

Central Swindon North Parish Council

Allotment Terms & Conditions – Working Group (In-Person) Review

Date: 20th January 2026

Time: 17:30

Location: Pinetrees Community Centre

Chair: Cllr Mick Lucas

Officer Lead: Andrew Briggs (Operations Manager)

Present

- Cllr Mick Lucas (Chair)
- Cllr James Yeowell (online)
- Phil Nobbs (Rodbourn Farm)
- Gary More (Redcliffe Street)
- Mick Carter (Pickards Field)
- Andrew Briggs (Operations Manager)
- Andy Reeves (Clerk - Online)
- Neil Jackson (Allotment Officer)

1. Purpose of Meeting

Andrew Briggs opened the meeting and confirmed that the purpose was to:

- Review comments received on the draft 2026 Allotment Terms & Conditions
- Clarify intent behind specific clauses
- Capture feedback for refinement
- Prepare a final draft for submission to the Leisure & Recreation Committee in early February, ahead of issuing April rent bills

No formal decisions were required at this meeting.

2. Overview of Draft T&Cs

- The draft largely reflected the version previously circulated.
- One minor addition had been made: a clause confirming the Council's right to update the T&Cs periodically, including to reflect legislative or statutory changes.
- A Briggs confirmed that two written responses had been received and that further comments raised verbally would be noted and reviewed within the meeting.

3. Access Times / “After Dark” Wording

Issue raised:

Concern that the wording around “daylight access only” and references to being on site after dark could be ambiguous.

Officer response:

- The intent is that access is permitted during daylight hours.
- Presence on site after dark is not encouraged and is at the tenant’s own risk due to safety considerations.
- Officers acknowledged that the wording could be tightened to improve clarity and agreed to review this.

Action:

Officer to refine wording for clarity.

4. CCTV Restrictions

Issue raised:

Why CCTV is restricted on allotment sites, and how wildlife cameras differ.

Officer response:

- Restrictions are due to data protection, privacy and safeguarding in shared community spaces.
- Wildlife cameras limited to a tenant’s own plot are permitted as they present a lower risk.
- This approach aligns with national practice.

5. Abandonment & Change of Circumstances (including Joint Tenancies)

Issues raised:

- How abandonment is identified in practice
- How change of circumstances applies where plots are jointly held

Officer response:

- Abandonment is identified through inspections, contact attempts, and elapsed time.
- Timeframes are indicative and supported by evidence.
- Change of circumstances does not result in automatic transfer; decisions are made case by case, including for joint tenancies.
- This protects fairness and the waiting list.

Action:

Officer to consider tightening wording for clarity, without changing policy intent.

6. Structures & Mature Fruit Trees

Issue raised:

Treatment of existing structures or fruit trees that exceed new standards.

Officer response:

- No intention to retrospectively enforce standards.
- Existing items are generally tolerated unless unsafe or causing nuisance.
- New installations must meet current standards.
- Unsafe structures may be required to be removed.

Action:

Review wording to better reflect pragmatic approach.

7. Composting & External Organic Waste

Issue raised:

Clause stating “no external waste may be brought in” may unintentionally prohibit:

- Vegetable peelings
 - Coffee grounds
 - Egg shells
 - Tea bags
- These are essential for composting and wormeries.

Discussion:

- Agreement that a defined exception may be appropriate.
- Risks noted: pests (rats), contamination, creep into household waste.
- Consensus that wording should specify:
 - Raw, unpackaged, plant-based materials only
 - No cooked food, meat, dairy or oils
 - Council retains right to review if issues arise

Action:

Officer to draft refined wording allowing limited biodegradable kitchen waste for composting/wormeries, subject to controls.

8. Bonfires & BBQs

Issues raised:

- Practicality of permission requirements
- Distinction between bonfires and BBQs
- Use for informal gatherings or community events

Officer response:

- Purpose of clauses is control and enforcement if nuisance or risk arises, not routine permission seeking.
- Bonfires already permitted under conditions, BBQ wording open to refinement.
- Written permission wording for BBQs may be softened while retaining safeguards.

Action:

Officer to revise BBQ wording to balance practicality with risk management.

9. Trespass & Tenant Safety

Issue raised:

How tenants identify unauthorised persons without confrontation.

Officer response:

- Wording already softened deliberately.
- Emphasis is on reporting concerns, not confrontation.
- Safeguarding of tenants is the priority.

Action:

Officer to further clarify wording to reinforce 'reporting only' approach.

10. Flooding, Drainage & Council Responsibility

Issue raised:

Clarification of responsibility where flooding occurs due to site conditions.

Officer response:

- Council is responsible for maintaining sites overall.
- Individual plot conditions cannot be guaranteed due to weather, soil or location.
- Council cannot accept liability for garden flooding.
- This reflects national practice.

Action:

Officer to review wording to ensure balance and clarity.

11. Generators, Power Tools & Machinery

Issues raised:

- Why generators are prohibited when petrol tools are allowed
- Use of generators for charging battery tools
- Electric chainsaws and power tools
- Start and end times for machinery use

Discussion:

- Concerns about noise, fumes, storage and enforcement.
- Recognition that newer generators may be quieter.
- Enforcement practicality noted.
- Suggestion to discourage rather than outright prohibit generators, or allow limited use with controls.
- Machinery start time debated (8am vs later); alignment with SBC practice noted.

Action:

Officer to review generator wording and machinery hours.

12. Chainsaws

- A specific discussion took place regarding the use of chainsaws on allotment sites.
- Concerns were raised about health and safety risks, including injury risk to the operator and bystanders, noise impact, and the need for competent use.
- The group noted that chainsaws may occasionally be required for legitimate site/plot management (e.g., removal of dead wood, dealing with larger branches), but that routine use could create unacceptable risk in a communal environment.
- The need for clear rules was highlighted, including whether chainsaws should be banned, restricted to certain times, restricted to qualified users only, or only permitted with officer approval.
- Officers noted that any approach should be enforceable, consistent across sites, and aligned with the Council's duty to manage risk.

Proposed outcome / next step

- Officers to draft a clear clause for inclusion in the 2026 T&Cs covering:
 - whether chainsaws are prohibited by default
 - whether use is permitted only with prior written approval
 - minimum conditions (competence, PPE, exclusion zone, time limits, noise control)
- The revised clause to be tabled for agreement alongside the wider "Tools & Machinery" section.

13. Ponds & Water Safety

Issues raised:

- Enforcement difficulties
- Visibility of ponds
- Risks to children and vulnerable users
- Existing ponds predating new rules
- Use of ponds for composting/manure

Officer response:

- Ponds are a high risk item.
- Council must manage liability and safeguarding.
- New ponds subject to strict conditions; legacy ponds may require review for safety.
- Suggestion made to issue a separate communication to tenants about ponds.

Action:

Officer to:

- Review pond wording
- Consider separate notification to tenants
- Explore how existing ponds can be safely managed

14. Cross-Referencing ASB & Enforcement

Issue raised:

ASB clause early in the document should clearly link to termination powers later.

Action:

Officer to add cross referencing between behaviour clauses and enforcement/termination section.

15. Fencing

Issue raised:

Clarification of fencing standards, heights, and case-by-case consideration.

Officer response:

- Restrictions are intended to prevent fully enclosed or visually obstructive plots.
- Height and type may be considered on a case-by-case basis where justified.

Action:

Officer to review wording to reflect discretion while maintaining standards.

16. Beekeeping

Discussion:

- Requirement for experience or training noted.
- Confirmation that mentoring and support is available.⁷
- Higher fencing requirements due to keeping practices.
- Case-by-case approval approach supported.

17. Next Steps

- Officer to consolidate all feedback and amend draft T&Cs.
- Revised draft to be presented to Leisure & Recreation Committee on 5th February 2026.
- Subject to approval, T&Cs to be published and issued ahead of April rent billing.
- Acceptance deemed on publication; new tenants continue to sign agreements.
- Further Working Group meeting to be scheduled, subject to elections.

Meeting closed: approx. 18:15