

Every dog must have their day care centre

24 May 2024



A dog day care centre ‘vital for the community’ has been approved for retrospective planning permission despite officers recommending it for refusal. The application was judged by officers as inappropriate development as it would fail to preserve the openness of the Green Belt which prevents urban sprawl.

Duncan’s Doggy Daycare, on Pointers Road in Cobham, was granted retrospective planning permission by a unanimous vote from Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) on Wednesday night (May 22). Cheers erupted from the gallery from Duncan’s family, friends and customers as the decision was confirmed, marking the end of an almost five year battle and three planning permission attempts.

Operating on the site since 2012, the centre is a family-run business which caters for approximately 120 dogs daily (licensed for up to 150 dogs). Employing 20 full and part time members of staff, the centre runs 24 hours a day and 360 days a year. Rather than renting a field like other dog day care centres, Duncan owns the land and facilities his business is built upon.

In a supporting statement to EBC, owner of the centre, Duncan MacBryde said planning approval is “critical”. He added his family’s “entire livelihoods are hinged on this planning decision” as they would be left without a home or income.

In the recommendation for denial, planning officials determined that fencing, exercise pens and the activity at the day care from dogs, staff and vehicles amounted to harm to the open Green Belt.

Chairing the meeting, Cllr Andrew Burley (Conservative/ Oxshott and Stoke D’Abernon) said there were a “raft of special circumstances” which could outweigh harm to the Green Belt. He commented on the economic benefit the business provided as well as the social service the popular day care was providing.

Speaking to the committee, the applicant’s representative Hugh Sowerby, said that Duncan had “done everything possible whilst maintaining a viable business” since the 2019 application. This included halving the size of the site, taking away two exercise pens, removing five unlawful buildings, removing all dog paraphernalia, and reprofiling and replanting part of the site.

Cllr Alistair Mann (Conservative/Cobham) said he was “struggling to find a better location” than on the site. He reasoned: “if this [business] does not exist here it will exist somewhere else [...] if it doesn’t exist on Green Belt, it will exist on Brownfield.” Moving the dog centre to Brownfield sites would prevent building “needed” houses.

The application marks the company’s third attempt for retrospective planning approval. Differences between the 2024 application and the 2023 refusal are that two containers, wooden pen structures and associated waste have all now been removed from the site.

The company has also reduced the site from 1.32 hectares to 0.6, as well as decreasing the number of pens from three to two. Officers acknowledged the impact had been reduced since the last proposal but it would still cause harm and restrict openness

Over 90 letters of support have been submitted to Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC), detailing why it should support a local business which is an “asset to the community”. No objections were received from the public, Surrey Wildlife Trust or Natural England.

Faithful customers of up to 10 years have praised the professionalism and care the company provides for their pets. Ms Tsvetanova said the dog daycare centre has “changed her [daily] life” and her dogs are so excited to come back to the centre.

Mrs Crosse said it would be “absolutely devastating” to her and her family if Duncan’s doggy daycare was no longer allowed to operate. Others commented that they may have to give up their pets if they could not find care for them.

One small business owner said the centre enables her to generate local income for Elmbridge. Another resident, Mrs Sheehan, said: “Duncans Dog Co provides a vital service to local working people to enable us to combine a hybrid working and dog ownership lifestyle...enabling [her] to go back to work and contribute to a wider society.”

Not only local residents, but patrons from South West London have also commented to support the application. Some expressed they “cannot do their job” without the daycare centre as it allows them to work full-time in central London.