

The really useful Allotment Tenants handbook

About this guide

This guide is provided for anyone who rents an allotment garden from Bicester Town Council.

This guide should be read in conjunction with your tenancy agreement.

This guide is not an authoritative interpretation of all applicable allotment law, but it attempts to explain your obligations under the formal agreement that is made between a tenant and Bicester Town Council.

You may have further questions, which can be asked of Bicester Town Council who will do their best to provide an answer. Contact details are provided in the guide.

The success of an allotment site is dependent on co-operation between garden tenants, allotment representatives and those responsible for the management of the site as a whole.

Allotment Holders Charter

We (the Council) promise that we will:

- Undertake the administration of allotment sites and provide access through the relevant officer for allotment holders who have queries or complaints.
- Inspect the condition of gardens and maintain suitable standards of care, issuing warnings and notices to quit as appropriate.
- Meet with allotment representatives at least twice a year to discuss any current issues
- Work closely with allotment representatives and tenants to ensure the provision of an appropriate and satisfactory allotment service.

What is an allotment?

An allotment garden is a piece of land which has been provided by the Council for rent. Sizes vary but are generally small (40 sq. m), standard (60 sq. m) or large (84 sq. m). It can be used for growing fruit and vegetables for you and your family. There are also some plots that are used for keeping chickens and rabbits.

You may not use your allotment for trade or business of any kind, camping or staying overnight.

Why would I want an allotment?

It is recognised by the Council that 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 social activity. They also provide valuable green open space important for biodiversity.

Who can have an Allotment?

Anyone who lives within the boundary of Bicester can apply for an allotment garden. Consideration to applicants outside of the Bicester boundary will only be given if the applicant lives in a parish that does not have its own allotment provision and if there is no waiting list of Bicester residents.

Application forms are available from the Bicester Town Council office or can be downloaded from the Bicester Town Council website. Current costs are also on the website.

Waiting Lists

If demand is greater than supply, we will keep a waiting list of people interested in renting an allotment garden. When a garden becomes available it will be offered to the person who has been waiting the longest.

What can I grow?

Allotment gardens may grow flowers, vegetables and fruit.

What animals can I keep?

Only hens and rabbits are allowed. Dogs and cockerels are not allowed.

Maintenance of Fences and Paths

We are responsible for maintaining the perimeter fence, main access roadways and large internal pathways. You are responsible for maintaining any internal fencing that surrounds your actual garden and the pathway to the right of your plot. If you are at all unsure, check with your site representative or call us.

Respect for other gardeners

There are over 300 Council allotment gardens in Bicester with almost as many different styles of gardening. It is up to individuals how they chose to work their garden as long as it complies with BTC standards. Traditional gardeners may cultivate the entire garden and plant rows of plants and vegetables. Others may have a different approach.

We encourage gardeners to cultivate their gardens and enjoy their gardening. Please respect other allotment gardeners and remember that you have a Duty of Care to each other and to visitors to the site.

Meetings with allotment site representatives

We will meet at least twice a year with an Allotment Working Party in order to discuss how we run the allotments, help identify the concerns of gardeners on their sites and decide how we can tackle problems together. The Working Party will consist of BTC councillors, BTC officers and allotment site representatives.

Contacting us

If you need information, have an enquiry about allotments call us on 01869 252915 , email enquiries@bicester.gov.uk or write to Bicester Town Council, The Garth, Launton Road, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6PS

Your allotment agreement

The agreement is between Bicester Town Council and you, the tenant.

When you sign the agreement, you are agreeing to take on a tenancy and to look after your garden and allotment site. You are agreeing to abide by the conditions in the agreement.

Please read your agreement and make sure that you understand your obligations before signing.

Subletting and garden sharing

You may have a private agreement to share your garden with a friend, however, you will still be the tenant.

The garden can only be held in one name at a time. The tenant is always responsible for the maintenance of the garden even if he/she chooses to share.

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

There may be certain, special circumstances when the Council may consider transferring the agreement to another name, but this will be at the Council's discretion and on application.

Problem Trees

You must not remove or prune trees unless we have given our agreement. If a tree is causing you difficulty, please contact your site representative or call us on 01869 252915. We will inspect the tree and deal with the problem if possible. The planting of trees is covered in your terms and conditions agreement.

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 that they do not seed and cause problems for other gardeners.

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.

Don't use foam backed carpet as it may rot down releasing harmful chemicals into the soil, causing pollution.

Don't stockpile timber, sheeting, newspapers or any other materials as they may become a hazard and also a breeding ground for rodents.

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 contact you and ask you to bring the plot up to the required standard within a reasonable timescale.

If you do not bring your garden up to standard within the timescale stated, your tenancy may be terminated.

If you have any problems please let BTC know and we will advise on what can be done to help. Under certain circumstances we may be able to offer assistance, and we can offer certain services for a fee, eg rotavating. We will work with the site representatives to achieve a satisfactory outcome for all parties.

Bringing composts and manure to site

Depending on the allotment site, deliveries of compost and manure are possible. Some sites have areas designated for communal use for this purpose. Enquire of your site representative what is acceptable on your site.

If you as an individual bring fresh manure to your garden, ensure that it is moved onto your allotment within 24 hours of delivery, is no more than can be used in a year and is covered to a tarpaulin or plastic sheet to lessen the problems with strong smells or insects.

Change of address

Please let us know your new address if you move house so that we can update our records. (It is useful if you could provide an email address as well)

This is important because 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 that you have given up your garden. You could lose your garden.

Sheds and structures

You cannot build sheds or any other structure unless you have our written permission to do so.

Sheds and other structures must be within your garden boundary and not obstruct paths between gardens.

Sheds and other structures should be removed by you at the end of your tenancy, and can only be left if there is agreement with the incoming tenant and BTC.

Right of Entry

Our officers and others employed by the Council may enter, inspect and carry out maintenance work on your allotment garden without notice if we need to. For example if there is a burst pipe or damaged fence on your garden.

Fences

Allotment site boundary fences are owned either by us or private landowners of the bordering properties or land. 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.

Disposal of rubbish

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 around the allotment site and unused allotment gardens.

We do not allow bonfires on any site, since this is a considerable nuisance to other users of the sites and neighbouring properties, has significant Health and Safety issues and is bad for the environment.

Repairs and maintenance

Should you require assistance for any repairs or maintenance to your allotment site ie perimeter fencing or water supplies, please telephone us on 01869 252915.

When calling, please provide the following information:

- Name of allotment site
- Nature of repair
- Contact name and telephone number and an email address if possible

Security

You must keep all gates closed and locked when not in use. This prevents trespass and illegal fly tipping.

Visitors to the site must be accompanied by the tenant or his/her family.

How the Town Council will serve statutory notices

We will serve notices in one of the following ways:

- Writing to you at the last address you have given us
- Putting the notice on the allotment notice board
- Putting the notice in a prominent place of the allotment site

Your rent

You are a tenant of Bicester Town Council and agree by signing the Agreement to pay the yearly rent in advance as set by the Town Council, either quarterly or annually. Rent and other charges are issued to tenants by 1st April each year.

How to pay

You can pay by cash or cheque at the council offices.

You can send a cheque through the post.

You can pay directly to the council's bank account. Contact us for the bank account details.

For security reasons do not send cash through the post.

Giving up your garden

When you decide that 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 to the incoming gardener, get the gardener off to a flying start and makes sure that the garden does not become overgrown.

Ending the allotment agreement

In some circumstances we can end the agreement with you or you can end the agreement in accordance with the terms of our tenancy agreement by writing to the Town Council offices at the address previously given.