Guide to Keeping Bees on Allotment Sites.

1. The benefits of keeping bees.

1.1 The main function of honey bees is as pollinators. They are of immense value to agriculture, horticulture and gardeners and are responsible for the pollination of crops estimated to have a value of £7 billion per year.

1.2 The bee population is under threat, and there have been reports in the national press as to their decline. Since 1992, when the varroa mite entered southern England from the Continent, bees in the UK have become more dependant on humans. The varroa infestation has moved northwards and colonies in hives can only survive if they are treated to combat varroa. Wild honey bee colonies die out but bumble bees are not affected.

2. Consulting.

2.1 Any person wishing to keep bees on allotments must first seek the agreement of the allotment site management and must undertake to abide by any rules stipulated and must satisfy the managers of their competence or that they have arranged adequate supervision, or will undertake appropriate training.

2.2 All plot holders on the site must be consulted as to their views on siting a hive on the site. This should be carried out by representatives of the site association.

2.3 The site association must also consult with neighbouring properties to satisfy themselves that those properties have no objections to bee hives on the allotment site.

2.4 Provided the majority of consultees have no objections, hives can be placed on site. However if any major concerns have been raised it must be considered as to how these will be addressed.

3. Management.

3.1 The allotments legislation is specific in that plot holders cannot trade on an allotment site for profit. (Small Holdings and Allotment Act 1908 Section 22), as the prime use is for an allotment holder to provide food for the immediate family. However it makes provision for limited sale of surplus produce – provided that the allotment is mainly cultivated for consumption by the plot holder and their family there is no legal constraint on selling surplus produce, and any proceeds should be reinvested in running and developing the site.

3.2 It is permitted to use part of the plot keep livestock and animals, by section 12 of the Allotments Act (1950), but not in such a manner as to create a nuisance.

3.3 Carry out a risk assessment.

3.3.1 Make sure all eventualities are covered.

3.3.2 That any risks are identified

3.3.3 There are actions identified to control any risks identified.

3.3.4 Measures are in place to prevent bees swarming.

3.4 A person keeping bees on an allotment must satisfy the allotment site management that they have made adequate arrangements to ensure that any problems caused by their bees in their absence will be resolved, for example a nominated person that can step in the bee keeper's absence.

3.5 The allotment site management will be responsible for policing the conditions on which bees are permitted on allotments. Local Beekeeping Associations could be requested to appoint members to be available to offer advice if required but the members would not be responsible for any action by individuals or association members keeping bees on allotments.

3.6 The Council requires that a person wanting to keep bees on an allotment will be a member of the local Beekeeping Association. Membership of a Beekeeping Association provides members with third party / public liability insurance through their affiliation to the British Beekeepers' Association. The BBKA also offers support and advice for bee keepers.

3.7 Beekeepers must have a recognised qualification such as the BBKA Basic exam and be reasonably competent.

3.8 The hives must be registered and open to inspection by the Regional Bee Inspector.

4. Siting of hives.

4.1 Bees must be carefully placed to be away from footpaths and direct thoroughfares.

4.2 No more than 3 hives should be grouped together.

4.3 Do not place hives in positions from which flight paths impinge on other allotment users or pathways.

4.4 Arrange for hives to be sited in a remote area of the allotment(s) away from other plot holders.

4.5 Limit the number of colonies in any area.

4.6 Ensure that bees are encouraged to rise in excess of 6 feet before leaving the plot by the use of screening which could be natural hedging, wooden fencing or fine plastic / wire mesh screening. Ensure that the flight path (of low flying bees) is not directly across other plots.

4.7 The bees should be screened for two reasons, so not to draw attention to them and to create a barrier to ensure the bees fly upward quickly to their normal flight height.

5. Handling of bees.

5.1 The beekeeper should as far as they are able ensure that the strain of bees used is gentle, for example by using a queen form a docile strain.

5.2 Mentoring. Do not allow inexperienced beekeepers to keep colonies of bees on the allotment without ensuring that the novice will have the benefit of guidance by an experienced beekeeper.

5.3 Do not handle bees when other people are gardening in the immediate vicinity.

5.4 Do not allow the strength of colonies to increase to swarming strength in an unmanaged way.

5.5 Handling bees should be done at times when the bees are very active, thus leaving fewer in the hive.

5.6 Always ensure there is someone else on site in case of emergency when handling bees.

5.7 A source of water should be easily accessible to the bees and be in place before the bees are established. Otherwise bees may congregate around taps or any open water.

5.8 When opening hives every care should be taken to ensure that it is not a busy time(i.e. busy weekend afternoons.), and that the weather conditions are favourable (not raining, windy or thundery).

5.9 Signage notification, a “Beekeeper at work” sign placed prominently while the beekeeper is working and for around half an hour after will ensure that no one walks too near unless they want to.

5.10 All swarm precautions will be taken. It must be noted that swarms do happen sometimes and may also come from other sources.

5.11 Phone numbers in case of emergencies should be clearly displayed on a notice board.

5.12Unused equipment should not be left around as it could spread disease.

5.13 If beekeepers were happy to show any interested parties the hives. A few extra sets of protective clothing are always good.

Sample Questionnaire.

The benefits of Bee keeping:

- This is a very old and traditional hobby.
- Bees produce honey, wax, and collect pollen.
- They provide a valuable pollinating resource for gardeners and wild plants.
- They support local food production and this adds to increasing the quality and flavour.
- Educationally: bees are social insects and, because of the way in which they can be managed in modern hives, their lifestyles can be easily studied. This gives them value in the classroom, and can encourage responsible attitudes to other creatures and the environment generally.
- In an urban environment, bees can be very productive as they are able to forage from a wide range of plants in gardens, parks etc., over a wide " flowering" period. There is an added advantage also, in that they keep to their own natural cycle, largely unaffected by humans - this independence, even in highly managed and controlled urban environment, can be quite inspirational to those who are sensitive to it.
- Although bees can act aggressively to defend their home, with good handling, adequate water supply and using docile strains, swarming and stings can be minimised and even prevented. They will keep to the hive during the winter period.

Allotment Site: *Insert name of allotment site, or street name of nearest street that abuts the site.*

Proposal: *State what you want to do.*

Location plan: *Provide information as to where on the site you wish to locate the hives.*

Do you agree with the proposal? (Please tick the box below)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Require further information ☐

Please provide any comments you wish to make:
