Background.

The keeping of livestock on allotments has been requested recently by a plot holder, and there is evidence of interest in this from a number of other allotment tenants. There is no current council policy, and the recent request was refused.

Investigation has discovered that under the Allotments Acts 1922 and 1950, unless there is a byelaw to the contrary, allotment tenants have a statutory right to keep hens and rabbits on allotments. There is no such byelaw in Worcester.

Interest is being shown in keeping hens and bees, so with this in mind it was agreed that a report be prepared by the allotment forum, describing a workable policy for livestock on allotments in Worcester. It should be noted that the current severe decline in the number of bees in the UK has led to government funding to investigate the cause, and do all it can to help reverse the trend. Declining bee population has a significant impact on UK agriculture.

The report also takes into account the proposed transfer of the allotments to a “self management” basis. Rather than rely solely on the City Council team to monitor the keeping of livestock, the forum agreed to appoint a Livestock Officer to work alongside the council.

Guidelines to Beekeeping on Allotments

Following requests from plot holders to keep bees on their allotments, the following is recommended as a way forward.

It should be noted that the harvest from top fruit trees in recent years has declined due to a decline in the overall bee population in the UK, and the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) is keen to assist wherever possible to encourage and promote keeping bees.

Recommended procedure

Plot holder applies to the council in writing, and provides evidence of their competency to keep bees, (qualifications) and membership of the BBKA.
(It should be noted that membership of the BBKA includes £5m of public liability insurance)

A notice of intention to keep bees is displayed at the allotment site for 21 days. This notice asks that any objections be put in writing to the council within this time period.

After 21 days, the site is visited by the council/allotment forum representative along with a member of the BBKA. The purpose is to consider the request, in the light of any objections or not, and agree any conditions to be placed on the agreement if approved.

These conditions may include:

Maximum number of hives.
Siting of hives
Requirement to keep membership of BBKA up to date (must be plot holder)
Screening of hives
Etc etc

Following this visit, the council write to the plot holder with the decision.

If agreed, this will be confirmed in writing together with a list of the conditions to be adhered.
If refused, this will be confirmed in writing and the reasons for the refusal set out.

If the request is refused, the plot holder will be able to reapply after a year has elapsed from the date of the decision letter.

Any failure to comply with the conditions of the keeping of bees would mean a termination of the allotment tenancy by the council.

The process leans heavily on the goodwill of the BBKA. If any expenses are to be paid to them, these must be met by the plot holder applying for permission to keep bees before the site visit. No charges will be made by either the council or the allotment forum.
GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING HENS ON ALLOTMENTS

Introduction

Allotment holders have a statutory right to keep Hens or Rabbits on allotments but not Cockerels under the Allotments Act 1950. For the purposes of the guidelines Ducks, Geese and other birds will not be permitted as part of this policy. A separate policy for the keeping of Bees is available.

The tenancy conditions that prevent the keeping of birds or livestock on allotments needs to be revised in view of the growing demand by allotment holders and in order to set guidelines that tenants must follow.

Registration and Inspection

Allotment tenants are required to register livestock with Worcester City Council, in writing, stating the number of birds to be kept and confirming their agreement to follow these guidelines in full.

Failure to register hens or meet the minimum standards in these guidelines may result in the termination of an allotment tenancy. A requirement of registration will be that the Hens should be vaccinated.

If Tenants choose to keep Hens on their allotment they must check on them daily, provide competent care and management and have the knowledge and skills to ensure the well being of the Hens. In addition Tenants are expected to keep them under proper control to avoid disturbance to others.

Representatives of Worcester City Council, or the Allotment forum Livestock Officer have the right to inspect the hens at any time. If the Council has cause to investigate complaints of maltreatment, costs of vets or other official inspections will be passed to the Tenant for payment.

Animal Husbandry

Number of Hens;

The maximum number of Hens permitted per allotment tenant should be 5 and the minimum number 2. Hens need companionship and should be kept in groups of two or more up to a maximum of 5. The limit of 5 is set in accordance with our requirements for housing and containment of the Hens.
Housing:

In addition to effective containment, housing is also key in ensuring the welfare of the Hens and should allow expression of natural behaviours.

Henhouse – A fully enclosed shelter that provides a minimum size of 2 square feet (0.2m²) per Hen is required. The optimum permitted size will be 4 feet x 3 feet. The fully enclosed shelter should provide protection from predators, clean dry bedding material to absorb moisture and odour (suitable choices are wood shavings or straw), warmth during the colder months and shade during the summer, adequate ventilation but draught-free, perches for sleeping, approximately 3-5cms wide with rounded corners to enable them to grip, nest boxes for laying eggs.

An Outdoor Run – A fully enclosed caged run that provides a minimum size of 4 square feet (0.4m²) per Hen is required and should provide the Hens with plenty of space to dig, dust themselves and flap their wings. The optimum size will be 6ft x 8ft.

The total area of the Henhouse and Run should not exceed more than 10% of the total allotment plot area although the maximum permitted size will be 10ft x 12ft.

Both the Henhouse and Outdoor Run should be regularly maintained to a good, tidy standard and free from obvious faults that may cause injury.

To minimise potential nuisance to neighbours the henhouse and Outdoor Run should be sited a minimum of 3 metres from adjacent boundaries abutting residential properties.

Feed:

Hens should have continuous and plentiful access to cool, clean and fresh water, provision of feed of a type appropriate to the age and species of Hen, fed in sufficient quantities, and sufficiently frequently, to maintain them in good health and satisfy their nutritional need.

Insoluble grit to aid digestion

Foodstuffs should be stored such that it is kept clean, tidy and properly protected.
from rodents and other pests. It is not permitted for foodstuffs to be scattered and an animal control feeding station is advised as an example of good practice.

Health

The Allotment Tenant will be held responsible for ensuring that their hens are free from distress, pain, injury and disease. Appropriate preventative and/or veterinary treatment should be available at all times. The Tenant should ensure that the Hens are vaccinated prior to arrival or at 6 weeks old. The Hens will need regular worming (twice a year) and clipping of claw nails to maintain them in a good healthy condition. They should be checked regularly for lice and the houses treated for Red Spider Mite.

Sanitation

In order to maintain healthy Hens and reduce odour problems, the henhouse and run should be cleaned a minimum of once a week or more frequently as necessary. Poultry kept on the same ground for more than a month will need regular worming.

Nuisance to Neighbours & Cleanliness

Provided the Hens are kept healthy and in clean conditions and food stuffs are stored such that it is kept clean, tidy and properly protected from rodents and other pests the keeping of Hens should not become a nuisance to others.

Allotment Tenants have a duty as part of the Allotment Tenancy Conditions not to cause a nuisance to others. In the keeping of Hens on an allotment plot Tenants should take all reasonable measures to minimise potential nuisances.

The Tenant will be responsible for the removal of all arisings or waste from the allotment site.

Breeding and Hens for Profit

Allotment Tenants are not permitted to breed Hens on the allotment site. Tenants are not permitted to profit from the sale of produce from the allotment as described by the statutory Allotment Act.

**Failure to adhere to the guidelines may result in a breach of the tenancy conditions and termination of the tenancy.**