Managing an Allotments Site – Course

Overview

1. Introduction

Managing an Allotment Site can be a challenging prospect but, if done properly, can be very rewarding. Whether you are Self-Managed, Leased or just have an Association that represents you and your fellow plot-holders, it doesn't matter, the fundamentals are the same. We have developed a Course to help you Manage Your Allotment Site

If you are Self-Managed then you will probably have an agreement called a Lease or an Agreement with your Landlord. The course will give you a basic understanding of Leases and Self-Management Agreements.

The Course is run over three evenings, either you can attend with others at one of our organised courses or we can tailor it to suit your own site and at your convenience. Once you have completed the Course, we will carry out follow up visits to discuss such things as changes to the Rules or Constitutions and many of the other aspects of Allotment Management listed below.

2. Constitution, Rules etc.

This section just briefly describes the Constitution. A Constitution is the document that governs any Association or Club or Society or even a Charity and is called Articles of Association if you are a Company. So, whatever you are or named as, the Constitution governs what you do, how you do it and is a basic set of powers, duties and principles of your Association. Note, it is not a set of rules or a tenancy nor is it a policy document, you will learn the difference between these documents in the course. Many times these documents are mixed up and it is confusing to work out what is actually the over-arching document. The over-arching document should always be the Constitution.

3. The Committee

The Committee is a group of people who listen to the Members of their Association, carry out their wishes and manage the finance, the paperwork, the membership list etc. On the course you will learn to recognise when the Committee 'assume' power that has not been given to them and to identify the clues to mis-management. Remember, the Committee is only as good as the people that elected them! On the course you will learn how the Committee interact with the Members and vice-versa, what the role of the Committee is. The Committee usually has Officers and Members, the officers are usually a Chair, Treasurer and a Secretary, the rest of the Committee is made up of Committee Members.

3.1. Officers of the Committee

As mentioned in the last paragraph, there are three or more Officers of the Committee. You will learn exactly the duties of a Chair, of a Treasurer and a Secretary. Also, you may make another Committee Member the Membership Secretary whose role is purely to deal with the membership list thus relieving an overworked Secretary.

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3.2. Holding Meetings

The Constitution will set out when and how often you should have meetings. Also, it will specify who can vote, do you allow proxy votes, who can speak at meetings etc. The course will guide you, depending on how big your site is and other guidelines, how often you should have meetings and also the etiquette at meetings. A vital aspect of any meeting is the Agenda and the Minutes, again, guidelines will be given how to write both of these.

4. Managing your Site

There are many aspects of managing an allotment site. The plots need inspecting on a regular basis, the Waiting List must be maintained, the list of Plot-Holders must be accurate as well as managing the finances and other administrative tasks. You will learn about these and more on how to make things easier for yourself.

4.1. Inspection Regime

The course will describe how to set up an Inspection Regime that is fair, regular and simple. It will give guidelines as to what is a 'good' plot or a 'bad' plot using a score sheet. Above all, the Inspection Regime should be absolutely transparent as it could form the basis for an eviction.

4.2. Waiting List

You will be a lucky site or an extremely unappealing site if you don't have a Waiting List. The course will describe how to maintain the waiting list, how you will manage people's expectations of the task of managing an allotment plot and how to prevent any people 'jumping the queue'.

4.3. Members List

You will probably have heard of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The keeping of people's data on a Members List will need to conform to the current regulation. You will learn the basics of GDPR and how it affects Allotment Associations. Also, you will learn what data would normally be held for a Plot Holder.

4.4. Financial Records

If you collect rents and spend the money on site repairs, buy materials from a supplier then you are effectively running a business even though any profit is put back into the Association. The Treasurer must manage the finance and be able to show exactly how money has been spent on the Members behalf. On the course you will learn the very basic principles of accounting and how to use your computer to help you. The course will cover your Association's legal obligations to such bodies as HMRC, Companies House and of course your own Members.

5. Documents

5.1. Tenancy Agreement

If you are a Self-Managed site then you may issue Tenancy Agreements on behalf of your Landlord. Other Landlords will issue the Tenancy Agreements themselves, you just manage the site for them, keeping the Members Register and doing Inspections etc. This area of Allotments management can be confusing and we will find out the type of arrangement your Landlord wants and work with them on providing the right documents for you.

5.2. Constitution

Again, depending on the type of Self-Management, the Constitution will reflect the type of agreement with your Landlord. The Course will describe the important bits of the Constitution that dictate how you manage the site on behalf of your Landlord and your Members.

5.3. Rules

Most Self-Management sites have to include the Landlords rules in the Association rules. You will probably be able to have your own rules, as long as they don't conflict with the Landlords rules.

5.4. Management Policies

The NCAA has created a 'Management Policies for Allotments' booklet. This will guide you through the exact procedures for Terminations, Inspections, Evictions, Membership, Expenses, Waiting List and many other subjects of everyday life on your allotment site.

6. Day-to-Day Management

Topics will include:

Running a Shop – the legalities of running a business on an allotment site
Plot Sizes and how to manage 'plot-creep'
Water Supplies and other utilities
Site Security
Bonfires
Buildings
Security
Livestock
Rodent Control, again there is another course on Rodenticide
Community Gardens and the benefits of them
…and many more

7. Business Plan

It is important that you have a Business Plan. A Site Inspection should take place and the report will show the areas of the site that need repairing and you should arrive at cost. The Course will describe how to draw up a Five-Year Plan of repairs, improvements and could include things like a Community Garden, plots for Schools and other Community based facilities.

8. Financial Management

In this part there will be an overview of basic financial control, how to deal with companies' house, HMRC etc. We will then concentrate on Rent Collections, Membership Lists, and, if you have one, how to control finance in your shop.
You will learn all about Audit Trails, the bits that tie everything together so that your members can see how the money has been spent, who authorised the expenditure and who was paid and where there rents go to!

9. Ongoing help, mentoring and guidance

We don't believe that you can learn how to manage an Allotment Site in a one-day course. The NCAA will give you follow-on help for as long as you need it. We will have meetings with your new or existing Committee and help you formulate a plan for the next five years.

Templates are available for rules, constitutions etc, we will help you tailor them to suit your site, ensuring that the documents are robust, fit for purpose and will last for many years. At the same time we monitor changes in legislation and can advise you on the ongoing changes you may need to make to these important documents, both now and in the future.

We can supply templates for the Members Register, Plot Inspection Regimes, Financial Control, Letters for new Tenants and Termination Letters and many more.

If you require, we can attend your Committee and other site meetings, giving you guidance and training on an ongoing basis, maybe even for a year, until you are really confident in managing your site.

The Course is held over three parts, one week apart, either at Chester le Street, Jesmond or Yarm.

Who are we, what do we do.

The Northern Counties Allotments Association (NCAA) seeks to serve the needs of Allotment Tenants, Managers and Landlords in the area bounded by the Yorkshire/Lancashire boundaries to the South, the North Sea to the East and the Cumbrian Coast to the West and Scotland. In terms of community areas this is the Tees Valley, Tyneside, the counties of Durham, Northumberland, Cumbria and Scotland together with the cities, parishes, towns and boroughs in the area.

We aim to assist allotment people with tasks that they may not be familiar with; Self-Management, Fund Raising, Constitutions, Rules for Tenants, guidelines on allotment management and others that occur from time to time like rodent control.

To see when the next Course is running or to attend one of our other events then go to our website www.ncaa.org.uk. To contact the Secretary: 0793 413 5470 secretary@ncaa.org.uk or the Counties Adviser 0793 291 5768 adviser@ncaa.org.uk.