

Wylam Parish Council – 11 June 2018

Use by dog owners of Charlie's Corner – result of consultation

Background

In late 2014 the Parish Council agreed to 'ban' dogs from using Charlie's Corner – see the minute from the Parish Council meeting on 10/11/14 in Appendix 1. Notices were put up to this effect in early 2015 and the position remained the same until 2017. In spring 2017 a request to run dog training classes was received from a Northumberland-based company, Dogs Little Helper. After considerable thought and discussion, a limited pilot over four sessions in July and August was agreed at the 12/06/17 meeting of the Parish Council - see Appendix 1.

The pilot sessions ran (though only three) and on 11/09/18 the Parish Council considered a detailed feedback report by the operator with covering comments from a councillor who had agreed to attend some of the sessions. The feedback in the reports was generally positive and the sessions seemed to have been well organised and run. However the pilot sessions did prompt two letters objecting strongly to allowing the dog training along with three letters broadly supporting either the training or wider use by dogs. The meeting noted all these and agreed to consult residents as a whole through The Globe before deciding whether or not to allow training sessions again - minute again in Appendix 1.

Consultation

The December 2017 edition of The Globe carried an article on the issue and comments were requested. As result of the article 18 emails or letters from 19 residents were received, with some overlap of respondents compared with the letters considered in September 2017. This report now gives a brief overview of the latest responses, with longer summaries of each given in Appendix 2. 16 residents were broadly in favour of either the dog training continuing or the land being made available at all times for responsible use by accompanied dogs and 3 against.

Views from those supportive of unlimited dog use included:

- convenient for dog owners with mobility problems, especially in inclement weather
- the site was not abused before the ban and the site has been little used by others since the ban
- there are other spaces in the village for children's play and sitting out
- it's a small minority of dog owners that cause problems
- dog owners are residents and have a right to expect something for their council tax

Views from those supporting dog training included:

- points as above
- training for dogs and their owners good for everybody
- the site can be monitored and cleaned after each session
- supports a local business
- site is secure for letting dogs off leads, unlike many other potential locations

Views from those objecting to dog use, either in general or in training:

- there was disturbance and mess including much dog poo before the ban and it would reappear
- other legitimate users of the space would be discouraged by dogs
- there are plenty of other locations for general dog walking and at least some for training
- allowing even limited training undermines the ban the rest of the year, not just here but on other sites
- some of the training for owners doesn't need to be on site

Conclusion

There is not a proposal on the table at the moment for further dog training sessions, so that an immediate decision is not needed. However, it would be sensible to agree a position now in the light of the consultation to give some guidance for potential trainers. It is suggested that the meeting first discuss briefly the way forward more widely on Charlie's Corner, perhaps considering how to promote its use for other activities or whether to introduce more planting and landscaping, given its underuse at the moment.

Such gradual development might in time render the space less suitable for dog training. But in the meantime it is suggested that in the light of the successful running of the pilot sessions last year that the Parish Council resolve that it would consider future similar applications sympathetically, but subject to discussion and a final decision at the time. It is suggested that the Parish Council also resolve that this in no way weakens its policy of not allowing dogs on the site at any other time.

Colin Percy

Appendix 1 – relevant minutes of past meetings

Extract from minutes of Wylam Parish Council on 10 November 2014:

96. **REVIEW OF USE OF CHARLIE'S CORNER BY DOG WALKERS.**

It was reported that, since the Parish Council had begun to monitor this situation in June 2013, and especially during the last 6 months, there had been an increase in dog fouling, despite warning notices. There was evidence that the commemorative poppy display had not been respected by dog owners. Complaints about the noise made by dog owners, particularly in the evenings, had been received from nearby residents. It was acknowledged that not every owner fails to clean up after his/her dog. After some discussion, it was agreed to ban dogs from Charlie's Corner. There would be an item about this decision in the December Globe and it would be reported in the press. It was agreed that the Parish Council would install banning notices at the beginning of January 2015 after the notice had appeared in The Globe. It was noted that there were plenty of other places to walk dogs in and around the village.

Extract from minutes of Wylam Parish Council on 12 June 2017:

30. **CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSAL BY WYLAM RESIDENT FOR DOG TRAINING CLASSES AT CHARLIE'S CORNER.**

A copy of the email received had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. At present dogs are not permitted at Charlie's Corner following a decision by Wylam Parish Council. The Chairman outlined the background to the decision to ban dogs from this area in early 2015, as a result of complaints by nearby residents. Concerns were expressed that dog training classes might be seen by the public as meaning that the dog ban was no longer in force. After some discussion, it was **agreed** that, as a pilot project, the resident concerned (a Dog Trainer) would be allowed to hold 4 sessions in July and August on a fortnightly basis under the strict conditions she had proposed. The Chairman, Anne Francis' opposition to this decision was **noted** at her request. Public reaction would be monitored by the Parish Council. It was **agreed** that the Parish Council would review all aspects of the trial in autumn 2017 and would then decide, as landowner, whether to allow future sessions. It was **agreed** that J. Joures would liaise with the resident concerned on behalf of the Parish Council.

Extract from minutes of Wylam Parish Council on 11 September 2017:

70. **REVIEW OF PILOT PROJECT: DOG TRAINING CLASSES AT CHARLIE'S CORNER.**

Copies of reports on the pilot project and correspondence received had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. The reports included reflections on the sessions by participants, an outline of the sessions and the rationale behind them and an assessment of other possible venues for dog training. The Chairman outlined the background to the decision to allow the pilot project. It was noted that the project had been well-received and valued by participants and that two letters of support, two letters of objection and one letter proposing no constraints on dogs at Charlie's Corner had been received. It was agreed that an article about the project would appear in the December issue of The Wylam Globe to invite further comments from residents on the project. It was further agreed that the Parish Council would then make a decision as to whether to allow Charlie's Corner to be used for further Dog Training classes in Summer 2018. It was agreed that the "No Dogs" notices would remain in place.

Appendix 2 - Responses to consultation in Dec 2017 edition of The Globe

Rough summary:

Oppose dog use = 3

Support dog use = 16

No	Support dog training use	Support all dog use	Oppose dog use	Same address	Mode of response	Date sent to PC	Comments
1	Yes	Yes			Email	28/12/2017	Delighted to read article. I have heart issues, and cannot walk far, so others have to take dog out at moment. Access to CC would be an enormous help. Supervised training would be greatly welcomed even if restricted to several times a year. The site was never abused or mistreated and always left clean. Hopefully facility will be restored, though monitored by pet owners.
2	Yes	Yes			Letter	29/12/2017	Refreshing to read article. Used the Corner for almost 12 year before it was closed. In that time met numbers of dog owners, many of whom were either old or could not walk far, plus others who found it ideal for training. Took part in recent training sessions. I and many others would welcome free access or, if not, supervised training. Would be willing to supervise cleanliness daily. One objection was that a person could not play with his grandchild due to fouling, but never seen site being used for children's play since the ban.
3		Yes			Email	03/01/2018	As responsible dog owner, was disappointed at the original dog ban. Only safe place to train and socialise my dog. Dog owners are residents too. Grassy space opposite can be used to sit or for children. Suggest lift overall ban.
4			Yes		Email	04/01/2018	A dog lover but do NOT support: 1. Training on PC land such as this or Engine Dene; 2. Training on CC even for a few hours a year; 3. Wider access for dogs generally on it. Don't need training for dog owners to collect dogs' deposits. Readmission to CC even for training would be a 'paw in the door'. There are alternative sites around Wylam. Those seeing training might assume OK generally to bring dogs on. Major step forward when dogs banned.

5			Yes		Letter	05/01/2018	Reiteration of previous letter objecting to dog use. Find it hard to believe we are going through debate again after 'no dogs allowed' decision. If training allowed again, would give green light to dog owners to use generally and cause damage. Surely there are other locations suitable. Allowing training would undermine no dog notices on other sites.
6	Yes	Yes			Letter	05/01/2018	I would very much support free access for dogs at CC, which prior to ban provided secure area to exercise dogs, especially for older villagers - a social meeting point. I do recall previous anecdotal complaints (noise, nuisance to near neighbour, damage and dog mess). Dog mess needs addressing, but there are penalties available. And it's only a small minority that cause problems. Acknowledge it is difficult for the PC to strike a balance, but the total ban is a blunt instrument and a more subtle approach is needed.
7	Yes			A	Email	05/01/2018	Support dog training. Clearly a demand and a need to promote responsible ownership and good practice. Provided site is cleared up after, objections to the training are short-sighted and self-defeating. CC seems ideal for this purpose and it needs more use generally.
8	Yes			B	Email	09/01/2018	Add support for training. I live close. Feel that mutually beneficial to have dogs well trained. And of course owners too, who learned much at the sessions about cleaning up mess, worming, need for regular exercise, control, having a safe enclosed area when dogs are young and being considerate to other users. No mess will be left and training sessions are few in number. We should treasure responsible dog owners.
9	Yes			B	Email	10/01/2018	Register support for dog training.
10	Yes				Email	10/01/2018	Supports use of PC land for training.
11	Yes				Email	10/01/2018	Register support for dog training.
12	Yes				Email	10/01/2018	Training dogs would be a wonderful use of the space as long as kept clean and tidy.
13	Yes				Email	10/01/2018	This is a great idea. Supports a local business and makes use of an underutilised piece of land - why not? As long as done thoughtfully and respectfully, surely can be no reasonable objection.
14	Yes			A	Email	11/01/2018	Register support for organised dog training at CC. Seems odd not supported by everyone. It will be of benefit to all that dogs are taught to behave properly and dog owners to be aware of their responsibilities, including control and disposal of poo bags. Only safe place for dogs off lead, so not alternative.

15	Yes	Yes			Email	11/01/2018	Non dog owner, but would still like to see responsible use of CC by dogs. I live there and it is never used. As long as dogs are under control and not messy, let's make good use of it.
16			Yes		Letter	12/01/2018	Expressed surprise at last year's decision to allow dog training on CC. The previous total ban was not taken lightly and after prolonged argument. The primary reason to exclude dogs was to meet an objections from some people wishing to maintain an enclosed area where children could play, under supervision. This would be spoiled by the presence of dogs and by uncleared dog faeces. Monitoring did indicate large amounts of faeces. And owners were coming from some distance to use the area for letting dogs loose. The PC consultation indicated 60% in favour of ban, 30% against and 10% don't know. Some supporting the ban were dog owners. I occasionally exercise a neighbour's dog and cannot see need for CC to be used. I appreciate the dog training is probably well organised, but cannot see a reason other areas cannot be used, e.g. Engine Dene. Allowing dogs on CC in any circumstances gives out a totally wrong message.
17/18	Yes				Email (from 2 people)	24/01/2018	We are fully supportive of using CC for more community based events, including dog training classes, provided there is a clear-up afterwards.
19	Yes	Yes			Email	06/02/2018	Register an objection to the banning of dogs on CC. I know it has been discussed at length before, but I don't think it has been resolved. Since the ban I have not seen any use of the area by children playing football or anyone sitting. The original objection was around a child wanting to play football but could not do so because of dog poo on the grass. There are plenty of other places to play where dogs are not allowed. CC was well used by people with young dogs and also nervous owners as the dogs could run free but in an enclosed space. It was also used in bad weather when paths down to the river were treacherous.

Compiled for Parish Council meeting on 11 June 2018 by CWP