

SOMERCOTES PARISH COUNCIL

Animals on Allotments Policy

Somercotes Parish Council in partnership with the Allotment Associations are keen to encourage allotment tenants to make the most of their allotment plot.

Keeping hens and/or rabbits is a way for tenants to enjoy a taste of 'the good life'. Nothing can beat the freshness of a newly laid egg and animal manure has always been used to improve soil for growing but you must not keep animals on your allotment unless you are prepared to look after their welfare needs.

This means having both the time and the know-how to do this properly.

Before you start:

If you have never kept hens or rabbits before it is important that you learn how to keep them properly.

There is plenty of information on the internet if you search under 'hen-keeping for beginners' or 'caring for rabbits'. You can also borrow books about it from the library. If you can't find what you need on the shelves, library staff will help you order books in from other Derbyshire libraries for free.

The best way to learn is from somebody who already keeps animals. People who do this well are often happy to help pass on what they have learned to new starters.

You must also look at how much keeping your chosen animal will cost. There will be the cost of buying your animals and a house and run to keep them in. Then they must have proper food, bedding, feeders and drinkers. You will need to buy disinfectant suitable for keeping your animal housing clean and products for preventing and controlling parasites. If your animal is ill you may have vets fees to pay as well. If you drive to your allotment every day to see to your animals there is the cost of fuel to consider.

It is not an excuse under animal welfare law to say that you cannot afford to look after your animals properly.

Think very hard about whether you can afford to keep them first.
There is more about animal welfare law later in this document.

Do I have time?

If you want to keep animals on your allotment you will need to be absolutely sure that you can visit them **at least once** every day. This includes weekends and bank holidays all through the year.

Twice a day is better for hens and rabbits, so that you can shut your animals in at night to keep them safe from foxes, as well as let them out when you feed them in

the morning. If the weather is very hot or very cold you must be prepared to visit **more than once** to check your animals have access to water.

Frozen water is the same as having no water at all! If you go away on holiday then you must arrange for someone else to visit your animals every day on your behalf. Keeping livestock is a big commitment and you must not start doing it if you do not think you can stick to it.

Can I keep anything else?

If a tenant wants to keep bees, they must write to the Allotment Association and Somercotes Parish Council to ask for permission.

Permission will only be given if you are an experienced bee-keeper who has passed the British Bee Keepers Association (BBA) basic exam and you hold public liability insurance (see our sheet on beekeeping).

If you want to keep any other type of livestock, you must write to the Allotment Association and ask for their written permission first.

How much of my allotment can I use for animals?

Remember that at least three quarters (75%) of your allotment must be used for growing. This only leaves a quarter (25%) of it for a shed and a greenhouse, any lawn or patio area and any animal sheds and runs.

How big can my hen house or rabbit hutch be?

If you put up housing for keeping hens and/or a hutch for keeping rabbits, the floor area **for each type of animal** kept on your plot **must not take up more than 24 square feet (2.23 square metres) altogether**. A building that measures 6ft by 4ft would have a floor area of 24 square feet.

So would two hen houses of 3ft by 4ft. Each hen house or rabbit hutch will need an outdoor run attaching to it.

Each hen must have **at least** 2 square feet of space inside the hen house and **at least** 4 square feet of space in the run. You can give **more** space but not less.

Each rabbit must have hutch space that is **at least** 6ft long by 2ft wide by 2ft tall. It will need the same amount of space in the run. You can give **more** space but not less.

Raising houses/hutches off the floor by at least 6 inches (15cm) stops rats hiding or nesting underneath. A ramp will then be needed between the house/hutch entrance and the run.

The run should be covered in wire/mesh that stops animals escaping or becoming trapped and protects them from rats, foxes and other wild animals.

For rabbits, the mesh must cover the floor of the run to stop the rabbits from digging their way out. If mesh is used for the floor of a chicken run, the gaps between the mesh must be big enough (at least 3 inches) for hens to scratch the ground to forage.

The animals you keep on your plot must always be kept for your own use and not for any business or profit.

As a guide, a point-of-lay hen might lay up to five eggs in any week, so the average family would not need more than 2 or 3 hens.

Emergency contact information

If you decide you want to keep livestock on your plot, you must fill in an emergency contact form **BEFORE** you bring any animals onto your plot. It is a condition of your tenancy with us in the new allotment tenancy agreement. We must have a telephone number, or numbers, where we are able to contact you at any time or at least leave a message.

You are responsible in law for looking after the needs of your animals. It is a good idea to give these numbers to the plot holders next to you so they can let you know straightaway if they notice any problems with your animals.

If we try to contact you to tell you your animals are at risk of danger or have escaped, we will expect you to act quickly to sort things out. We are aware that phone numbers change but it is your responsibility to keep these contact numbers up to date. If we cannot contact you in an emergency because you have not told us about changes to your emergency contact numbers, we will ask you to remove your animals from our site.

Also, if we cannot contact you and your animal needs urgent veterinary treatment, we will pass on the cost of the treatment to you for payment.

You will also need to tell us how many of each kind of animal you are keeping on your allotment on the emergency contact form and tell us quickly about any changes to those numbers.

What allotment law says about keeping hens and rabbits.

Although the 1950 Allotment Act allows plot holders to keep hens and rabbits, it also says that they must **not** be kept in a way that makes them “prejudicial (harmful) to health or a nuisance”.

This means anything that you do - or **don't** do - that makes it likely that your animals will spread disease to other animals or people or where they cause a problem of smell, noise or damage to other tenants and their plots. If we feel that there is a problem with the way you keep your animals we can come onto your plot **at any time** to investigate. If you do not put things right after we have asked you to, then we will write to you and ask you to remove your animals from the allotment site.

Animal Welfare Act 2006

This law is mentioned in Paragraph 6 of the new allotment tenancy agreement. It makes the owner responsible in law for looking after the needs of their animals. It says that the owner must take all reasonable steps to make sure that their animals have :

- a suitable environment (place to live)
- a suitable diet
- the chance to show normal patterns of behaviour
- a place to live with, or apart from, animals of their own kind (as needed)
- protection from pain, injury, suffering and disease

Anyone who is cruel to an animal, or does not look after its welfare needs, may be banned from owning animals, fined up to £20,000 and/or sent to prison. If we have good reason to believe that you have failed to meet the needs of animals kept on your allotment, we may take steps to end your tenancy.

Meeting your animals' welfare needs

Generally speaking, if you take proper care of your allotment animals, they will be happy and healthy and give you few problems. The list on the next page contains some of the things you will need to think about before you bring livestock onto your plot.

All animals need:-

- A suitable environment (place to live)
- Housing that is warm and dry that they can use at any time (except when being cleaned out).
- Enough space in the house so that all the animals kept together can get into it at the same time with room to lie down or roost. They also need plenty of clean dry bedding for them to do this comfortably.
- Shelter that gives protection from the weather including shade in summer and warmth in winter.
- Ventilation and room for air to move around the house without the animals being in a draught.
- A suitable diet
- To have access at all times to clean fresh drinking water. This must be changed at least once every day (see 'Do I have time?', page 1) and containers cleaned daily.
- Enough food of the right sort for their kind every day to keep them well fed and in good health.
- Food must be fed from feeders that are cleaned every day. Feed or water provided outside should be sheltered to keep it clean and dry and must be kept out of the reach of rats and other wild animals.
- Any food stored on the plot must be kept clean and dry and in a metal container with a lid so that rats Animals of Allotments Policy Page 4 of 5 and other wild animals cannot get to it.

- Any spilled food must be cleaned up immediately so that rats and other pests are not attracted.
- The chance to show normal behaviour patterns
- A place to live that allows animals to behave in a natural way. There must also be room for the animals to move about easily and space for feeding/drinking, a toilet area, sleeping and to hide away.
- Access to daylight every day during daylight hours.
- A place to live with, or apart from, other animals (as needed)
- Companions of their own kind. Rabbits, hens and bees are all creatures that naturally live in groups. They will become stressed, bored and lonely on their own.
- The only time an animal should be kept apart from others is if it is sick or has been injured by others that share a house/hutch. It is cruel to leave an animal housed with others that are attacking it.
- Protection from pain, injury, suffering and disease
- To be checked every day for signs of ill health or disease.
- Well kept housing with no sharp edges or corners on which animals could be injured
- Vaccination each year carried out by a vet.
- Weekly cleaning and disinfection of animal housing.
- Care taken to prevent or treat parasites such as fleas, worms, lice and mites on animals or in their housing.
- Immediate treatment by a vet if an animal is injured or suffering.

Planning for fire and flood

Plot holders who keep animals should make a plan for what they will do to prevent/deal with:

Fire

All materials that catch light easily, like straw, hay, waste bedding, empty bags, etc must be stored well away from where animals are kept. A way of controlling any small fire - a bucket of water or dry sand -should be kept close to the run. The water should be kept topped up and covered to prevent water loss, the sand should be covered to keep it dry.

Flood

Some allotment sites can be affected by flooding. You should have a safe place in mind to move your animals to if your allotment is affected.

Outbreak of disease

From time to time there can be outbreaks of animal diseases that affect your area or even the whole country. The diseases can be quickly passed on by contact and through the air. If you keep hens, even one or two, it is a good idea to register with the Great Britain Poultry Register. Then, if there is an outbreak of disease, you will be contacted to tell you about it and be given advice on how to deal with it quickly.

When your tenancy ends

When your tenancy with us ends (and however it ends) you must remove any animal housing that **you have used** on your plot while you have been a tenant. This means both any housing and runs that you have put up yourself or any that were on your plot when your tenancy began. This is to reduce the risk of disease being passed on. If buildings/runs are not removed by the tenant, the Allotments Association can charge the cost of removing them to the tenant.

Information sheets are available that give more information about caring for the different kinds of animals we allow on our allotments. Please see the links below:

Hens/Pullets:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732227/code-of-practice-welfare-of-laying-hens-pullets.](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732227/code-of-practice-welfare-of-laying-hens-pullets)

Rabbits:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rabbits-on-farm-welfare/caring-for-rabbits>