

Trunch Parish Council

Report of the Public Meeting held on 29th January 2020

The Future Use of the Playing Field

The Public Meeting to discuss the Future Use of the Playing Field was attended by 91 residents and two Environmental Officers from North Norfolk District Council.

All those people who came along were polite and courteous in the way they contributed to the business of the meeting.

The Chairman explained the objective of the meeting was to have a playing field clear of dog mess. The Councillors had carried out research, investigation of facts and come to a conclusion that in the short term may not be to the approval of everybody but was based on a lot of research and a consensus of opinion. It was stated that a rough survey suggested that there were circa 130 dogs in the village which is 1 in 7 of head of the population of Trunch. This agrees with the national average ratio of 1 in 7.

The Chairman summarised the matters which led to a 3 phase way forward viz.

The Council had listened to opinions and suggestions, reviewed the history including reference to the conveyance for the land, search of the past articles in the Mardle going back 30 years and had seen photographs of the signs indicating that 'No dogs allowed'. Medical and safety issues were considered and neighbouring Parish councils had been contacted. Consultations with North Norfolk District legal and Environmental teams had been carried out. Having digested and considered the opinions, suggestions and facts the Parish Council tabled a 3 phase plan as follows:-

PHASE 1 Erect additional signs reminding dog owners to 'pick up' after their dogs and use the disposal bins provided. Request owners to keep dogs on leads and use the signposted route. Install dog poo bin(s) and a dog poo bag dispenser(s). Additionally, some dog owners have agreed to pick up any uncleared poo to assist with this phase. In the event that Phase 1 is unsuccessful, go to PHASE 2 – As phase 1 with the addition of a fenced and gated dog exercise enclosure. In the event that Phase 2 is unsuccessful go to PHASE 3 – Request NNDC to implement a Public Spaces Protection Order under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, effectively banning dogs from the playing field.

A lively but controlled debate followed the introduction of the 3 Phase plan. The debate began by the Officers from NNDC pointing out that the only Order (Bye Law) ever implemented by NNDC was that applied generally, including the playing field, and introduced in 1996 when under the Dogs (Fouling of Land Act) 1996 owners could be prosecuted for not clearing up their dog poo. Many people raised comments during the meeting including, the installation of CCTV surveillance, the construction of a footpath along the North Walsham Road between the Methodist Church and Blooms Turn thus avoiding the need to go into the playing field, a fenced route around the north, west and south side of the playing, more large signs, dog bins and dispenser and taking photographs and reporting offenders. It was pointed out that the field was intended for a childrens' play area not for exercising dogs. Some people voiced their opinion that a dog ban should be implemented immediately because offending owners have had ample time to stop this anti-social activity. Two or three attendees mentioned the poor state of footpaths around Trunch making it difficult to walk, leaving no choice but to use the playing field for exercising their dogs. The NNDC Officers confirmed that there had not been any prosecutions during the past year. Most of those at the meeting had come to the conclusion that whilst there are a small number of owners prepared to flout the law there will be no solution to the problem which has existed for over 30 years. A resident stated that if this is the case why spend any more money in trying to solve the unsolvable.

In conclusion, it was generally agreed that we will never solve the problem of dog mess left uncleared on the playing field. Unfortunately, it seems that it will be left to the responsible dog owners and others to do the job of those owners who refuse to clear up the mess left by their dogs. I will let you know the progress on all the issues raised e.g use of CCTV cameras, a fenced walkway around the field and unnecessary costs. I won't list them all again. However, I will mention one pertinent point raised, that back in 1954 it was due to the generosity of a local farmer and the generous donations made by villagers, some of whom are no longer with us, that we have the privilege of a playing field. It is a shame that this privilege is abused by a very small number of dog owners who don't have the common decency to pick up their dog's poo.

I thank the residents of Trunch who came to the meeting, those who have contributed by individual discussion with the Councillors, Kathryn and Gerald Clark for assisting with the review of past copies of the 'Mardle' and the NNDC Officers Emily and David whose advice and help is much appreciated. Brian Boughton - Chairman