Queen's Park Dog Run – Dog Petition Response 13/09/2023

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Summary

A petition has been brought to the council by a resident of Queens Park, with 164 signatures, asking that Westminster City Council does not spend council taxpayer funds on a project to split the dog run area in Queens Park into two areas, along with associated dog friendly planting and dog exercise equipment.

Background

The existing dog run area at Queen's Park has been in situ for many years and is very well used by a wide audience in the local community. It's not just a place to let your dog off the lead, it's also become a regular meeting place for local people. It encourages more people to use the other facilities in the park and has led to the creation of new friendships and social bonds, which has established a stronger community connection.

Although the dog run is a well-loved asset, it is one long linear space surrounded by fencing with a gate at either end. This results in all dogs and owners mixing together. There have been separate incidents where dogs have attacked other dogs, ending in subsequent injuries. Two of those dogs needed to be euthanised by local veterinarians. Owners of smaller dogs are particularly concerned about mixing their pets with very large dogs, and on occasion, larger dog owners have been known to close off the entrance with litterbins to stop other owners from entering.

Local residents had previously requested for the dog run to be divided and split to increase usage of the area and allow owners to move their dogs to where they would feel safer or provide an area where less socialised dogs could be trained and exercised. It was felt that this was a reasonable request due to the issues stated, but that the Council lacked funding to carry out the works to split the area with new fencing.

Officers in the Council's animal welfare team proposed seeking external funding and an application to Veolia's sustainability fund was made on the basis of new fencing, dog friendly planting and exercise equipment to further activate the area for users. The team were informed that their submission to the fund was successful in November 2022.

To ensure that the new scheme would be accepted and approved by the local community, a consultation was run over 4 weeks in February 2023 (this was extended a further 4 weeks until 24th April 2023) asking local people if they supported the proposed changes to the dog run area. 71 responses to the survey were received with 66% of respondents agreeing with the proposed changes. The result of the consultation has been reported to councillors for their consideration and we await approval that the scheme can go ahead based on the results of the consultation.

During the consultation a petition was brought to the council, led by a resident of Queens Park, with 164 signatures, asking that Westminster City Council does not spend council taxpayers funds on a

project to split the dog run area in Queens Park into two areas, along with associated dog friendly planting and dog exercise equipment.

The portfolio holder asked the Parks Manager to take the request away, investigate further and come back with this response to the petition.

Response

The petition relates to asking that taxpayers funds collected by the council are not spent on the delivery of new infrastructure for the Queen's Park dog run.

In this case funds from the council's general budget has not been allocated to this proposed scheme.

The animal welfare team which is part of the Council's Environment team were successful in securing an external funding source (Veolia) which proposes to fully cover the costs of the works for the fencing and the dog friendly planting. Further, the team have successfully secured the dog exercise equipment for free from working with our good partners at Battersea Dogs Home.

Conclusion

The parks team acknowledges the nature of the petition and the concerns raised about how taxpayers funds are spent.

However, in this case, due to the fact that the funding for this scheme is from external sources (both in funds and in kind), and that the consultation received a majority positive response from the local community, that the council turns down the petitioner's request and that Councillors continue with their consideration to approve the works to go ahead.

The matter is now considered closed. We thank the petitioner for taking the time to raise the matter with the council.