

# Ashford and District Smallholders Association

## Animal Welfare Policy 2020

This policy has been produced to ensure that animals kept on the Ashford and District Smallholders Association site are done so with their welfare as a priority.

**Allotment holders who wish to keep livestock should be able to demonstrate minimum standards of experience/training before being allowed to keep animals on site.**

Members should keep animals in a way that enables them to perform normal behaviours, maintains them in good health and minimises disease problems.

This policy has been created in conjunction with the RSPCA and their guidance to animals being kept on allotments, Spelthorne Borough Council, DEFRA and the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

### Keeping livestock on the allotment

Any member wishing to keep livestock on site must make a written application to the committee. The application should detail the animal(s) concerned, the quantity or numbers as well as outline the full details of their intentions including suitable housing arrangements and how they intend to care for the animals, meeting the minimum welfare standards detailed in the policy.

**Any allotment holder keeping animals MUST supply full contact details with a 24-hour phone number in case of emergencies,** as well as details of a second contact should they be unavailable.

**Failure to apply to the committee to keep livestock or to meet the minimum standards in these guidelines, may result in the termination of a member's allotment tenancy.**

## **Minimum Welfare Standards for Livestock Kept on Site**

Under section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, a person responsible for any vertebrate animal must take all reasonable steps to ensure they meet all of its welfare needs to the extent required by good practice. This applies to both farm and pet animals. The following minimum welfare standards **must** be adhered to by all members who keep animals on site.

### **Need for a suitable environment**

Continuous access to shelter, free from sharp edges, protrusions etc which could cause injury, and including a clean, dry, well-bedded lying or roosting (for poultry) area large enough to allow all animals using the shelter to lie down (or roost) together at the same time.

### **Need for a suitable diet**

Continuous ready access to an adequate supply of clean, fresh drinking water. Provision of feed of a type and form appropriate to the age, condition and species of animal, and which is fed in sufficient quantities, and sufficiently frequently, to maintain them in good health and to satisfy their nutritional needs. Such foodstuffs should be properly protected from rodents and other wild animals. If farm animals are kept on the allotment, storage and removal of manure must be arranged to prevent contamination of watercourses or other nuisance.

### **Need for appropriate housing**

It is our aim to ensure that animals kept on plots can exhibit their normal behaviour patterns. Animals should be given space for this as far as possible.

Animals should be kept with suitable companions of the same species, or apart from other animals, where appropriate.

The society does not allow animals to be kept on wire or mesh flooring.

### **Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease**

Competent care and management from those with the knowledge and skill to ensure the animals well-being as well as regular, frequent inspection (at least daily, and more frequently where needed) of each animal by a competent person. Suitable steps should be taken to protect animals from other animals. When needed appropriate preventative and/or curative treatment should be available to animals. Vaccinations, where appropriate, should be carried out by a veterinary surgeon, who should also advise on worming.

In view of the specific needs and the sometimes complex legislative requirements covering the keeping of pigs, cattle, equines and sheep, it would be extremely difficult to care properly for these species within the confines of an average allotment, and hence, these animals will not be kept on premises.

Regular visits from animal welfare experts will be conducted to ensure the minimum animal welfare standards are adhered to. Any breaches of these standards may result in action being taken against the member, who may have their membership terminated and, where an offence is suspected, reported under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

## CHICKENS

Under the 1950 Allotment Act members are allowed to keep hens on their allotment, as long as they are only for the use of the tenants and not used for business or profit. If members chose to keep chickens on an allotment they must check on them daily, provide competent care and management and have the knowledge and skills to ensure the well-being of the animals. In addition, members are expected to keep them under proper control to avoid disturbance to others. All committee members have the right to inspect livestock at any time. If the committee decides to investigate cases or complaints of maltreatment, costs of vet or other official inspections may be passed onto the tenant for payment.

### Water

**Chickens must have access to clean and fresh water at all times.** In cold weather, care should be taken to prevent drinking water from icing-up. Should this occur, the ice should be broken manually; chemicals that prevent the build-up of ice or break it up once formed must **never** be used.

Drinkers should be cleaned regularly and water must not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition. Drinkers that prevent chicks climbing in and drowning should be used. If new chickens are introduced to the allotment, they must be provided with facilities to which they are already accustomed, as chickens do not like to drink from unfamiliar drinkers.

### Food

Chickens will spend much of their day scratching and foraging for food. However, they will need additional food, suitable for their age and breed, to provide a balanced diet. Feed must be sheltered to keep it clean and dry. Feed dispensers must be cleaned regularly and precautions taken to prevent infestation and contamination of the feed. Chickens must also always have access to insoluble grit (e.g. hard flint grit) to aid digestion. If the birds are kept on a grassed area, the grass should not be allowed to become too long, as, if eaten, long strands can become impacted in the crop, making it difficult for the birds to digest food.

### Laying hens

Hens will naturally prefer to find a quiet, secluded place to lay their eggs. Therefore, hens must be provided with individual, enclosed nest boxes. The boxes must be draught-free and lined with plenty of clean, dry and comfortable nesting material, such as straw or wood shavings.

### Housing

Chickens must be provided with warm, dry and well-ventilated housing. Adequate ventilation is very important, and while it is important to keep the birds warm, there must also be good air circulation inside the housing. The floor must be covered with a suitable substrate, such as wood shavings or straw, which must be kept dry and friable and therefore topped-up or replaced when necessary. Chickens like to dust bathe and preen their feathers, therefore a suitable material, such as wood shavings, should also be supplied for this activity. Feed and water facilities should be provided within the house.

Owners must ensure that there is plenty of space for the birds to move around easily and perform their natural behaviours within the house, this will depend on the size and number of chickens and the layout of facilities. It is important not to overstock birds as doing so may increase aggression and the potential for conflict.

Chickens naturally seek a raised position to roost at dusk, and must therefore be provided with perching facilities. There must be enough perching space for all the chickens to roost at the same time. However,

there must be enough space either side of the perch for hens to get up and down from them without injuring themselves. The accommodation must be cleaned out frequently and disinfected to ensure that there are no harmful parasites that could compromise the birds' health.

### **Pasture**

The birds should have plenty of space to move around easily and perform their natural behaviours, this will depend on the size and number of chickens and the layout of facilities.

### **Company**

It is recommended that people keep at least three hens (female chickens) which get on well together.

### **Introducing new stock to an existing flock**

Mixing of chickens that are unfamiliar with each other must be done carefully. Mixing breeds with substantially different body weights or individuals of markedly different sizes may result in increased conflict and bullying of smaller birds so should be avoided.

### **Health**

Members must be able to recognise birds with health problems. Signs of poor health may include a hunched posture, erect feathers and a reluctance to move. Birds may also be found hiding, for example in corners or amongst housing equipment, and may tuck their head under their wing. Healthy birds appear alert and interested in their environment, and look 'bright eyed' and well hydrated. Chickens can be susceptible to lice and red mites. Lice, which are 2-3mm in size, can be found all over the body with their eggs being deposited around the shaft of the feather. Red mites are smaller and are more likely to be found on the fixtures within the shed.

### **Sanitation**

In order to maintain healthy livestock and reduce odour problems, the run and hen-house should be cleaned a minimum of once a week or more frequently as necessary.

### **Worming**

Poultry need regular worming, particularly if they are kept on the same ground for a prolonged period (more than a month).

### **Feather pecking**

Members must be able to recognise feather pecking, which is where hens peck and pull at the feathers of other hens, sometimes leading to more serious injuries and even cannibalism. It can affect hens in any system, including commercial farming systems and hens kept as pets.

## BEES

Bees play a critical role in the pollination of so many plants, especially fruit crops. Higher yields and better quality produce will result from having hives nearby. Bee-keeping on an allotment must be carried out by someone with experience and knowledge, demonstrating they are competent at keeping bees. Anyone wishing to keep bees on site must be a member of a local beekeepers association and have the relevant insurance to cover public liability. The British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) provide details on local clubs and insurance policies, as well as beginner courses.

Bee Hives are best sited away from other plot holders, paths and public roads and therefore will only be permitted on perimeter plots (not including those backing onto residential premises).

The beekeeper must practice effective methods of swarm control and carry out regular inspections (at least once a week during the swarming season) for signs of swarming and there should be cover for this if the beekeeper is away.

It is noted however that Swarming is a natural phenomenon and no matter what steps are taken, there will inevitably be occasions when colonies will swarm.

The beekeeper should be aware of the temper of the bees and shall not bring onto the allotments colonies that are known to be aggressive temperament. If colonies are unnecessarily aggressive, then they should be re-queened with a queen from a reputable supplier of "docile strains".

Hives must be raised off the floor and bees should be encouraged to fly over high hedges, fences or 2m screens around the hives, especially if their flight path crosses a footpath. Contact details for the beekeeper must be displayed on site.

DEFRA officials and the Regional Bee Inspectors have statutory powers to access hives to deal with disease. The committee will co-operate fully with them in this regard.