

PLANNING STATEMENT TO ACCOMPANY PLANNING APPLICATION

OCTOBER 2023

RE: BEST BUDDIES SECURE DOG FIELD, SEALLADH BREAGHA, SOUTH WEYDALE, THURSO, CAITHNESS, KW14 8YJ.

This application seeks planning permission for a change of use from horse grazing to dog off lead walking and play area. It is proposed that the 3975m² (75m x53m) secure field will be used for dog owners to walk their dogs off lead. The proposed Dog Field is located within a rural location, 4 miles from Thurso. From Thurso you travel along the A9 for 3 miles until the Weydale Sign. Turn left and travel 0.9 miles along this unclassified road, where you then turn right along a communal track (which I contribute for the upkeep of the track) for 0.3 miles then turn right and this is where the land is under the ownership of the applicant (Audrey Gunn). The field is on the left. There are no trees or hedges within the proposed Dog Field and there is no risk of flooding and no access to amenities is required. In the future it is hoped to plant a fast growing hedge along the end of the field nearest to the house to provide a natural screen but until they grow a screening panel can be used. The boundary of the proposed Dog Field has been kept 22m away from a hard standing area which the local farmer occasionally uses to work with sheep.

The Dog Field would be for outdoor recreation whilst preserving the openness of the land. The proposal does not call for the construction of any buildings on the site or any real material alterations to the site. There would not be any adverse impact on neighbouring properties. As a result of the proposal it is planned to provide satisfactory parking for 2 or 3 cars and a turning area within the site. It is planned to have a double gate system for maximum security, where the customers open the first gate, drive through and then close the gate before their dogs are taken out of the car. There will be a second pedestrian gate to enter the grass field. The existing access to the site does not compromise highway safety. Since no development is necessary to the change of use application the design and form remains in character with the area which is open and rural in appearance.

The site is located on land next to the applicants dwelling house named Sealladh Bregha, South Weydale, Thurso, KW14 8YJ and is surrounded by a 3 meter wide track and then fields. The surrounding fields have flagstone fencing and have established hedging which are approximately 7 ft high, which provides a natural screening from any livestock within the fields. It is proposed to heighten the existing fence to 6ft using deer fencing materials and small mesh will be added along the bottom of the existing fence. The pedestrian and vehicle gate will also be 6ft high with full mesh wire. The gates will have a combination padlock and users will be emailed or messaged the combination prior to their allotted time slot. The combination will be changed daily to ensure that only those that have booked have access to the field. The field is short grass with some rough grass areas.

The nearest dwellings from the boundary of the field are some distance, the nearest being approximately 500m away. At the moment the area which would become the parking area is a passing area on the applicants' track which is adjacent to the field. This passing area would be extended to a larger hard standing which would be located directly next to the gate of the field and would serve as adequate room for 3 vehicles to park and turn.

All dog walking sessions are pre-booked for a half-an-hour or hour slot. Dog walkers cannot turn up speculatively. The field is booked exclusively for the dog or dogs and their owners and the owners walk their own dogs. The field is not lit. No walks take place before dawn nor after dark and no additional lighting is installed or proposed.

It is planned to create walkways within the field by strimming and cutting grass pathways, no stone chippings will be used for paths as it is uncomfortable for dogs to walk on. It is hoped to have dog agility equipment within the field for use of the clients to enhance and stimulate the dog activities. As part of the proposal it is planned to encourage wildlife and an area of the grass will be enhanced with a wildflower meadow mix – Cornfield Annuals, Scottish Highland Meadow Seed Mix and Scottish Lowland Meadow Seed Mix.

There will be waste bins within the field which will have heavy duty black plastic bags within them. All dog mess will be picked up and bagged by the users and placed in the waste bins. Poo bags will be provided for use by the field users. The dog faeces will be double bagged before disposal. The bins will be emptied twice weekly and the field will be regularly inspected to ensure the site remains clean and clear.

The Field will be hired by dog owners, with a maximum of 6 dogs in the field at one time. (All dogs must get along with each other) Full Terms and conditions will be required to be agreed and users will be expected to have their own pet insurance even though the applicant will have Field Hire Insurance in place. All dogs using the field will be up to date with worming and vaccinations and will not be allowed access if they have been ill within the previous 48 hours. A water cube will be situated at the corner of the field to provide drinking water for the dogs. And to shower off the dogs if they are muddy prior to going back into their cars, Field users will be asked to respect the countryside and its activities and if the farmer is moving or working with sheep, barking to be kept minimal.

The reasons that people use a dog walking area include:

- dog owners have a safe and secure enclosed space for dogs to roam off lead
- many countryside and park walks are intersected by roads or fields occupied by animals, making off-lead walking more difficult
- Reactive dogs - some dogs are aggressive with other dogs and some timid or nervous; the benefits of the walking field is that it is a safe, controlled and enclosed space.
- Training purposes –recall, agility, general obedience
- Rescue dog rehabilitation – building a positive relationship with the owner, learning how to play and have fun
- Dogs in season – exercise in peace without any other unwanted canine advances
- Dogs with unreliable recall
- Puppies – gentle training area, stimulation, learning
- Elderly Dogs - can enjoy calm and relaxing exercise without being ambushed by other peoples unruly dogs
- Dogs with strong prey drive – sight hounds for example have the instinct to chase prey if not within an enclosed area
- Dogs that have recently had surgery – can recuperate in a calm environment

The proposed operating hours are 9am – 4pm weekdays and weekends in Winter and 9am – 9pm in the Summer.

I (Audrey Gunn) the applicant want to open this Dog Field :-

1. To offer much needed secure, enclosed and private dog exercise facilities for dog walkers
2. Contribute towards providing facilities that encourage healthy and active communities, focusing on wellbeing and outdoor activity.
3. To generate further income to allow my business Best Buddies Dog Walking to enhance sustainability and keep up with the ever growing cost of living crisis.
4. Support other local businesses who require such facilities in order to operate their commercial dog walking businesses.
5. To provide a much needed facility for dog owners, This will be a unique project as there are no other facilities like this in the County.