

# **Petitions launched on allowing dogs in Edinburgh cemeteries**

## **Campaigners are going head to head over Edinburgh Council's rules on allowing dogs in cemeteries.**

Petitions have been launched both for and against the city's pre-Covid ban being reinstated, following a grieving dad's anger at "irresponsible owners" allowing their pets to disturb his son's grave.

Paul Irvine, whose three-year-old son Xander was tragically killed after being hit by a car in 2020, has lobbied the council for stricter regulations for over two years.

A 'no dogs in cemeteries' policy, with exceptions for assistance dogs, was previously in place across Edinburgh's 43 burial grounds and lifted due to the pandemic.

As the issue was revisited, councillors agreed to maintain access however said animals must be kept on leads.

Officials are now to set investigate whether the current rules are being properly enforced and followed.

A petition launched by Andy Lees in support of Mr Irvine's campaign has gathered more than 1,300 signatures.

It hopes to "raise the profile of the issue, initially convince Edinburgh Council to bring itself into line with the majority of other Scottish councils, and eventually lead to a Scotland wide ban on dogs in cemeteries, churchyards and

burial grounds”.

A counter-petition set up in response, with 563 signatures, to “halt the petitioned ban on dogs in Edinburgh cemeteries” argues graveyards “should be respectfully shared by all – including our four-legged friends who often play an important role in our grieving and healing process”.

This came despite the initial petition stating exceptions should be made for canines accompanying mourners and assistance dogs.

Addressing a council meeting in 2022, Mr Irvine said dogs had repeatedly destroyed soft toys left at Xander’s headstone in Morningside Cemetery.

He told councillors he’d also witnessed dogs urinating on gravestones “even when on the lead”.

In a post to a public Morningside community Facebook group earlier this year, he said: “Unfortunately the situation has not changed, I have to speak to dog walkers on a daily basis, often getting abuse and even threats.

“I see the same people come several times a day to walk their dogs, some even arrive by car. Many swap the leads to extremely long extendable leads and MOST of them let their dogs urinate on graves and headstones. Many just stroll past Xander’s grave with no consideration, probably letting their dog urinate on his grave.

Teddies still go missing and get destroyed. I see the same in cemeteries all over town. What happened to respect?”

Now he is calling on the Scottish Parliament to pass a law to make exercising a dog in a cemetery “an offence punishable by an on the spot fine for infringement”.

Meanwhile those campaigning against a ban claim there are “very few incidents related to dogs, with occasional dog

fouling being the only issue”.

The petition, started by Monti Stramka, states: “The proposed ban on dogs in cemeteries seems to be based on reasons that do not reflect the reality of most visitors’ experiences.

“I feel given the sensitive nature of the issue people are only hearing one small side as some are too intimidated to give their views. I want to ensure all voices are heard.”

It highlights the capital as “the city of Greyfriar’s Bobby, the faithful dog who stayed with his owner until his own sad death,” adding: “How can we love and promote such a heartfelt well known and loved story yet not allow dogs into cemeteries?”

Culture and communities convener Val Walker, tabled a motion at last week’s committee recognising the “continuing public interest and concern over the behaviour of dogs in cemeteries”.

It noted that “two petitions have been circulated on this matter, one proposing the reinstatement of the “No Dogs in Cemeteries Rule”, and a counter-petition in opposition to this”.

Passed unanimously by councillors, it asked officers to provide an update on “compliance and enforcement of the current rules” and said the two opposing groups behind the petitions should be notified of the date of the meeting where it will be considered.

She said: “I’m conscious that this issue is one of concern for many of our residents. Whilst people need to walk their dogs this must be done in a respectful and controlled way especially in spaces where others will be remembering friends and loved ones.

“Unfortunately, if dogs cannot be kept under control whilst in

cemeteries we'll need to look at measures we can take to address this.

"I'd also encourage all dog owners in the city to be conscious of these concerns and potentially consider using our wide network of fantastic parks across the city instead of cemeteries when walking dogs."

By Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter