



Business Plan

1. Mission Statement

1.1 Our Purpose

The Rotherham Allotments Alliance will provide, promote and develop allotments in Rotherham so that they offer people of all backgrounds and abilities opportunities to enjoy gardening in safe, secure, accessible and environmentally sustainable surroundings. In doing so, it will make efficient use of available resources to ensure that the service is financially self-sufficient whilst remaining affordable to those who want to use it. The Alliance operates as a Community Benefit Society which is registered as non-profit making with any surplus being retained by the Alliance, used for the benefit of its members.

It will do this by:

- enabling allotment societies to flourish on sites where they already exist
- providing guidance and support to such societies where required
- managing sites which do not have societies efficiently
- promoting the establishment of new allotment societies on sites that do not currently have them and/or establishing a volunteer base for sites that are unable to form a society
- developing and implementing plans for the improvement and promotion of allotment gardening across the borough of Rotherham.

1.2 Why the Rotherham Allotments Alliance is needed.

Council-owned allotments in Rotherham have suffered over recent years due to limited levels of investment in sites and services. Consequently, some areas of allotment land are in very poor condition making them difficult to cultivate, and they are failing to reach their full potential in terms of numbers of people using them. Three are concerns that the viability of some allotment sites may be put at risk because of this. Many sites have waiting lists. It has also proved difficult over recent years to develop the wider benefits of allotments, including volunteering opportunities, skills development and community engagement.

A review of Rotherham's allotments carried out by Rotherham Council working in partnership with Rotherham and District Allotments Association concluded that self-management offered best prospects for realising the potential of allotments within available resources.

The Rotherham Allotments Alliance, having now been in operation for one year, will allow allotment gardeners to control the development and operation of allotments in Rotherham to deliver sustainable service improvements, increase occupancy rates and promote the environmental and social benefits of growing within the wider community, including improved health and well-being.

1.3 Rotherham Allotment Alliance Current Position.

The RAA formally took responsibility for administration of all allotment sites previously administered by RMBC in January 2020. Unfortunately, there have been delays in completing the full legal transfer with leases and site deeds being currently in the hands of both parties' conveyancing solicitors. It is hoped this matter will be resolved in early 2021.

The Alliance formally appointed an administrator to deal with all administrative duties involved in managing the allotment sites under the Alliances control. The Allotment Support Assistant – Donna Bushby has undertaken plot lettings, rent collection and organised site maintenance and emergency works during the

period.

The covid pandemic during 2020 brought its own difficulties curtailing and restricting access to members by way of meetings and site inspections. Board meetings have been held by zoom since April, not an ideal but has allowed the Board of Directors to continue the task of preparing the Alliance for the years to come with the adoption of policies and codes of conduct covering all aspects of the operations, allotment rules, standing orders, financial regulations, business plan, health and safety, confidentiality, equalities, environment, volunteering, complaints etc.

As an incentive for new tenants and to clear overgrown plots, the RAA waived the rental fee for 2020 for new tenancies on those plots that needed substantial clearance work. Other works that have taken place on sites include asbestos removal, water leak detection and repair and fly-tipping removal. 10 sites also had the provision of a skip.

2. Services

2.1 What we will do

The principal business of the Rotherham Allotments Alliance will be to sustain and improve allotment sites and services previously provided by the Council. The main elements of these services are as follows:

Routine allotment management and maintenance

- Letting of allotment plots on directly managed sites, including management of waiting lists, plot preparation and collection of rents.
- Temporary letting of unused allotment land for other compatible uses, including grazing.
- Maintenance and improvement of directly-managed sites, including grass, hedges, trees, boundaries, gates, water supplies, communal buildings,
- Preparation of vacant plots
- Letting of allotment sites to allotment societies and/or establishing a volunteer base

Service development

- Developing networks to support existing allotment societies
- Encouraging and supporting formation of new societies on sites without self-management
- General promotion and development of allotment gardening across Rotherham

2.2 The Value of Our Services

Allotments are unique in that they provide ordinary people with opportunities to enjoy open-air recreation, physical activity, food production, contact with nature, social interaction, practical skills development and volunteering at an affordable price and close to home. Rotherham Allotments Alliance will add further value to this resource by giving allotment gardeners and other supporters a real say in how services are developed, and by harnessing their knowledge and enthusiasm to extend the benefits of allotments within the local community.

2.3 Scale

The capacity of the Alliance to deliver these services is largely dependent on the amount of land available for allotment gardening. Current provision (updated in 2020 by the RAA) allows it to offer up to 345 allotment plots covering a total of 12.10 hectares on 10 directly managed sites, and a further 806 plots managed by societies on 15 sites covering 28.69 hectares. Plus an additional 2.46 hectares of grazing land. However, in practice, this capacity is reduced by past failure to maintain vacant plots in a condition that makes them suitable for letting. Furthermore, it may be possible to increase the number of

opportunities for individuals to participate by subdividing large plots into smaller areas. In the longer term, it may also be possible to develop additional plots on 4 statutory allotment sites, totaling 3.7 hectares, that are currently uncultivated, and to bring other allotment sites, currently administered by others, into the Alliance.

2.4 Ensuring Quality

The continued success and viability of this business will depend on the Alliance's ability to assure the continuing quality of the services offered. For this reason, the Alliance will develop and implement a performance framework in association with site societies, that will include, for example:

- expenditure
- income
- member satisfaction
- proportion of land under cultivation and let
- waiting lists
- complaints from members

It will monitor this information to identify trends, set targets, address areas of weakness and drive service improvement.

The Alliance will also take steps to ensure its services remain relevant and up-to-date. For example, it will undertake periodic review of best practice elsewhere in allotment service provision. As a member of the National Allotment Society the Alliance will actively engage in networking and information sharing to support this. It will also review feedback from members to identify their priorities for development. This will be collected in the form of a survey.

3. Social Impact

3.1 The Local Community

The Rotherham Allotments Alliance will serve people living in and around Rotherham. The area comprises the urban centre of Rotherham and a number of smaller settlements and countryside surrounding it. Approximately 75% of the land area of Rotherham borough is rural. The latest mid-year estimate of Rotherham's population is 260,800 as at June 2015.

The growth of Rotherham's urban areas during the 19th and 20th centuries was driven largely by industrial development, particularly coal, iron and steel. These traditional industries have declined greatly over the past thirty years, with negative impacts on the local community. Rotherham is currently the 52nd most deprived district in England (in most deprived 16% nationally). The key drivers of deprivation in Rotherham are:

- Health and Disability (21% of population in English top 10%),
- Education and Skills (24% of population in English top 10%) and
- Employment (24% of population in English top 10%).

(Rotherham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Rotherham Demographic Profile 2016-17.)

3.2 The Role of Rotherham Allotments Alliance

Rotherham Allotments Alliance can help to address needs arising from local deprivation by making better use of allotments to provide opportunities for people to be more physically active, reducing isolation, developing skills and building personal confidence.

Currently there are 1151 plots on Council-owned allotment sites. In February 2018, there were 1107 plots on Council-owned allotment sites. 9% of these plots were not in use, including 5% that were unlettable.

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At the same time, there were 150 people waiting for an allotment plot. The aim is to increase the number and range of people involved in allotment gardening and associated activities, for example by:

- Re-instating disused plots to make them suitable for letting
- Improving access, welfare and other facilities to make sites more attractive to a wider range of users
- Promoting allotment gardening more effectively, and introducing more effective procedures for plot letting
- Enforcing cultivation standards more rigorously to ensure efficient use of available plots
- Supporting existing allotment societies, and the development of new societies
- Working in partnership with other bodies to engage with the wider community through events, volunteering opportunities, education and training etc.

Not only would the number and diversity of people benefitting from allotment gardening and associated activities increase, but the condition of allotment sites would improve also, with associated visual amenity, environmental and horticultural benefits.

3.3 Measuring Social Impact

Delivery of benefits of allotment gardening to the local community is dependent on availability of plots, and the number of people engaging in the activity. So that the Rotherham Allotments Alliance can monitor and report on its performance in this regard, it will use the following primary measures:

- Total number of plots
- % of plots cultivated and let
- Number of members
- Number of people on waiting lists

As a large proportion of plots are on sites managed by societies, then the Alliance will work with those societies to incorporate data from their sites into the above measures. The Alliance will also be able to develop secondary measures as necessary to monitor performance of specific activities and projects. These could include environmental measures, for example, total length of hedge within allotment sites.

4. Our Customers and Stakeholders

4.1 Allotment Plot-holders

This group is of fundamental importance to the business of the Rotherham Allotments Alliance. Allotment Plot-holders are the main customers of the service, and income from rent they pay is essential for continuing service provision. On directly-managed sites, such people will pay rent directly to the Alliance who will be responsible for managing all aspects of the service they receive. On society-managed sites, plot-holders will pay rent to the society, who will then pay a rent to the Alliance. In these cases, plot-holders will benefit from certain services provided by the Alliance, as well as other support provided by the Alliance to their society as required.

Total rent income from directly-managed and society sites is expected to be sufficient to cover the cost of service delivery because the Council have been managing allotments on this basis prior to their transfer to the Alliance. Furthermore, it is expected that the Alliance will achieve efficiency savings through alternative procurement arrangements and use of volunteers.

Plot-holders will also constitute the overwhelming majority of the membership of the Alliance, and therefore be able to influence key decisions taken by it. It is also expected that most volunteers, including directors, will be drawn from this group.

The Alliance will engage with plot-holders directly through its website, correspondence and general meetings where members will be able to vote on important issues. By volunteering to become involved in the running of the Alliance, or to help with specific projects, plot-holders will be able to engage more actively.

4.2 Other Members

Membership will not be restricted to plot-holders. Anyone who supports the aims of the Rotherham Allotments Alliance may become a member. This might include former allotment gardeners, people on waiting lists, and representatives of other local community bodies.

The Alliance will engage with supporter members in the same ways as with plot-holders. An annual subscription of £3.00 will be payable to maintain membership. As supporter members, subscriptions will need to be paid by them annually.

4.3 Site Allotment Societies

Societies are also very important stakeholders. They are relied upon by their members for day-to-day site management. Indeed, the proven effectiveness of such local management, as identified through a user survey in 2017, has been a major driver leading to the establishment of the Alliance. The Alliance will also need the support of Societies in membership administration, for example maintenance of member names and contact details, and collection of performance data.

One of the principle aims of the Alliance is to maintain an environment where site societies can flourish. It will do this by:

- Continuing to provide services and other support to societies where this is more practical or cost-effective than the society doing things itself
- Providing specialist advice, either directly or through partnerships with other organisations
- Facilitating and encouraging mutual support networks amongst different societies
- Promoting allotments generally to help maintain demand for plot rentals
- Engaging with societies, by correspondence or meetings, to ensure their interests are taken into account when making decisions
- Encouraging society representatives to stand for election as directors of the Alliance
- Ensuring lease terms and conditions, and rents are fair and reasonable.

4.4 Rotherham Borough Council

Whilst the Council has chosen to be less directly involved in the management of its allotments, it will still have a significant interest in the work of the Alliance. This will include the following:

- Continued delivery of allotments on Council land in line with requirements of the Allotment Acts
- Sustainability of self-management arrangements
- Proper conduct of the Alliance, in the best interests of plot-holders and the local community generally
- Ensuring a dynamic and engaged allotment community in Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- For allotments in Rotherham to be recognised nationally as a beacon of good practice.

The Council will be closely engaged in the strategic management of the Alliance by nominating two

elected members to act as its representatives on the board of directors.

4.5 Rotherham and District Allotments Association (RaDAA)

RaDAA worked with the Council to review allotment services in Rotherham, leading to the formation of the Alliance. RaDAA therefore also had an interest in the sustainability of self-management arrangements, ensuring the proper conduct of the Alliance in the best interests of plot-holders and the local community, ensuring a dynamic and engaged allotment community, and for allotments in Rotherham to be acknowledged widely as a beacon of good practice.

Whilst RaDAA has supported the establishment of the Alliance, it has stated that it is important that it remains independent of it, as its role may require it to arbitrate in disputes between individuals, societies and the Alliance itself. Therefore, it will not engage in or try to influence decision-making processes of the Alliance. However, individual RaDAA members may become involved in running of the Alliance, independently of RaDAA. RaDAA has stated that any future claim of perceived conflict of interest will be met and vigorously contested. Currently, RaDAA is not active due to a number of reasons including the pandemic. It is possible that it will be resumed in the near future.

4.6 Other Allotment Providers

Allotments in some areas of Rotherham are provided by Parish Councils rather than Rotherham Borough Council. Such providers are expected to be interested in the same things as RaDAA (see above). Furthermore, they may be interested in future opportunities for control of their sites to be taken on by the Alliance.

Other allotment providers will not have any automatic role in the governance of the Alliance. However, it is envisaged that they may work in partnership with the Alliance, for example to promote allotment gardening to a wider audience, or to share resources.

4.7 Wider Community

The wider community in Rotherham and the surrounding area will have an interest in the successful management of allotments so they do not become a nuisance to neighbouring areas, but rather that allotments and allotment gardeners make a positive contribution to quality of life for the wider local community.

The wider community will not have any automatic role in the governance of the Alliance. However, individuals who support the aims of the Alliance may apply to become members.

5. Marketing Plan

5.1 Market Segments

5.1.1 Time-rich

This group includes people who are retired, unemployed, working part-time or who have few other commitments. Currently a large proportion of plot-holders are from this segment, reflecting the fact that allotment gardening is a great way of staying fit and active when otherwise one might become sedentary and under-occupied.

5.1.2 Time-poor

Many people in full-time employment or education, bringing up children, or caring for elderly or disabled relatives, can struggle to find time to do things they enjoy and to find relief from the stresses of everyday life. Results of the 2017 allotment user survey appear to confirm this, with just 10% of respondents being younger than 40, 37% being between 40 and 59, and 53% being 60 or older. This group can stand to benefit hugely from an activity like allotment gardening, but marketing to them must consider the difficulties they face in making a commitment.

5.1.3 People who might feel excluded

Analysis of the 2017 user survey gives some insight into groups who might currently feel unable or unwilling to get involved in allotment gardening. For example, only 24% of respondents were female, compared to 50.8% in the general population. 5% were from a BEM community, compared to 8.1% in the general population. However, the number of respondents who stated they had a disability was relatively high, at 27%. The proportion of people in the general population with a limiting long-term illness is 21.9%.

One of the agreed aims of the Alliance is to widen participation in allotment gardening. The above figures suggest that marketing effort may need to be focused on females and people from BEM communities, but the Alliance will also seek to identify and address the needs of others who feel excluded because of physical, intellectual or cultural barriers.

5.2 Competition

Allotments are generally provided as a public service by statutory allotment authorities covering specific geographical areas. Thus, there is very limited competition in the allotments market itself. However, allotments do have to compete for people's leisure time and spending against other activities including a wide range of sports and hobbies, home entertainment, socialising and travel.

Some competitors benefit from large marketing budgets, not readily available to allotment providers. Others may appear attractive because they do not involve making a significant long-term time commitment, or because they can be accessed without having to leave the home.

However, allotment gardening has a number of competitive advantages which, in combination, represent a unique selling point. These include the ability to produce something of value, freedom to start and finish at times to suit individual needs and preferences, ability to work either independently or collaboratively, physical activity, spending time outside, escape from the built environment and stressed of everyday life, low cost, learning and skills development, and pride in the fruits of one's efforts.

5.3 Marketing Methods

5.3.1 Research

Whilst possible marketing techniques have already been identified, as discussed below, the Alliance will seek to improve its understanding of the effectiveness of different methods to reach different market segments. Such research can include:

- Surveys of non-users (e.g. at events, or on-line) to find out why they don't have an allotment, and what would encourage them to start.
- Asking new users why they decided to start allotment gardening
- Networking with other providers and national organisations to identify what has worked well elsewhere
- Exploring innovative techniques used by other types of business.

It will also monitor the effectiveness of different marketing methods, listed below, by recording numbers of enquiries generated, number of new starters, retention rates after 3 months, 6 months and 1 year, and

costs.

5.3.2 Working with Site Societies

The Alliance sees it as being able to spearhead efforts to improve public awareness of, and enthusiasm for allotment gardening. However, it is clear that to be as effective as possible it must work closely with individual site societies to deliver a joined-up message and to add value to each other's marketing activity. Therefore, it will be keen to pursue the following methods not only by itself, but also in partnership with site societies.

5.3.3 Website

The Alliance's web-site will not only be where members can go for information and communication, but it will also act as a shop window for people who may be looking for a new leisure activity. The web-address will be shown widely on other materials produced by the Alliance to ensure maximum exposure.

5.3.4 Social Media

The potential of channels such as Facebook and Twitter are recognised as offering cost-effective ways of reaching a wide audience. Of particular value is the fact that they can be used to target under-represented groups, including younger people and females, as well as specific geographical areas. They are also very flexible, allowing new material to be posted quickly to respond to situations where interest in allotments may be increased, for example by news stories and other media coverage.

5.3.5 Site Notices

The Alliance will be able to capitalise from its extensive physical presence within many of Rotherham's communities. Notices posted at the entrance to allotment sites can be used to advertise the availability of plots, forthcoming events, and schemes to encourage people to try out allotment gardening (see below).

5.3.6 Events

The annual Rotherham Show, well-known locally for its display of produce from allotments, attracts thousands of visitors. It therefore offers a unique opportunity to reach a diverse audience with a large proportion on people who may already have an interest in horticulture. It is therefore proposed that the Alliance has a high-profile presence at the show to promote allotment gardening generally and to put people in touch with sites where plots are available.

5.3.7 Partnerships

The Alliance understands that some under-represented groups may be hard to reach due to cultural or intellectual barriers. It will therefore look to work with partners who have an existing profile within such communities, to communicate the opportunities offered by allotments in ways that are appropriate to the audiences in question. Such partnerships may also deliver solutions to overcome physical barriers where necessary, for example by providing specialist transport.

5.3.8 Special Schemes and Offers

As explained in section 5.1.2 above, it is likely that some people do not take on an allotment plot because they feel unable to commit sufficient time or energy to make it a success. The Alliance will explore the possibility of introducing introductory schemes and offers such as:

- Mini-plots (these could also be offered on a longer-term basis)
- Mentors
- Starter groups with shared plots.
- Social events
- Adapted plots for universal access
- Community lettings.

6. Production and Process

6.1 Process by which inputs become outputs

The processes to be operated by the Alliance can be categorised as follows.

6.1.1 Routine allotment management and maintenance

Starting with pre-existing Council budgets and processes as a model, the Alliance will set service standards and deploy resources as necessary to deliver routine operations across directly-managed sites to achieve these standards. In doing so, it will monitor performance, review standards and explore alternative delivery options to achieve continuous improvement in service quality and value for money.

a) Plot letting, tenancy administration and management of waiting lists (directly managed sites only)

The Alliance proposes to continue to utilise the Colony computer application, which has previously been used by the Council for all tenancy administration functions. The Council has used general administrative staff to operate the system, and also to assist with telephone enquiries from current and prospective tenants. The Founder Directors will undertake an appraisal of options for delivering this work, including employing a member of staff, using consultants, and using volunteers. It will speak to other providers, in particular self-management bodies, to identify strengths and weaknesses of each option.

b) Administration of society tenancies

It is expected that this will be undertaken using the same method as that adopted for administration of individual tenancies on directly-managed sites. By utilising the Colony computer application, the Alliance will offer administrative assistance to site societies, including maintenance of tenancy records, waiting lists and rent collection.

c) Site maintenance

This work includes maintenance of boundaries, trackways, communal areas and buildings, water supplies and vacant plots, as well as waste collection and pest control.

Previously, the Council has used a variety of methods to deliver this work. For example, general site maintenance has been done at times by a dedicated staff members, and at other times by agency staff. Waste collection has involved commercial hire of skips, and pest control has been undertaken by contractors. The Alliance will assess cost-effectiveness of these and any other options for delivering site maintenance, including volunteering, before selecting preferred methods. All such operations will be subject to continuous review, and varied as necessary to ensure good value for money. Review of all services provided is currently in progress to determine the best course of action.

As well as delivering such services on its directly-managed sites, the Alliance will continue to provide selected services on behalf of societies on their sites, as the Council does currently. It will jointly monitor

the effectiveness and value of such services with societies, and jointly review whether to increase or reduce the range of services provided to them.

6.1.2 Service development

The Directors will be responsible for reviewing performance information, member feedback and best practice guidance to identify service development priorities. They will also lead on service development planning, including resourcing strategies. However, they will seek advice and guidance, wherever possible at zero or minimum cost, from national and local organisations, including Co-operatives UK and the National Allotments Society.

External grants will be sought for major project development and delivery, again with the support of partners where possible. Small-scale projects and those with limited financial implications may be managed and delivered by Directors and other volunteers, subject to robust assessment of risks. Such projects might include development of mutual support networks, equipment purchase, small-scale events, and development of new societies on sites that do not currently have them.

6.1.3 Advocacy, Fund-Raising, Promotion and External Communication

The Alliance aims to raise the profile of Rotherham's allotments to help sustain and increase demand, to support fund-raising efforts, and to build confidence in the allotments movement both locally and nationally. Such efforts will be led by Directors who may create specialist teams of volunteers to deliver more focused work in this area. Where funds allow, consultancy support may also be used.

6.1.4 Membership Services

All members of the Alliance, regardless of whether they rent an allotment plot or not, are entitled to view the following documents. These can be found on the RAA website (rotherhamallotments.org.uk) or hard copies can be posted on request.

- A copy of the annual report and accounts
- A copy of the rules of the Alliance
- An invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting, and any other general meetings called by the Alliance
- Vote in elections to appoint board members, and to vote on resolutions presented at general meetings (may include postal ballots)
- Stand for election as a board member
- A share certificate, and/or a statement of their share account

Additionally, the Alliance will make news and information about its activities available to all members and enable them to:

- Support the society as a volunteer, campaigner or provider of expertise
- Express their opinions about the society's policies and future plans
- Participate in the affairs of the society and learn how to become more actively involved
- Recommend the society to other people in the community.

The Alliance proposes to manage these membership services using the same systems it selects for tenancy administration (see section 6.1.1 (a) above).

6.2 Inputs

6.2.1 Income from Rents

Under Council provision, corporate billing and banking systems were used. The Alliance will continue to post invoices to individual tenant's home addresses to ensure that all bills are received directly. Being sent electronically would be more cost effective but not ideal as not all tenants have access to email plus there is scope for invoices to be missed. The logistics of sending individual invoices by email would be time-consuming. Payment methods offered are via online banking / bank transfer, cheque sent in the post or payment at a bank or Post Office. Tenants wishing to pay at the Post Office will need one of the RAA's paying in slips which is provided on request. Postal payments are sent to the PO Box and collected weekly by the treasurer, who then logs payments and pays them into the bank/Post Office.

Any late payments are chased by the ASA who records any correspondence and issues any terminations where necessary.

6.2.2 Income from Share Purchase and Subscriptions

All members will be required to purchase a share for £1. Supporter/Associate members do not pay rent, and therefore share and subscription payments will need to be collected from them separately, using the same resources and systems that will be used for rent collection.

6.3 Finance

In order to comply with legal requirements and in the interests of proper and efficient financial management, the Alliance will have to have systems in place for the following:

- Accounts preparation
- Payroll (if employing people)
- VAT advice, if necessary
- Book-keeping
- Reporting account's report under requirements the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 Section 85, or audit, as necessary
- Insurance

The current Treasurer for the Alliance is Al Dean who sits on the Board of Directors. The Treasurer, with the assistance of the ASA, will produce monthly statements, and also the annual statement, to present to the Board. Lay Auditor(s) will also be appointed to audit the annual accounts using Quickbooks.

The Council's insurance section has recommended that the Alliance procures both Public Liability and, if it employees staff, Employer's Liability cover to the value of no less than £5m. In addition, if it intends to operate any vehicles it will also need to arrange motor insurance to cover them. As a member of the National Allotments Society, the Alliance will be able to utilise its Public Liability Insurance Scheme. The Alliance has sought insurance provision and will implement once the signing of the lease has been completed.

6.4 Quality Assurance

As described in section 2.4, the Alliance will implement quality assurance systems to maintain efficient use of resources, customer satisfaction and continuous service improvement, all of which are important to the long-term viability of the Alliance.

6.5 Reporting to Members and Stakeholders

The Alliance will share information with its members and other stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability. This will include annual reporting of accounts (as required by law), results of customer satisfaction surveys, complaints monitoring data, membership statistics, allotment occupancy rates and waiting list numbers. Such information will be posted on the Alliance web-site, and reported at AGMs.

7. Premises and Equipment

7.1 Premises

7.1.1 Allotment Land

The allotment sites the Alliance requires to deliver the service have been in existence for many years prior to its establishment, and will be leased to the Alliance by Rotherham Borough Council. Societies will be granted a sublease on their sites by the Alliance.

A comprehensive audit of allotment sites was undertaken from 2017 to 2018. This recorded sizes, numbers of plots, facilities and condition. A summary of this information is given in the table below.

	Direct Managed		Society	Total
	active	inactive		
Size and occupancy				
number of sites	13	4	13	30
total area (sq metres)	167750	37004	255604	460358
% area cultivatable	74.3%	0.0%	68.2%	64.9%
number of plots	515	0	592	1107
Total number of plots	515	0	592	1107
% plots let	77.5%	n/a	92.7%	85.6%
% plots unlettable	11.3%	n/a	1.4%	6.0%
% plots vacant	11.3%	n/a	5.9%	8.4%
Number on waiting lists	66	n/a	53	119
No. waiting where plot vacant	20	n/a	5	25
Boundaries				
Total length boundary (m)	6927	2172	8795	17894
% boundary fence not present	19.4%	31.0%	22.0%	22.1%
% boundary fence mostly/poor	21.0%	32.8%	20.2%	22.1%
% boundary fence mostly/good	59.5%	36.2%	57.7%	55.8%
Total number of gates	29	2	35	66
Number of gates mostly/poor	6	0	4	10
Number of gates mostly/good	23	2	31	56
Tracks and Car Parking				
Total length tracks and paths (m)	4127	0	6603	10730
% tracks and paths mostly/poor	44.3%	n/a	25.9%	33.0%
% tracks and paths mostly/good	55.7%	n/a	74.1%	67.0%
Total number of parking spaces	36	0	57	93
Plots per parking space	14.3	n/a	10.4	11.9
Buildings				
Total number of buildings	21	0	147	168
Plots per building	24.5	n/a	4.0	6.6

number of buildings mostly/poor	3	0	9	12
number of buildings mostly/good	18	0	138	156
Utilities				
% sites with water supply	61.5%	0.0%	76.9%	60.0%
% sites with electricity supply	0.0%	0.0%	46.2%	20.0%
number of water taps	61	0	30	91
plots per water tap	8.4	n/a	19.7	12.2
number of water troughs	4	0	42	46
plots per water trough	128.8	n/a	14.1	24.1
Environmental Issues				
area heavily overgrown (sqm)	9562	10322	6040	25924
area moderately overgrown (sqm)	6052	13837	6946	26835
area with Japanese Knotweed (sqm)	33	0	123	156
area with rubbish to be cleared (sqm)	2897	9104	0	12001
area prone to flooding or waterlogging (sqm)	1728	0	4936	6664
area with no soil cover (sqm)	187	0	0	187
% total site area with liabilities	12.2%	89.9%	7.1%	15.6%

7.1.2 Offices and Meeting Space

In order to minimise costs, the Alliance will not rent or buy permanent office or meeting space. It is required to have a registered office address in order to register as a charitable community benefit society. This is currently BAS Phoenix Pavilion, 18A Brunswick Road, Rotherham, S60 2RH. The Allotment Support Assistant is employed on a work-from-home basis so most routine administration work will be undertaken from domestic premises, although some societies have indoor space within their sites that could also be made available for this purpose. Meetings will be held either in society buildings, or in space provided by the Council.

7.2 Equipment

7.2.1 Tools and Vehicles

The Council has previously purchased the following equipment to meet the operational needs of its own member of staff who has been responsible for site maintenance:

- Strimmer
- Leaf-blower
- Hedge cutter
- Bag of hand tools

Agreement will be sought to transfer this equipment to the Alliance when convenient, subject to checks that they remain fit for use.

The Council has leased a vehicle for use by its allotment operative. The Alliance will consider vehicle requirements into account when assessing options for delivering site maintenance works.

7.2.3 ICT

The Alliance ASA operates using a laptop with Microsoft 365 subscription, colour laser printer and laminator. Stationary supplies such as paper, envelopes, pens, stapler and staples, laminator pouches, plastic wallets, postage stamps, address stamps have been purchased. The Alliance also has a mobile phone contract with a Samsung smartphone which is a dedicated number. Additionally, the following specialist applications are being utilised:

- Accounting and book-keeping software. 'Quickbooks' has been recommended by accountants who have offered to support the Alliance with financial accounting.
- Allotment management database. The Council previously used 'Colony'. The Alliance has now taken over the license of the software from RMBC and continues to use this system for all the allotment data management.

8. People

8.1 Founder Members and Directors

The establishment of the Alliance was being steered by a group of volunteers from the allotment community, Rotherham Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, who has overall responsibility for Council allotments, and one other elected member of the Council. This group of Founder Members are now acting as Directors. Support is being provided by Rotherham Borough Council during the establishment of the Alliance and subsequent transfer of management responsibility for sites and services to it. The appointment of a part-time Allotment Support Administrator has taken place who is now responsible for all the administration of the Alliance, reporting to the Board of Directors.

Short profiles of the Directors are given below, in alphabetical order of surname.

8.1.1 Al Dean

Role in Alliance: Treasurer

Secretary and plot-holder on Broom Valley new allotments and RaDAA member.

8.1.2 Mick Hirst

Role in Alliance: Board Member

Plot holder on Avenue Rd allotments.

8.1.3 Councillor Emma Hoddinott

Role in Alliance: RMBC appointed

Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety.

8.1.4 John Palmer

Role in Alliance: Vice Chair

Plot holder on Barnsley Rd allotment site. Former Allotment Officer.

8.1.5 Councillor Brian Steele

Role in Alliance: Chair, RMBC appointed

Plot holder on a non-RAA site.

8.1.6 Mohammed Suleman

Role in Alliance: Board Member

Plot holder on Clifton allotment site.

8.1.7 Jack Taylor

Role in Alliance: Secretary

Secretary and plot-holder on Wood St Site

8.2 Skills Gaps and how they will be filled

e.g. training, recruitment, co-option, use of consultants etc. All Directors have been asked to complete a 'skills gap' questionnaire.

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9. Organisational Structure

9.1 Rotherham Allotments Alliance

The Alliance is a Charitable Community Benefit Society established by the Council in partnership with representatives of allotment societies and individual allotment gardeners to take over the management and development of Council-owned allotments in Rotherham. It will be run by and for its members. All individuals who rent a plot on an allotment managed by the Alliance, or leased by the Alliance to a society, will automatically become plot-holder members. Membership is not restricted to these allotment gardeners, as others will be able to join as 'supporter/associate members'. All members will purchase a share that entitles them to vote at general meetings of the Alliance. A further condition of membership is that people pay an annual subscription. Plot-holder members will have these payments deducted from their rent, and will therefore have nothing extra to pay.

A Board of Directors will be responsible for management of the Alliance on behalf of the general membership. This will be a 'Stakeholder Board' comprising up to 7 Directors elected by members, 2 Directors nominated by Rotherham Borough Council, and up to 2 other temporary Directors with particular skills or experience, co-opted by the Board as required.

The Alliance may choose to employ staff, contractors and consultants as necessary for the efficient delivery of its services.

The functions and responsibilities of the Alliance are as follows:

9.1.1 Governance

- Development and implementation of its own rules and regulations
- Setting service standards and monitoring systems including KPIs
- First line step-in/rescue in case of failing Society
- Secretarial support and record-keeping for Alliance business

9.1.2 Provision of Allotment Land

- Sub-let allotment sites to Allotment Societies
- Monitor demand for allotments across borough, including data supplied by Societies
- Make recommendations to RMBC for acquisition/disposal of allotment land
- Consider requests from Societies to surrender all or part of their leased land, and support them in finding alternative uses (e.g. grazing)
- Help RMBC in applying for permission to dispose of surplus allotment land, including statutory consultation.

9.1.3 Finance, insurance and staffing

- Employ staff as required
- Set annual budget for Alliance business (incl staff costs)
- Calculate and collect rent payments from tenants on directly-managed sites and Societies
- Monitor own budget and report to members regularly
- Take out insurance cover as necessary for Alliance business
- Decide whether members must join National Allotment Societies to benefit from insurance cover

9.1.4 Site Improvement and Maintenance

- Deploy resources to help Societies with maintenance and improvement projects, and to arrange the following:
 - Regular safety inspections of trees across all sites, and arrange works as needed
 - Deal with invasive species, flooding and hazardous waste reported by Societies
 - Lead or support procurement for Societies of skips, pest control etc.
- Consider Society site improvement proposals, and decide whether to support
- If supporting, apply to the Council for capital on behalf of Society
- Otherwise, work with Society to address weaknesses in bid
- Identify and share information about other external grant funding opportunities

9.1.5 Tenancy Management

- Sub-let allotment sites to Allotment Societies
- On directly-managed sites:
 - Provide information about how to rent a plot and plot availability
 - Manage waiting lists
 - Prepare vacant plots for letting
 - Issue tenancy agreements
 - Collect rents and other payments (e.g. water)
 - Take action to address under-payment, including possible termination of tenancy
 - Agree and issue site rules
 - Take action to address non-compliance, including enforcement and possible termination of tenancy
 - Respond to general enquiries from tenants
 - Take action to try to resolve disputes between tenants
 - Respond to complaints from tenants and others

9.1.6 Service Development and Promotion

- Champion all allotments, and provide a unified voice on matters of general interest
- Develop and implement borough-wide communications to promote the benefits of allotment gardening, including Alliance website
- Help Societies by encouraging new volunteers to strengthen sustainability and representativeness of committees.
- Work with partners to reach under-represented and disadvantaged groups
- Share/promote good practice guidelines from national bodies and between Societies
- Encourage neighbouring Societies to form clusters for mutual support and resource sharing
- Arrange and promote skills development opportunities for volunteers in all Societies (e.g. training, mentoring)

9.2 Alliance Management Functions

Function	Who or How?
Chair	Councillor Brian Steele
Society Secretary	Jack Taylor
Treasurer	Al Dean

9.3 Rotherham Borough Council

The Council will retain its statutory duty to provide land for allotments. It will therefore be the ultimate

landlord for this land. However, its role will not be restricted to being a higher authority, but instead it will participate in the governance of the Alliance through its nomination of two Directors to its Board. The functions and responsibilities of the Council are as follows:

9.3.1 Governance

- Nomination of Council reps to Allotments Alliance
- Ultimate responsibility for allotments service standards and legal compliance
- Ultimate step-in/rescue powers if self-management body failing

9.3.2 Provision of allotment land

- Lease all Council allotment land to Allotments Alliance.
- Consider requests to provide new land, or to take back surplus land from Alliance
- Acquire or appropriate land for new allotments as required
- Manage any surplus land surrendered by Alliance, noting that grazing income may need to be passed back to Alliance to support their activities
- Apply to Secretary of State for permission to dispose of surplus allotment land

9.3.3 Finance, insurance and staffing

- Manage capital reserves from sale of allotment land in accordance with Allotments Acts
- Allocate capital funding to support site improvement projects or to acquire new land for allotments
- Receive reports from Alliance on use of capital funding, including achievement of agreed outcomes, leverage of match funding etc.
- Advise on level of insurance required by self-management bodies
- Supply TUPE information if these regulations apply to any staff to be taken on by the Alliance

9.3.4 Site Improvement and Maintenance

- Process applications from Alliance for capital funding to support site improvement projects
- Provide technical advice on tree safety, invasive species, flooding and hazardous waste, as requested by Allotments Alliance

10. Financial Projections

See Appendix 1 for our 2020 financial statement.

See Appendix 2 for our provisional financial forecasts for 2021 and 2022.

10.1 Assumptions

The financial assumptions are that occupancy will increase slightly for 2021. The price per square metre will remain the same as 2020. The clearing of unlettable plots will commence.

10.2 Start-up Capital Requirements

The Alliance received £15,000 from RMBC in 2020 which was the proportion of rents collected for the first 3 months of 2020.

10.3 Investment Sources

The Alliance has investigated revenue streams from funding and is eligible to apply for Ward funds and other providers. This information has been provided by South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau.

10.4 Break-Even Forecast

See Appendix 1 and 2.

10.5 Specific Financial Indicators

Occupancy levels.

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% of rents received.

10.6 Contingency Arrangements

The Alliance has allocated a £10,000 contingency allowance and £10,000 reserves allowance in the 2021 forecast.

11. Risk Analysis

11.1 SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Proven track record of successful site self-management in Rotherham	Information passed on from authority is inaccurate or omitted completely
Political support for new management model	Limited capacity / understanding of self-management on directly managed sites
Existing administrative systems transferred to new management operation easily	Poor condition of some sites due to neglect, particularly directly-managed sites
Council willingness to support the transition to new model	Pandemic has hindered progress on improvement works
Website and Facebook page are operational	Quality of currently provided groundworks service has been substandard
Opportunities	Threats
Council capital financial support for site improvement	Possible difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers as Directors
Charitable CBS well-placed to seek external funding and tax benefits	Lack of necessary expertise amongst volunteers
Scope to seek more cost-effective operational solutions	Inability to form Allotment Societies for individual sites
Volunteer resource and enthusiasm amongst allotment plot-holders	Refusal of existing Allotment Societies to participate in the Alliance model
Pandemic has encouraged interest in allotments to increase	Poor performance by new body
Utilize other social media outlets to promote the allotments and allotment gardening	Insufficient funds/insolvency
	Improper conduct by Directors etc

11.2 Risk Mitigation

Weaknesses and threats	Action to take
Limited capacity/ understanding of self-management on directly managed sites, leading to inability to form site societies	Alliance to manage sites where a society does not exist. Alliance supports and builds capacity where needed to form new society. Possible formation of multi-site societies where individual sites are too small to sustain them.
Lack of necessary expertise amongst volunteers	Professional advice on legal and other specialist matters is available to members of the National Allotment Society and from bodies such as Co-operatives UK. Training of selected volunteers and any staff employed by the Allotments Alliance is advisable, as this will equip them to provide support to, and mentor other volunteers across all sites as needed.
Poor condition of some directly-managed sites and insufficient funds to address liabilities	It is expected that the Alliance and site societies will be in a strong position to develop successful

	<p>bids for grant funding. Not only are they able to access funding not available to the Council, but the energy and enthusiasm of volunteers with good local knowledge will also be invaluable in making the case for funding. The Council has made £100k capital available to the Alliance, and this can be used as match funding for external funding bids.</p>
<p>Possible difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers as Directors</p>	<p>Ensure support is available where necessary to help inspire potential volunteers, to promote volunteering opportunities, to deal with any problems that may occur, and to build volunteer leadership skills. Support may be sought from organisations such as Voluntary Action Rotherham, and the National Allotment Society.</p>
<p>Refusal of existing Allotment Societies to participate in the Alliance model</p>	<p>The Council would explain that it will no longer lease sites directly to Societies. Thus a proportion of rent collected by all Societies would be passed on to the Allotments Alliance to allow it to operate. Societies and their members would be able influence how the Alliance spends its budget. Should a Society be unwilling to work in this way, then its lease on the site would be terminated and the Alliance would control the site directly, pending formation of a new society if possible.</p>
<p>Poor performance by new body</p>	<p>By agreeing a set of performance indicators and putting in place a monitoring system, the Allotments Alliance would be able to identify any Societies that appear to have difficulty maintaining standards, and provide support necessary. Ultimately, the Alliance could terminate a Society's lease and take over control of the site if all else fails. The Alliance would also need to monitor and report its own performance and take action if this falls below standards agreed by its membership.</p>
<p>Improper conduct by people within self-management bodies</p>	<p>A comprehensive code of conduct must be in place for volunteers and staff working within the Allotments Alliance, and the Alliance must put in place effective measures for monitoring and enforcing this, including a whistle-blowing policy. Independent auditing of accounts will help to identify any irregularities.</p>
<p>Financial insolvency</p>	<p>Proper accounting and cost-control measures will reduce the risk of running out of money. Over time, it is recommended that the Alliance builds up reserves that can be drawn upon in times of need.</p>

11.3 Contingency Plans and Exit Strategy

What could possibly go wrong?	What would we do if it did?
<p>The Alliance looks to winds itself up due to failure to manage any of the above risks</p>	<p>The Council will be represented on the board of the Alliance, and will do all it can to help avert this. In the event that it is unable to, then the Council</p>

	will have to resume control of allotments in accordance with its statutory duties under the Allotments Acts.

12. Summary

Following a difficult first 12 months in operation, the Alliance is in a well-placed position to ensure its success. With strategic use of the capital funding, revenue from rents, applied skills and knowledge from Board members and advice from governing bodies, the Alliance will be able to offer continued improvement of the allotment provision in the Rotherham borough.

The main activities will be to ensure that any previous issues that have occurred on sites, i.e. plots being deemed unlettable for various reasons, will be resolved, with health and safety being of the utmost priority. The creation and development of good working relationships with both society committees and tenants on direct-managed sites will be a valuable tool as the Alliance strives to achieve its goals. The role provided by the Allotment Support Assistant will ensure that all current and future tenants will have a point of contact plus promotion of the Alliance can take place.

Financially, the Alliance will be able to control expenditure, seek out cost-effective ways in which to provide maintenance and improvement for all sites and ultimately operate sustainably to continue the allotment provision for future generations.

Appendix 1 INCOME and EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT - from Inception 8.11.19 to 31.12.2020.

Information	Money out £	Money in £	Balance £
New Account 8.11.2019 Inception.			£ -
RMBC Capital transfers		£ 22,991.83	

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Sandymount	£	1,552.86	
ASA	£	15,503.23	
Rents received			£ 47,797.47
returned	£	66.26	
discount	£	509.59	
Royal Mail PO Box 819. x 2	£	547.50	
Parker Rhodes Hickmott - Solicitors fees deposit	£	1,000.00	
GET Services Website	£	1,000.00	
Colony	£	1,454.92	
NSALG 2021 Subscription	£	66.00	
ZOOM	£	57.56	
Domain renewal	£	14.39	
Microsoft	£	45.12	
Intuit	£	177.60	
Telephone & insurance (Tesco)	£	269.78	
Office Costs	ASA		
Stationery & office equipment incl Computer battery	£	1,035.93	
HP Laser Printer	£	210.83	
Postage Stamps	£	825.00	
Pettycash & sundries	£	157.52	
Security 2 x CCTV cameras	£	191.50	
Skips TKL x 9	£	1,755.00	
Coral Design logo signs	£	40.00	
Business Stream Water Scrooby	£	654.89	
JT Sundry purchase. Padlock keys. Scrooby & High St	£	158.70	
Information Commissioner x 2 registration	£	80.00	
GMS Services. 2 x strim & rotavate, Rawmarsh	£	240.00	
Stansfield Rawmarsh	£	62.00	
S&R Services Avenue Road	£	5,400.00	
Parkway Sheet Metal Gate @ Scrooby	£	72.00	
L&N Waste High Steet	£	1,200.00	
Aquaforce Scrooby	£	180.00	
Pest Control Rosehill wasp nest	£	49.00	
Balance c/f 31.12.2020			£ 36,212.12
	£	34,577.18	£ 70,789.30

Appendix 2

RAA - Financial Projection 2021

<u>Item</u>	<u>Full year 2021</u> <u>Cost</u>	<u>Notes</u>
	-	
ADMIN & ACCOUNTING	£ 23,361.39	
IT & Comms	£ 2,373.03	
Marketing	£ 3,486.00	
Site Costs	£ 45,040.00	
Other Costs	£ 21,000.00	
Total	£95,260.42	
Income	£ 45,583.64	SOCIETY INCOME
(without price increase)	£ 13,470.03	DM INCOME based on current lets
	£ 36,212.12	2020 surplus
	£ 95,265.79	Total Income
	£ 5.37	Remaining Balance

RAA - Financial Projection 2022

<u>Item</u>	<u>Full year 2022</u> <u>Cost</u>	<u>Notes</u>
	-	5% increase on 2021
ADMIN & ACCOUNTING	£ 24,529.46	
IT & Comms	£ 2,121.03	
Marketing	£ 3,486.00	
Site Costs	£ 31,740.00	
Other Costs	£ -	
Total	£61,876.49	
Income	£ 41,850.82	SOCIETY INCOME
(without price increase)	£ 20,470.21	DM INCOME based on current lets
	£ 62,321.03	Total Income
	£ 444.54	Remaining Balance
Income (with price increase)	£ 42,687.84	SOCIETY INCOME
(added 2020 vacant plots)	£ 20,879.61	DM INCOME based on current lets
	£ 63,567.45	
Potential Income		
Vacant Plots	£ 1,267.74	
Unlettable Plots	£ 920.00	
Total Potential Income	£ 2,187.74	

