



## Allotment Gardens Guidance Document

### I. Overview

Allotments provide a source of fresh food, healthy outdoor exercise and social interaction and can benefit all groups in society by providing a link to nature. Allotment gardening addresses all 3 aspects of well-being - social, economic and environmental.

Whilst managing an allotment plot can be extremely rewarding, it requires a significant commitment of time and effort to ensure the plot is in a suitable condition throughout the year. During the planting and growing seasons this will require much more time than during the winter months.

The aim of this document is to assist tenants in understanding the approach taken by the Parish Council in ensuring that allotment plots are kept to an acceptable standard.

It can be hard work, especially at the beginning. It is important to be realistic about the amount of time you can commit to your plot. Once in good condition a general rule-of-thumb is that an allotment requires about one hour per week per 25 sq. metres. This means for the largest plots on the Hunter Park site, you'll need to spend, on average, ten hours a week working your plot to keep it in good condition from about April to October, the smallest plot would require two hours a week.

You will have to visit during winter months too to keep an eye on your plot even if no winter crops are planted. Once your crops start to grow, the necessary weeding, watering and harvesting are more of a pleasure than hard work.

There are long waiting lists and more demand than supply of allotments in Twyford so you must use your plot, underuse is an unfair waste of a scarce resource. The Parish Council will try to ensure that tenants do not take on more land than they can cultivate and anyone not actively cultivating their plot may be asked to vacate it.

## 2. Tenancy Agreement

The tenancy agreement for each allotment garden (plot) sets out the expected requirements from the tenant. These include:

- The allotment is mainly for the production of vegetable or fruit crops
- The allotment garden should be kept clean, free from weeds, diseased or harmful plants and pests and to retain the existing topsoil, keeping it in a good state of cultivation.
- The allotment garden must be clear and in a good state of preparation for cultivation. This clause does not apply during the first three months of a Tenancy. As a guide, between the months of April and September, at least 75% of each allotment garden should be cultivated.

## 3. What does cultivation mean?

The Parish Council's definition of cultivation is growing plants that have uses, including edible crops (vegetables, soft fruits, herbs), ornamental flowers and green manures. The majority of each plot should be for the production of vegetable or fruit crops.

Full Cultivation has several states through the cycle of each year:

- The plot is in readiness for growing.
- The plot is well stocked with growing produce relevant to the time of the year.
- The plot is in the process of being prepared for the allowable crops or season.

## 4. How much of the plot requires cultivation?

The cultivated area means the area which is being prepared and subsequently planted with crops, namely fruit and vegetables or flower production. At any time the Tenant is required to have their plot in a cultivated state, to regularly dig or mulch, prune and weed not less than 75% of this total area. Compost bins, glass houses, cloches, water butts, polytunnels and fruit cages are also included within the cultivated area.

A maximum of 25% of the allotment area is allowed for grass paths, shed space and/or a seating area. Areas of lawn or meadow/wildflowers are not included within the cultivated area and should not exceed 10% of the total plot. Plots must be cropped and harvested.

It is not sufficient to simply clear weeds without using the area to produce crops and flowers. Any such plots are considered uncultivated and likely result in a breach of tenancy. A good rule of thumb is that if there are more weeds than cultivated plants, then the rule is being broken and action is required.

## 5. Inspections

Inspections are carried out by the Parish Council on a regular basis - typically every two months during the growing season, but do take place all year round. The following are examples of observations that will be made during inspections:

- Is the majority of the plot is being cultivated and cropped? Have large areas have been left unworked?
- At mid-summer, most of the plot should be used for growing allowable crops. Plots mostly covered, for example with plastic sheeting, are not considered to be cultivated.
- Are there uncontrolled areas of perennial weeds such as couch grass, ground elder, brambles, nettles and unmanaged grass?
- Are the internal and adjacent communal grass paths mowed and trimmed.
- No large areas of black plastic sheeting covering the ground.
- Unauthorised structures.
- General tidiness of the plot and structures.

At each inspection, the Parish Council would expect to see each plot in a state relevant to the season as follows:

In the main growing season:

- Fruit, vegetables or flowers
- Lawn and grass paths mowed and trimmed
- No weeds going to seed
- No brambles or couch grass creeping around the plot

In the winter months:

- The above (but obviously less fruit, vegetables and flowers)
- Beds dug over ready for the winter frost
- Or if no dig methods are being used - a clean bed with no weeds
- Green manures being grown
- Growing areas being prepared

## **6. New Tenants**

New Tenants have a 3 month grace period without inspection, after which they are expected to have at least 75% of their plot cultivated

## **7. Communication with Tenants**

**Stage 1** Following an inspection, the Parish Council will make informal contact, normally by email, with any tenants whose plots are considered not to be in a condition expected for the time of year, and potentially in breach of the Tenancy Agreement, and understand why this is in the case.

**Stage 2** Generally, there would be an expectation that there will be an improvement in the situation by the time of the next inspection.

If this is not the case, then a Final Warning letter will be sent outlining the issue(s) and giving the Tenant 4 weeks to rectify the issue(s) specified.

**Stage 3** If no significant improvement is seen to have been taken place, the Tenant will be issued a Notice to Terminate informing them that the Tenancy Agreement has been Terminated and the plot must be vacated.

If a Tenant has already been issued a Final Warning letter in the current or previous allotment year, that is to say since the 1<sup>st</sup> April the previous calendar year, then a further failure to comply with Tenancy Agreement may lead to an immediate Notice to Terminate being issued.

Appeals are only accepted in writing and must be submitted within the first 14 days of the date of the Final Warning letter.

## **8. Change in Circumstances**

The Council recognises that every tenant has their own personal circumstances that impact on and can influence their ability to attain these standards and will take all representations into account before determining any course of action.

The Council will take into account exceptional circumstance such as ill health and bereavement if cultivation standards are not met. Tenants are advised to notify the Council as soon as these circumstances occur, so that these representations can be taken into account during inspections.

In certain situations, a co-worker may be nominated by the Tenant to temporarily cultivate the plot during this time, with prior written consent from the Council. The co-worker will not however be entitled to take on the tenancy of the said allotment garden should the original Tenant surrender it, unless their name is at the top of the waiting list.

In instances where a Tenant is struggling to maintain a plot, it may be possible to avoid termination of the tenancy if the Tenant gives up part of their plot which can be let to others by the Council. Prior written consent from the Council is required for any Tenant considering this and it should be noted that not all plots are suitable for sub-division.