

Countryside Service



# PLANNING FOR DOG OWNERSHIP IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS: REDUCING CONFLICT – ADDING VALUE

Access and greenspace design guidance for planners and developers



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## GOOD DESIGN: Reducing conflict – adding value

Dog owners are traditionally one of the most frequent, year-round users of urban greenspace and public access to the wider countryside. Owning a dog – or the aspiration to do so – has a significant influence on the location and type of home their owners will purchase. Furthermore, once moved in, a dog in the home has a profound impact on where family members go and what they do.

Yet until recently, the design and management of greenspace in and around new housing has not recognised the fundamentally different needs of dog owners, compared to residents without dogs.

Consequently, insensitive planning has led to needless conflict, for example on playing fields, wildlife areas, multi-use trails and nearby farmland. It has also worked against the many social and health benefits associated with dog ownership<sup>1</sup>.

The innovative and evidence-based masterplanning approach at Whitehill & Bordon Eco-town has highlighted how good design and strategic planning for dog ownership in new housing developments can minimise conflict for all concerned.

This document will similarly help you to:

- Plan for dog owners' needs in order to reduce conflict for all greenspace users
- Attract a premium from marketing dog-friendly homes
- Design greenspaces that attract dog owners away from sensitive sites
- Minimise greenspace and access management costs
- Add value and secure good publicity from innovative design
- Comply with European Union Birds and Habitats Directives
- Facilitate improvements in human health and social inclusivity

<sup>1</sup> Cutt, H.; Giles-Corti, B.; Knuijan, M. and Burke, V. (2007) Dog ownership, health and physical activity: A critical review of the literature. *Health & Place* 13. 261–272



# UNDERSTANDING DOG OWNERS

Planning for dog ownership in new housing ensures the health and social benefits of pet ownership are supported while also reducing the likelihood for conflict.

## Demographics

Ownership of the UK's 8 million dogs transcends all sections of society. In the south east of England, around 1 in 5 households will contain a dog, with similar proportions in all other areas of the UK<sup>2</sup>.

In socio-economic terms, while dog ownership is highest amongst people in the C2DE groups (manual, partly/unskilled occupations), a family home is the most reliable predictor of household dog ownership. There is a pet dog in 27% of all family homes of people in the ABC1 group (professional, managerial and skilled occupations).

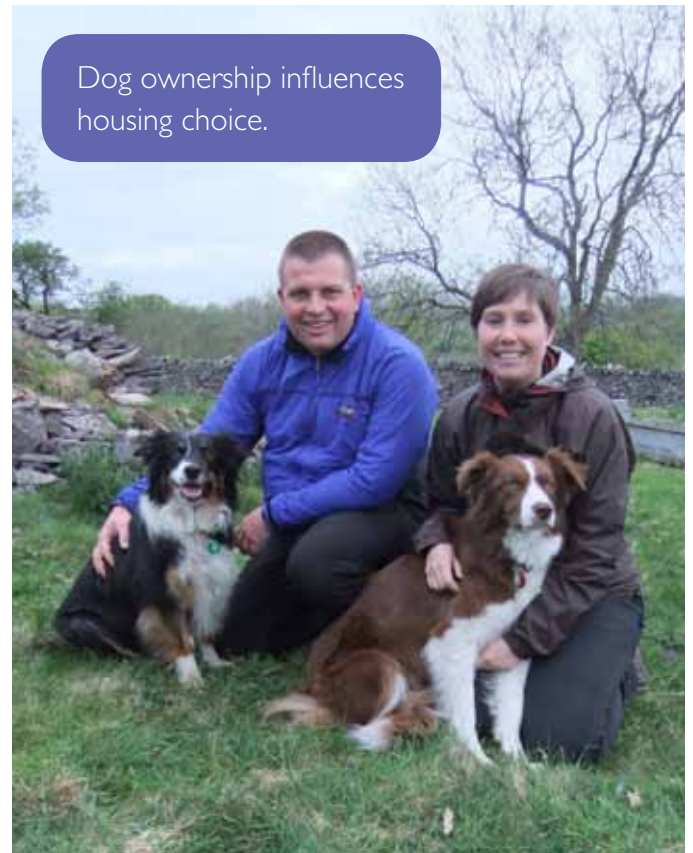


There will be a dog in almost a third of all family homes.

*Dogs are most commonly kept by families*

## The dog as a family member

Dog owners usually have very strong emotional bonds with their pets, with around two thirds regarding the dog as a full family member<sup>3</sup>. A dog's safety and enjoyment is thus a high priority and greatly influences owner behaviour, be it deciding what house to buy, or where and when to go for a walk.



Dog ownership influences housing choice.

*Dog owners have strong emotional bonds with their pets*

<sup>2</sup> All demographic data from Pet Food Manufacturers' Association: [www.pfma.org.uk](http://www.pfma.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> Understanding the psychology of walkers with dogs: new approaches to better management. University of Portsmouth. [www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs)

## Social benefits

Scientific studies repeatedly show that people with dogs are significantly more likely to have better mental and physical health, take exercise more frequently and be less socially isolated<sup>4</sup>, compared to people without dogs. Many of these benefits support national, regional and local government targets for more inclusive and healthier communities.

## Access needs

While recreational walking without a dog is greatly influenced by the weather and time of year, most dog owners walk with their pets once or twice every day, all year round and in all weathers.

This explains why 51% of all visits to England's countryside and greenspace involve walking with a dog<sup>5</sup>. Studies from all over the UK repeatedly show that the three most important amenities dog owners seek are off-lead access, close to home and away from traffic<sup>6</sup>.

If greenspace meeting these requirements cannot be accessed on foot from new housing, most dog owners will drive on a daily basis to where this can be found, as opposed to taking fewer walks or being less inclined to keep a dog.



Routinely driving to dog walking areas from new housing works against a wide range of national and local government policies for environmental protection and sustainable development by:

- Increasing short journeys by car on a daily basis
- Displacing off-lead exercise to more sensitive sites
- Disengaging dog owners from adjacent green infrastructure

Off-lead access, close to home, accessible by foot and away from traffic are the top priorities for accommodating dog owners in new developments.

## Design for people

Good design for dogs is, in practice, just another aspect of good design for people, irrespective of whether they have – or even like – dogs. While dog owners have specific needs, these are in addition to the general requirements for greenspaces that are safe, attractive and accessible for everyone. Good design equally helps those people seeking to minimise contact with dogs, by providing informed choice and accommodating off-lead access where it causes least conflict.

KEY POINTS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
 <b>DO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodate dog owners' needs throughout the development planning process</li> <li>• Recognise the many benefits dog ownership brings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide dog-friendly greenspace within walking distance</li> </ul>
 <b>AVOID</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for dog owners at the expense of other interests</li> <li>• Seeing dogs in only a negative light</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assuming every dog owner will have access to a car</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Dogs, access and nature conservation. English Nature Research Report 649 (2005): [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: The national survey on people and the natural environment – annual report from the 2010–11 survey. Natural England Commissioned Report NECR083: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> Assessment of perceptions, behaviours and understanding of walkers with dogs in the countryside. Sport Industry Research Centre: [www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs)

# HOUSE AND GARDEN DESIGN

Good planning for dog owners begins at home. Well-designed houses and gardens reduce the pressure on public greenspace and minimise the potential for conflict between dogs owners, their neighbours and passers-by.

Such good design can also add value to individual properties at minimal cost, enhancing sales opportunities with pet owners, particularly families.

## Glazing of external doors and windows

Dogs quickly become protective of their homes and may instinctively bark at strangers. Their owners may also welcome or encourage this behaviour, to make their homes feel safer.

However, this can cause noise and other nuisance to neighbours and passers-by. It can be minimised by:

- Avoiding transparent materials in the lower half of doors and windows overlooking roads, pathways and other public spaces
- Interior layouts that separate the main/front entry door and letter box from communal and living areas

Conversely, glazing windows and doors to the floor at the rear of the home can provide environmental enrichment for dogs, who can find movement outside visually stimulating. If this becomes too exciting, the glass can be obscured without detracting from the public street scene.

Having one rear door or panel with a solid base (eg wood, rather than glass), makes it easier to install a dog flap, allowing the pet to enter the garden of its own accord.

Making existing buildings more dog-friendly may require planning permission if they are listed or in a conservation area. Contact your local planning department for more information before starting work.

## Front gardens

Front gardens are usually not suitable as unsupervised private greenspaces for dogs because:

- They are usually the primary means of access to the home
- They can lead to excessive barking and/or anxiety for the dog and passers-by
- Conflict can occur with postal workers, meter readers and other unplanned visitors
- Gates will be in frequent use and more likely to be left open, allowing the dog to escape
- Any perimeter boundary feature (eg fence or wall) is likely to be low enough for a dog to climb or jump



*Safe and secure rear gardens are good for pets and people.*  
© Karen Bush

## Rear gardens

These can provide safe and attractive private greenspace for pet dogs when they:

- Are completely separate and secure from any public areas, including the approach to the front door and letterbox
- Have a complete and secure perimeter boundary (eg a wall or fence), with the first metre being solid to give visual and acoustic separation
- Use landscaping and shrubs alongside fences and other garden boundaries, to prevent dogs from running along them unhindered; the latter encourages excessive barking and other unwanted territorial behaviours
- Contain a mixture of paved, gravel and grass surfaces

A boundary height of 1.7 metres will contain almost all dogs, but this may need to be reduced as a compromise to meet other requirements for good design.

- Have self-closing and lockable gates into the front garden and any other public spaces
- Avoid using plants, shrubs and cocoa bean mulches that are poisonous to pets<sup>7</sup>
- Include a decomposing dog toilet (approx £15, 2012) to dispose of dog faeces in an environmentally-friendly way

Composting dog toilets provide a green option for domestic dog waste disposal.



Images © www.armitages.co.uk

KEY POINTS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
<span style="color: green; font-size: 2em;">✓</span> <b>PROVIDE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure rear garden with visually solid boundary</li> <li>• Self-closing gates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decomposing dog toilet</li> <li>• Provision for dog flap in rear door</li> </ul>
<span style="color: red; font-size: 2em;">✗</span> <b>AVOID</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Floor-level glass facing public areas</li> <li>• Dogs in front garden</li> <li>• Poisonous plants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to run unhindered along fence lines</li> <li>• Unrestricted internal access to the front door</li> </ul>

For more information refer to *Dog-friendly gardening* by Karen Bush, Hubble and Hattie 2012

<sup>7</sup> Poisonous plants list available from: [www.dogstrust.org.uk](http://www.dogstrust.org.uk)



# OVERALL GREENSPACE PROVISION

The amount of greenspace associated with new housing is critical to the enjoyment, health and well-being of all residents, not just those with dogs. Accordingly, this guidance needs to be applied in conjunction with other local, regional and national guidance on greenspace in and around housing developments. Contact your local planning department for more information.

## Specific requirements for dog owners

Dog owners' desire for walking their dogs off-lead, close to home and away from traffic once or twice a day, imposes specific requirements in terms of greenspace, in addition to the general requirements above.



*Off-lead access, away from traffic and close to home to home are the top priorities for dog owners*

In particular, accommodating the “daily dog walk” is a key requirement.

Surveys of existing greenspace users commissioned as part of the Whitehill & Bordon masterplanning process, showed that 88% of daily visitors said dog walking was the primary reason for their visit<sup>8</sup>. Walkers with dogs most frequently undertook a circular dog walk of around 2.7km, with a mean penetration distance into the greenspace of 784m from the start point (eg car park). While these access requirements are typical of dog owners' access requirements in other parts of the country, local research is needed to identify the type and extent of dog walking, and thus the greenspace needed, for each development site.

The daily dog walk on greenspaces around Whitehill & Bordon is on average 2.7km long.

If the greenspace provided within a development cannot accommodate these requirements, most dog owners will travel to greenspace outside the development. If access close to home is insufficient or reduced, most owners will go elsewhere rather than walk their dogs less frequently or for shorter distances.<sup>9</sup>

## Proximity

Dog owners will on average walk no further than 400-500 metres to get to greenspace that is in all other ways suitable for exercising their pets. Thus greenspace needs to be within this distance to dissuade dog owners from driving to what they perceive as more suitable areas for the daily dog walk.

<sup>8</sup> Visitor Access Patterns on European Sites surrounding Whitehill and Bordon, East Hampshire. UE Associates. Available at: <http://www.whitehillbordon.com>

<sup>9</sup> Kennel Club 2011 survey of dog owners' attitudes to greater restrictions on existing access. More information from: [kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk](mailto:kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk)





Dog owners will drive twice a day to get to suitable off-lead greenspace if there isn't any close to home



On-lead requirements significantly reduce an area's attractiveness for dog walkers

## Discounting



Even where the shape and size of greenspace can physically accommodate a suitable circular walk, other qualitative factors can significantly reduce its ability to meet dog owners' needs, such as:

- too many other people using the same space, leading to conflict or a reduced level of enjoyment
- incompatible uses – eg frequently-used sports pitches
- on-lead restrictions
- concerns about personal and pet safety
- pre-existing ecological interest giving rise to restrictions on dogs

Consequently, the apparent amenity provided by a given area of greenspace, may need to be “discounted” to determine its practical suitability. While this concept of discounting is relevant to the design of any greenspace for walkers with dogs, it is formally enshrined in Natural England's requirements when greenspace is being provided as mitigation to prevent a net increase in disturbance to European Protected Sites (see Appendix A – Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace).

The following good design principles illustrate how to minimise the need for greenspace to be discounted in relation to walkers with dogs.

Natural England requires at least 8 hectares of suitable alternative natural greenspace for every 1,000 new residents.

KEY POINTS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
 <b>DO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider a wide range of greenspace guidance</li> <li>• Accommodate a circular walk to match locally-assessed needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide greenspace within 500 metres of new homes</li> </ul>
 <b>AVOID</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing only the minimum requirements for each criterion</li> <li>• Creating conflict by under provision of dog-friendly greenspace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forcing dog owners to drive to greenspace each day</li> </ul>

# GREENSPACE DESIGN

The design and layout of greenspace facilities (including green infrastructure, access corridors, and public open space) will greatly affect its attractiveness for dog owners.

Good design can positively accommodate off-lead exercising of dogs, in areas where this causes least conflict with other legitimate interests, such as cyclists, horse riders, people seeking to minimise contact with dogs, and areas with children's play equipment. The design and provision of dog-friendly facilities can also be very effective at guiding owners away from areas containing protected wildlife that may be adversely affected by dogs.

Dog-friendly greenspace and facilities will also be attractive to people without dogs. It is vital at the planning stage to convey that such areas are not for dog-owners' exclusive use, nor at the overall expense of other interests.

Good planning for dog owners allows informed choice and complementary management to benefit all interests.

## Safety

Most residents will avoid areas where they feel unsafe, even if they are attractive in many other ways. This is a particular issue for walkers with dogs as they need to exercise their pets at dawn, dusk and even in the dark during winter. General principles of designing inherently safe greenspaces always need to be applied, irrespective of other dog-friendly facilities.

## Lighting

Having some appropriate artificially-lit, dog-friendly routes will attract owners during winter and help to establish the habit of visiting the desired dog-friendly areas all year round. Greenspace around the edge of housing will often be the most

suitable for this, to prevent urbanisation of more natural areas, and the practicalities of installing and maintaining the lighting. While off-road commuter cycle routes through greenspace are often lit at night, they are usually not suitable for exercising dogs due to conflict with cyclists.

## Woodland and enclosed landscapes

As with people in general, some dog owners enjoy walking in more enclosed landscapes, such as mature woodland, which can also have a greater perceptual visitor carrying capacity, as fewer people seem to be present. However, some dog owners feel less safe in such areas.

Thus, to be most attractive, overall greenspace provision needs to provide choice and ensure that a circular dog walk can be completed in a largely open and perceptually safe landscape with clear open sight lines along pathways. This is vital if the new greenspace is designed to attract dog owners away from open landscapes, such as heathland.



*Greenspace needs to offer dog owners a variety of attractive, open and enclosed natural landscapes*

## Path surfacing

Greenspace will be most attractive to dog owners when it offers a variety of path surfaces, from short grass through to free-draining, all-weather surfaces. It is essential to have some circular routes that can be used year-round, in all weathers, without needing walking boots, as well as routes with a very informal, naturalistic feel. The best surface treatments are those that will also reflect the local landscape character and traditional path making techniques.

## Grass length in amenity areas

Variety in grass length is very important. Short mown grass is excellent for playing games with dogs, and allows fouling to be readily seen and removed. However, some dogs prefer to defecate in longer grass, and too much regularly mown grass will detract from an overall naturalistic feel. Mown areas are especially valuable close to entry points (where fouling is most likely) for ease of access by mowing contractors, and so owners can readily access places where games can be played with excited dogs. A mowing regime should also be developed to embrace differential mowing patterns that reduce cost and promote grassland biodiversity.

## Car parking

To be most attractive to dog owners in new developments, dog-friendly greenspace should be within a 500 metre walk from home. However, if the greenspace is wholly or partly designed for dog owners from further afield, or aimed at attracting them away from other sites such as sensitive areas for wildlife, then car parking is essential.

Car parking provision could make an area of greenspace very attractive to dog owners from outside the new development, especially if there is an under-provision of dog-friendly greenspace in the vicinity. If the greenspace becomes too popular, this could reduce its attractiveness for local residents, who may in turn then start driving to other areas, thereby undermining the original purpose of the greenspace. Very clear management aims for each greenspace area are thus essential to inform car parking provision. An integrated, area-wide car parking strategy is also essential, as off-site changes in car park management and charging by third parties could displace excessive numbers of dog owners onto greenspace within

new developments, or onto nearby sensitive sites for nature conservation.

Car parks must be set back from connecting roads to avoid accidents when excited dogs are getting out of cars. Car parks also need to directly abut the greenspace, so dog owners can access it without using a lead. While car parks need an open feel to be perceived as safe, dog owners will also be attracted by some shaded areas in the summer to keep their cars cool while parked.



*Car parks must allow direct access to greenspace without needing to use a lead*

The greenspace's purpose must also influence the charging policy for parking, and reflect the resources for any related enforcement. Free parking for dog walkers is essential to attract them away from other sites; however, this could make the sites too busy, or encourage all-day parking by commuters.

An annual permit system, with a nominal fee, can be used to attract regular dog owners. This can also be used to obtain contact details of site users for monitoring and engagement purposes. Alternatively, a duration limit (eg 4 hours maximum), can be imposed to minimise use by commuters.

## Information and signage

Clear on-site information is needed to ensure all greenspace users are aware of its dog-friendly purpose. Otherwise conflict can be created, or exacerbated, if it is not clear that off-lead access in such places is encouraged. Signage must also very clearly indicate the location of any multi-use facilities (eg cycleways), and other areas where leads are required or dogs excluded.

All signage and information must be welcoming and use positive phrasing to describe the required responsible behaviours in specific and measurable terms. “Keep dogs under close control” is meaningless; “Prevent your dog from approaching other people uninvited” is far better.



*Clear and positive on-site information reduces conflict*

As regular visitors are unlikely to look more than once at static on-site information, a canine community notice board with space for community events, lost pets, canine services and suppliers will attract dog owners back to on-site information, and generally foster greater engagement. This is especially important as peer pressure from other dog owners is the best way to influence dog owner behaviour<sup>10</sup>.

Communication with dog owners is best achieved using a variety of methods, including face-to-face contact, working with local vets and canine service providers, social media, websites and printed materials.

## Perimeter and boundary treatments

A dog's safety is of paramount importance to its owner. The fact that even the most well-trained dog can be startled into running across the path of an oncoming vehicle will be of concern. To be most attractive to dog owners, greenspace needs continuous secure boundaries of at least 1.2 metres in height against nearby roads and other dangers. Open fencing designs will enhance informal surveillance and retain a sense of

openness, but any openings or gaps must not allow small dogs or puppies to escape.

If such fencing obstructs existing routes for wildlife (eg badgers), consultation with the local council biodiversity officer and/or wildlife trust will allow the relevant dog-proof flaps, tunnels or gaps to be inserted in the boundary, as occurs when major roads are fenced-off.

Double, self-closing, wheelchair-accessible gates are needed at entry and exit points leading to car parks, roads and other dangers. Where an entry point is likely to have a high level of use, two or more separated entrances are essential, as conflict between dogs is most likely when forced together in enclosed spaces, such as gateways.



*Double, self-closing gates are essential at greenspace entry points from dangers such as busy roads and car parks*

## Access to water

Access to carefully chosen areas of clean water where dogs can splash, swim and rinse off muddy paws is desirable. Apart from this being a valuable amenity for dog owners, it can also keep dogs out of water features that contain sensitive wildlife, or where such access causes problems for other interests. Liaison with the Environment Agency will ensure any new features do not adversely affect water quality.

The attractiveness of water areas will also be enhanced by having a sloping and free-draining access point. This allows dogs to exit the water without getting muddy and also prevents bank erosion and downstream siltation.

<sup>10</sup> *Understanding the psychology of walkers with dogs: new approaches to better management. University of Portsmouth. Available at: [www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs)*





*Specially-designed access points attract dog owners away from more sensitive water features*

If clean water is not available on-site in the form of water features, then canine drinking fountains will attract dog owners, especially in the summer. Some designs need regular inspections and cleaning to avoid cumulative or intentional contamination. In London's Royal Parks, water fountains for people have been installed with lower level bowls for dogs.



*Drinking fountain for people and dogs*

A dog wash near greenspace exit points will also heighten the area's attractiveness, especially where pathways can be muddy. This can simply be a water tap with a small length of hose, situated on a free-draining surface.



*Dog wash at Worcester Woods Country Park*

## Seating

Dog owners will appreciate seating as much as visitors without dogs, with the design and materials chosen to reflect the desired degree of naturalness, maintenance and robustness. Seating is especially helpful along circular routes, and should be set back from path surfaces to avoid conflict with passers-by.

## Activity trails

Providing a series of jumps, tunnels, weaving poles and log walks along a given route will greatly attract dog owners to such areas, and encourage them to be more active with their dogs. This helps increase dog control and reduce human and canine obesity, by facilitating active play and fun training during walks. Such trails can also act as a social focal point for dog owners, further building a sense of community responsibility for the greenspace. Specific guidance is available from evaluated pilot projects<sup>11</sup>.



*Activity trails attract dog owners, helping them to have fun and get fit with their pets. Images © Lee Valley Regional Park Authority [www.visitlevalley.org.uk](http://www.visitlevalley.org.uk)*

<sup>11</sup> Dog activity trails: promoting fitness and fun with your best friend. *Journal of the Society of Companion Animal Studies*. Available from: [www.scas.org.uk](http://www.scas.org.uk) or [kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk](mailto:kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk)

## Fenced-in training areas

Few dog owners have access to safe, confined outdoor areas away from home where young dogs can be safety trained to have good off-lead recall. Such fenced-in areas within greenspace will be very attractive to dog owners and facilitate



Enclosed dog training areas are very popular and reduce conflict with other greenspace users

better off-lead control. An area of around 0.5 hectares is ideal, especially if it has short mown grass. The area can also serve as a focal point for wider engagement with dog owners. Local dog trainers have also been successfully approached to run informal sessions in such areas.

The perimeter boundary height need only be 1.0 metre high if this is simply internal fencing within the greenspace, but it would need to be higher if there was no other barrier between the training area and a nearby danger such as a road.

Only one entry point should be provided, so that owners can see the whole area perimeter is secure. Having two gates a few metres apart at the entry point is recommended in order to reduce the potential for conflict between excited dogs entering and exiting.

If there is car parking nearby, the training area may attract dog owners from further afield, especially if there is little other provision in the area. This may or may not be desirable. Either way, any such demand may need to be managed or additional areas provided. In Australia, separate fenced-in training areas for large and small dogs are provided to reduce conflict in popular locations.

KEY POINTS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
<p> <b>PROVIDE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A choice of open and enclosed landscapes</li> <li>• Free draining and naturalistic path surfaces</li> <li>• Car parking if the greenspace is not within walking distance</li> <li>• Clear information about off-lead access and desired behaviours</li> <li>• Separation from roads and other dangers</li> <li>• Seating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An appropriately lit route for use during winter</li> <li>• Variety in grass length</li> <li>• Access to clean water for swimming and drinking</li> <li>• Dog wash</li> <li>• Activity trail</li> <li>• Fenced-in training area</li> </ul>
<p> <b>AVOID</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating greenspace that feels unsafe</li> <li>• Providing car parking if this will attract too many dog owners from elsewhere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single, narrow entry points into greenspace</li> <li>• Blocking established routes for wildlife with fencing</li> </ul>





# MANAGEMENT OF FOULING

While treading in dog faeces is universally disliked, a balanced and considered approach to managing this issue is essential to ensure greenspace maintains its intended attractiveness to dog owners. This is especially so if it is designed to attract dog owners away from other sites where fouling, or increased use by off-lead dogs, would be more of a problem.

## A multifaceted approach

High levels of faeces on car parks, amenity grassland and path surfaces will displace dog owners, as well as other visitors, to other sites. Equally, a heavy-handed response to fouling can displace irresponsible owners to quieter sites with greater wildlife sensitivities. It can also make the environment feel less relaxed and welcoming for responsible dog owners too.

Thus, a balanced, costed and clear management approach needs to be designed-in at the planning stage to avoid needless conflict at a later stage. Once greenspace is established, ample supply of free dog bags and bins, and targeted, proportionate enforcement is usually the best approach.

## Dog bins

The provision of dog bins and free bags makes it easy for dog owners to do the right thing and pick up where this is required. If not provided on-site, bags can be made available in local outlets (especially vets) and overprinted with positive, locally-relevant messages.



*Bins must be located where dogs defecate, rather than in the car park for a contractor's convenience*

General litter bins can be used for dog waste to save money and reduce visual clutter.

Bins must be placed where they are easiest to fill by dog owners (that is, very close to where dogs defecate), and not located for the convenience of the contractors emptying them (for example in the car park). Bins need to be placed along routes used by dog owners, especially in the first few hundred metres from entry points and car parks. The places where faeces are not picked up, or filled bags left behind, give an accurate indication of where additional bins are needed.

Receptacles don't need to be dedicated dog bins – general litter bins can be used too. This can be a more cost-effective and less visually intrusive approach, although dual-use bins need to be clearly marked as such.

The expense of ongoing management and provision of bins needs to be factored into calculations for greenspace management costs. It is also socially and practically very difficult to remove a bin once it has been provided. For advice on the local costs of installing, maintaining and emptying dog bins, contact the local council's environmental health team in the first instance.



*Dual-use bins must be clearly marked*



## Flick it off the path zones

In some areas where the level of usage is comparatively low and nutrient enrichment is not a problem, an arguably greener approach to dog fouling has been adopted. Dog owners are asked to “flick it off the path”, rather than having to pick up if their dog fouls where people do not generally walk. This allows faeces to decompose naturally and reduces the environmental cost of transporting bagged dog waste to landfill or incineration.



A “flick it” approach in quieter areas can reduce the number of filled bags left behind

This approach must be used with care and monitored, as it is not suitable in all areas. Equally, having areas where it is not necessary to pick up can be very effective in attracting less responsible dog owners away from more sensitive sites.



Keeping only the paths clear of fouling, while allowing fouling elsewhere, can be a more effective approach in less intensively used areas

## Enforcement action

If enforcement is required, it must be very tightly focussed on persistent repeat offenders, rather than dog owners in general. The potential for enforcement action to displace the perpetrators to more sensitive sites must also be considered when assessing the overall merits of enforcement action.

KEY POINTS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
<p>✓ <b>PROVIDE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity about what is required and where</li> <li>• Long term funding for maintenance and emptying of bins</li> <li>• Bins where they are most convenient to fill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free disposal bags</li> <li>• Work with dog owners to foster peer pressure for compliance</li> </ul>
<p>✗ <b>AVOID</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locating bins only in car parks</li> <li>• Displacing dog owners to more sensitive areas due to enforcement action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing bins</li> <li>• A general campaign against fouling if only a few people are not picking up</li> </ul>

# ONGOING MANAGEMENT

The effectiveness of dog-friendly greenspace can be completely undermined without ongoing management that supports its purposes in perpetuity.

Apart from sufficient lifetime funding for site management, the following issues need to be addressed.

## Retention of primary purpose

With many interests competing for a finite amount of greenspace, amenity groups may seek to use dog-friendly greenspace in different ways over time. While such community engagement is a positive sign, very careful consideration is needed to ensure any new activities are not incompatible with achieving the greenspace's primary purpose (eg providing free-running exercise for dogs). Otherwise, conflict is likely to occur and the original management aims may be undermined as dog owners are displaced to more sensitive areas.

## Dog Control Orders (DCOs)

DCOs can be used to impose restrictions such as banning dogs from certain areas, requiring leads to be used, or faeces picked up. Local councils can then fine dog owners for non-compliance<sup>12</sup>. Imposition of these on greenspace can significantly reduce its attractiveness to dog owners, and so binding management agreements with councils may be needed to prevent DCOs displacing dog owners to other areas.



*Dog Control Orders can reduce greenspace's attractiveness to dog owners*

## Engaging the dog-owning community

Working with owners and local vets is the most effective way to influence dog walker behaviour. This can be instigated to promote wanted behaviours (eg taking more exercise or responsible behaviour on protected sites for wildlife), or to minimise unwanted behaviours (eg faeces being left on paths).



*The most enduring management approaches are developed by working with dog owners*

## Conservation grazing

Conservation grazing is increasingly seen as an effective and environmentally-friendly way to control vegetation. However, it can lead to conflict with greenspace users – particularly dog owners – if not introduced in a sensitive, measured and proportionate way that provides informed choice and no net loss of amenity for existing greenspace users.

<sup>12</sup> Dog Control Orders: Guidance on Sections 55 to 67 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. Available from: [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

Conflict arising from the introduction of any grazing animals can be especially acute with dog owners, because wider messages (eg in the Countryside Code) are for “dogs on leads around livestock”. Thus, in effect, the introduction of grazing reduces off-lead access, which is the single most important amenity for most dog owners. In addition, irrespective of lead use, up to 80% of dog owners will avoid greenspaces where there is livestock due to safety and other concerns<sup>13</sup>.



*Conservation grazing will lead to conflict if it imposes extensive bans on off-lead access with no alternative provision*

So while conservation grazing can be a legitimate and worthwhile approach for greenspace management, its potential to create conflict with dog owners, or displace them to more sensitive sites, must be addressed. Early engagement with dog owners on any such proposals, and clarity about the availability of nearby alternative areas for off-lead dog walking, will help to reduce conflict.



*With careful livestock selection and early dog owner engagement, conservation grazing can be successfully introduced*

If fencing allows only part of a site to be grazed at a given time, the ungrazed areas can retain their attractiveness for dog owners, providing they can be accessed without encountering livestock en-route from entry points, car parks etc. Also, there must always be accurate, up to date on-site information identifying the areas where grazing animals are not located.



*Accurate, up-to-date information about grazing reduces conflict and provides informed choice*

*Extract taken from: [www.malvern hills.org.uk](http://www.malvern hills.org.uk)*

Brighton and Hove Council have saved money and reduced conflict for visitors and graziers alike by training local dog walkers to be “lookers”, who keep an eye on the livestock and help other pet owners avoid conflict. [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk)

In the West Midlands, the Malvern Hills Conservators publish a weekly “Stockwatch” item in the local paper and on their website, so dog owners can avoid sheep with certainty if they want to enjoy a trouble-free, off-lead walk. [www.malvern hills.org.uk](http://www.malvern hills.org.uk)

<sup>13</sup> Kennel Club 2011 survey of dog owners’ attitudes to greater restrictions on existing access. More information from: [kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk](mailto:kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk)



## Welcome packs

Owners of new homes must have accurate and accessible information about dog-friendly facilities, restrictions and responsible behaviour from the day they move in. Providing such information to dog-owning house buyers prior to sale can also add value and be used as a selling point.

A welcome pack with greenspace information alongside details of local vets and other dog-friendly services and amenities will help new residents do the right thing from the very start.

Otherwise, lack of awareness can lead to behaviours and patterns of use being established which, while usually well-intentioned, may well reduce the effectiveness of the greenspace provided and heighten conflict with, for example, other residents and sensitive wildlife.

## Integrated management

Apart from the greenspace on their doorsteps, dog owners will also have a range of other access opportunities in the wider countryside, especially if they have access to a car.

What happens in the wider area can significantly reduce the effectiveness of dog-friendly design within a development. For example, increasing restrictions in one area could – intentionally or by default – displace large numbers of dog owners onto the greenspace within the new development, which may not be large enough to cope with the increased demand.

Consequently, it is vital that an integrated approach to managing and accommodating access for dog owners in the area is adopted by local access and land managers. This can initially be a contentious issue and so needs to be discussed at an early stage in the development planning process.

It is also essential that there is active, honest and open engagement with the local dog-owning community. Quite apart from this ensuring management proposals are equitable, well-informed and deliverable, it is the ethos and behaviour of the local dog-owning community as a whole that has the greatest practical influence on behaviour. It is thus essential to engage with and develop advocates within established networks, including dog training clubs and canine service providers, such as vets, groomers, pet shops and professional dog walkers.

An integrated approach will allow dog owners to make positive choices about where to go and what to do at different times of year, and ensure rangers and other site staff are working in a complementary way, and not simply displacing issues caused by poor management to other areas.



*Baseline and ongoing monitoring is essential for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of dog-friendly greenspace. © SIRC*

## Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation of greenspace is essential to optimise its effectiveness over time, especially if it is provided as statutory mitigation to enable development to take place. It is thus important to design a visitor behaviour monitoring protocol from the outset, especially so that baseline data can be meaningfully compared to changes over time.

Apart from absolute statistics on greenspace use (eg obtained through observational studies and electronic people counters), qualitative data is also useful to collect, such as why greenspace users come here, rather than somewhere else. If the greenspace is designed as mitigation to avoid additional pressure on protected sites for wildlife, it is also important for monitoring to take place on those sensitive sites too.

When assessing dog owner behaviour (eg on wildlife sites), it is vitally important to define precise measurable criteria, such as “dog kept on the path”, as opposed to “dog under control” which is imprecise and difficult to assess purely by observation.



At Danebury Hillfort in Hampshire<sup>14</sup>, site managers used fixed-point photography to establish a baseline level of dog fouling, plus attitudinal surveys of dog walkers, before management changes were introduced. These assessments were repeated 3 months later and showed that management changes had reduced fouling by 82%, eliminated attacks on livestock and better protected the most sensitive area for wildlife from off-lead access by dogs.

Because monitoring was designed into management changes from the start, the site staff were able to illustrate their success, and fine tune their new approach to make it even more effective.



KEY POINTS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
<p><b>✓ DO</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure continuity of management</li> <li>• Base management decisions on monitoring data</li> <li>• Develop an integrated approach to managing access with adjacent land and access managers</li> <li>• Provide ‘Welcome to your new home’ packs for dog owners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve dog owners in the management process</li> <li>• Establish baseline data before creating new greenspace</li> </ul>
<p><b>✗ AVOID</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive on-lead areas</li> <li>• Dog Control Orders displacing dog owners elsewhere</li> <li>• Knee jerk reactions to specific incidents</li> <li>• Introducing grazing without addressing the impact on dog owners</li> </ul>	

<sup>14</sup> Complete Danebury case study details at: [www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs)

## SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE NATURAL GREENSPACE: THE CONCEPT

While this planning guidance will reduce conflict and increase the marketability of any new development, its principles are particularly relevant to the design of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

SANG is a concept developed by Natural England that provides a mitigation framework to help developers and planning authorities provide sufficient greenspace, to ensure that the occupation of new homes by dog owners will not be detrimental to the flora and fauna in surrounding areas designated under one (or both) of two legally-binding European Directives.

The 1979 Birds Directive gave rise to Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for migratory and vulnerable bird species. The 1992 Habitats Directive established Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to similarly protect areas of land that are important for wildlife other than birds.

Provision of SANG is complemented by Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM), to ensure they continue to fulfil their purposes throughout the lifetime of the new development.

Well-designed and managed SANGs aim to attract dog owners away from sensitive sites for wildlife. This approach of positive provision is now seen as preferable, compared to traditional measures of trying to restrict dog owner access to more sensitive sites solely by restrictive or enforcement measures as, in practice, these are difficult to enforce and unlikely to provide sufficient mitigation against adverse impacts.



Brand new SANG like Rook's Nest Wood are very quickly colonised by dog walkers because they meet their needs. Nest Wood near Wokingham, Berkshire.

It is important to note that SANG is designed as mitigation for added visitor pressure arising from additional housing; it is not designed to mitigate for established visitors to SPAs and SACs. Indeed, SANGs could become ineffective if they attract more dog owners than they were designed for.

The Revised Whitehill & Bordon Masterplan 2012<sup>15</sup> is using SANG to ensure new housing has no adverse effect on nearby protected wildlife.

This publication complements Natural England's SANG detailed design guidance<sup>16</sup>; both documents need to be read and applied in conjunction with each other.

<sup>15</sup> Available at: [www.whitehillbordon.com](http://www.whitehillbordon.com)

<sup>16</sup> For the most up-to-date information on the creation and management of SANG contact your local Natural England office.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## **Whitehill & Bordon Eco-town**

Extensive on-line evidence base, policies and plans including the 2012 Revised Master Plan and 2011 Green Infrastructure Strategy:  
[www.whitehillbordon.com/the-library](http://www.whitehillbordon.com/the-library)

## **Walkers with dogs**

### ***New approaches to managing dogs in the countryside.***

Behavioural research reports and practical management advice:  
[www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs)

### ***Managing dogs in the wood***

Practical good practice advice and case studies for managing walkers with dogs in any environment: [www.forestry.gov.uk/england-dogs](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-dogs)

### ***Dogs, access and nature conservation***

Summary of evidence on interactions between dogs and wildlife. English Nature Research Report 649 (2005): [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

### ***People and dogs in the outdoors***

Summarises the use of behavioural psychology to influence dog walker behaviour, including UK-wide case studies. Research report for Cairngorms National Park Authority: [www.cairngorms.co.uk](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk)

## **Housing design**

### ***Four Legs // Four Walls.***

Detailed guidance on pet-friendly contemporary house design in Australia – many of the principles are also applicable to the United Kingdom:  
Email: [steve@sjacm.co.uk](mailto:steve@sjacm.co.uk)





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