

3. Address by Joanna Sanders - secure dog area in East Oxford

I would like to speak to you about the requirement for a secure dog area in East Oxford. In tandem, there is a national petition running with 3000+ signatures; the organisers support our local petition. Although this is a national requirement; I am initially focusing on the East Oxford area and Florence Park as this is the most popular dog walking park in this area.

There are many reasons dogs need safe spaces these include health issues, rescue dogs being rehabilitated, previous bad experiences, puppies in training, old or very nervous and shy dogs. The Yellow Dog UK Project which you will be able to find online covers the requirements in a lot more detail than I have time to in this speech.

I do want to make it 100% clear we are not asking to replicate the United States dog park model. Which encourages all dogs to be off-lead in dog parks; mixing dogs that are very well behaved and other dogs that experience some or all the difficulties I have already mentioned. This can lead to dog fights and bad behaviour being replicated. This proposal continues to allow well-adjusted dogs to have the run of the main park. The secure area would only be for dogs with a legitimate requirement. This would improve the experience within Florence park for the whole community; as family days out, football games etc would not be interrupted by off-lead uncontrolled dogs.

Dog attacks have risen by 76% in 10 years. Dog attacks are almost always preventable, if owners are responsible and the public are educated. This area will give owners a safe space and support to allow them to work with their dogs; which will benefit everyone in the community. As well as an emotional cost, there is also a financial cost the RSPCA estimate that the cost of irresponsible dog ownership in the UK was £80.5 million in 2014. Creating area's like this which are already available in many European countries will reduce both the financial and emotional burden of irresponsible dog ownership. It will also enrich the lives of the many dogs who require this sort of facility.

We will be following up this speech with our petition that now has more than 600 signatures and a detailed proposal.

We are not asking for funding and will be proposing a revenue model.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any further questions?

Written response from Councillor Smith, Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport

Thank you for your address and petition. What is being requested is a specialised animal facility which is not commonly provided by local authorities either within parks or elsewhere on council land. I have asked council officers to look into whether there is a demand for such a facility locally, whether the council is best placed to provide such a facility and if so what the practical considerations for managing such a facility might be. I also attended a meeting of the Friends of Florence Park recently where this issue was discussed and it was agreed that local dog walkers would present the council with a proposal for consideration.

The mini golf at Florence Park which dog walkers have started to use as an informal dog pen is currently leased to San Remo and the council will be working in partnership with them on options for its future.

Verbal response from Councillor Smith

I know that the group will bring forward a full proposal for this facility and look forward to receiving this. Unfortunately using the mini-golf area for exercising dogs is not a long-term option. We will try and work with you on finding a viable permanent solution.