**Note of the Special User Group Meeting: Dogs in Clissold Park held on 4 March 2015**

1. **Introductions and apologies**

Approximately 25 park users attended the meeting. All but two or three were dog owners and/or dog walkers. Also present were Bruce Irving, Interim Park Manager; PC Dag and a colleague from the police Safer Neighbourhood Team; and Clissold Councillors Sophie Cameron and Sade Etti. The meeting was chaired by the User Group Chair, Caroline Millar and Mark Forsyth, the dog owner/walks rep on the user group.

We were expecting to have a presentation from a representative of the Environmental Enforcement Team from Hackney Council but were notified two hours before the meeting that he would not be attending. It was agreed that the meeting would go ahead despite his absence and that Bruce would provide what information he could and any questions he could not answer would be passed on to the Enforcement Team. It was also agreed that he would be invited to attend a further meeting within the next couple of months.

1. **Purpose of the meeting**

The Chair outlined the purpose of the meeting. It had been agreed to hold the meeting as there had not been enough time at the user group meeting on 10 January to discuss the issues of enforcement and irresponsible dog owners.

The main focus of the meeting would be on these issues but the Chair had received a number of emails on wider issues related to dogs and it was agreed that these issues, and any further issues raised by the meeting, would be noted so that, if necessary, they could also be taken forward by the user group.

1. **Dog control orders in the park**

Bruce provided an overview of the dog control orders that are in force in Hackney and spoke specifically about how they relate to Clissold Park.

This covered dog fouling, dogs on leads and “dogs on leads by direction” whereby enforcement officers can ask people to put dogs on leads in certain circumstances.

It was agreed that it would be useful for the enforcement team in conjunction with the park management and in consultation with the user group to draw up a “Frequently Asked Questions” document around enforcement which would be made publicly available.

The consensus was that the vast majority of the time owners behaved responsibly in the park and that overall the principle of “self-policing” was an important one and worked well in Clissold Park. It was however recognised that some people did feel nervous of intervening in some incidents and with some individuals.

1. **Irresponsible dog owners (PC Dag, Safer Neighbourhoods Team)**

The Safer Neighbourhood Team representative gave a summary of the legislation surrounding dangerous dogs and the steps which the police and others could take in given circumstances.

The group felt strongly that it was important that the legislation which related to collars and ID tags was enforced. It is particularly important for dogs to have collars because if they become involved in an incident it makes it easier for people to take control of the dog.

It was generally felt that in most circumstances issues between dogs and owners was and should be addressed by those present at the time and the group agreed that this was preferable to police intervention in most cases. The SNT however stated clearly that if people were in any doubt they should not hesitate to call the police. If there was an urgent, emergency situation they should call 999. If there was an ongoing issue of concern or someone wished to report an incident after it had happened the 101 number was more appropriate or they could email the SNT or the park manager who would ensure that the appropriate steps were taken and the right agencies informed.

It was agreed that it would be useful to include a comprehensive list of contact details for such issues, including who to contact in which circumstances, on the noticeboards and on the Hackney Council Clissold Park Page. The User Group would ink to this on its website.

There was a range of views as to whether there had been an increase in dog on dog attacks in the park and whether the park felt less safe in terms of dogs. Some felt the increase might be attributable to the fact that there were more dogs in the park but that there did not seem to be a marked number of such incidents. Others said nevertheless they felt more anxious about bringing their dogs into the park.

1. **Future meetings**

It was agreed that it would be useful to hold further regular meetings to look at dog issues, perhaps twice a year. Because of the non-attendance of the key speaker at this meeting it was agreed that he would be invited to attend a meeting in May 2015. It was agreed that it would be helpful to have a draft “Frequently Asked Questions” document for consideration at this meeting.

1. **Other dog issues (Chair)**

The Chair informed the meeting of a number of issues that had been raised in emails and on Facebook with regard to dogs in the park and these were briefly discussed.

Numbers of dogs in park and number of dogs walked by dog walkers – it is recognised that there has been a marked increase in the number of dogs as well as people using the park but there were mixed views as to whether this caused any particular issues. The Council has no plans at present to limit the number of dogs that any one person can walk in the park.

There was a request for dogs to be allowed to swim in the New River. Bruce Irving responded that this was unlikely to be introduced as the reason why dogs were not allowed in the New River was to protect the wildlife and in particular the nesting birds.

There was a request for a tap in the park which could be used to wash dogs. There were concerns about how this would be managed particularly in terms of irresponsible use. This will be considered further by the park management.

Concerns had been expressed about barking dogs being left outside the café whilst their owners were inside. There were also concerns about the number of people who still do not put their dogs on leads around the café. It was agreed that café staff should be dealing with both these issues on an ongoing basis.

It was confirmed that dog were not allowed to swim in the New River and owners who let their dogs do so are liable for a fine although in most circumstances they are likely to receive a warning first rather than an immediate fine.

A park user had emailed to suggest that people be asked to put their dogs on leads from 12 noon to 3pm on summer days to prevent them bothering people who were eating picnics in the park. Some people felt that people who wished to picnic in the park should sit in the fenced areas. Those present did not support this proposal.

**Actions:**

* **The outcomes of this meeting will be reported to the User Group Meeting on 14 March and these minutes posted on the website**
* **The park manager will pass on the key questions asked at the meeting to the Enforcement team – these are listed below.**
* **A meeting will be set up in May to which the Enforcement team will be invited**
* **The user group will work with the park management and the enforcement team to draft a “Frequently Asked Questions” document for further consideration at the May dogs meeting**
* **The park manager will prepare an information sheet with contact details to make it easier for people to find who to contact with regard to concerns about dogs in the park which will be posted in the noticeboards and online.**

**Questions**

* + **Are enforcement officers trained in dog behaviour?**
  + **What criteria do enforcement officers use to make a judgement on whether an individual is control of their dog?**
  + **Is there a legal definition of “being in control”?**
  + **Are dogs required by law to wear a collar and tags? – If so is this enforced?**
  + **What are the responsibilities of the dog warden?**
  + **What should you do if your dog attacks another dog?**
  + **What happens if you witness an incident?**

11/3/15