



Allotment Provision in Wales:

A Transition Perspective

John Mason, Co-Founder, Transition Bro Ddyfi

April 2010

Below: correspondance regarding allotment provision in Machynlleth (full versions appended)

This obviously leaves the council in somewhat of a dilemma. On the one hand we have been approached by interested members of the public to provide them with allotment gardens, in line with the provisions of the 1908 Allotment Act, but appear to have no suitable land available within our ownership/responsibility and on the other hand, according to that Act we, as the responsible authority, should provide such an area for allotment use if requested (by more than 6 local residents, of which there are considerably more in this case).

I do understand the frustration that you and your Group are experiencing and I recognise the Health and Well-being benefits that can be accrued by the development of allotments and the involvement of the wider community. Unfortunately, although the Health and Well-being agenda does appear to have high profile in theoretical terms the allocation of resources to move forward initiatives of the type that you describe are very sparse and in some cases non existent.

The problem here appears to be twofold. Firstly, there is always a problem of resources. Service areas do not have a specific budget for the provision or even the maintenance of allotments and this is unlikely to change, considering the significant challenges we are currently experiencing in sustaining our existing services. Secondly, although within Service Areas, the provision and allocation of allotments rates highly, this is certainly not the case considered against competing priorities elsewhere within the Council.

Below: oil geologist Colin Campbell on the Second Half of the Oil Age (see text for more details)

.....it is now evident that the world faces the dawn of the Second Half of the Age of Oil, when this critical commodity, which plays such a fundamental part in the modern economy, heads into decline due to natural depletion. A debate rages over the precise date of peak, but rather misses the point, when what matters — and matters greatly — is the vision of the long remorseless decline that comes into sight on the other side of it. The transition to decline threatens to be a time of great international tension. Petroleum Man will be virtually extinct this Century.....

Part 1: Peak Oil and the Transition Movement

The concept of “Peak Oil” was first aired in the 1950s by oil geologist M. King Hubbert (1). Based on the inescapable fact that our economically-extractable natural resources are all strictly finite commodities, Hubbert presented extraction rate curves for producing oilfields. He found that in each case the production-rate followed a bell-shaped curve, with rapidly increasing production rates leading up to a plateau or peak, followed by rapidly decreasing production rates. A typical figure (taken from Hubbert’s original work) would look something like this:

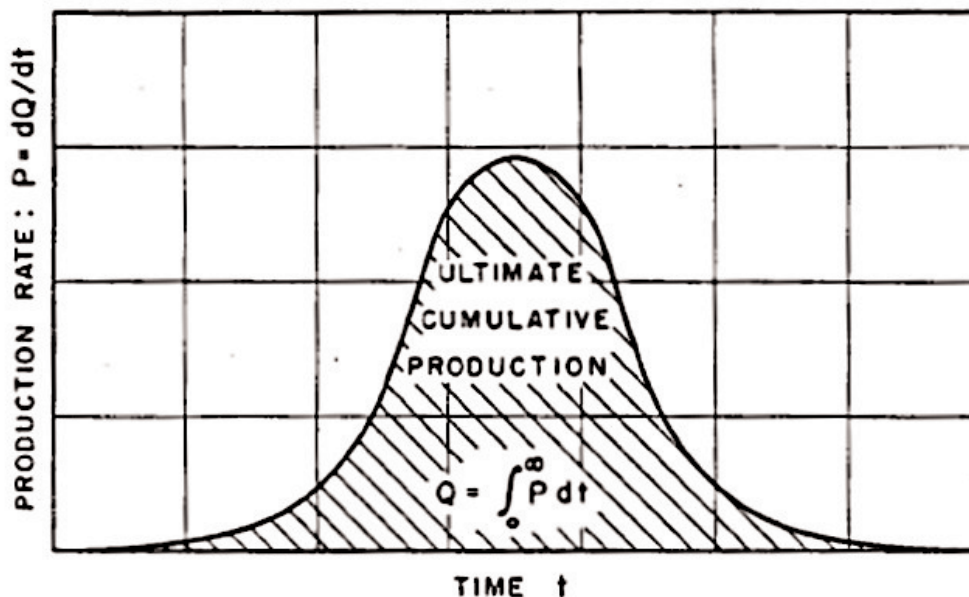


Figure II - Mathematical relations involved in the complete cycle of production of any exhaustible resource.

Hubbert went on to extrapolate production curves from single wells to whole oilfields, and thence to whole countries. To considerable ridicule at the time, he predicted a production peak of 1970 for the Lower 48 states of the USA. Less than 15 years later, the Lower 48 passed its peak, in 1971.

Had it not been for the major find of the North Sea oilfields in the 1960s, Hubbert’s World prediction for Peak Oil - around the year 2000 - may well have been similarly accurate. However, since that time, discoveries around the world have dwindled whilst demand has shot up, especially with the new growth economies of India and China appearing on the scene. We are now using about four barrels of oil for every new barrel our geologists discover.

The significance of our level of oil consumption may be illustrated by taking a recent discovery: in March 2006, a major new find was announced in the Mexican Gulf of potentially ten billion barrels. Although this is indeed a big find, let us look at it in the context of consumption. Given that world demand currently runs at about 85 million barrels a day, this “major” ten billion barrel find gives us (assuming all of it can be recovered) less than 120 days’ worth. I invite Committee members to run the calculation every time a new find is announced!

The exact timing of Global Peak Oil remains a hotly-debated topic: some claim that we are at the peak, others that it will be around 2015 while others have adopted a more rosy outlook - 2020 or 2030 or later, though in many cases these optimistic figures have recently been revised sharply back towards the present day. What is certain, however, is that there will come a point in our lifetimes where conventional crude oil supplies go into decline. This is something that will directly affect all of us (2,3).

It is certainly true that there are vast, mostly unworked, resources of oil in non-conventional deposits such as oil-shales and tar-sands. However, these will never directly substitute for conventional oil for two principle reasons:

a) they require far more costly, energy-intensive extraction processes and are not profitable at the low crude oil prices that we enjoyed until recent years;

b) they are rate-constrained, i.e. the rate of production in millions of barrels/day cannot conceivably match that of regular crude in its heyday. For example, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers have suggested the vast Tar-Sands of Alberta could be producing - at full development - just under 4.5 million barrels of oil per day by 2020⁽⁴⁾. That's just over 5% of current global oil demand.

An Unprecedented Problem

"The peaking of world oil production presents the U.S. and the world with an unprecedented risk management problem. As peaking is approached, liquid fuel prices and price volatility will increase dramatically, and, without timely mitigation, the economic, social, and political costs will be unprecedented."

Peaking of World Oil Production: Impacts, Mitigation, & Risk Management. US Department of Energy, 2005⁽⁵⁾

It is clear that we currently exist in an economy that relies on very high cheap energy usage to function normally. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the 2008 recession was preceded by a massive surge in the price of regular crude oil up to \$147/barrel at one point. As the recession started to bite, demand fell - in accordance with the first principles of economics - and then collapsed to the point that oil was briefly back to around \$30/barrel. The current risk is that as we recover from recession, demand for oil will again increase, it will again approach supply constraints, the price will spike again and the next recession will follow. It is my view that this dysfunctionality will continue, and once oil goes into decline, get much worse - until we find an economic model that is less reliant on cheap oil-based energy. If we fail to do so, the words in the text box above are all too likely to ring true.

Recognition: the birth of the Transition Movement

The Transition Movement started up at Kinsale in the Republic of Ireland about 5 years ago as a response to the recognition of the magnitude of the forthcoming challenges that Peak Oil presented. Since then, it has gone around the world virally, so that there are hundreds of Transition Initiatives at various stages of development. There are Transition Towns, Villages, Streets, Cities, Counties, Peninsulas and Islands. All have one thing in common: they are grassroots initiatives looking to address the potential problems caused by Peak Oil (and Climate Change) at a community level. This is no rejection of the role of local, regional and national Government: rather, it is the recognition that all communities contain a largely untapped collective genius that, if put to work creatively, would go a long way to creating community resilience to external shocks⁽⁶⁾.

Transition Initiatives recognise the importance of three things in particular when looking to create community resilience: appropriately, these constitute a new version of the famous old “three R’s” - but in this case they are as follows:

Recognition - Reskilling - Relocalisation

Recognition is the process of understanding the problems that we all face - in a world that we often take far too much for granted. This might involve awareness-raising events, for example.

Reskilling involves learning again the essential life-skills that our grandparents took for granted but which many of us have lost or did not have in the first place. Examples would include even basic things like veg-growing.

Relocalisation involves redeveloping local economies; again, food production is high on the list - it has to be given the high dependency on cheap oil-based transport that characterises our current food supply-chains, which are therefore extremely prone to oil shortages or price spikes.

Once established, Transition Initiatives tend to become subdivided into various groups according to the skills and interests in any one community: thus there are food, energy, transport groups and so on. Visible manifestations of Transition Initiatives might include plantings of fruit and nut trees, garden-swap schemes or reskilling courses taught within the community. Importantly, Transition Initiatives do not seek to impose or take anything over: there is a strong emphasis on building bridges with existing community groups.

The community also recognises two crucial points:

** that we used immense amounts of creativity, ingenuity and adaptability on the way up the energy upslope, and that there's no reason for us not to do the same on the downslope;*

** if we collectively plan and act early enough there's every likelihood that we can create a way of living that's significantly more connected, more vibrant and more in touch with our environment than the oil-addicted treadmill that we find ourselves on today.*

From the Transition Network website

Allotments from a Transition perspective

Transition Bro Ddyfi ⁽⁷⁾ was founded in 2007 and as such was one of the first Welsh Transition Initiatives, although now there are many. Ongoing projects in our area have a strong focus on food - unsurprisingly, in the Dyfi Valley, home to the Centre for Alternative Technology and several Renewables firms, there are already community energy groups engaged upon a variety of projects.

The production of much food in the local area was - until a few decades ago - accepted as the norm. It was only with the glut of cheap oil and the technology that was developed to use it that we saw, during the 20th Century, a shift from food dominated by local produce (with more exotic things imported) to a truly global food supply chain. The end of cheap oil will likely reverse this situation and many of the chains will become increasingly fragile and vulnerable to disruption. This is something that it makes absolute sense to prepare for.

There are a variety of ways in which such preparations can be made, from an individual level upwards to the largest farms. Being a grassroots organisation, the Transition focus is on what is possible for individuals and small groups within the community. We already have a fruit-tree project ongoing in Machynlleth, but there is much more that we need to do: one thing we are looking at is a garden-swap scheme. Garden-swap involves people taking on the gardens of others who are unable to tend them any more - due to ill health, disability, old age and so on - and growing food, to be shared between the gardener and the resident.

I have some personal experience of garden-swap as I took on the garden of a friend whose working/social life had led to it becoming overgrown with a dense tangle of brambles and conifers. The project was started in February 2009 (see images below) and in the first year its yield was a great surprise to me, this being my first year as a gardener since my early teens, rather a lot of decades ago! As well as the vegetables, the fact that the garden was tidy and well-maintained made it possible for my friend to enjoy it himself once again, so the project was mutually beneficial. The garden in question is in the process of being planted-up for year two.

R: Garden-swap: an extreme example!

Dyfi Bridge, 2009.



As beneficial as garden-swaps are, to do this on a larger scale would require a more organised approach: this is something we are currently exploring. In addition, a much larger project, perhaps involving twenty or more gardens and gardeners, would require a sensible degree of administration, just to ensure everything runs as smoothly as possible.

Onto allotment provision in Machynlleth: I have appended some samples of correspondence on the matter (my thanks to Town & County Councillor Michael Williams for providing me with these). They paint an all-too-familiar picture: limited publically-owned land, a significant part of which is not suitable for a variety of reasons; talk of compulsory purchase of private land but with few or no resources with which to do so, the recognition of the connection between health and well-being and veg-growing but the admission that in the light of other competing priorities it is just not possible to do anything at a Town or County Council level.

The waiting list for allotments in Machynlleth is currently heading towards 50 and for the reasons I have already outlined, interest in growing food - and thereby demand for land - is surging upwards. How, then, can this lack of growing space be addressed?

From a Transition perspective, which places community engagement and cohesiveness above all, it would seem that compulsory purchase of land from local landowners is exactly the opposite way in which this dilemma should be tackled. Forced sales of this nature invariably lead to resentment which can be divisive within any community.

Instead, perhaps a more constructive approach would be to offer incentives to landowners to get involved with vegetable growing projects, in a manner akin to what is known as Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) ⁽⁸⁾. Community-supported agriculture began in the early 1960s in Germany, Switzerland, and Japan as a response to concerns about food security and the urbanisation of agricultural land. Groups of consumers and farmers in Europe formed cooperative partnerships to fund farming and pay the full costs of ecologically sound and socially equitable agriculture. The idea took root in the United States in the early 1980s and expanded rapidly, so that community supported farms have been organised throughout North America, mainly in the Northeast, the Pacific coast, the Upper-Midwest, and Canada. North America now has at least 13,000 CSA farms, 12,549 of them in the US alone (as of 2007), according to the US Department of Agriculture.

CSAs generally focus on the production of high quality foods for a local community, often using organic or biodynamic farming methods, and a shared risk membership/marketing structure. This kind of farming operates, at its most evolved level, with a much greater than usual degree of involvement of consumers and other stakeholders, resulting in a stronger than usual consumer-producer relationship. The centuries-old bond between consumer, producer and the natural seasons is thus rebuilt: something that will happen in any case once oil depletion is underway, but in this case positively. This not only allows growers to focus on quality growing, but also it can go a long way towards levelling the playing field in a food market that currently, and many feel wrongly, favours large-scale, industrialized agriculture over local food.

Returning briefly to the Peak Oil theme, it should be noted here that highly mechanised agriculture as practised today is something that will be exceptionally vulnerable to the high fuel prices that are likely to be experienced in any oil-depletion scenario: likewise long-range transportation of foodstuffs. The more that can be grown locally via mostly manual labour, the better the resulting food and the greater the resilience to future oil-shocks. Members will recall the 2000 fuel protests, where the Government were warned that the supermarkets were running out of food stocks. Any additional supply-crisis within an overall oil depletion scenario could, I suggest, be seen as an acute version of the same condition.

The core CSA design includes developing a cohesive user group that is willing to fund a whole season's budget in order to get quality foods. This may vary from a group of individual growers renting plots of land and growing their own food (a private allotments scheme in other words) through to more organised cooperative farming and food provision via e.g. box-schemes. By CSA theory, the more a farm embraces whole-farm, whole-budget support, the more it can focus on quality and reduce the risk of food waste or financial loss. However, such schemes also, first and foremost, need to reflect local needs and, certainly in the case of Machynlleth, the first priority would have to be to deal, so far as is possible, with the growing number of people on the allotments waiting-list.

Would local landowners take an interest in becoming involved with such a scheme? One already is - Wil Lloyd Williams, our local butcher, has 40 acres of grassland adjacent to the town of Machynlleth and is looking into the possibility of creating a sizeable community garden as part of a development with some of this land: the garden would be divided up into plots along similar lines to the existing small allotment sites in the town. Although this project is still at an early stage, my discussions with him have been extremely constructive and it is fair to say that he is very much "on the case" when it comes to Peak Oil and how our future way of life is likely to differ from the present.

Logistics and figures

At a standard plot size of 250m² (and many people may find this too big an area to manage), 12-15 allotments can be fitted into an acre of land (allowing for pathways) ⁽⁹⁾, so that in the case of Machynlleth alone, just three acres put into horticulture would pretty much eliminate the existing waiting list.

Provided that land intended for allotments was previously agricultural land, planning permission is not required for allotments, so that is one major hurdle that does not have to be dealt with. See Section 55, subsection (2) paragraph (e) and section 336, Town and Country Planning Act, 1990 ⁽⁹⁾.

There remains one question regarding the process of converting agricultural land to allotments: how are Single Farm Payments affected? This is something that I have so far failed to answer to my complete satisfaction (queries with DEFRA pending), although I suspect that land used for nursery beds, fruit etc is included. However, at the 2009 rate for non-SDA land of about £70/acre (190.47 Euros/hectare) ⁽¹⁰⁾, this is not an insurmountable problem.

Otherwise, the main *financial* burden in setting up community gardens on farmland is the setup cost. This is a one-off expense per area taken into cultivation, involving things like rabbit-proof fencing, bringing in a water supply, having basic access to the road system, division of land into plots and administering the uptake process. Materials and labour are the main cost here: for example, a square field with an area of one acre would require just under 255m of fencing - this should not cost more than £2000 ⁽¹¹⁾.

Ongoing maintenance is likely to be much less costly and could probably be absorbed comfortably into the plot rental fees. These rental fees, at 15 allotments to the acre (UK rents vary from £25-35), would amount to at least £375-525 per annum, given the likely demand for smaller-than-standard plots. Here I can speak from experience: the 120m² garden I have been working could provide me with fresh vegetables all year round, if planned in order to do so - that's about half a standard allotment.

Areas of intervention from the Welsh Government?

I have already raised a simple but valid objection to compulsory purchase of agricultural land for allotment provision, which in my view would have to be seen as an absolute last resort. It is basic human nature that carrots tend to work better than sticks: on that basis, is there any scope for the Welsh Government to develop a scheme involving incentives and support to landowners to turn over areas of farmland to allotments or to develop more evolved CSA projects?

Given the following:

- * the lack of available land for allotment provision
- * the greatly rising demand for allotment space
- * the demonstrable lack of publically-owned land suitable for this purpose
- * the amount of potentially suitable agricultural land adjacent to Wales' rural communities
- * the critical need for relocalisation of food production post-Peak Oil (coming soon)
- * the clear health benefits of growing some of your own food (fitness and fresher food)

it would seem to me that the Welsh Government could very usefully support the development of community gardens on current agricultural land. Key to this would be help with setup costs and promotion/awareness-raising: together these could be rolled into a programme of Welsh Government-supported local community gardens at communities across Wales, demonstrating that the Welsh Government has addressed the six points above by working with communities.

References

- (1) <http://www.hubbertpeak.com/Hubbert/1956/1956.pdf>
- (2) <http://www.peakoil.net/about-peak-oil>
- (3) <http://www.theoil drum.com/>
- (4) <http://www.capp.ca/CANADAINDUSTRY/OILSANDS/Pages/default.aspx#W68nMENKwBvK>
- (5) http://www.netl.doe.gov/publications/others/pdf/Oil_Peaking_NETL.pdf
- (6) <http://transitionculture.org/>
- (7) <http://www.transition-bro-ddyfi.org.uk/>
- (8) <http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/about/csa/index.cfm>
- (9) <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/uploads/article459/Creating%20an%20Allotment%20Site.pdf>
- (10) <http://www.rpa.gov.uk/rpa/index.nsf/0/107C64203153191680257654005ADC77>
- (11) <http://farmingforum.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=12927>

Appendix: examples of correspondance regarding allotment provision in Machynlleth

(following five pages)

Cyfarwyddiaeth Adfywio Cymunedol ac Economaidd /
Economic and Community Regeneration Directorate

Graham Davey

Grŵp Gyfarwyddwr, Adfywio Cymunedol ac
Economaidd /

Swyddfeydd Sant Ioan / St John's Offices
Pumffordd / Fiveways

Llandrindod / Llandrindod Wells

Powys

LD1 5ES

Os yn galw gofynnwch am / If calling please
ask for:

County Councillor J.M. Williams,
5, Bryn y Gog,
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Powys SY20 8HL

Chris Tully

Tel / Ffôn: (01597) 827588

Fax / Ffacs: (01597) 827555

Email / Llythyru electronig:

tull@powys.gov.uk

Your ref / Eich cyf:

Our ref / Ein cyf:

Date / Dyddiad: 8th February 2006

Dear Councillor,

New Allotment Site - The Plas Grounds, Machynlleth

As a result of our site meeting just before Christmas regarding the above proposal, I have now met with colleagues from the Development Control section to discuss the planning implications.

Unfortunately the news is not good. The area is actually included within the Grade 2 star Parks & Garden site (a subsequent addition to the map that was produced for our site visit) and as a requirement of any planning application on such a site the proposals would need to enhance and improve the visual amenity of that site in order for it to be favourably considered. The application for the provision of allotments in that location could not be considered as such and therefore, I have been advised, could not be justified.

This obviously leaves the council in somewhat of a dilemma. On the one hand we have been approached by interested members of the public to provide them with allotment gardens, in line with the provisions of the 1908 Allotment Act, but appear to have no suitable land available within our ownership/responsibility and on the other hand, according to that Act we, as the responsible authority, should provide such an area for allotment use if requested (by more than 6 local residents, of which there are considerably more in this case).

I propose to forward a copy of this letter to Mr Rob. Shelton (Property Services Manager) for his comment/advise, as I feel that I have now considered and exhausted all possible areas within the authority's responsibility in Machynlleth.

I would be interested to have your views or comments regarding the above.

Yours Sincerely,



C. Tully,
Outdoor Recreation Manager

Cyngor Sir Powys County Council

Gwasanaethau Pobl / People Services
Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol: Gwasanaethau Pobl /
Executive Director: People Services
Philip Robson

Pennaeth, Gwasanaethau Hamdden, Diwylliant a Chefn
Gwlad /
Head of Recreation, Culture, & Countryside Services
Paul Griffiths

**Gwasanaethau Hamdden, Diwylliant a Chefn
Gwlad / Recreation, Culture & Countryside
Services**
St. John's Offices
Swyddfeydd Sant Ioan / Saint John's Offices,
Spa Road East, Llandrindod Wells. Powys LD1
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Os yn galw gofynnwch am / If calling please ask
for:

Lembit Opik MP,
Constituency Office,
3, Park Street,
Newtown.
Powys SY16 1EE

Chris Tully
Ffôn /Tel: (01597) 82 7588
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E-bost / Email: tull@powys.gov.uk
Eich cyf /Your ref:
Ein cyf /Our ref: RCCS/
Dyddiad /Date: 21st March 2007

Dear Mr Opik,

Your Ref: LO/sh/Nicholas

Re: Allotment Provision, Machynlleth

I am in receipt of your recent correspondence received on the 19 March, which has been passed onto me for my consideration and response.

All existing allotments in Machynlleth, under the responsibility of the Council's Outdoor Recreation Service are fully utilised, with a current waiting list of some 30 residents living within the locality. As a result of previous correspondence on this matter the Outdoor Recreation Service together with other Council Divisions with land owning responsibilities within the Machynlleth area, have undertaken a review of their land with a view to seek out potential sites for new allotments. Unfortunately, this exercise proved to be unsuccessful.

The only option open to the authority, therefore, is to consider compulsory purchasing land that would be fit for the purpose. This is ultimately a decision that would have to be made by the Council and not by individual officers of that Council.

The problem here appears to be twofold. Firstly, there is always a problem of resources. Service areas do not have a specific budget for the provision or even the maintenance of allotments and this is unlikely to change, considering the significant challenges we are currently experiencing in sustaining our existing services. Secondly, although within Service Areas, the provision and allocation of allotments rates highly, this is certainly not the case considered against competing priorities elsewhere within the Council.

In conclusion, therefore, it is clear that allotments are not a high priority for the Council at this time.

I am sorry I can not be of greater assistance.

Yours sincerely



Paul Griffiths
Head of Recreation, Culture & Countryside Services.

Copies to:

Gwasanaethau Pobl / People Services
Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol: Gwasanaethau Pobl /
Executive Director: People Services
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Eich cyf Your ref:
Ein cyf /Our ref: RCCS/PG/AH/MJ
Dyddiad /Date: 18th May, 2007

Dear Ms Jones,

Re: Machynlleth - Allotments

Further to your letter dated 16th April, 2007, inviting Chris Tully to your event on 26th May, 2007.

Mr Tully has spoken to me about the matter and as Head of Service I thought it appropriate to write to you directly. Unfortunately neither Chris Tully nor I can impact significantly on the problem to which you refer. There are no resources allocated for the purchase of land to extend allotments in Machynlleth and given the Council's competing priorities such funding is unlikely to be available in the foreseeable future. In addition it has not been possible to identify land that could be converted "free of charge".

Although Chris and I are happy to meet with representatives of the Group we cannot see what can be gained from attending your event on 26th May when the answers to the questions we are likely to be asked are out of our hands. If you have particular locations in Machynlleth that you have identified as a Group that you think could be developed as allotments and the cost of such development will not be borne by the County Council then please let us have details and we will be happy to respond as appropriate. Alternatively if you wish to meet with Chris and I to discuss the matter further then please feel free to contact my Office to arrange such a meeting.

I do understand the frustration that you and your Group are experiencing and I recognise the Health and Well-being benefits that can be accrued by the development of allotments and the involvement of the wider community. Unfortunately, although the Health and Well-being agenda does appear to have high profile in theoretical terms the allocation of resources to move forward initiatives of the type that you describe are very sparse and in some cases non-existent. In the meantime may I wish you all the very best with your event on the 26th May.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Griffiths
Head of Recreation, Culture & Countryside Services

c.c. **Councillor Michael Williams**
Chris Tully, Outdoor Recreation Manager

Gwasanaethau Pobl / People Services
Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol: Gwasanaethau Pobl /
Executive Director: People Services
Philip Robson

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Gwlad /
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Mr J. Parsons,
Clerk to Machynlleth Town Council,
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Os yn galw gofynnwch am / If calling please ask
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E-bost / Email: tull@powys.gov.uk

Eich cyf /Your ref:

Ein cyf /Our ref: RCCS/

Dyddiad /Date: 11th July 2009

*Councillor - Copy, for
your information -
Please get back to me*

Dear Mr Parsons,

if you would like to discuss further.

Regards Chris

Allotment Provision - Machynlleth

Thank you for your letter of the 28th May, a copy of which has been passed to me for my response.

I am aware that there has been an issue concerning the lack of provision of allotment gardens within the Machynlleth area for some time now. Indeed a petition to that effect was handed into this authority by members of the community requesting that consideration is given by Powys County Council to provide more allotment space within the town. As a result, this council has undertaken a trawl of its land portfolio within the town to ascertain whether any of that land could be considered for the development of allotment gardens.

As a result of that audit, a piece of land to the rear of Bryn y Gog estate was identified for this purpose, but upon further site investigation it has recently been ruled out of the equation, primarily due to the unsuitable ground conditions, together with access issues and its proximity to the rear gardens of houses on the estate.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the point raised in your letter regarding the expected responsibilities of the allotment authority. The provision for allotment gardens was first included within the Inclosure Act of 1845 and the responsibility for administering these was passed to the parish councils under the Local Government Act of 1894. They were once again placed under the responsibility of the parish councils in the 1908 Allotment Act. These Acts have been repealed many times since, culminating in the Statute Law (Revision) Act 1993 which passed over their powers of management to the local authorities. The Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 went one step further and named the community and town councils, County & County Borough Councils in Wales as the "allotment authorities."

The law contained within the 1908 Act although repealed many times, has remained substantially unchanged. Section 3 of the Act states that "it is the express duty of every allotment authority, where they are of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments in their area, to provide a sufficient number of them, and then to let them to persons resident in the area". The act goes on to say that "if the duty is not carried out, an interested person would be able to apply for a judicial review, and seek a mandatory order, in accordance with Part 55 of the Act". In practice, however, this somewhat archaic procedure has rarely been used.

This in itself raises an interesting point. The 1994 Act actually places equal responsibility on the community & town councils and the County & County Borough Councils to provide land for allotment gardens, should there be demand for that provision within the area.

I believe that the County Council has unsuccessfully explored the possibility of using land under its portfolio within Machynlleth, for allotment use. There is also a further provision within the Act that gives the allotment authorities powers to compulsory purchase land for such use, if no other land is otherwise available. Realistically, however, in the current economic climate faced by all local authorities, I believe that this should not be considered as being an option at this time.

So, where do we go from here?

I can only really suggest the following courses of action:

- That a local allotment association is formed, from within the interested members of the community, and that they explore the possibility of obtaining/renting a suitable area from a willing private land owner. Although I am not an expert in this area, there would be the possibility of obtaining grant aid towards the set up costs associated with this option. The association would then undertake the responsibility of maintaining that area, preferably on a long term let from the land owner.
- The town council offers land from within its own portfolio, for the creation of allotment gardens. If this is practical, this too could be leased out to an association, who would be responsible for gaining funds to cover the appropriate set up costs and also be responsible for the long term maintenance of the allotment gardens under lease from your authority.
- That the town planners are approached to consider the allocation of land for allotment gardens within the review that is currently being undertaken of the Local Development Plan.
- **That the town planners are also approached to consider the provision of allotment gardens as part of any section 106 agreements or planning gain provision that may occur as a result of proposed development within the town in the future.**
- To explore the possibility of dividing the existing allotment gardens in the town into smaller plots in order to cater for an increase in tenancy.

I understand that the above response is probably not what your authority was expecting to receive in reply to your letter, however, the question of additional allotment provision never seems to be quite as straight forward as it may first appear.

I would respectfully request, therefore, that your authority takes a little time to consider the shared responsibilities of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 and also considers whether or not you may have land within your portfolio that might be suitable for the development of allotments. Once this has been done, I would be happy to work with you in order to agree a joint way forward.

I look forward to your response in due course.

Yours sincerely



Mr Chris Tully
Outdoor Recreation Manager

Copies to: County Councillor J.M. Williams
County Councillor C.G. Gwillim
Ian Fraser, Head of Housing
Paul Griffiths, Head of R.C.C.S.