



High Peak Borough Council
working for our community

High Peak Borough Council Allotment Tenants' Handbook



Introduction

The benefits of allotment gardening to individuals, families and 'the environment' have come into sharper focus over recent years.

Their main function remains the production of relatively inexpensive and healthy fruit and vegetables, but at the same time they also provide an opportunity for people to exercise outdoors, learn new skills and make new friends. They can also contribute to broader environmental aims such as; reducing food miles, encouraging organic gardening practices and provide space for wildlife.

This Handbook has been produced for anyone who rents an allotment from High Peak Borough Council and should be read in conjunction with your Tenancy Agreement.

The Handbook covers the basics to get you started, health and safety issues, security, sheds, livestock you are allowed to keep and other rules and regulation.

What is an Allotment?

An allotment garden or plot is a piece of land, which can be rented by individuals for growing fruit and vegetables for personal and family use.

They vary in size and shape but in general full sized plots are usually 300 sq yards or above. Some full sized plots have been split in half and there are also a few smaller plots referred to as 'starter plots'.

Getting Started

Your plot may be in reasonable condition however quite often recently vacated plots may have been neglected by their previous tenants and will require some work to bring them up to a reasonable standard.

It's a good idea to inspect your plot before you do anything to find out the following:

- Are there any hazards which need attention?
- What kind of soil do you have?
- Which direction does the sun rise in the morning and set in the evening?
- Are any areas shaded by trees or buildings?
- How easy is access to and around the plot for watering, deliveries of compost etc?

Allotment Rules & Plot Layout

There are some basic rules in your Tenancy Agreement which you should be aware of before you plan the layout of your plot:

- 1/3 of your allotment can be used to keep either hens or rabbits up to a maximum of 12. If you want to keep other livestock you need the Council's permission. The remaining 2/3s of your plot must be used to cultivate fruit and vegetables or flowers (clauses 11 & 12).
- If you are planning to place sheds, greenhouses or other structures on your allotment you will need to get written permission from the Council (clauses 6 & 7).

- Using barb wire or any asbestos product is not permitted. If you discover some on your plot please report it to the Allotment Officer (clauses 8 & 13).

Caring for your Allotment

The most important rule in your Tenancy Agreement is to keep your allotment cultivated and tidy by controlling weeds so that they don't seed or cause a problem to other gardeners.

There are also rules requiring you to look after paths, hedges, fences and gates on the allotment and ensuring paths don't become obstructed by overgrown hedges or materials.

Dos & Don'ts of looking after your Allotment

Here are a few simple guidelines which will help you look after your allotment:

- Prepare your beds before the growing season begins by making sure they are weed free, have been cultivated and by incorporating plenty of organic material such as compost or manure. If you prepare the soil well you'll have less watering, weeding and digging to do.
- Take time over winter to plan what you want to grow the following season but remember to identify varieties that grow well in your area.
- Rotate your crops. This means growing crops in different beds from year to year. Crop rotation will limit the damage done by soil borne pests and disease.

- Start with easy to grow vegetables such as potatoes, peas, beans, onions, pumpkins etc until you gain experience.
- Keep your allotment neat and tidy and as free of weeds as possible once spring and summer arrive.
- Don't allow weeds to seed or spread and cause a nuisance to other tenants.
- We don't demand people to garden organically but reducing the amount of chemicals and pesticides used on your allotment will be good for the environment and more rewarding in the long run.
- If you can't manage to cultivate all your allotment as a temporary measure you can cover beds using polythene sheeting or organic mulches to keep the weeds down.
- Don't use rubber backed carpets as they may rot down and release harmful chemicals into the soil.
- Look after your paths, hedges, fences, gates and other boundaries.
- Don't stock pile timber, sheeting, newspapers or other materials as they may become a fire risk/hazard and will look unsightly and take up space which should be cultivated.
- Do respond to warning letters within the stated timescale or your tenancy agreement will be at risk.
- If you have a temporary problem such as illness which prevents you from looking after your allotment please let the Allotment Officer know. Under certain circumstances we may be able to offer assistance or advice.

Access to Water

Water is essential for plant health and growth.

In particular, seedlings and young plants need sufficient water until they become established, especially during the summer months and dry periods. Some sites have mains water however many do not and are reliant on tenants collecting and storing water on site.

Be Water Wise!

Here are some useful tips to help save water:

- If your site has mains water use it sparingly and only to top up your water containers.
- If you have a shed or greenhouse consider installing a length of gutter and a piece of drainpipe to collect water off the roof into containers.
- Water butts and containers need to be covered and located on stable ground to reduce the risk of accidents and evaporation.
- Don't use a hose to water plants directly & try to water early in the morning or later in the evening when the sun is less strong.
- Mulch fruit and other permanent crops with a thick layer of compost or chipped bark to conserve water in the soil. It will also prevent weed growth! With crops such as strawberries it may be possible to grow them through black polythene.
- Before you plant or sow seeds incorporate plenty of organic matter

into the soil such as garden compost or manure. This will help to conserve water and improve the general structure of the soil.

- On sandy soils grow a larger proportion of plants that thrive in drier conditions such as herbs.
- Keep on top of the weeds. If your plot is weedy they will take up water as well as your crops!

Compost & Manure

Composting not only makes sense as a way of recycling the green waste generated on your allotment it will also save you money, improve your soil and help you grow strong healthy plants.

Compost is decayed plant material and is produced by the actions of bacteria although worms and other invertebrates can contribute to the end product.

Warm, damp conditions with a supply of oxygen are perfect for making compost. If the compost is too dry, too wet or compacted then the organic processes will be stifled or stop altogether.

If you just compost one or two types of material such as grass clippings or vegetable waste the heap may be too damp or compacted. Mixing a variety of materials together is a good idea as it allows air into the heap and therefore speeds up the decay process.

Given the right conditions & right materials compost can be produced surprisingly quickly & as part of the process heat is generated which helps to kill weed seeds.

If you are composting perennial weeds make sure their roots have been destroyed and seeds heads removed or they may survive the composting process and contaminate your soil. It's not a good idea to dispose of diseased plants on your compost heap as they may also contaminate the soil. Animal products and cooked food deposited on a compost heap may attract vermin.

Plot holders may also wish to band together to arrange for deliveries of well rotted farm yard manure. If you do the manure should be moved onto your allotment plot within 24 hours of delivery and covered with a tarpaulin or plastic sheets to reduce issues of strong smells or flies.

When buying manure try to seek assurances from the supplier that the manure has not come from animals fed on grass or straw bedding treated with hormone weed killers, especially aminopyralid products. These pesticides have been linked to soil contamination on allotments causing abnormal growth in some vegetables such as potatoes, beans, peas, carrots and salad vegetables.

Safety, Security & Respect

Duty of Care

Allotments are usually safe and secure places to be however from time to time you may either spot something which is a hazard or need to report a security issue.

It is important to remember that health, safety and security is everyone's responsibility and as a tenant you need to make sure that your plot is safe and secure for you & your family. Here are a few headings and rules which will help reduce these risk:

Pesticides & Chemicals

- Handle & use pesticides with care and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Never pour pesticides into unmarked bottles or containers & make sure they are locked away when not in use.
- Use protective clothing when using chemicals and wash your hands and any splashes immediately after using them.
- Don't spray chemicals when it's breezy as they may contaminate your neighbour's plot.
- Consider the potential harm to wildlife, pets & children & never spray near ditches, rivers or ponds as the chemical may harm wildlife.
- Always dispose of your waste chemicals responsibly. Your local waste recycling centre will offer advice if you are unsure.

Personal Health

- Have a First Aid Kit handy for scratches, stings etc.
- Built up physical activity slowly if you are not used to it. If you do have a known medical condition and are concerned contact your doctor before starting work on your plot.
- Wear gloves and wash your hands, especially when handling, chemicals compost or manure. Consider having a tetanus vaccination or booster if you haven't had one for a while.
- Working outdoors in strong sunlight can result in sun burn. Use adequate sun protection or limit your time in the sun.
- Drink plenty of water if you are working hard, & especially during hot weather.

Tools & Equipment

- Make sure you know how to use tools and equipment safely. Follow manufacturer's instructions, especially when using power tools.
- If possible try not to keep power tools or fuel on your allotment.
- Always wear appropriate protective clothing such as goggles, sturdy footwear, ideally steel toe capped and gloves.

Storage of Materials & Waste

- Don't store materials on your plot unless you intend to use them immediately and always store them safely and tidily. Large quantities of materials reduce your plot size and can pose a hazard.
- Dispose of waste responsibly and recycle materials where possible either composting on site, taking it home or to your local household waste disposal site.
- Do not bring old tyres or carpets on to your plot as they may pose a hazard/contaminate the soil.
- It is an offence to leave waste material in communal areas. From time to time communal skips are ordered for people needing to dispose of large or bulky items. Please take care when filling skips and always wear gloves/sturdy footwear. Never put asbestos in a skip (see separate heading on asbestos).

Security

- A well tended plot is less likely to attract anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- Keep your site and plot secure by closing/locking entrance gates after use & investing in secure fencing although remember barb wire and razor wire are not allowed.
- Keep valuable tools and equipment at home or in a secure metal shed.

- Buy the best quality padlocks you can afford for use on shed doors and windows.
- Look out for your neighbours and consider joining or forming an allotment watch scheme.
- If you are going to be alone on your allotment, let someone know where you are and carry a charged mobile phone with you.
- Local Police and other agencies may offer to security mark property. Alternatively mark/paint property with postcodes/other identifying marks.
- If you suffer any theft or vandalism report the incident to Derbyshire Police on their non emergency telephone number 101 or 999 if someone is at risk or there is an emergency.
- Let the allotment officer know about any incidents.

Asbestos

Sheds and other buildings with asbestos are still relatively common on allotments and if they are in good condition pose little risk to the public. The Council is attempting to compile a register of asbestos structures on its allotments. If you discover it or suspect it is present on your allotment please contact the Allotment Officer. They will inspect it and offer advice on how best to manage it or arrange its removal. Tenants should under no circumstance bring asbestos onto their allotment.

Children on Allotments

Allowing children to visit and work on your allotment is welcomed however it is important that they are supervised by a responsible adult. Always consider potential hazards and ways you can reduce or eliminate risk before allowing them on your allotment. In particular:

- Look out for broken glass or sharps and always make sure children wear gloves when working in the soil & wash their hands afterwards.
- Use clear plastic in buildings/ structures as an alternative to glass. Never store panes of glass or old double glazing frames on your allotment.
- Protect the tops of garden canes which can cause eye injury.
- Chemicals should be stored out of reach of children & excluded from your allotment when and immediately after pesticides have been used.
- If children are using tool and especially ones with sharp edges make sure they are supervised and taught how to use them safely.
- Cover water containers & ponds to reduce the risk of accidental drowning by young children if you have these on your allotment.
- Some parts of plants such as berries on trees and shrubs & mushrooms are poisonous, whilst other plants can be an irritant if touched. If in doubt seek advice.
- Make sure children use sun protection.

Respect for your Neighbours

One of the rules of your tenancy agreement is not to cause nuisance or annoyance. By thinking about how your actions may affect other tenants and adjacent properties it may be possible to avoid unnecessary conflict. Here are some simple tips:

- Don't allow weeds to seed or spread onto other allotments or gardens.
- Keep the paths and hedges adjacent to your allotment well maintain and never allow them to become obstructed.
- Close entrance gates immediately after use and if you bring your vehicle onto the allotment keep to the speed limits and show respect to other tenants.
- Don't dump litter or waste on communal areas and show respect and consideration when you use other communal features such as buildings, taps, and compost bays.
- Only have bonfires as a last resort and consider alternatives such as composting or taking your waste to your local Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- Smoke from bonfires and other fires can be a nuisance to people. Please consider the affect on you neighbours and follow Guidance from NSALG (separate leaflet).
- Persistent smoke nuisance can be an offence under the Environmental Protection Act.

- Please keep your dog on a lead whilst on the allotment and clean up after it.
- Please ensure your children do not cause a nuisance to other plot holders.
- Allotment holders are as varied as the local community and will have different ideas about how they want to manage their allotment. Offer advice but don't be offended if they want to do things differently.

Sheds, Greenhouses & Polytunnels

Many new tenants will wish to construct a shed for storage, greenhouses and poly-tunnels for growing seedlings, young and tender plants.

If you are considering putting up a structure on your allotment you will need written permission from the Council. At the end of your tenancy unless you have an agreement you will be expected to remove any structure you have installed.

All structures should be well built and maintained and not pose a hazard or nuisance to yourself or the public.

Livestock

Providing that 2/3s of you allotment plot is used for growing vegetables, fruit or flowers the remaining 1/3 can be used to keep up to 12 hens and or rabbits. Other types of livestock will need the written permission of the Allotment Officer and will be subject to specific conditions.

Please do your research before you consider keeping any livestock so that you are fully aware of any care, housing, welfare, health and hygiene requirements.

Please store food stuffs away from the plot or in a metal bin to discourage infestation from rats and other pests.

Try to leave your contact details with a neighbour in case of emergencies and consider how you will look after your livestock when you go on holiday or if you are unable to visit them for any length of time.

It is your responsibility to be aware and comply with any legislation relating to the keeping of livestock.

Wildlife & Pests

The types of wildlife (& pests) attracted to your allotment will vary depending on its location. Many types of birds, insects and amphibians (frogs and toads etc) prey on allotment pests such as aphids, slugs and snails.

Allotments can provide homes for these beneficial animals and tenants can encourage them by putting up nest boxes and bird feeders, creating a small wildlife pond or by growing flowers which will attract beneficial insects.

Rats and mice are attracted to waste vegetables and grain. Keeping your plot tidy and free of weeds and food debris will discourage these pests.

The Council will only offer help to control rats and mice on allotments when the infestation is likely to impact on the wider community.

Use physical barriers such as yoghurt pots around young seedlings to fend off slugs and snails or nets over brassicas to prevent the Cabbage White Butterfly laying its eggs. If you do use off the shelf products please use them sparingly and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Other environmentally friendly methods of slug and snail control include; barriers (copper tape on pots / raised beds, sheep's wool around the base of plants; biological controls such as nematode treatments & pet & wildlife friendly slug/ snail pellets based on Ferric Phosphate (not methaldehyde).

Birds will take ripe berries such as red current and strawberries. Nets can be used as a physical barrier however birds can sometimes become trapped in loose netting so inspect them regularly.

Rabbits can come off adjacent land and numbers have been increasing over recent years. They will eat a variety of vegetables and the only option may be to surround vulnerable crops or your whole allotment with rabbit proof wire netting dug a few feet into the ground. Shooting rabbits or other pests is not permitted for health and safety reasons.

Foxes will be attracted to allotments containing hens and other poultry. Make sure your fencing and housing is sturdy enough to withstand potential fox attacks.

Rules

Allotment Tenancy Agreement

When you rent an allotment you are in effect taking on responsibility for a piece of land. The Council needs to be sure that you manage this land in a responsible manner & that it will be in a fit state to rent out again to another person if you decide to give it up.

Our tenancy agreements are usually leased for a period of one year from the 1st April to 31st March. In March/April you will receive your tenancy agreement form which if you want to renew for another year will need to be signed and returned to the Council.

It is important that you read and understand the terms and conditions attached with your agreement as you will need to comply with them in order to protect your tenancy.

Rent

The rental fee you are charged takes into account the cost of managing the site and other local circumstances.

For sites directly managed by High Peak Borough Council rent invoices are usually raised and sent out in April/May for the year in advance. The invoice will explain how you can pay your rent.

The rent should be paid within the timescale explained on the invoice. If you are unable to pay the full amount in one go you should inform the Council. If you do not pay your rent within the time allowed you will be in danger of losing your allotment.

Subletting & Sharing

Sub-letting (charging others rent for the use of part or all of your plot) is not allowed and will result in your tenancy being withdrawn. You may wish to share the responsibility of looking after your plot with someone else however it is worth noting they will not have any rights to your plot if you decide to give it up.

Trading

You cannot run a business from your plot. Some allotment associations may be able to sell trade goods and surplus produce provided the proceeds are re-invested on the site.

Change of Address

If you move or your personal details change in any way please notify the Allotment Officer as soon as possible so that we can amend our records.

Giving up your Allotment

If you decide that you no longer want your allotment please let us know in writing. You will be expected to remove any property unless you have made a special arrangement and to leave the allotment in a reasonable condition so that the next tenant is not unduly affected. The Council reserves the right to charge you for any reasonable reinstatement costs if the plot is left in a poor state.

Contacting Us

You can contact the Allotment Officer by:

Post:

Allotment Officer, Town Hall, Buxton, Derbyshire, SK17 6EL

Email:

customerservices@highpeak.gov.uk marking for the attention of the Allotment Officer

Phone:

0845 129 7777 & asking for the Allotment Officer

High Peak Borough Council's Website contains information on allotments.

Follow the link below:

<http://www.highpeak.gov.uk/hp/council-services/parks-and-open-spaces/allotments>