

# **NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE ALLOTMENTS WORKING GROUP**

## **Review of Policy on Structures (Sheds, Greenhouses, Polytunnels, Temporary Covers)**

**November 2010**

### **Introduction**

Newcastle upon Tyne City Council operate a policy of devolved responsibility to Allotment Committees for the authorisation and monitoring of structures/buildings upon allotments. Whilst the City Council through links with planning and development as well as other amenity services may become involved in extremes, it is usually the Allotments Officer and Allotments Working Group members who advise Allotment Committees upon matters requiring clarification or arbitration.

### **Background**

Previous guidance dates from 1984. This review provides an opportunity to encompass contemporary building materials and gardening practice, for example polytunnels. This does not detract from previous guidance which was specific and of a high standard, that is dimensions of buildings and the use of new timber.

Allotments now enjoy a higher profile than at any time since the 'Dig for Victory' campaign; demand increases as do waiting lists. This ultimately increases pressure to effectively manage allotments sites and individual plots; including buildings and the volume of land available for cultivation.

**Building Guidance** – encompassing sheds, greenhouses, polytunnels, temporary covers and internal fences.

The objective has been to keep guidance to a minimum consistent with maintaining and improving the standard of allotment buildings.

### **Approval**

- The erection of any building is dependent upon 'prior' approval by the Site Committee. Advice if necessary may be sought from the Allotments Officer and/or Allotments Working Group representatives.
- Prior approval is sought by making an application in writing, including a diagram, measurements and materials.
- Materials should not be ordered or delivered prior to approval.
- **Access** – a pathway should be kept around buildings for maintenance and access purposes.

### **Location**

- Due regard must be given to neighbours and proximity to site perimeters in locating buildings.
- Due regard must be given to overall Site Plan and environmental impact.
- Uniformity of location and materials should be considered. Uniformity needs to be balanced against expression of individuality. Some sites specify no sheds, or sheds/greenhouses in line, or only aluminium greenhouses only, or that polytunnels must be commercially produced standard. It is now accepted practice that new plot holders be allocated half-plots, the location of structures should be such as to facilitate this, that is buildings should not straddle the mid-line.

- Dimensions**
- The apex of any structure shall not exceed 8ft 6in. Maximum dimensions of sheds are 10ft x 8ft.
  - No more than 25% of an allotment may be taken up by structures.
  - A minimum of 75% of an allotment should be under cultivation, this excludes working or sorting out areas.
- Materials**
- Sheds must be of sound treated timber or pre-formed commercial construction.
  - Timber should be treated or painted in brown or green.
  - Greenhouses may be timber or aluminium.
  - UPVC is not allowed, likewise recycled windows and doors (except for cold frames) thus avoiding structures which convey a ramshackle appearance.
  - Polytunnels should be regarded as a variation of greenhouses. **NB** the 25:75 rule applies. There is no requirement to remove the polythene covers at season's end, this practice shortens the life of an expensive structure.
  - Chrysanthemum covers and similar – height should not exceed 7ft, timber should not exceed 2 in x 2 in, covers to be allowed 01.08 – 30.11. These covers are regarded as temporary structures and may be in addition to the 25% permanent structure rule.
- Glazing**
- Shall be of glass (preferably toughened) horticultural perspex or clear/opaque polythene, or clear acrylic/PVC.
  - Corrugated or polycarbonate is not allowed.
  - Adequate glazing bars must be used.
- Maintenance**
- All structures should be regularly maintained. No stipulation is made other than that identified during bi-annual site inspections.
- Heating**
- Shall be by paraffin or bottled gas. Due regard will be given to safe storage and regular disposal of gas bottles.
- Internal Fences**
- Maximum height 3 ft, construction post and wire. Post 2 in x 2 in two or three strands of wire, galvanised.
- Water Collection**
- Plot holders are encouraged to collect water from building roofs. Water storage should be in containers which are not sunk into the ground and thereby avoid potential danger. Site inspections should monitor water features and storage in light of risk.

## **Discussion**

Much time is spent and many complaints generated by the size, condition and location of allotment buildings. Whilst any policy needs to set out standardised guidance across the City, there is a need to address issues on a site by site basis. Committees in dealing with disputes need to bear in mind that they demonstrate their actions have been reasonable and equitable.

Although guidance has existed for many years, many of the issues which arise could be avoided by adherence to the guidance, particularly that of prior authorisation and maintenance.

Where standards are not met, a sensitive plan to remedy matters should be put in place. In most cases an opportunistic and incremental movement toward desired goals can be made, particularly as plots become vacant.

## **Recommendations**

1. The above guidance is adopted.
2. Policy of incremental shift toward the identified standards be made.
3. Absolute adherence to the principle of prior approval.

## **Conclusion**

The North East has a rich heritage which includes allotment gardening. The historical and cultural context still prevails and attempts to re-label allotments as leisure gardens is a potential source of conflict. Depending upon one's standpoint, allotments have always been 'leisure' gardens.

It is unreasonable to expect allotments to be of 'show' garden standard. Nonetheless the City Council, neighbours and fellow gardeners have the right to expect a certain standard of buildings and cultivation and that allotments enhance the environment as opposed to detract from it.