

Full Council

12 March 2024



Report of: Tim O’Gara, Director Legal and Democratic Services

Title: Petition Debate: Objections to Bristol City Council Changes to Allotment Rules and Rent

Recommendation

That Full Council debates the petition and refers it to the Mayor / relevant Cabinet member for a formal response.

Summary

Under the Council’s petitions scheme, where a petition has 3,500 or more signatures from people who live, work or study in Bristol, the petition organiser can request a Full Council debate.

The Council has received a petition in relation to Objections to Bristol City Council Changes to Allotment Rules and Rent

The petition organisers have requested that Full Council debates the petition.



Details of the petition

1. The wording of the petition is as follows:

Petition title / subject: **Objections to Bristol City Council Changes to Allotment Rules and Rent**

Petition wording: Bristol City Council have begun a consultation on proposed changes to rules across their allotment sites, as well as proposing significant rental increases. Full information around these changes and the ability to respond directly to the Council during the consultation are available via this link:

<https://www.ask.bristol.gov.uk/bristol-allotment>

These changes would see enormous rent increases for plot-holders, with rents more than doubling for many plots on sites with water access. In attempts to show that they are not just doing this for profit, they are proposing to increase availability to discounts for tenants on Universal Credit and other benefits - negating to mention that even with these discounts plot prices for eligible tenants will still be higher than they are currently and therefore will not be any more accessible than they are right now.

There are also proposed additional fees that cover everything from setting up a new tenancy to applying for permission to keep hens and bees, or to erect a greenhouse or shed. There's even a proposed additional charge for requesting permission to install a pond - despite the huge positive benefits these have for wildlife and nature across our allotment sites. Currently none of these items are charged as additions, and there is no possible justification for adding charges onto items that the Council should already be handling as part of their management responsibility and are already paid for. There is also the proposal to charge sites for holding events, which would have a hugely detrimental impact on the community and deter sites from doing this. Our site, for example, holds an annual bat walk - this is a free event which we all look forward to and brings the allotment site together, but would be unlikely to go ahead if we were expected to find funds to pay the Council for an event we organise and that they have no involvement with. There is absolutely no cost to the Council in us holding such events, and therefore no justification in charging sites other than purely for greed.

In terms of amendments to the rules, I'm sure I've not spotted every single change and would urge people to read through the Council's information carefully before replying to their consultation. Those that I've particularly noticed include expecting tenants to remove/replace all glass across their plot within the next 5 years or at the end of their tenancy. Not only would this be enormously wasteful in terms of destroying perfectly good greenhouse structures, but would also be potentially very expensive for tenants having to re-glaze frames with the required twin-wall plastic - with no financial assistance from the Council. Hedges and fences must be removed, as well as large play equipment for children.

For me, the worst of these proposed rule changes is that all trees, except dwarf root stock fruit trees, must be removed. The implications for this are huge, both environmentally and financially, and in many cases would result in absolutely no positive benefits whatsoever. The cost and responsibility of removing these trees seems to be suggested as lying with the current plot

holder, who has 3 years to perform this work. Not to mention the devastating environmental impact this would have. If you are an allotment lover yourself, you'll be aware of the enormous array of wildlife that these sites are home to and each tree will be supporting an entire ecosystem which the Council are now demanding to be destroyed. In a time where we are more aware than ever of issues with climate change and the impact we have had on our planet, massacring established trees across Bristol's allotment sites can have no possible positive benefit and will only ever make our sites poorer.

As I say, I'm sure there are many, many further issues in the proposed changes which I haven't highlighted or haven't even yet picked up but I hope the above makes the need to object to the Council's proposals clear. Please do sign this petition if you agree that access to space to grow your own food should be for everyone and not the reserve of more affluent households, that destroying mature trees in a time of climate emergency benefits no-one, and that charging tenants additional fees for the work that Councils are already being paid for is inherently wrong. Please check out the link above and respond to the Council's consultation, and if you've managed to stick with my ramblings this far - thank you!

2. The petition has been organised by Holly Wyatt.
3. The petition has secured 6414 signatures to date, 3,965 from Bristol residents. Verified as of 21 February 2024.
4. Full Council is asked to debate the petition.
5. Under the petition scheme, the petition organiser is permitted up to 5 minutes to present and speak to the petition. The petition scheme allows a further period of up to 15 minutes for discussion of the petition by councillors at the Full Council meeting.
6. The Full Council has agreed the following in relation to dealing with petitions with over 3500 signatures: The topic of the debate should be referred to the Mayor/Cabinet, or other relevant body with the petitioner's views and Full Council's views.

RECOMMENDATION

Following the debate, the Full Council is recommended to refer the petition to the Mayor, in order that the Mayor can consider his response, in liaison with the relevant Cabinet member.