

Consultation of rent increases and changes to fees, charges and tenancy conditions on Nottingham City Council's Direct Let Allotment Gardens

Alex Begg Allotment Officer (alex.begg@nottinghamcity.gov.uk)
Nottingham City Council Allotment Service 0115 9172727
November 2017

Introduction

The Allotments Service has investigated how an increase in allotment garden rents, charges and tenants' responsibilities can help support the development and investment in allotment provision across Nottingham City.

Background

The Allotments Service manages both directly-let allotment tenancies and supervises the leases of other Council-owned allotment sites. There are approximately 2800 Council-owned allotment plots across the city, covering 1.9% of the land area of Nottingham City or just under 10% of the accessible open and green space in the city. The Allotments Service directly manages approximately 800 plots largely situated on the smaller allotment sites. The remaining 2000 plots are leased to and managed by 19 independent associations or allotment bodies.

Allotment Rent Rate

The current allotment rent rate is 14p/m² and has increased in increments from 7.2p/m² in 2011. Allotment rent rates country-wide have been traditionally very low and this is often reflected in the quality of allotment sites and the service provided to allotment tenants. The Council's Allotments Service has been increasing the quality of the allotment provision and has recorded a small increase in the quality since the first quality audit undertaken in 2012.

To allow the further improvement and development of the allotment provision the Council is consulting on raising the allotment rent rates over a number of years, for the Council's direct-let allotment gardens. Rent increases will allow further investment in Nottingham's allotment provision.

We calculate that rental income at the 'eventual rate', including the effect this will have on leasehold rental income, will allow the full-funding of the administration of the Council's Allotments Service & and the management and basic maintenance of the direct-let sites. This eventual rate is calculated at 56p/m². This eventual rent rate is comparable to other authority's current rent rates.

Following changes to the charging for water in 2014, allotment tenants who are supplied with water, are charged a rate for water that covers costs of water and the supply network. No changes are proposed for the charging of water.

To offset the increases in rents for citizens who are entitled to eligible low-income benefits or eligible disability benefits, tenants can apply for a rent concession (discount) of 50%. Tenants over the age of 65 can apply for a rent concession (discount) of 25%.

The Allotments Service manages many small allotment plots with areas less than 125m². The administration of these tenancies and the resources needed for annual invoicing of rents, often outweigh the small rental income on these plots. We proposed that a minimum plot rent equivalent to 125m² is charged for these plots. For the current year this would be a rent of £17.50.

Leasehold Rent Rates

The current leasehold rent rate is set by the lease agreements, to match the direct-let rent rate at each rent review. The leasehold rents on current lease are reviewed every five years, under condition of the lease. We propose, for future allotment leases, that the rent rate for leasehold allotment sites is agreed between the Council and allotment site leaseholders on a site-by-site basis and will take into account the quality of the site and allotment provision. We hope that well managed, good quality sites, can be rewarded by lower leasehold rent rates that can be passed on to the allotment tenants.

Charges and Fees

Much Allotment Officer time is spent managing breaches of allotment tenancies. It is not unusual for some tenants to abandon their allotments in a poor condition, needing council officer time to chase the tenant to rectify these breaches and often leading to organising repairs and invoicing the tenant concerned.

To encourage allotment tenants to surrender their plots in the proper legal manner, the Council proposes that we levy a £50 charge if we need to resort to issue a Tenancy Termination Notice. In this way, we hope that tenants will either, surrender their tenancy in a timely fashion when they no longer need the allotment plot, or they will rectify any breaches in a timely fashion. In addition, we propose the 'second and subsequent Breach Notice' charge is increased from £10 to £20.

Hedgecutting

On some direct-let sites the costs of cutting hedges are high due to only having pedestrian access for the Council's operatives. We propose to consider the transfer of responsibility for cutting the **outside** of plot hedges to individual allotment tenants. We realise that in some instances, this responsibility could be overly onerous. The Allotments Service will be assessing the impact to tenants of this transfer of responsibility over the next year.

Summary of Current Proposals

1. The rent rate is increased over five years to a rate of 56p/m². This equates to a year-on-year increase of 8.4p/m² for the next 5 years.
2. For leasehold sites within a **new lease** structure, rent rates will be set by agreement between the Council and the site leaseholder.
3. A minimum rent is introduced that will equal a plot size of 125m² (50% of the standard allotment size).
4. Fees and charges: An increase to £20 for charge for the second and each subsequent Breach Notice; a new £50 charge for issuing a Termination Notice.

Please feel free to respond to these proposals by email at allotment.office@nottinghamcity.gov.uk, by letter or if these prove difficult please feel free to make contact with us by telephone on 0115 8763399.