



Refurbishment and build project for Animal Concern Cumbria

February 2021

Introduction

Animal Concern Cumbria is a long established, small Cumbrian charity which helps to find new homes for animals that for no fault of their own have been abused, neglected, abandoned or whose owners cannot continue to care for. The charity is self-funding, is overseen by a trustee board and is run by a small team of staff and dedicated volunteers.

The charity has been in operation since the 1970s firstly operating from individuals homes, then from a local authority allotment site in Workington and as currently from the site at Egremont in West Cumbria.

Originally known as Marlborough and providing commercial stabling, cattery and kennelling, the site has been providing services for animals for several decades and continues to do so. While the site has some purpose built animal facilities there was a need for upgrading and re-organising these to meet good modern standards in animal care.

Since taking on the site in 2014 the charity made various improvements such as drainage infrastructure, to improve sewage treatment on the site, installed a boundary fence, a fenced outdoor dog exercise area and setting up a secure sensory garden for dogs free play. In addition, regular maintenance has been performed to keep the site functional, such as replacing collapsing floors in outbuildings and improving lighting about the site. Unfortunately, this has been likened to using a sieve to drain Windermere as the key utility outbuildings have deteriorated to a level of repair that for the cost of upgrading would not deliver much benefit.

On assessment, the buildings were deemed unfit for purpose due to unsound structures, foundations and floors, lack of weather-proofing and vermin proofing, corroding roof struts, disintegrating concrete flooring, lack of heating and appropriate lighting, unsuitable access doors, no grooming facilities nor appropriate comfort facilities for staff and volunteers at the point of work.

For the charity to continue its longstanding service to the community the facility must be fit for purpose, meet regulatory standards, and provide a hub that enables the charity to support and care for animals for rehoming or are feral, and supports wider work of education of animal welfare through training and guidance. It was therefore decided to demolish the redundant buildings and build afresh. A demolition notice was issued to the local authority for this.

Site Description

The Mary Irwin Re-homing Centre is located approximately 2 miles west of the centre of Egremont in West Cumbria. It is surrounded by fields and farmland with no immediate neighbours.

The site covers approximately 2.65 acres, or around 1 hectare, and is split into several distinct areas:

- A car park and vehicular access from the public road in the south west corner of the site
- An admin bungalow and surrounding gardens
- A central open area (until recently a stable block which provided animal equipment storage, animal laundry, animal food prep and storage, cattery, and garden tools storage. To the rear of this block and adjoining were old kennels. This building has been demolished)
- A separate hut containing a WC, sink and water heater – This building has been demolished
- A separate unit used for volunteers comfort breaks – This building has now been demolished
- A purpose built kennel block comprising separate kennels with two additional timber kennels alongside - retained
- A rough bank to the east of this, sloping down to a small watercourse, to the east of which a sensory garden is being developed for animal free play - retained
- The northern part of the site, comprising just over half of the total area, is an open field and dog-walking track, within which is the fenced off-lead exercise area. This also has its own vehicular access - retained.

Site prior to demolition of buildings



Site Aspects and Use

Drainage and water

The small watercourse that runs along the eastern part of the site, is flowing mainly underground across the lower site area and a small portion overground at the south western slope. The lower ground at this point can become slightly boggy and while not suitable for building is a good space and accessible for an open sanctuary space for dog enrichment (a fenced off area, to be landscaped). The unused area to the rear of the kennel block is also not suitable for building but is expected to be used for wild meadow, encouraging wildlife and birds.

The site upgrade considers the water issues and looking at how to manage/reduce the impact on run-off rates, using elements such as rainwater collection, soak a ways, and planting.

Sewage is dealt with by way of a bio-mass tank, the old septic tank was decommissioned in 2018 and the new system installed. Animal solid waste is dealt with via a local authority waste collection.

Heat, Power and Telephony

The site is connected to the mains electrical grid - with a single phase supply - and the mains gas grid. It also has telephone and internet connection.

The animal facility is a 24/7 – 365 operation and requires a stable supply of energy to ensure we meet animal welfare standards of heating/temperature control and light delivery, as well as providing a good light level for safety of staff and volunteers, particularly in the winter months with shorter days and less natural light. In addition, the utility area houses several laundry machines which have a reasonably high daily demand.

The single phase electrical supply has limited capacity and the cost of upgrading to 3 phase is prohibitive for the charity, there is a view to installing a variety of energy sources to support the mains supply and consider renewable sources. Voltaic panels and/or wind turbines for heating, water, and light.

The admin building (bungalow) is currently the only building with heating capacity provided through a domestic gas boiler for heating and hot water.

Bungalow and garden

The bungalow houses administration facilities for the charity being offices, reception, training/board room, kitchen, and bathrooms. This building is largely well maintained but is in plan for internal decoration and general maintenance to the external. The external doors and windows are covered by metal bar frames and roller doors for security purposes.

Bungalow garden

The bungalow has space to the front, rear and sides and is sectioned with planting and fencing. The rear garden space across the whole back of the bungalow is intended for cat accommodation, being a distance from the dog accommodation and easily screened. The cat accommodation will consist of 'pods' which house individual cats or small cat families in self-contained units. Generally made from uPVC these pods can be configured in any combination or layout to suit. The charity is looking at installing 8 units in 'blocks' of 2 and 3 in the garden space, with planting between. These pods will provide accommodation for isolated cats, maternity units, and cats available for rehoming. It is anticipated that a max number of 30 cats would be held at any one time. The pods replace the cattery element previously provided in the stable block. Previously some of the space housed a timber shed used as an isolation kennel with secure outside space.

The garden space to the side and front are not being developed at this time.

Utility Block

This will be a new building to service the animal laundry, food preparation and storage for cats & dogs. It will also incorporate a WC for staff and storage for animal equipment (beds, bedding etc) and storage for garden tools/equipment. This replaces the stable block facility.

Kennels

The main kennel building is at the eastern side of the block of outbuildings. It has a central aisle giving access to 9 internal pens, with each having access to its own small area of secure external space. This building was in reasonably sound condition but requiring roof insulation and new ceiling, internal decorating of walls and floors and improved weather proofed kennel doors. The block was previously heated using individual heat tubes in each pen. The exterior is currently being renovated with appropriate painting and metal work. There is no intention of expanding or changing the layout of this building. Prior to demolition of the stable block kennels the site had a capacity to hold approx. 30+ dogs. This project is not seeking to increase that number.

Dog facility building

This is a new building providing indoor play space for dogs, a vet and groom room, 'Meet & Greet' space and WC.

There is a critical need for dogs and their handlers to have a dry space to exercise and work away from the wet and cold. A regulatory requirement for animal welfare is that dogs should have at least 2 x 20 minute exercise periods in a day. They should also have social interaction and play time. It is also necessary to give many of the dogs some basic training and behavioural modification training to enable them to live in domestic homes. While the site has a reasonable amount of outdoor space that can be utilised it is also an exposed area and weather plays a big factor in our ability to deliver these services to the dogs. For many periods throughout the year the weather is either too wet with heavy rainfall and/or too cold from extreme winds. In order to fulfil a duty of care to our staff, volunteers, and animals we need to provide a sheltered space to perform the activities and have sufficient floor space for the dogs

to run and use equipment freely.

Vet/Groom Room - In addition, there is a requirement in animal welfare to ensure all animals are washed and vet checked on arrival to the centre and groomed on being rehomed, as well as having general regular grooming and periodic vet checks. This requires a dedicated space.

Meet & Greet space - We also require a space where potential animal adopters can meet animals onsite in a safe, secure environment; we refer to this as 'Meet & Greet'. This space is generally an indoor seated area and a secure outside area where the dog and adopters can be observed for compatibility, it also operates as a space where dogs can be observed and assessed for their understanding and behaviours when in a domestic setting, such as knowing to go outside for toileting etc. For convenience this space is located as part of the main facility building.

Views of the site pre-demolition of outhouses.



Above left to right - Front of Admin Bungalow & end of stable block with comfort room, side back section of garden with Iso hut, comfort room.

Below – left to right – Stable block front with WC block, stable block rear kennels, stable block laundry end by WC block & ISO kennel



Stable block interior

Left to right – food prep and storage, laundry, cattery



Project Brief

The Charity would like the Mary Irwin Re-Homing centre to be an operational unit for the charity, forming a hub for all their activities, and as part of a network of other animal shelters across the county. They would like to provide accommodation for dogs, cats, and small animals such as rabbits - and facilities for training, workshops for fundraising and education. There are several factors driving the need for this development:

- The poor state of the majority of the existing buildings.
- The need to provide accommodation for dogs, cats and small furries that meet regulation and associated standards.
- The need for these new facilities to be arranged in a way that meets animal welfare standards, and manages disease control, while providing comfortable, safe, and secure accommodation and enriching experiences.
- The need for better ancillary facilities - food storage, laundry, and sheltered animal exercise areas for use in bad weather.
- The need for better meeting facilities, for those visiting to meet and potentially adopt animals. This should include better access control to the site, so that members of the public cannot gain entry to the animal accommodation.
- The need for better staff facilities - for tea making and shelter in bad weather, easily accessed WC and clothes drying area.
- The need to maximise energy efficiency, whilst providing more services - so that the existing mains electricity connection does not need to be upgraded.

The charity would like the new development to be environmentally responsible and consider including the following:

- Highly energy-efficient buildings and services, to make all accommodation comfortable and easy to keep warm whilst keeping bills and carbon emissions low. The biggest users of energy are currently the heating and the industrial-scale washer-dryers.
- On-site renewable energy, such as solar panels and wind turbines (there are a number of these located in the neighbouring farms as the wind factor is high) - to further reduce running costs and provide low-carbon electricity.
- The responsible use of materials - with an emphasis on robust and low maintenance products and finishes that are easy to keep clean.
- Space for wildlife and greater biodiversity across the site by integrating bird boxes, bug boxes, wildlife-friendly landscaping and possibly building elements such as green roofs.
- Planting of shrubs and trees to screen buildings, act as boundaries and provide a pleasing visual and sensual experience.
- Responsible water management across the site, using sustainable drainage systems such as rainwater harvesting, soak away, and planting to manage surface-water run-off.