

## **Annex 8. Background history of Moorpool Allotments**

The building on Moorpool estate was largely complete in 1913. Harborne Tenants Ltd stated a number of founding principles in a remarkably farsighted document in 1908  
*"plenty of fresh air..."*

*. [in] one of the healthiest parts of the town...*

*..on this estate exceptional conditions in this respect will prevail....*

*...they would build houses, well laid out, with nice spaces, grass and trees....*

*..there would be space for recreation ...*

*..on that land they did not anticipate heavy traffic over that spot, and the roads would be narrow and more space given for the houses...*

*..it was impossible for a tenant to do anything which would endanger the character of adjoining houses and street....*

*...employers of labour were answerable for calling together on a limited space many thousands of operatives..they had a great responsibility..they should not leave it to the City Council to purchase a little space here and there. They wanted city councillors and urban district councils to have the power to say to building speculators "You shall not crowd houses irrespective of decency and health of the children and inhabitants"....*

As part of the ethos of starting a community with "nice spaces, grass and trees" there was exceptional provision for allotments. Part of the foresight of the directors of Harborne Tenants Ltd was that allotments provided not only land for food cultivation, but also provided green views for all to share and (as environmentalists were only just beginning to realise) improved the provision of fresh air (the "green lung" of which town planning in Birmingham has so much to be proud). Although also on private land the Moorpool allotments have always been treated as classical allotments under the 1922 allotments act (with appropriate annual tenancy agreements, collection of annual rents, serving of eviction notices [see annex 2 Contract & Eviction Notices] and consideration as allotments under Birmingham City Council planning application rejection S/03083/96/OUT).

The regulation and maintenance of allotments was taken seriously, with annual public inspections (the "Estate Walk") and with prompt action taken as necessary. Gradually however, less interest was taken in the regulation of cultivation and maintenance of allotments. Nowadays, once the basic allotment contract is granted, its renewal appears automatic on payment of subscription, yet some boundaries are derelict and some allotments have become increasingly overgrown and derelict.

Residents initially did not object to this gentle approach until it recently became clear that, while the gentle approach fitted with the peace and tranquillity of the estate, the dereliction had its obvious drawbacks too. While this continued to enhance the green view and "green lung" elements, it also meant that keen potential allotment holders could only stand by while allotments fell further into disrepair and appeared unable to take on some allotments (see Annex 1. Letters & Valley Site Allotments).

A more serious situation also arose as the value of land in Harborne appreciated. Some of the derelict allotment areas became obvious targets for planning application. This culminated in the 1996 planning application to build on the allotments at the bottom of Margaret Grove that had not been rented out. Fortunately the Birmingham City Council planning office maintained the original spirit of the estate and the reasons for rejecting Application ref S/03083/96/OUT were:

1) *the proposal would result in an undesirable precedent and conflicts with the policies set out under section 3 para 3.62 of the adopted city of Birmingham Unitary Development Plan seeking the retention of allotment areas.*

2) *the proposal conflicts with the policies set out under section 3 para 3.27 of the adopted*

*city of Birmingham Unitary Development Plan which state that planning permission will not normally be granted within Conservation Areas, unless supported by detailed proposals showing siting, design and external appearance.*

*3) the proposal conflicts with the policies set out in the adopted city of Birmingham Unitary Development Plan and Planning policy guidance note #17 in that it would involve the loss of an area of urban open space of public value*

*4) the site is within a designated Conservation Area and the proposed development would be incompatible with the character and appearance of the Area.*

While a number of these reasons still apply (See Moseley Gold Club application S/01392/07/FUL), the Moorpool allotments are again under threat from planning applications.

In 2005 residents became increasingly aware of both the fundamental value of allotments to the whole estate but also of the vulnerability of the allotments. The Moorpool Allotment Association was set up and one of its first resolutions was to pass a motion objection to loss of any allotment area on the estate.

In 2007 the Moorpool Residents Group surveyed residents on the whole estate and found 62 residents wanted to rent allotments (annex 3. Moorpool Regeneration Group survey results). This is hardly surprising considering the changing demography on the estate: older tenants leaving and increasing numbers of rented properties being sold off to energetic younger families with a renewed enthusiasm for growing their own food.

Grainger PLC may claim that they are having useful negotiations with the Moorpool Allotment Association. From the Moorpool Allotment Association's point of view however there have not yet been any negotiations and Moorpool Allotment Association wishes its position on this to be clearly represented. Grainger have raised some suggestions including a sum of money, but eviction notices have also been served with the accompanying statement that evictions will stand regardless of the outcome of any planning applications (See annex 2 Contract & Eviction Notices). The Moorpool Allotment Association's position is that its membership does not want to see loss of any allotments, but is prepared to explore any options that will increase the use, tidying and best management of all Moorpool allotments.