



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru  
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Cynaliadwyedd  
The Sustainability Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 18 Mawrth 2010  
Thursday, 18 March 2010**

**Cynnwys**  
**Contents**

- 4 Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon  
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions
- 4 Ymchwiliad i Ddarpariaeth Rhandiroedd yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth—  
Ffederasiwn y Ffermydd Dinesig a Gerddi Cymunedol a Chymdeithas y Pridd  
Inquiry into the Provision of Allotments in Wales: Evidence Session—the Federation  
of City Farms and Community Gardens and the Soil Association
- 15 Ymchwiliad i Ddarpariaeth Rhandiroedd yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth—  
Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru, Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd, Cyngor Bwrdeistref  
Sirol Conwy a Chyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wrecsam  
Inquiry into the Provision of Allotments in Wales: Evidence Session—Welsh Local  
Government Association, Newport City Council, Conwy County Borough Council and  
Wrexham County Borough Council
- 27 Cynnig Trefniadol  
Procedural Motion

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,  
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.  
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Lorraine Barrett	Llafur Labour
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair)
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour
Brynle Williams	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Leanne Wood	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Lyn Davies	Rheolwr Golygfa Stryd, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy Street Scene Manager, Conwy County Borough Council
Nicola Ellis	Swyddog Dylunio'r Tirlun, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wrecsam Landscape Design Officer, Wrexham County Borough Council
Martin Howorth	Rheolwr Parciau, Cefn Gwlad a Hawliau Tramwy, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wrecsam Parks, Countryside and Rights of Way Manager, Wrexham County Borough Council
Craig Mitchell	Swyddog Polisi, Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru Policy Officer, Welsh Local Government Association
Dan Morris	Gweithiwr Cefnogi Cymru, Ffederasiwn Ffermydd y Dinesig a Gerddi Cymunedol Wales Support Worker, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
David Morris	Rheolwr Tir a Chefn Gwlad, Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd Grounds and Countryside Manager, Newport City Council
Ben Raskin	Cynrychiolydd Garddwriaethol, Cymdeithas y Pridd Horticultural Representative, Soil Association

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol**  
**National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Ryan Bishop	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Meriel Singleton	Clerc Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 1.04 p.m.  
The meeting began at 1.04 p.m.*

### **Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Michael German:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this meeting of the Sustainability Committee. I will make the usual housekeeping announcements at the beginning. In the event of a fire alarm, you should leave the room via the marked exits and follow the instructions of the ushers and the staff. No fire alarm tests are due today, so if there is an alarm it will be a real one. Please switch off all mobile phones, pagers and BlackBerrys as they interfere with the broadcasting equipment. We operate through the media of English and Welsh. Headphones have been provided for you. The amplification of the audio is on channel 0 and the translation is on channel 1. The volume control is on the side. Please do not touch any of the buttons on the microphones, as that disables the system. The red light will come on as you indicate that you wish to speak.

1.05 p.m.

### **Ymchwiliad i Ddarpariaeth Rhandiroedd yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth— Ffederasiwn y Ffermydd Dinesig a Gerddi Cymunedol a Chymdeithas y Pridd Inquiry into the Provision of Allotments in Wales: Evidence Session—the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and the Soil Association**

[2] **Michael German:** Today, we are to take evidence on the inquiry into allotment provision in Wales from the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, the Soil Association, the Welsh Local Government Association, Newport County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council and Conwy County Borough Council. I welcome to the meeting Dan Morris who, if I have got this right, is the Wales support worker for the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.

[3] **Mr Dan Morris:** That is right.

[4] **Michael German:** I also welcome Ben Raskin, who is the horticultural representative of the Soil Association. We normally ask people whether they wish to make any introductory remarks, about allotment provision in this instance. You will know the terms of reference that we have given for this study. You do not have to and we can, alternatively, go straight into questions. What would you prefer to do?

[5] **Mr Raskin:** I have a couple of things that it would be good to say.

[6] **Mr Dan Morris:** Yes, I have a few things to say.

[7] **Michael German:** Okay. You go first, Ben, and then Dan can come in.

[8] **Mr Raskin:** Thank you very much for inviting me, first of all. Although allotments are not specifically an area of work on which we do a lot, they impinge on a lot of areas of work that we do, so that is our interest in this. We are particularly keen to provide a progression of opportunity and learning for people about the production of food, ranging from people who might know nothing about it and who have no access to land to a commercial grower or farmer. Allotments are very often the first step that people take on that journey. We are seeing a lot of interest from people applying to our apprenticeship scheme and through our community-supported agriculture scheme. These people really want to grow and get involved in food production. That might have been sparked by having an allotment or, alternatively, if

they cannot get hold of an allotment, they might be looking for other ways to get involved in food production. So, that is our experience.

[9] We also have a number of farmer members in Wales—we have 350 farmer members, of which about 90 are horticultural. We are quite keen to link them with members of the public, to make use of their knowledge and experience to train people who are taking on growing for the first time. We would love to explore some links between allotment holders or community groups, perhaps, and a local grower who could come in to build up their knowledge. One thing that we are noticing is that people come in and are excited about this, but their lack of knowledge is a real barrier to getting started.

[10] **Michael German:** Thank you, Ben.

[11] **Mr Dan Morris:** Hoffwn siarad Cymraeg, ond fe atebaf unrhyw gwestiynau wedyn ym mha iaith bynnag. Yr wyf yma yn gwisgo dwy het. Mae'r het gyntaf ar ran Cymdeithas y Dalar, sef rhandiroedd cymunedol y bu imi eu cychwyn yn Llandeilo ar dir yr Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol. Mae'r cynllun hwnnw'n mynd yn hynod o dda. Mae 100 o aelodau, mae gennym gyswllt gydag ysgolion lleol, mae 100 o aelodau yn y clwb garddio yno, ac mae clwb garddio traddodiadol yn y dref gyda 140 o aelodau. Felly, mewn tref fach o 2,000 o bobl, mae dros 300 o arddwyr yn fwyaf sydyn, sydd yn eithaf diddorol.

**Mr Dan Morris:** I would like to speak in Welsh, but I will answer any subsequent questions in whichever language. I am here wearing two hats. The first hat is on behalf of Cymdeithas y Dalar, which are community allotments that I started in Llandeilo on land owned by the National Trust. That scheme is going extremely well. There are 100 members, we have links with local schools, there are 100 members in the gardening club there, and there is a traditional gardening club in the town, which now has 140 members. Therefore, in a small town of 2,000 residents, there are more than 300 gardeners all of a sudden, which is quite interesting.

[12] Yn ail, yr wyf yma fel swyddog maes i Ffederasiwn y Ffermydd Dinesig. Mae'r ffederasiwn yn cefnogi cymunedau i redeg cynlluniau cynaliadwy, ac mae rhandiroedd yn rhan fechan o hynny. Mae gerddi cymunedol a ffermydd yn rhan bwysig o waith y ffederasiwn.

Secondly, I am also here as a field officer for the Federation of City Farms. The federation supports communities in running sustainable schemes, and allotments are a small part of that. Community gardens and farms play an important role in the federation's work.

1.10 p.m.

[13] O ran hanes, yr wyf wedi bod yn garddio ers y gallaf gofio. Yn fy mlwyddyn gyntaf yn yr ysgol uwchradd, yr oedd yr athro hanes, Mr Jones, yn ddeiliad rhandir yn y rhandiroedd ym Mhorthmadog. Cae Pawb yw enw'r rhandiroedd, ac maent yn dal i fod yno. Mae'n rhaid ei fod yn gwybod ei hanes. Yr oedd yn dweud wrthym, pan fyddai'n sôn am gyfreithiau'r yd, fod pobl y werin yn gofyn i ffermwr lleol a fyddent yn cael tyfu eu bwyd ar ei dir, a byddai'r ffermwr yn dweud wrthynt wneud hynny ar y dalar. Dyna pam yr ydym wedi galw ein cymdeithas yn Gymdeithas y Dalar. Credaf fod honno'n elfen bwysig.

To give some history, I have been gardening ever since I can remember. In my first year of secondary school, the history teacher, Mr Jones, was an allotment holder at the allotments in Porthmadog. The allotments are called Cae Pawb, and they are still there to this day. He must have known his history. He used to tell us, when he was discussing the corn laws, that the ordinary folk would ask the local farmer whether they could grow their food on his land, and the farmer would tell them to do so on the headland—the *dalar*. That is why we have called our association Cymdeithas y Dalar. I think that that is an important aspect.

[14] Mae hynny'n dal i ddigwydd, ac un esiampl o hynny yw Cae Coch, Rhydymain, lle mae pobl leol yn cael tyfu bwyd ar y fferm. Nid oes arian yn cael ei dalu o gwbl i'r ffermwr, ond mae'n cael cymorth pan ddaw amser cynaeafu. Yr oedd arnaf eisiau rhoi'r cefndir hwnnw, achos dyna sy'n bwysig.

That still happens, and one example of that is Cae Coch in Rhydymain, where local people are allowed to grow food on the farm. The farmer is not paid any money at all, but he gets help when it comes to harvest time. I wanted to give you that background, because that is what is important.

[15] **Michael German:** Diolch yn fawr. Thank you very much. I will start off with what may appear to you to be an obvious question. Do you believe that the recent interest that we have seen in allotments and community growing will increase, have we reached a plateau, or is it a passing fad?

[16] **Mr Raskin:** I would say that it will increase, almost certainly. I think that, increasingly, people want to know more about the food that they eat, where it has come from, and how it is produced, and, if possible, they want to do it themselves. I have been with the Soil Association for three and a half years, and, before that, I was a commercial manager at the Welsh College of Horticulture in Northop. Three and a half years ago, we really struggled to find any students who were interested in growing food, but already, from speaking to my old colleagues, I know that that has started to change a bit. We are just inundated: we have nearly 250 people on a waiting list wanting to be apprentices or growers, and more and more people are coming through every week. I do not think that that is going to change, especially with food scares and food prices increasing, and all those sorts of things. As the oil runs out, food gets more expensive, and so I think that people will still want to be producing food, for sure.

[17] **Michael German:** Is it going to increase, Dan?

[18] **Mr Dan Morris:** Yes, definitely. There is an amazing mixture of people in society who are keen to do it. In our scheme in Llandeilo, it is about 50:50 for English and Welsh speakers, but I suppose that there are about six different nationalities there, even in a small rural area. It is definitely going to increase. There is an emphasis on growing your own food, but it is not just that. A cultural change is happening.

[19] Referring back to Cae Pawb in Porthmadog, I visited it last year and saw that one plot was full of flowers. I was quite amazed by that, really. Two ladies stood up, who had been down on their knees weeding. 'Why all the flowers?', I asked. 'That is what we do', they said. 'You do not grow any vegetables or fruit?', I asked. 'No, we can go to the shop for those', they said. [*Laughter.*] 'But why the flowers?', I asked. 'We arrange flowers for the local church', they said. So, there is much more going on there than just growing food.

[20] **Michael German:** Thank you. If there is to be an increase in demand, we must find the land on which to do that work. Do you think that the supply of land should fit the demand and, if so, where do you think this supply of land will come from?

[21] **Mr Dan Morris:** Well, I have been around quite a lot in Wales looking at all these schemes. I do some voluntary work for Carmarthenshire County Council, so I get to do gardening work with adults who have special needs. I have been asked what can be done with surplus land on occasions, and I have started the ball rolling to set up community gardens and allotments. One example was in Castell Newydd Emlyn, where there was room for six plots, and we got a group of local people interested. Unfortunately, the county council's estates department wanted £2,000 per annum in rent, despite the fact that I pointed out that they had been spending £2,000 on lawn mowing over the past 25 years for no other purpose. The group just dropped it. They would not go to that expense.

[22] **Michael German:** So, the price was an important feature, was it?

[23] **Mr Dan Morris:** From what I gather, departments are not blocking these schemes. It is individuals within departments who are doing so. I have worked in local government and in architecture for nearly 40 years, so I knew how to tackle things when we had a problem with, say, the planning department. All that was needed was to go to the head of the department, and it was virtually sorted out. Some individuals have not caught up with the Assembly's improvement plan, which has been signed up to. It has not gone all the way down to all the staff as yet, and it is about time that that happened.

[24] **Michael German:** Where is the land going to come from, Ben?

[25] **Mr Raskin:** There are various places from which land can come. There is publicly owned land, but there are also organisations such as the National Trust, the church and private landowners, many of whom might well be willing. I am not aware of too much in Wales, but I know that there are some private landowners in England who would be happy to allow people to use part of their land. I am working with a farmer near me who is desperate to become the community hub for his village, and he is setting up 12 allotments in the corner of a field as a trial. He also has a farm shop, so there is a commercial interest in bringing more people in and in making his farm viable.

[26] However, it is not purely about the money; it is about being a part of the community. I think that part of the barrier for landowners is having confidence in what is going to happen. There is a lot of fear as a landowner: are people going to come in and totally wreck your land and make you a laughing stock with your neighbours? That is a big thing for farmers. Are they going to leave rubbish all over the place? Do land owners want the public coming through and tramping all over their land? There are issues such as that. Will people know what they are doing or, after five years, will the soil be so useless that nothing will grow in it afterwards? Will they be able to get rid of people if it does not work out? There are a lot of fears, but they can all be overcome if you give people tools and guidelines at the beginning, if you approach it in the right way, and if each side has confidence in what is happening.

[27] Part of it is about how you arrange it: should you have a permanent lease, a 10-year lease or a one-year rolling lease? For instance, we have one community group that rents land from a landowner, a trust. That started off on a one-year lease only, because it was a bit nervous. After five years, the trust can see that the people in the group know what they are doing, they are treating the land well, they are a thriving community group, and they now have a 10-year lease on it. So, it is about building that relationship.

[28] I think that there is land out there. The National Trust, for instance—and you have a couple of examples—is really starting to think about this as a way of connecting with its members and with the public.

[29] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae'n ddiddorol iawn gwranddo ar Dan yn sôn am yr arferion ym Mhorthmadog o ran galluogi'r bobl leol i dyfu cynydau ar gyrion tir amaethwyr. Credaf fod hynny'n mynd yn ôl i'r Hen Destament, gyda llaw.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It is very interesting to listen to Dan talking about the practices in Porthmadog in enabling the local people to grow crops on the edge of farmers' land. I believe that that dates back to the Old Testament, by the way.

[30] **Mr Dan Morris:** Ydy, wir?

**Mr Dan Morris:** Does it really?

[31] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Ydy, mae i'w gael yn yr Hen Destament. Yr oedd yn arfer yn y dyddiau hynny, ac mae wedi parhau.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Yes, it can be found in the Old Testament. It was practised in those days, and it continues. I want to ask a

Mae arnaf eisiau gofyn cwestiwn am y cynllun yn Llandeilo. Gwn am y cynllun hwnnw, a chredaf ei fod yn gynllun arbennig o dda. A fydddech chi, Dan, yn gallu rhoi rhywfaint o'r cefndir inni o ran sut y sefydlwyd hwnnw, a'r berthynas gyda'r Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol? Credaf ei fod yn cynnig potensial, gan fod yr ymddiriedolaeth yn dal llawer iawn o dir yng Nghymru.

1.20 p.m.

[32] **Mr Dan Morris:** Ydy, mae'n dal llawer o dir. Yn anffodus, mae llawer iawn ohono yn dir sy'n arbennig o ran ei harddwch neu fyd natur neu'r hyn a'r llall. Gofynnais i'r ymddiriedolaeth y diwrnod o'r blaen sut ymateb oedd i'w chynnig, a dywedodd bod yr ymateb yn dda iawn ger trefydd mawr a dinasoedd. Mae'r tir sydd ganddi yn y wlad yn bell o gymunedau ac nid yw'n gallu denu pobl. Ta waeth, mae'n dangos rhyw fath o symud ymlaen. Yn sicr, mae ganddi ffermydd hefyd, ac mae'n awyddus iawn i gael cynlluniau amaethyddiaeth a gefnogir gan y gymuned arnynt. Credaf fod llawer o le i hynny. O ran perllannau, yr ydym yn gobeithio dechrau un yn Llandeilo. Nid oes yr un berllan lle ceir y mathau Cymreig o goed i gyd yno. Mae gennym arbenigwr yn Llandeilo sy'n barod i'w chynllunio, ac mae gan yr ymddiriedolaeth y tir ar ei chyfer, felly yr ydym yn gobeithio cael honno nesaf.

[33] Nid oedd gennyf fy ngardd fy hun. Yr oedd angen un arnaf, ac yr oeddwn yn tybio efallai fod pobl eraill yn yr un sefyllfa. Lansiais y syniad o dan y cynllun trefi trawsnewid, a daeth 13 o bobl at ei gilydd. Yr oedd gan bawb wahanol syniadau ond dywedais wrthynt mai hwy oedd y pwyllgor llywio o'r funud honno. Yr oedd gennym ddigon o enwau i fynd at y llywodraeth leol i gael tir ond yr oeddwn yn tybio y byddai hynny'n cymryd blynyddoedd lawer o bosibl. Yr oeddwn yn mynd i ofyn i ffermwyr lleol a'r Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol am gymorth. Yr oedd pawb yn dweud na fyddwn yn cael dim gan yr Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol. Y diwrnod wedyn, cynigiodd ffermwr dir da inni, ddwy filltir allan o'r dref, ond yr oedd mynediad iddo'n beryglus iawn. Dridiau wedyn, euthum i weld y rheolwr yn Ninefwr, a dweud beth oedd ei angen arnaf.

question about the scheme in Llandeilo. I am aware of that scheme, and I believe that it is an extremely good scheme. Could you, Dan, give us some of the background of how that was established, and the relationship with the National Trust? I believe that it offers potential, because the trust holds a great deal of land in Wales.

**Mr Dan Morris:** Yes, it does hold a great deal of land. Unfortunately, much of that land is designated in terms of its beauty or nature and so on. I asked the trust the other day what the response was to its offer. It said that the response was very good close to large towns and cities. The land that it has in the countryside is far away from communities and it cannot attract people. Despite that, it shows that some progress is being made. Certainly, it has farms too, and it is very keen to get CSA schemes on those. I believe that there is a lot of scope for that. On orchards, we hope to establish one in Llandeilo. There is no single orchard where all the Welsh varieties are available. We have an expert in Llandeilo who is willing to plan it, and the trust has land available for it, so that is what we are hoping to have next.

I did not have my own garden. I needed one, and I thought that perhaps there were other people in the same situation. I launched the idea under the transition towns scheme, and 13 people came together. Everyone had different ideas, but I told them that they were the steering committee from then on. We had enough names to approach the local authority to ask for the land, but I thought that that could possibly take years. I was going to ask local farmers and the National Trust for help. Everyone said that I would get nothing from the National Trust. The next day, a farmer offered us good land, about two miles out of the town, but the access was very dangerous. Three days later, I went to see the manager at Dinefwr, and I told him what I needed. 'I have just the place,' he said. The land was there, and it was fenced to keep out deer and rabbits and so on. It used to be a tree nursery.



'Mae gen i'r union le,' meddai. Yr oedd y tir yno yn barod, gyda ffens ceirw a chwingod a'r hyn a'r llall. Hen feithrinfa goed oedd hi. Felly aethom yn syth am hwnnw. Cawsom drafferth o ran cynllunio. Yr ymddiriedolaeth oedd yn ymdrin â'r ochr gynllunio i gyd. Gofynnodd a oedd angen caniatâd cynllunio. Cymerodd y broses honno naw mis. Yr oedd yr adran gynllunio yn ceisio dweud bod y tir yn yr ardal gadwraeth, er nad oedd. Yr oedd pob math o bethau'n codi, a dim ond drwy fynnu cael fy nghynnwys mewn cyfarfod y dechreuodd pethau symud. Yr oeddwn wedi gweithio mewn pensaernïaeth felly yr oeddwn yn gwybod beth oedd y drefn ac yr oeddwn yn gallu dweud wrth y swyddog cynllunio beth oedd y gyfraith ar hyn. Yn anffodus, rhoddodd ei sodlau yn y ddaear wedyn; yr oedd *ego* yn dod i mewn iddi.

So we immediately made a move for that land. We had difficulty in terms of planning. It was the trust that dealt with all the planning aspects. It asked whether planning permission was required. That process took nine months. The planning department was trying to say that the land was part of the conservation area, although it was not. There were all sorts of issues, and it was only by insisting on being included in a meeting that things started to move. I had worked in architecture so I knew how things worked and I could tell the planning officer what the law was on this. Unfortunately, he dug his heels in after that; the issue of *ego* came into it.

[34] **Leanne Wood:** I want to go after the question of public or private land. It is great to hear the innovative examples that you have given of working with farmers and so on. However, there is a problem, is there not, in that the Allotments Act 1950 provides good rights for people on public land but the same rights are not there on private land? I know of plenty of examples of people who have had long-established allotments, for 100 years in one case, where the private landowner has suddenly decided that he wants to develop that land for something else and they have had no rights whatsoever to remain on the land. So, while I accept that there are innovative things going on, do you have a view on this public versus private argument? Do you think that one is preferable over the other, and do you think that there is anything that we could do, in making recommendations as a committee, to enable rights for those people who are either currently on allotments on private land or who will be getting allotments on private land in the future?

[35] **Mr Dan Morris:** From my understanding, all parties would have to agree before a site became registered, and that only municipal allotments can be registered. I think that there is a need for both types. For the registered type of allotment and the other, I think that the criteria should be the sustainability of the scheme.

[36] **Leanne Wood:** When you say 'register', do you mean to register as a municipal site?

[37] **Mr Dan Morris:** Yes. They are supposed to have good protection, but that has been weakened over the years. I think that the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners and the allotments regeneration initiative would have first-hand experience and knowledge of all that and would offer better expertise on that issue. I think that, for the future, it is the sustainability of the schemes that is important. If we go back to the laws of Hywel Dda, in the eighth century here in Wales, there was no concept of ownership. That is interesting in itself. You could hold land if you husbanded it in a proper manner, which is another phrase for sustainability, I think. If there was a river running through your land and there were fish in the river, you could not own the fish; they owned themselves.

[38] **Michael German:** I think that those are interesting words for us as a committee, because we will be looking at that issue later. Do you have anything to add to that, Ben?

[39] **Mr Raskin:** I agree. I think that publicly owned and managed allotments would be the ideal. However, if there are not enough of them, some of these other schemes are perhaps a

way of managing high demand in the meantime. Clearly, there is a risk if it is public—  
[*Inaudible.*]

[40] **Michael German:** Brynle, do you want to come in on this point?

[41] **Brynle Williams:** Yes, if I may. Sorry for being late, Chair. I am most concerned. Just out of curiosity, you mentioned £2,000 for rent, but how big an area are we talking about? Around 20 or 30 acres?

[42] **Mr Dan Morris:** No. It is enough for six half-size allotments. A quarter of an acre, at the most.

[43] **Mr Raskin:** We have heard of a few other farmers looking to take advantage of community groups as well here. They are talking about £1,500 or £2,000 a hectare—

[44] **Brynle Williams:** But this was the council.

[45] **Mr Raskin:** Yes, sorry.

[46] **Brynle Williams:** What I am getting at is that, regrettably, those who should be supporting these allotments—the very councils—are the ones that are putting all the problems in place. As I say, £2,000 for a quarter of an acre—by gum, I would give them the piece of land for that, never mind let it to them, but that is by the by. I understand what you are saying, in that it has to be kept as a local government or municipal holding, but it will possibly have to be done through local agreements with local landowners if we are to expand this into more of the rural areas. I think that it is a great shame. You said that you were at the Celyn in Northop before. We have lost an opportunity in Cilcain where the community bought five acres of land and just planted it all with trees because one individual wanted to do that. That was such a waste. How can we project this further into rural communities? Regrettably, most of these allotments are around major conurbations. I would like to see more being established in rural communities, because the demand is there.

[47] **Mr Dan Morris:** Adrian Walsh, the allotments regeneration initiative officer, sees the main problem as being in rural Wales rather than the urban areas. There is less provision there, and plenty of land. It is very interesting. Farmers are responding and, in the main, they are quite happy to receive four times the amount that they would get for the best grazing. That is £100 per acre. With allotments at £25 each for a year for half-size allotments—that is about average—that gives him £400 an acre. If a farmer invests in the fencing and puts in water and different facilities, then he can charge a lot more, and I think that that would be right.

1.30 p.m.

[48] **Brynle Williams:** I could be rather mercenary and look at that and think, ‘That is one hell of a good rent—£400 an acre’, excuse the term. I would say that £120 or £130 an acre is a damned good rent. I wish that farmers would listen to this and see that they are not being greedy in wanting that. As you say, you want road frontage, you want parking in rural areas, and you want water.

[49] **Michael German:** We only have a short time with these witnesses, and I want to make sure that we get through Leanne’s questions, Brynle. We started a bit late, so if you could just take five minutes each, that would be very helpful. Leanne first, and then Brynle.

[50] **Leanne Wood:** My question involves the issue of planning. You have identified planning as an obstacle in some cases, particularly the planning fees. You said that fees should be waived. Can you expand on that? Who do you think should pay the planning

application fees? Do you think that a change of use from agricultural to allotment should be a permitted development?

[51] **Mr Dan Morris:** From my understanding, it is permitted according to the planning guidelines for farmers issued by the Assembly, but there are ambiguities. I have noted them and sent them to Chris Bilsborough, who is taking that up.

[52] **Leanne Wood:** Could the committee have a copy of that note?

[53] **Mr Dan Morris:** Yes, I have it here with me somewhere.

[54] **Leanne Wood:** Thank you very much. Could you tell us about the waiving of planning fees?

[55] **Mr Dan Morris:** Again, in the guidelines, it says that there are no planning fees, but there are planning officers who charge those fees. Some charge £100 per allotment for putting a shed up, and the shed itself costs only £100. It is very bad out there.

[56] **Leanne Wood:** Is that happening everywhere, or is it in patches?

[57] **Mr Dan Morris:** No, it is inconsistent.

[58] **Leanne Wood:** Do you know of some local authorities that are particularly bad?

[59] **Mr Dan Morris:** Borth allotments have had to pay £350 to put in a pre-planning application, and it was not needed as it is agricultural land.

[60] **Leanne Wood:** So it is not just that fees are charged, but that, in some places, the amount of fees being charged varies.

[61] **Mr Dan Morris:** They are insisting that a pre-planning application be put in, and it is clear from your guidelines that it is not needed at all.

[62] **Michael German:** We can raise that issue with the Welsh Local Government Association, who will be appearing next. Do you have another question, Leanne?

[63] **Leanne Wood:** There is something else that I want to ask. You have highlighted in your evidence that many people are not aware of the work involved in cultivating a plot and that that, sometimes, can result in people leaving and abandoning them. What do you think could be done to reduce the chances of people giving up?

[64] **Mr Raskin:** The beauty of community allotments, where more than one person is responsible for one plot, is that, if you are away for the weekend or you go on holiday for three weeks, you are not worried about everything dying while you are away if there are 20 of you. Also, digging a plot on your own is not as much fun as digging it with other people. There is that whole element of community and talking to people and learning from each other which inspires you to keep going. That certainly helps.

[65] **Leanne Wood:** So, you think that, rather than looking at allotments as individual people having individual plots of land, the way to go is community-orientated allotments.

[66] **Mr Raskin:** Yes. Some people will want to have their own allotments. I am not saying that everything should be community-based, but I think that there is an element of trying to build something in with that, such as having a community orchard, for example. There are so many different models, and it may be that, by trying to allow people some autonomy in how

they manage their own allotment, it might allow that to happen to some extent anyway.

[67] **Mr Dan Morris:** It is very interesting that, in our first year, 20 of the 61 plots changed hands. Five of those were because the individuals moved with work; the rest had only seen allotments done on television, I think, and had a shock. It is interesting. It does not matter what background people are from—some are relatively poor, some are relatively wealthy—they all have a folk memory within them. What poor people give each other is food, and it is wonderful to experience the sharing that is going on.

[68] **Mr Raskin:** I would like to mention one other quite inspiring example that I saw in Spain. It was an allotment that was set up specifically for senior citizens. There were about 1,100 or 1,200 allotments—it was a big area—and they employed someone full-time, a skilled grower, who managed it. A lot of his management was just talking to people and teaching them, because people did not necessarily know what to do. There were also a few bits of electronic equipment and rotavators that the members could hire, and he managed that side. They bought seed together and compost in bulk, so there were added benefits, but having someone whom you are able to go to if there is a problem stops you from thinking, ‘Oh, crikey, it’s died, what am I going to do?’

[69] **Leanne Wood:** Could you give us some details about the scheme?

[70] **Mr Raskin:** I can certainly do that. It is state funded, by the city council, I think. It is just outside Madrid. I can certainly send you some details.

[71] **Leanne Wood:** It would be useful to have some more information on it.

[72] **Michael German:** If you could send that on to the clerk, that would be very helpful.

[73] **Brynle Williams:** We have received evidence detailing a number of different initiatives. Could you please provide some examples of what, in your experience, has and has not worked well? What are the major drawbacks that you have seen and encountered, if I can put it that way?

[74] **Michael German:** This is about finding new ways of getting more allotments and getting more people involved in community gardens and so forth. What is good practice and what is bad practice?

[75] **Mr Raskin:** In terms of good practice, if we are talking about community groups, which is probably what I have most experience of, it is about ensuring that there is an understanding within the group of what is involved and being very clear about what they want. As Dan was saying, they have seen it on television and then suddenly they have it. You get a similar thing sometimes with community groups, who take on an acre of land, and then suddenly think, ‘Oh, right, we’ve got an acre, what are we going to do with it?’ That can be an issue. So it helps to be very clear at the start about what is involved, what is on offer and what they are going to get out of it.

[76] **Mr Dan Morris:** Sometimes brownfield sites are offered when there are plenty of other good sites, and there is a lot of work involved in decontaminating those. They are fine for community schemes such as wildlife areas and so on—they are very good for that—but I think they should be avoided for food growing.

[77] **Brynle Williams:** That brings me nicely to my next question. What policies do you encourage and employ with regards to water and pesticide use, composting and waste disposal?

[78] **Mr Raskin:** We clearly would not encourage pesticide use. Irrigation is almost essential, particularly if you are going to allow polytunnels or greenhouses. You can collect water, but it is very hard to collect enough. I quite like community composting. I think that it allows you to manage composting better—you can have bigger heaps, which get hotter, and therefore produce better compost. Again, the more that you can do as a community exercise, the more it brings people together.

[79] **Mr Dan Morris:** There are community allotment schemes where there is community composting, and it works very well. I think that that is a good thing.

[80] **Brynle Williams:** How do you believe local authorities and community farming and gardening groups can work together to meet local needs?

[81] **Mr Dan Morris:** Links have to be forged. Personally, I am not a computer person. I just go around knocking on doors. I had support virtually all the way through by doing that. Gardening clubs, schools—they all link together. We have now started to link up with other schemes, and they happen to be on the Heart of Wales line, so we have asked the Heart of Wales line and the Cambrian coast line whether they would be interested in all these sustainable schemes linking up and using the line again and that is happening. So that is being set up. We are hoping to send rhubarb up the line; it used to come by train.

1.40 p.m.

[82] **Mr Raskin:** What would be very helpful is very clear guidance from the council as to what the policy is, what is available and how to approach it—if you are interested in getting an allotment or being a part of a community group, how you go about it and who you talk to. Certainly, my experience from England is that that is not very clear; I do not know whether the same is true here. You need real clarity and to publicise: ‘This is what we would like to do, even if we do not have enough land at the moment, these are the ways in which we can help you access whatever it happens to be’. Again, there are quite a lot of areas of land in public places that are not being used for anything—verges or whatever—which could, with the right management, be used for producing food. There may be ways of addressing that too.

[83] **Leanne Wood:** Have you had any experience of groups of people coming together to form a petition to the local authority for land? The Allotments Act 1950 states that local authorities have to assess demand and meet demand, and if six petitioners write to the council, the council has a duty to look at what is available. What is your experience of that process? Does it deliver land for local people, or are there problems with it?

[84] **Mr Dan Morris:** It varies across Wales. There are authorities that are responding to it very well. In Narberth, people tried for 15 years and failed. They went to a farmer in the end. They were desperate for land. They are paying £2,000 for enough room for 20 plots.

[85] **Leanne Wood:** So £100 a year each.

[86] **Mr Dan Morris:** That is the situation. In Ferryside, people could not get land. I identified vast amounts of land that the local authority had, but it will not release it. A sustainability month has just been run in Ferryside, and it would not recognise it. I do not know how much the authority is spending on the lawn mowing in the area. It is horrendous. It is many, many thousands of pounds. The authority actually started mowing last week, and the grass was frosted.

[87] **Michael German:** Brynle has the final question.

[88] **Brynle Williams:** I ddilyn hynny, **Brynle Williams:** To follow on from that, it

mae'n ymddangos i mi mai gwrthwynebiad y cynghorau yw'r prif bwynt ar draws y sbectrwm. Sut y gallwn oresgyn hynny? Mae'r cynghorau yno i'n cynrychioli ni, y bobl, ac eto nid ydym yn datrys rywbeth mor syml â'r angen am *allotments*, lle mae'r tir ar gael. Yn yr hanner awr o dystiolaeth yr wyf wedi'i glywed gennych chi, mae un bwgan yno o hyd ac o hyd, ac mae'n drist gennyf ei glywed. Sut ydych chi'n gweld y gallwn oresgyn hyn? Mae'n fy nhrwblu i.

appears to me that opposition by councils is the main point across the spectrum. How can we overcome that? The councils are there to represent us, the people, and yet they are not resolving something as simple as the need for allotments, when the land is available. In the half an hour's evidence that I have heard from you, one problem arises again and again, and I am saddened to hear about it. How, in your view, can we overcome this? It troubles me.

[89] **Mr Dan Morris:** Mae'n eithaf clir yn fy meddwl i. Mae gan y Cynulliad y cynllun gwella hwn sydd ar waith er 2002, ac mae'n eithaf clir. Ceir contract rhwng y llywodraethau lleol a'r Cynulliad ac mae'n dweud yn eithaf clir ynddo bod angen rhoi pob cefnogaeth i gynlluniau cynaliadwy. Credaf fod angen atgoffa llywodraeth leol o hyn, a chynghorau sir yn bennaf. Mae digon o esiamplau—credaf fod gan Ffederasiwn y Ffermydd Dinesig a Gerddi Cymunedol restr o'r cynghorau sy'n gweithio'n dda gyda chymunedau. Mae angen defnyddio'r rheini fel esiampl dda yn hytrach na dweud y drefn wrth y rhai nad ydynt yn bihafio, a chychwyn fel hynny, efallai.

**Mr Dan Morris:** It is quite clear in my mind. The Assembly has this improvement scheme, which has been in place since 2002, and it is quite clear. There is a contract between local authorities and the Assembly and it states quite clearly in it that sustainable schemes should be given every possible support. I believe that local government needs to be reminded of this, especially county councils. There are plenty of examples—I believe that the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens has a list of the councils that work well with communities. We need to use those as exemplars, rather than criticise those that are not behaving appropriately, and start from there, perhaps.

[90] **Brynle Williams:** Mae'n rhaid iddynt ddeall nad dim ond mater o gynhyrchu bwyd yw hyn. Mae agweddau o safbwynt iechyd yn dod i mewn i hyn, yn sicr.

**Brynle Williams:** They must understand that this is not just about producing food. Health issues come into this too, certainly.

[91] Sorry, Ben, would you like to comment?

[92] **Mr Raskin:** Yes, absolutely, there are health benefits in producing healthy food and also in exercise, and in reducing illness through being out in the open air, and all the benefits from that as well.

[93] **Leanne Wood:** Chair, could we ask for a copy of the list to which Dan just referred?

[94] **Michael German:** Yes, that would be very helpful. You can give it to the clerk afterwards. Do not worry about it now, Dan. You can find it later and give it to the clerk on the way out, perhaps.

[95] We have come to the end of our questions for both of you. You are the opener. You have given us the picture upon which we can now base the rest of our questioning. Sitting behind you are the representatives of local government, so we can address some of the questions that you have raised to them. Thank you both very much for your evidence. You are welcome to sit and listen to what the colleagues behind you have to say. There will be a record, which you will be able to read, of every word that you have said. It will be made available to you for correction, not of what you have said, but in case it has been recorded incorrectly. Thank you very much. We will now take evidence from the colleagues behind you.

1.46 p.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Ddarpariaeth Rhandiroedd yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth—  
Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru, Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd, Cyngor  
Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy a Chyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Wrecsam  
Inquiry into the Provision of Allotments in Wales: Evidence Session—Welsh  
Local Government Association, Newport City Council, Conwy County Borough  
Council and Wrexham County Borough Council**

[96] **Michael German:** While people are coming to the table, I remind Members that we have papers from all of the local authorities that are giving evidence and also from the Welsh Local Government Association. I have a request for the colleagues who are taking their seats: you can assume that Members have read your papers. In a moment I will ask you to introduce yourselves and state your job titles so that we have them on record. Then, if one of you, perhaps the WLGA representative, wants to say a word of introduction on this topic, that is fine, but I do not think that we have time for everyone to give a view on everything. In answering questions, it would be much more appropriate, if you want to defer and you are happy with the answer given by one of your colleagues, for you to leave it like that and we will move on to more questions. We have rather a lot of questions that we would like to ask you.

[97] Starting with Lyn and moving across, could you please give your names and state who you are for the record?

[98] **Mr Davies:** My name is Lyn Davies, and I am the street scene manager for Conwy County Borough Council in north Wales, with responsibility for allotments.

[99] **Mr Mitchell:** I am Craig Mitchell from the Welsh Local Government Association.

[100] **Mr David Morris:** I am David Morris, grounds and countryside services manager for Newport City Council.

[101] **Mr Howorth:** I am Martin Howorth, parks, countryside and rights of way manager for Wrexham County Borough Council.

[102] **Ms Ellis:** I am Nicola Ellis, allotment officer for Wrexham County Borough Council.

[103] **Michael German:** Thank you very much indeed. As you are the representative of everybody here, Craig, is there anything that you wish to say to start off with, or do you want us to go straight into questions?

[104] **Mr Mitchell:** I would like to make a few, very quick points. I know that your time is short today. I want to lodge with the committee today a copy of this document, 'Growing in the Community'. Unfortunately, I could not provide an electronic copy, because the Local Government Association charges for it and so you cannot get an electronic copy. What we have been doing in Wales is promoting this document and its supplement, 'A Place to Grow', which, hopefully, tackle some of the issues that you have been discussing today in terms of the management of allotments, support for new allotment holders and how you can subdivide allotment plots so that new entrants can have a more manageable workload initially. It talks about the planning issues in relation to that and, obviously, as the WLGA, we are very concerned if there are inconsistencies in how planning departments are dealing with allotment issues.

[105] At a recent meeting with the heads of planning from the 25 planning authorities, we raised the issue of allotments, and we will take back the comments from today and the recommendations of the committee to those heads of planning to ensure that the issues are tackled. I have one other very quick point. It has been made clear today that allotments are about more than just food production. As part of the sustainable development framework—Assembly Members will have copies of this—we have developed a sustainable food module, which sets out a whole range of issues around food such as food security, sustainability and health and wellbeing. We are in the process of beginning work with councils to look at these issues and help them to understand the full range of issues involved, which go far wider than just allotments.

[106] **Michael German:** Lorraine will start the questions.

[107] **Lorraine Barrett:** If you have the information, could you tell us how many people are currently on waiting lists across Wales, what the average waiting time is for a plot and how often local authorities review these lists? I do not know whether Craig would have that all-Wales information?

[108] **Mr Mitchell:** Unfortunately, we do not have that information. That is within the scope of this committee's work, and we have asked local authorities to respond to the committee directly with that information. We will encourage them to do that.

[109] **Michael German:** We have representatives of three local authorities here. Perhaps we could ask them that question one at a time. How many are on your waiting lists?

[110] **Mr Davies:** We have 300 people on our list. The average wait is probably years.

[111] **Lorraine Barrett:** I suppose that it is a case of someone giving up a plot early into the lease period or of waiting for someone to die.

[112] **Mr Davies:** That is correct. We have just started a new management regime. Previously, we issued people with a standard size allotment. We are now in the process of subdividing some of the plots, as they become available, so we can move the waiting list along more quickly.

[113] **Lorraine Barrett:** May I ask something on that, Chair?

[114] **Michael German:** We will get the three responses first.

[115] **Lorraine Barrett:** Okay.

[116] **Mr David Morris:** We have 192 on our list.

[117] **Michael German:** How long do people wait?

[118] **Mr David Morris:** About four years.

[119] **Mr Howorth:** Ours varies, but it is about 166. The wait is about two years.

[120] **Lorraine Barrett:** What I wondered was: if people are given an allotment, is it up to them how long they keep the allotment? Are they given it for a certain period and then it is reviewed? Do you review the allotments to ensure that they are being used? I know of allotments where little is being grown, or nothing at all, and it is a waste then, if others are waiting. Is there that sort of ongoing review to ensure that they are being used properly or used at all?



1.50 p.m.

[121] **Mr Davies:** It is a yearly renewable tenancy. As long as allotment holders maintain their plots, they can stay on for as long as they want. The management regime of our allotment service has changed recently, and it has a small budget and no member of staff is allocated to it. So, the monitoring of the allotment service has not been very good. Consequently, allotment plots have remained unused for a period of years before it has been reported to us and we have been able to take steps to remove the tenant and get new people on.

[122] **Lorraine Barrett:** Would it be feasible for the bigger allotment areas to self-manage, almost as a co-operative, where a representative of the group would let you know if there was a problem?

[123] **Mr Davies:** Yes. I am sorry that I am hogging the answers.

[124] **Lorraine Barrett:** I was asking you, so that is okay.

[125] **Michael German:** Let Lyn answer this, but if you have something different to say or to add to it, by all means do so.

[126] **Mr Davies:** It is possible for groups to self-manage—we have a self-managing allotment association—but it is not terrifically popular. People are happy with allotments that have been run and maintained by the local authority for years. We recently started an initiative to try to form allotment groups, so that allotment tenants can, for example, apply for grants that the local authority cannot apply for to improve their allotments. We have one successful self-managing association. It allocates the plots, takes the rents and decides what repairs are necessary in the allotment and its members buy seeds and machinery together.

[127] **Michael German:** Martin, David and then Leanne want to make a point, and then we will come back to you, Lorraine.

[128] **Mr Howorth:** I want to make the point that Nicky spends part of her time on allotments and we actively manage the allotments. We ensure that everyone is cultivating their land and, if they are not, they will get letters. Part of our allotment strategy in 2007 was to actively manage allotments so that anyone who wanted an allotment had to be on it, cultivating it across the year. We have a big waiting list, but Nicky has been going into the community to set up allotment sites in communities, so there are two strands to our allotment strategy, which we may talk about later, but there are different ways of going about things. Each council is slightly different in its approach.

[129] **Mr David Morris:** We have 25 sites, four of which are self-managed. It is council policy to encourage all the allotment sites to become self-managed eventually, because that has obvious advantages. We find that sites that have had a lot of investment over the years seem to go for self-management first. In other words, they are saying to us 'Bring it up to a certain standard, and then we will self-manage'. Trying to encourage the smaller allotment sites to become self-managing is the biggest challenge. For the future, we are looking to create federations of small allotment sites to make a bigger group that will then self-manage.

[130] **Leanne Wood:** I want to return to the question about the numbers of people on waiting lists. How confident can we be that we are all measuring the same thing?

[131] **Mr David Morris:** We cannot be confident. Although we have 192 people on the waiting list in our area, we have 75 unusable plots. They are not attractive, either because they

are not in the right location or because the terrain is such that they are not attractive. Although there is capacity, people may not want that particular location, so they are waiting for the good plots to come up.

[132] **Michael German:** They are waiting for flatlands.

[133] **Leanne Wood:** I also wonder how many times people are counted, because they could put in applications for a number of different sites. Could they, therefore, be on a list three times?

[134] **Mr David Morris:** It is possible, but the solution to that is in the hands of the allotment committee members, who know everyone and who also tend to know everything about everyone. So, if it is the first cousin of the second wife three times removed, they will know the name of the oldest daughter. So, it is hard to do that in practice.

[135] **Michael German:** I call on Martin and then we will go back to you.

[136] **Mr Howorth:** Waiting lists—

[137] **Michael German:** I am sorry to interrupt, but, as you can see, when people indicate to me, I know that they want to speak and they are on my list. If you do not indicate, I take it that you do not want to say anything.

[138] **Mr Howorth:** We should not get too hung up on waiting lists. Waiting lists do not show the latent demand, which is far bigger than waiting lists. People will look at our website, see that the waiting list is big and they will just go away. We know that, in the community, there is a huge demand that is not met. Waiting lists do not really give a true reflection of the demand in the community.

[139] **Mr Davies:** I second Martin's point: waiting lists do not give a true reflection of demand. The majority of people on our waiting lists are from the areas where we have existing allotments on the coastal belts. In the rural areas, we have very little demand, but I suspect that that is because we do not have any allotments there. If we had more allotments, I am sure that we would have a big demand from the rural areas.

[140] **Lorraine Barrett:** By definition, in the rural areas, there should be a lot more land available, if the farmers were generous enough to make some available. How much land has been acquired via lease or compulsory purchase, and how much has that cost to implement?

[141] **Michael German:** Does anyone have an answer to that? There is no information on that.

[142] **Lorraine Barrett:** It is just that councils have powers to acquire land for allotments by lease. I see that there are none. That is okay. How much land is acquired through alternative gardening projects, and how have local authorities assisted with this? Do you have any experience of this?

[143] **Mr David Morris:** We have two on the boil, Chair, one of which has come as a consequence of the massive housing development at Llanwern, where we proactively go to the developer before he builds his 10,000 houses, saying that we definitely want allotment space. This quite surprises developers, because, obviously, as developers come in from England, they do not expect to allocate land under section 106, or whatever, for that type of use. However, they have agreed and this will be going forward when the development takes place.

[144] Another interesting one that we have—it is an area with which the Chair is familiar—is a very socially difficult part of Newport, called Pill, where we have the demand but no ability to service that demand. So, we have been left with a large recreational grassed area that is underutilised. We are now going through processes to cordon off that area and go straight to a community garden—rather than straight to an allotment—which the community will self-manage. It will be a really interesting trial for us, because I cannot stress enough, as the Chair knows quite well, how socially and economically difficult that area is. It is a matter of ‘Watch this space’. If that rolls out successfully, we will look at some other socially difficult areas where that can be done.

[145] **Lorraine Barrett:** The committee needs to keep an eye on that. There are some lost opportunities for section 106 agreements and various developments in my constituency, which is an inner-city area, where it would have been great to have some allotments in housing developments.

[146] **Michael German:** Meriel will have heard that. Any information that can be fed in to keep us informed will be very helpful.

[147] **Mr David Morris:** We are now working closely with the planners, and we are looking carefully at the unitary development plan to see what is available. Using section 106 agreements, specifically for allotments, is now a priority of ours, because it is the only economically viable way for us to tackle the problem of sorting out the waiting lists and trying to cater for the burgeoning demand, because there is simply no Government resource; it has to come from outside, and section 106 is the best vehicle for that.

[148] **Mr Howorth:** We have worked with three community groups in the past year to set up allotments; two of which were on council land, and one of which was on charity land. We are in the process of working with five community groups on other areas of land, most of which, I would suggest, will probably be council land, to set up new community gardens or allotments.

[149] **Mr Mitchell:** I just wish to briefly flag up that some research was undertaken around two years ago by the Welsh Assembly Government into planning gain and the use of section 106 agreements across Wales. It broke down what section 106 actually provided. I am not sure whether the open-space provision actually broke it down into allotment provision per se, but it may be worth reviewing that research to see whether it has anything interesting to say.

[150] **Michael German:** The relevant person already has a pen in her hand.

[151] **Mr Davies:** We have had some limited interest from elderly people who have large gardens seeking people to help them to work their gardens. One of the strands of our policy will be to try to fit up the people who want a garden with the people who need gardeners.

2.00 p.m.

[152] **Joyce Watson:** I am glad that you mentioned that, because that was an area that was going through my mind. Everyone is talking about lack of space and lack of use, but it seems obvious. It happens in unofficial agreements between neighbours in any case, in that one neighbour will, in effect, pinch next door’s garden because theirs is not big enough to grow what they want. That might work effectively in rural areas, where there are small conurbations of social housing, because the people there know and trust each other—you need an element of trust if you are going to let somebody come in to your back garden; let us be clear about that. If you have any examples of where that is working well and how you have taken it forward, they would be useful to us.

[153] **Michael German:** If you have any examples, please feed them through the committee,

because we can put them in the report.

[154] We are going to have some questions from Brynle now, after which we shall have some questions from Joyce.

[155] **Brynle Williams:** This leads nicely from what Joyce was just saying about barriers to and constraints on the provision of allotments. How often are allotment tenancies terminated due to tenants not meeting the cultivation standards? What is the procedure for removing a tenant from a plot? Are the costs for restoring a plot to tenantable condition collected? If so, how often is this done, and what is the average cost that tenants are expected to pay?

[156] **Mr Davies:** Last year, we conducted a review of the whole allotment service, and we had cause to remove 18 or 20 people from their plots because they were not maintaining them. The process involved writing to the people to advise them that they needed to maintain their plots and that, if they had problems, due to health reasons or any other reason, they should contact us. Where there was no response and the plot remained unmaintained, we wrote again to give them a period of notice, informing them that, if the plot was not maintained by that date, we would terminate their tenancy. With those people who ignored us or did not maintain their plots, we eventually terminated their tenancy. It took a period of about three months altogether.

[157] As you can imagine, the grass on these plots was waist high. We cut the grass, we killed what remained, and we rotavated the soil so that new tenants would have a clean plot to start with. That is important, because although many like the idea of gardening, they do not realise the hard work involved; we want to make it as easy as possible for them. We also offer a service to those allotment holders who, for one reason or another, cannot maintain their plots temporarily, because of ill health or because they are away on a long holiday or whatever. We offer a relatively cost-effective service to maintain their plots for them. The cost of bringing an allotment plot up to scratch is somewhere between £80 and £100.

[158] **Ms Ellis:** We have followed similar rules. I go out every month to check that the allotments are being worked. If I find a plot that is not being worked, we send a out a letter to ask whether the tenant is having any problems, possibly due to health reasons, that may be preventing them from tending the plot. If I have not heard back after a month and, on returning, I find that the plot still has not been worked, we send out a second letter. This letter basically states that they have four weeks to remove any items from the plot because they have not been in contact with me.

[159] If the plot is left with lots of weeds, one of the rules in our tenancy agreement states that tenants must leave the plot in the same state as they had it and that any costs incurred in getting the plot back to the original state are payable by the tenants. So, that person has to pay for us to get it back to how it was.

[160] **Michael German:** What sort of money are we talking here? Is it £80 to £100 again?

[161] **Ms Ellis:** Yes; it all depends on how they have left it.

[162] **Michael German:** It is a ballpark figure.

[163] **Ms Ellis:** To be honest with you, what has happened so far is that, when I have sent the letter out, to be fair to them, many of them have contacted me to say that they do not want the plot any longer. In that case, I just take the next name on the waiting list, and that person will take on the plot. People are so desperate for plots that they will take them in any state. So, it has never really come to that.

[164] **Mr David Morris:** We had 997 spaces in total in Newport. We have about one difficult customer per year, on average, and the situation is usually dealt with by the site secretary and committee. There is an appeals process to the council, but it has not been exercised for at least eight years. Once the plot has been vacated, we go in to carry out any remedial works to make it fit for purpose, which costs an average of £136.

[165] **Brynle Williams:** Are tenants given an option of a full or a half plot, and what effect does the allocation of half plots have on the number of tenancies being terminated because of non-cultivation or through tenants resigning?

[166] **Mr David Morris:** We are starting to look proactively at reducing the size of plots to try to bring that waiting list down. People tend to prefer the larger plots. We are finding that the age profile of the allottees has changed dramatically. The average profile of an allottee 10 years ago was a 55-year-old gentleman; now, 35 per cent of our allottees are ladies under the age of 45, which is a dramatic turnaround. That change in age profile has also affected the type of plot that the allottees want to cultivate. I am not sure whether that answers your question fully, but it may do to some extent.

[167] **Michael German:** Has the pattern of what is grown also changed?

[168] **Mr David Morris:** Yes, most certainly, Chair.

[169] **Michael German:** What has changed?

[170] **Mr David Morris:** I heard Dan, I think, talking about cut flowers earlier. Growing flowers is not unusual, although not necessarily for church purposes. However, the site committees are quite concerned about it, and wonder whether anything should go into the agreements in future years to specify what should be grown. Generally, they take the view that growing flowers is not the best use of that type of land if there are people on the waiting list who want to grow vegetables. That is a debate that will go forward, and we will try to have a useful input to that.

[171] **Mr Howorth:** We have only offered quarter plots for the past few years to try to get as many people as possible on to the allotment. We find that people like quarter plots because they are easier to work. Most people do not want huge plots nowadays. Very occasionally, issues will arise, but, as we do not offer anything but quarter plots, when full plots come up for renewal, we subdivide them to get as many people as possible onto allotment sites and to get the maximum use of them.

[172] **Mr Davies:** We also give people the choice of a full or half plot. People have been choosing half plots more recently, which helps our waiting list figures. Our age structures are completely different from Newport's: 75 per cent of our allotment tenants are aged 50 and over.

[173] **Michael German:** To be clear, are we talking about a plot being five perch? Is that right, or has something changed in the past 30 to 40 years? What is the size of a plot nowadays?

[174] **Mr Howorth:** It is difficult for us to specify the size. What we call a quarter plot is 8m by 5m, although that is not exact.

[175] **Michael German:** Craig, can you help me with that?

[176] **Mr Mitchell:** In our guidance, which was written by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, a conventional plot is 250 sq m, 10 pole or 10 rod.

[177] **Michael German:** Okay, it is 10 pole or 10 perch.

[178] **Brynle Williams:** I imagine that a plot would be the distance from the first panel on the screen at the back there to the end of the television. I think that that would be about 5m by 13m.

[179] **Michael German:** So, for clarity and to get accuracy on this, do you all agree that a 250 sq m, or 10 perch, poles or rods is what we are talking about? That is a plot size. I am just checking that we are all happy with the terminology

2.10 p.m.

[180] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Thank you for clarifying that, Chair.

[181] **Michael German:** I am sure that not all Members are clear on it.

[182] **Lorraine Barrett:** I am more confused. [*Laughter.*]

[183] **Michael German:** It is 250 sq m, if you want it in new money, as it were. [*Laughter.*]

[184] **Mr David Morris:** It may be helpful if I mention that we carried out a survey of other authorities over the past few months, and Bristol and Cardiff are the same as well—10 perch.

[185] **Michael German:** Brynle, do you want to carry on?

[186] **Brynle Williams:** Most certainly, Chair. Evidence provided by the Federation of City Farmers and Community Gardeners described a concern that local authorities could opt out of using land for allotments to avoid their being legally tied up as statutory allotments. How do you respond to that?

[187] **Mr Davies:** Last year, for the first time, allotments featured in our corporate plan, which stated that the council would increase the amount of land available for allotments. So, what you describe is definitely not the case in Conwy.

[188] **Brynle Williams:** The evidence from the Federation of City Farmers and Community Gardeners also stated that planning fees—and this is very contentious—should be waived for community groups setting up allotments and community gardens, because the majority of groups are run voluntarily and have limited funds. The federation also states that fulfilling the local authority strategy is an obligation. How do you respond to that?

[189] **Mr David Morris:** Yes, it is quite true. I heard the gentleman giving evidence earlier about planning fees, and we are very concerned about that. We seem to have made some headway with our own planners, and are going for a blanket consent for all the units on the site, to try to cover it within the £100, or whatever sum. Clearly, to ask £100 for each allotment is absolutely outrageous and not viable—morally, apart from any other reason.

[190] As for the planning regime overall, we are struggling with it. We are finding that it is a barrier to progress, and I note that, in the papers that we had from the committee, you said that you wanted us to come up with solutions and proposals for improving things over the long term. From Newport's perspective, streamlining or improving the planning constraints would be enormously helpful. For the community garden that we are trying to set up in this very rough area, we are having to go through processes put to us by our solicitor, who says that we have to put an advert in the local paper about converting recreational open space into allotments, but those advertising costs are of the order of £1,000. Clearly, what we will try to

do over the next few months is look at creative ways of ensuring that that £1,000 expenditure is not levied on the community itself but is borne by us internally. There seems to be nothing in legislation to enable these community groups to get going, and that is not right. All the time, the officers in the other departments are thinking about how to get around these obstacles. We are hitting a brick wall and, instead of trying to go over it, we are trying to go around it.

[191] **Mr Howorth:** With the last two community allotments that we set up, we paid the planning fees for the community.

[192] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae'n ymddangos i mi, o wrando ar dystiolaeth Conwy, Casnewydd ac Wrecsam, fod agwedd gadarnhaol yma. Mae David wedi sôn am y problemau sy'n bodoli o fewn cynghorau weithiau ac am y tensiynau rhwng adrannau ond, at ei gilydd, mae'r ymateb yn bositif iawn. Yr oeddwn am ofyn i Craig a ddewisodd Conwy, Casnewydd a Wrecsam i ddod yma heddiw am eu bod yn enghreifftiau o arfer da, achos yr oedd y dystiolaeth a gawsom yn y sesiwn flaenorol yn dweud bod anghysondeb drwy Gymru, a bod awdurdodau lleol yn gallu bod yn rhwystr yn aml iawn yn hytrach nag yn fodd o hyrwyddo hyn.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It appears to me, from listening to the evidence from Conwy, Newport and Wrexham, that there is a positive attitude here. David has mentioned the problems that sometimes exist within councils and the tensions between departments but, on the whole, the response is very positive. I wanted to ask Craig whether he chose Conwy, Newport and Wrexham to come here today because they are good exemplars, because the evidence that we received in the previous session was that there was inconsistency throughout Wales and that local authorities can very often be a barrier rather than a means of facilitating this.

[193] **Mr Mitchell:** To be honest, I know that Wrexham is here partly on the recommendation of the WLGA. I think that Newport and Conwy are here because the committee itself recognised that they were potentially interesting authorities to talk to. By implication, it is the better authorities that will be coming to the committee to talk about their experience, and one of the concerns and key messages that I am taking from today is the inconsistency in how local authorities approach these issues. I reviewed the guidance on planning policy and allotments law, and there is not a lot in the guidance that we give out on the development control side, but that seems to be one of the problems that is emerging from the discussion today. This is more about strategic land-use planning for the locality. So, these authorities may not be typical of authorities across Wales, and there are issues with different approaches and inconsistencies in approach.

[194] **Michael German:** Joyce has a whole series of questions to ask you.

[195] **Joyce Watson:** This first one is for the WLGA. As a representative body of unitary authorities—and I know that you have alluded slightly to this—after today, will you go back and speak to your colleagues in the WLGA who represent all the other areas, namely policy officers and so on, so that you can start to unpick some of this? You are the representative body of local government in Wales. Do you think that you will take some of the evidence that you have heard back to your colleagues and try to make progress in this area, which is a difficult one for some, even in their own authorities?

[196] **Mr Mitchell:** Part of my role within the WLGA is to be the lead on planning issues, so I can certainly go and have a conversation with myself, as it were, to sort myself out, and I will certainly speak with other colleagues. In particular, colleagues from the health improvement team are part of the group set up by the Minister for Rural Affairs to look at community-grown food, which will be reporting soon. Part of its work involves looking at allotments, and we expect a report and recommendations shortly, in April.

[197] The other key strand for us is the sustainable development framework for local government, which is the mechanism by which we are working with authority members and officers on a range of sustainable development issues. As I mentioned, the food module has recently been produced, and we are looking at how we can take forward some of the key messages from that document and work with authorities on that basis. It is an issue that we are actively thinking about. We have to try to help authorities to find solutions to this.

[198] **Leanne Wood:** You said that you would go back to talk to colleagues in other local authorities about consistency, but I am not sure whether you had arrived when we were talking to the other witnesses earlier about the provision in allotments legislation for six people to come together to petition a local authority, and about the duty on a local authority to know the level of demand and to meet it. The evidence that we received earlier was that compliance with that is patchy. Some local authorities are good at responding to such petitions, but it sounds as though others are appalling. Would you also be prepared to look at that, as an organisation representing all local authorities?

[199] **Mr Mitchell:** Absolutely. The key issue is understanding the demand and trying to meet it. One small point, which is also in the guidance written for the WLGA by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, 'A Place to Grow', on page 10, is that the Act lays out that:

[200] 'Requests for allotments submitted by at least six local taxpayers or electors must be taken into account in considering whether a demand exists. Having determined that there is a demand, the local authority must be able to demonstrate that it has a strategy in place to meet that demand.'

[201] The guidance goes on to say that the law imposes no deadline for eventual provision and that an interested party may seek a judicial review if they feel that the authority is not working. I do not want to dance around the point, but that leaves some vagueness about what exactly meeting that duty means. Perhaps that is one issue that we will have to try to address with authorities, to try to give them an understanding of what we think good practice in that area is so there is not that vagueness.

2.20 p.m.

[202] **Leanne Wood:** I think that you have identified a gap that we will need to look at as a committee. However, out of interest, how do local authorities assess demand? We have already established that waiting lists are not a good way to measure this.

[203] **Mr David Morris:** To answer Leanne's question, if it is helpful, I can tell you that our current provision is 11.4 plots per 1,000 households. We are able to extend that to 15. I think that there is a national average. So, we already have 11.4, but I think that the average is about 10, and we are able to extend it to 15. You are seeking proposals from local authorities. My proposal for a good way forward would be for the Assembly Government to identify what the target rate should be per 1,000 households. Then there would be a national baseline.

[204] **Leanne Wood:** That is helpful.

[205] **Michael German:** Martin and Craig, please answer quickly as we need to move on.

[206] **Mr Howorth:** We assess demand in terms of community response. The community will come to us via the community council or community groups and say that, within their community, they want allotments because they do not have any or that they want a particular sort of space, and then we will work with them to see how we can facilitate that. So, it comes



from the community or community groups rather than as a result of any external input. We are working on more of a community basis at the moment.

[207] **Mr Mitchell:** TAN 16 on sport, recreation and open spaces was published in January 2009. It identifies how these issues should be tackled in the local development plan process. The guidance suggests that an open-space assessment should be undertaken to identify local needs, that there should be an audit of that provision, and that the standards of that provision should be set before applying those and feeding that through to the local development plan process. On page 20, the advice note clearly makes the point that allotments are very much part of the mix for open-space provision for a local authority area.

[208] **Joyce Watson:** Moving on to resources and the fact that each local authority will decide for itself what proportion of its resources it will devote to allotments, what is the average amount of resource allocated to the provision of allotment land annually? How have resources, assuming they were there in the first place, been affected by the economic climate?

[209] **Mr David Morris:** As I said, we have 997 allotment spaces. We spend £105,000 a year on the maintenance of those sites. We receive £8,000 in income, which we are currently reviewing. We have three members of staff working permanently on allotments, with one member of staff specifically sending invoices out and ensuring that cash comes in. The current administrator in Newport is looking to close the gap on our budgets, and he will be reviewing the charges on allotments shortly. In the long term, I think that we will seek to protect our allotments and add to them, but the sheer gap between expenditure and income is so great at the moment in Newport that I do not think we can keep our charges at the current rate.

[210] **Mr Howorth:** Excluding Nicky's salary, we are spending £15,000 a year on our four statutory allotments, and we get an income of £9,000. However, as I said, as it excludes Nicky's salary it is not a true reflection of our costs. The figures for expenditure and income are quite close.

[211] **Mr Davies:** I have a net expenditure of £5,000 for our 11 allotments, and I have no staff. Over the past 20 years, no money has been spent on providing new allotments in Conwy. Last year, a business case was put in and, in line with the corporate plan, the council allocated £150,000 to the provision of new allotments. So, we now have some money to buy land and set up the infrastructure.

[212] **Joyce Watson:** If I were to ask the same question of the WLGA, would you be able to get an average?

[213] **Mr Mitchell:** We can certainly contact authorities and ask them for their average expenditure and income. We can take that away as an action point from today.

[214] **Joyce Watson:** Okay. What is the level of objection received from third parties with regard to land being converted into allotments? Have you utilised compensatory mechanisms, and, if so, in what way?

[215] **Michael German:** That question can be answered by anyone who has done this job.

[216] **Mr Davies:** We have recently been through a planning process applying for a new allotment. The amount of objection is significant. The objections will relate to the area in which the allotment is to be sited. Given that we are trying to site this one in an urban area surrounded by houses, people do not generally like to see change. It is an open space that we are converting, and we had a lot of objections. The planning process and gaining planning permission for the site took an extremely long time.

[217] **Michael German:** We will now have two blocks of questions, one of which is from Rhodri Glyn and the other from Lorraine. I will be very strict indeed because we started slightly late. Therefore, we will have five minutes of questions from Rhodri Glyn, and five minutes of questions from Lorraine to finish.

[218] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Fe wnafl i osgoi'r cwestiwn cyffredinol a mynd at y cwestiwn penodol. Yn y dystiolaeth ysgrifenedig, mae Wrecsam yn awgrymu y gallai Llywodraeth Cymru hyrwyddo hyn drwy'r broses gynllunio. At beth yn union yr ydych yn cyfeirio wrth ddweud hynny? A ydych yn cyfeirio at newid yn y defnydd o dir?

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I will avoid the generality and try to get to the detailed information. In the written evidence, there is a suggestion from Wrexham that the Welsh Government could promote this through the planning process. To what exactly are you referring? Are you referring to a change in the use of land?

[219] **Mr Howorth:** It is really just an encouragement to local authorities to consider allotments a little more. I know that there is planning guidance, but I do not think that it is really embedded in local authority planning thinking, particularly in terms of section 106 moneys. The thinking is always about open spaces, grass and play areas, and not about allotments. I think that that is a matter of encouraging local authorities to think a little more along those lines, in the way that we do.

[220] **Mr Mitchell:** Obviously, with the community infrastructure levy coming in and section 106 being phased out for this type of use, there will be a different mechanism in place shortly.

[221] **Mr Davies:** The committee talked earlier about permitted development from agriculture to allotment use. I would also like to see permitted development from recreation to allotment use to get rid of some of our green space and our green deserts more easily.

[222] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Perhaps I could ask for a note from Craig on these two issues. I was about to ask for an update on the task and finish group on community-grown food, on which the WLGA sits. It might be easier for you to do that via a note rather than trying to do it orally now. Perhaps you could give us some understanding of the action highlighted in the 'Food and Drink for Wales' action plan to encourage more people to grow their own fruit and vegetables. Is that active?

[223] **Mr Mitchell:** That would have been an issue that our health improvement team was taking forward with local authorities to encourage them to allow that. It is a colleague from that team that now has—

[224] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Could we have a note on that as well?

[225] **Mr Mitchell:** Yes, of course.

[226] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Great; thank you.

[227] **Lorraine Barrett:** I have three questions that could be answered in a note perhaps. I would quite like to ask Nicola a question, if that is okay. As a landscape design officer, would you be involved in some of the issues that Lyn mentioned, such as the objections to an allotment being allowed in an urban setting surrounded by houses? Are there ways in which you could look at making it acceptable?

[228] **Ms Ellis:** The two community groups that I have dealt with are surrounded by houses. When it went to planning, I think that we had one objection for the first one, and we have had

no objections for the second one. We did consultation work with the people living around the area first and said, 'This is what will happen and there will be so many plots'. We just explained the situation to them. The majority of people were quite happy for the land to be used for allotments rather than the building of more houses. I have not really had a problem with anything like that.

2.30 p.m.

[229] **Lorraine Barrett:** That is interesting. We could pursue the landscaping and the street scene issues. We think of big tranches of fields when we think of allotments, but there are opportunities for inner-city developments. The question out of my three that is the most important or interesting for me is on local authorities' policies with regard to using pesticides, composting and waste disposal. How often do you monitor these issues to ensure compliance?

[230] **Mr Davies:** On our allotments, we do not insist that tenants' allotments are pesticide-free or herbicide-free. We have a local authority policy for pesticide use, being peat free and so on in our parks and open spaces, but we do not enforce that in our allotments.

[231] **Ms Ellis:** In our allotment tenancy agreement, we do not say that everyone has to be organic; they can use pesticides. However, we say that they have to use them in a reasonable manner and ensure that they do not affect anyone else's plot and so on. We also have compostable areas on all our allotment sites where people can put their waste. That is collected by the council and taken away and recycled. We also encourage people to compost on their own plots. We have started a policy of giving them pallets so that they can make their own compostable areas and encouraging them through leaflets to compost on their own plots and to use their own water supplies.

[232] **Leanne Wood:** Are you aware of any education projects in which people are given information about the potential problems of using pesticides and herbicides and information on permaculture gardening? Are you aware of anything like that?

[233] **Ms Ellis:** We have an allotment association that has an allotment shop on site and it provides information and tends to encourage people to garden organically. It does not enforce that, but it encourages people, and all the products in the allotment shop are now organic.

[234] **Michael German:** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon. It may appear to have been rushed, but you have been questioned for an hour, and there are notes that we would be grateful if the committee clerk were to receive so that we can pursue issues in more depth. If you think that there is anything else that we need to know, please write to tell us in a submission to the clerk. There will be a transcript of what you have said, a copy of which will be sent to you for checking—not whether you have said the right thing, but for checking whether what is recorded is what you said—and for correction only. Once again, thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon, which has helped us a great deal in establishing the facts in our inquiry.

[235] The next meeting of the Sustainability Committee will be on 21 April, when we will continue with the inquiry into allotment provision in Wales. We will focus on more innovative approaches to providing more allotments in Wales.

2.33 p.m.

### **Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion**

[236] **Michael German:** I move that

*the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi).*

[237] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 2.33 p.m.  
The public part of the meeting ended at 2.33 p.m.*