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Plot Inspections Policy

Reading Road Allotments

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1. Introduction

Woodley Town Council is committed to the effective management, safety, and sustainability of its allotment site at Reading Road. This policy sets out the Council's approach to regular inspections, compliance monitoring, and the promotion of good plot cultivation. This document will be used by officers to develop fair and objective enforcement of site rules for all tenants, along with clear guidance and transparency of the processes which the Council undertake to achieve this end.

2. Legal and Policy Context

Allotments Acts 1908 – 1950

Law & Property Act 1925

Local Government Act 1972

Lease Agreement of the site from Reading Borough Council

Tenancy Agreement for tenants

3. Aims and Objectives

Ensure compliance with the Tenancy Agreement and site policies

Promote good levels of cultivation

Allow effective re-allocation of unused plots to new tenants

Establish effective and environmentally responsible waste management across the site

Safeguard the long-term use of the land as an allotment site

Identify health and safety hazards on site

4. Inspection Types & Frequency

Inspection Type	Frequency	Purpose
Routine site inspections	Two or three times a year	Ensure good cultivation and adherence with the Tenancy Agreement
Ad-hoc inspections	As required	Investigating complaints, incidents and general compliance
Follow-up inspections	As required following improvement notices	Ensuring satisfactory compliance to remedial action
End of tenancy inspections	Upon notification of end of tenancy	Ensuring the plot is returned to the Council in a satisfactory state and free of waste material

5. Advance Notification

The Council will provide tenants with a minimum 14-day notice period prior to routine site inspections, via an email to all applicable tenants, and posted on the Allotments notice board

Due to the responsive nature of ad-hoc inspections, no advance notification will be provided to tenants

6. Inspection Team

Woodley Town Council work alongside the Woodley Allotments Tenants Association (WATA), to undertake many of the on-site duties including plot inspections. Routine site inspections may be carried out by one individual, however follow up inspections which may result in the termination of any Tenancy will take place by a minimum of two inspectors, with the recommendation for further action to be sought being unanimous.

7. Inspection Criteria

During routine inspections, inspectors will be primarily ensuring that the plot is being cultivated to a satisfactory level, in accordance with the Tenancy Agreement, and monitor

for any other evidence of non-compliance. Inspectors will use the below criteria when inspecting plots, and report their findings to Woodley Town Council.

At least 25% cultivation of crops for plots within three months of the start of Tenancy

At least 50% cultivation of crops for plots within six months of the start of Tenancy

At least 70% cultivation of crops for plots within one year of the start of Tenancy

Noxious weeds being suppressed and ultimately removed

No carpet, tyres, glass, concrete or other non-compliant material on the allotment

No unauthorised livestock

Plot is clear of waste, and superfluous material not associated with usual allotment activities

No unauthorised structures or structures which are damaged, un-safe or non-compliant

Plot boundary pathways are clear and unobstructed

No evidence of encroachment on to neighbouring plots, the boundary path, or communal land

Plot number is clearly displayed

No other evidence of neglect, or non-compliance with the Tenancy Agreement and Allotments Policies

If any breach is noted by inspectors, then the details of this should be clearly logged, along with the date of inspection. Evidence of a reported breach should also be provided, usually in the form of a photograph, and these will be kept on record.

8. Enforcement

Enforcement is the responsibility of the Council. A Council Officer will review each case and use the below criteria, to determine the appropriate action to take. This criterion uses a traffic light system to determine the severity of each case, and the initial remedial action to be warranted.

Green/Pass – Plot passed the inspection with no issues identified

Amber/Borderline – Some minor issues were noted which the Council must monitor, and the tenant must rectify

Red/Fail – Plot has failed the inspection and requires remedial action

Below is guidance for how each potential breach would be graded by the Council Officer,

and their usual enforcement however with the nature and variance of any specific case, deviation from the standard enforcement may be required, such as when cases are extraordinary or where a breach may not be considered black and white. Care will be taken to ensure each case is dealt with fairly. These are only guidelines, and each case many not necessarily result in the same outcome.

Amber/Borderline

Fail Condition	Enforcement Action	Justification
Missing plot number	Email to the tenant, insisting action prior to the next round of site inspections, where a notable improvement is expected.	This is considered a small issue, however it is a requirement of the Tenancy Agreement to clearly mark plots, assisting during inspections and for our maintenance team.
Small amounts of debris/ unmanaged boundary immediately surrounding the plot	Email to tenant (or tenants in the case of it being a joint issue by neglect in the boundary between two plots), insisting action prior to the next round of site inspections. In the event of a complaint being raised by a neighbouring tenant, this will instead be escalated, and a 28-day improvement notice for remedial action will be issued.	Plot boundaries should be kept safe and secure to allow easy access between them. In the event of a complaint being raised by a neighbouring tenant, the Council should consider that tenant's concerns.
Less than 25% of the plot being cultivated for new tenants who have had tenancy for under 3 months	Email to tenant to insist on improvement prior to the next round of routine inspections, where a notable improvement is expected.	Many new tenants inherit potentially difficult plots, which may not be suitable for immediate cultivation, especially at certain times of year. This will give them some breathing room, while also presenting the opportunity to consider if working an allotment is not within their ability.
Between 25 – 50% of the plot being cultivated for	Email to tenant to insist on improvement prior to the next round of routine inspections, where a notable improvement is	Many new tenants inherit potentially difficult plots, which may not be suitable for immediate cultivation, especially at certain

<p>new tenants who have had tenancy between 3 to 6 months</p>	<p>expected.</p>	<p>times of year. This will give them some breathing room, while also the opportunity to consider if working an Allotment is not within their ability.</p>
<p>Between 50 – 70% of the plot being cultivated for tenants who have had tenancy for over a year</p>	<p>Email to the tenant to insist on improvement prior to the next round of routine inspections, where a notable improvement is expected. In the event of a repeat offence this will be escalated to a 28-day notice for remedial action.</p>	<p>Mitigating circumstances may be currently affecting the level of cultivation possible on the plot, though in the event of repeat offences the Council may be justified in considering escalating the case to ensure remedial action is undertaken to promote good levels of cultivation. Tenants may be offered the opportunity to explore options of reducing their plot to a more manageable size or moving to a smaller plot.</p>
<p>Small levels of neglect or uncut grass</p>	<p>Email to tenant to insist on improvement prior to the next round of routine inspections, where an improvement is expected.</p>	<p>While constant management of grass and growth is an expectation of tenants, tenants can occasionally fall behind due to mitigating circumstances, and Council Officers must manage their time and workloads effectively and it may be considered unreasonable for a heavy-handed approach to minor levels of neglect.</p>

Red/Fail

<p>Fail Condition</p>	<p>Enforcement Action</p>	<p>Justification</p>
<p>Less than 50% of plot being cultivated for tenants who have had tenancy for</p>	<p>A 28-day improvement notice will be emailed to the tenant, after which a follow-up inspection will take place.</p>	<p>This will be considered a breach of the Tenancy Agreement, and tenants should advise us if there is mitigating circumstances that will mean they are unable to meet the required levels of cultivation.</p>

over a year		
Waste material on the plot, or unauthorised items including, but not limited to, mounting wood, carpet, tyres and glass	A minimum 28-day improvement notice will be emailed to the tenant, after which a follow-up inspection will take place. This notice period may be extended to up three months in cases where a tenant may have inherited a lot of waste. The Council may induce fines or pass on costs associated with clearing plots in extreme circumstances.	Woodley Town Council have a duty to ensure good environmental practices on the allotment site, and cannot allow waste to be present on plots. Tenants should dispose of these responsibly and lawfully. Mounting waste can make plots difficult to let to new tenants. The Council assist tenants by providing skips on site, while the Woodley Allotments Tenants Association also assist with schemes for the recycling of specific materials, and managed bonfires. Tenants take on the plot as seen, so in the event of inherited waste, they should be aware of their responsibility to clear the plot.
High levels of neglect, or noxious weeds allowed to take hold on the plot	A 28-day improvement notice will be emailed to the tenant, after which a follow-up inspection will take place.	Neglected plots can hide hazards within long grass or brambles, which may pose a danger to neighbouring tenants or inspectors. Weeds can spread to neighbouring plots, or make the plot difficult to let a new tenant at the end of tenancy.
Unauthorised livestock	A maximum two week removal notice. Any costs associated with the removal of unauthorised livestock will be met by the tenant.	Unauthorised livestock cause a number of concerns, including disease, animal welfare, environmental and legal concerns. Tenants may keep hens and rabbits on their plot, however they must first apply through the Council and adhere strictly to the Council's Animal Keeping Agreement.

<p>Unauthorised structures</p>	<p>The compliance of the structure will first be reviewed, and retrospective permission will be considered. A fine will be issued. If a structure is not deemed appropriate, the tenant will be given a minimum period of 28-days to facilitate removal.</p>	<p>To ensure compliance with structure rules and control development across the site. The Council must ensure the long term safeguarding of the allotment site and ensure compliant materials are being used per the Tenancy Agreement.</p>
<p>Damaged, unsafe or dilapidated structures</p>	<p>A minimum 28-day improvement notice, up to a maximum of three months depending on the severity of any environmental or safety impact.</p>	<p>Dangerous structures could lead to injury, property damage, or expensive clean-up costs for the Council. Tenants should ensure these are maintained well as per the Council's Structures and Development Policy. We understand the maintenance of a structure can be expensive and difficult work, so the timescale can vary on a case-by-case basis.</p>
<p>Concrete, mortar, or other difficult to remove material on the plot</p>	<p>A minimum 28-day improvement notice will be emailed, though the length of time allowed may vary depending on the severity. Failure to comply will result in the termination of tenancy with costs associated with removal met by the tenant.</p>	<p>The Council must ensure the long-term safeguarding of the allotment site and ensure compliant materials are being used per the Tenancy Agreement.</p>
<p>Encroachment on to neighbouring plots, boundary path or communal land</p>	<p>The Council's response will vary significantly depending on the scenario, and the impact of the encroachment on neighbouring land or plots. A minimum 28-day improvement notice will be issued for most cases, along with a fine.</p>	<p>Encroachment can lead to areas of the site which are designated wildlife areas being interrupted and can create an unfair system for tenants. Tenants should keep within their allocated boundaries. Expansion of plots must be done in a controlled manner with Council authorisation before changes to plot boundaries are made. Plot boundary paths should be retained.</p>

<p>Major development of the plot without authorisation</p>	<p>A minimum 28-day improvement notice will be issued, though this may scale up depending on the circumstances, up to instant termination of tenancy depending on the severity. Any costs associated to re-instate the plot will be met by the tenant.</p>	<p>The Council must consider the long-term use of the site, and manage the site in an environmentally responsible manner. It is stipulated by the Tenancy Agreement and in the Council's Structures and Developments Policy what is permitted.</p>
<p>Unauthorised damage or felling of trees and shrubs</p>	<p>Issuing of fines, as per the Council's Allotment Fines and Penalties Policy. In a severe case, instant termination of tenancy may be issued.</p>	<p>The Council has a responsibility to uphold good environmental practices, ensuring the protection of trees and habitats on the site.</p>

This list is not exhaustive, and situations outside of this scope may occur. The Council will endeavor to exercise a reasonable approach to any scenario.

For tenants who do not have an email address, then a letter will instead be posted to the address in place of an email in the case that enforcement action needs to take place. It is the responsibility of the tenant to ensure they provide the Council with up-to-date contact details.

In the event of a follow-up inspection of a plot being required, the improvement period will always be specified in writing to the tenant. A follow-up inspection will not take place before the specified period has elapsed, however it may also not happen immediately after the end of that period, due to the availability of inspectors.

If a plot does not improve within the specified period, the Council will escalate the case. An amber (borderline) fail will be escalated to red (fail) and a further improvement notice issued. A red fail may result in a 28-day Termination Notice. The Council will require detailed evidence, including multiple photographs and clear reasons for failure. Where doubt remains, a Council Officer will inspect the plot independently of the Woodley Allotments Tenants Association and determine the next steps.

Woodley Town Council reserves the right to waive any improvement or Termination Notice.

9. Extensions

An extension of time to an improvement notice may be considered, in cases where tenants advise us of mitigating circumstances. We will consider an extension in the following scenarios.

Period of ill health affecting the tenant

Bereavement

Maternity or paternity leave

If the tenant has not had an extension before

10. Exemptions

In many cases, there are mitigating circumstances which can affect the level of cultivation possible on the allotment. In these scenarios, the Council can issue exemptions during plot inspections. Some reasons may include;

Period of ill health affecting the tenant

The tenant has inherited a difficult plot

Poor weather, including flooding of the allotment

The tenant has gone away

Maternity or paternity leave

Bereavement

Any other mitigating circumstances

It is the responsibility of the tenant to advise the Council and/or Woodley Allotments Tenants Association of these circumstances, preferably prior to routine plot inspections being carried out, so they can be considered during the inspection process.

Advise the Council and/or Woodley Allotments Tenants Association of any long leave of absence, and how long this may be

Advise the Council and/or Woodley Allotments Tenants Association if they are currently experiencing periods of ill health making it difficult to work the plot

Advise the Council and/or Woodley Allotments Tenants Association if they are finding the plot too difficult, and would like to downsize to a smaller, more manageable plot

Advise of the Council and/or Woodley Allotments Tenants Association of any other mitigating circumstances they are currently facing

Ensure the plot is maintained during planned holidays, whether by neighbouring tenants or friends and family

If the tenant has requested third party help for the plot, it is the responsibility of the tenant to inform any individual invited on the site of the requirements of the Tenancy Agreement, and site rules

In the event of planned long-term absence, the tenant should cover the plot to prevent the spread of noxious weeds

The Council are willing provide lee-way for mitigating circumstances, especially for periods of ill health which can affect the level of cultivation possible. The Council does however have to consider the requirements of the Tenancy Agreement, and any leave of absence requested for a period of 6 months or more, will be discussed between the Council and the Woodley Allotments Tenants Association.

The Council will correspond with tenants who have advised us of a leave of absence, for the monitoring of unused plots. In some scenarios where the upkeep of the plot may not be viable for a long period of time, the Council will liaise with the tenant and the Woodley Allotments Tenants Associations about options such as covering the plot to avoid the spread of noxious weeds.

11. Termination

In the event of unsatisfactory improvement that leads to the termination of tenancy, a 28-day Termination Notice will be issued to the tenant. This will be served via Royal Mail signed for post, and emailed to tenants to ensure receipt. The tenant must remove any personal belongings within this period, and return their keys back to the Council. For any waste, unauthorised structures or material left on the plot, the costs associated with the removal may be sent to the outgoing tenant.

Tenants who have received a Termination Notice will be unable to apply for an allotment at the Reading Road site for a minimum of two years after the end of the termination period.

12. Appeals

The tenant will have the ability to appeal a Termination Notice. An appeal must be made in writing to the Council, within 14-days of the Termination Notice being issued. Tenants should provide reasons why the appeal should be allowed, along with any supporting evidence.

Appeals will be considered by an Officer at the Council of Manager level, who is otherwise usually uninvolved with allotment duties. The written appeal, along with historical context and evidence will be provided to the Officer. Some of the considerations include the following;

Mitigating circumstances of the tenant, or specific plot

Severity of the case

Evidence provided to support Termination Notice

Evidence provided by the tenant against Termination Notice

History of the plot, including previous notices issued, issues raised or allowances provided

Enforcement options the Council may explore other than termination of tenancy

Outcome of similar appeals

Once an Appeal decision has been reached, this will be provided in writing to the tenant, with the decision made being final. No further appeal will be allowed.

13. Record Keeping

Inspection findings will be retained with the Councils Allotment Records

Recorded breaches will be kept on record for up to 7 years

Photos of plots may be retained for the duration of tenancy

14. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed as required, or in response to legislative changes

Alterations to this policy will be approved by the Councils Leisure Services Committee

Document approved by: Woodley Town Councils Leisure Services Committee – 20th January 2026