

## Policy Committee Decision Report

<b>Title of Report:</b>	Allotment Rents
<b>Date of Decision:</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> December 2024
<b>Report To:</b>	Communities, Parks & Leisure Policy Committee
<b>Report Of:</b>	Ajman Ali – Executive Director - Neighbourhoods
<b>Report Author:</b>	Ruth Bell – Head of Parks & Countryside/ Rowan Longhurst – Service Manager, Countryside

**Executive Summary:** This report seeks committee approval for a 2% increase in allotment rent and water charges for the period 2026 - 2027. The report summarises allotment law and explains how the rent increase enables the Council to work towards the outcomes of the Council Plan and continue its statutory duty to provide allotment sites for people to grow their own food. Tenants must be given 12 months' notice (usually in January) of any increase in rents. Committee approval allows the service to give legal notice.



## Council Plan Outcomes:

[Great neighbourhoods that people are happy to call home](#)

## Policy Committee Remit:

This report is to be considered by the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee as its remit includes:

- Parks, Leisure and Libraries, Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure Facilities, Community events, Parks and Countryside (including non-highway Trees and Woodlands), Allotments, Ecology, Bereavement Services, Libraries

## Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? No

## Recommendations:

The Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. Approve a 2% increase to allotment rents for 2026/27.

**Financial Implications:** [Yes] Approved by: Adrian Hart

**Legal Implications:** [Yes] Approved by: Robert Parkin

**Equality and Inclusion Implications:** [Yes] Approved by: Ed Sexton  
Initial Equalities Impact Assessment completed with EIA number: 2395

**Climate Change Implications:** [Yes] Approved by: Kathryn Warrington

**Background Papers:** None

**Appendices:** None

## 1. Background to the issue

- 1.1 Sheffield City Council fulfils its statutory allotment duty through the provision of over 3400 allotment plots across the city.
- 1.2 A rent increase allows the service to continue its governance, maintenance and improvements to sites. Without rent increases, ongoing inflation results in higher services and supplier costs that would be detrimental to the councils ongoing Statutory duties, meeting outcomes of the 'Council Plan' and Sheffield Green Open Spaces Strategy.
- 1.3 Allotment rents and charges are reviewed annually, and in line with the respective tenancy agreements. Tenants must be given 12 months' notice (usually in January) of any increase in rents to take effect from the following year.
- 1.4 A review of rents was undertaken in 2014/15 and prices were increased substantially. Since then, prices have increased annually based generally on inflation levels as follows:

<b><i>Date of increase</i></b>	<b><i>% increase</i></b>
<i>April 2014</i>	<i>60%</i>
<i>(No increase April 2015- April 2017)</i>	
<i>April 2018</i>	<i>1.8%</i>
<i>April 2019</i>	<i>2.7%</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>2.6%</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>2%</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>2%</i>
<i>April 2023</i>	<i>2.9%</i>
<i>April 2024</i>	<i>5.5%</i>
<i>April 2025</i>	<i>5.96%</i>

- 1.5 In addition to the new pricing model, which was developed in 2014/15, a new discount structure was put in place. This increased the discount for those on a low income or with disabilities from 50% to 75%. A large-scale consultation was carried out prior to the 2014 increase. The outcome of that consultation was that most tenants would prefer to see rents increase than have a reduction in service.

## 2. Proposal

2.1 Previous rent approvals of 2024/25 and 2025/26 had been below inflation levels, therefore, when considered alongside significant cost increases for the service (services/suppliers), it represents a budget 'reduction' and does not generate a saving to the Council. The reduced budget resulted in fewer site improvements. To put into context, a 1% below inflation increase reduces the maintenance budget by approximately £3500. See Figure 1 below for comparison of rent against inflation.

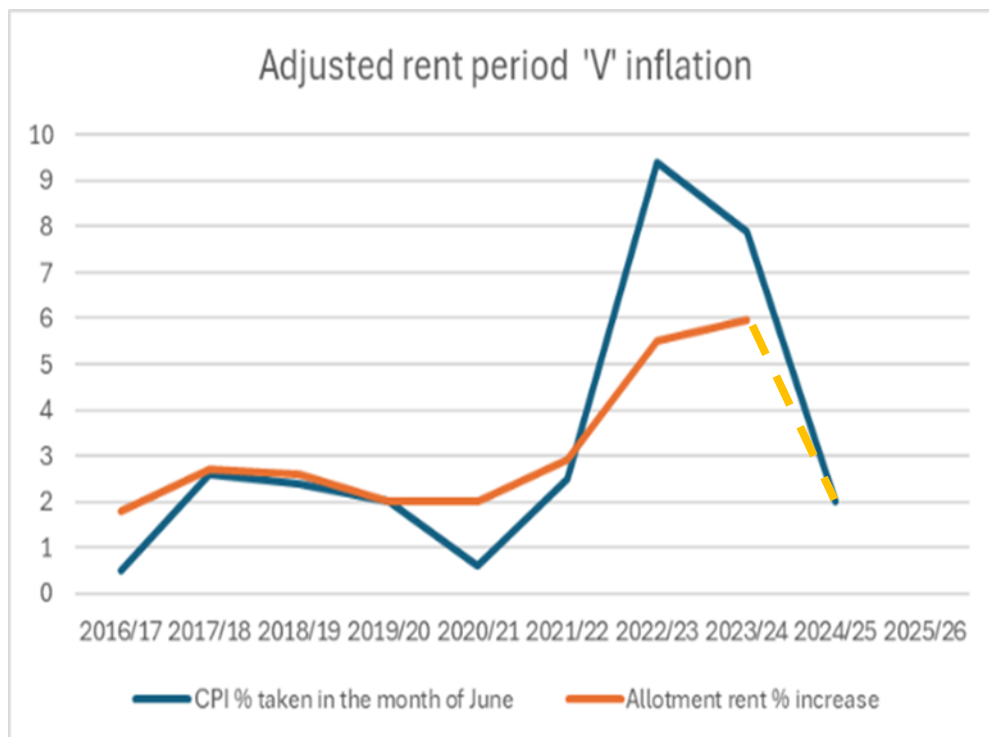


Figure 1 Adjusted Rent 'v' Inflation

2.2 It has been stated before that our rents are among the most expensive in the country. However, we are now seeing that many local authorities are no longer able to subsidise the provision of allotments. The result is to either raise rents and/or reduce the concessions offer. Direct comparisons with other authorities can be misleading, as there are many differences in how allotments are categorised and priced, the concessions available, and how the service is delivered. Our 75% discount for those on a low income or with disabilities is generous compared to other authorities: most offer lower discounts, or no discount at all. We feel that the large discount is fair, as it makes allotments more affordable for those who might struggle most otherwise. We are unusual in that all our sites are directly managed by the Local Authority, with no self-management (other than Rodney Hill's management of their own water supply).

- 2.3 Self-management can be a way to keep rents lower since some of the general maintenance of sites is done by volunteers. Previously discussions at the Allotment Advisory Group have indicated a willingness to learn more about self-management models. The involvement of volunteers in elements of site maintenance allows SCC officer time to be focussed on developing the allotment estate in Sheffield and is a real benefit to the service. The exact model is something that needs to be explored further with the group.
- 2.4 We have sought to compare the rents to rental charges for agricultural land owned by the Council (although the two things are very different, since allotment holders receive different services and facilities). However, information for comparison was not available since charges and reviews of charges for agricultural land depend on specific agreements.
- 2.5 The proposal is to apply a for a 2% increase in the Council's allotment rent and water charges for the period 2026 - 2027. The proposal has been based on previous consultation where tenants indicated they were willing to accept rent increases in line with inflation, but that they preferred the decision to be taken annually. It is therefore proposed that the rent increase will be in line with the ONS inflation rate of 2% (CPI figures for June 2024) and rounded to the nearest 5p for 2026/27. This proposal does not generate a saving to the Council.
- 2.6 The rent increase enables the Council to continue to provide decent allotment sites for people to grow their own food. This proposal would enable us to maintain staffing levels and continue with maintenance of the allotment sites (e.g. repairs to infrastructure). Table 1 shows a summary of the current prices and shows the proposed increases for the respective plots. The largest increase being proposed for 2026/27 is £4.05/year for a plot of over 301m<sup>2</sup> before any appropriate concessions are applied.

<b>Plot Type</b>	<b>Rent 2025/26</b>	<b>Rent 2026/27</b>	<b>Water 2025/26</b>	<b>Water 2026/27</b>	<b>Total 2025/26</b>	<b>Total 2026/27</b>
<b>Up to 100m<sup>2</sup></b>	£32.85	£33.51	£17.70	£18.05	£50.55	£51.55
<b>101m to 200m<sup>2</sup></b>	£66.86	£68.20	£36.34	£37.07	£103.20	£105.30
<b>201-300m<sup>2</sup></b>	£96.16	£98.08	£49.27	£50.26	£145.45	£148.35
<b>&gt;301m<sup>2</sup></b>	£143.10	£145.96	£60.93	£62.15	£204.05	£208.10
<b>Parson Cross 1</b>	£9.43	£9.62	£5.09	£5.19	£14.50	£14.80

<b>Parson Cross 2</b>	£16.42	£16.75	£8.85	£9.03	£25.25	£25.80
<b>Pigeon Loft charge</b>	£ 63.36	£64.63	x	x	£63.35	£64.65

Table 1 Current annual charges for 2025/2026 and proposed charges for 2026/27 (rounded up to nearest 5p)

### 3. How does this decision contribute to the Council Plan?

3.1 The report contributes to the Council plan out of Great Neighbourhoods that people are happy to call home.

3.1.1 The rent increases will enable the council to continue to provide opportunities for Sheffield's diverse communities to grow food sustainably.

3.1.2 It will allow the council to work towards the next 4 years priority of all parks and greenspace reaching 'Sheffield Standard' by 2030 (Green and Open Space Strategy 2010-2030) and work with communities and societies to keep allotments financially and ecologically sustainable.

3.1.3 Support for healthy eating, along with the environmental benefits of locally-produced food, is also an important component of 'Fairer, Healthier, Greener' the Food Strategy for Sheffield which includes a commitment to working with local communities and partners to identify spaces where sustainable food production and provision can be accommodated.

#### 3.2 People – Prosperity – Planet

By providing a link to nature, allotment gardening addresses all three of the Council's triple lock priorities of people, prosperity and planet.

3.2.1 People – The proposal allows the council to continue to provide access to Allotment spaces in our communities and close to people's home.

3.2.2 Prosperity - The proposal will enable the council to continue provide welcoming and healthy places to grow food, spend time together, live healthily and belong to their communities. It allows the council to continue to invest in the allotment estate, ensuring clean, green and safe places that are fit for purpose.

3.2.3 Planet -The proposal will enable the council to protect the environment for future generations and maintain our green economy and contributes to the Council's 10 Point Plan for climate action. The way our food is grown and reaches our plate (so the amount of processing, packaging, the distance it travels) makes a significant impact on the environment. Whilst It is not the

role of the council to tell people what they should buy or eat, it is widely accepted that we need to change the way we eat and consume, growing our own food can also save money as well as reduce packaging and waste. There is a growing industry of sustainable food, with Sheffield's Institute for Sustainable Food at the forefront of technology and growing more of our food locally using nature friendly methods can increase our food security as well as reducing emissions. Providing a good quality, affordable allotment estate will assist in achieving these ambitions.

### 3.3 City Goals

3.3.1 Allotments provide an opportunity for our diverse communities to directly support the City Goals, namely:

- A Green & Resilient Sheffield' (Goal 4, 5 and 6)
- A Sheffield of Thriving Communities' (Goal 7, 8 and 9)

3.3.2 Allotments provide an opportunity to contribute to the 'Transformation of Sheffield's Food System' with reference to Sheffield City Council's 'Food Strategy 2023, vision of fairer, healthier, greener' and ShefFood's 'Local Food Action Plan for Sheffield, a collective vision for Sheffield where everyone has access to healthy sustainable food.

## **4. What community or partner engagement has been undertaken and how has it informed the proposal?**

4.1 In 2018 a consultation with all allotment holders about rent setting was undertaken, via a questionnaire. The response rate to the questionnaire was 22%. 70% of those who responded indicated that they were in favour of small yearly increases in charges e.g. year by year and in line with inflation.

4.2 In 2022 with inflation peaking at 11% and a rent increases proposal that would not be inline with the results of the 2018 consultation, we carried out a wider consultation exercise, inviting tenants to complete a survey. Taking the results into consideration, proposed a 2024/25 increase of 5.5% (lower than inflation), which was approved by the Committee.

4.3 In 2023 with inflation still at 6.8% we carried a wider consultation exercise inviting tenants to complete a survey on several options, again taking results into consideration, proposed a 2025/26 increase of 5.96% (lower than inflation) was approved by the Committee.

4.4 The Allotments Advisory Group membership includes Parks and Countryside Service (Allotments), 5 elected members, 5 representatives from Sheffield Allotment Federation and those 30 Allotment Societies that are constituted. Included in the terms of reference the group may



‘consider and comment on policy and strategic issues and other issues relating to the Allotments Service, raised by elected Members of the Allotments and Leisure Gardens Advisory Group, or the Sheffield Allotments and Leisure Gardeners Federation’.

- 4.5 With inflation returning to pre-2022 levels it is considered appropriate to adopt the 2018 consultation results (small rent increase in line with inflation).
- 4.6 This proposal was discussed with Allotment Advisory Group on the 22nd of July 2024 and positively received  
<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/allotment-advisory-group-minutes-22-july-2024.pdf>

## 5 What alternative options did we consider?

- 5.1 Alternative Option 1: Rents remain at 2025/26 levels for 2026/27.

This option was rejected as the proposal would significantly decrease the level of service and site improvements that can be undertaken. Following previous years of below-inflationary rent increases, this would represent a reduction to the budget for the service.

- 5.2 Alternative Option 2: Rents increased by an amount greater than inflation.

This would allow much needed investment in the estate's attainment of 'Sheffield Standard; by 2030. Additional budget could be allocated to those plots that are currently unlettable due to their unviable condition, reducing extensive waiting times for allotments and increasing revenue.

This option was rejected as the proposal may impact on those in our communities who rely on allotments to live healthy, fulfilling and sustainable lives. With the lasting effects of the 'cost of living crisis' those existing tenants may face financial hardship and allotments would become unaffordable.

## 6 How has equality, diversity and inclusion been actively considered?

- 6.1 Overall, there are no significant differential, positive or negative, impacts from this proposal. The decision to increase annual allotment rents would impact on all our allotment holders. The increase in rent would be comparatively small (between 30p and £4.05 per customer per year



before discount), depending on the size of plot, provision of water and entitlement to a discount. Discounts/concession (up to 75%) are already available to make allotments more affordable to those on a low income, with disabilities or of state pension age. See figure 2 for tenants who receive a discount/concession (2023/24).

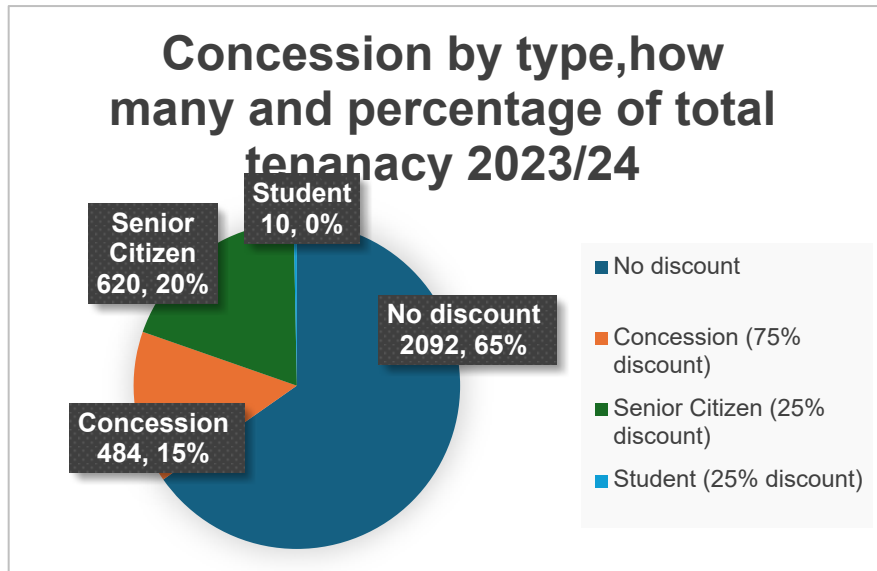


Figure 2 Concession by type, how many and percentage (2023/24)

## 7 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 7.1 The Council continues to face significant financial challenges and must make difficult decisions about services that the people of Sheffield care deeply about.
- 7.2 The additional funds collected from the rent increase will be invested directly into the allotments service and allow the service to remain self-financing with no detrimental impact to the council.
- 7.3 Previous years compromise of below inflation rent increases have resulted in a reduction in the level of service when compared to pre-2022.

## 8 Legal Implications

- 8.1 The City Council has a statutory duty under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 to provide allotments if it believes there to be a demand for them. Setting of allotment rents is governed by section 10(1) of the Allotments Act 1950 which provides that land let for use as an allotment should be let at “such rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay” for land let on the same terms for such use, provided that the Council may let allotments at a reduced rent if satisfied that there are special circumstances affecting the tenant which make a reduced rent appropriate.

- 8.2 In the 1981 case of *Harwood v Borough of Reigate and Banstead* the High Court, when considering the reasonableness of a proposed rent increase, held that the local council, and nobody else, was required to determine the rent that a notional (rather than a particular) tenant might reasonably be expected to pay and that in its determination it should:
- listen to representations made by or on behalf of its allotment tenants.
  - Consider all relevant circumstances in a broad common-sense way.
  - Give such weight as it thought fit to various factors in the situation.
  - Come to a right and fair conclusion.

The Court gave guidance on the approach to be taken:

"... not to discriminate against this recreational activity as compared with other recreational activities. In other words, unless there are some very special circumstances relating to this particular recreational facility which, if it were some other recreational facility would require that a higher charge should be made for the use of that facility, then in the ordinary case if there is to be an increase in the rent charged then it should be in line with the increases that have been charged for the use of the other recreational facilities. "

- 8.3 The rent levels described in this report comply with the statutory requirements and are in line with the High Court's guidance and the discount structure sets out the circumstances in which it is appropriate to charge a reduced rent. Allotment rents are not being set at a level that will make a profit but to maintain a similar level of service (with a small reduction in site improvements).
- 8.4 Because allotments are let on yearly tenancies the Council must provide 12 months' notice to tenants of any changes to the allotment tenancy agreement or the amount of rent to be collected.

## 9 Climate and Environmental Implications

- 9.1 Due to the nature of this proposal (concerned with rent increase only) a full scored CIA is not required, however there are clearly climate related benefits from the maintenance of a quality allotments service.
- 9.2 The proposal will enable us to continue to deliver a quality allotments service, and hence enable our tenants to continue to grow their own food and reduce their carbon footprint. Allotments provide an opportunity to grow and consume food locally. This has a benefit in relation to reducing food miles and recycling through local composting, helping Sheffield to be a sustainable city, and contributes to our ambition to be a net zero carbon city by 2030.

- 9.3 Enabling tenants to grow their own food also reduces the use of food packaging and connecting people with the production of food helps encourage a reduction in food waste. Furthermore, many allotment holders choose to grow organically, so the provision of the allotment service helps tenants access organic food.
- 9.4 Maintaining a good quality allotment service also helps maintain the land in productive use, providing biodiversity and carbon storage benefits.

## **10 Other implications**

- 10.1 Workforce implications - The proposal will help protect our ability to continue to employ the staff needed to provide the Allotments service.
- 10.2 Property implications - The proposal will help us to continue to maintain our allotment estate and protect against Anti-social behaviour.
- 10.3 Health and wellbeing implications - The proposal will protect our ability to provide allotments for the people of Sheffield. There is considerable evidence that having an allotment has health benefits. For example, having an allotment helps combat loneliness. It can play a part in preventing and alleviating mental ill-health. It provides exercise, and increases the time spent outdoors, hence increasing vitamin D levels. It helps promote a diet of fresh, local, seasonal produce, and helps people enjoy the well-being benefits associated with a greater sense of connection to nature. 'Food Strategy 2023'.

## **11 Reasons for decision**

- 11.1 The recommendation to the Communities, Parks and Leisure Committee is to increase the rents by 2% in 2026/27, this protects the staffing levels within the team to continue to provide support to allotment holders and their allotments and maintains a small site improvement budget. It takes in to account the results of the 2018 consultation, increasing rent by a relatively small proportion.

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