

MATA

Mediation and Training Alternatives

LOST THE PLOT

General information

Background

Westbourne District Council (WDC) covers a large area of the south coast, well known for its retirement homes and wealthy promenaders. A few years ago it started a pets memorial ground on some landlocked waste ground adjoining the local cemetery, where, for a significant fee, owners could bury their deceased pets in ground near to their human 'relatives'. The package included tasteful 'pet boxes', a brief ceremony at the graveside and a small headstone or plaque to mark the spot. The ground generally was well-maintained lawn.

The scheme has been an immense success, transforming an unsightly area of wasteland into an attractive public amenity. Some people paid large sums of money to give their pets a fitting farewell.

The dispute

Unfortunately, nearly two months ago a grave mistake was made when "Fido", deceased pet of Mr and Mrs Fortune, was buried (with the full de lux package) in a plot reserved by Mr and Mrs Cash. This plot adjoins the grave of "Hildegarde" who had recently died and who had been a lifelong mate of "Frederike" (who had not long to go). The Cash's had bought the two plots so that "Hildegarde" and "Frederike" could lay together in death as they had so often in life.

A week after "Fido" was buried, the Cash's had tended "Hildegarde's" grave to find that she was now accompanied by "Fido" (whom she had never met, let alone laid with). They were deeply upset and had a very emotional meeting with those responsible at WDC. WDC then wrote to Mr and Mrs Fortune proposing that "Fido" be exhumed and reburied in another plot (at no cost to them). The Fortune's, of course, were also deeply upset, having laid "Fido" in his final (they thought) resting place. So they refused the reburial.

All sides consulted solicitors and some strong letters were exchanged. WDC, whilst admitting their error, felt helpless and very worried that their innovatory scheme would receive the worst possible publicity and so damage their revenue-producing activity.

WDC proposed mediation and the pet owners agreed at the behest of their solicitors.

Attending the mediation

One of the Cash's (or their solicitor)
One of the Fortune's (or their solicitor)
Chief Officer of WDC Public Amenities Department
Mediator

©DRichbell
April 2004