

Sevenoaks TOWN Council



Allotments Strategy

Updated
2021-2025

Sevenoaks Town Council
Council Offices
Bradbourne Vale Road
Sevenoaks, Kent, TH13 3QG

Tel: 01732 459953

Email: allotments@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

Website: www.sevenoakstown.gov.uk

Mission Statement

Within the town of Sevenoaks and, as a priority, Sevenoaks Town Council wants to ensure the continuation of allotment sites, that these are available for parishioners of Sevenoaks and are managed in a well-run and sustainable manner for the enjoyment of those who wish to grow their own food.

Background

Sevenoaks Town Council is publishing this updated strategy to show that it has a clear Mission Statement in relation to allotments as shown at the start of this document.

The document will also set out what can be expected from an allotment tenant and how this would be managed.

The statutory provision of the Small Holdings & Allotments Act 1908, ss23, 26 & 42, provides town and parish councils with the power to provide allotments and duty to provide allotment gardens if demand is unsatisfied.

Sevenoaks Town Council is duty bound to provide allotments for its residents if the statutory demand is provided.

Sevenoaks Town Council is a member of the National Allotment Society. (www.nsalg.org.uk)

The Town Council employs a member of staff who has professional experience of operating allotment sites; in addition, they have also personally tended allotments for many years.

The Chief Executive / Town Clerk is responsible for the operation and governance of all the Town Council facilities. Prior to working for Sevenoaks Town Council, the Town Clerk has developed several new allotment sites and has been responsible for administering allotment sites for over thirty years, although is no longer involved in the day-to-day administration. The Town Clerk's family has also had an allotment for many years.

The Open Spaces & Cemetery Manager has experience of management of public open spaces including a cemetery and allotments. He is also a professional horticulturist.

This document is intended to provide, in a concise manner, information relating to Sevenoaks Town Council's provision and aspirations for the future of allotment gardening in Sevenoaks.

Allotment Provision in Sevenoaks

Allotment plots have historically been measured in rods. A rod equals 30.25 square yards.

The modern method of charging for allotment plots is by square metres.

Over many years since the allotments were laid out boundaries have shifted, and plots now vary in size. In order to ensure accuracy of the plot measurements, every single plot was measured manually over the winter of 2019-2020.

In October 2021, the method of measuring and charging for allotments changed from rods to square metres.

At the time of writing (November 2021) Sevenoaks has two allotment sites.

1. Bradbourne Vale Allotments (BVA) – 33 plots of varying sizes, totalling 6,786 square metres (259 rods).
2. Quaker's Hall Allotments (QHA) – 250 plots of varying sizes, totalling 40,500 square metres (~1,600 rods).

As an Allotment Tenant or prospective Allotment Tenant what should I expect?

1. Parishioners of Sevenoaks with an interest in obtaining an allotment should be able to receive information about waiting lists, be able to put their name on the waiting list and be kept updated as to when they are likely to be able to have an allotment.
2. All tenants should be provided with a written Tenancy Agreement.
3. Efficient and effective allotment administration.
4. The allotment site should have good access, good security, water provision and freedom from neglected plots.
5. Fair, open and equal treatment regardless of race, religion, gender, sexuality, gender assignment, age or disability, and to be treated with respect by the Council and by fellow allotment tenants.
6. Fair charges and rents.

What is expected of an Allotment Tenant?

All allotment tenants will be provided with a Tenancy Agreement setting out in detail the terms and conditions of the Tenancy Agreement.

The main requirements are:

1. To work at the allotment regularly.
2. To prevent growth of weeds which will impede on neighbouring allotment plots and or pathways.
3. To only use the allotment for the purposes set out in the Tenancy Agreement.
4. To comply with the requirements for security in relation to locking of gates.
5. Not to sublet or pass on the allotments to a third person.
6. To conserve water.
7. To pay annual rent at allocated time.
8. To leave the allotment at the end of the tenancy in a suitable condition so that it may be re-let to another tenant.

Self-Management of Allotment Sites via Allotment Associations

Sevenoaks Town Council owns and manages both allotment sites.

Until 2017, QHA was managed for the Council by Sevenoaks Allotment Holders' Association (SAHA), but the lease was not renewed. Historically, when long leases were normal for sports and other open spaces, SAHA was provided with a 50 year lease to manage the allotments.

The Town Council has publicly stated that it would prefer both sites to be managed by Allotment Associations.

There are the following benefits to self-management of allotments:

1. Potentially reduced revenue costs for the Council.
2. On-site management enabling day-to-day responses to problems and needs.
3. The allotment association may be able to access funding streams that are not available to the Council.
4. Democracy within an allotment association would be determined on which facilities the income from allotment rent is invested.
5. Opportunities for volunteers to use their relevant skills.

The government's document *Growing in the Community, second edition*

(<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/growing-community-second--8f5.pdf>)

and its supplement *A Place to Grow* (<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/place-grow-supplementary--736.pdf>) state:

1. There needs to be a 'rescue strategy' to manage the risks to both the Council and the association should devolved management arrangements break down.
2. Devolved management agreements need to be reviewed on a regular basis, to ensure that they are delivering good value to the service users.
3. Financial risks – the only regular source of revenue obtained from most allotment sites is rental income. Most allotment rents are quite modest. Allotments can therefore face serious funding problems.
4. Records can be withheld or not provided for a variety of reasons which prevents the Council from ensuring that the communities' needs are being met. A Place to Grow states "... *that many local authorities are not in a position to evidence the total demands for allotments in their area, because they do not require devolved management associations to supply reports on their waiting lists. Consequently the interests of people on these lists are not taken into account in the planning of new sites*".
5. A Place to Grow also states: "*It is important that associations are made aware of the standards set by a local authority for any direct-led sites in respect of cultivation standards, plot sizes, waiting lists and other aspects of good practice.*"
6. The allotment site belongs to the whole of community of Sevenoaks and is important to note (Growing in the Community) that "*No single group can reasonably expect to veto over how a resource for the whole community should be used.*"

History

Small plots of land for the 'deserving labouring poor' to supplement their food supply were proposed from the late 18th century onwards. This became a statutory requirement for local authorities with the introduction of the Allotments Act in 1887.

In the 1890s, Lord Hillingdon gave the (then) local authority a plot of land adjacent to Quaker's Hall for allotments. In the early 1960s, Sevenoaks Urban District Council (SUDC) sold eight acres of the site for the development of housing, which became Kennedy Gardens. The remaining 11 acres of the site were leased to SAHA until 2016.

In around 1966-7, the SUDC agreed to 'compensate' the tenants of the site for the loss of plots by putting in a structure of concrete roads, taps and eight shed blocks with a total of 182 locker-style sheds. A large shed was also placed centrally, and this is where SAHA still has its shop, known as the Trading Centre.

A further three acres of land to the north side of Bradbourne Vale Road were purchased by the SUDC in 1931 for allotments.

Measurement of Plots

By looking at the scale maps of both BVA and QHA, there is an obvious visible difference in the size of plots.

Up until 2021 plots have been rented using the traditional measurement of a 'rod'. This equates to 30.25 square yards. Each plot was rented as 10 rods, although in recent years, they have been split in half, and sometimes into quarters (at QHA), to make them more manageable.

It was not considered particularly fair that every tenant should be paying the same rent when some plots are larger than 10 rods and some are smaller. The Allotments Manager therefore carried out a year-long project to measure every single plot.

Information gathered at the SE Region Allotment Officers' Forum in July 2019 indicated that the more modern way of measuring plots is square metres.

Methodology

Every plot was measured using the traditional rod measurements so that a direct comparison with what had been assumed to be the correct plot sizes could be made.

1. Measure the left edge and the right edge, then calculate average
2. Measure the top edge and the bottom edge, then calculate average
3. Multiply the two numbers together to get the area of the plot in square feet
4. Divide this number by 9 to get square yards
5. Divide this number by 30.25, which makes the number of rods

Using the more accurate area measurement in square feet (rather than rods), the area of each plot was converted into square metres using the formula $1\text{ft}^2 = 0.092903\text{m}^2$.

Therefore, a 10-rod plot measuring exactly 302.5yds^2 (2722.5ft^2) = 252.93m^2 (rounded to 253m^2)

Sevenoaks Town Council now has an accurate record of the area of each plot to the nearest 10cm and, the Allotments Manager, having walked more than 100 miles, can now categorically state that almost every single plot is a different size, which confirms initial observations.

Therefore, commencing 1st October 2021, plots are paid for by the square metre and not by the rod.

This new method has been explained in clear language to our tenants so that they understand that the system benefits them enormously. Each plot is now priced according to its actual size and no longer with the generalised 10-rod, 5-rod or 2.5-rod assumption that has stood for more than one hundred years.

Future measurement or re-measurement will be done in metres and not feet. The initial measurement in feet was simply so that the conversion from rods to square metres could be done accurately.

Nature Conservation and Promotion

Sevenoaks Town Council continues to be committed to realising the potential for allotments to be utilised as wildlife resources. The Town Council will bear in mind the following principles in relation to this:

- To make sure that all allotment tenants are committed to improving, valuing and protecting our habitats and wildlife, to provide a well-balanced and sustainable environment, which contributes to a good quality of life for present and future generations.
- The Town Council will – where possible – aim to reduce chemical, energy and water use by good management practices.

The Environment Matters

The following explains how management of the allotments is being developed in accordance with sustainable work practices.

Water Management

The use of hosepipes on our allotments sites is not permitted except for filling up a water butt or similar container on a plot.

At BVA there are five taps and at QHA there are ten taps. An analysis of water bills (July 2018 to October 2021) has shown that water usage at BVA is approximately 5.4 times that of QHA.

All taps and water tanks at BVA are to be replaced with dipping tanks. See Appendix 1. Tanks have been purchased and the work is expected to be completed before the end of March 2022.

Where appropriate, tenants should be encouraged to water their plots at various times of day to ensure minimum water evaporation.

Rainwater harvesting should be mandatory on sheds and greenhouses and will be so for future installation. STC has installed tanks and water butts on the shed blocks at QHA. Many tenants already collect rainwater.

Soil Conservation

Poor soil conservation methods result in the reduction of soil fertility and poor soil structure. In turn, this leads to plants having reduced vigour and increased propensity to disease. Buying in compost to remedy such a situation is costly and damaging to the environment.

To prevent this situation arising, tenants are encouraged to compost green waste from their plots for subsequent use on the beds. This organic matter will rot down and improve and maintain soil structure, aid moisture retention and provide a habitat for micro fauna.

Green waste not suitable for composting such as pernicious weeds (marestail, couch grass, docks etc.) are collected from the main gate of the QHA site by the District Council and enters the green waste recycling scheme, which is a hot composting system, thereby making the waste inert.

Wildlife Initiatives

Both allotment sites are already havens for wildlife, and allotment gardeners are generally in tune with nature including the importance of encouraging pollinating insects onto their plots.

Large areas of BVA are left un-mown through the spring, while the wildflowers are at their peak and there are plenty of 'bug hotels' and wildlife ponds across the site, installed by caring tenants.

Meanwhile, at QHA, there are bug houses, multiple ponds, areas of un-mown grass (especially in Bill's Orchard) and swathes of wildflowers, whether intentional or otherwise.

There are three beekeepers at QHA who maintain several hives between them, thereby increasing the bee population on-site.

New tenants are sent information about managing and encouraging wildlife as part of their 'welcome pack'.

The Council's No 1 Priority – Climate Change and Carbon Neutral

In early 2020 the Town Council resolved to formally recognise the Government and KCC declarations for aiming for Zero Carbon and to integrate this within the vision and throughout the emerging Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) and within the Town Council's general operation.

The Town Council has started work on creation of an Action Plan to review:

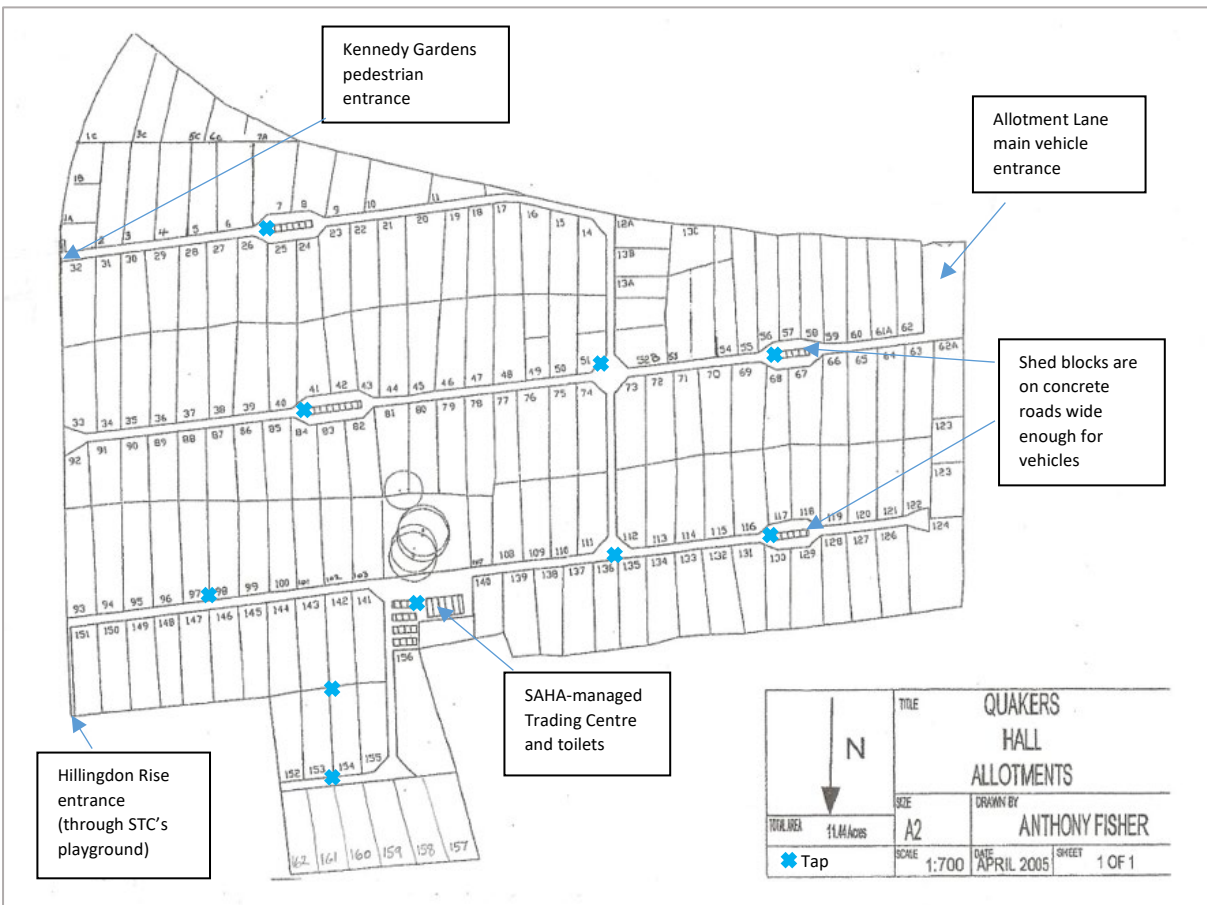
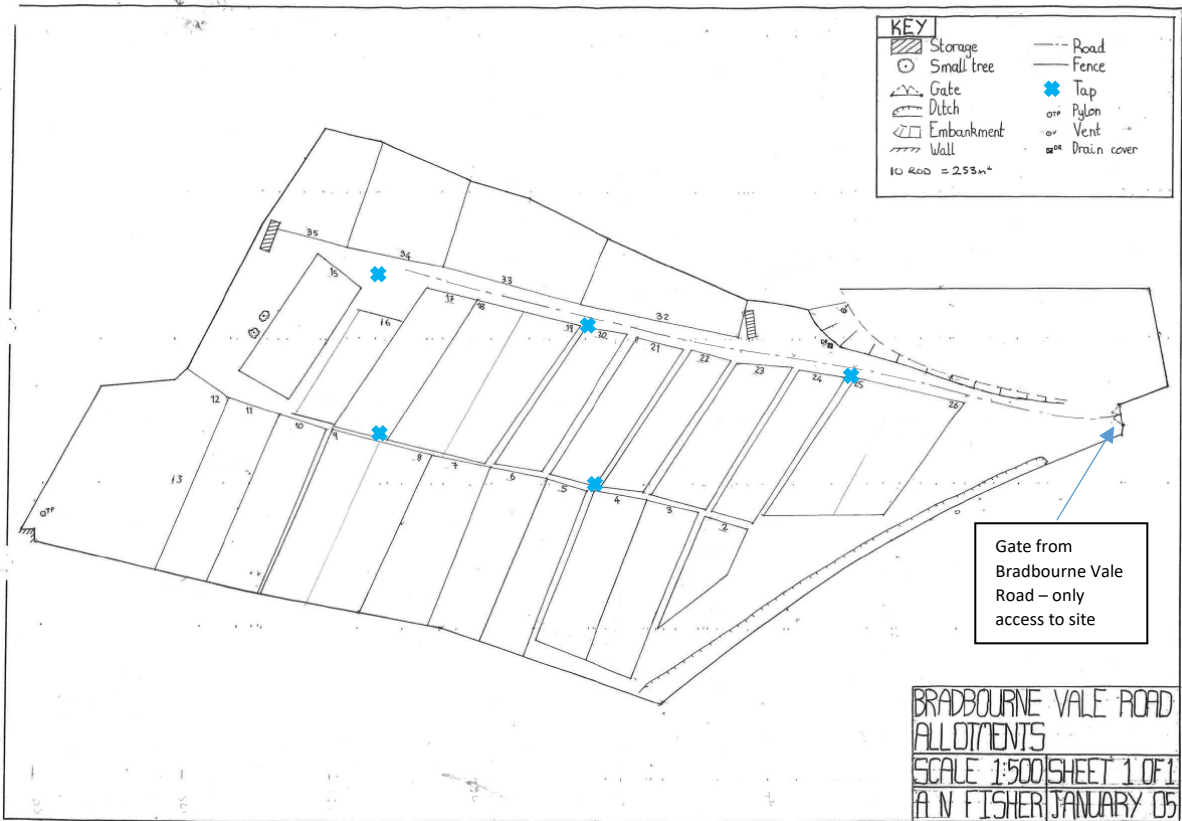
- Reducing cars / traffic particularly in relation to school traffic.
- STC new buildings to be as sustainable and eco-friendly as possible. Existing buildings to be improved to be more sustainable with reduced carbon footprint where practicable.
- Include planting of more trees, where possible fruit and nut trees.
- Continue to promote Refill Scheme and Sevenoaks Plastic Free Pledge.
- Cycle racks / planters to be installed.
- Install drinking fountains where possible at STC sites.
- Increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
- NDP Transport Strategy recommendations including 20 mph, one-way system in town centre and shared space.
- Link STC open spaces together with 'green routes'.

- Encourage increased use of public transport – buses and trains by having improved facilities including live running information.
- Install electric car charging points at STC sites.
- Consider enabling community initiatives for sustainable living eg. Toy Library, Zero Waste Shop, Community Orchards, Community Cycle Workshops, Repair Café, promotion of alternative resources eg. nappies.

If members of the public are interested in participating in discussions to develop the local Action Plan to address Climate Change and Carbon Neutral initiatives, they are asked to contact the council via council@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

Aims for Achievement in 5 years

1. Replace all existing taps and tanks with cattle trough-style dipping tanks. (Appendix 1)
2. Maintain the waiting list and reallocate plots as soon as they become available.
3. Maintain 100% occupancy of both sites.



Appendix 1

Cattle trough-style dipping tanks

