

Halls Farm Allotments and Leisure Gardens Association

Plot Inspection Criteria

Introduction

Regular plot inspections are carried out at Halls Farm Allotments to ensure that our space is being used to its best potential. Leaving a plot untended is unfair for a number of reasons:

- ◆ Lots of weed seeds will be produced, blowing onto neighbouring plots.
- ◆ Weeds may also hinder access to neighbouring plots.
- ◆ We have other people eagerly waiting for a plot at Halls Farm who could make good use of the space.
- ◆ It generates a lot of work for the committee and other volunteers clearing up abandoned plots for re-letting.

In recent years we have received a few complaints from plot holders who don't understand why the committee has written to them about the state of their plot so we felt that a guide to what is being assessed during plot inspections would be useful. Please also read "Plot Inspection Process", which details how and when the inspections take place.

Percentage Cultivation

The ideal state is that every single square metre of your plot would be "cultivated". By this, we mean that the soil has been dug, is weed-free and suitable for sowing seeds or planting out into. This does not necessarily mean that things are growing in every available gap and there are exceptions (see later). Clearly also, it is expected that some of your plot will need to be devoted to compost heaps, water butts, storage and access paths, and this is fine.

In your first year or two of plot holding you may well find it a struggle to get the whole plot under control (especially if it was received in a bad state from the previous plot holder). In these circumstances, it is fine to set aside an area of land as uncultivated and to focus on what you can achieve. However, *uncultivated* does not mean *abandoned*, and this area of land will need to be carefully managed to ensure that it does not become a nuisance to others and an even bigger problem to yourself. There are various options to keep such areas under control including putting down cardboard, weed matting, plastic sheeting etc or by strimming regularly.

After around 6 months of plot holding we would expect to see that the whole plot is under control. This means that the whole area is a mixture of cultivated land and managed uncultivated land. After around 2 years of plot holding we would expect cultivation to be well over 75% and fast approaching full cultivation.

A final word on managed uncultivated land. This does have a time limit and it is not acceptable to simply cover up land and leave it for years on end. If you cannot cope with all the space that you have then consider reducing your plot size to a half plot (if applicable) or perhaps see if a friend, relative or neighbour wants to come along and help you with the plot. We would not, therefore, expect to see any piece of land covered for much more than one year.

Percentage Cropped

The second important factor that we look at is how much is being grown? There is no point clearing land just to leave it beautifully dug but nothing growing. Nobody can have crops in every square metre all year as there are always different things to harvest and follow-on planting. We would, however, expect to see that at least half of your cultivated land has crops growing in it during the main growing season.

It should be said that 'crops growing' does not just refer to vegetables. It is quite acceptable to grow other plants and flowers in your space. Small areas of lawn are also fine, as long as they are kept well mown and under control.

Path & General Appearance

Almost all plot holders have at least one grass path to take care of. You can identify your path as follows. Stand on the main central grass path and look at your plot. Your path is the one on the right of your plot. This needs to be kept well mown at all times. There is a push mower in the wheelbarrow shed that can be borrowed for this purpose or you can use shears. You can also join the mower scheme by attending a demonstration session and paying a £5 key deposit. You may also be able to pay another plot member to do this for you – ask the committee for details of any plot holders currently offering this service.

We don't focus too much on appearance of plots, after all, for most people they are working vegetable gardens rather than immaculately manicured gardens. However, piles of rubbish and junk are not acceptable for extended periods of time and need to be dealt with by taking to the tip.

Exceptions

There are of course, some exceptions. Setting aside an area of plot, as orchard is fine (but please ensure that you discuss this with the committee first and ensure that you buy dwarf tree varieties). You do need to remember that trees should be confined to the bounds of your plot and not allowed to overhang neighbouring plots and paths. This may require some hard pruning at the appropriate time of year. If the plot is grassed between the trees then this should be kept well mown and under control.

Mitigating Circumstances

There could, of course, be a very good reason why your plot is looking a bit neglected and the key here is communication. If you or a dependant are ill, have a really busy year at work or are going on some extended travelling then please let us know. Maybe you could find a friend / relative / neighbour to help out for a while. Even if you can't, please do let us know the reason and when you think you will be able to get on top of things again.

Whilst the committee will be as accommodating as possible, there has to be a limit somewhere, and if your situation has not recovered in a year then we may have to consider re-letting your plot. You would, of course, have the option to go back on the waiting list and take on another plot in another year or so when your situation improves.