

Allotment Consultation

The comprehensive consultation on allotments has progressed through another stage. The consultation commenced with the National Allotment Society (NAS) contacting allotment tenants and other stakeholders to gather their views on the existing allotment service.

The NAS report was subsequently shared with Tenants and feedback encouraged. From this a number of reports have been presented at Environment Committee meetings, with public participation at one of these meetings.

A range of documents were then produced and distributed to Tenants, and those on the waiting list; an on-line survey was sent to all Tenants and prospective Tenants with e-mail addresses, the documents and the survey were sent by post to those Tenants without email addresses.

There was a good response to the survey with 158 people taking part online and 5 by post.

Three 'drop-in' sessions were held at the Guildhall on Monday, 27th September, 13:00 - 16:00, Wednesday, 29th September 17:00 – 19:00 and Wednesday 13th October, 15:00 – 18:00. There was a total of 47 people who attended across the three sessions.

Feedback at these sessions was positive and a lot of points were clarified.

The main issues that were raised at these sessions mirrored those raised in the survey. The majority of attendee had also taken part in the survey or were planning to contribute once after attendance at the Guildhall.

Feedback

The key findings of the survey, were as follows:

Q1 - What do you like about the Proposed Tenancy Agreement?

There were 126 on-line responses to this, another 32 people chose to skip this question.

A significant number of respondents found that the Agreement was much improved, comments included: "more modern", "very clear", "simple to understand", "fair" and "good".

The emphasis on environmental issues, biodiversity and wildflowers received the highest number of positive comments.

Tenants also commented that it felt like the Council were taking back control with the appointment of an Allotment Officer and more enforcement, and that tenants would have more of a voice in how allotments are run.

There was support for the limited number of plots per household, sensible fees, the ban on carpets and the removal of concessions for non-City residents.

Q2 - Is there anything you would like to change in the Proposed Tenancy Agreement?

There were 139 responses to this, 19 people chose to skip this question.

The key issues that were regularly commented upon in the survey were also raised during all the sessions in the Guildhall:

- **Retrospective enforcement** – concerns/queries about the potential for the Council to apply the rules retrospectively for existing and inherited greenhouses, sheds, hard standing, trees etc.
- **Charging for water** – respondents needed more clarity on how any scheme would work; had concerns about fairness and questioned whether allotment rents would be reduced as water was included within the existing charges. Around 1/3rd of people who raised concerns about the introduction of water charges, stated that sprinklers are currently banned and should remain banned.
- **Ban on social gatherings** – social gatherings were seen as being beneficial to the community, sometimes involved family visits, were an opportunity to mix with like-minded people and were good for mental health.
- **Tree height** – this was the next most commented issue – concerns about existing trees and 6 feet being too small. Suggestions included: 8-12 feet high, “trees should be managed”, “trees must be pruned”.
- **Hard surfaces** – comments about existing patio areas (places to sit and have a cup of tea), hard standing to secure sheds/greenhouses to, there was some confusion about whether paving slabs (which are removable) could be used.
- **Weed suppressant/plastic ban** – tenants use plastic in a managed way to try to control weeds; polyethylene membrane is specifically designed for weeds suppressing.
- **Car parking** – some sites have been organised in a way that enables tenants to park their cars on-site due to parking problems in the neighbouring area and elderly and/or infirm people unable to get to site without cars.
- **Sheds** - the restriction on a single shed per plot and the requirement to get approval from the Council were raised. There are a number of metal sheds in existence.

In addition to the most frequent responses detailed above, other popular issues were:

- **Greenhouses** – glass is cheaper and sturdier than polycarbonate.
- **Fruit trees only** - flowering shrubs should be allowed (pollination, biodiverse) in addition to fruit bearing plants/trees.
- **Ban on bonfires** – incinerators not always practical, diseased material (as well as dry organic matter) should be allowed to be burnt.
- **No fences** - fences were used in some locations.
- **Co-worker** – would they be entitled to take on the plot after 6-months (having invested a lot of time and effort).

Clarification that ½ plots were entitled to have a shed (the current wording suggests full plots) was mentioned quite frequently, this simply requires a rewording to clarify.

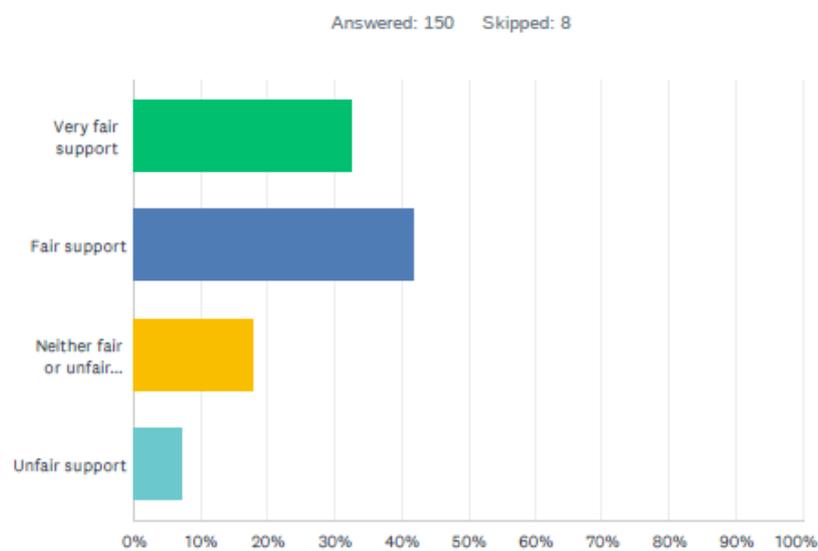
Q3 - Is there anything you would like to be added to the Proposed Tenancy Agreement?

There were 111 responses to this, although the vast majority simply responded with “No” or “Nothing”.

Of the 20 or so comments; election/re-election of site representatives, rules on poly-tunnels, a limit on pond sizes, allowing the use of horticultural polypropylene (linked to plastic ban in Q2), all received 1 or 2 comments each.

Q4 - Do you believe that the Proposed Concession Regime offers fair support to those tenants who are entitled to receive them?

There were 150 on-line responses to this question, the results show that 77% of respondents believe the proposed concessions offer fair or very fair support and 7% believe the concession support was unfair.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very fair support	32.67%	49
Fair support	42.00%	63
Neither fair or unfair support	18.00%	27
Unfair support	7.33%	11
TOTAL		150

Q5 - Are there any aspects of the Proposed Concession Regime that you would like to change?

There were 101 responses, again, of these, a significant number responded “No” or “Nothing”.

Responses were relatively balanced, with equal numbers for and against individual concession changes.

A few respondents felt that concessions should be abolished all together, with others proposing that the existing concession regime should be maintained for existing tenants, with any changes only applying to new tenants.

Q6 - What do you like about the Proposed Role of the Allotment Officer?

There were 93 responses to this question, the majority of which were positive.

Having a contactable, focused and pro-active full-time resource was seen as beneficial and also demonstrated the Council's commitment to allotments.

Increased support for the Site Representatives, monitoring and control of sites and management of vacant plots were all widely seen as being beneficial to the service. Communications, allotment website, the leading and agenda management of meetings and the involvement in applying for funding for biodiversity projects, were also positively mentioned.

Q7 - Is there is anything you would like to change in the Proposed Role of the Allotment Officer?

There were 82 responses, but less than 20 actually commented, the remainder said "No" or "Nothing".

Most of the comments were suggestions, rather than changes to the role, these included: involve other tenants, not just Site Representatives, operate a complaint procedure for tenants, pre-announce site visits and undertake site visits with tenants' present.

Q8 - Is there anything you would like to be added to the Proposed Role of the Allotment Officer?

There were 81 responses, but only around 10 actual comments.

Organise Site Representative elections, support site development, mediate tenant disputes, encourage good allotment practices and ensure consistent messaging to noticeboards, were all suggested.

Q9 - How beneficial do you believe that the recruitment of an Allotment Officer will be?

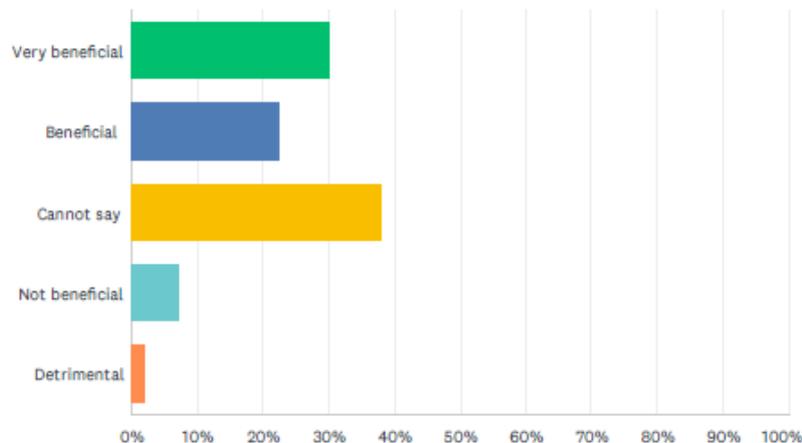
There were 139 participants, with those that responded 53% thought the recruitment to be very beneficial or beneficial, 38% did not offer an opinion, 7% thought it was not beneficial and 2% thought

it

was

detrimental.

Answered: 139 Skipped: 19



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very beneficial	30.22%	42
Beneficial	22.30%	31
Cannot say	38.13%	53
Not beneficial	7.19%	10
Detrimental	2.16%	3
TOTAL		139

Q10 - What do you like about the Proposed Role of the Site Representative?

Of the 83 responses, the majority of whom found the proposal to be supportive of the Site Representatives, recognises that they have a crucial role to play, it clarifies the role and is comprehensive.

A lot of comments were supportive of the role that the Site Representatives undertake but did not refer to the role profile document.

Q11 - Is there anything you would like to change in the Proposed Role of the Site Representative?

There were 85 responses, a lot of these were “No” answers, the main topic of the comments was around Site Representative elections – suggestions that these should be fixed-term or annual.

There were more positive comments about the Representatives and recognition that a lot is expected of them.

Q12 - Is there anything you would like to be added to the Proposed Role of the Site Representative?

50% of participants responded to this question, the vast majority submitted “No” comments, with around 12 suggestions. These included: encouragement of community and community events, 50% attendance at meetings and responsibility for mowing access roads.

Q13 - What do you like about the Proposed Relationship with the Forum and Allotment Engagement Meetings?

There were 80 on-line responses. The Allotment Engagement Meetings being welcomed as a positive development. Quarterly meetings were seen as adequate, providing better communications, defined but not prescriptive, supportive/working together and no power struggles or friction.

Suggestions included: invite other tenants on occasion, distribute minutes to all sites.

The Proposed Relationship with the Forum received few comments; a number of respondents did not see the purpose of the Forum; with concerns that it could overlap with the Site Representatives' Engagement meeting.

There were suggestions that an Allotments Association, made-up of a wider group of tenants, would be better placed to deliver the social aspects, and wider community benefits, of the allotment community.

Q14 - Is there anything you would like to change with the Proposed Relationship with the Forum and Allotment Engagement Meetings?

The final question had 81 responses, with around 20 actual comments.

The main comments were that the Engagement Meetings should be open to a broader attendance, not just Site Representatives.

There were minimal comments relating to the Forum. One response proposed that the Forum should hold its own meetings for Site Representatives to discuss matters important to them.

There were suggestions that a Social Society or Allotment Association could form to deliver the social aspects of the allotment community, with the closure of the Forum. This organisation to be operated by tenant volunteers and supported by the Allotments Officer.

Other suggestions

There have been a number of other suggestions/points raised, these included:

- Polytunnels,
- Plot sizes – split available full-plots to 2 x ½ plots to help with waiting lists and to give people a taste of the commitment required for allotments,
- Plot sizes – increase the number of ¼ plots and raised beds, where possible, to enable less able people, and people with disabilities to participate,
- Organisation of future Site Representative elections (agree election frequency)
- Site Representatives deputies' (number, elections/process etc.)