

Keeping Chickens on Allotments Policy

Under section 12 of the allotments act 1950 tenants are legally allowed to keep chickens, specifically hens, on their allotment as long as they are not kept for trade or business purposes. Other forms of fowl or birds, including ducks or geese, may not be kept on any allotment land.

Witham Town Council welcomes tenants' applications for chickens provided that they are kept in a manner that is not prejudicial to health, do not create a nuisance to others and abide by animal welfare legislation, and that at least 50% of the plot is kept for growing fruit and / or vegetables.

Chickens take a lot of commitment and require time and energy, please think carefully before applying to keep hens on your plot.

This policy sets out the framework under which a tenant is permitted to keep chickens.

Application

1. Any person keeping hens on allotment land must be an allotment tenant and is bound by the allotment conditions of tenancy.
2. In applying to keep hens on an allotment, the allotment tenant accepts that all costs and expenses incurred for the keeping of any hens will be met by them.
3. Tenants keep chickens on their allotments at their own risk. Witham Town Council accept no liability for loss, injury, or theft of hens.
4. Tenants with a plot of less than 100 square meters will not be permitted to keep poultry, however a request can be made to change to a bigger plot when one becomes available.
5. Witham Town Council will permit a maximum of 7 hens (no cockerels) for the tenant's own domestic use on plots over 100 square meters. Poultry need companionship and therefore any application must be for a minimum of three hens.
6. Allotment tenants who wish to keep chickens on their allotment plot must put their request in writing to the Town Council. The application should include:
 - a. The number of hens being applied for.
 - b. A diagram of the coop showing all measurements clearly marked and materials to be used.
 - c. A plan showing the location of the coop within the plot along with the size of the allotment plot (as per the tenancy agreement).

The hen house can only be erected once permission has been granted.

General

7. All hens MUST by law be registered with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) within one month of keeping poultry. Witham Town Council will require evidence that this has been done within a month of hens being introduced to the allotment. Registration can be completed by

following the link <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-as-a-keeper-of-less-than-50-poultry-or-other-captive-birds>

8. The allotment tenant must provide contact details to ensure that they can be contacted at any time by the Allotment Officer in case of an emergency. Details of the vet used by the tenant must also be provided.
9. The most important consideration is the welfare of the hens and meeting their physiological and behavioural needs. This is accounted for under the **Animal Welfare Act 2006**, which the tenant must adhere to. The owner is responsible in law for looking after their hens and must take reasonable steps to make sure they have the following:
 - A suitable environment
 - A suitable diet and clean fresh water (no kitchen waste)
 - The chance to show normal patterns of behaviour
 - A place to live with others of their own kind
 - Protection from pain, injury, suffering and disease
10. The tenant is not permitted to breed hens on the allotment site nor profit from the sale of produce. Sale of hens / chicks or eggs will lead to the immediate termination of the tenancy.
11. All hens must be fully vaccinated prior to coming on to the allotment garden and a full list of hens and their individual medical history must be maintained and available to view upon request.
12. Under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, the tenant is responsible for preventing rodent infestations. Feed must be stored securely, the hen house and run must be cleaned regularly (any spare food should be swept up daily), and rodent traps or bait stations used if necessary. If a rat infestation occurs at the allotments and it is deemed to be a result of hens on the tenant's allotment, the tenant must meet the costs of any associated vermin control.

Housing

13. The housing structure must be robust, fit for purpose and maintained in good repair with no sharp edges and have easy access for cleaning.
14. The total area of the hen house and run should not exceed more than 20% of the total allotment plot. Any other structure that is already on the plot must be included in the 20% total.
15. To minimize potential nuisance to other plot holders, the henhouse and run should be a minimum of 3 meters from the boundary of the plot.
16. The fully closed shelter (hen house) must meet the following criteria:
 - Be tall enough for the tenant to stand up inside to allow easy cleaning and checking of the hens.
 - Provide a minimum of 30 square cm per hen to allow them to stand, turn around and stretch their wings

- Provide protection from predators such as foxes and badgers. Note that foxes are adept at climbing, jumping and digging.
- Offer hens continuous and plentiful access to cool, clean and fresh water, that must be changed daily.
- Ensure there is enough feed appropriate to the age and species of hen and in sufficient quantities as well as insoluble grit to aid digestion. The feeder **MUST** be raised from the ground to discourage vermin. **Please note that it is illegal under UK law to feed hens kitchen scraps, even from a vegan household, to avoid any chance of cross-contamination.**
- Provide clean dry bedding material to absorb moisture and odour (e.g. wood shavings or straw)
- Provide warmth during colder months or shade during summer. As a general guide the aim should be to achieve a temperature range of 10 -20 degrees centigrade
- Be draught free and have adequate ventilation
- Perches should be around 3-5cm wide with rounded edges (like a brush handle), and at the right height to suit the size of the bird. Each bird requires 25cm perch space.
- Provide nest boxes for laying eggs which are draught free and quiet with a good layer of nesting material.

17. Hens must have continuous daytime access to open air runs with access to a minimum of 8 hours of sunlight. The outdoor run must provide the following:

- A fully enclosed caged run that provides a minimum area of 2 meters squared per hen and provides the hens with plenty of space to dig, dust themselves and flap their wings.
- Protection from predators
- An additional means of overhead shelter to provide hens with protection from direct sunlight, strong wind and driving rain.

18. The run should be moved regularly to avoid “foul sick” or muddy conditions that could lead to ill health or discomfort.

Storage of Food and straw

19. Food storage on site must be kept in a vermin proof container such as a metal dustbin, so it is kept clean, tidy and properly protected from rodents and other pests.

20. Straw and litter are flammable and needs to be stored away from the coop and exercise area. It is recommended that dry sand is kept close by in case of emergencies.

Welfare

21. Hens thrive under routine and need daily care. The tenant must visit the hens **twice a day** to let them out and put them to bed in the evening.

22. The tenant is responsible:

- For ensuring that their hens are free from distress, pain, injury and disease. Early signs of ill health include changes in food and water intake, less preening and chatter and / or a change in egg production and quality.

- All preventative and / or veterinary treatment and maintaining a medical history of each hen
- Ensuring all hens are appropriately vaccinated
- Worming hens regularly (twice per year) and clipping claw nails to maintain them in a good healthy condition.
- Checking hens for lice and red mites
- Treating the hen house for Red Mite
- Checking the water is not frozen in winter months

23. The tenant must allow the Allotment Officer and / or an animal welfare representative to inspect the hens at any time. If the council or animal welfare representative has cause to investigate complaints of maltreatment, injury or illness then the council reserves the right to give permission for a vet to give medication and all reasonable costs of vets or other official inspections will be passed to the allotment tenant for payment.
24. Where it is thought necessary, and in the interest of any hen, notice will be served accordingly to order improvements to the accommodation or overall management of the plot. In certain circumstances, immediate action may be required
25. The tenant must report any serious, longstanding or contagious health problems to Witham Town Council immediately with details on the treatment being received and notification when the problem is cleared.
26. All deaths of hens are to be recorded by the allotment tenant and reported to the Town Council immediately. All dead hens must be disposed of offsite. Burial or incineration of hen carcasses is strictly prohibited at the allotment site. Where more than one hen dies at the same time (by which it means within 60 hours of the death or discovery of the death), the remaining hens will need to be checked by a vet for disease.
27. Failure to keep any hens safe and in secure conditions with adequate food and water will result in a warning in the first instance. If no improvement is seen within 5 working days or if a second warning is required within a 12-month period, this will result in the loss of your tenancy. A serious breach in hen welfare could result in an immediate termination without prior warning.

Outbreak of disease

28. From time to time there can be outbreaks of animal diseases that affect your area or even the whole country. The diseases can be quickly passed on by contact and through the air. If there is an outbreak of disease the Animal and Plant Health Agency will contact the tenant who will be given advice on how to deal with it quickly. This advice must be followed.

Cleanliness

29. Uneaten food left on the ground attracts other birds (who may carry disease) and vermin. The uneaten food must be swept up daily.

30. Food and water containers should be kept clean and in good condition. To avoid contamination, water should be brought on to your plot rather than cleaning containers under a running tap.
31. The hen house and run should be cleaned a minimum of once a week or more frequently if necessary. The hen house and nest boxes must be disinfected regularly to remove parasites from crooks and crevices.
32. The tenant is responsible for the removal of all waste materials from the site. Soiled bedding is not compostable.

End of Tenancy

33. When the tenancy ends, the tenant must remove any animal housing that has been used during the tenancy. If any buildings / runs are not removed, Witham Town Council will charge the amount of cost to remove the structure back to the tenant.

By applying to keep chickens, the tenant agrees to comply with the conditions set out in this policy AND the allotment tenancy agreement issued by Witham Town Council.

Adopted: Environment 13.10.2025

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