

Result of Consultation on Commercial Dog Walking

Introduction

This report sets out the results of the consultation on commercial dog walking, which was carried out between 26 June 2015 and 22 July 2015.

Three options were presented for consideration, as follows:

- Option A: Blanket ban on all commercial dog walking on NML land.
- Option B: Commercial dog walking to be permitted on NML land, subject to appropriate conditions relating to the number of dogs walked, safety and conduct.
- Option C: Unrestricted commercial dog walking to be permitted on NML land, with NO conditions relating to the number of commercial dog walkers allowed, number of dogs walked, safety and conduct.

Further details are set out in the consultation document that was posted to all Netherne households on 25 June 2015. The consultation has been as wide reaching as possible, including NML member properties as well as residents of Guinness Trust and former NHS properties.

Total votes cast

Two ways to vote were available – using the ballot box in the Estate Office at the Leisure Centre, or using an online voting form.

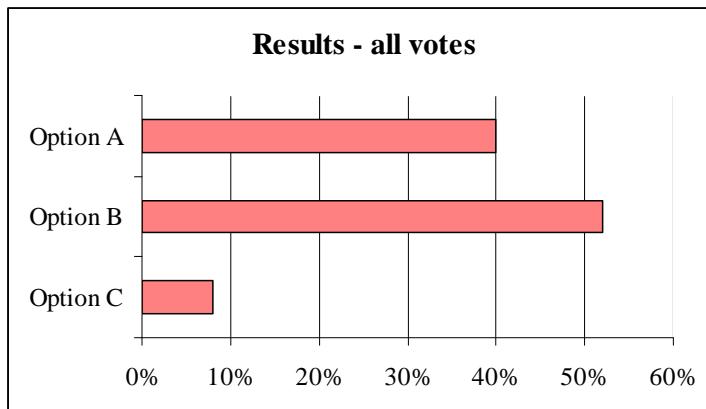
A total of 182 votes were cast, with 60 of these using the ballot box and 122 using the online voting form.

156 of the votes were cast by NML member properties, and 26 of the votes were cast by residents of Guinness Trust and former NHS properties.

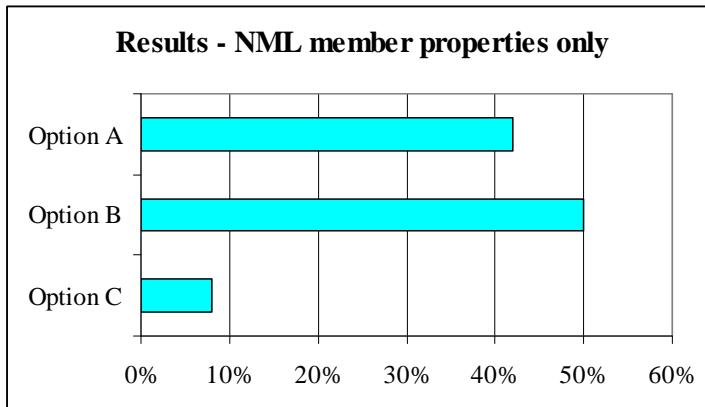
The Board were pleased to see such a high number of residents using the opportunity to give their view on this matter. We expect to use the online option again in future votes, be that for AGMs, surveys or consultations.

Results – all votes

A summary of the overall vote is shown in the bar chart below:



Results – NML member properties only Also shown, for information only, is a summary of votes cast by NML member properties only:



Conclusions

The Board noted in the consultation document that there appeared to be no proposal that would meet with universal approval.

We gave a recommendation for residents to vote for Option B, as we considered this to provide a sensible balance between conflicting viewpoints. We also said that we would accept a majority view of those who vote.

Despite the recommendation given to residents, we have still seen a significant proportion (40%) of residents voting for Option A – which was for a blanket ban on all commercial dog walking on NML land.

However, we do have a majority of 52% voting for the recommended Option B, which is to permit commercial dog walking on NML land, subject to appropriate conditions relating to the number of dogs walked, safety and conduct. We refer to this as the “License Option”.

A small percentage of residents voted for Option C. Reasons given for such a vote centred on wanting commercial dog walkers to be allowed to walk more than the 4 dogs in Option B.

Several residents shared concerns about the number of dogs being walked at any one time, and being unable to control large numbers of dogs. We share those concerns, and this is why we proposed a limit of up to 4 dogs under Option B – as is allowed in the Royal Parks.

We have also consulted the Reigate & Banstead dog warden on this issue. They confirm that private land is not governed by rules applying in the wider borough. The dog warden also stated that whilst up to 6 dogs are permitted to be walked in the borough, in her opinion it would be safer for 4. This is because it is easier to control smaller groups of dogs.

Given the vote, and the significant proportion of residents who do not want to see *any* commercial dog walking on NML land, we retain the view that Option B, as presented in the consultation document, provides a sensible balance. Accordingly, we will proceed with issuing commercial dog walking licenses to interested parties. We are currently giving careful thought to the License wording, terms and conditions, so that the License Option can be implemented as soon as possible.

We have already had one application for such a license, and expect at least two other residents to apply for a commercial dog walking license.

Any commercial dog walkers who do not apply for a license will be unauthorised, and so will not be permitted to use NML land for conducting their business.

Comments

During the consultation, a large number of comments have been received. We thank everyone who took the time to comment. The wide range of opinions on this topic was clearly highlighted by the result of the consultation, and this also came through in the differing viewpoints expressed in the comments.

The following is a summary of the main themes in the comments:

- Unanimously held view that only residents' dogs should be allowed to be commercially walked on NML land.
- Many parents feared for children being chased or jumped on by dogs (by either individually walked dogs or commercially walked dogs).
- Many expressed a view that they no longer feel able to enjoy the land because of commercial dog walking.
- Couple of opinions that people should just walk / look after their own dogs, with commercial dog walkers therefore not being needed.
- A few stated that local public areas should be used for commercial dog walking, rather than NML land.
- The level of the license fee; some residents do not want any license fee but others want significant fees for using NML land for commercial purposes.
- Questions about how a license will be policed and monitored, but noting that if license terms are not adhered to, then licenses should be revoked. A point was made that a substantiated reason needs to be given for revoking a license.
- Requests for dogs always to be on a lead; some considered this to be essential but others said dogs needed to be free to exercise (possibly in a designated area).
- The number of dogs allowed to be walked; some residents find packs of dogs to be intimidating, with commercial dog walkers being unable to control them, and are concerned about even 4 dogs, but others want to allow up to 6.
- Any limit on the number of dogs allowed to be walked commercially should include the dog walker's own dogs.
- Many comments on the level of uncleared dog waste in the village.
- Many concerns raised about irresponsible individual dog owners (walking without leads, not clearing up). Suggestions for rules applying to commercial dog walkers to also apply to individual dog walkers.
- A number of comments were made about individual commercial dog walkers.
- Commercial dog walkers provide a service to residents that should be continued. A concern was raised about potential issues arising in the village if commercial dog walking was not allowed on NML land.
- Suggestion for commercial dog walkers to carry suitable identification to show they are licensed.
- 3 of the 182 respondents thought that the consultation document was misleading.
- Several comments that Netherne has bigger things to deal with, like the smoking / drinking / litter activities of youths.
