

Election of Site Reps is a key recommendation of the Allotment Strategy.

**What is the role of the site representative?**The Site Representative is a volunteer plot holder who plays a part in the management of the site for the Council. Due to a severe restriction of Council funding Site Reps now play an essential role in keeping the service running. Site Reps give up a lot of their own time and BHAF wants to make clear how much we appreciate them. Our Allotment Service would be in a much poorer state without them.

Site reps were historically just appointed by the Allotment Officer. However, as the name implies, part of their role is representing plot holders. Sometimes the Council will consult Site Reps on issues affecting all plot holders. The Allotment Strategy, which we are bound to follow, requires that they should be elected to ensure they actually are representing the wishes of their plot holders and have their support.

It is often very difficult to find someone to take on the role of Site Rep, and there is not usually a queue of volunteers offering to take on the role! In the five years since the allotment strategy, BHAF have called for nominations at all sites and there has only been one election process, a situation where there were two people who wanted to take on the role and only one Site Rep position. Sadly this one time an election was run in conjunction with the Allotment Service it met with severe problems as the process and code of conduct had not been thought through clearly enough, and it resulted in elections being suspended. That is the reason for this discussion; we are attempting to establish a new agreed process for electing Site Reps.

 **Proposal for a cost and time effective way of managing Site Rep Elections**BHAF are concerned that there are two different approaches to electing Site Reps (see below) and we think a single system of Site Reps elections across the whole city using the same process for everyone is preferable and would ensure greater transparency and representation of all plot holders.

Minimising cost and time spent on the elections should be a priority. A simple solution would be to carry out all elections all at the same time every 2 or 3 years. And elected reps for a fixed term all ending at the same time. It should be remembered that it is a rare occurrence for an actual election to take place as usually there are not more site rep places than there are volunteers. But where there are more nominations than site rep places an election should take place.

**BHAF Suggested System for Site Rep Elections for discussion**

When plot holders are sent their annual invoices in October we feel this could be an opportunity to contact every plot holder and notify them about Site Rep elections. This would mean the postal cost of this part of the process was zero.
A short letter would include the site reps role description and it would list sites and current site reps at all sites. It would also list any vacancies and ask for any new nominations for the roles by a deadline.

Current Site Reps would automatically be nominated (if they wish). Any plot holder wanting to stand for election at their site could respond by email or post to BHAF. This would mean there was no extra work for the allotment service. Any site where there were more nominations than site rep positions available would go forward to an election. From our experience over the last few years we estimate this would be no more than 2 - 3 sites each time.

Candidates would be asked to supply a short resume and would be given a ‘code of conduct’ to adhere to during the process. All plot holders at the site where an election is taking place would then be emailed a link to an online service to place a vote against their plot number or asked to vote by replying to the email. If they had no email they could be posted a ballot by the allotment service. That would be the only work required of the allotment service; sending ballot letters to those on a site without an email.

There would be one vote per plot or half plot. Those that have more than one plot would only have one vote. Co Workers would not have a vote.

BHAF could set up the online voting and administer it and give online access to the allotment office for transparency.
Or voting could simply be carried out by replying to a ballot email. Postal votes could be posted to BHAF or the Allotment Service if they wished. Votes would be counted and elected reps declared.

In the situation where a site rep retires midterm for any reason, a site rep could be ‘appointed’ by the allotment service and BHAF pending the next round of elections. We think this is the simplest, most open, cost effective and least time consuming method of ensuring that everyone across the city has access to electing their site reps.

**Discussion**BHAF is not just the Committee! All plot holders are members of BHAF. We offer this document as a starting point for discussion. We intend to discuss the election process at our next Allotment Forum meeting on 22nd January. Or please emails us your thoughts. If we can agree a process between us we can vote on it at the AGM In March

**Background**

**From the Allotment Strategy**<https://www.bhaf.org.uk/content/category/about/allotment-strategy>
 **Appendix 5: Recommendations on the role of Site Reps**

* **1**. **On sites where there is no society or association**, elections should be organized by the Allotments Officer in conjunction with the Allotments Federation.
* **2**. **On sites where there is a society or association** it should be a responsibility of that body to organize the election. The society should take account of the fact that not all plot holders may be society members. Nominations and voting for Site Representatives should be open to all plot holders. If no candidates come forward then BHAF should appoint one directly.

The strategy suggests two different approaches to electing Site reps, one for sites with an association and a different system for those without an Association. However, the BHAF Committee is not sure that there should be two systems for electing Site Reps and we think this strategy recommendation could be reviewed.

**What are Allotment Associations?**Allotment Associations are essentially private members groups which operate on less than a quarter of allotment sites. They charge a small annual fee to join and members benefit from, for example, seeds and compost at reduced prices.

Associations sometimes take over some infrastructure management tasks at their site, this is of great benefit to the service. BHAF support Associations and have encouraged and supported the formation of 2 new Associations in the last 3 years, one at ‘Keston’ and one at ‘Whitehawk and Craven Vale’. There is also one in the pipeline at Thomson Road. Associations can play a role in creating a sense of community at Allotment Sites, which helps with support for plot holders and site security. However, not all plot holders want to join their local Association. Some people visit the plot to get away from it all. Association membership only averages about 10-20% of plot holders at sites where Associations exist.

This is a summary of the two system approach suggested by the strategy and our thoughts on them.

* **1.** **On sites without an Association**

The Allotment Office and BHAF arrange elections.
The Allotment Office has the contact details (address and email) of every plot holder. When they sign up for a plot, plot holders also consent to having their email address shared with BHAF.

Both the Allotment Office and BHAF are therefore able to notify every plot holder by email and the Allotment Office are able to notify the very small number without email by post.

They can be confident that every plot holder is aware of the election process.

 BHAF already has a bulk email account and a survey monkey account which could be used for electronic voting.

Voting could therefore take place by an online and a postal ballot ensuring everyone has access to the vote.

* **2.** **On sites with an Allotment Association.**

Allotment Associations, while certainly being an asset to the site, only really represent their members. They will only have the contact details of their members, but Associations on average only have about 10%-20% of plot holders at their sites as members. Associations will therefore have problems making sure all plot holders are aware of and able to vote in any elections.

They would need to rely on posters on gates to advertise the elections. Many people do not see or take notice of these posters.

Associations elect their committee and site reps by a show of hands at their AGM. Many plot holders do not or cannot attend these AGMs with attendance even at the biggest Associations being around 20-30 people, which is <10% of plot holders. There is also an issue that in certain cases plot holders perceives the Association as a ‘clique’ and feel intimidated to attend the meetings.

Associations also have members who are not plot holders (members of the public without plots who join Associations for cheap seeds etc) they attend Association meetings but they should not have a vote on who the site rep is. This makes a ‘show of hands’ problematic.

It should also be noted that some Associations are keen not to run Site Reps elections anyway and want them run by the Council and BHAF.