



Site Inspection Procedure

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the procedure for site inspections across both sites to ensure that they are completed in a fair and unbiased manner. This is also to be transparent with our society members on the process we follow and our expectations of cultivation. The committee aims to manage the inspection process on a case-by-case basis, and may take personal circumstances into account.

Governance

The procedure will be reviewed in September 2024 to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Procedure for inspecting the site

Full site inspections are to be completed twice a year, approximately at the beginning of May and at the beginning of August.

Site inspections are to be completed by a minimum of two committee members, with at least one committee member from that site and one other from either site. Ideally, one of the committee members completing the inspection should have been involved in the previous site inspection to report on progress. The chair of the site being inspected should not be involved in inspections so as to remain impartial.

When reviewing plots, each half plot should be reviewed individually at Burnside and Vinery, not as a whole area for those who have multiple half plots. At Vinery, some tenants do still hold quarter plots; in this instance the inspectors should review the quarter the same as they would a half. These are then to be placed under the following categories:

Category 1: Plot on the whole is well maintained and requires no intervention.

Category 2: Plot in need of some remedial action - more than half of the plot area with evidence of cultivation, but some non-compostable rubbish piling up, some areas of long grass or weeds.

Category 3: In need of significant improvement – less than half of the plot area with evidence of cultivation, significant amounts of non-compostable rubbish, significant amounts of overgrown areas with long grass or weeds – or essentially no cultivation at all, derelict structures, etc.

For Categories 2-3, notes should be made about any specific issues on each plot leading to them falling into this category.

It is advisable that photos are taken of plots that fall into Category 3, which can be used as evidence.

NB: If an individual has taken on their plot in the last six months then they should usually only be assessed as a Category 1 or 2, unless there is clear evidence that no activity has taken place.

Procedure for notices to tenants

Once a site inspection is complete and the inspection report written, the Society Secretary should contact those tenants whose plots fall into Categories 2-3.

Actions following being reviewed as Category 2.

Category 2:

- Tenant to be reminded of the requirements to cultivate, with details of areas of concern.
- Tenant to be asked to consider whether they want to keep the plot.
- No further action at this stage but the plot will be reviewed at the next site inspection and there will be an expectation that the plot will be improved at that stage. If so, then it should be lowered to a Category 1.
- If at this next inspection the plot remains the same then it can be issued a Category 2 again. If on the third inspection it has still not improved then it will escalate to a Category 3.
- If the plot has worsened by the next inspection, then it can be escalated to Category 3.

Category 3:

- If a plot appears to have fallen below the cultivation standard required of the plot holder in their tenancy agreement, an initial warning letter should be sent.
- This initial warning should state that they are in breach of the cultivation rule of their tenancy agreement, detailing exactly where they are failing (e.g. not enough of the plot dug over ready for planting, too many weeds, etc.). They should be asked to respond within 14 days.
- If no response after 14 days, then a notice to quit can be served (see below).
- Once they have responded, assuming there are no mitigating circumstances (see below), a final warning should set out exactly what is expected of the plot holder and should set a reasonable time limit for the works to be completed (usually 30 days).
- The final warning letter should also state that if the plot holder fails to complete these expected works, then a notice to quit will be supplied.
- If mitigating circumstances are cited for low or lack of cultivation with a wish to continue then, at the discretion of the Secretary, inspectors and/or Committee, the inspection result may be downgraded by one category or a longer period to rectify issues can be offered.

Notice to Quit:

- A notice to quit should only be issued if the plotholder has not satisfied the terms of their warning under Category 3 following 30 days to rectify any issues raised, or if they do not reply to the initial Category 3 warning.
- The tenant should be given 30 days to remove any of their belongings from the plot, and their tenancy terminated after those 30 days. After this date anything on the plot becomes the property of the Society.

The site committee should be BCC'd into any notices of Category 3.

If a tenant rents more than half a plot, notices can be served for reducing plot size rather than affecting the whole area managed by the society member. For example, if a tenant rents two half plots, and one is well maintained but the other is poorly managed, notice can be given to reduce to one half only with the society member retaining the well-managed plot. This should follow the same notice process as above. Vinery tenants should not have their area reduced to one quarter only.

Generally, plots should only be moved to a Category 3 after previously being served notice of a Category 2.

Managing responses

Receiving these warnings can be quite disappointing and upsetting for society members and each case should be dealt with compassionately. If responses from tenants are not straightforward, then the Secretary should discuss the response with the two inspectors before replying.

Escalation process

If any responses from tenants seriously dispute the inspection results, then in the first instance the response should be shared with the relevant site committee, with details of the concerns, supporting evidence for the categorisation from the inspectors, and the tenant's reasoning for the dispute. The Site Committee must then discuss this (by email is acceptable) and come to a majority decision. Committee members can visit the site to evaluate the plot for themselves as part of this process. The tenant should be informed in a separate response that their reply is being escalated and that the committee will return with a decision within seven days.

If a decision cannot be made by the Site Committee, then this should be escalated to the full Committee for input.

If the full Committee cannot come to a decision, the Site Chair will make the final decision.

In any of these cases, the Site Chair will notify the tenant of the final decision. There is no appeal process.

If this requires further support from a legal viewpoint, please contact NSALG via email following discussion with the joint committee natsoc@nsalg.org.uk or Tyler@nsalg.org.uk

Committee member plot inspection

As Committee members also are almost always tenants, their plots should also be regularly inspected and categorised, and they should be served notices as any other tenant.

Inspectors should not inspect their own plot (meaning Committee members' plots will only be inspected by one inspector). If the other inspector has any concerns about the cultivation of one of the inspector's plots, they should arrange to review this with another Committee member (not the Site Chair) within seven days. The same inspection process should be followed as detailed above.

Administration

The details of the inspection should be uploaded to the Google Drive under Allotment Documents>Inspections. A new folder should be created with the following naming convention YYYY-MM with a folder for each site saved into this file.

The outcomes of the site inspection should be uploaded into the appropriate folder with the following naming convention 'YYYYMMDD Site Inspection'.

Information should be appended to the inspection document detailing replies from any tenant who was emailed, and detailing the outcome for Category 3 plots.

Any supporting evidence should also be uploaded to the appropriate file with the naming convention YYYYMMDD Plot No [insert plot number].