

Allotment report September 2024

Wem Town Council has 65 allotments located at Love Lane for which are let to residents living within the boundaries of Wem Urban parish.

Currently all allotments are let.

Formal inspection takes place every 4 months to check allotments are being cultivated and being maintained by tenants to an acceptable standard.

Cllr Paul Johnson accompanies an officer on this inspection.

To date we have carried out 3 formal inspections this year, most recent on 28th August 2024.

In the event a plot is considered to be in breach of the tenancy agreement, a letter is sent to the tenant requesting improvement unless officers are aware of mitigating circumstances such as poor health.

Following the inspection held 28th August, 9 improvement letters have been issued, resulting in one tenant giving notice and another requesting a reduction in size from a ½ plot to ¼ size plot.

Waiting List

Currently there are 5 people on the waiting list and we are actively promoting the allotments to ensure we have full occupancy.

Communication to Allotment tenants

We have set up a group e-mail to enable us to communicate better with allotment holders, recent communication requested any feedback.

Notice board

In July 2024 we hosted a pupil from Thomas Adams School on work experience and one of the tasks we gave him as a project was to assist in making the Allotment notice board more engaging both to allotment holders and to promote the waiting list. Feedback has been positive from allotment tenants.

Signs

Following approval from the Council, new signs have been purchased and will be erected over the Autumn to clarify the plots, making it much easier for Allotment tenants to know their boundary / plot. This will also assist when showing prospective new tenants plots which are available.

Promotion possible events

Allotments not only provide food for tenants but are also important to some tenants as part of their health and wellbeing, they are a place of social engagement, we are keen to promote for tenants who wish to engage arrange a seed swap, a tea and cake event at the allotments.

Next year we are proposing to support and promote National Allotment Week which will be in August 2025.

Introduction of a retainer for new tenants

We would like The Council to consider introducing a retainer fee to be paid by any new tenants, as part of their tenancy agreement.

In the past several tenants have left sheds, wood, broken glass and general rubbish on their plot after vacating and there is often no way that the Council can make the tenant tidy the plot. Sometimes a skip is required to remove items prior to reletting or a rent reduction is offered to a new tenant, either option results in a financial cost to the Council. If a tenant gives notice and leaves the plot in a poor condition this retainer could then be used to cover the cost of plot clearance and work needed to bring the plot back into a lettable condition.

With the introduction of a retainer system, when a tenant gives up their allotment the plot would be inspected by a member of staff and a councillor and the retainer would be either fully or partially refunded to the tenant depending on the condition of the plot. The retainers would be held in earmarked reserves to ensure the funds are kept separate from Council and are accounted for.

This practice is common in other allotments in Shropshire, Selattyn and Gobowen PC charge a deposit of £50 on a half plot, it should be noted that the plot sizes on this allotment are significantly smaller than the plots at Love Lane. Bishops Castle TC charges a flat retainer of £200

Officer recommendation

That all new tenants are charged a retainer on the following sliding scale

Half plot £125

Quarter plot £75

Kate Sumner

Facilities Officer