Recently, I have been trying to engage with neighbours whose barking dogs create major disturbances. The immediate area I have been dealing with is along, and immediately above and below Willow Road.  It took some time to establish where the barking came from as there were multiple areas, and also dogs escaping from properties and wandering up and down the river. For a number of weeks the barking was literally continuous, starting at 6 am, and coming from a number of different directions. For someone like me, who works from home during the day, the situation became intolerable.

Once I had tracked down the relevant owners, some neighbours responded very positively to my concerns, others less so.  I am sharing what I have learned, in the hope that it will assist in managing and resolving what has become an intolerable situation for many residents, reflected in the large number of complaints you have received recently.

Dogs bark for many reasons, including being left alone or being locked up; being new to the neighbourhood; communicating with other dogs close by due to loneliness; responding to trucks and other noisy disturbances (e.g. builders); and responding to other dogs being walked on pavements or streets, and running to the border of properties when a barking frenzy of most dogs in the vicinity breaks out.

Owners need to establish what is causing their dogs to bark regularly, and accept that this creates serious disturbances for neighbours. In general, dogs – especially those confined to the small properties which predominate in Newlands - need to be trained, and should never be left alone for long periods. Some neighbours leave dogs largely unattended for the day, or even a whole weekend when they go away. This creates havoc in the area.

Responsible dog owners understand that:

* They cannot have dogs on small plots without training and learning how to manage dogs on these properties;
* Dogs need exercise and training on a leash. It is unfair to have untrained dogs, who bark consistently as they are pulled up and down the streets and pavements, as often happens on through-roads like Willow and many others;
* Dogs on properties need to be trained to get used to passers-by and vehicles on the roads;
* Dogs need company and are not there just to secure a home, without training. They cannot be locked up in the house or left to roam for the whole day.

Many owners of barking dogs seem to treat dogs as simple security puppets. On these small plots, without appropriate training, this is a major cause of disturbances.

THREE CASES

1. One very co-operative and concerned neighbour understood the extent of the problem his dogs were causing. He asked his vet for advice, and was given the name of a dog behaviourist who analysed the problem.  She established that the neighbours, new to the area, had acquired an untrained puppy, who stood guard every times the owners left (starting at 6 am!) With support from the canine therapist (who also communicated details of the programme to me) and training, this situation has improved considerably. I am sure there are many competent and qualified dog trainers: the one who helped out in this situation is Lynda Montignies, [www.dogzathome.co.za](http://www.dogzathome.co.za).

2. Another neighbour has fitted anti-barking devices or collars, which apparently help train dogs not to bark.

3. A third neighbour, whose dog barked when it detected movement in my house and garden, agreed to cordon off the alleyway between our properties, so that her dog no longer sensed movement on my premises.

WAY FORWARD

We need to think about a **code of conduct** for the neighbourhood which includes dogs and other disturbances such as building (out of working hours) and noise mitigation, and using of power tools at inappropriate hours. Weed-eaters are a huge problem especially when used on weekends. A code of conduct might also serve to guide new residents. In my limited experience, a number of the worst barking dog situations come from the properties of recently-arrived residents, who do not realise that having dogs on small suburban properties comes with responsibilities to both neighbours and dogs.

Residents need to be made aware of Council regulations on noise in general, and barking in particular. Naming and shaming of serial offenders who do not take remedial action might be a preferable option to the legal procedures associated with Council enforcement.