

BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL

Environment Committee

17 September 2026

Cockerels on allotment sites

Recommendation

The Committee RESOLVE to agree to:

- Continue the custom and practice of permitting cockerels and cocks on certain allotment sites across Blyth for current tenants only, at their current number only.
- Apply the tenancy agreement and allotment law consistently going forward; no incoming tenants are permitted cockerels or cocks on sites managed by Blyth Town Council (BTC) or Newsham and New Delaval Allotment Association (NNDA).
- Cockerels and cocks are permitted on sites managed by Blyth Smallholdings and Allotments Association (BHSA: Bolam, 20th Avenue and 23rd Avenue) under the current lease arrangements, running until 9 August 2030.

Ward

All except Plessey (no allotments in this ward)

Risk Management

No budget required. This report directly addresses the risk of noise being found to be a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and leading to fines payable (potentially by Blyth Town Council).

Objective

Promoting the environmental, social, and economic wellbeing of the town and its community.

Crime Prevention

This gives due consideration to the risk of statutory noise nuisance.

Public Sector Equality Duty

No impact.

Report

This report has been undertaken to allow the Committee to respond to a request from a member of the public to table a discussion: *Will the Council put restrictions in place or a complete ban regarding cockerels in allotments due to the noise disturbance.* The information contained should allow for a full discussion of the relevant information and resolution.

Summary

- Cockerels are young male birds up to 1 year. Cocks are the older bird (1 year plus). Neither are permitted under allotment law.
- This report refers to cockerels throughout, this should be taken as referring to both cockerels and cocks.
- There is no local provision for cockerels in the tenancy agreement for sites managed by BTC or lease and tenancy agreement for NNDDA, but custom and practice has allowed it dating back to Blyth Valley Borough Council (BVBC).
- There is currently provision for cockerels within the lease agreement for BSHAA; carried over from the original 2008 BVBC lease (Appendix 1).
- BTC is therefore not consistent with allotment law or the majority of our own lease and tenancy terms due to the practice of BVBC. Officers are satisfied tenants are taking responsible and reasonable steps to control the noise from cockerels.
- There have been a very low number of complaints (3) about noise from cockerels in a 2-year period, and none of these have met a threshold to progress beyond the first stage with Public Protection (diary kept and submitted). Additionally, Officers cannot identify any complaints prior to this, and certainly no findings of statutory nuisance.
- While cockerels remain on sites, there will always be a risk of a statutory noise nuisance, and subsequent legal notices and fines.
- Cockerels are not necessary for egg-laying, but do play a role in a nationally significant breeding programme for rare poultry breeds.

Law and practice

Currently, Blyth Town Council's position with regards to cockerels is not consistent with either allotment law or the tenancy agreements issued by BTC or NNDDA.

The Allotment Act of 1950, Section 12(1) specifies the livestock permitted under law in allotments; in summary, only hens and rabbits may be kept.

When referring to hens, the law means the female of the species and excludes cockerels.

In Blyth, there are cockerels on sites through a mixture of custom and practice dating back to Blyth Valley Borough Council (BVBC), and a variation in the lease agreement with BSHAA which permits cockerels under the umbrella of 'poultry'. This has been carried over from the original 2008 lease between BVBC and BSHAA, before BTC, into the leases of 2016-2023 and 2023-2030. The lease with Newsham and New Delaval Allotment Association specifically excludes cockerels and therefore aligns with the legislation, but custom and practice since BVBC has allowed them. See Appendix 1 for tenancy and lease agreements.

The keeping of cockerels is therefore outside allotment law and outside of the majority of lease and tenancy agreements. Officers would recommend that the Council take steps to bring practice in line with the legislation.

Risk of statutory noise nuisance

Cockerels can cause a statutory noise nuisance. Northumberland County Council's Public Protection Team is obliged to investigate under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. If the noise meets the threshold to be found a nuisance or prejudicial to health under this legislation, an abatement notice can be served, followed by fines if the noise continues. While the responsibility falls to the owner of the cockerel to avoid noise nuisance, the landlord (Blyth Town Council) would also need to take steps.

It is acknowledged that hens (females) can also make noise. Hens are permitted on allotments under law, so where they are kept owners must ensure they do not cause a noise nuisance.

Noise mitigation

The National Allotment Society recommended that if there are cockerels on plots, tenants take sensible noise-management measures, such as isolating them overnight.

Review

Officers undertook a review of the noise mitigation methods used by tenants for cockerels currently on sites. A letter was sent to tenants ahead of the visits to plots with the National Allotment Society recommendations on noise mitigation.

Number of cockerels

Wensleydale	2
Old Beatrice (NNDDA)	1
Newsham Side Club/Winship Street (NNDDA)	1
Bolam (BSHAA)	19
20 th Avenue (BSHAA)	8
Total	31

No cockerels on the remaining sites: New Beatrice, Bebside, 10th Avenue, Delaval Gardens and Laverock Gardens (all managed directly by BTC).

All tenants were found to be compliant with the recommendations, taking practical measures towards noise mitigation. All had a covered area to their housing, allowing for the elimination of light in the mornings. Some locked the roost doors (manually or on timers). One Bolam tenant had moved roosts from the housing side of the plot to the furthest side, although there is no minimum recommended distance between housing and livestock on allotment plots. Association representatives and individual tenants were all mindful of their responsibility, though tenants

were reminded again of the need for appropriate noise recommendation methods as part of the review.

Number of complaints and number of statutory nuisance findings

Noise complaints are investigated by Northumberland County Council's Public Protection Team. The complainant is initially asked to keep a diary of noise incidents. If a concern is noted, Public Protection may then progress to the next stage of installing a noise monitor. Should they determine from this that there is a noise nuisance, the owner and/or Blyth Town Council would receive an abatement notice and possibly a fine.

A Freedom of Information request was submitted for complaints in the last 2 years.

Total number of complaints to Public Protection in 2 years	3
Number of complaints which progressed to a diary	1
Of these, complaints which progressed to noise monitoring	0

The number of complaints is very small. None have been considered such a concern that monitoring equipment has been required. There have been no incidents of a statutory nuisance being found.

We are not aware of any complaints relating to any site other than Wensleydale.

National Breeding Programme

While it is noted that cockerels are not required simply for egg production, they *are* necessary for breeding. A number of tenants engage in the breeding and showing of rare poultry breeds and contribute significantly to the survival of these breeds both through their own birds and the advice, support and encouragement they lend to breeders nationwide. The breeding programme in Blyth does not support the national food economy. Local breeders express a strong concern that if cockerels are no longer permitted on allotment sites in Blyth, this represents a significant set-back to the national breeding programme as a whole, in terms of opportunities for current and future breeders.

Implementation

It is acknowledged that cockerels may be born onto plots where breeding is occurring as a natural consequence of the breeding programme. The Poultry Club of Great Britain acknowledges that during the breeding season, the number of cockerels can get out of hand and advises to only keep the cockerels required¹. From site visits, officers noted that breeders are careful to manage numbers and breed levels for the health of the stock. With expertise, it is possible to sex chickens from very young (a few days old), and physical features allow sexing from around 5 weeks. BTC would expect that tenants first seek avenues for rehoming any

¹ [Guidelines for the keeping of cockerels.pdf](#)

cockerels born before considering humane culling, and for this to take place as soon as practicable and certainly before the bird matures and becomes capable of crowing. The current regular schedule of inspections allows for cockerels to be identified and we will work with tenants and Associations to assist with the process.

BTC will also work alongside Associations and tenants to ensure there is a good transition to any new policy.

Hannah Jenner
Principal Officer

3 September 2026

Appendix 1 – Tenancy and Lease Agreements

Blyth Town Council Tenancy, and identical tenancy between Associations and individual tenants

7. Livestock

- 7.1 Except with the prior written consent of the Council the Tenant shall not keep any animals or livestock on the Allotment Garden save rabbits and hens to the extent permitted by section 12 Allotments Act 1950. (Such animals not to be kept for trade or business purposes and accordingly to be limited in number as the Council may provide in writing.)
- 7.2 Livestock must be kept so that they are not prejudicial to health or a nuisance.

Lease Agreement between NNDDA and BTC – specifically excludes cockerels

- (j) not to keep or allow to be kept any animals or livestock outside of those permitted by section 12 of the Allotment Act 1950 on any part of the said land in the following categories
- (i) poultry, not exceeding thirty six in number (cockerels not permitted)
 - (ii) rabbits, not exceeding two breeding does
 - (iii) pigeons, not exceeding fourteen pairs unless by agreement with the Council (except between the breeding season)

Current Lease Agreement between BSHAA and BTC (2023-2030)

- (j) not to keep or allow to be kept any animals or livestock outside of those permitted by section 12 of the Allotment Act 1950 on any part of the said land in the following categories
- (i) poultry, not exceeding thirty six in number
 - (ii) rabbits, not exceeding two breeding does
 - (iii) pigeons, not exceeding fourteen pairs unless by agreement with the Council (except between the breeding season)

Historic Lease Agreement between BSHAA and Blyth Valley Borough Council (2008-2016)

- (j) not to keep or allow to be kept any animals or livestock outside of those permitted by section 12 of the Allotment Act 1950 on any part of the said land except in the following categories and not in excess of the following numbers:
 - (i) poultry, not exceeding twenty-four in number
 - (ii) rabbits, not exceeding two breeding does
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Historic Lease Agreement between BSHAA and Blyth Valley Borough Council (2016-2023)

- (j) not to keep or allow to be kept any animals or livestock outside of those permitted by section 12 of the Allotment Act 1950 on any part of the said land in the following categories
 - (i) poultry, not exceeding thirty six in number
 - (ii) rabbits, not exceeding two breeding does
 - (iii) pigeons, not exceeding fourteen pairs unless by agreement with the Council (except between the breeding season)
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