

The Dog Exercise Area

Excerpt from draft report on outcomes of the 2015 community workshop on developing a vision for Cummings Park.

The existence of a Dog Exercise Area (DEA) in Cummings Park has been a contentious issue, and appeared from some comments to be the primary focus for some attendees. Further, prior to the workshop splitting into groups at tables, an attendee stated that use of the area for dogs had detrimentally affected the Scouts who could no longer use it for their activities. This probably increased the salience of the DEA as an issue for other attendees. These factors may help explain why the DEA was the feature of Cummings Park receiving the most comments (72) at the workshop.

As was outlined in the Method section, nothing should be read into exact numbers of comments on particular features. Reasons include that some comments came from tables rather than individuals, some attendees may have made multiple comments on some features, and discussion at particular tables may have stimulated comments that individuals would not otherwise have made.

It is clear that significant numbers of workshop attendees generally supported the status quo regarding the DEA, while significant numbers wanted substantial change. There was at least one 'dislike' comment about the DEA from all six tables, and at least one 'like' comment from five of the six. All three emails from people unable to attend the workshop mentioned the DEA, with two liking it and the other disliking it. For the record, in total there were 18 'like' comments and 22 'dislike' comments.

Reasons for liking the DEA included:

- a social gathering place or social hub for people and dogs
- there was a community of dog owners
- easily accessed, safe and sheltered
- good for disabled dog owners and friends
- dog friendly – most dogs there have “a great chilled out time”
- dog-poo bags and bins available
- improved surface because of matting
- easy for dogs to go down to the stream and drink
- the stream is great for kids and dogs alike.

Reasons for disliking the DEA included:

- not the best use of the only flat, sunny area in Cummings Park (similar comments from four tables and one email)
- need to walk through the DEA to get kids from the carpark to the playground
- access to the park for the less mobile is difficult except via the DEA
- not comfortable using the DEA with children because of dogs

- being jumped on by dogs when passing through the DEA
- dog owners don't always clean up after their dogs
- no physical barrier to stop off-leash dogs entering other areas of the park
- dogs intrude over the bridge into other park spaces
- dogs enter the stream and destroy stream banks
- dogs damage the turf
- lack of compliance of the DEA with council standards.

There were 16 suggested enhancements relating to the DEA including:

- fencing the DEA / securing it / keeping it separate from the rest of the park (four similar comments)
- self-closing gates to help segregate the DEA
- swapping the locations of the DEA and playground (three similar comments)
- time zones during the day for dogs and other activities
- provide dog-poo bags and/or improve disposal facilities (two similar comments)
- better integration with other parks with teen, child and dog areas in different parks
- improving the Chelmsford Reserve as a DEA and converting the Cummings Park DEA into a grassed area for families.

Finally, a further 16 comments were made under the 'Intelligence' heading. These included:

- now the Chelmsford Reserve is a DEA this changes the need or leaves no need for a DEA in Cummings Park (two similar comments)
- the Chelmsford Reserve is not a good alternative – fencing issue and small size
- the Chelmsford Reserve would be an excellent alternative if fencing better
- the DEA is muddy in winter (two similar comments)
- the DEA massively used by dog owners
- there is a Sunday dog class, which may have implications for WCC revenue and other uses of the area
- the DEA is not consistent with some WCC standards.

Some comments under 'Intelligence' were questions, perhaps indicating that some attendees were seeking information rather than providing it as was the intention.

There were two further comments about dogs in addition to the 72 comments relating specifically to the DEA. Both were 'dislikes': the absence of 'people only' areas in Cummings Park, and off-leash dogs in on-leash areas.