

**Beckington Parish Council consultation response to Planning Application 2021/0868/FUL
Change of Use of Agricultural Field to Sui Generis use of field for exercising dogs.
At 379803 152200 Bath Road Beckington**

Beckington Parish Council object to this proposal most strongly for many reasons.

Scale, overlooking:

The proposed fields extend the full length of the western side of Beckington and take up an area of 8.34 hectares or approximately 20 acres. This is a large area and larger than any other similar facility in Mendip. This would cause a significant change to people's outlook and people living in the adjoining dwellings have the potential for their privacy to be invaded. This could be a particular problem for the residents of Frome Road and Mount Pleasant where the topography means that people in the field could look straight into the upstairs rooms of the properties as they are at the same level.

Security:

For all the residents abutting these fields they would arguably be at greater risk of being burgled than currently as what is normally only seen by people directly involved in agriculture would be seen by many more. This could well increase the possibilities for burglaries, shed break ins or other disturbance. It is certainly currently making residents feel uneasy.

Visual amenity:

Local village residents value seeing the land used for traditional farming and appreciate seeing farm animals. At the moment these fields are used for grazing sheep and having this quiet pastoral use on the boundary is considered beneficial and fitting for a village: the proposed activity of dog walking would change the ambience for many residents.

Noise, disturbance:

It is feared that there will be noise of dog barking in the neighbouring properties. We feel it optimistic and unrealistic that any dog barking would necessarily be stopped by its owner as is suggested in 1.5 of the Planning Statement. Indeed, given the large area of land there is deep concern that owners will have to shout loudly to cover the long distances to call their dogs. This is of particular concern as the dogs this facility is being offered to, designed for and marketed to are those with "innate running or chasing behaviour" and "nervous" temperaments as in 1.1 of the Planning Statement.

The applicant refers to management of the facility to prevent anti-social dog behaviour but gives no indication how this would be achieved. There is no indication that the facility will be staffed for example.

Other reasons:

Quality of land and proximity to settlement:

The proposed site is mainly good or excellent quality agricultural land. The field to the south of Mill Lane is Grade 1 and the rest of the land in this application is Grade 3. Dog walking can take place on more marginal land and this solution would be preferable to us. We are aware that the farmer owns approximately 150 acres and consider that it would be far more appropriate to use a more isolated parcel of land and preferably of lower agricultural quality than the bulk of land which is being proposed. We are aware of other dog walking sites in the district, and none have houses nearby, all being isolated and consider that this would be more appropriate in this case.

Value to the community:

The statement is made that this dog walking facility would benefit the community and paragraph 1.3 of the Planning Statement brings several additional points into sharp focus. The proposed area is significantly larger than other dog walking facilities in Mendip by a factor of five times the average size of four to five acres.

If the word community means Beckington then we would question the claim that dog owners do not take their dogs out. as stated in 1.3 of the Planning Statement. This is not the case: they do and regularly. It is also stated in 1.6 that a problem with dog excrement on the Recreation Field by the village hall would be alleviated by this application. It is not credible that these dog owners who walk their dogs free on the Recreation Field would decide to pay to use a proposed dog walking business across the road – or be able to afford to on a daily basis. As such it would not offer any improvement in the quantity of dog poop on the Recreation Field for users of that facility including the cricket club etc. It is also hard to see how this would offer a solution to this dog poop problem since the proposed opening times of the facility (9.00 am to 5.00 p.m. on weekdays, not open weekends, or bank holidays) would not be helpful to all the dog owners in Beckington since most will walk their dogs before 9.00 a.m. and after 5.00pm. These opening times do not suggest that it is truly recreational facility for the people of Beckington but is intended for a wider market and would be more likely to be used by people travelling from outside the village. This is underlined by the mentioning of parking and vehicular access five times in the short three-page Planning Statement,

Beckington is very fortunate in that it has many footpaths as part of the Public Rights of Way network, and these are used regularly by dog walkers. In particular on the western side of Beckington dog walkers can access easily from Mill Lane footpath FR 1/3 which enables them to access other paths and complete a circuit.

Management plan:

It is stated that dog walking would result in regular land maintenance, monitoring of ground conditions and water courses and conserving and enhancing the landscape. It is not clear how this would be done in a consistent and formalised way. A detailed management plan has not been provided and giving over such a large area to dog walking must surely have ecological implications which have not been addressed.

The statement that the field has large flat areas allowing accessibility to all ages and mobility is misleading. At the southern end, the gradient is far greater than that recommended for the disabled and this significantly reduces the area available to all potential users.

The fields are on either side of Mill Lane and it is not clear how the users would access both parts.

Reason for change of use:

We recognise that diversification is happening in the farming world and know that there are other opportunities locally for this as at Woodland Farm, 7 acres in Frome, Widgets Farm at Standerwick, 7 acres, and Muddy Paws, 4 acres, at Shepton Mallet. Local residents are well able to use these facilities.

A further point which we feel it pertinent to make but which is not a matter for consideration in this application is that of the possible change of use to residential and the building of houses. The field to the south of Mill Lane was put forward by the landowner for housing development for Mendip's SCHLAA 2008, SCHLAA 2012 and in the call for sites in 2015. In the Local Plan Part 11

consultation in February 2020 the landowner put forward all of the fields (BECK005 A,B and C) in this sui generis application for up to 60 houses. In October 2020, 20 homes on part of the field to the west of the Bath Road were submitted to the Planning Inspector on Local Plan Part 11. The outcome of this is not yet known. The Parish Council carried out surveys in 2008 and twice in 2013 to identify out of the sites put forward for housing development which would be most acceptable to parishioners. In the Beckington Parish Council Development Site Selection Survey April 2008 the facility south of Mill Lane was the least popular area for housing development and in 2013 it was the least popular of the large, proposed sites in the village

Summary:

This application has attracted a lot of interest and people have taken up entrenched positions. The Parish Council considers that any facility of this kind should, ideally, be planned for poorer quality agricultural land well away from settlements allowing privacy for both local residents and dog owners and carers. Thus we urge you to reject this application.