

# Darwin Veterinary Centre

## Going for Gold!

Darwin Veterinary Centre in Biggin Hill has just been awarded the 'Gold' Cat Friendly Clinic Status - one of only 39 surgeries in the whole of the UK to achieve this accolade!



The scheme was set up two years ago by the ISFM (International Society of Feline Medicine) with the aim of encouraging vets to cater more specifically for cats' needs, in order to make surgery visits less stressful for cats and their owners. The Cat Friendly Clinic standard is available as either a Silver (Essential) or Gold (Advanced) award, depending on the criteria met by the clinic, and Darwin has worked hard to achieve the Gold standard.

The main principle behind the award is the willingness of the staff to 'think cat', and understanding that cats are not just small dogs. The staff at Darwin Veterinary Centre recognise that cats have very specific needs and want to cater for them to the best of their abilities. The rigorous criteria for the scheme has also seen Darwin invest in equipment designed specifically for cats, and all staff follow the gold standard of cat handling as laid out in the ISFM guidelines.

We talked to head vet and practice principal Sonya Miller-Smith about the changes at Darwin and what this means for your cat. She said "We are very proud of the changes we have made to the surgery over the last year. We have a new purpose built dedicated cattery, where we can care for cats away from dogs and other animals during their stay. We have had much larger cages fitted which allows extra space for cats to move around and exhibit normal behaviour. We use feline appeasing pheromones throughout the surgery to help cats feel relaxed. Our hospitalisation cages house a cat 'fort', offering an enclosed sleeping space for comfort and a raised platform to perch on and watch the world go by. The extra space also means we can encourage owners to bring their pet's favourite beds, toys etc. from home with them, with familiar scents to make the whole experience more cosy and comfortable".

Registered veterinary nurse Terri Biddle is Darwin's newly appointed "Cat Advocate". Terri adores cats so was the perfect choice for this role, and it is her job to ensure every cat has a relaxed and pleasant experience – which of course means lots of fuss and cuddles! Terri is also on hand to answer any questions about general cat care, and is happy to show clients around the cattery if they want to see behind the scenes. Terri says "It's great working somewhere where cats are so highly regarded. It's lovely to get feedback from clients who are so relieved to see their cat looking calm and cosy during a hospital stay, which can be a worrying time for them. The cats really respond well when their own beds and favourite toys are brought in for them".

Terri also mentioned that the practice has an extensive website with informative articles on not only cat care, but dogs, rabbits and most recently even chickens! In order to keep clients well informed they also produce their own newsletter and run a popular facebook page which is updated several times a week with topical and useful information for pet owners ([facebook.com/DarwinVets](https://www.facebook.com/DarwinVets)).

Darwin Veterinary Centre is running short, cat-only clinic sessions twice a week, currently during Wednesday evening and Saturday morning surgeries. These appointments are proving to be popular and help to ensure a peaceful waiting room experience for your cat. Outside of these times the surgery also provides a quiet place for cats to sit away from dogs and other animals - and out of sight of each other to avoid any arguments! Sonya and the team would like to point out that this doesn't mean they don't still love seeing all their doggy clients, and think the separate kennel and waiting areas benefit the dogs too as many can be overexcited or even frightened by the presence of cats.

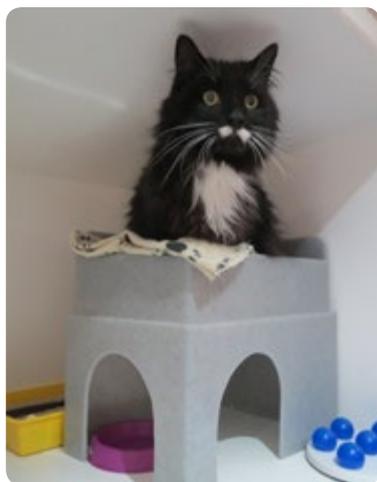
There are many benefits for making the vet practice cat friendly. As territorial creatures, cats are already stressed the second they leave their home, so they are at a major disadvantage by the time they arrive at the vets. It is the goal of the staff at Darwin to make visits as relaxed and stress-free as possible. All Darwin's vets and nurses have undergone specialist training to ensure they handle cats especially gently and head vet Sonya says it is much easier for them to complete a thorough clinical exam and get more information on a cat's health if they are more relaxed - making the whole experience much more pleasant for cat and owner alike.



Why not come and see for yourself? To make an appointment please call Darwin Veterinary Centre on 01959 541153, check the website at [www.darwinvets.com](http://www.darwinvets.com), or just pop in to speak to one of the team.



Cat Advocate Terri Biddle VN



Patient Jack happily perched in his cat fort.

