

# Green-fingered Monks Eleigh residents urged to take an allotment

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Angela Forrest, one of the few Monks Eleigh allotment holders

While councils all over the country are being urged to cut the size of allotment plots to accommodate the ever-expanding waiting list of potential growers, one village in Suffolk is facing the opposite problem.

Garden guru and former *Ground Force* presenter, Charlie Dimmock, recently suggested in a gardening magazine that traditional 250sq m allotment plots – originally intended to provide enough food to feed a family of four – should be divided into quarters to reduce waiting lists and provide more manageable plots for today's busy modern gardener.

However, the allotment committee in Monks Eleigh, near Lavenham, has vacant plots and is struggling to find people willing to take them on, despite the low annual rental fee of just £15.

Secretary of the allotment committee, Jacques Forrest, who with his wife Angela has tended one of the plots for the past 15 years, said: “We used to have 12 full-sized allotments but we gave six of those back to the landowner because no-one was using them. Of the remaining six, only three are being used.

“In the spring, the parish council spent a lot of money turning them back into cultivated pieces of land. A couple of people paid the rent but we haven’t seen them since.”

According to Mr Forrest, a number of factors could be deterring potential green-fingered members of the community from committing to an allotment. He said TV gardening shows with beautifully manicured plots, managed by an army of ‘off camera’ extras, gave people an unrealistic idea of how much hard work is involved in creating and maintaining a vegetable garden.

He continued: “Every time we see Monty Don going into his garden, it looks immaculate but you don’t get a garden like that without a lot of hard work.

“The site owners in Monks Eleigh don’t want us to have sheds or buildings on the allotments and there isn’t a tap up there for water so maybe that is putting people off. But it is on a bed of clay and there are springs up the hill so it doesn’t need too much watering.”

Mr Forrest, who heartily recommends allotment growing, said the committee would be willing to subdivide the plots into thirds or quarters to attract tenants.

He added: “Having an allotment is a great way of getting out into the fresh air and it’s good exercise. Any vegetables you grow taste so much better than the produce you buy in the shops because you can get it from the garden to the pan in less than an hour.”

Meanwhile by contrast in Sudbury, town clerk Jacqui Howells said allotments had been cut into halves or thirds to reduce the waiting list, which at one time had 60 people on it. She added: “Although the allotments were traditionally used to feed whole families, gardening is more of a healthy pastime now so gardeners don’t need such big plots.”

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Monks Eleigh allotments can email [jwforrest@talk21.com](mailto:jwforrest@talk21.com)