal of rubbish
- communal compost bays erected on six allotment sites

An on-going debate is taking place at allotment sites about the merits of full Society self-management. This would involve AMAS becoming a private trust, which would be delegated full control of local allotments, independent to the local authorities.

Manchester Allotment Survey 2003

Produced by AMAS – the Association of Manchester Allotment Societies. The survey covers all forty allotment sites within Manchester, with a total of 2,229 plots. The report covers all aspects of allotment provision, and the condition of amenities on sites, and information about plot population and Society organisation.

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG)

NSALG helps allotment tenants enjoy the recreation of gardening, and promotes health, education and community fellowship. The Society encourages the formation local associations, safeguards their interests through improved legislation, and advises generally on all problems that face the amateur gardener. The Society aims to ensure that facilities are made available to all who desire to follow the recreation of gardening and endeavours to instil a better understanding of the fact that gardening is a recreation for the mind and body as well as a source of economic wealth both to the individual and to the nation. NSALG meetings are attended by representatives from regional federations, of which AMAS is the local Association of Manchester Allotments, which represents local allotment holders in the city.

For more information on NSALG visit: www.nsalg.org.uk

Scope for Community Projects on Allotments

There is a lot of scope for community food initiatives on allotment plots. The most important thing to realise however, is that each allotment has its own local society, and their own way of doing things. Most of these societies are open to the concept of community initiatives, but ideas should be negotiated with the society, and projects should be developed with sensitivity to the users of the site.

Ideas for community allotment projects include:

- Food growing for environmental and community groups
- Intergenerational projects, transferring knowledge and skills from older people to younger generations
- Referral schemes, prescribing allotment plots as treatment/therapy, for individuals suffering from physical and/or mental health problems.

Community Allotments in Manchester

Nell Lane Allotment

This is a large site situated off the Nell Lane estate, next to Southern Cemetery in Chorlton. A new strip of land has recently been established, from which two community groups have obtained plots:

- Action For Sustainable Living (AfSL) – a local environmental group, have a team of volunteers, who are working together to manage the plot, using permaculture principles to grow healthy food. During 2005 the group organised an Introduction to Permaculture course, which was held in a yurt with straw bale seats, and attended by 14 staff and volunteers. During the course the participants created a design for the plot, and laid down some basic infrastructure. Regular volunteer workdays now take place on the plot.
- The Manchester Leisure Over 50s Group have a site next to AfSL and HARP, from which they run regular group sessions.



For more information on Nell Lane allotment contact Martin, the society secretary: 07759 324 377.

PACE - The Physical and Community Exercise Team

This is a partnership initiative between North Manchester Primary Care Trust, Sports Action Zone and New Deal for Communities. The aim of PACE is to promote increased levels of physical activity within the health wards of North and East Manchester. PACE operate an allotment on the Scotland Hall Road site in Newton Heath. For more information contact James McInerney: james.mcinerney@northpct.manchester.nwest.nhs.uk

Cyprus Street Tots Plot

An allotment plot for the teaching about fruit and vegetables to the under fives is currently being developed on the Cypress Street site in Harpurhey by Sure Start and MERCi and should be fully operational in 2006. For more information contact Geraldine Wall: geraldinew@bridge-5.org / 0161 273 1736

MEEN - Manchester Environmental Education Network

MEEN operate an allotment on Scotland Hall Road in Newton Heath for groups of school children. Pupils are taught about vegetables and the environment. For more information contact Raicheal Locke: meen@gn.apc.org

Booth Centre – Manchester Cathedral

This allotment plot on the Crumpsall and Cheetham site boasts a large greenhouse. The aim of the project is to help homeless alcoholics return to mainstream society. Gardening helps them to maintain their sobriety. For more information phone 0161 835 2499.

Manchester Leisure – Sports Development Unit

The Sports Development Unit is currently operating two schemes on Manchester Allotments, on Cypress Street and Southern sites. Young offenders clear derelict plots in return for training in Sports Development Qualifications and the plots are then tended by the unit's over fifty age group health referrals. For more information contact Jim Canniffe: 0161 232 3104.

Manchester Learning Disability Partnership

- Allotment therapy for people with learning disabilities held at Frenchbarn Lane allotments in Blackley every Monday and Wednesday 12.30 – 3.30pm March to October. Grow flowers, herbs and vegetables. Also contains a sensory garden.
- Allotment therapy for people with learning disabilities held at Debdale Park allotments in Gorton every Thursday 10.00 – 2.00pm . Grow flowers, herbs and vegetables. Learn basic woodworking skills.
- Wednesday, day of gardening, labour and horticulture in Wythenshawe Park. 9.00 to 4.00pm

For more information on these projects contact Gemma Clegge: 0161 205 1364

GP Referral Schemes

There is a lot of potential for tying allotments around the City in GP Referral schemes. The basic idea is that rather than prescribing drugs, GPs can prescribe people suffering from ailments such as stress, for example, with an allotment plot. There is a growing amount of substantiated evidence indicating the positive health benefits of growing food. Benefits are derived from better nutrition, physical activity, and the spiritual uplift gained from connecting with nature. MERCi (the Manchester Environmental Resource Centre initiative) have undertaken a substantial amount of research into the subject, and are looking into establishing a GP referral scheme for Manchester allotments. To find out more about this, and to obtain a copy of the research report, contact Andy Farmer, email: farmallot@yahoo.co.uk / phone: 0161 273 1736.

Accessing Information on allotments in Manchester

There are several places to get information on local allotments:

- **The Association of Manchester Allotments:**

www.amas.org.uk

Phone / email Ron Carter, Honorary Secretary 0161 224 3922 /

carterron@tiscali.co.uk

1 Park Range, Victoria Park, Manchester, M14 5HP

The Association has an interactive online allotment finder at:

www.amas.org.uk/AllotmentFinder.htm

- **Allotments Manager, Manchester City Council:**

www.manchester.gov.uk and follow the: 'Leisure' and 'Allotments' links.

Or contact Ms Sue Roberts:

Alexandra Park Offices, Moss Side M14 6JL

phone 0161 226 3322 / email s.roberts2@notes.manchester.gov.uk

- **Community Health Information Profiler (CHIP):**

www.healthprofile.org.uk and follow the: 'What Information is there about ...' and 'Food and Healthy Eating' links.

(Here you can find names and addresses of Allotment Societies in the City, along with a lot more health related information and data.)

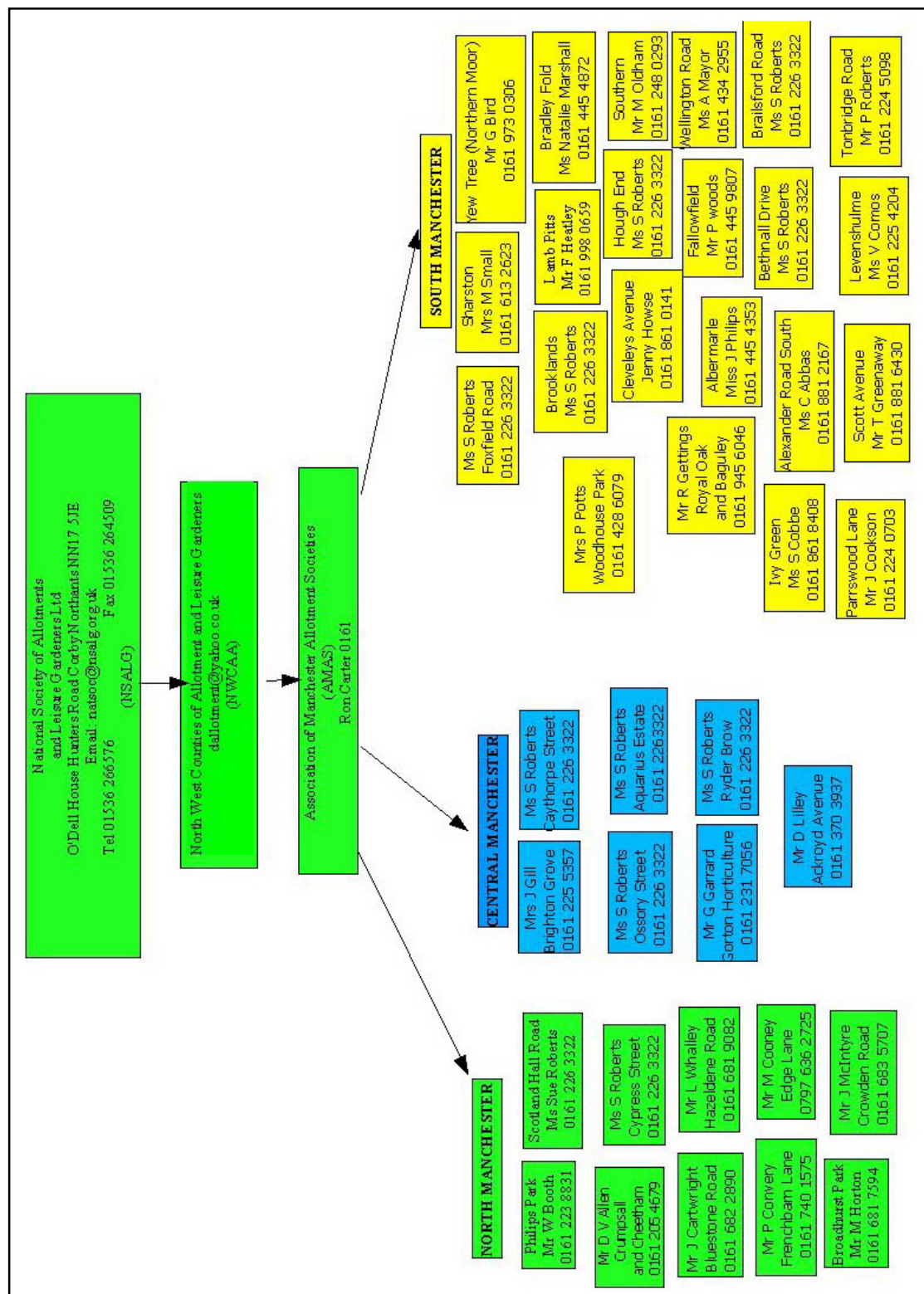
Obtaining a Plot

There are two ways of applying for an allotment plot:

1. Contact the City Allotments Manager on 0161 226 3322
2. Find the nearest allotment site to where you live, and visit on a Sunday morning, when the society trading hut is likely to be open, and plot-holders will be around

There may be a waiting list for plots at your chosen allotments but you can either ask for your name to be added to the list or apply for a plot on another site. For details of vacant plots, contact:

- Manchester Leisure on 0161 226 3322, or
- Ron Carter, Honorary Secretary at AMAS - 0161 224 3922, email carterron@tiscali.co.uk



Schematic representation of allotment organisational structure in Manchester. Produced by Andy Farmer, MERCi, March 2006.

Old Trafford Community Allotment

Planting and Living in Old Trafford

Seymour Grove Allotments

Spring Planting!




Contact Liz or Tina on 0161 873 7182 to join us down on the plot

Why not help us to get the community allotment ready for spring planting.

Come down for a dig and to find out more about how you can get involved.

- No previous gardening experience needed
- Any level of physical ability welcomed
- Children Welcome

Share in a harvest of organically grown vegetables and fruit!



PLOT is a partnership of organisations from the local area working to help people grow their own.







Sample publicity material for Old Trafford Community Allotment. Provided by Claire Wheeler, Action For Sustainable Living

Regeneration Issues

During 2005/06, MERCi (Manchester Environmental Resource Initiative) have been leading a partnership bid, with other local groups, to obtain a significant Big Lottery grant to support local food work. The main objectives of the grant are to “Teach, grow, show, tell and share”.

A large part of this funding is anticipated to support allotments. The Joint Health Unit has been working on a complimentary bid, to support infrastructure development in allotments, but this has run into difficulty, and has caused knock-on difficulties for the allotment side of the Big Lottery application. The basic problem is that local authorities have a statutory obligation to maintain allotments, and because of this, such work is non-fundable by the Big Lottery. The nature of usage of allotments is changing with the times, and they are becoming more a facility for young people and families. There is a need for the allotment infrastructure to modernise with these changes, if allotments are to thrive within the Food Futures strategy. However, Food Futures investigations have shown that the cost of allotment infrastructure regeneration is potentially enormous, and the budget is simply not there.

Andy Farmer who is based at MERCi has suggested the idea that Manchester’s allotments are placed within an independent trust, run collectively by allotment societies. This would relieve the LA of its statutory obligation, and enable the Trust to raise money independently from sources such as the Big Lottery, for infrastructure improvements. This is feasible under the city’s Best Value policy. Similar processes have happened in Nottingham and Coventry. Nottingham allotments have alleviated themselves of infrastructure problems successfully within a period of about seven years. The possibility also exists, that allotments could take a social enterprise approach, and sell produce from plots, to help cover infrastructure costs.

Development Threat to Allotment Gardeners:

There is currently enormous pressure on allotment sites from housing development, and regeneration agencies. For example, in February 2006 all the plot holders at Edge Lane allotment in Openshaw, East Manchester were served eviction notices, in order that the site may be developed. AMAS, and the Edge Lane society contested the eviction notices on the basis that improper planning permission existed.

Such ‘regeneration’ efforts are contrary to raft of sustainability strategies and organisations that are operating in conjunction with Manchester Partnership, including:

- The hearts and minds of thousands of allotment holders across the City
- The Manchester Food Futures Strategy
- The Community Network For Manchester Health Inequalities Pool
- The Environment Network For Manchester
- The Greening Manchester Initiative
- The work of PCTs and Sure Start initiatives
- Older people, mental health and allotment referral schemes
- Environmental groups and volunteers
- Other city strategies including the Manchester Biodiversity and Tree strategies



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