



# Tenant Handbook

2020

V1.2

# **Welcome to your new allotment!**

We hope that you will enjoy your allotment for many years to come.

This allotment handbook provides you with information about some of the key terms and conditions of your tenancy agreement. We hope that it also contains lots of other useful information as well as important safety advice. Whilst parts of this handbook are aimed at new allotment tenants, there is still plenty of important and useful information for those who have held an allotment tenancy for some time. We therefore ask all tenants, new and old, to make use of this handbook.

It is very important that you read this handbook carefully and that you keep hold of it for future reference. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to get in touch.

**Email: [contact@yorkallotments.org](mailto:contact@yorkallotments.org)**

**Telephone: 07746268588**

**Postal Address: York Allotments, Popeshead Court Offices, Peter Lane, York, YO1 8SU**

You can send post to us at the address above but please be aware that this is not a staffed office so you cannot come and see us.

# Tenancy Agreement

Your tenancy agreement is the legal agreement between you and YACIO that governs the use of your plot. Please sign and return one copy of the agreement to YACIO through your Site Secretary. On their receipt of this signed legal agreement you are free to start gardening.

## YACIO

### **York Allotments Charitable Incorporated organisation**

**(YACIO)** manages the 16 allotment sites previously run by City of York Council until 2017. These are distributed across the city, with more information available on our Allotment Finder page.

YACIO is run by Trustees who each bring their own gardening and other work experience and skills to manage the allotments in a fair and open way.

### **Who are the trustees?**

The current volunteer trustees are:

- Tony Chalcraft (Carr Lane) – Chairperson
- Colin Smith (Green Lane) – Secretary
- Lisa Turner (Wigginton Terrace) – Treasurer
- Simon Wild (Low Moor) – Trustee
- Adam Myers (Low Moor) – Trustee
- Maria Lewington-Gower (Green Lane) – Trustee

The Charity's Constitution, which has been ratified by the Charity Commission, proposes that there can be up to nine trustees who can hold a post for up to three years before being put before an Annual General Meeting for re-election.

### **How are decisions made about how the Charity will be run?**

The trustees will have responsibility for managing all of the City of York allotment sites but be accountable to members through any

resolutions passed at Annual General Meeting(AGM)s. The Trustees meet on a monthly basis to discuss all operational aspects of the charity, including finances, new policies and specific issues that have arisen. There is an internal Manual that ensures that the way decisions are made are governed and applied fairly across all of the 16 allotment sites. The AGM is held once a year to discuss new policies or issues that have arisen. All members of the charity who are allotment holders will be entitled to attend the AGM and cast a vote on any issues raised. This will include nominating new trustees or re-electing current trustees.

YACIO has one part time administrator to deal with the routine administration and each site is represented by a voluntary Site Secretary who deals with letting new plots and reporting any site issues.

### **How does someone become a member of the charity?**

All paid-up tenants are automatically members of the charitable organisation.

### **Constitution**

A copy of the charity's constitution as well as minutes from past trustee meetings are available for download from the YACIO website.

## **Deposit**

When you take on your allotment tenancy you pay a refundable deposit. This is held by YACIO until such time as your allotment tenancy is terminated. If you leave your plot in poor condition you will not receive your deposit back. You pay a separate key deposit so remember to return your keys when you leave. If you lose your key and need a replacement you will have to pay another deposit.

# Rent

Allotment rents must be paid each year. An invoice is sent out to all plot holders at the beginning of the calendar year and plot holders are encouraged to make payment as early as possible. Instructions of how to pay are included on the invoice. Where a tenancy begins part way through the year, the reductions as set out in the tenancy agreement will be applied. Where a plot is granted rent free in the first year this only applies to that calendar year and an invoice will be raised in the January of the following year.

## **Concessions**

If you wish to claim a concession on your rent you must fill out the Application for Concessionary Rent, available on our website, and send it to the Administrator along with appropriate proof of eligibility. For concessions that are granted based on changing circumstances we will write to you each year to ask you to resubmit your application.

Site secretaries are not party to information relating to concessions, and all queries and communication should be directly with the administrator of YACIO, and is treated confidentially.

# Sharing and Co-working

You may wish to be assisted on your plot by someone else. If you would like the person you are assisted by to have rights with regards to the tenancy agreement then you must register them with YACIO as a co-worker. This must be done in writing or via email. You may add a co-worker at any time during your tenancy.

Any nominated co-worker must have been added for one year before they are eligible to take over as the main tenant. You cannot sub-let your plot (charge others a rent for using it) and any tenant found to be doing this will have their tenancy terminated.

# Contact

YACIO will usually contact you by email in the first instance, where you have provided us with one. Annual invoices are sent each January by post. Therefore please make sure you keep us updated with your current email and postal address in order to assist with administration. Where there is more than one tenant for the plot the first tenant on the tenancy agreement will be the one we send our correspondence to.

# Site Secretaries

Each allotment site has a voluntary representative known as the Site Secretary. These volunteers are plot holders who assist YACIO in the smooth running of the allotments. You should have met your Site Secretary when you first viewed your allotment. If you have any questions or concerns your Site Secretary should be your first point of contact.

Please note that site secretaries have no involvement with invoicing, so for any financial questions please contact the Administrator.

# Getting Started

Once you get your allotment plot it can be tempting to jump in immediately but a little bit of planning will help you in the long run and make sure you can keep up your momentum.

- Take time to plan the layout of your plot for ease of use
- Develop a yearly plan of what you will grow
- Think about shade, ease of access, growing space, watering, etc.
- Create narrow planting beds to allow easy access to the soil
- Use crop rotation to keep your soil healthy
- Manure your plot regularly to maintain soil fertility
- Ensure you have good paths and keep paths clear of hazards
- Don't do too much in one go but maintain steady and regular progress

# Cultivation

We require the majority of a plot to be under cultivation. You must demonstrate that you are maintaining your plot in a cultivable state.

This means that you are:

- making every effort to control weed growth
- preparing the soil for sowing or planting
- planting out new crops during the growing season or maintaining perennials such as fruit bearing shrubs or trees
- maintaining any ground around fruit trees and bushes to minimise weeds
- keeping the plot in a neat and tidy state

The use of weed suppressant covering is permitted in the following circumstances:

- to prepare an overgrown plot for cultivation (weed suppressant coverings should not normally be in place for more than 12 months)
- on a temporary basis for small areas of the plot (not exceeding 50% of the total area) not currently being used for growing
- in the event of a prolonged absence, either due to illness or circumstances beyond the plot holders control, larger proportions of covering are permitted providing the tenant makes arrangements for YACIO to be notified.

After 3 months it would be expected to see parts of the plot cleared and dug over. After 6 months we would expect to see some crops in place (depending on the time of year) and the plot substantially dug, or uncultivated areas covered with weed fabric or other weed suppressant materials. By the end of the first year of your tenancy we would expect to see the whole plot in a good state of cultivation. If you have difficulty achieving this please make contact with us.

If you know that you are going to be unable to garden for some time please let us know and where possible cover your plot in advance to minimise weed growth to avoid causing problems for your neighbours.

### **Non Cultivation**

If you are sent a letter for non-cultivation you will be allowed 21 or 28 days to make significant improvements (depending upon the severity of the issues). If you fail to reply or improve the state of cultivation, you will be sent a further letter and your tenancy may be terminated.

If there are extenuating circumstances for why you are unable to cultivate your plot you must let us know so that these can be taken into consideration.

## **Livestock**

You need permission to be able to keep livestock on your allotment. You must fill out the permission form and wait for permission to be granted before bringing any livestock on site. There is an extra charge of £6 for the keeping of livestock on your plot.

We permit a maximum of 12 hens, 6 ducks or 3 geese per full sized plot (reduced as plot size reduces) and they must have appropriate care and housing.

Our full Guidelines on Poultry and Pigeon Keeping can be found on our website.

Bees are permitted to be kept on some sites either on individual plots or specially developed Apiary sites. Appropriate screening must be put in place to protect neighbours and passers by and you must be properly trained as a beekeeper as well as a member of York and District Beekeepers' Association or similar and hold appropriate insurance. Further guidance on beekeeping can be obtained from the Administrator.



# Structures

You must get permission to erect a shed, greenhouse, chicken coop or other structure on your allotment. You should first discuss this with your Site Secretary, who will be able to advise you on your particular site rules. You must fill out the permission form, obtainable from your Site Secretary or the Administrator, and get this signed by your Site Secretary before any work commences. Failure to do so may lead to a warning being issued and a note placed on your file. Infringements of Allotment rules may impact your continued tenancy.

The current guidance for structures can be found on our website.

# Recreational and Play Equipment

Allotments are primarily intended for horticultural use. Although they have a recreational role, this is subsidiary to their main purpose. It is recognised that for some plot holders, especially those with children, some availability of recreational and play equipment is important. YACIO therefore wishes to be flexible in allowing some recreational and play equipment on plots providing it is:

- proportionate in size and space occupied to the size of the plot (e.g. taking up only a small area of the plot)
- is situated and used in such a way not to cause a hazard or nuisance to neighbouring plots

There are some types of equipment that is not allowed for the reasons given:

- trampolines (not permitted because of size, health and safety and insurance issues)
- any larger equipment used for ball games (e.g. football goals, cricket stumps, etc.) (not permitted because of the risk of balls going onto other plots, damaging crops/greenhouses, etc.). However, smaller equipment used for ball games conducted at ground level are permissible providing the area of the plot occupied is proportionate
- climbing equipment (e.g. large climbing frames or nets)
- large fixed slides, seesaws, swings, etc. (small and portable versions are permissible)

# Hosepipes

Hosepipes must only be used for filling water butts and containers. You must not use them to directly water your plot. Sprinklers are strictly prohibited.



This is for several reasons:

- Using a hosepipe for extended periods means that other plot holders cannot get water.
- Watering with a hosepipe is inefficient and leads to excessive water consumption, much of which is lost to evaporation.
- Excessive water usage may lead to a water shortage and a hosepipe ban in times of drought.

You can attach guttering to garden sheds and greenhouses to collect rain water but remember to keep water butts covered and ensure that they are located on stable ground.

Organic matter can be dug into the ground and a thick layer of mulch placed around established plants to help retain moisture in the soil. Water your allotment in the morning or evening to reduce risk of evaporation or scorching.

Give plants a thorough soaking to encourage deep rooting. Also, remember that over-watering can be just as unproductive as under-watering!

Water will usually be turned off on site during the coldest months to prevent burst pipes. This includes sites with livestock so make sure you have other arrangements in place.

# Bonfires

Allowing a bonfire to cause a nuisance to neighbouring residents or other allotment tenants contravenes your allotment tenancy. It may also be an offence under environmental protection law. If the Council's Environmental Protection Unit receive a complaint they issue an official warning. After a warning, further nuisance could lead to a court appearance and a fine of up to £5,000.

Please note the following rules for trouble free bonfires:

- Don't light a bonfire on a warm, dry day, when neighbouring residents may be sitting out in their garden or drying their washing
- Don't light a fire between Easter & October unless the weather is cold and grey
- Don't burn your weeds – most can be composted to improve the soil
- Don't bring rubbish from home to burn on your plot
- Only burn dry, woody garden waste
- Choose a still, cool evening for your fire
- Make sure the fire is out before you leave it



## Hedges and Shared Paths

If your plot boundary includes a hedge, maintaining this is your responsibility. If you are unable to take on such work please discuss this with the Site Secretary and an alternative plot can be sought for you. Remember, it is an offence to disturb nesting birds so please check your hedges before cutting and only cut at appropriate times of year. Hedges and fences should not exceed 1.5 meters high.

While main access paths are mowed by our contractors, paths between plots are the responsibility of the tenants on either side. You must keep the pathway maintained and passable up to the middle of the path. This may mean mowing or clipping back weeds or grass or even cutting back plant growth such as tree branches or brambles.

## Pesticides

YACIO encourages an organic approach to gardening wherever possible. Pesticides can dramatically impact local pollinator populations and affect crop harvests and yields. A number of

allotment holders keep bees both on individual plots and on the apiary sites and inappropriate pesticide use can cause hundreds of pounds worth of damage to these colonies.

**Never** spray pesticides on a flowering plant.

We recommend trying to minimise the use of pesticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilisers, or reduce the levels of use over time. If you do use them, remember they are not a quick fix and should only be used in specific situations - try to keep use to a minimum and always be mindful of the following important safety advice:

- Follow all relevant legislation
- Always keep products in their original containers
- Follow the instructions for use carefully
- Do not estimate amounts - measure them carefully
- Use personal protective clothing and gloves
- Wash hands after use and wash off any splashes immediately
- Store out of the reach of children and locked away securely
- Ensure you are not contaminating your neighbours' plots or local watercourses
- Consider the potential harm to wildlife, pets and children before use
- Check old products to ensure they have not been banned
- Contact your local waste management and recycling centre for disposal advice.

## Weeds

### **Removing Weeds**

When taking on a new plot there are likely to be plenty of weeds. Be prepared for lots of hard work to clear the plot properly, but remember it is a job worth doing. Careful weed removal and preparation of the soil at this stage will reap future benefits!

### **Regular Weeding**

To keep on top of weeds you need to make frequent visits to your plot, especially during the main growing season, and make weeding a regular task. Digging over the ground and removing roots is the only

really effective organic way to remove weeds but other methods can help.

### **Weedkillers (Herbicides)**

These generally fall into two types: contact and systemic. Contact herbicides can be useful for large areas of annual weeds and usually work on contact with foliage. They have minimal impact on perennial weeds, such as nettles or brambles, and are best avoided on allotments, save your money and use a hoe instead!

Systemic weedkillers, such as glyphosate, destroy plants from within, including their roots, usually following a spray application to the foliage. They are therefore useful for controlling perennial weeds such as bindweed, couch grass, ground elder and bramble. We advise restricting their use to the initial clearance of plots, after which any regrowth can be tackled by hand weeding. It is important that you check any old products you may have stored in your shed. Many commonly used products have now been withdrawn from sale due to their adverse impact on the environment and their use is now banned. If you continue to use such products you will be breaking the law.

**Disposing Of Weeds** You can compost annual weeds (avoid seed heads) but roots of perennial weeds will grow again if they are composted before they are killed. (Try drowning them in a bucket of water.) Use the internet or a good gardening book to help you identify common annual and perennial weeds. Do not burn weeds as this can make a bonfire very smoky.

### **Invasive Species**

Please inform us immediately if you have any invasive species on your plot as you may need specialist advice to remove them. A complete list can be found in the Health and Advice section on the following website <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prevent-the-spreadof-harmful-invasive-and-nonnative-plants> .

Ones to watch out for on allotments include:

Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed.

# Composting

## **Why Compost?**

Compost is a natural, nutrient-rich, soil-like medium of decayed organic matter. It is a product of the natural breakdown of dead plants and other organic matter such as fruit and vegetable peelings. With time and a little bit of care and attention, this organic matter decomposes with the assistance of micro-organisms and earthworms to produce a valuable source of compost. This can improve and enrich the soil, helping to feed your plants and to encourage them to grow strong and healthy.

## **Making Compost**

Making compost is not especially difficult. The easiest method is to purchase a compost bin specially designed for the purpose. If you prefer the DIY approach, you can build your own compost bin. To do this you may want to contain the heap using reclaimed timber and four wooden posts to make a bottomless box; covering will also help to retain moisture. Alternatively, just heap all your organic matter into a big pile in a corner of your plot. However this method looks less attractive, can suffer from a lack of firmness and can lose the heat generated internally unless covered. Digging or 'turning' your compost occasionally will help to speed up the process and will discourage rats and other vermin from nesting in these areas.

## **Safe Composting**

Always use gloves when handling compost or manure and wash your hands afterwards.

Don't compost cooked food or animal products as these can attract vermin and possibly contain harmful bacteria or disease.

# Rubbish

When you take on a plot you may find rubbish and other debris, which we ask you to remove and dispose of carefully. Many materials can easily be transported off-site for recycling or safe disposal at one of the Council's waste recycling facilities. Materials such as wood or bricks

can be reused on the plot, saving the need to send materials to landfill. If you come across material on your plot that is difficult to dispose of, we ask you to try to remove as much as possible safely before contacting us for further assistance. YACIO is unable to provide skips for general waste disposal so think carefully about what you bring on to your plot and how it will be disposed of in the future.

In exceptional circumstances YACIO may be able to assist you with the removal of large or bulky waste, such as clearing an old shed left on a plot. Please discuss this with your Site Secretary when taking on the plot or contact the Administrator to discuss this further.

## Wildlife

### **Beneficial Wildlife**

Allotments provide a range of habitats for birds, small mammals, amphibians and insects, to name but a few. Many animals are beneficial to gardeners as they prey on pests such as aphids, slugs and snails. As far as possible, tenants should look to share their allotments with local wildlife. Birds can be encouraged with nest boxes and feeders placed in trees. Remember to check for nesting birds before cutting your hedges.

### **Unwelcome Wildlife**

Rats are attracted by uncultivated areas, spaces under sheds, piles of debris and open compost heaps as well as available food, such as unharvested crops and excess livestock feed.

Keeping your plot tidy and well cultivated helps deter them. If further action is required, products for dealing with rats are available from DIY stores but only use in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. YACIO will only take action if there is a severe infestation which cannot be contained by the above measures and which impacts on the wider community.

Pigeons can be a problem, particularly on sites located close to woodland/or agricultural land. The only way to ensure protection for crops is to cover them with netting. Please be mindful to secure nets properly so that birds do not become trapped in loose netting. It is

advisable to check netting after heavy snowfall or strong winds which may cause it to collapse.

Foxes generally do not cause too many problems and the main issue is unwanted digging, particularly if animal-based fertilisers such as blood, fish and bone are used. The best way to avoid this is to minimise the use of such products and to cover areas of freshly-dug soil. If you keep rabbits, chickens or pigeons on your plot, make sure their housing is sturdy enough to withstand potential attacks by foxes.

## Personal Health

- **Tetanus** - Tetanus is an illness caused by bacteria present in soil and manure, which can enter the body through the tiniest abrasion, scratch, thorn, puncture or cut. Your GP may be able to offer a vaccination.

- **First Aid** - A first aid kit is always a wise addition to the tools kept in the garden shed. A small selection of adhesive plasters, antiseptic wipes to clean wounds, sting cream, a pair of tweezers for removing thorns and splinters and a gauze or lint pad to use as a compress to stop bleeding if you are badly cut are useful contents.

- **Exercise** - Having an allotment can be hard work so please be mindful of your own capabilities and physical limitations and build up slowly, particularly if you are not used to it! If you have a known medical condition you may want to seek medical advice before starting work on your plot. Thrive is an organisation to help people who have ill health or a disability to garden and more tips and advice can be found on their website at: [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk)

- **Wash Hands and Use Gloves** - There is a risk of illness from bacteria (such as E.coli) which can be present in animal manure and even home made compost. Please wash your hands regularly and always wear protective gloves when handling potentially harmful substances.

- **Sun Protection** - If you are spending long periods on your plot then please ensure you have adequate sun protection and limit your exposure to strong sunshine. Also, keep yourself hydrated by regularly



drinking water or other soft drinks and avoid physical exertion during the hottest part of the day.

## Security on Allotments

Many of us find that time on allotments is both tranquil and enjoyable. Plot holders spend a considerable amount of time on their plots and put in a lot of effort, keeping their plot well maintained and productive. It can therefore be very distressing if your site suffers from incidents of vandalism or anti-social behaviour. The tips on the following page are aimed at increasing plot security and reducing vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

### **Respect**

As an allotment holder you are expected to be courteous and respectful to other users of the site and neighbouring properties (this is a condition of your tenancy). Everyone is entitled to enjoy their plot.

- ✧ Consider security at all times - all tenants have a responsibility for maintaining security on their site
- ✧ Please respect tenants, neighbours and other members of the public on your site
- ✧ Report any incidents to the police (using 101 for non-emergencies or 999 for emergencies)
- ✧ Please make YACIO aware of any incidents
- ✧ Please keep dogs on a lead
- ✧ Please clean up after your dog
- ✧ Do not visit other plots without permission or cause a nuisance to your neighbours

### **Nuisance**

A plot holder must not cause or permit any nuisance to any other plot holder or to the owners or occupiers of any adjoining or neighbouring property. YACIO will not tolerate any threatening, violent or intimidating behaviour by plot holders under any circumstances. Any plot holder found guilty in a court of law of offences involving an allotment plot or other plot holders will be given immediate notice to terminate.

## Security Checklist

- ✧ Keep your plot well maintained. A well tended plot is a lot less likely to attract vandals than one that looks uncared for.
- ✧ Don't leave any valuables on site. If possible take all tools with you when you leave. Any tools left on your plot should be security marked.
- ✧ Don't use or keep combustible or dangerous materials on your plot.
- ✧ Dispose of rubbish appropriately. A site that is well presented and looks used and cared for can help to reduce anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping.
- ✧ Keep your site and your plot secure. If your site has fencing keep the gates locked at all times.
- ✧ Razor wire or similar are not allowed under any circumstances.
- ✧ Be a good neighbour. Looking out for one another will help make your site feel safer.
- ✧ Be aware of personal safety when working on your own. Always let someone know where you are and, if possible, have a means of contact such as a mobile phone.
- ✧ Join your allotment association. Allotment associations need your support and many are working in partnership with us to improve safety on allotments.
- ✧ Report all incidents. The police target resources at areas where crime is most often reported. Please report all incidents using the 101 number (or 999 if someone is at risk or it is an emergency). Please let YACIO know of any incidents but please note we are not able to report them to the police on your behalf.

## Sale of Produce

You are not permitted to run your allotment plot as a business. You may only sell genuine surplus produce from your plot – or give it away. You may not sell produce from on site except where special permission for an Allotment Shop has been granted.

# Associations

Most of YAICO's sites also have an Allotment Association. You can join your site association, usually for a small fee. This gives you access to a variety of different things such as social events, bulk buying of seeds or manure and a good support network of experienced plot holders. YACIO encourages the formation of strong Associations so that tenants can support each other and work together for the beneficial interest of the allotment site as a whole.

If your site does not already have an association then think about starting one!

Please note that all Associations function independently of YACIO so please contact them directly with any queries.

# Allotment Shops

Some sites may operate a shop as part of the community or association activities. These are not operated by YACIO, however, as with the associations, they must follow YACIO's rules. Your Association and/or Site Secretary will have further information, and information is typically displayed on Notice Boards

Please contact them directly for further information.

# What to do if you have a problem.

Your Site Secretary should be able to assist you or guide you in the right direction if you have any issues on site. You can also contact YACIO if you feel an issue needs to be addressed by a Trustee. Please use the contact details provided at the beginning of this booklet.

YACIO welcome compliments, comments and complaints from anyone using or visiting the allotments. Feedback can help to improve services and plan for the future.

YACIO are always pleased to hear about services working well. Sometimes YACIO will excel in what it does, and it is positive to highlight and celebrate aspects of work where it performs

exceptionally well. YACIO can take steps to ensure that it maintains excellence in those areas and, where possible, will transfer skills and ideas to other areas of its work.

YACIO also realises that things can occasionally go wrong and that people may not be happy with the service, support, site maintenance or behaviour of others. YACIO may need to address these problems and, where possible, put things right and subsequently learn from mistakes and ensure they are not repeated. YACIO aims to try and resolve complaints quickly and where possible, adopt an informal approach.

Complaints may be submitted in any format which can include face to face; letter; telephone; email. The administrator will identify any complaints and record them. All complaints will be referred to the Trustees.

If a crime or incident of anti-social behaviour has occurred on your allotment please report all such incidents to the police. The police target resources at areas where crime is most often reported. Please report all incidents using the 101 number (or 999 if someone is at risk or it is an emergency). Please let YACIO know of any incidents but please note we are not able to report them to the police on your behalf.

# **Happy Gardening!**