

# Keeping Chickens Policy

## Keeping Chickens

Under the 1950's allotment act, allotment holders are allowed to keep hens or rabbits on their plot. The Parish Council have limited this to Chickens only. For the health of the chickens and to reduce the number of rats attracted, the Parish Council have put the following rules in place.

Please remember that two thirds (66.6%) of your plot must be used for growing.

If you have never kept chickens before you must learn how to keep them properly. There is plenty of information on the internet or at your local library. There are already plot holders with chickens who are more than happy to give any advice you may want, if you ask.

You must also look at how much keeping your chickens will cost. There will be the cost of buying your birds 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 chicken house 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 chickens, 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 chickens properly.** Think very hard about whether you can afford to keep them first.

**The chickens you keep on your plot must always be kept for your own use and not for any business or profit.** The average family would not need more than 3 or 4 hens.

Cockerels are **not** permitted at any time.

Chickens or Chicks must be purchased from a reputable source that vaccinates them to stop infections

Each chicken needs approximately 2 square feet of space in the hen house and 4 square feet of space in the run.

All hens must be able to stand, turn round and stretch their wings when inside. They also need enough space to perch or sit down without interference from other birds, when they are together.

The hen house must be warm, dry, well ventilated, and secure. Enough fresh air should be provided by means of doors or other apertures, the birds should be protected from draughts, it is recommended that the entry doors face due south wherever possible.

The floor must be easy to clean, wood shavings or straw will need to be topped-up or replaced when needed. This is especially important when it's wet, as the floor coverings are used for foraging and dust bathing.

Perches should be around 3 to 5 cm wide with rounded edges and at the right height for the size of the bird. Hens like to perch and sleep together at night, so there should be enough room inside the hen house for all the birds to roost at the same time. At least 15 cm should be allowed for each bird, with enough room between the perches so that they can get up and down without hurting themselves. The nest boxes themselves should be draught-free, quiet, and enclosed with a good layer of clean dry nesting material of straw or wood shavings.

Hens must have continuous daytime access to open air runs, which, if possible, should be moved regularly to avoid 'fowl sick' or muddy conditions that could lead to ill health or discomfort.

There should be overhead cover, such as small trees or a purpose-built shelter which will give the birds protection from the sun but also from bad weather and any possible predators. The birds should be able to always access the shelter, except when the huts are being cleaned. When there is an outbreak of avian flu chickens are required to stay under cover, so some sort of complete cover is required for the run.

- All livestock is subject to strict welfare codes enforced by the RSPCA and DEFRA and covered by the Animal Welfare Act.
- You are responsible for the control of vermin.
- The chicken house must be cleaned regularly.
- All necessary fire precautions must be taken.
- All chickens must be inspected at least once a day.
- The tenant must allow the Allotment Officer and/or an animal welfare representative to inspect the chickens at any time.
- The tenant must leave emergency contact details.

### **Health**

The chickens need:

- A suitable environment
- A suitable diet.
- The chance to show normal patterns of behaviour
- A place to live with or apart from, animals of their own kind.
- Protection from pain, injury, suffering and disease
- Protection from predators.
- A draught free environment but with adequate ventilation.
- Warmth in the colder months and shade during the summer.
- Perches and roosting areas that are easily accessible to the birds.
- An adequate number of nesting boxes. .
- A surface that allows the chickens to take dust baths.

Any sick or injured chicken must be removed immediately, and the correct and appropriate treatment provided. Any national disease prevention and/or control programmes must be adhered to.

Red mite is a real problem to chickens and once you have them in the coop are near impossible to get rid of normally the chicken house requires burning. They like dark conditions in crevices of chicken houses etc. There is a specialist chicken bedding which is treated with pine oil that deters the mite.

If we have good reason to believe that you have failed to meet the needs of the chickens kept on your allotment or caused a nuisance to neighbouring plot holders, we may take steps to end your tenancy.

### **Feeding and watering**

Clean fresh water must be available. Chickens drink a great deal so water will need filling more often than food. Food and water containers should be kept clean and in good condition. Feed and bedding should be stored in vermin proof containers. Plastic containers are not permitted as rats can chew through these very quickly. Enough food should be given to ensure the chickens are properly fed but not too much, as to attract vermin. The chickens should be visited at least once a day. During the winter months make sure that drinking water is not frozen.

### **Planning for fire and flood**

Plot holders who keep chickens should 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.

### **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 chickens, even one or two, it is a good idea to register with the Animal & Plant Health Agency overseen by the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs although this is a voluntary registration for less than 50 birds. 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

### **Construction of the chicken coup and run**

The Council ask that weld mesh is used in the construction of the run and hen house and that the weld mesh base is dug down into the ground and then covered with soil. The base should be fastened to the side walls with secure fixings to help stop the intrusion of vermin. The lower half of the run should have a double skin e.g., Weld mesh and aviary panels.

The entrance to the house/run must have adequate locks that cannot be easily pushed open.

### **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 is to reduce the risk of disease being passed on. If buildings/runs are not removed by the tenant, the Parish Council can charge the cost of removing them from the deposit or from the tenant.