

Drury Lane Allotments Inspection Policy

The purposes of inspection are to:

- Ensure the allotments are maintained as an asset to the local area and are managed in a safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable manner;
- Ensure that tenants are cultivating their individual plots to their full potential as set out in the Tenancy Agreement and Allotment Tenants' Handbook;
- Identify where individual tenants require support or guidance to improve their plots;
- Establish a transparent and fair process for ending the tenancy of plots which are not being cultivated according to the agreed standards.

Two Allotment Committee members and a Parish Councillor conduct the inspections and are expected to adhere to agreed allotment policies and procedures. The inspections take place three times a year, in mid-March, mid-June and mid-September. These inspection periods are notified to tenants in advance, however the exact date / time will be determined according to the availability of the inspection team and the weather.

New tenants are not included in the inspection cycle during their 6-month probation period. Instead, they receive monthly support and feedback from their mentor. After passing probation, tenants are inspected following this policy, but judgements take into account the state of the plot when the tenant took it over. New tenants will not be expected to achieve 75% cultivation of their plot within their first year if the plot was very overgrown when they started.

The Allotment Association aims to build an allotment community where all tenants have access to support to enable them to be successful gardeners and to gain satisfaction from their plots. This is fostered through the 6 months of probation and mentoring for new tenants, a newsletter, social events, working party days, a WhatsApp group and seed and plant swaps.

If a tenant has a genuine reason why they cannot work their plot for a period of time or is not managing to keep on top of it for health or other reasons, they should contact the Allotment Association Committee as soon as possible. This information will be treated in the strictest confidence. A reasonable timescale to bring the plot back to an acceptable standard will be agreed, and if required, some support from other tenants to help look after the tenant's plot may also be arranged.

Inspections focus on:

Cultivation: Tenants are expected to make good use of their plot for the purpose of growing vegetables, fruit, herbs, flowers for cutting, or cover crops such as green manure. If there is a greenhouse, this should also be used for cultivation. 75% of the area of the whole plot should be cultivated in the main summer growing season (May to September). The cultivated area includes a working compost heap but does not include any area taken up by internal paths, seating, storage area or shed. Areas of the plot which are overgrown, or ground covered in weed membrane, cardboard etc or beds which are cleared but not planted, do not count as cultivated. Some of the rear plots, where former brick-built structures have been demolished, have ground that cannot easily be cultivated, but can be used for compost heaps, raised beds or a wildlife area. If the plot is not being used to its full potential, with at least 75% of the total area in cultivation during the main growing season, this will result in a Notice to Improve for Cultivation.

Weeds: If the plot has significant annual or perennial weeds which are covering beds, setting seed or otherwise impacting on successful cultivation, this will result in a Notice to Improve for Weeds.

Safety and Maintenance: Any structures on the plot including sheds, greenhouses, fences, compost heaps, ponds or water butts should be maintained to a safe standard. Any hedges should be pruned to no taller than 1.5m (noting that it is illegal to cut hedges between 1st March and 31st August). Internal paths and the path to the right of the plot should be well maintained for safe access. No rubbish should be accumulating. If anything on the plot is deemed to pose a risk to tenants, the environment or wildlife, this will result in a Notice to Improve for Safety and Maintenance.

Feedback

Tenants will receive feedback, by email, within 7 days of the inspection. Inspection feedback should be objective, factual and focus only on matters which relate to items in the Allotment Tenants' Handbook. There are different ways to garden, and we respect the variety of approaches which are used across our site, e.g. dig or no-dig, small beds with internal paths or full plots in rows. Feedback for each of the three inspection areas will be graded green / amber / red on the feedback form.

- Green: the elements covered in this area are met to a good standard.
- Amber: there are some jobs to do, but overall, the standard is acceptable.
- Red: there are significant concerns and an Improvement Notice will be issued to set out exactly what the tenant is required to do for the plot to return to an acceptable standard.

If any issues are identified in a plot inspection, the tenant will be offered the opportunity to meet with a committee member to discuss the feedback and how to act on it. The tenant will also be offered the opportunity to receive advice from another tenant.

Plot: / Date: / Inspected by:	Spring	Summer	Autumn
Cultivation: 75% of the plot area is cultivated with allotment crops.			
Weeds: Growing areas are largely weed free.			
Maintenance and safety: Structures, paths, hedges, ponds are safely maintained.			
Outcome of inspection:			

Improvement notice: An Improvement Notice will specify the area/s for improvement with photographic evidence of the issues identified. A re-inspection of the specific items identified will take place no more than 6 weeks later. If no improvement has been made during this period, a Notice to Quit the plot will be issued.

Warning notice: If the issues identified in the Improvement Notice have been partially but not fully addressed after the period of 6 weeks has elapsed, a Warning Notice (with photographic evidence) and a further period of no more than 6 weeks will be given before re-inspection.

Notice to Quit: A notice to quit is issued if:

- a tenant has not addressed the issues identified in an Improvement Notice
- a tenant has not fully addressed the issues identified in a Warning Notice
- a tenant has received Warning Notices on two occasions within one inspection cycle year (starting in March)
- A tenant intimidates Allotment Association Committee members, Parish Councillors or attempts to interfere with the inspection process.

A Notice to Quit signed by the Parish Council clerk and accompanied by a covering letter will be sent to the tenant and will include references to the following: a termination date; an instruction to the tenant to remove all personal property; an outline of the implications of failing to comply with any special condition imposed by the Parish Council in respect of any clearance / rectification work deemed necessary to restore the allotment to an acceptable condition.

Right of Appeal: The tenant is entitled to a final right of appeal to the Parish Council if they have been issued a Notice to Quit which they believe is not justified. A different pair of Allotment Association Committee members and a Parish Councillor not previously involved will review the allotment inspection feedback, improvement notices and consider the tenant's viewpoint before arriving at a decision which will be final.

Policy agreed by SDPC 23.2.25