



Beekeeping on Allotments

Guidance Notes for Local Authorities

These Notes are intended as a guide to good practice for Local Authorities and other bodies having responsibility for Allotments and similar plots of land used by the public in the UK.

1. Background

As pollinators, bees of all native species are unquestionably vital to our food supply, and are kept by a large and growing number of enthusiasts. They are the primary pollinators of our 'top fruit' crops, such as apples, pears, plums, peaches, etc. as well as soft fruit, such as strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, etc.

However, they can be viewed with suspicion and even fear by some people. Bees are often blamed for stings actually caused by wasps. Mostly, fear of bees is groundless, as in the UK we have no actively aggressive species, and people are unlikely to be stung unless they disturb a nest or, in the case of the honeybee, cause hived bees to think they are under attack. In rare cases (considered to be less than 1 in 200 people) such fear may be to some extent justified due to a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction, but most of these people are likely to be aware of their sensitivities and will know what action to take should they be stung. A number of them will routinely carry an EpiPen (self-medicating adrenalin injection) and in any case, health professionals consider that they can reach virtually anyone in the UK quickly enough for successful treatment.

The species of most concern in these Notes is the honeybee (*Apis mellifera*), which is the only native bee that is kept for its honey. Bumblebees (*Bombus* spp.) are considered to be endangered and should be conserved wherever possible.

2. Beekeeping and Public Safety

Notwithstanding the above, public safety must be taken into account when considering the siting of beehives on allotments and similar plots of land.

The principal safety issue is the potential for stinging incidents, and how this can be minimized.

We suggest a three-point approach:

1. Restricting the number of hives in a given area
2. Ensuring that beekeepers are advised of their responsibilities
3. Design the site to maximize public safety

Hive Density

Given the nature of allotments – i.e. many plots within a contained area – consideration must be given to the potential for numbers of beehives to accumulate within a relatively small area of land. While this scenario is, in practice, unlikely, Local Authorities may wish to impose a limit on the number of hives per plot.

Beekeeper Responsibilities

Landowners should satisfy themselves that allotment holders wishing to keep bees understand that:

1. Beekeepers placing hives on allotments should have appropriate Public Liability insurance.
2. Hives should be opened between mid morning and mid afternoon, and not while other allotment holders are nearby.
3. Beekeepers are responsible for ensuring that their bees do not cause a nuisance to the public or other allotment holders.
4. Hives should be placed as far as possible from any public walkways adjacent to allotment boundaries.
5. Hives may be surrounded by a 6 ft./1.8m fence, to cause bees to enter and exit the area above head height.
6. A contact telephone number should be displayed on or close to the hives, so the beekeeper can be reached if an emergency should arise.

Site Design

Where landowners have control over the overall design of the allotment site, a special area may be provided specially for beekeeping, away from gardening areas and boundary paths.

3. Consultation

When introducing beehives to an allotment area where they have not previously been kept, a consultation process with all interested parties will be an important step to ensuring good relations between beekeepers and other gardeners.

A number of Local Authorities already take a constructive approach to beekeeping on allotments, which we encourage. Given an open-minded, consultative approach, we feel that common-sense solutions can be reached in most circumstances, and the benefits to gardeners of having a healthy, local pollinator population will outweigh any small increase of administrative work involved.