

A photograph of two men working in a garden. The man on the left is older, with a beard, wearing a straw hat and a purple and white striped polo shirt. He is crouching and holding a small plant. The man on the right is younger, wearing a blue beanie and a blue denim shirt, also crouching and looking at the plant. They are in a garden with various plants and a wooden fence in the background.

# Non-Statutory **Devolved Allotment Management**

gosen \

 place  
people  
potential

## In Brief

Many councils face an impossible situation with allotment sites. Budget pressures mount, maintenance backlogs grow, and waiting lists stretch years—yet these green spaces matter deeply to communities and deliver genuine policy wins across health, environment, and social cohesion.

### What We Offer

Gosen takes on the sites councils can no longer sustain, transforming them through professional management and dedicated investment—with zero cost to the public purse. Through long-term partnerships, we handle everything: operations, maintenance, improvements, insurance, and compliance. Councils retain ownership and oversight while eliminating budget drain and reputational risk.

### The Difference

Our pilot project demonstrates what's possible. A derelict site plagued by fly-tipping became a thriving 60-plot community within eight weeks. We achieve 98% occupancy where council-run sites average 80-85%. We respond to maintenance issues in days, not months. Sites become environmental and social assets rather than administrative burdens.

### Why This Matters

*Allotments deliver multiple outcomes simultaneously: food security, mental health benefits, community connection, biodiversity, and green infrastructure. With the right management, neglected sites can become showcase assets that reflect well on councils while requiring no resources.*

## Introduction

Across the UK, thousands of allotment sites face similar challenges—overgrown plots, deferred maintenance, stretched budgets, and impossible choices between competing priorities. Yet beneath the brambles and fly-tipping lies extraordinary potential. These aren't just plots of land. They're community infrastructure waiting to be unlocked: green lungs in concrete cities, food security for families under pressure, outdoor therapy for isolated neighbours, wildlife corridors in urban spaces, and places where strangers become friends over shared harvests.

Gosen exists to bridge the gap between what allotments are and what they could be. We partner with councils facing resource constraints, taking on sites that would otherwise continue deteriorating or face disposal. Through long-term agreements, we transform liabilities into assets, problems into solutions, and neglected land into thriving ecosystems—at no cost to the public purse.

*This isn't about managing decline. It's about proving that with dedicated resources, professional commitment, and genuine community engagement, even the most challenging sites can become places of growth, connection, and possibility. The work starts with soil. But it's really about people, and the futures we can build together.*





## The UK Allotment Landscape

Allotments are woven into British life, from Victorian plot systems to wartime "Dig for Victory" campaigns. Today, roughly 330,000 plots exist across the UK, 29% of which are non statutory—but demand dramatically outstrips supply, with waiting lists stretching a decade in some cities. These aren't just vegetable patches. Allotments slash food bills for families facing cost-of-living pressures, deliver measurable mental health benefits, and create intergenerational communities where neighbours share knowledge across class divides. As urban green corridors, they support pollinators, improve air quality, and cut food miles to zero.

### **The Multi-Benefit Asset**

Allotments deliver multiple policy wins simultaneously—addressing food poverty, mental health, social isolation, and environmental targets through one low-cost intervention. For councils navigating difficult budget decisions, allotments represent infrastructure that pays dividends across every strategic priority.

*The challenge isn't whether allotments matter—communities know they do. The challenge is finding sustainable management models when resources are stretched impossibly thin.*



# The Hidden Cost of Council Management

Council-run allotments carry costs that often remain hidden in broader budget lines—making the true financial burden hard to quantify. When these costs are isolated and calculated, the picture becomes clear: even modest sites consume significant resources annually.

When all costs are aggregated—direct operations, embedded administration, opportunity costs, and occasional crisis expenses—the typical council subsidy per plot ranges from £200-500 annually. For a 100-plot site, that's £20,000-50,000 in real annual cost to the council, even though rent collection might show £4,000-6,000 income.

Sites appear to "break even" only when administrative costs are hidden in other budget lines and maintenance is reactive rather than proper. The true cost becomes visible only when everything is counted.

*Even a modest 100-plot site can consume nearly £50,000 in council resources annually when all costs are properly accounted for. Scale this across multiple sites and the burden becomes substantial—yet the sites still underperform, with low occupancy, long waiting lists, and limited community engagement.*

*The question isn't whether councils can afford to continue this model. For many, the answer is clearly no. The question is whether there's a better approach that delivers superior outcomes at zero cost.*

## ALLOTMENT RENT SUMMARY

### ANNUAL ALLOTMENT STATEMENT

#### Cost Breakdown:

Typical 100-Plot Council-Run Site

#### Annual Operating Costs:

Grounds maintenance £12,000

Water & utilities £3,000

Waste & fly-tip £4,000

Repairs & infrastructure £8,000

Insurance & legal £2,500

Administration (0.4 FTE) £12,000

Management & oversight £3,500

**Subtotal Operating Costs: £45,000**

#### Hidden & Variable Costs:

Complaints (60 hrs) £2,000

Committee support (30 hrs) £1,000

Debt recovery £1,500

Fallow plot loss £900

H&S incidents & legal £2,000

**Subtotal Hidden Costs: £7,400**

**Total Annual Cost: £52,400**

Annual Rental Income £4,250

**Net Annual Council Subsidy: £48,150**

Per-plot subsidy: £481





## The Scale of the Council Challenge

Across the UK, allotment sites face remarkably similar challenges regardless of location or management structure. Fly-tipping, antisocial behaviour, infrastructure decay, unresolved disputes, and mounting liability exposure create a cycle of managed decline. These aren't individual council failures—they're structural problems that compound when sites lack dedicated professional management.

Neglected sites attract illegal dumping—mattresses, construction waste, household rubbish—requiring repeated costly clearances. Vandalism, theft, and antisocial behavior make sites feel unsafe, discouraging existing tenants and deterring new ones. Officers spend significant time mediating boundary disputes, access conflicts, and complaints about rule-breaking, often without clear enforcement mechanisms. Infrastructure deteriorates steadily: water systems leak, fencing fails, paths become impassable, communal facilities decay. Annual maintenance backlogs grow while budgets face pressure. Health and safety compliance becomes harder to maintain, increasing liability exposure. Staff juggle these demands alongside other parks responsibilities, responding reactively to crises rather than managing sites strategically. The result is sites that consume resources without delivering their full potential value.

*These problems aren't inevitable—they're symptoms of under-resourced management competing with impossible priorities. Professional partnership offers a different path.*

# Benefits of Devolved Allotment Management

Devolved management allows councils to transfer day-to-day running of allotment sites to specialist organisations through long-term leases or management agreements. Rather than selling off valuable community assets or continuing to drain stretched budgets, councils can partner with experienced operators who revitalize neglected sites at no cost to the public purse—while councils retain ownership and meet their community obligations.

## **Financial Relief**

All site improvements, repairs, infrastructure upgrades, and ongoing maintenance costs transfer to the managing organisation. There's no capital expenditure required, no drain on annual budgets for groundskeeping or administration, and no hidden costs from fly-tipping removal, security issues, or legal disputes. Struggling sites that once consumed resources become self-sustaining community assets.

## **Operational Freedom**

Staff time and resources are freed for other priorities. The managing organization handles security, access control, plot fee collection, debt management, tenant agreements, complaints, maintenance, compliance, and insurance. Teams can redirect capacity to strategic work rather than firefighting site-level problems.

## **Risk and Liability Reduction**

By transferring day-to-day responsibility, councils immediately reduce exposure to accidents, vandalism, legal claims, and health and safety incidents. The managing organisation assumes site safety, user compliance, and public liability—protecting the council from reputational and legal risk.

## **Increased Provision Without New Land**

Professional management brings redundant or informal green spaces back into productive use, creating new plots and maximizing site capacity. This directly increases allotments available within the borough.

## **Rapid Reputational Wins**

Visible transformation happens quickly. Fly-tipping cleared, overgrowth removed, professional signage installed, active plots cultivated, and modern online systems launched—often within weeks. Residents associate the council with action, regeneration, and environmental stewardship. This builds trust and reflects positively on elected members.

## **Delivering Strategic Priorities**

Revitalized allotments help councils meet green agenda targets, social value commitments, public health objectives, biodiversity goals, and community cohesion priorities—simultaneously and without extra investment.

## Comparing Management Models

Councils face a fundamental choice in how they manage allotment sites: continue direct management, devolve to volunteer associations, or partner with professional operators like Gosen Group. Each approach has distinct implications for budgets, staff capacity, risk exposure, and outcomes.

Direct council management provides full control but comes with ongoing costs, staff burden, and stretched resources competing across multiple priorities. Sites receive inconsistent attention, maintenance backlogs grow, and problems escalate slowly over years. Volunteer-led associations can work well initially, reducing council burden and creating strong community ownership. However, they depend entirely on volunteer availability and expertise. When committees change, key members burn out, or enthusiasm wanes, sites deteriorate rapidly. There's no guaranteed continuity or professional standards.

*Professional partnership offers a third option. Councils retain ownership and ultimate control while transferring day-to-day operations, all associated costs, liability, and improvement investment to specialist operators. Sites receive dedicated expert management and consistent professional standards—without any drain on council budgets or staff time.*

|                             | Council Direct Management           | Association Management        | gosen                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Cost to Council</b>      | Maintenance, admin & staffing costs | Minimal, but requires support | Zero                          |
| <b>Staff Burden</b>         | High - daily management             | Medium - oversight needed     | Zero - fully hands-off        |
| <b>Risk &amp; Liability</b> | Council carries all risk            | Shared concerns               | Fully transferred             |
| <b>Improvements</b>         | Requires capital budget             | Limited fundraising           | Fully funded investment       |
| <b>Management</b>           | Stretched resources                 | Volunteer-dependent           | Dedicated expert team         |
| <b>Response Time</b>        | Slow - competing priorities         | Variable availability         | Rapid - dedicated resources   |
| <b>Sustainability</b>       | Vulnerable to cuts                  | Volunteer turnover risk       | Guaranteed via agreement      |
| <b>Maintenance</b>          | Reactive, budget-limited            | Volunteer-led                 | Proactive & professional      |
| <b>Technology</b>           | Often outdated                      | Spreadsheets                  | Modern automated systems      |
| <b>Accountability</b>       | Internal only                       | Inconsistent                  | Professional KPIs & reporting |
| <b>Engagement</b>           | Limited capacity                    | Good but patchy               | Structured, resourced         |

# The Real Cost Comparison

Councils have three options: direct management, volunteer associations, or professional partnership with Gosen Group. Each has distinct impacts on cost, risk, and effectiveness.

## Hidden Costs Often Missed:

- Officer time dealing with complaints, disputes, waiting lists: 200+ hours annually (£6,000 value)
- Legal costs for tenancy issues, Health & Safety incidents: Variable, often £2,000-5,000/year
- Reputational costs from negative press about neglected sites: Unquantified but real
- Opportunity cost of fallow plots (lost rental income): £3,000-6,000/year

## The Gosen Model:

All these costs and risks transfer to Gosen. The council retains:

- Land ownership
- Strategic oversight
- Political credit for site transformation
- Zero financial burden

## Staffing Impact:

Typical council allotment management requires 0.4 FTE per 100 plots. For a borough with 500 plots, that's 2 FTE—approximately £50,000/year in staffing costs alone. Professional devolution frees this capacity for other priorities.

|                            | Council Direct Management | Association Management               | qosen |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Site maintenance & grounds | £15,000                   | £5,000 (volunteer + council support) | £0    |
| Administration (0.4 FTE)   | £12,000                   | £2,000 (council oversight)           | £0    |
| Water & utilities          | £3,000                    | £3,000 (council pays)                | £0    |
| Insurance & legal          | £2,500                    | £1,500 (shared)                      | £0    |
| Fly-tipping removal        | £4,000                    | £2,500                               | £0    |
| Repairs & infrastructure   | £8,000                    | £3,000                               | £0    |
| Total Annual Cost          | £44,500                   | £17,000                              | £0    |
| 5-Year Total               | £222,500                  | £85,000                              | £0    |



## Partnership Models Explained

Every council's situation is different. Gosen offers three partnership structures to suit your needs—from full transfer of responsibility to collaborative management. Each protects council interests while delivering transformation at zero cost. Every model delivers the same core benefits: zero cost, zero management burden, zero risk, and thriving community greenspaces.

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### Long Lease on Peppercorn Rent

The council grants Gosen a long-term lease (typically 25+ years) for a nominal fee of £1 per year. Gosen assumes full responsibility for all aspects of site management, investment, maintenance, and liability. The council retains ownership and the land returns at lease end—fully improved and revenue-generating.

*Best for: Sites requiring significant investment, councils seeking maximum resource relief*

### Lease with Option Agreement

Similar to a peppercorn lease, but includes provisions for the council to buy back management or terminate under agreed conditions. This offers flexibility if circumstances change while still providing Gosen with sufficient security to invest significantly in site improvements.

*Best for: Councils wanting flexibility while securing professional management*

### Management Contract

The council retains ownership and the lease, but contracts Gosen to manage all day-to-day operations for an agreed period (typically 5-15 years). Gosen handles tenants, maintenance, improvements, and compliance while the council maintains closer oversight and can resume direct control more easily.

*Best for: Statutory sites where councils want shorter commitment or closer involvement*

## The Pilot Project

Every transformation starts with proof of concept. Our first site was exactly the kind of problem asset councils struggle with—years of neglect, mounting complaints, impossible cleanup costs, and disposal seeming like the only option. We took it on to demonstrate what's possible when professional management meets community need.

The site had deteriorated into a dumping ground. Fly-tipping was constant, antisocial behavior routine, infrastructure non-existent. The council faced escalating cleanup costs with no budget for transformation. Within eight weeks of taking on the site, we'd cleared all waste, secured the perimeter, installed infrastructure, and created sixty new allotment plots. We engaged with the local community, built waiting lists, and began lettings. Within the first year, we achieved 98% occupancy—sustained into year two—and reduced fly-tipping and antisocial behavior incidents by 96%. The site transformed from liability into thriving community asset, generating its own revenue while delivering measurable environmental and social value.

*Most importantly, it proved the model works: neglected sites can become showcase assets when management combines professional expertise, dedicated resources, and genuine community engagement.*

**8 weeks**

to clear and  
secure the site

**60**

new allotment  
plots created

**98%**

occupancy in  
year 1+2

**96%**

reduction in fly  
tipping and ASB



# Our Performance Metrics

Stretched resources, competing priorities, and budget constraints make consistent allotment performance difficult for councils. These challenges are structural, not personal. The metrics below demonstrate what specialist management achieves when sites receive focused attention, professional systems, and sustained investment.

For a 100-plot site, the difference between council-average and Gosen performance translates to:

- 15-18 additional productive plots generating food, community value, and rental income
- Waiting list cleared 2-4 years faster than under typical council management
- £3,000-5,000 additional annual income from improved occupancy and collection rates
- 200+ additional volunteer hours from engaged community programming
- Zero H&S incidents or liability claims due to professional compliance systems
- Measurable environmental outcomes supporting council green agenda commitments



*\*Council performance data: Aggregated from publicly available local authority allotment reports, FOI responses, and National Allotment Society surveys covering 2022-2024 period. Sample size: 85 local authorities across England and Wales.*



# Social Value & Community Impact

Gosen transforms sites into community hubs that deliver measurable social value. Regular events bring neighbours together across ages and backgrounds. Plotholders collaborate on practical projects like building communal benches from reclaimed materials, creating wildlife habitats, and maintaining shared spaces—activities that develop skills and forge genuine social bonds.

## Beyond the Boundary

The impact extends beyond site boundaries. Surplus produce goes to local food banks, addressing food poverty directly. School partnerships provide outdoor learning opportunities for hundreds of children annually. Social prescribing programmes bring isolated residents into therapeutic activity. Skills workshops build self-sufficiency. Sites become volunteering opportunities for people experiencing unemployment or retirement transitions.

## Measurable Outcomes

Across our sites, we track social value delivery:

- 2,400+ volunteer hours annually
- 800kg+ surplus produce donated to food banks
- 15+ community events per site per year
- 200+ children participating in schools programmes
- 45+ individuals supported through social prescribing







## Environmental Impact

In 2024, we launched the Gosen Community Canopy—a commitment to plant 7,000 trees across our sites by 2027. We're nearly halfway there. With 2,900 trees and hedging plants already in the ground, this isn't a corporate offset scheme or token gesture. Every tree is planted by the people who'll benefit from it—plottolders, volunteers, committee members, and local residents working together to transform their sites into thriving ecosystems.

The impact multiplies over time. These trees will sequester tonnes of carbon annually, provide habitat for birds and pollinators, cool urban microclimates, and create the kind of mature green infrastructure that takes decades to develop—all while remaining in community ownership. The Community Canopy transforms allotment sites from functional growing spaces into multi-layered ecosystems that deliver year-round environmental and social value.

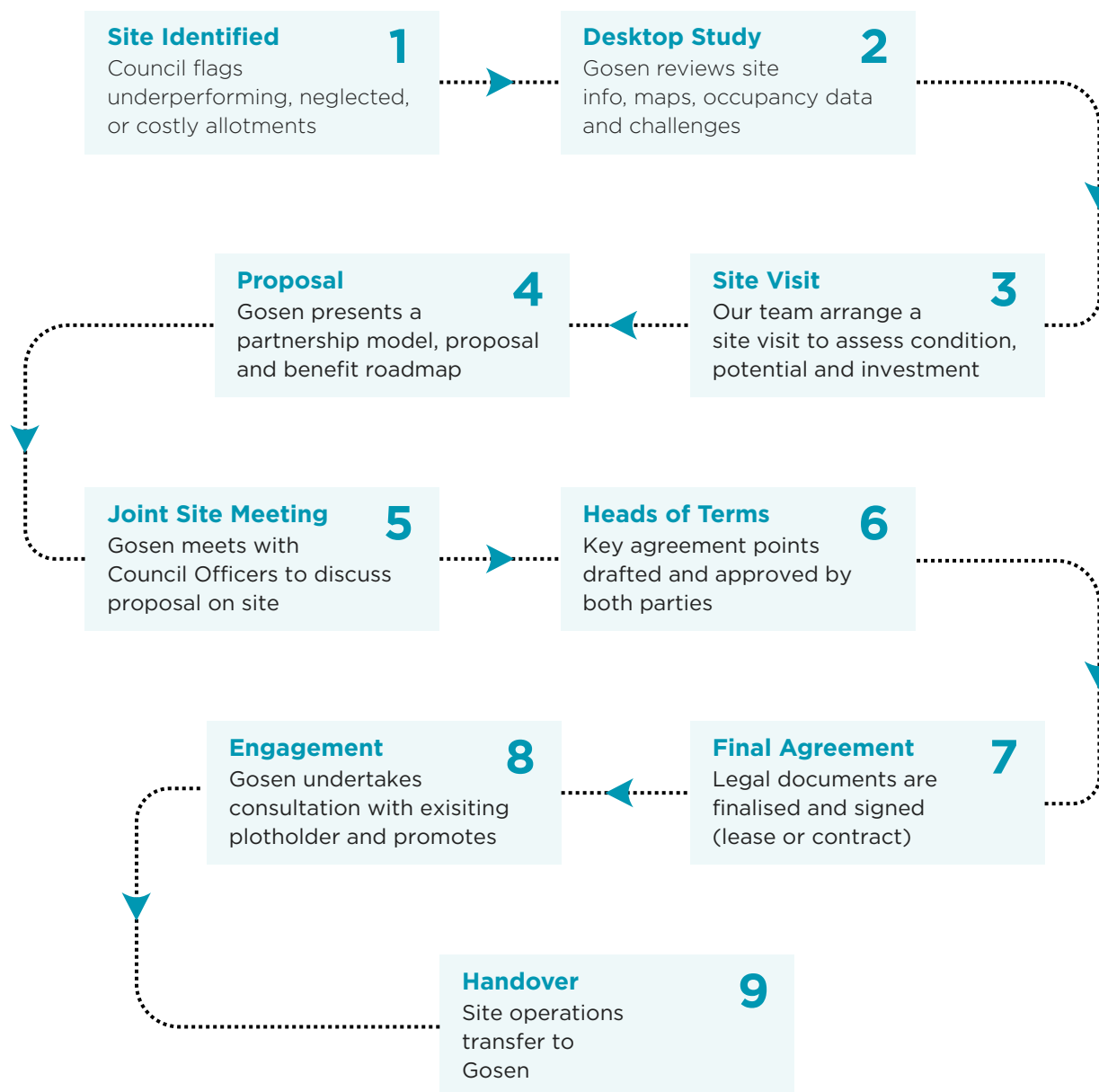
Our environmental programme includes:

- Wildflower meadows for pollinators
- Hedgehog highways and bug hotels
- Composting systems to eliminate green waste
- Rainwater harvesting reducing mains water use by 40%
- Native hedgerow restoration
- Chemical-free growing education

# The Partnership Process

Working with Gosen is straightforward and risk-free. From initial conversation to site handover takes just 8-12 weeks, with minimal council involvement. We handle assessments, proposals, legal documentation, and community engagement—you maintain oversight and make final decisions at key stages.

From conversation to transformation in under three months—with zero council cost, zero staff burden, and zero risk. While we handle assessments, community engagement, and investment, you maintain control at every decision point. The entire process is designed around one principle: making it as easy as possible for councils to say yes to transformation. We succeed only when sites thrive and councils are genuinely satisfied with the partnership. That alignment of interests is what makes this work.





## A Quick Self Assessment

Most councils know their allotment sites face challenges—but the full extent often stays hidden beneath competing priorities and day-to-day pressures. This honest assessment takes two minutes. Tick the statements that apply to your sites.

### 0-3 boxes ticked

Your sites are performing well. Maintain current management but consider professional partnership for future growth or expansion.

### 4-7 boxes ticked

Warning signs are present. Consider exploring partnership options before challenges escalate. Early intervention prevents bigger problems.

### 8-12 boxes ticked

Significant challenges requiring attention. Devolved management could transform your situation quickly and cost-effectively.

### 13+ boxes ticked

Urgent intervention needed. Every day of delay increases risk and cost. Let's talk immediately about rapid transformation options.

- ☐ Our allotment occupancy is below 85%
- ☐ We have waiting lists exceeding 2 years
- ☐ We receive regular complaints about site conditions
- ☐ Fly-tipping and antisocial behaviour are ongoing problems
- ☐ Staff spend 10+ hours per month on allotment admin
- ☐ We can't respond to maintenance issues within a week
- ☐ Our approach is reactive
- ☐ We're uncertain if all sites meet current H&S standards
- ☐ We worry about our liability exposure
- ☐ Neglected sites create reputational risk
- ☐ Our allotments don't actively feature in corporate strategy
- ☐ We can't evidence the community/environmental benefit
- ☐ We're not confident we're meeting statutory obligations
- ☐ We couldn't easily respond to demand for more provision
- ☐ Allotments feel like a legacy obligation
- ☐ In 5 years, our sites will likely be in worse condition
- ☐ We're managing decline, not growth
- ☐ Current trajectory leads to disposal or abandonment
- ☐ We lack the resources to turn sites into showcase assets
- ☐ If nothing changes, the problems will only get worse

# Your Questions Answered

## What happens to statutory allotment sites?

Statutory sites remain protected under the Allotments Acts 1922-1950. Our partnerships typically focus on non-statutory sites, though statutory sites can be included under management contracts where councils retain greater control. All legal protections remain in place regardless of management model.

## Can the council terminate the agreement?

Yes. All agreements include termination clauses with notice periods (typically 6-12 months for management contracts, longer for leases). Break clauses can be negotiated for specific circumstances. Councils retain ultimate control and can resume direct management if needed.

## Who is liable if someone has an accident on site?

Gosen assumes full public liability insurance and legal responsibility for site safety under lease and management agreements. The council is indemnified against claims arising from site operations.

## Will existing plotholders lose their plots?

No. Existing tenancies are protected and honored. We engage with all current plotholders before and during handover, explaining changes and answering concerns. Most find management improves under professional oversight—better maintenance, clearer communication, responsive issue resolution.

## Are we meeting our statutory obligations under this model?

Yes. All statutory obligations continue to be met—operationally by Gosen, with council oversight. The legal responsibility remains clear and documented. We ensure full compliance with all relevant legislation.

## Where does the money go?

Plot fees cover site operations: maintenance, improvements, staff costs, insurance, utilities, and community programmes. We operate sustainably—generating modest returns that allow us to invest in growth, take on more challenging sites, and maintain professional standards.

## How do you make this financially viable?

Specialist focus, economies of scale, and professional management systems. We manage multiple sites efficiently, achieve higher occupancy through active marketing, collect fees more effectively, and reinvest strategically in improvements that increase site value.

## Will plot fees increase significantly?

Fees are set competitively and fairly, typically aligned with local authority rates. Any increases are phased, transparent, and justified by improvements delivered. We balance commercial viability with accessibility, offering concessions for low-income households, seniors, and disabled plotholders where appropriate.

## What if Gosen goes insolvent?

The land remains council-owned. Partnership agreements include contingency provisions for insolvency, ensuring plotholders are protected and councils can resume management. Insurance bonds can be required for additional protection.

## What costs might councils still face?

Minimal to none. Legal costs for reviewing agreements (standard due diligence). Potential minimal officer time for quarterly reviews. No ongoing operational, maintenance, or management costs.

**How long does the handover process take?**

Typically 8-12 weeks from initial agreement to operational handover. This includes due diligence, legal documentation, plotholder consultation, and transition planning. We manage the process to minimize disruption and accommodate council timelines.

**What about sites with existing problems?**

These are exactly the situations where professional management adds most value. We have experience resolving disputes, recovering arrears, and bringing derelict plots back into use. Problem sites often see the most dramatic improvements under dedicated management.

**How do you engage with existing associations?**

We actively partner with existing committees and associations where they exist. Many continue running social events, seed swaps, and community activities while we handle administration and maintenance. We see plotholders as partners—their knowledge and commitment are invaluable.

**What happens to council staff currently managing sites?**

Typically, limited staff time is dedicated to allotments (spread across other duties). This time is freed for other priorities. We've never encountered a situation where job losses resulted—staff are redeployed to other areas needing capacity.

**How do you handle waiting lists?**

We inherit existing council waiting lists and process them fairly using date-of-registration priority. Modern online systems make this transparent and efficient. Our higher turnover and reclamation of fallow plots means waiting lists reduce faster.

**Will the community character change?**

Our goal is to enhance, not replace, community character. Existing plotholders remain, committees often continue social functions, and we invest in facilities that strengthen community connection. Sites become more active and welcoming, not less.

**What about people who can't afford increased fees?**

We offer concessions for those facing financial hardship, disabilities, or pensioners. Accessibility matters to us—these sites serve communities, and pricing must reflect that responsibility.

**Are you a private company?**

Yes, we're a for-profit social enterprise. We generate sustainable returns through efficient management while delivering measurable social and environmental value. Our success depends on thriving communities and satisfied councils—profit and impact align rather than conflict. The alternative is often continued decline or disposal.

**How is this different from privatization?**

Councils retain ownership. The land never leaves public hands. We're contracted service providers, not buyers. At the end of agreements, sites return fully improved. This is professional management, not asset disposal.

**What guarantees do we have about long-term commitment?**

Long-term agreements (10-30 years) give us security to invest substantially. Our business model depends on successful, thriving sites—we have every incentive to maintain high standards. Performance metrics and oversight ensure accountability.

