



**ALTON TOWN COUNCIL**

**PLOTHOLDERS  
HANDBOOK**



**2017**

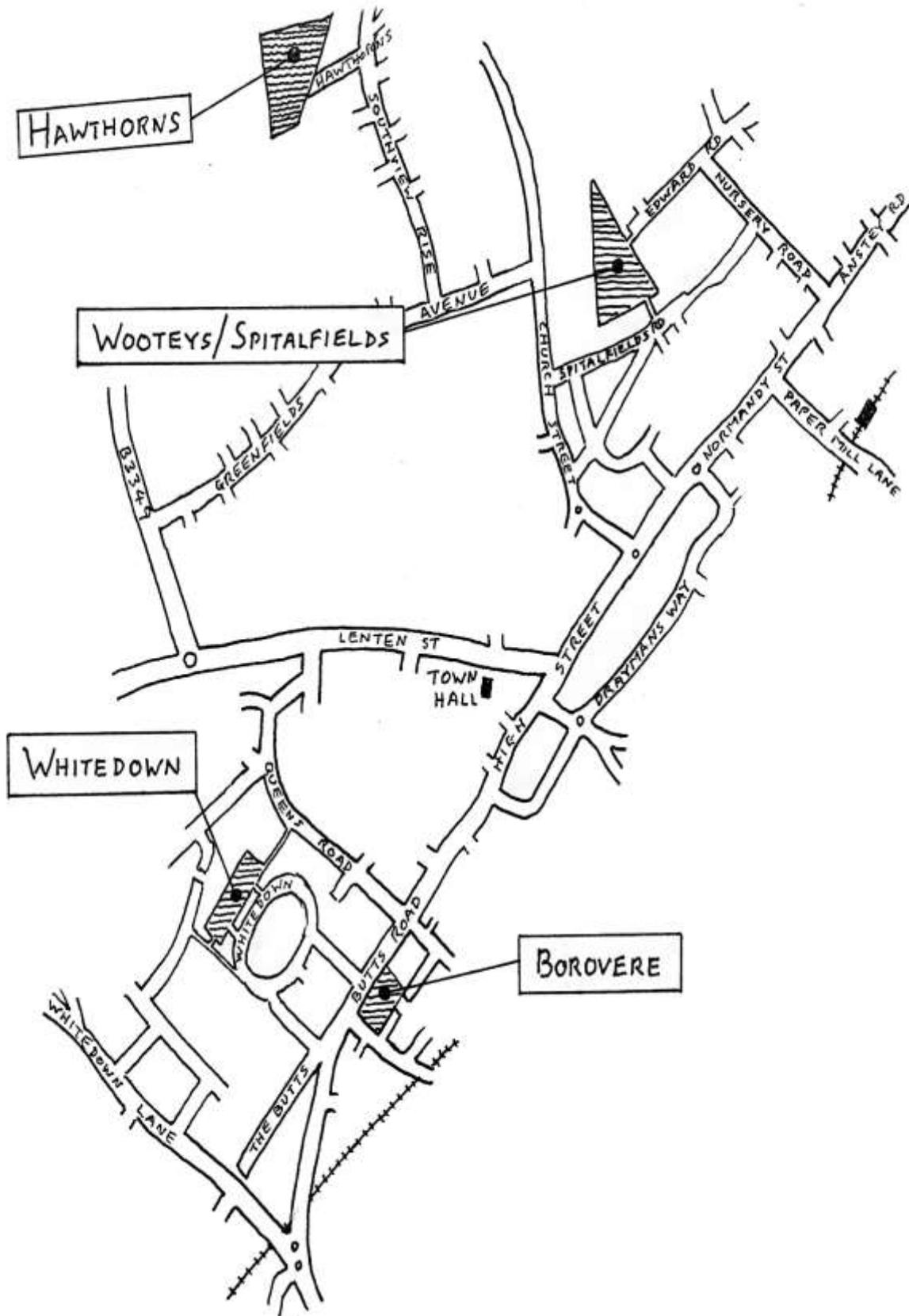
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# ALLOTMENT SITES



## **Allotment History – Alton**

If you talk to an old-timer they will tell you that there were allotments where most of the houses built in the last fifty years or so now stand. Alton must have been full of very active gardeners. As recently as the 1960s the Ordnance Survey maps showed nine allotment sites in Alton. Just as elsewhere, demand fell off as we all became wealthier. There are now just five sites:- Borovere, Hawthorns, Spitalfields, Whitedown and Wooteys.

## **Allotment History – National**

The English allotment had its heyday during the Second World War when the government's *Dig for Victory* campaign persuaded people to beat fresh fruit and vegetable shortages by growing their own. As townspeople went back to the land to feed their families, the number of allotments soared to over a million. These small areas of land reserved for urban farming go back further than this though. The Allotment Act of 1887 meant local authorities were obliged to provide allotments if there was a demand and they have played a part in English life ever since. The number of allotments fell dramatically after the end of the war in 1945, but recent years have seen a surge in interest, as people look for ways of growing cheap organic food and an escape from the stresses of modern life.

## **Strategy for Allotments**

Alton is a small market town of character with a strong agricultural and horticultural tradition. The Town Council is committed to preserving the town's best elements, whilst adopting progressive policies to make sure that Alton moves with the times. The Town Council's overall strategy includes the preservation and enhancement of the town's open spaces, ranging from the Public Gardens through to Anstey Park and Jubilee Playing Fields and to natural open spaces, Kings Pond, Windmill Hill, Greenfields Amenity Land and Flood Meadows and allotments. Its policies towards allotments are geared to maximising the benefits of allotments to the community.

### Social Contribution

The very wide range of people who take part in allotment gardening makes a valuable contribution to social integration in the town.

### Physical and Mental Health

The well-recognised physical and mental benefits of gardening make it a valuable leisure activity for those who do not wish or are unable to participate in more vigorous sports. Modern housing density means that few people have enough space to grow fruit and vegetables at home. The Town Council aims to ensure that allotments are available to those who wish to grow their own produce.



### Environment

The Town Council values allotments for their environmental contribution as green lungs and wildlife corridors. By ensuring that sites are well-located, car travel is minimised. Locally produced food helps reduce food miles and thus also contributes more widely to the environment.

### Rents and Funding

The Town Council aims to recover day-to-day operational costs through the rents. The cost of administration and site improvements are borne by the Town Council. This is intended to ensure that rents are kept within the means of those on low incomes and also broadly in line with those for other authorities in Hampshire. Financial constraints affect the implementation of allotments strategy in the same way that they affect other aspects of the Town Council's responsibilities.

### Management

The Town Council operates a programme of regular inspections with set criteria from March to October with one or two additional inspections in the Winter. Town Council officers will continue to make regular inspections and appropriate action will be taken to ensure that the tenancy conditions are strictly respected. The Town Council is also determined to see all plots being properly cultivated and tenancies will be terminated during the term of a tenancy if plots are not properly maintained and cultivated.

The Town Council holds an annual best kept allotment competition to encourage plotholders to operate their plots in a tidy and attractive manner.

The Town Council encourages participation of the Alton Allotment Association in as much of the management process as possible to ensure the involvement of stakeholders. Currently the Alton Allotment Association's involvement includes routine site maintenance, assistance with plot inspections and showing prospective new tenants vacant plots.

### Security



Site security is a key factor in preventing vandalism and theft and also keeping allotments fully occupied. The Town Council, therefore, seeks to ensure that adequate security is provided at all sites in partnership with plotholders.

Any equipment kept on the sites is at the plotholders risk and should be covered by your own household insurance.

## Rules for Allotments

The allotment tenancy agreement is between Alton Town Council [www.alton.gov.uk](http://www.alton.gov.uk) and you, the tenant. When you sign your tenancy agreement you are agreeing to take on a yearly tenancy and to look after your plot and allotment site. You are agreeing to abide by the conditions in the agreement.

## Your Plot and the Allotment Site

### General

Allotments are primarily for food crops. You can cultivate any fruit, vegetables or herbs you like. Many plotholders also grow flowers for picking, for encouraging bees, hoverflies etc or just to cheer up their plot.



Plots on most of the sites are separated by a narrow path (or just a line) from one another and therefore plotholders do need to make sure that their plot does not make life more difficult for their neighbouring plotholder. If plotholders use sprays, great care is needed to prevent drift. Also try to ensure that you do not allow weeds to flower on your plot to prevent seeds being blown around the site.

If you have a problem in maintaining your plot because of illness or other reason, you still have a responsibility to make sure that it is kept under control. Please remember to talk initially to your Site Representative (details of your Site Representative can be found on the gates, noticeboards or from the Town Council's Allotments Officer).

Allotments provide the opportunity to meet a wide variety of people from all walks of life on a friendly and informal basis. Advice, seeds plants and produce are frequently swapped.

### Site Representatives

All sites have Site Representatives, their names, plot numbers and telephone numbers are available on the noticeboards at each site. Site Representatives do not have to be a member of the Alton Allotment Association, as long as you are a plotholder you can be a Site Representative.

A Site Representative is a plotholder who will be happy to try and answer your questions or queries. Site Representatives will also pass on details of any problems they cannot address to the Town Council or the Alton Allotment Association and also attend the Allotments Sub Committee.

### Giving Up

If you decide to give up your plot, please give the Allotments Officer at the Town Council as much notice as possible so that it can be offered to the next person on the waiting list and there can be a smooth handover. The new plot holder will benefit from getting the plot in a good condition and being able to make a prompt start.

### Allotment Site Maintenance

In the past, the Town Council was unable to maintain the sites to a reasonable standard. In 2000 the Town Council and the Alton Allotment Association entered into a contract to carry out the routine grass and hedge cutting on the sites on a regular basis.

Maintenance is now generally very good and it is hoped to keep this going. The Alton Allotment Association pays Association members to carry out these works. Because it has no overhead costs, other than insurance, repairs and renewals funds, its prices to the council are low. The result is that the work gets done at a lower cost to the Town Council. Everyone gains from this and everyone has a key part to play in keeping the allotment sites clean and tidy.

## Plot Inspections

All plots are inspected regularly during the growing season (March to October) to ensure that adequate standards of cultivation are maintained. There is no set style of gardening and a plot is deemed satisfactory so long as it is under control **and** being used for growing plants, whether vegetables, fruit or flowers ie is under cultivation. Significant numbers of weeds in seed is one thing that indicates a plot not under control.



Site Representatives or a Committee Member of the Alton Allotment Association accompany an officer of the Town Council during the monthly inspections and act in an advisory role.

Plottolders should advise their Site Representative (details are available on the noticeboards at the sites) and the Town Council if there are any special circumstances or difficulties that will prevent them from tending their plot.

Criteria for assessing plots:-

- Non-cultivation
- Weeds going to seed
- Long grass
- Unkempt plots

The administration procedure for a poor plot is as follows:-

Stage 1

- **Letter A** – First warning letter requesting plotholder to tidy plot.

Stage 2

- **Letter B** – Notice to terminate tenancy if plot not up to standard at the following inspection (within one month) or at any future inspection

Stage 3

- **Letter C** – Withdrawing notice if plot is up to standard at the following inspection.

or

- **Letter D** – Notice to confirm termination of tenancy if plot is not up to standard at the following inspection.

## Rents and Renewals

The rent runs from January to December and is reviewed annually. Tenancies commencing from September will be rent free for the remainder of the year.

Rent renewals are issued in December and are to be paid by the end of January.

As part of the annual rent collection, voluntary membership to the Allotment Association is also collected and passed on, with ploholders details, to the Association.

The council provides and subsidises allotments for the residents of Alton and Holybourne. Once the waiting list has been exhausted vacant plots may be considered to those who live out of the parish.

### **Administration Costs**

In addition to the annual rent, all new tenants will be required to pay a one-off administration fee, currently £25.

### **Plot Sharing**



You may have a private arrangement to share your plot with a friend; however, you will still be the tenant. The tenant is always responsible for the maintenance of the plot even if he/she chooses to share. If you decide to give up your plot, you should not pass it onto your friend directly.

Alton Town Council may, in appropriate circumstances, arrange a new agreement with your friend. The council does however, encourage the friend to add their name to the waiting list.

## **Caring For Your Allotment**

The main requirement of your agreement is to keep your plot tidy by removing litter and rubbish. Also to control weeds regularly so they do not seed and cause problems for other gardeners.

If you cannot manage to cultivate your entire plot, it is acceptable, as a **temporary** measure only, to use mulch matting or heavy-duty plastic, which has to be secured. After use, the plotholder must remove such material from the site. **Do not** use rubber-backed carpet as the backing does not rot down and releases harmful chemicals into the soil causing pollution.

Plotholders should compost all green waste that it is practical to do so. Compost bins should be located at least 3' (approx 1m) away from neighbouring properties to prevent rats. Plotholders are responsible for removing any other waste from their plots. Dumping anywhere on the site is **strictly** prohibited and will be regarded as putting the plotholder in breach of their Tenancy Agreement.



The Town Council provide a limited rubbish collection service during the winter. Notice of the collection date will be posted on each site and the Alton Allotments Association's website [www.altonallotments.co.uk](http://www.altonallotments.co.uk) at least one week ahead.

Plotholders are responsible for keeping the paths alongside their plots cut and in good order.

When spraying, plotholders must prevent any drift onto other plots on the site. Plotholders should minimise the use of chemicals on their plots and ensure that they follow environmentally friendly practices.

## Trees



Only dwarf stock fruit trees and fruit bushes are permitted. Full, standard or vigorous trees will not be permitted. Please read the following information if you are considering planting fruit trees or fruit bushes on your plot.

- Location

Any fruit tree or fruit bush must be planted with sufficient distance from the edge of the plot to ensure its height and breadth will not impact or cast shade on an adjoining plot, nor the branches and roots interfere with any pathway when the tree has reached its maturity.

Consider planting distances if planting more than one tree. A minimum of 8' (2.4m) should be allowed unless a trained form, such as a cordon, is being grown.

- Size

Following guidance sought from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) the maximum height of any fruit tree on a plot is not to exceed 13' (approx 4m). Be aware that some varieties are more vigorous than others, even when on a dwarf rooting stock.

If a tree exceeds the maximum height the plotholder is responsible to properly maintain the tree and appoint an approved contractor if needed. Fruit trees need to be regularly pruned to avoid getting larger than intended.



Details of suitable dwarf or semi-dwarf found rootstock for the type of fruit you wish to plant can be found on the RHS website [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk) . The website gives information on the mature size of trees for each rootstock to assist the plotholder in determining a suitable location.



Information is also available on suitable varieties required in the local vicinity to ensure cross pollination to produce fruit, as not all varieties are self-pollinating, and also gives advice on the maintenance required to keep fruit trees producing and in good health.

## **Water**

Water costs money, so use water from the standpipes carefully (and not at all if there is a hosepipe ban).



## Structures – Sheds and Greenhouses

### Sheds

Sheds are permitted on plots **with prior written permission from the Town Council** and must comply with the following:-



- Maximum size is to be no more than 4' x 6' (approx 1.2m x 1.8m).
- Sheds must be professionally manufactured.
- Sheds must be maintained in good condition or removed at the plotholder's cost.
- At the end of the tenancy the council will allow the outgoing plotholder to leave the shed on the plot if it is in good condition and if the incoming plotholder agrees.
- Sheds must not shade any part of an adjoining plot at any time of the day.
- No part of a shed may be less than 12" from the edge of the plot or a boundary fence/hedge.
- The shed can only be placed on paving slabs to meet the requirement of a temporary structure. A concrete base is deemed as a permanent structure and is **not** permitted.
- Non-glass materials should be used for doors and windows.

## Greenhouses

Greenhouses are permitted on plots **with prior written permission from the Town Council** and must comply with the following:-



- Maximum size is to be no more than 4' x 6' (approx 1.2m x 1.8m).
- Safety glass, a certificate needs to be provided prior to permission being granted, or polycarbonate, is to be used.

The Hawthorns site is the exception where **no** greenhouses or sheds are allowed. Tool chests are permitted. If guidance is required please speak to the Site Representative or the Town Council.

## Glass

The Town Council phased out the use of glass on all allotments and new requests for sheds and greenhouses are advised to install polycarbonate/plastic pane windows. If glass is the only option, safety glass can be permitted on production of a safety certificate, prior to permission being granted.

## Safety on the Allotments

Plotholders must ensure that tools and equipment are used and stored carefully to avoid injury to themselves and others. If chemicals and fuel are used, the manufacturers' instructions and directions must be followed. Water storage containers should remain covered when not in use.

### Bees



Bees are essential for fertilisation of beans, peas, strawberries and raspberries etc (sweetcorn is wind pollinated which is why it is planted in a block rather than a row).

Beekeepers are, therefore, especially welcome on an allotment site, so long as there is a barrier around the hive to ensure that the bees' main flight paths are above head height. Permission is needed for a hive.



Bees are kept on land adjacent to the Hawthorns site by a qualified person. Permission has been granted with the requirement that there is an adequate flight path and insurance.

The many varieties of bumble bee make a critically important contribution to pollination. Make sure that there are plenty of flowers around to attract them; once they have arrived they will go to your fruit and vegetables as well. Single flowers are best because few double flowers are pollen rich.

### Bonfires

Bonfires, or fires of any sort, are **not** permitted.

### Children



Plotolders' children are welcome on the sites, if properly supervised. Children enjoy visiting the allotments with their parents/guardians, especially if they can help or cultivate a small area themselves. Many plotolders are happy to see interested children.

Parents/carers are reminded that children need to be supervised at all times for their own safety.

### Rats

Discouraging rats on the allotment site is everybody's responsibility. Turn compost bins regularly and place plastic bins on paving slabs to prevent burrowing. Remember to harvest your produce and enjoy them before they do! Do not allow your plot to become overgrown or allow rubbish to build up, old carpet and timber provide cover for rats to live.



## Dogs



Dogs are permitted on the allotment sites **but owners must keep them on a lead**; they must be kept on the owner's plot and prevented from causing any nuisance to other tenants; owners **must remove droppings from the site.**

## **Security**

Plot holders are required to ensure that the gates are locked at all times in an effort to minimise theft and vandalism.



## **Gardeners with Special Needs**



The Spitalfields/Wooteys site has two raised beds, these are two smaller plots with wheelchair access all around and raised to about 24"/60cm so they can be worked on from a wheelchair. There is also one small ground level bed.

## Site Maintenance

Subject to satisfactory performance and pricing, the Town Council places an annual contract with the Alton Allotment Association to cut the grass on the main pathways, most of the hedges and trim vacant plots if necessary. Other preparation work on plots which are due to be re-let may be included.



Volunteers to assist with this work are always welcome. Please contact the Allotment Association if you are prepared to help. Training and a small payment for the work is given.

If repairs are needed to gates, locks or fencing please contact the Town Council's Allotment Officer.



## **Allotments Sub Committee**

The Town Council's Allotments Sub Committee meets quarterly and is attended by two Councillors, the Town Council's Allotments Officer, the Grounds Administrator, the Grounds Manager, the Chairman of the Alton Allotments Association and the Site Representatives.

The Sub Committee approves allotment policies, recommends improvements and maintenance to the Town Council and deals with issues referred by the Allotments Officer and the Alton Allotments Association.

## **Alton Allotment Association**



Alton Allotment Association was founded in 1994 originally to fight the development which is now known as Hermitage Close which took half of the original Borovere site. Unfortunately, the Association was too late to save 24 plots, many of which, at the time, were vacant for various reasons. However, the Association has grown since then and has been able to build up a good relationship with the Town Council.

The aims of the Association are:-

- To promote allotment gardening in Alton.
- To liaise regularly with the Town Council and to represent allotment holders' interests in negotiations with the Town Council.
- To arrange meetings, open days and visits etc.
- To negotiate discounts for members from local horticultural suppliers.

The Town Council liaises regularly and shares information with the Alton Allotment Association. The Association also shows prospective tenants vacant plots wherever possible. Details of Site Representatives can be found on the site noticeboards at the entrance gates or from the Town Council.

The Alton Allotment Association also operates a seed purchase scheme in association with the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Limited (NSALG) and King's Seeds, offering discounts to members.

Plottolders are able to join the Alton Allotment Association via their Site Representative or through the Town Council but are under no obligation to join.

A number of local garden centres offer a discount on production of a current Alton Allotment Association membership card. Full details can be obtained from the Association or their website.

The Alton Allotment Association consists of its members and the Association's Committee consists of a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer and can also include Site Representatives.

Further information about the Alton Allotment Association is available on their website [www.altonallotments.co.uk](http://www.altonallotments.co.uk) .

### **Contacting the Town Council**

Samantha Brown is the Town Council's Allotments Officer. You can contact her by visiting the Town Hall, phoning her on 01420 83986 or email at [info@alton.gov.uk](mailto:info@alton.gov.uk) . There is also information on allotments on the Town Council's website, [www.alton.gov.uk](http://www.alton.gov.uk) .

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Alton Town Council  
Town Hall  
Market Square  
ALTON  
Hampshire  
GU34 1HD

01420 83986

[www.alton.gov.uk](http://www.alton.gov.uk)

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