

The allotment tenants' handbook

This guide is provided for anyone who currently has an allotment garden or has an interest in becoming an allotment tenant.

It provides a summary of many of the important details in our tenancy agreements and aims to answer any queries that might arise.

If you can't find what you are looking for in this guide please contact us and we will do our best to answer your queries.

What is an allotment?

An allotment garden is an area of land designated for the growing of vegetables, fruit or flowers and may be used to keep some livestock too. It can be used for growing for you and your family but should not be used for any business purpose.

Allotment gardening can be a very rewarding pastime and can make a valuable contribution to the quality and health of people's lives. They are also important as recreational assets and can be a good means of social activity.

How big are they?

Our plot sizes vary but are usually about 250 sq metres which has been provided by the council for rent.

Who can have an allotment?

Anyone who is over 18 and lives within Sefton can apply for an allotment garden. We regret we do not offer allotments to persons who do not reside in the borough, however if you are a tenant and later move from the borough there is no obligation to surrender it.

Are plots available?

This varies from site to site, generally speaking there is a bigger demand for allotments in the north of the borough than for sites in the south of Sefton. Therefore you can expect to wait for an allotment in Crosby and Southport. Vacancies are currently available in Bootle.

How do you manage waiting lists?

If there is a waiting list, allotments will be allocated in date order to the person who has been waiting the longest.

What can I grow?

Allotment gardeners most commonly grow vegetables, some tenants grow fruit and flowers. Allotments may be used as a leisure garden.

What animals can I keep?

Chickens and rabbits are allowed. Sometimes tenants seek to have bees. These are permitted but we ask you advise us in advance of where hives will be located and to join a body that encourage and support members following good practice.

Cockerels are not permitted to be kept on allotments.

What areas are the Council responsible for?

We are responsible for perimeter fences, entrance gates and internal communal spaces. Maintenance of internal fencing, sheds, greenhouses and the plot is the allotment holder's responsibility.

What is expected of tenants?

There are around 1,700 allotment tenants, some on Council managed sites and others on sites managed by Allotment Associations under delegated self-management agreements.

In all cases there is an expectation about what people can and cannot do on allotments and this is explained in our tenancy agreement.

It is up to individuals to choose how to work their allotment plot but there is an expectancy you will visit and work to maintain it to a reasonable standard. We encourage tenants to fully cultivate their allotment and enjoy the benefits of all that hard work.

The most frequent problem occurs is when tenants fail to maintain the plot to a reasonable standard. Please do not leave your plot to deteriorate as this may affect other tenants.

Please respect other allotment gardeners and remember you have a duty of care to each other and also visitors to the allotment site.

When you sign your tenancy agreement you are agreeing to take on the legal responsibility for land. You are agreeing to abide by the conditions in the agreement.

Will the Council help promote allotments?

Yes, we use the Councils social media platforms and press releases to raise awareness of allotments.

I have a disability what help might there be?

Allotments are a physically demanding activity and prospective tenants are asked to consider the ability they will have to tend to allotments. The Council is always open to discussing how plots may be adapted to assist people with mobility needs and encourage the establishment of raised beds.

The 'Green Gyms' is an initiative that supports people wanting to help with growing vegetables in a communal shared space with raised beds and the support of others. A Green Gym scheme operates at Queensway Allotments. There you can join a cheerful group of all ages and abilities, do a bit of gardening, have a chat, share the produce and perhaps make new friends. Don't be put off by the word "Gym" – this is about gardening and getting some gentle exercise, rather than pumping iron!

Telephone numbers for the Green Gym are 07815151006 or 07930 994911

Are there toilets on site?

Few allotment sites have toilets on site and this will be one matter you will need to consider. Currently only Dunningsbridge Road and Queensway allotment sites have toilets on site.

Are there Allotment Associations I can join?

Some allotment sites have Allotment Associations and you might well wish to join in with their activities. Allotment Associations on some sites even lease the site from the Council, directly placing tenants in charge of decisions like allocation plots.

Do Allotment Associations manage allotments?

Currently seven of the fourteen sites in Sefton are managed by Allotment Associations under a lease with the Council. A lease devolves responsibility from us to the Association meaning the Association is the tenants landlord.

This handbook explains the rules relating to Council managed sites, however with the exception of some variations much of what is contained in this handbook is likely to also apply to leased sites.

What do I do if I have a problem with an Association?

Allotment Associations are community groups, the Council does not run these groups and the only powers we have are contained within their leases. In the first instance if you are unhappy with decisions taken by the Allotment Association please refer queries in the first instance to their Secretary.

Contacting us

If you need information or have an enquiry about allotments please call: 0151 934 2943 or e-mail allotments@sefton.gov.uk

Here are some important matters in our tenancy agreement

People seeking an allotment should in particular consider if these things are acceptable before you seek to become a tenant.

Subletting and sharing the allotment

Only one person will be the tenant at one address. Subletting is strictly not allowed, although you may have family and friends helping you undertake your work. Schools and community groups can take up a plot but we will expect a named contact who will lead and oversee any work and that person will be our tenant.

If you decide to give up your garden, you must not pass it on to your friend directly. You must let us know you intend to give up your allotment and it will be allocated to the next person on the waiting list.

Trees

You must not remove or prune trees other than fruit trees unless we have given our agreement. If a tree is causing you difficulty, please contact us. We will inspect the tree and deal with the problem if possible.

Caring for your allotment garden

The main requirement of your agreement is to keep your garden or gardens cultivated and tidy by removing litter and rubbish, and controlling weeds regularly so they do not seed and cause problems for other tenants.

If you cannot manage to cultivate your entire garden, it is acceptable, as a temporary measure to mulch part of it with polythene sheeting or organic mulch to keep the weeds down.

Do not use carpet, as they down they release harmful chemicals into the soil and causing pollution.

Do not stockpile timber, sheeting, newspapers or other materials as they may become a hazard and also a breeding ground for rodents.

Not meeting acceptable standards

Your garden will be inspected from time to time and if not cultivated or if we think there is a breach of the agreement we will write to you and ask you to bring the plot up to the required standard within a reasonable timescale.

If you don't bring your garden up to standard within the timescale stated your tenancy may be terminated.

If you have temporary problems please let us know. Under certain circumstances we may be able to offer assistance and we do understand that people can become ill. Its best to tell us, please don't wait for us to issue notices to you.

Bringing composts and manure onto the site

Tenants may bring green waste such as hedge clippings, grass clippings and weeds onto their garden for making into compost for use on their garden.

Similarly gardeners can arrange for deliveries of manure. However, you must not bring onto site more material than you can use during the year.

Cover fresh manure and compost heaps with a tarpaulin or plastic sheeting to help lessen the problems of strong smells and flies.

Delivered manure should be moved on to your allotment garden within 24 hours of delivery.

Bringing other things onto site.

Bringing waste onto site to dispose at the allotments is strictly not permitted, in particular hazardous waste like asbestos is against the rules.

Only bring things into site if you are confident that one day, if you end your tenancy, it can be moved off site and will go with you.

Removing things from site.

We hope you will be removing your fresh crops but other than this please make sure you remove from site any waste you generate.

Watering your crops

Not all sites have water and where it is provided the cost of it is shared between tenants. The Council recharge based on the consumption Water Plus indicates has been made.

Water is a precious commodity, please use it sparingly and consider other allotment tenants when watering your plot. Follow these simple guidelines to sensible watering:

- If other tap sharers are waiting, limit your watering to half an hour. Don't leave hoses running when you are not on the allotment site.
- Never leave hoses running overnight.
- Remember that hosepipe bans imposed by the water companies apply to allotment gardeners and they can fine you for ignoring a ban.

Change of address

Please let us know your new email, phone number and address if you change them, so we can update your records.

This is important as we will continue to write to you at your last known address. If for example your rent invoice does not reach you and we do not receive payment, we will assume you have given up your garden. You could even lose your allotment.

Sheds and greenhouses

You cannot build sheds and greenhouses unless you have our written permission.

Buildings must be within your garden boundary and not obstruct paths between gardens.

Sheds and greenhouses should be removed by you at the end of your tenancy; they may only be left if you agree with us or the incoming tenant. Should the shed or greenhouse remain on site after the tenancy ends it will become our property or the next tenant.

Soil and minerals

You must not take away or sell soil, earth, sand and gravel from the allotment site.

Right of entry

The council may enter, inspect and carry out maintenance work on your allotment garden without notice. For example if there is a burst water pipe or damaged fence to our boundary.

Either the council or private landowners in the bordering properties own the boundary fences of the allotment site. You must not move or damage any fences. In particular please do not pile rubbish against fences as this can cause them to lean and rot.

Plots may be fenced; however, you must use suitable materials. In particular, you must not use barbed wire or anything which may leave sharp edges. Please also avoid brightly coloured materials and take care not to obstruct pathways.

Disposal of plot waste

We would ask each gardener to consider composting or recycling as an alternative to disposal.

You must not deposit or allow anyone else to deposit rubbish anywhere on the allotment site. This includes the hedges and ditches around the allotment site and unused allotment gardens.

Creating smoke can cause a nuisance and be an offence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Allowing smoke to drift over nearby roads may also lead to prosecution under the Highways (Amendment) Act 1986 if it endangers traffic.

Remember that smoke from fires can be annoying to neighbours, ruining their enjoyment of their gardens and preventing them from opening windows and hanging out their washing.

Bonfires are not permitted but we understand that burning diseased plants and other dry material may sometimes be the best option so discuss this with us as we must avoid causing nuisance. Pick a time when it is not likely to inconvenience neighbours. You must not burn green or damp materials that will cause smoke. Bringing rubbish in to burn is not allowed. Never leave fires unattended!

Security

You must keep all gates closed and locked when not in use. This prevents trespass and illegal tipping. Visitors to the site must be accompanied by the tenant or his / her family.

Your rent

As a tenant you agree to pay the yearly rent in advance at the rate set by the council. Rent and other charges are issued to tenants on 1 April each year. We will also charge you for the consumption of utilities for the site, based on a proportioned share.

Giving up your garden

When you decide you no longer want your allotment garden please let us know in writing. This will end your agreement. Please do not wait until we invoice you for the rent.

By letting us know early, we are able to arrange to have your garden taken over as soon as you stop working it. This will help you make arrangements if you have sheds etc. that can be sold or passed on to the incoming gardener, to get the new tenant off to a flying start and makes sure the garden is not overgrown.

Could you not find what you were looking for in this guide?

Please let us know as we will revise this guide from time to time.

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