

To all Councillors.

Re: Dogs being off Lead in the Playing Field Consultation

Being aware that not everyone reads the Parish Magazine and also being made aware that for many a YES or NO answer did not allow them to express their complete answers I have 'consulted' well over 100 people in the village for their views.

My questions referred to various different topics that I felt may give concerns to people. I have done this by talking to people, emailing and using messenger. The results have been very informative and many worries I thought would be mentioned did not appear, i.e. very few people raised concerns about dog excrement and most agreed that they had never noticed a problem and that everyone they had seen were always 'picking up' after their pets. They felt enough bins were provided but many thought that a few more signs were needed. Most also felt that inconsiderate people who did not 'wish to pick up after their dog' were unlikely to do so whether the dog was on a lead or not.

With regard to whether dogs should be on a lead again people had various views but many felt that especially during the autumn and winter months when very few (if any) children played in the field there was no reason for dogs to be on a lead. Some were quite emphatic that this was 'ridiculous' and especially for older people or older dogs who were not so capable to be tromping over extremely muddy fields or not fit enough to walk all the way to the beach. Some also mentioned the 'livestock in fields' issue.

Sadly I felt, more than I thought expressed the view that they did not care as they never used the Clapps Mead Playing Field or Play Area at all. Of course, most dog owners were in favour of dogs being off lead and who all commented that they used their common sense and if children were playing in the field they put their dogs on a lead. Over the last 25 years that has always been what I have witnessed and if kids were playing football then owners respectfully controlled their dogs.

The people who communicated a YES dogs should be on leads voiced the same concern with regard to when children are playing in the field. That appeared their only concern. Everyone agreed that the Play Area should be a DOG FREE ZONE and many 'NO' people felt that another picnic table should be placed there so families could picnic without the worry of dogs.

Of course, there were one or two 'extreme' views – one gentleman insisted that all dogs and cats should be banned from Chideock altogether (obviously not a pet lover) and quite a few said that they were absolutely fed up with Notices, Rules & Regulations, people's intolerance of others and most people could be trusted to use their own common sense. Common sense was a recurring theme.

Many elderly people expressed the view that taking their dog to the park and throwing a ball for them within a distance capable of them making within the village was the 'highlight' of their day as they usually found someone to chat to at the same time and that may be the only person they spoke to that day. I personally feel very strongly about this as over the years I have chatted to or witnessed this social interaction and was horrified to hear that because of the DOGS ON LEADS signs they had now arranged 'dog walkers' as to walk any further was beyond their capabilities. This intolerance to lonely and vulnerable people I find very offensive.

To sum up I felt it was much 50/50 so as with all areas of conflicting views I like to identify the problems, address and find solutions that will mean compromise on both sides but lead to happy outcome for all. I list below considerations for the Parish Council to which a rightly worded 'Resolution' could be made.

- a) Whilst it is possible to make different rules for different times of the year (as they do on the beach) I wonder if this cause confusion which in turn can lead to conflict but this is something the Parish Council could consider.
- b) More emphasis that that the Play Area is a strict NO DOG area and additional facilities for families supplied i.e. picnic tables etc.,
- c) Signs as follows: **PLEASE KEEP YOUR DOG ON THE LEAD IF CHILDREN ARE PLAYING IN THE FIELD.**
- d) More signs 'Please pick up after your dog'. (these used to be available from the local authority/dog warden.

My preference is for B,C and D of the above and I believe is a fair compromise for all and would respect all the views of everyone I have spoken to. It would address the concerns of dogs being off lead when children are playing. (This appeared t be the main reason for people saying YES on the questionnaire). It would also give confidence to parents/children to ask dog owners to put their dogs on leads if they have not already done so which would be 'backed up' by the signage. This would satisfy people who wish to allow their dogs to play freely when the field is empty and it would be a compassionate solution for elderly/disabled people wishing to exercise their dog who struggle to walk further afield.

I would further add that having spent 25 years living so close to the Playing Field I have witnessed the use of the field first hand and problems encountered. Very few 'village children' use the football nets these are mainly used by holidaymakers during the holiday seasons. Problems occur every year with groups of older youths turning up in cars (blockings private driveways and the lane) to play games of football. Last year it was a particular problem which resulted in the Clerk allowing me to put up Notices and the Clerk speaking to the police. On several occasions I had to confront these youths as they also bring along loud music and pretty foul language with themselves. It is also the reason so many wooden slats get broken on the Play Area fencing. I feel instead of the laminated signs I put up on the gate and Notice board a permanent Notice should be put up on the gate. Below is a copy of the signs I put up last year and the year before.

BY ORDER OF CHIDEOCK PARISH COUNCIL

**ALL PLAY EQUIPMENT INCLUDING FOOTBALL NETS AND POSTS ARE FOR THE USE OF
CHILDREN
UNDER 14 YEARS OF AGE ONLY.**

NO ADULT FOOTBALL GAMES ALLOWED ●

The Clerk, Chideock Parish Council

I have also noticed that the goal posts are very rusty and need repainting with white hammerite which is something that I did yearly up until last year. Nets are also hanging off. This would certainly have been highlighted on the then yearly ROSPA REPORT. I sometimes wonder if these football nets are more trouble than they are worth.

We all value this special place and all strive to keep it a safe space for all and I request that Parish Councillors give due consideration to this report so that **everyone** can enjoy this Recreational space.