



Business Plan 2023

1. Mission Statement

1.1 Our Purpose

The Rotherham Allotments Alliance provides, promotes and develops allotments in Rotherham to offer people of all backgrounds and abilities opportunities to enjoy gardening in safe, secure, accessible and environmentally sustainable surroundings. To do so, it makes 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 is doing 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.

Following the review conducted in 2018, the Rotherham Allotment Alliance was established to realise the potential of allotments through self-management, within available resources.

1.3 Rotherham Allotment Alliance Current Position.

The RAA has now been in full operation for 3 years. Unfortunately, the full legal transfer is still not yet completed. Frustratingly, this matter has now dragged on into 2023. Both sides' solicitors have been tasked with reaching a speedy conclusion to the situation. It is hoped that this will be resolved in early 2023.

The Alliance employs an administrator (seconded from RMBC) to deal with all administrative duties involved in managing the allotment sites under the Alliances control. The Allotment Support Assistant, Donna Bushby, undertakes plot lettings, rent collection and organises site maintenance and emergency works. The Allotment Support Assistant is also involved in financial processes such as invoice payments and budget setting.

Following on from the covid pandemic, normal operations have resumed in 2022. In order to manage time better, board meetings now take place once a month in person, with finance and maintenance sub-committee meetings taking place 2 weeks before, and 2 weeks after the board meeting, on an alternate basis via Zoom. To further utilize time and resources better in 2023, board meetings will occur every 2 months, with Officer meetings, and finance and maintenance sub-committee meeting alternating in-between, as and when required, via Zoom.

Plot clearance and site improvements have still been the main focus of 2022 with a considerable amount of clearance work being done on a number of sites, using the Community Payback service. This has meant that funds have been channeled into waste removal, rather than labour costs. Sites that still need work have been identified and the incentive of discounted or free rent is being offered to new tenants where applicable. The RAA hopes to continue the relationship with Community Payback in 2023 and carry out work on other sites.

2. Services

2.1 What we do

The principal business of the Rotherham Allotments Alliance is 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 2022 by the RAA) allows it to offer up to 367 allotment plots covering a total of 12.10 hectares on 10 directly managed sites, and a further 831 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 made them suitable for letting. Some areas of land are also no longer useable as allotments for reasons such as flooding. With better planning, it has been 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 depends 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 / neighbouring residents

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 (NAS), the Alliance will actively engage in networking and information sharing to support this. The Allotment Support Assistant has been attending Allotment Officer meetings organized by NAS. It will also review feedback from members to identify their priorities for development. This will be

collected in the form of an online survey.

3. Social Impact

3.1 The Local Community

The Rotherham Allotments Alliance serves 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 264,984 at May 2022. (www.rotherham.gov.uk/data/people/population/1)

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 51st 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.)

These statistics will be updated when they become available.

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. This has been especially important since the pandemic and also with current rising living costs.

Currently there are 1184 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. At the same time, there were 150 people waiting for an allotment plot. Currently, there are 56 people on waitlists for direct-managed sites and 110 on society-managed sites. 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 and removing historic waste
- 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, conducting regular inspections, 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 uses 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 pay rent directly to the Alliance who is responsible for managing all aspects of the service they receive. On society-managed sites, plot-holders 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 also constitute the overwhelming majority of the membership of the Alliance, and therefore are 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 engages with plot-holders directly through its website, social media, letter and email correspondence and annual general meetings where members are able to vote on important issues. Bi-annual meetings for both shareholders and societies have also been introduced to allow for the sharing of ideas and information between tenants and the board of directors. 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 is not 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 Related Associations

The Alliance will work with any bodies associated with allotment gardening, either on a local or national level, i.e. National Allotment Society (NAS) and Rotherham and District Allotment Association (RaDAA).

4.6 Other Allotment Providers

Other allotment providers within the area of Rotherham MBC include Parish Councils and private landowners. The RAA will work in partnership with these providers to promote allotment gardening. The RAA would also consider management opportunity for any sites if requested by the provider.

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. The dividing of plots is of benefit to this group as a smaller plot will be much more manageable than a larger space.

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.

To foster a closer working relationship and partnership with Allotment Societies who administer their allotment sites directly, the RAA introduced bi-annual forum meetings specifically aimed for attendance by Allotment Society representatives. The RAA AGM (usually held in late March) gives the opportunity for discussion and agenda setting for two further meetings to be held in months 7 and 11 each year. The agreed agendas will be the basis of discussion to further the improvements of allotment provision within the remit of the RAA to meet both the individual Allotment Societies and RAA aims and objectives.

5.3.3 Website

The Alliance's website is not only where members can go for information and communication, but it also acts as a shop window for people who may be looking for a new leisure activity. The web-address is shown widely on other materials produced by the Alliance to ensure maximum exposure. Development of the website in 2022 will include offering the information in different languages to attract members from ethnic minorities. Further development will come from updating the current information and utilizing an online forum for tenants to comment in and pass on information / ideas.

5.3.4 Social Media

The potential of channels such as Facebook, Instagram 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. In 2022, Instagram was added to the social media portfolio and posts are being made to this platform. Plans for 2023 include a more detailed schedule of posts, relating to all aspects of allotment gardening.

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). Direct-managed sites will benefit from having dedicated notice boards installed at the site entrance to show information for both current and prospective tenants.

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. Space in the horticulture tenant marquee was occupied again by the Alliance in 2022. Two competitions were run – a children’s nature quiz and adults ‘guess the fruit / vegetable’ competition. It was decided that one competition, aimed just at children will be done in 2023 as more engagement was sought with the children’s quiz. Potential tenants were asked to leave their details, to be contacted regarding site preference and be added to waiting lists.

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. 2022 has seen a number of community groups being established on some sites and the RAA will help to promote these plots to volunteers.
- Rental discounts for new starters, when taking on a previously un-cultivated area, to allow plot to be brought into cultivation.

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

Commencing with pre-existing Council budgets and processes as a model, the Alliance sets service standards and deploys resources as necessary to deliver routine operations across directly managed sites to achieve these standards. In doing so, it monitors performance, reviews standards and explores 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 will continue to utilise the Colony online application, which has previously been used by the Council for all tenancy administration functions. The Allotment Support Assistant is responsible for all of the administrative tasks associated with allotment lettings, i.e. issuing invoices, tenancy agreements and keys via both telephone and email.

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 offers administrative assistance to site societies, including maintenance of tenancy records, waiting lists and rule compliance.

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 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 still ongoing 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 did. 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. A survey

was conducted with societies to ask what services they were willing to undertake themselves. The results were very mixed so it was decided that maintenance such as grass and hedge cutting (where RMBC had provided provision) would continue to be offered to ensure a standardized and reliable offering to each site. In 2022, pest control was brought 'in-house' with site volunteers and Directors undertaking training to be able to distribute the bait. Any work carried out by outside organisations is monitored to ensure it is carried out to the required standard.

6.1.2 Service development

The Directors are responsible for reviewing performance information, member feedback and best practice guidance to identify service development priorities. They 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 and policies of the Alliance
- Minutes from board and sub-committee meetings
- 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. Due to improvements with the Colony system, the Alliance is trialling the sending out of invoices via email in 2022. The Alliance holds approximately 80% of tenants' email addresses so the remaining 20% will still be posted, or if requested by the tenant. It is identified that printing and postage costs will be reduced by using email. 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 Allotment Support Assistant / 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 plot holders at the time of RAA taking responsibility (2019) automatically became shareholders and £1.00 of their first rental at that time was placed in the share account – subsequently £1.00 share certification is taken from their first rental payment new tenants. Supporter/Associate members pay a subscription of £3.00 per annum, £1.00 from the first subscription being their share certification. The subscriptions will be collected 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 accounts report under requirements the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 Section 85, or audit, as necessary
- Insurance

Normally, The Treasurer, with the assistance of the ASA, will produce monthly statements, and also the annual statement to present to the Board. In 2022, difficulty has been experienced in appointing a suitable Treasurer who could fulfill the requirements of the role. A Treasurer had been appointed but had to resign due to work commitments. The ASA continues to conduct all financial activities and prepare all financial reports, supported by the Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee and the Chairperson. Following on from the use of a community auditor in 2021, the board has made the decision to use this service again as it is deemed to ensure good financial practices, with advice from a professional service.

The Council's insurance section has recommended that the Alliance procures both Public Liability and, if it employs 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. Following confusion regarding the insurance provided by RMBC, the Alliance has sought public liability insurance provision in 2022. Insurance for RMBC-owned buildings will remain with RMBC until 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 website and reported at AGMs in the form of an annual report.

7. Premises and Equipment

7.1 Premises

7.1.1 Allotment Land (Not sure if this section is still relevant? Should we substitute it with an up-to date summary and a previous years total for comparison? Is that feasible?)

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		
Occupancy				
number of sites	10	4	15	29
Total number of plots	364	0	816	1180
% plots let	90%	n/a	97%	94%
% plots unlettable	5.2%	n/a	2.2%	3.1%
% plots vacant	1%	n/a	1.3%	1.2%
Number on waiting lists	54	n/a	117	171
No. waiting where plot vacant	27	n/a	51	76

Please note that the society statistics are not accurate due to tenant information not being submitted by a number of sites

7.1.2 Offices and Meeting Space

In order to minimise costs, the Alliance does 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 46 Celandine Rise Swinton, Mexborough, S64 8PL. The Allotment Support Assistant is employed on a work-from-home basis so most routine administration work is undertaken from a 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, in space provided by the Council and remotely via the Zoom platform.

7.2 Equipment

7.2.1 Tools and Office Equipment

The Alliance has an amount of tools and office equipment in order to operate effectively. See below:

<u>Office Equipment @ 10.03.23</u>	<u>Tools @ 10.03.23</u>
HP Laptop & Charger	Laser distance meter
Multi-USB connector	pliers
Mouse & Keyboard	2 x scissors
Laminator & pouches	snips
HP printer	needlenose pliers
Mobile phones x 2 (main & spare)	6 x screwdrivers
Highlighters	tie wraps
Stapler / Staples / paperclips	2 x rat box keys
Tippex	camera cables
Stampers x 3	1 x screwbit for plot number screws
Post it notes	tags
Duplicate book	adjustable spanner
plastic wallets	2 x inspection chamber lifts
Labels	water tap tool
Bank envelopes	blue-handled bolt croppers
envelopes / paper	bolts / washers / security nuts
stamps	
Allotments Law book	Spare keys / locks / chains

Pest Control Supplies:

Rat poison, 6 full boxes, 1 part box (50%)

Rat poison (bromakill) 2 x 7kg bags

Rat boxes x 30

Snap traps x 16

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 Directors

Short profiles of the Directors are given below.

8.1.1 Brian Steele

Role in Alliance: Chair

Plot holder on a non-RAA site.

8.1.2 John Palmer

Role in Alliance: Vice Chair

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

8.1.3 Jack Taylor

Role in Alliance: Secretary

Secretary and plot-holder on Wood St Site

8.1.4 Mohammed Suleman

Role in Alliance: Board Member

Plot holder on Clifton allotment site.

8.1.5 Mick Hirst

Role in Alliance: Board Member

Plot holder on Avenue Rd allotments.

8.1.6 Tess Sheen

Role in Alliance: Board Member

Plot holder on Avenue Rd allotments.

8.1.7 Sue Jackson

Role in Alliance: Board Member

Plot holder on Rectory Field allotments.

8.1.8 Councillor David Sheppard

Role in Alliance: RMBC appointed

Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion.

8.1.8 Councillor Rachel Hughes

Role in Alliance: RMBC appointed

Member of Improving Places Select Committee

8.2 Skills Gaps and how they will be filled

e.g. training, recruitment, co-option, use of consultants etc. All Directors had previously been asked to complete a 'skills gap' questionnaire. This is now under review and directors will be asked to complete.

9. Organisational Structure

9.1 Rotherham Allotments Alliance

The Alliance is a 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 is 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 is responsible for management of the Alliance on behalf of the general membership. This is 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
- Give members an opportunity to 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, with the permission of RMBC
 - 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
- 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	Brian Steele
Society Secretary	Jack Taylor
Treasurer	

Officers Responsibilities:

Chairperson: Usually, a chairperson of an organisation is elected annually and their duties will not only include taking the chair at meeting, but also seeing to it that the affairs of the organisation are being properly conducted, in the best interests of the business. The Chairperson is also responsible for the Allotment Support Assistant and acts as line manager.

Secretary: The secretary is the main legal contact for the organization. They are responsible for ensuring that all the organization is administratively well-run and within the requirements of the law.

Treasurer: It is the Treasurer's responsibility to ensure that the finances of the organization are kept accurate and up to date. The Treasurer will also be responsible for the preparation for the annual accounts of the organization, which are presented at the AGM.

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 2022 financial statement.

See Appendix 2 for our provisional financial forecasts for 2023, 2024 and 2025.

10.1 Assumptions

The financial assumptions are that occupancy will increase slightly for 2023 due to the clearance work of plots. The price per square metre was raised by 5% for 2023 with a suggestion of future increases up to 5%, only if necessary. The clearing of unlettable plots will continue.

10.2 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.

10.3 Break-Even Forecast

See Appendix 1 and 2.

10.4 Specific Financial Indicators

Occupancy levels.

% of rents received.

10.5 Contingency Arrangements

The Alliance-allocated a £10,000 contingency allowance.

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
Capability and organizational skills of Allotment Support Assistant	Day-to-day operation in the long-term absence of the ASA
Dedicated input from directors	Restrictive lease agreement from RMBC

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Opportunities	Threats
Charitable CBS well-placed to seek external funding and tax benefits	Possible difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers as Directors
Scope to seek more cost-effective operational solutions	Lack of necessary expertise amongst volunteers
Volunteer resource and enthusiasm amongst allotment plot-holders	Inability to form Allotment Societies for individual sites
Pandemic has encouraged interest in allotments to increase	Refusal of existing Allotment Societies to participate in the Alliance model
Utilize other social media outlets to promote the allotments and allotment gardening	Poor performance by new body
Adopt alternative/modern vision – i.e. market as ‘Urban Gardening’ to attract younger / different socio-economic group participants	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 bids for grant funding.

	<p>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 made £100k capital available to the Alliance which was used to fund the most urgent improvement works.</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, 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</p>

	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.
Financial insolvency	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.
Long-term ASA absence	Holiday / sickness absence will be covered by specific Directors taking responsibility for individual duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email – • Collection of post from PO box – • Telephone – • Plot allocations on directly managed sites- • Financial issues raising orders and paying invoices.

11.3 Contingency Plans and Exit Strategy

What could possibly go wrong?	What would we do if it did?
The Alliance looks to wind itself up due to failure to manage any of the above risks	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 will have to resume control of allotments in accordance with its statutory duties under the Allotments Acts.

12. Summary

The last 12 months have seen a more 'normal' operation for the Alliance so it has been able to understand better the standard operational needs. Because of this, the Alliance can ensure its continued success. With strategic use of the 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

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borough.

Health and Safety, the clearing of remaining unlettable plots and removing historic waste will be a continuing priority, sourcing outside funding where required for specific projects. The education and encouragement of good gardening practices will be focused on, with regular inspections ensuring that tenants are working their plots effectively.

The strengthening of the relationship between the RAA, societies and tenants will continue with the bi-annual forum meetings and information and advice will be shared where appropriate.

The ASA remains to be a point of contact for all current and future tenants and will be responsible for promoting the sustainability of the provision for future generations.

Appendix 1 2022 Financial Report

Appendix 2 2023/2024/2025 Budget Projections

