

Address withheld

5th March, 2021

Dog fouling in public spaces.

Dear Chairman, Councillor Hazzard, Councillor Jeans, and Town Clerk Lindsey Wood

Sue and I have just recently read your Council Report on the front page of the March Mere Matters and note there are problems in the control of Dog Fouling in Mere. You also ask for any ideas from the public. Having put my head above the parapet recently, I offer some suggestions in ways of dealing with this national disgrace in a positive way.

As a daily walker of PAT dog Gizmo, I see that 99% of fellow walkers are responsible citizens of Mere who pick up and bin quite properly. Where we walk, the footpaths, lanes and surrounding roads of Mere one rarely sees a dog pile- more often horse droppings and tractor dropped mud.

What one does see is the black plastic bag dropped in a hedge, or near a gatepost, perhaps thrown into woods. The bridleway to Stourhead is a favourite spot as is any land off the beaten track. One often meets visitors on these paths, and on Castle and Long Hill, with dogs off leads and uncontrolled.

We live close to the meadows under these hills, and have a view of them. Families wander over the grass with dogs off lead, and one can see what goes on. The hedges off the Meads footpath is awash with poo bags. Dog owners allowing this are local and live in Mere. We can't believe the mind set of these people.

May I suggest that a 'blaming' and 'negative' approach is not likely to achieve results. People will just dig in and say 'sod the council'. Set out a positive strategy for encouraging those to join in to make our town a better and safer place to be, for the sake of their children, and grandchildren. I highlight the 'grandchildren' as I see many older persons (and I am one of them) taking their pooches out very close to home, not walking-fit to do what most of us do for exercise, and unable or unwilling to pick up what is left on the pavement and grass verges.

But its not all about them. Visitors and passers by, workers from the industrial estates close to the Hill also walk and exercise their dogs that they have left in their cars, whilst at work. We have many conversations with them in the meadows.

So what to do? Education, and encouraging a joint effort to improve the town. No blaming, no retribution, letters from the County Council and Town Council will turn people off. If theft and criminal damage is dealt with by police by a caution, over reaction for a 'dog poo' offence is deemed excessive.

**Suggestions for some actions, to be included in a Business Plan for this activity.
Time scale needs to be set and monitored.**

1. An attractive colour leaflet to be given out to regular dog walkers for them to distribute voluntarily to other walkers. Not to be accusing but asking for 'Your Help'.
2. Councillors, or a team of hand picked volunteer dog walkers, visit chairs of PTA's or Head Teacher of our school to ask to be invited in for a ten minute talk to students on dog hygiene at start of a school day., with dog if allowed. (Gizmo is a registered PAT Dog.)
3. Contact all the Chairs, Secretaries or reps of those organisations advertising in the Mere Matters to offer a ten minute presentation prior to the meetings.
4. Gentle attention to be paid to reaching the elderly in sheltered homes, where dogs are encouraged and allowed.
5. Leaflet drop to residential houses. I would be happy to cover my area.

Further Steps. Leaving leaflets and answering questions.

6. A Councillor, also a dog owner, voluntarily taking on the Chair to navigate this process. I know just the right person.
7. A Councillor, or his/her representative, to lead a small team to visit all businesses in Mere, including shops and industrial businesses.
8. Publicity to be managed and used appropriately to inform and educate the public.
9. One person, Chair or Secretary to maintain records of activity completed and keep members informed and 'up to date'.
10. A person skilled in the use of publicity and feedback with recent active business experience to be available to the team for advice.
11. Any start date to begin when the end of the pandemic is in sight.

Can the school be invited to participate?

Starting in the summer or later in the autumn term if the pandemic is slow to end, invite the school to paint, or draw a picture of happy and contented dogs by the children, perhaps using a competition and prize for 'winners in each age group? Presented by the Chairman of the Council? Dogs names? Pam and Peter Poodle!!

Gains? Children growing up with knowledge, and may encourage adults to be more responsible.

Costs to the public purse?

Always important and minimal in this case, but sponsorship (Hillbrush, Chalke?) may be an attractive way forward?

I finish with the comment, repeated perhaps, that as soon as 'offenders' are identified as such, publicly criticised and admonished, general support for Council action will be lost.

Education, not prosecution, is the way forward.

Yours sincerely,

Bill

W.W.Coltham

Copy for George Jeans as County Councillor.

Copy for Town Clerk.