

MEETING REPORT

Meeting: Parks & Open Spaces, 25 March 2024
Agenda item: PA23-043
Report subject: Dog Fouling
Report author: J Gilbert, Assistant Town Clerk

BACKGROUND

A member of the public visited the Town Hall to complain about the amount of dog mess in Filham Park, and followed up their visit with an email:

From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: 08 February 2024 13:12
To: Ivybridge TownHall <townhall@ivybridge.gov.uk>
Subject: Dog mess

I would like to say that Filham park is starting to get really disgusting with dog poo especially around the fishing lake I am a dog owner myself and I always clean up behind my dog I think something needs to be done about it because if a child falls in it or touches it then get infected with a disease
Regards [REDACTED]

The majority of park users do pick up after their dogs, however sadly there are still a number of irresponsible owners/dog walkers who fail to do so.

The parks officers empty the dog waste bins in our parks regularly, but it is not part of their role to clear up dog mess in the parks.

The officers have advised that dog fouling is an issue in all our parks and open spaces. Indeed, it is one of the top anti-social problems nationwide. Dog mess is unsightly, unpleasant and can spread disease, or in extreme cases, cause blindness. If dog owners/walkers do not ensure dog mess is picked up and properly disposed of, a penalty of between £100 and £1000 may be payable. There are exceptions if someone is registered blind or has mobility issues.

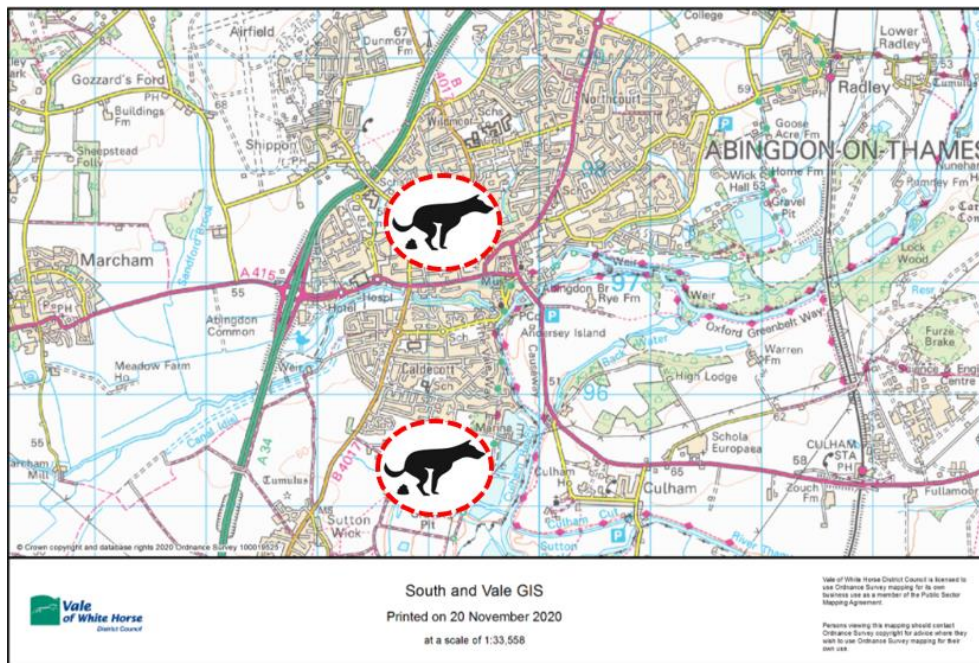
MEETING REPORT

Below are just some examples of how other councils are tackling the problem of dog fouling. Many of these are the actions of higher tier local government, however some of these could be applied by the Town Council.

- (i) Display signage asking owners to pick up their dog mess, highlighting the laws and penalties;



- (ii) Undertake campaigns to highlight the problem using communication channels. Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District councils launched a dog fouling awareness campaign with maps showing locations of the highest number of complaints



MEETING REPORT

- (iii) In Stockton primary schoolchildren have given dog foulers a good telling-off with posters saying "pick up your poo" and "there is no poop fairy".
- (iv) Children's poster campaign - The children from a local primary school in Hartburn are campaigning to stop irresponsible dog owners leaving their pets' mess after noticing a rise in dog fouling. They ran a competition to design posters encouraging dog walkers to pick up after their four-legged friends, with drawings of the offending excrement captioned "eww stinky", "no one likes to step on it" and "care for your world". The pupils' campaign hopes to help keep the streets clean with their designs. The five winners will see their posters going up on lampposts in the area.

A Hartburn councillor, who got involved in the campaign and worked with the children, said: it had been brilliant to get involved in this campaign with the children. Their pride in the local area and determination to make a difference is amazing, and that these posters will make people stop and think twice before they walk on.



- (v) Call it out / Call it in / Clear it up

Call it out – North Devon Council ask the public to call offenders up on it if they see them failing to pick up after their dog. They advise to do it politely, perhaps by offering them a spare bag and not to put themselves at risk. It is important to let the public know about the potential dangers of confronting or recording offenders. Offenders can react to being confronted, ranging from excuses about not having bags to collect the waste all the way up to violent altercations.

The Parks Officers could be issued with dog poop bags to offer anyone they observe failing to pick up. Again, they have to assess the risks of approaching the public.

MEETING REPORT

Call it in – North Devon Council encourage the public to report dog fouling to the dog warden. This helps them to catch and prosecute the culprits and also builds up a picture of where the problem areas are, so they know where to patrol. South Hams District Council have a Report Fouling link on their website.

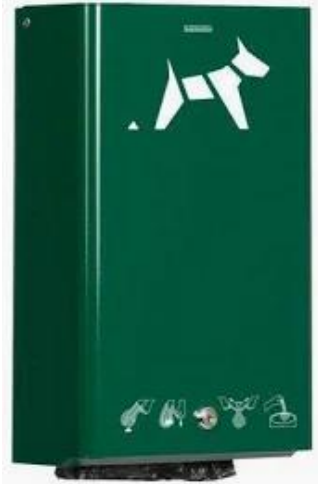
- (vi) Reporting App - Oswestry Town Council are asking their residents to report any incidents in their locality, and Shropshire Council offer a free 'Pooper Snooper' smartphone app <https://poopersnooper.app/get-started>.

The idea behind the app is to enable residents to monitor the areas they visit and care about. The data will visibly demonstrate problem areas and allow residents to receive more targeted material to tackle the problem. Any incidents that are cleaned up can be marked as resolved, and bin locations can be recorded within the app, with a 'find nearest bin' function helping to locate bins in unfamiliar walking areas.



MEETING REPORT

- (vii) Dog poop bag dispensers – Fife Council installed free dog bag dispensers across parks, recreation areas and walking routes in the authority. They teamed up with an organisation called Tikspac UK who provide the dispensers and unlimited bags, with the costs covered through sponsorship and advertising on the dispensers; therefore, all the council have to do is re-fill the dispensers. A survey of council areas where these stations have been installed has shown an average 56.8% reduction in dog fouling complaints and 49.4% average reduction in littering.



- (viii) Spray dog mess - Some councils are spraying dog mess in bright colours. This supposedly shames the dog owners when it shows the sheer amount of dog mess and also acts as a marker to stop it being trodden in.

This idea was discussed with the parks officers, and although they thought it was a good idea they did not wish for this action to encourage negative comments from the public, and that if officers have time to spray they have time to pick up. Spraying would only be done only if they observed mess, and not for them to go looking for it. The other negative from this action is the danger that the parks look brightly coloured depending on the amount of dog mess.

Cheshire West and Chester have introduced a campaign where communities spray the faeces. Leaflets about good dog ownership are then dropped in the vicinity. The spraying is monitored and a nominated contact reports to the Council and their streetcare team then remove it. However, we would not have the staff resources to act upon this.



MEETING REPORT

- (ix) Dog DNA identification - Dog DNA scheme - London Borough of Barking (no pun intended!) and Dagenham introduced a voluntary dog DNA registration scheme that allows dog owners to access their pet's DNA profile, breed overviews, a place to store medical records, kennel information, etc) through PooPrints UK. This also allowed the council to match any dog fouling found to an owner. During the scheme pilot they found around 50% less fouling than they usually would on their streets, with reductions up to 90% reported.

City of Edinburgh Council is looking at creating a 'dog DNA register' to deter owners of an estimated 13,000 canines from leaving their pets' business on the streets. Under the scheme, dog mess on a pavement would be collected and tested against the database. One option would be to send guilty owners a fine by post. The action is being proposed after it was disclosed that just four fixed penalty fines were issued across the whole of the city in 2021. Edinburgh council receives around 1,300 complaints about dog fouling each year, according to data for the past three years.

There would be an Edinburgh bylaw that would require dog owners to register their dogs with the city council, which would hold a database. Dog wardens would pick up any mess and 'take a test from it and hopefully track it down'.

PROPOSAL: To consider how the Town Council should tackle the issue of dog fouling in its parks and open spaces