## **FORMING AN ASSOCIATION and SELF-MANAGEMENT OF ALLOTMENTS**

## **BY AN ALLOTMENT SECRETARY**

##  **(John Doherty Preston Lane Allotments, Updated 2011)**

**Forming an Association**

A site might want to form an association so as to access funding for projects on site. They might be quite happy with their present landlord and the way the site as a whole is managed.

. When the Association is established they might then feel like taking on aspects of management after consulting with their landlord.

**ADVANTAGES of having an Association**

* Committee is more in touch with tenants and on a small site (up to 50 gardens) is likely to know everyone by name.
* Shows that the site is organised when dealing with the council or other official bodies.
* You can join NSALG for £2 per member
* People take more notice of you
* Offers involvement and a lot of satisfaction
* Opportunity to take initiatives on the site like a best kept garden competition, a barbeque or trading
* Grant funding is available

**STARTING UP**

A group of interested tenants should meet together and do the following:

1 Adopt a constitution and draw up a set of rules ‑ every future tenant will sign a copy of these (model constitution and rules are available from the NSALG and ARI).

2 Decide what subscription to propose (more on

 this later)

3 Notify every tenant of a General Meeting. It is often best to hold this at the site, a nearby pub or community centre would do.

4 Run the General Meeting

 Agenda. Explain what is happening

 Election of Officers: Chair

 Secretary

 Treasurer

 Election of Committee

 Adoption of Constitution and Rules /

 NSALG membership

 Future subscriptions

 A.O.B.

 Date of first Committee meeting

If you succeed in all of the above, you have done well and are now running as an association.

Money should be kept in a bank account with any two signatures from chair, secretary or treasurer on cheques.

These days it is a great help to be able to use email and the internet so it is best if someone on the committee can do this.

**PROBLEMS YOU MIGHT ENCOUNTER**

The most common problem is that a few plot holders won’t join or pay subs however modest. There is not much you can do about this and provided they are just a small minority then the whole site will still benefit from the many other advantages. It does mean that the dissidents won’t be covered by site insurance or enjoy other benefits of NSALG membership.

**WHAT IS SELF MANAGEMENT?**

An allotments site run by a committee of tenants from the site who collect rent, administer the site, let gardens, keep it tidy etc.

**ADVANTAGES of Self Management**

* plot rent will almost certainly be a lot less than the un-subsidised economic rent that a council might charge. 1
* vacant gardens can be kept tidy and re-let quickly.
* problems can be quickly identified and sorted out
* costs can be kept down

Help is available from the NSALG and Allotments

Regeneration Initiative (ARI) to associations and councils.

Also as a community group grant funding is more available than to local authorities to fund site improvements and community projects. You will need a constitution and a bank account with two signatures required. Your local CVS or similar will help as will NSALG and ARI

It can take 6 months to a year to do all the above if you need to form an association first depending largely on how fast the Council Officers are able to move.

It may be as well to allow the association to settle down for a year or so before going on to manage the site.

**DISADVANTAGES**

* Committee members have to do some work
* You have to have sufficient people, (6‑8) on the site to be prepared to help
* You take responsibility for site services, roads, water etc
* You may have to deal with problem tenants.

A small amount of work done every week or month can quickly lead to a much improved site, with all gardens taken and a very friendly atmosphere.

Sites run by one person alone as secretary over a large number of years usually founder eventually and it is not fair on the secretary to do it all himself.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR SELF-MANAGEMENT**

BEFORE YOU START: It is best if every single tenant

 Although it is best if everyone agrees in principal with the site being run by a committee of tenants, it is possible to go ahead with a very strong majority around 80% or more in favour. Get a simple signature from every tenant to say that they understand what is happening and agree with the proposals. It can involve visiting tenants' homes if you don't see them on the site.

Consult with the landlord, usually the local council, and get a suitable lease prepared. 5 years is an absolute minimum, 10 to 15 years better.

Agree with Council on i) Lease ii) set of Rules and

iii) financials including site rental

\* Stockton Council demands a modest rent from self-managed associations. Other councils may not and some are so keen to dispose of responsibility for allotments that they will pay an annual fee to self-managed associations.

Affiliation to NSALG is highly recommended and at present costs £2 per year per tenant, minimum £20.

You must have sufficient people to take office on the committee. Secretary and Treasurer are crucial jobs. A good Chairman is a real asset. It is best if officers can change over the years. You need a sufficient number of tenants to actually be on the committee so it isn't exactly the same year after year. Training for officers is available through the local CVS or similar.

You need names and addresses of tenants. The Council will usually help with this but you may need to catch tenants to check.

You should have about 11 meetings a year plus the A.G.M. and when the place is running smoothly most meetings take about half an hour. It is better to meet regularly and often so as to deal promptly with business and to keep meetings short.

**If you haven't got your committee don't even attempt self-management.**

If you have a committee and (almost) everyone agrees then read on…

### RUNNING THE SITE

Don't forget that it is the Committee who run the site. It is administered by the Secretary and Treasurer according to the agreed rules. Everything should be referred to the Committee which will meet every 4-5 weeks.

Jobs may include:

* Maintenance of site, boundary, roads, grass etc
* Provision of services eg. water
* Payment of water bill, rent to Council etc
* Best Kept Allotment Competition
* Keeping tenants in order
* Applications for buildings, sheds greenhouses in keeping with Council guidelines
* Removal of difficult tenants
* Tidying up, skips, grass maintenance, vacant gardens, gates, locks etc, etc
* Arranging the A.G.M. with audited accounts

Simple paperwork, headed notepaper, etc are required but a modern computer or word processor is quite sufficient although not essential.

### TRADING

This is a separate issue but a trading sub-committee may be started up and money made trading can help to keep rents down.

### EXPENSES OF RUNNING A SITE

Water is our greatest expense. For a 20mm pipe or below the fixed charge is £33.30 with water at 99.02p a cubic metre on top. Fixed charges rise dramatically for larger pipes. Cattle troughs with a ball valve and a hosepipe ban will help to keep water wastage under control. One water point should be a press tap for drinking water. Water used as above costs about £7.50 a year per tenant for us with one press tap and 7 troughs for 48 gardens.

Council charges for sites vary from peppercorn rents to a few hundred pounds.

Administration can cost more than you might think and works out at around £2 - £3 per garden per year.

This includes:

* AGM notices
* Rent notices
* Letters etc plus postage
* Insurance currently £75.25 p.a. for Public Liability and Products Liability cover

We try to keep our tenants fully informed as well as saving costs but we do believe in personal letters not simply putting up a notice on a board. Hand delivery of letters can save money.

New tenants pay a registration fee of £4 a head to cover the cost of 2 copies of the rules, gate key and letters.

£2 a year should be added to the rent to cover affiliation to NSALG.

Grass cutting, tidying unkept gardens and maintaining fences etc also cost money.

### INCOME

Rent is the principal income.

Commission on seed scheme sales can bring in a useful sum as can an active trading hut.

**Further Help**

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners

[www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk) tel 01536 266 576

Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI)

[www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari) tel 0117 963 1551

Their Factsheet ‘Devolved Management’ goes into more detail on different degrees of looking after yourself.

Your local Community Voluntary Service (CVS).

This is sometimes called by different names but local librarians will help locate it.

This organisation is a charity to help local community groups get organised and raise funds. They provide courses for officers of committees and will usually advise on fund raising with help in form filling.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

If everything goes wrong, you can always hand the site back to the Council - but don't expect them to thank you for it!

1 In 2011 a local authority should charge around £75 p.a. per plot to cover its costs whilst a self managed site could break even at £30 p.a. per plot plus site rent.