



Information & advice for

Keeping Chickens

Keeping Chickens – avoiding nuisance to neighbours

Keeping a few chickens in your back garden for some free, fresh eggs can be a rewarding hobby. While there are no laws preventing you from keeping them, it is advisable to check your property deeds or consult your landlord to make sure there are no covenants preventing the keeping of 'livestock'. Similarly it is unlikely that you will require planning permission if you are only keeping a few chickens in a small garden-shed sized coop. Where you may encounter problems is if your neighbours start to be bothered by matters relating to noise from your birds or odour and vermin issues stemming from the way you keep your brood. This fact sheet gives some advice to help you avoid causing a nuisance under current UK law.

What do I need to be aware of under UK nuisance law?

Local councils are legally obliged to investigate any complaints made under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relating to public health and nuisance issues. With regard to keeping poultry this normally involves noise, odour and the attraction of insects and vermin. In cases where our evidence shows that any of these issues is causing a significant interference with another person's use and enjoyment of their property we can serve a legal notice on the person(s) responsible for the nuisance requiring action to be taken to stop the problem or face prosecution for non-compliance. With this in mind it is important to ensure that you practice good hygiene and house-keeping not only for the welfare of your hens but also to avoid causing problems for your neighbours.

How many birds can I keep in my back garden?

There are no limits specified but you will need to be realistic about the amount of space you have available, the time commitment you can make, costs involved (feed, medication, parasite and disease treatment) and the impact a large number of birds might have on your neighbours. Most people base their decision on how many eggs they want. As a rule of thumb a hen can lay between 200 and 250 eggs per year dependent upon the breed, their health, age, how well they are fed and also the time of the year so three or four birds will be sufficient in most cases. You can sell any surplus unmarked eggs at your gate or locally door to door, but if you sell eggs to someone who will sell them on, such as a shopkeeper, you need to register with the Egg Marketing Inspectorate and also register as a food business

with your local Environmental Health food team on 023 8068 8000. In addition, if you are intending to keep more than 50 chickens, you will need to register your brood with DEFRA; this is so that poultry keepers can be notified of disease outbreaks such as Avian Influenza. You can register online at www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/animals/poultry/.

General advice for controlling problems

The first thing you should consider is the location of your coop. Placing it right up against neighbouring properties may be inviting trouble if you are unable to sufficiently control noise, odour, flies and vermin. Secondly, you should consider the general welfare, housekeeping and hygiene arrangements. Chickens need fresh food and water every day and cleaning out on a frequent basis, at least every few days, depending upon how many chickens you keep and how dirty their enclosure becomes. Generally a well-planned cleaning and feeding regime, thoroughly implemented will help to minimise most problems, but make sure whoever looks after your brood when you go away knows what to do to maintain high standards.

Noise

Generally, hens do not cause too many problems although certain breeds are noisier than others and hens can be very noisy when they lay so you may wish to consider the closeness of your coop to neighbouring properties and gardens. Cockerels cause the most noise problems, particularly in the summer months when they begin crowing at sunrise and may continue throughout the day. If you are keeping only a few hens purely for egg production, you don't need a cockerel so unless you intending breeding chickens there is no need to have one. Sometimes people unintentionally end up with a cockerel when they buy chicks; it is difficult to sex very young chicks and some may grow into cockerels. It is very difficult to control their crowing during the day, but it can be controlled in the very early morning if the cockerel is kept in a totally dark enclosure overnight so that it cannot see the sunrise until it is let out to crow at a more reasonable time. Be prepared to make some difficult decisions about getting rid of your cockerel if it starts annoying neighbours otherwise buy older birds whose sex can be confirmed to avoid ending up with one.

Odour and Flies

The chicken coop can be a smelly place, particularly during the summer months. You should ensure that you clean the coop out on a regular basis and cleanse the area with a suitable disinfectant if necessary. It may be a good idea to use a plastic membrane underneath the coop to make it easier to do so, but be careful because sometimes mice will burrow under this and use it for shelter. Woodchip and straw absorb droppings and can be removed easily.

Waste

Do not allow excess food and bedding waste to accumulate on your property, it will start to smell, provide somewhere for flies to breed and mice to shelter and may attract rats looking for food. Make sure it is regularly gathered up, bagged and disposed of appropriately.

Food

Scattering the food across the ground often leads to some being missed by your birds and left for rats and mice. You get more control by using proper feeders that do not fall over or allow spillage and keep out the rain giving your birds' good access to dry pellets or grain. Try and monitor the amount of food you put out so that no excess is left for vermin. At night remove the feeders or empty them and collect up any spillage and also dispose of any domestic kitchen scraps you may have put out for them. Store your feed (and bedding) in secure vermin proof containers and clear up any spillages.

Rats and Mice

Once vermin realise there is an accessible food supply they will return over and over leaving their faeces and urine to contaminate your hens' feed and water. You will also be exposing yourself, your family and your neighbours to the diseases that rats and mice carry in their faeces and urine. You need to ensure you do as much as possible to keep the area in and around your coop as clean as possible. Some people advise putting the coop on slabs or a concrete base to make it easier to clean around the area. However, mice may burrow under the foundations so this not always a good idea. It is, however good advice to raise the coop 20-25 centimetres off the ground to prevent rats or mice moving in underneath. You can find further advice on the web for setting up and keeping poultry including the following site www.direct.gov.uk/en/Environmentandgreenerliving/Smallholders/DG_189309

If you require more information please contact:

Eastleigh Borough Council

Direct Services

Pest Control Section

Hedge End Depot

Hedge End

Hampshire

SO30 2RA

Tel: 023 8068 8000

Email: pestcontrol@eastleigh.gov.uk

Website: www.eastleigh.gov.uk