

MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT COUNCIL OPEN SPACE, SPORT & RECREATION STUDY: ASSESSMENT REPORT

PART 9: ALLOTMENTS, COMMUNITY GARDENS AND CITY FARMS

Introduction

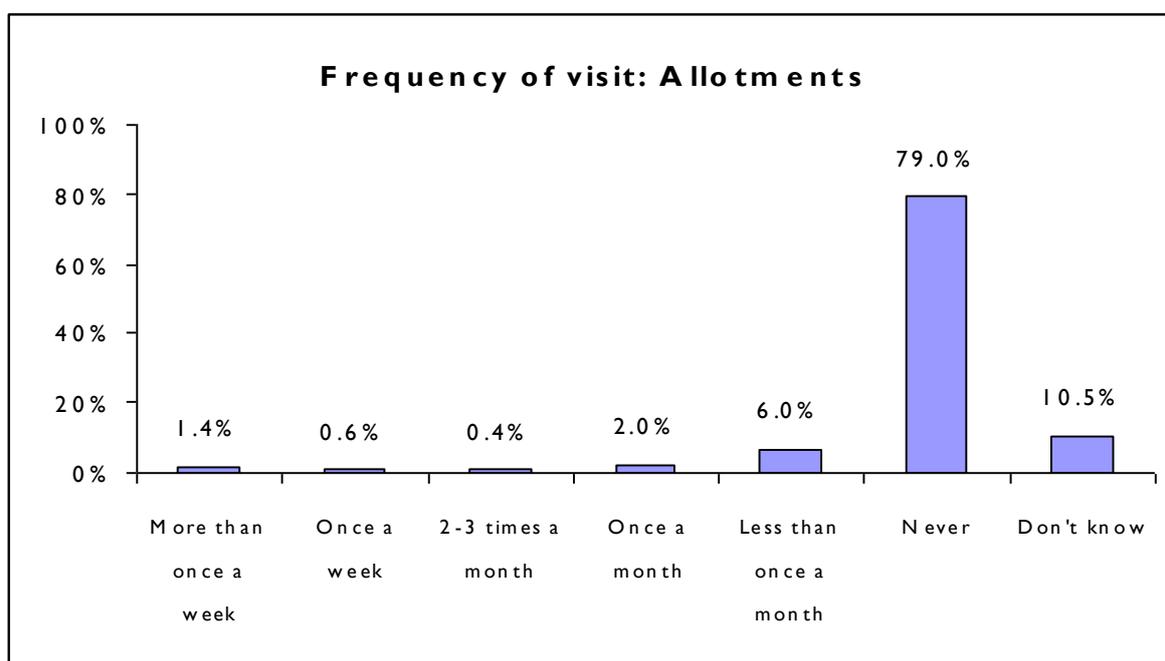
9.1 The typology of allotments, community gardens and city farms, as set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide includes sites, which provide 'opportunities for those people who wish to do so to grow their own produce as part of the long term promotion of sustainability, health and social interaction.'

Context

9.2 This section outlines findings from the survey of residents in relation to their use of and attitudes towards the provision of allotments in Malvern Hills District. It provides a context for the subsequent sections, which address the quantity, quality and accessibility of provision. Results are provided for the descriptions used in the survey itself.

Usage

Figure 9.1: Frequency of usage of parks in the previous 12 months

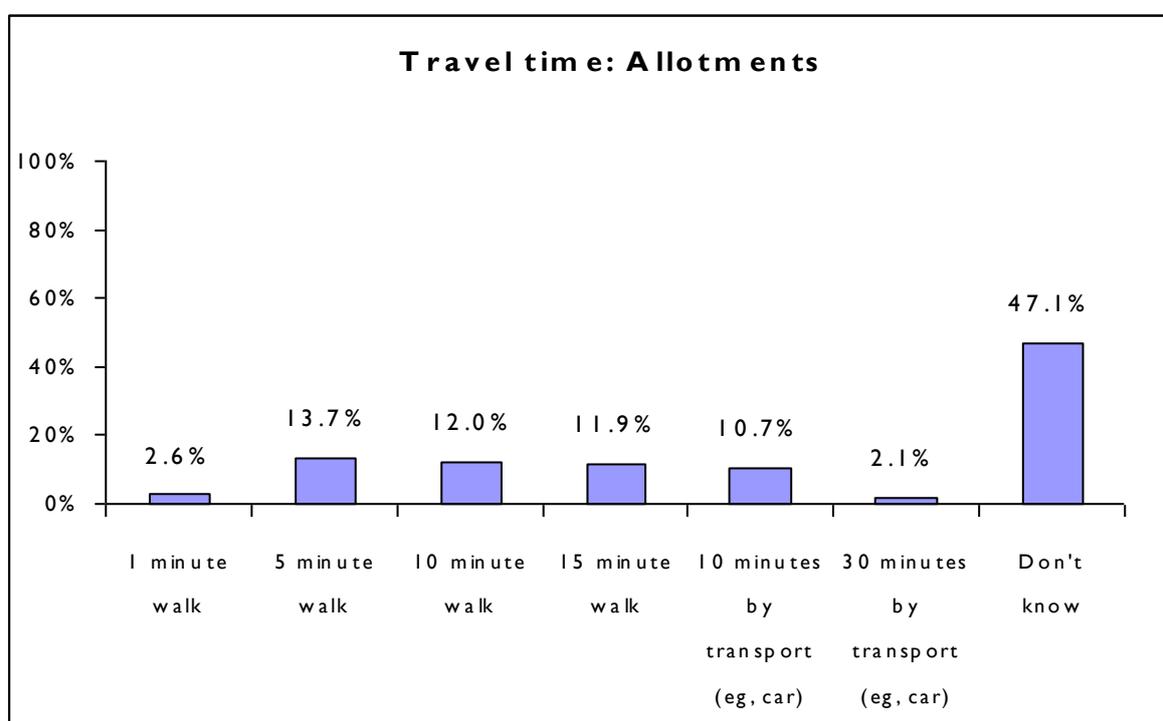


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9.3 The overall level of usage of allotments is the lowest for all the open space typologies (10.5%). Reflecting the nature of provision, the majority of users only visit their plot less than once a month (6.0% of total population). Overall usage is slightly lower in Tenbury Town area (7%) and the rural areas (7.5%). This probably reflects access to provision. Usage increases slightly by age, reaching 14.7% for 55 – 64 year olds, compared to no 19 – 24 year olds and just 4.9% for 25 – 34 year olds.

Travel time

Figure 9.2: Time prepared to travel to access an allotment



9.4 Reflecting the very low levels of use, nearly half of respondents (47.1%) are unable to specify how far they would travel to access an allotment. Such provision tends to be localised and this is illustrated by the fact that the majority of those identifying how far they would travel would be willing to walk no further than for 15 minutes (40.2%) than travel by car (12.8%). There is no significant variation by area, gender or age.

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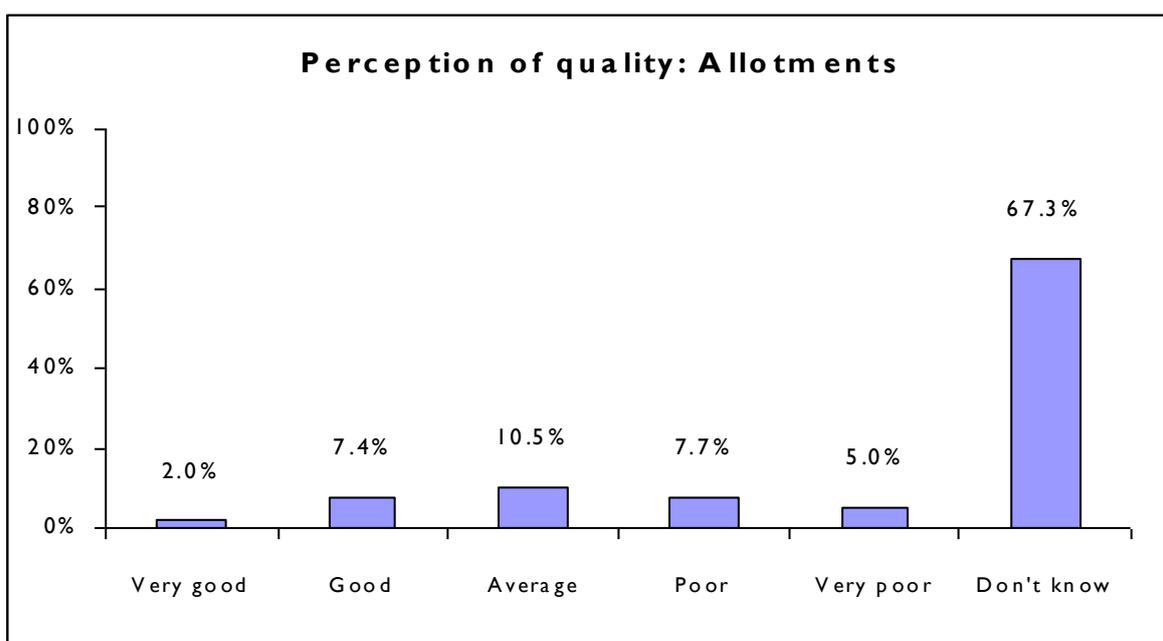
Quality of provision

9.5 The low level of use of allotments overall is reflected in the high proportion (67.3%) unable to rate the quality of provision. Slightly more residents (12.7%) rate quality as poor or very poor than those who rate it as good or very good (9.4%). This is reinforced by the quality assessments (see later). Although sample numbers are low, because of usage levels, the proportion rating allotments as good or very good is higher in Malvern Town area (16.5%) and particularly low in Tenbury Town area (2.8%) and the rural areas (4.8%). However, this relates strongly to usage levels as there is a strong correlation with proportion unable to comment. Also reflecting usage, the proportion rating allotments as good or very good increases with age from 2.5% amongst 55 – 64 year olds.

Availability

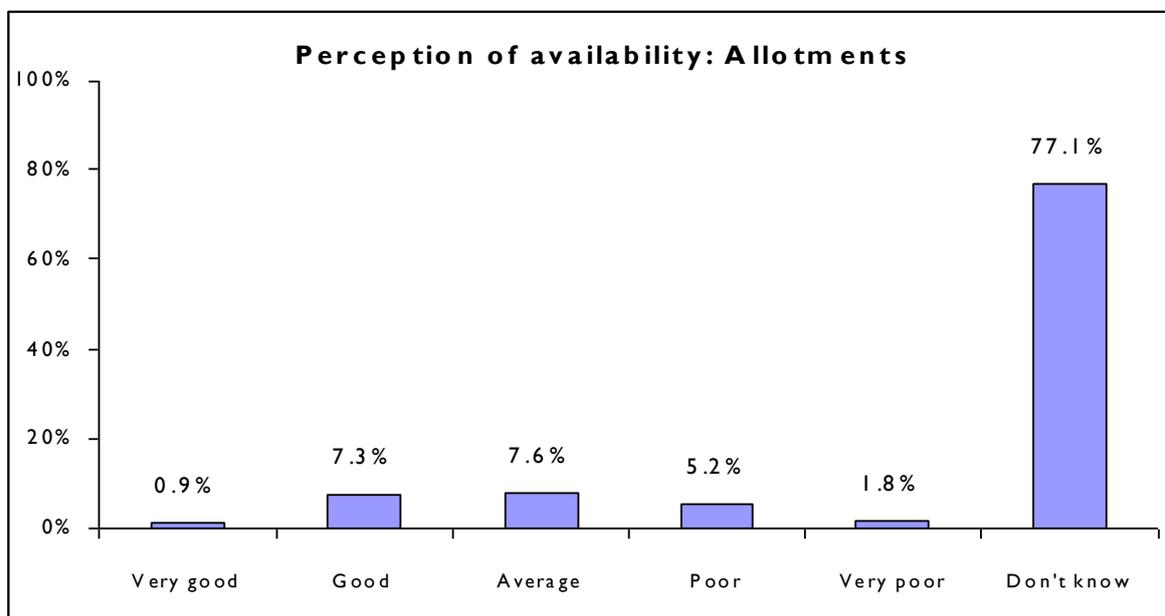
9.6 Over three quarters of respondents (77.1%) are unable to comment on the availability of allotments reflecting low usage. Under one in ten (8.2%) rate the availability as good or very good; a similar proportion (7.0%) rates it as poor or very poor. Again, the rating of availability is highest in Malvern Town area (12.5% reporting it to be good or very good) and lowest in Tenbury Town area (1.4%) and the rural areas (4.8%). Figures are strongly correlated to usage levels. The rating of availability by different age groups also reflects usage, just 5.1% of 25 – 34 year olds rate it as good or very good, but this increases by 12.3% amongst 55 – 64 year olds.

Figure 9.3: Quality of provision of allotments



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Figure 9.4: Availability of allotments



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Key issues

Current provision

9.7 There are ten sites classified as allotments in Malvern Hills District equating to eight¹ hectares.

Table 9.1: Distribution of allotment sites by analysis area

Analysis area	Allotments	
	Number	Size(ha)
Malvern Town area	6	5.40
Rural areas	1	1.22
Tenbury Town area	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	3	0.97
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	10	7.60

9.8 The majority of allotment sites are, at present, operating at 100% capacity, for example, Knappway Allotments and Goodwood Road Allotments. Consultation highlights high demand for allotments across Malvern Hills District, also demonstrated through the combined waiting list of 31 people. There is a perceived deficiency in provision, as the waiting list demand cannot be met.

9.9 There is land on Elgar Avenue, where is adjoins Mayfield Road, which is currently overgrown and disused. However, the site is actually designated as statutory allotment provision. In the past it has been used as allotments but repeated vandalism, theft and anti-social behaviour forced tenants to terminate their tenancy and the site fell into its current state of being unused and overgrown. The negative reputation associated with it and the current neglected appearance inhibits potential use. Consultation identifies that, even though MTC has offered to clear the site, enhance facilities and reinstate allotment provision, potential tenants are unwilling/reluctant to locate here. As it will be difficult to encourage allotment tenants to use the site, alternative uses should be investigated.

¹ Figures rounded up

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- 9.10 As the site is statutory allotments a possibility exists to create a community garden. Consultation identifies that MHDC community safety team recognises the need for community engagement in the area and has aspirations to enhance the site and create a local park for community use. An alternative is to investigate, with involvement of the community safety team, the feasibility of establishing a community managed project to transform the site into a community garden. Community gardens are a sub-typology of allotments and can vary from wildlife gardens to fruit and vegetable plots on housing estates, from community poly tunnels to community orchards. They are often developed by local people in a voluntary capacity, and commonly retain a strong degree of volunteer involvement. This is one way of moving forward with the site. Support and advice regarding establishing community gardens and funding sources can be obtained through the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (www.farmgarden.org.uk).
- 9.11 With potential to meet demand for allotment provision in Malvern Hills District, MTC has identified opportunity for a change of use of an amenity greenspace, Jamaica Close. MTC has previously submitted an application for the change of use to allotments. However, this was refused due to local resident objections. MTC is currently appealing against the decision. The site assessment undertaken at Jamaica Close identifies that despite being of poor quality (31%) it is a well-used greenspace of high value to local residents (38%). Catchment mapping demonstrates that the area is adequately covered in terms of access to both amenity greenspace and allotment provision.
- 9.12 During consultation, allotment associations expressed opinions regarding the possibility of provision of a 'super allotment site' in Malvern Hills District, something being considered by MTC. Provision of a 'super allotment site' would help resolve waiting list demand and focus maintenance and investment. However, to be successful the location would have to be easily accessible for residents within Malvern Town (as this is where the demand is). Consultation finds that on the existing smaller sites, plot holders enjoy the sense of community and familiarity amongst users. There is concern that this type of environment and community spirit would be lost at a site of a much larger scale. Consultation identifies an area of land off Lower Howsell Road, owned by Madresfield Estate, which was once allotment provision but is now a natural/semi-natural greenspace. This is a large area which can potentially offer 100 allotment plots. However, although site assessment rates the site as low quality, the value has been assessed as high due to the habitats and ecological value of the semi-natural environment and the amenity value of the site. If the site were reinstated as allotments the social inclusion and health benefits will be retained.



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Accessibility

9.13 The effective catchments of allotments has been identified using the approach shown in Table 2.2. The following catchments are used to identify the coverage of current provision:

- District-wide significance (site more than 10ha) – 3,200 metres.
- Settlement significance (site between 1ha and 10ha) – 1,800 metres.
- Neighbourhood significance (site between 0.66ha and 1ha) – 1,200 metres.
- Local significance (site up to 0.66ha) – 240 metres.

Settlement hierarchy

9.14 It is possible to assess and quantify demand for allotment provision. Consequently, no minimum provision is identified for individual settlements.

Table 9.2: Gaps in provision of allotments across Malvern Hills District

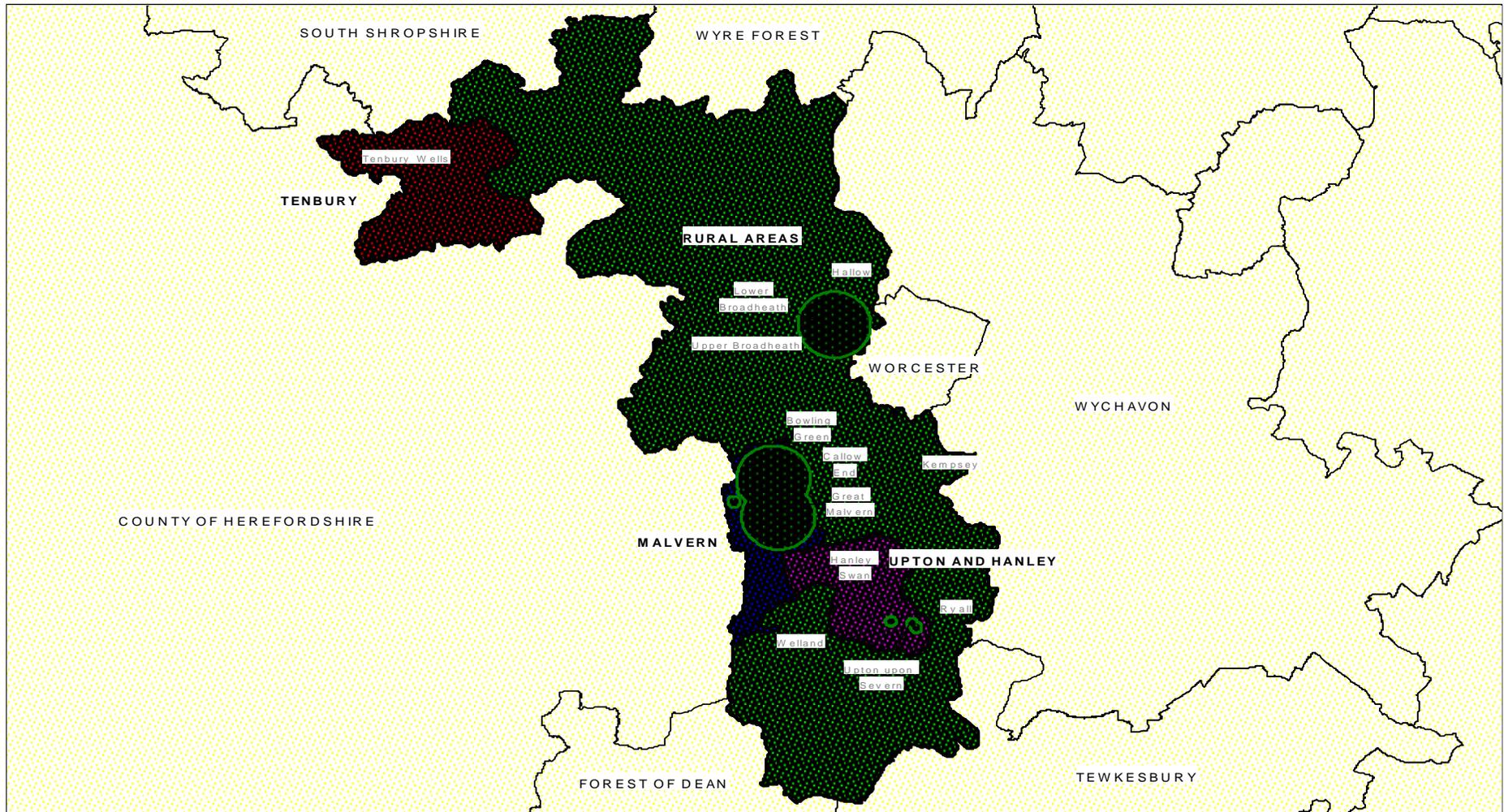
Analysis area	Catchment gaps	
Malvern Town area	<input type="checkbox"/> South Malvern (Malvern Wells, Little Malvern)	
Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/> Hallow <input type="checkbox"/> Callow End	<input type="checkbox"/> Kempsey <input type="checkbox"/> Ryall <input type="checkbox"/> Welland
Tenbury Town area	<input type="checkbox"/> Tenbury Wells	
Upton and Hanley areas	<input type="checkbox"/> Hanley Swan <input type="checkbox"/> Minor gap in north Upton-upon-Severn	

9.15 A perceived deficiency of allotment provision has been identified across the District. The biggest deficiency identified by mapping is in Tenbury Wells where there is currently no allotment provision. Although consultation does not identify demand for provision in the area, it should be noted that demand is often a function of supply.

9.16 Mapping demonstrates that the majority of Malvern Town area and Upton Town area is adequately served in terms of allotment provision. However, consultation identifies that these are the two areas where there is greatest demand, which is not actually being met by current provision. To further enhance provision in Upton and meet waiting list demand there is potential for the Graftons Allotments to be fully utilised to provide a further 17 plots. The site is owned by MHDC and the majority of the site is currently uncultivated due to poor drainage. Drainage improvements will facilitate the usage of the site, which should be considered in terms of meeting waiting list demand at Rectory Road Allotments, particularly if and when this site is lost due to expansion of Upton Cemetery (discussed further below).

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Figure 9.5: Allotment sites mapped against settlement areas with catchments applied



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- 9.17 Poor drainage is a common issue highlighted during user consultation, in particular Knappway Allotments are prone to flooding during inclement weather. Poor drainage creates a barrier to access due to paths becoming unusable and therefore inhibiting access to plots.
- 9.18 Due to a lack of allotment provision in Kempsey, as identified through consultation and demonstrated through mapping, residents from Kempsey travel to Great Malvern in order to access allotment provision e.g. at Goodwood Road Allotments.
- 9.19 MTC has submitted a planning application for the extension of Malvern Cemetery into an adjacent allotments site, Madresfield Allotments. If approved, 12 plots will be lost leaving 47 plots. As a condition of planning permission, the remaining 47 plots will be protected for at least eight years. If permission were granted, 12 allotment tenants would be affected. Some of these will just relinquish tenancies and others will transfer to the top of waiting lists at Knappway and Goodwood allotments. However, this will be at the expense of residents already on the waiting lists.
- 9.20 A similar predicament may be faced by Upton-upon-Severn in coming years. Consultation suggests that burial space capacity at Upton Cemetery will be reached within the next 15 years. The resultant need for expansion will put pressure on adjoining allotment provision (Rectory Road Allotments).
- 9.21 Raised beds are not provided at any sites. However, individual tenants are permitted to construct raised beds. MTC, although not proactive in promoting the service, is willing to create raised beds if requested by a tenant. This, along with poor wheelchair access and path quality restricts the usage of allotments by community and disability groups.
- 9.22 Throughout the District there is a lack of promotion of allotments and the associated health and well being benefits. There is a need for raised awareness to improve access to provision. This can be achieved through increased information accessible on the MHDC website, production and distribution of a promotional leaflet and establishment of allotment starter packs to provide relevant information for new tenants with tips regarding how to cultivate plots and achieve maximum benefit.
- 9.23 The Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) recognises the health benefits offered by allotments. This importance should be reflected in greater promotion of allotment provision e.g. leaflets. There is an aging population in Malvern Hills District and, although young couples and families are increasingly using allotments, traditionally the main users are older residents. For this reason consultation highlights opinion that MHDC should ensure adequate provision of open space suitable to elderly users. It is felt therefore that Section 106 contributions from

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development of e.g. retirement villages could be used appropriately to meet the needs of the more elderly population.

- 9.24 The cost of a plot on MTC allotment sites varies according to plot size but has recently increased to approximately £43 per year. This is greater, in comparison to Worcester City Council, which offers plots ranging from £15 to £30 per year. Users feel that the high rent is disproportionate to the level of investment back into the sites.

Management

- 9.25 The majority of allotment sites in the District are owned and managed by the town and parish councils. A specific officer oversees the running and maintenance of the MTC owned sites and is responsible for managing waiting lists and plot allocations.
- 9.26 There is currently no allotment strategy for the District and there are no plans for the drafting of one. This results in a lack of strategic management of allotments in terms of maintenance and development.

Quality

- 9.27 The methodology for assessing quality is set out in Part 2 (Methodology). The table below summarises the results of the quality assessment for allotments in Malvern Hills District. The threshold for assessing quality has been set at 60%; this is based on Green Flag criteria. Individual site summaries can be found at the end of this section.

Table 9.3: Quality scores for allotment sites by analysis area

Analysis area	QUALITY Scores					Number at:	
	maximum score	lowest score	MEAN score	highest score	spread	below 60%	above 60%
Malvern Town area	116	32%	40%	55%	23%	6	-
Rural areas	116	48%	48%	48%	-	1	-
Tenbury Town area	116	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	116	32%	40%	47%	15%	3	-
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	116	32%	41%	55%	23%	10	-

- 9.28 All allotment provision in the District has been assessed as poor quality, with a mean score of only 41%. This, in part, is due to poor quality paths within sites,

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limited disabled access and lack of toilet facilities. Consultation also identifies demand for improvement of these particular features.

- 9.29 The majority of allotment sites have access to a water supply. Sites owned by MTC have seen an increase in the number of taps available. However, consultation identifies there is still demand for an increase in the number of water stands at Goodwood Road Allotments, where stand pipes are every four plots and the water pressure is poor.
- 9.30 There is a desire to investigate the feasibility of providing toilet facilities at Goodwood Road Allotments, Malvern and Old Hollow Allotments, Malvern.
- 9.31 Several allotment plots across the District are rented to holders, but are not being cultivated. This impacts on the overall visual quality of sites. The issue was identified during consultation and reinforced in the site assessments; for example, Madresfield Allotments, where three rented plots are uncultivated. This is usually the result of a tenant being unable to dedicate the time and labour required to tend to a plot sufficiently. MTC does inspect sites to identify uncultivated plots and, in doing so, after a warning and no improvement or if there is no genuine reason for the plot being uncultivated, the tenancy will be terminated. However, user consultation identifies that this system is not efficient enough with plots remaining uncultivated for long periods of time.

Value

- 9.32 The methodology for assessing value is set out in Part 2 (Methodology). The table below summarises the results of the value assessment for allotments in Malvern Hills District. A score of 20% or less is considered to indicate that a site has low value. A full of low value sites and an indication of their position relative to the threshold can be found in Part 33.

Table 9.4: Value scores for allotment sites by analysis area

Analysis area	VALUE Scores					Number at:	
	maximum score	lowest score	MEAN score	highest score	spread	below 20%	above 20%
Malvern Town area	105	20%	27%	35%	15%	-	6
Rural areas	105	40%	40%	40%	-	-	1
Tenbury Town area	105	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	105	21%	33%	41%	20%	-	3
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	105	20%	30%	41%	21%	-	10

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- 9.33 Although all the allotment sites scored poorly on quality, all have been assessed as high value, with the average value score across the District being 30%. This is due to the associated social inclusion and health benefits of allotments and also the ecological value of the sites.

Community involvement

- 9.34 Four of the MTC owned allotment sites (Old Hollow, Madresfield Road, Goodwood Road and Knappway) have active allotment associations, acting on behalf of plot holders. Currently, no allotment associations self manage sites. However, two associations, Madresfield Allotment Association and Goodwood Allotment Association, expressed an interest in self-management. MTC has expressed a willingness to investigate this but has so far made no approaches to any associations. Moving towards self-management will reduce MTC management responsibilities, e.g. tenant management. It will also allow associations to obtain external funding and feel secure enough, if given a long term lease of at least 5-10 years, to invest in the relevant sites.
- 9.35 Self-management of Old Hollow Allotments has been offered, by West Malvern Parish Council, to West Malvern Allotment Association. However, the Association currently feels that the legal requirements and the commitment needed outweigh the benefits that would occur. To ensure maintenance work is carried out at the site a number of plot holders have formed a working party group to enhance the water supply. The Association also expresses desire for support with better marking out of plots to ensure the plot boundaries are well defined.
- 9.36 There is opportunity to encourage greater usage of allotments by school groups and community groups which should be encouraged to utilise the educational, social well being and healthily living aspects of tending to allotments.

Security

- 9.37 One of the key issues highlighted throughout consultation is poor security of allotment sites resulting in recurring thefts and vandalism. This does deter usage. Although all sites are fenced users consider the fencing to be insufficient to provide adequate security. Consultation highlights the presence of vulnerable points in fencing, which require attention in order to address the problem of unauthorised access. However, site assessments rate the quality of boundary fencing to be adequate or better at the majority of sites.
- 9.38 Poor security exists on a number of sites due to the current trend of waist high lockable gates. The gates are easy to climb over, leaving sites open to vandalism e.g., Goodwood Road allotment site. The Police recommend that the sites have higher gates installed.

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9.39 MTC has recently funded high-rise metal perimeter fencing at Knappway Allotments, which has seen a drastic decrease in the level of vandalism. However, consultation indicates that access from the adjoining PROW requires signage and a lockable gate to restrict access to plot holders only.

Summary of site consultation

9.40 This section collates issues raised during consultation regarding allotments in Malvern Hills District. This is presented alongside site visit quality and value scores for comparison. It is not a comprehensive list of sites and only covers sites raised during consultation.

Site	Quality score	Value score	Comments
Goodwood Road Allotments	55%	31%	<p>There is demand for the access road, from the entrance and internally, to be hard surfaced. This may help create improved parking space for plot holder vehicles and will improve wheelchair access within the site.</p> <p>There is a need to improve the perimeter fence, which is damaged in sections allowing unauthorised access.</p>
Knapp Way Allotments	51%	34%	<p>Drainage is a particular issue affecting the North West to the North East corner of the site. There is demand for drainage improvements to facilitate increased usage of the site.</p> <p>Consultation identifies that access for wheelchair users is difficult due to the poor condition of the un-surfaced internal road/paths. There is demand for the main access path/road to be hard surfaced.</p>
Madresfield Allotments	35%	31%	<p>As identified by the site assessment the perimeter fencing is variable in quality and low in a number of places. This leaves the site open to vandalism and theft which deters users having sheds on site to store tools. There is demand for improved fencing to be erected to provide greater security.</p> <p>The entrance to the site is located on a bend of a busy road. Due to there being no pavement the entrance opens directly onto the road. This is considered unsafe and feasibility of relocating the entrance should be investigated.</p>

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Allotments summary

Current provision

- There are ten sites classified as an allotment in Malvern Hills District equating to eight hectares. All sites are identified as low quality. In terms of value, all ten sites are identified as high value. This reinforces the importance of allotment provision with the District.

Future provision

- A demand based equation is identified in the calculation of standards to determine the future requirements for allotments. This needs to take into account that some areas of the District, notably South Malvern (Malvern Wells, Little Malvern), Hallow, Callow End, Kempsey, Ryall, Welland, Tenbury Wells, Hanley Swan and a small area in north Upton-upon-Severn, have no access to allotment provision.

Other issues

- The majority of vacant plots are too overgrown or not in suitable condition to let. Condition of vacant plots and the unmanageable size of plots results in poor take-up.
- There is a lack of strategic allotment management.
- There is demand to raise the profile of allotments across the District. MTC need to be more proactive.
- General maintenance of sites is considered to have declined. Grass cutting, improving fencing and the laying hardcore are priorities for improving the quality of sites.
- Security is a key concern for plot holders. There is demand to upgrade gates and improve fencing.