



GUIDANCE FOR SCOTTISH BEEKEEPERS ON KEEPING BEES IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

The following notes are intended to help Scottish beekeepers adopt good practice in circumstances where honey bees are kept in an urban setting.

Urban beekeeping is becoming increasingly popular, and it's important that SBA members understand the issues that might arise. Firstly, several layers of rules and regulations can apply. For example, at a national level, Section 49 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 deals with complaints about animals or other creatures causing annoyance. This allows someone who has *reasonable cause for alarm or annoyance* due to a creature (like a persistently barking dog or, indeed, honey bees) to apply to a District Court to make an order “requiring the person keeping the creature to take, within such period as may be specified in the order, such steps (short of destruction of the creature) to prevent the continuance of the annoyance as may be so specified”. SBA members have been subject to such orders in the past. So, beekeepers are under a legal duty to ensure their bees do not become a nuisance to neighbours.

If you are planning on keeping your bees in a built-up area, you should start by checking with your local council, as they may have specific ordinances in place for urban areas or near public spaces. Some councils may restrict beekeeping in certain residential areas or on allotment sites. Always check the specific rules for your area.

Examples of possible restrictions are:

- **Hive Placement:** Councils may have rules about where you can position your hives, often requiring them to be away from footpaths and property. They may also specify the need to ensure that the bees have a flight path that minimizes interaction with people. This can sometimes be achieved by having a wall or high hedge between hives and neighbours.
- **Maximum Number of Hives:** Some councils may limit the number of hives allowed in urban gardens.
- **Permits and Registration:** Your local council might require you to obtain a permit or register your hives.

Irrespective of local or national rules and regulations, beekeepers will owe a civil duty of care to others who might be affected by their activities. Common law in Scotland will adopt the “neighbour principle”: that is, beekeepers must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions that could foreseeably harm those closely affected by their actions.

Specific things to consider include:

- **Swarm Management:** Effective swarm control is crucial in urban environments where swarming bees can cause concern. Regular hive inspections and competent swarm management are essential.
- **Bee Health:** Maintaining healthy colonies and managing pests and diseases is vital to responsible beekeeping. In an urban area you could well find that there are many other beekeepers nearby who could be affected by diseases and pests originating in your stocks. You

should register your apiary with the National Bee Unit (NBU). Notifiable pests and diseases must be reported to the Scottish Government Bee Inspectors.

- **Water Source:** Providing a suitable water source for your bees will prevent them from seeking water in neighbours' gardens or public areas.
- **Temperament of Bees:** The temperament of honey bee colonies can vary. It's especially important in an urban setting that colonies with excessively defensive traits are re-queened from more docile stocks. Bear in mind, though, that even a normally placid colony can become defensive, for example, when a strong nectar flow comes to an end or when they are being robbed by wasps
- **Communication with Neighbours:** Even if not legally required, you should talk to your neighbours about your beekeeping plans so that you can address any concerns and foster good relations.
- **Beekeeping Tasks:** Don't open hives when neighbours are working or relaxing in their gardens. Extra care should be taken during more disruptive beekeeping manipulations, such as splitting colonies or conducting full health inspections.

In summary, urban beekeeping in Scotland requires adherence to rules and careful practices to avoid causing nuisance. Key considerations include complying with local council regulations, for example on hive placement and maximum hive numbers. Beekeepers must ensure responsible swarm management, maintain healthy colonies, provide a water source, and re-queen aggressive colonies. Communication with neighbours and avoiding disruptive activities are crucial. Legal accountability under Scottish common law emphasises the duty of care that beekeepers owe to others.
