

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of deputations from members of the public. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes following which one Member of the Council, nominated by the Mayor, may speak in response. It shall then be moved by the Mayor and voted on without discussion that the deputation be thanked for attending and its subject matter noted.

Notification of two Deputation(s) has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

7(a) Deputation concerning the reinstatement of dog-free zone in Queen's Park - Ms Sandra Magson (Spokesperson)**REINSTATEMENT OF DOG-FREE ZONE IN QUEENS PARK**

"This deputation is presented jointly by The Friends of Queens Park and Queens Park Local Action Team on behalf of users of Queens Park and local residents.

The Council is being asked to re-establish the historic balance that existed prior to January 2009 between dog owners and other users of the park by restoring to the south lawns, cascade & pond areas, wild and quiet gardens and tennis courts, 'dog-free' status.

Since the mid-1970s and following a popular community campaign highlighting the problem of dog fouling in the park, the above areas were a 'dog-free' zone, leaving the whole of the northern lawns below West Drive as an area for exercising dogs. The arrangement operated very successfully for a period of 30 years. Both dog owners and other park users respected the arrangement which as a consequence was self-enforcing, achieving a balance of need for all park users.

In January 2009 new dog control orders came into force overturning this historic arrangement and making the whole of the park, with the exception of the children's play area, 'dog-friendly'.

As a result an imbalance has now arisen between the needs of those affected by dogs and those seeking to exercise dogs in Queens Park, where none previously existed. Most dog owners valued the previous arrangement which ensured for them an area where they could exercise their dogs freely and without criticism or conflict. The new arrangements have introduced a previously unfelt tension due to people engaging in incompatible activities in a heavily used and compact space.

The new dog control orders cannot compensate for the loss of the 'dog-free' area. The major concern relates to dog excrement raising serious health

issues around *toxocariasis* and the unpleasantness of fouling generally. Putting dogs on leads would not resolve this issue.

The park and south lawns in particular, support a wide variety of activities over the year from organised events to individual usage.

For example schools and nurseries in the area use Queens Park for play, sports and educational projects. More than 1,800 children attend schools and nurseries within 5/10 minutes walk of the park. Staff and parents advise they place a high value on having access to the park for a range of learning activities. The Local Authority organises fun days for younger children during the summer months. A local 6-a-side football team set up portable goal posts every Sunday for a supervised game. Friends of Queens Park hold their annual summer picnic in the park. Brighton Festival have chosen the park's south lawn for outdoor installations and entertainments and a local language school regularly brings its students in the early evening for a game of organised rounders during the summer months.

More generally, families and their friends use the South Lawn as a gathering point for picnics; students study and revise; adults and children walk through this area on their way to work, school and nursery. Older people sit on the benches to enjoy the view and sunshine. Singles and groups just relax and/or sunbathe on the grass. Teenagers gather in groups to chat. Grandparents bring their grandchildren to the pond area to watch the squirrels, geese and other wildlife and adults and children engage in games of football, cricket, frisbee etc. These park users value the park as one of the few in Brighton & Hove where they can relax in a dog-free area. They are entitled to and expect an environment that is clean and healthy.

The changes brought about in January 2009 represent a loss of amenity to such park users. The peace, tranquillity and closeness to nature, being a reason they love the park, is placed in jeopardy.

Wildlife in the park has flourished as a consequence of a portion of the park being dog-free for the last 30 years. Biodiversity within the park has been nurtured, especially by the Park Rangers and local wildlife activists, and provides considerable pleasure to many park users. The recent introduction of dogs to sensitive wildlife areas risks reversing these achievements and appears to contravene both the council's own policy on biodiversity and the law. It is a rare privilege that the wild garden has an active badger sett. The Sussex Badger Trust advises that to give free access to dogs to an active sett is likely to be in breach of the 1992 Badger Protection Act. It is also arguably in breach of the council's duty of care to dog owners as illustrated by the severe injury to a Patterdale terrier in April when it went down the badger sett and was mauled. The RSPB advise that giving dogs access to the pond when water birds are nesting may be in breach of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

This petition in asking for re-instatement of the 'dog-free' area of the park is not an anti-dog proposal and there is no wish to ban dogs from the whole of the park. It is a sensible compromise allowing for a part dog-friendly and part dog-free park that has a history of proven workability. The majority of dog

owners approached in respect of the petition have been supportive of re-instatement and recognise the need to strike a balance in respect of the needs of all park users.

Queens Park is a much loved, vibrant and appreciated community park retaining much of its historic elegance and style, and in a sense acting as a back garden for many local residents. What happens in their park matters to local people and the revocation of the 'dog-free' area has caused considerable consternation, dismay and disappointment. The names on the petition numbering over 1,500 reflect the concern and show the support that this issue has engendered in our community.

The park is heavily used with a wide range of demands being made upon a relatively small space. The large number of park users and dog owners in such a small park makes the concept of a 'shared space' impracticable as opposed to larger parks where it may be possible.

Re-instatement of the dog-free area would incur no additional cost to the Council and the area is already fenced. Indeed a cost saving would result as a dog-free area would avoid the need for installation of additional bins for dog waste around the pond, south lawns, tennis courts and wild garden where none currently exist.

We urge the Council to support the reinstatement of the dog-free area and to instigate the appropriate action as soon as possible.”

Councillor Geoffrey Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment, will respond.

7(b) Deputation concerning the provision of Primary School Places – Mr Bob Howitt (Spokesperson)

'THE FUNDING AND PLANNING FOR THE PROVISION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN THE CITY'

“The provision of Primary school places in the past two years has been one emergency measure after another, with this year seeing the creation of Benfield Infant in a matter of weeks, in a year we expected only a small rise in the numbers.

Action4kids and parents across Hove welcome the opportunity offered by the Connaught road site, but it is clear that even with this site and the proposed extensions to three schools in the city, we will still struggle to accommodate the intake for 2011 which will require places for at least 230 extra children.

Despite all the facts and history clearly defining this problem, we still do not have a blueprint or strategy from the council to outline how and when these problems will be addressed, instead we just see more delay and more quick fix measures.

Today we see the consequences of the delay and indecision compounding the problem further as we face the scrapping of the 'Building Schools for the Future' funding and the threat of further cuts.

The council owes a great deal to families across the city that have had to endure a great deal of frustration, disappointment and hardship over the years as a direct result of the council's lack of planning and commitment.

It is time for the council to repay the debt it owes to parents, teachers, governors and schools in the city by giving a clear commitment to not only find the funds to provide the school places, but a blueprint, strategy and timetable so that all the affected parties can at least plan and prepare for the changes instead of finding decisions forced upon them.

I would like to thank the council for their time today and hope we can all work together to find a solution."

Councillor Vanessa Brown, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People, will respond.