

Dog Exercise And Training Area, Church Street, Higham

Introduction

This application is a retrospective application for a change of use of a field previously used to graze sheep to be used for dog exercise and training.

The field is located in the middle of a larger area of land with the land in one ownership and which comprises areas of grazing and established plum and other soft fruit -orchards. As can be seen from the red lined plan, the dog exercise and training field is located in a position where it is away from the road, Church Street, and away from houses in Church Street and Bull Lane.

This field had original post and wire fences. The fences have been made higher by the use of timber batten fixed to the fence posts and stock wire extended to about 1.8 metres in height and netting placed over the wire.

The applicants have a lease arrangement to use the land for dog exercise and training and have in place a booking system so that only one person's dog or dogs are using the site at anyone time. A 15 minute buffer time between the one hour sessions allows for solo bookings to use area at any one time.

There is room for two or three cars to park by the entrance to this exercise/training field, however, experience shows that users arrive in one car, use the field and leave before the next person arrives. The field has operated for 4 months so far and has been booked by a number of dog owners living in Higham in particular who walk their dogs to the field.

This is an area where dogs can be allowed off their leads away from other dogs in a safe, fenced area and can be given training and exercise by their owners safely.

As the applicant's agent, I was keen to see the field in use before writing this statement and have been to see an owner with three dogs using the field for training and dog exercise. From what I saw the dogs enjoyed running around freely and exercising whilst enjoying the small number of enrichment activities such as a small sand bed, some vehicles tyres set up as a jump and a timber structure they can climb and jump on to. There was no barking from these dogs, just running, climbing and sniffing about in the field.

Applicant's Statement.

We're sorry that we have started to use this field ahead of having planning approval. We didn't realise that our uses would be treated as a change of use of the field. We're looking to use this field over a long period, at least 5 years if possible, however, if it is helpful, we would accept a 2 year initial consent so everyone can see how this use progresses.

We have received great interest from residents living close by in both Church Street and Bull Lane as well as from other parts of the village. Many dog owners have expressed their thoughts that this is a very necessary facility enabling their dogs to get exercise and to be trained in a safe environment. The footpaths and field tracks in Higham are heavily used by dog walkers so it's really beneficial to have an area which can be booked for private use.

Our proposal is to offer a safe and secure exercise area for dogs and their owners. The field will be used as one area by one owner or dog carer at one time. We have a booking system so that the field is used for a maximum of 1 hour per user with 15 minutes buffer time between users which ensures that the previous user has left the field before the next user arrives and prevents meeting between dogs. There is sufficient space for a car to park outside the training field. In the event the next user arrives before the last one has left, there

is room for the next user's car to wait out the way before parking in the correct space. The access track is gated where the access point is on Church Street and the gates are left in the shut position.

Exercise and Training Area

The original field fencing, post and stock wire fencing remains and has been extended with timber batten and another layer of wire added making the fencing secure to about 1.8 metres in height. Netting is placed over the top layer of wire which helps define the training area.

Our booking system ensures that only one client uses the field at one time. We have a limited number of bookings for 1-4 dogs or 5-8 dogs. Unless a client is using the area for XL Bully Type dogs then they need to ensure they are following Government guidelines which we check prior to their arrival. In the last 4 months 89% of our bookings have been for clients with 1-4 dogs with professional dog walkers and trainers occasionally using the area with no more than 5-8 dogs. The percentage with 5-8 dogs being no more than 11% of the total use.

Opening hours will vary for season

Winter 7.00am -4.45pm

Summer 6.30am - 8.45pm

7 days a week

Regarding waste, all owners are requested to take their dog faeces home with them. The field is checked and cleaned every evening by us.

There are no toilet facilities for the dog owners. As the booking period is only for one hour and we expect all the users to live locally, this is not a problem.

Apart from extending the height of the fences there is no other change to the field so it can revert back to grazing use easily should our use come to an end.

The field has been in use for 4 months so far. We are not aware of any concerns raised by local residents and, as mentioned, a number of residents use the area for their dogs. I, live close by in Church Street and visit daily to ensure the field is cleaned up after use and that owners control their dogs correctly. All clients agree to terms and conditions when using the area, any owner who doesn't adhere to these conditions or doesn't control their dog (s) can be prevented from using the area, if necessary.

Equipment within the field is limited as the photographs below show. All equipment can be removed easily as they just rest on the ground.

The pasture in the field will be left to grow throughout May each to benefit the wildlife. Areas of the field are left unmown to provide areas of natural habitat, again benefiting the wildlife.

There will be no artificial lighting.



Fencing.





Dog enrichment ie jumps, tyres, sandpit etc.



Parking area by field gate.

Planning position.

Policy CS7 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 supports proposals that promote the appropriate expansion and diversification of the rural area economy. The principle of the proposals is acceptable providing they meet the criteria of the Policies below.

Green Belt

Para. 137 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 states that ‘The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.’

Para. 147 states that ‘Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.’

Para. 148 states that ‘When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.’

Para. 149 states that a Local Planning Authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. The proposal does not involve the construction of any new buildings and therefore this paragraph does not apply.

Para. 150 states that certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Point (e) relates to material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds).

The land has been used previously for grazing. The habitat is enriched under this proposal by being left to grow throughout May and with areas of the field left unmown.

No new structures or buildings are proposed on the site and there is no impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

The site is a reasonable distance from residential properties and is not visible from the road due to existing trees and hedges.

We consider this use to be low impact in terms of the level of use and the change to the field, the field remains as permanent pasture which is fenced and able to revert back to grazing use as an when the dog training and exercise use comes to an end. This use is appropriate use in the countryside.

Design

There is no design input or design aspect to this application.

Access

The field is accessed from an existing stone surfaces access track from Church Street. The track is gated and locked other than when in use as described in this statement.

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