



HAMPSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE



SELECT COMMITTEE - VISITORS WITH DOGS

September 2022



Hampshire
County Council



Purpose of Presentation

- Highlight the increase in ‘Visitors with Dogs’ using our Countryside Estate.
- Issues resulting from increasing numbers of Dogs using our Countryside Estate
- Benefits to health and wellbeing
- Seek support for a proactive approach to influencing behaviours of visitors with dogs.



 **HAMPSHIRE**
COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE



Level of use of our Countryside Estate

- The Countryside Service manages a significant number of Parks, open spaces, National and Local Nature Reserves and wider landscape access via the Public Rights of Way network.
- And we receive a large number of visitors!
- Visitor Numbers to our Country Parks are estimated to be over 2.5m each year.
- Users to our sites and rights of way network are harder to measure - Data produced by Natural England in 2015/16 states that there was around 34 million visits taken in the Hampshire countryside using a footpath/cycle routes.



Growth in Visitors with Dogs

The population of dogs kept as pets in the United Kingdom (UK) was estimated at 13 million in 2020/21, which constitutes a marked increase from a decade earlier in 2010/11, when the dog population in the UK was around 7.6 million.

As the population of dogs grew in the United Kingdom over the last decade, so did the share of dog-owning households in the UK. Between 2019/20 and 2021/22, the share of UK households owning a pet dog jumped from 23 percent to around 34 percent.

This sudden rise has increased the numbers of visitors with dogs on our estate and highlighted the need to have a more focused approach to this user group.



Issues that we are seeing:

In addition to a general growth in visitor numbers, we have seen:

- Increased complaints about dogs, disturbing other users (e.g. picnickers or young families).
- A general lack of understanding of desired dog behaviours in public spaces.
- An increase in not picking up of Dog Fouling.
- Lack of understanding of Wildlife Disturbance and consequences of dogs off lead.
- Cattle and Sheep attacks on our grazed habitats (e.g Butser Hill - sheep attacks, Manor Farm – dog out of control got into livestock shed)
- Growth in Commercial Dog walkers on our Countryside estate



The wellbeing benefits of walking your dog

- Dog walkers account for half of all visits to the UK's outdoors (approximately 16m visits), with many passionate about walking their pets in a safe and responsible way in forests, along coastlines, and through the countryside.
- The Government recognises that dog ownership provides key health benefits by promoting active and healthy lifestyles, thus reducing the burden on the NHS.
- In addition to helping to alleviate stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness, there are:
 - Benefits that come from regularly exercising with your dog.
 - Daily walks outdoors boost physical and emotional wellbeing,
 - Going for a dog walk also increases social interaction within your community.
 - Dogs can help with confidence too, by being by your side during these social interactions, which can be a source of anxiety for some.
- In summary, owning and regularly walking a dog can benefit wellbeing



Previous Works delivered in partnership with the Kennel Club

- Visitors with Dogs have been recognised as one of our most regular users for some time. Since 2005 HCC Countryside Service has worked in partnership with 'The Kennel Club' and others, carrying out research and producing guidance to assist the public, private landowners and land managers in minimising the impact of dogs in the countryside.
- The service also takes an active role in many dog walking groups such as The New Forest dogs forum.



Taking the lead managing walkers with dogs on your site

Introduction In 2005 a chance meeting between officers at Hampshire County Council, the Kennel Club and the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) was the beginning of a partnership to explore new approaches to the management of walkers with dogs in the countryside.

Several research reports and pilot projects later and a lot has been learnt. This guidance aims to bring together the key findings of our research and present a few of the projects that Hampshire County Council has implemented by harnessing this new knowledge and understanding.

Who is it for?

This good practice guide is aimed at land managers in the public sector who have to balance the need to feed livestock, conserve and enhance habitats whilst enabling the public to explore and enjoy the countryside. It aims to provide you with some thoughts and ideas that you might like to try on your own sites.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the Hampshire County Council officers who have assisted with this and to Stephen Jenkinson, the Kennel Club Access Advisor. More information on all this work is available at www.hants.gov.uk/dogs

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are causing problems
or nature reserve.
is us a better
do what they do.
reduce problems on
r dogs to:

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Roles and Responsibilities

- **The Countryside Service** have a responsibility when providing a space for people, to ensure that it is Safe, Compliant and Appropriate, that visitors behave in a reasonable and responsible manner and that that they are not put at risk while doing so.
- **District, Borough and Unitary Authorities** are responsible for the provision of dog wardens and of any legal orders to restrict use (PSPO - Public Space Protection Orders / CPO - Community Protection Orders)
- The **Police** are responsible for issues that are linked with a dangerous or out of control dog, where a person is injured.



Summary of Position

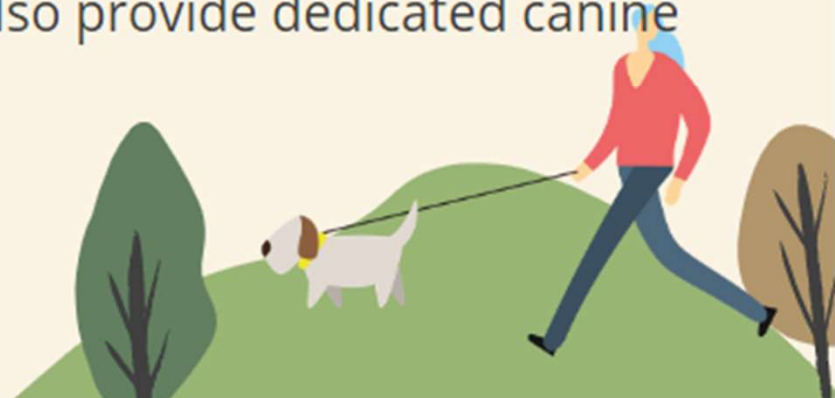
- During the Pandemic we have seen exponential growth in dog ownership with many of these owners unfamiliar with visiting open spaces with or without dogs.
- We are seeing an increase in user conflict, poor behavioural traits and disturbance of habitats and wildlife.
- As the number of visitors to our countryside estate increases, the ability to manage the needs of all users becomes challenging.
- We will be welcoming to all users (including Visitors with Dogs) and will seek to address areas of conflict with clear guidance for staff and visitors.
- This guidance will ensure that we have a series of **behaviours that are requested of users** and will **encourage joint messaging and approach across other organisations and local authorities**.
- Seek to implement a range of measures to ensure that we are effective and engage well with partners and users.

	HCS Work to date	The proposed next phase
Dog walking code	Dog walking in the Hampshire Countryside webpage included a Dog Walking code based on the Countryside Code	Producing a shorter more actionable voluntary set of behaviours for 'Visitors with Dogs' Promotion via leaflets, presentations and a new Coast and Country Webpage facilitated by Bird Aware Solent and all Partners
Website	Countryside canines	Website refresh and re brand by Bird Aware Solent's Coast and Country Canines initiative.
Staffing resource	No dedicated role for Dog Initiatives	This area of work will be led by a member of the HCS SMT, with time allocation from an existing HCS member of staff to ensure a consistent approach is adopted. In addition, by working in partnership with the Bird Aware Solent team we have secured a temporary additional resource to develop and promote the code and behaviours and the associated web page.
Training	Sporadic training	A programme of training for staff, landowners and partners organisations. Working with dog trainers to promote consistent messaging.
Petiquette	A Petiquette Code has been developed to advise visitors with dogs how to use our cafe's and seated eating areas.	Consistent and coherent messaging for all to be rolled out at all HCS food premises
Commercial dog walkers	No specific guidance for this audience - no national guidance to draw from	Production of a voluntary charter that businesses can sign up to, promising to behave responsibly in return for certain benefits. Run by Bird aware Solent

DOG WALKING CODE

Key Statements

- HCC welcomes responsible dog owners to its coast and countryside. We positively encourage you to walk your dogs in a way that will ensure our spaces remain a pleasant environment for you, your dog and the many families and other visitors that our coast and countryside receive.
- Much of our land is dedicated to nature and species conservation and as such we ask you to respect any necessary restrictions. Please follow the instructions on site signage and use the QR code to check any new restrictions for access
- In addition to our parks and other natural areas we also provide dedicated canine facilities to enhance your experience.



DOG WALKING CODE STATEMENTS

Behavior/Action and what that means

- **Keep your dog under effective control to make sure it stays away from wildlife, livestock, horses and other people unless invited.**

You must: Always keep your dog on a lead or in sight and be confident your dog will return on command. Make sure your dog does not stray from the path or area where you have right of access

- **Keep you and your dog safe around livestock. Never let your dog approach or chase wildlife or livestock.**

You must: Give wild animals, livestock and horses plenty of space. It is good practice wherever you are to keep your dog on a lead around livestock.

- **Bag and bin your dog poo - any public waste bin will do**

You must: Always clean up your dog's poo because it can cause illness in people, livestock and wildlife.

- **Share the Space. Follow local signs and keep to marked paths**

You must: Be considerate to those living in, working in and enjoying the countryside and always check local signs as signs will tell you about any local restrictions.

- **We expect users of Public Rights of Way to follow the Countryside Code and our core behaviours**

You must: ensure that you and your dog keep to the public footpath and do not trespass into nearby properties or land.

DEVELOPING A COMMERCIAL DOG WALKERS CHARTER FOR OUR COUNTRY PARKS



The commercial dog walkers charter will be a voluntary charter that businesses can sign up to, promising to behave responsibly in return for certain benefits. Similar schemes have been used effectively in several locations in the UK, including the New Forest and Edinburgh, and have been praised by industry leaders such as the Kennel Club.

The Charter will have 5 main points, businesses must:

1. Have insurance
2. Walk a manageable number of dogs at once and have a lead for each one
3. Transport dogs safely and use a lead when exiting vehicles
4. Don't disturb wildlife or other people
5. Always pick up after dogs and dispose of waste responsibly

We will be reviewing car parking charge options.

As an incentive, businesses may be able to advertise on the Coast and Country Canines site, dog owners will then be able to use this directory to find a participating dog walker.

Businesses will also receive a newsletter with dog behaviour advice, news, places to walk or where restrictions may be in place and articles by professionals.

This will:

- reduce the number of dogs walked at once
- increase control and safety
- reduce disturbance of wildlife and other visitors
- reduce fouling
- be safer for dogs
- mean fewer dogs left frustrated or under stimulated
- reduce uninsured businesses
- help owners find a legitimate responsible dog walker
- help businesses with advertising, training and guidance on how to run a dog walking business and where to walk



PETIQUETTE

HCC welcomes responsible dog owners to its coast and countryside. This includes its indoor facilities such as eating establishments.

In order to maintain, clean and welcoming facilities a petiquette has been established.

We just ask some simple 'petiquette' from our lovely 4 legged friends:

- your dog is clean and flea free. Muddy paws like muddy shoes should be wiped
- your dog is kept on a lead in indoor areas
- your dog is house trained and trained to sit
- you always clean up after your dog
- your dog doesn't disturb others by barking or jumping up
- you never leave your dog unattended or unsupervised



WEBSITE REFRESH



The Coast and Country Canines website will be a key part of our outreach and support to dog owners, with our aim being to change their behaviour in order to reduce wildlife disturbance. Our messaging will focus on how to make walks enjoyable and safe for dogs and owners, while being aware of and protecting wildlife and the environment. The website will be inviting, genuine and dog focused, both visually and in the content.

What will the website provide dog owners?

- Interactive map of where to walk
- Feature suggested walking routes
- Training guides
- Education on safer and more engaging ways to walk
- Participating professionals such as dog walkers and trainers
- Dog friendly businesses
- Lost and found dogs page
- Other dog related content such as articles and podcasts
- Community of likeminded dog owners



How will the website achieve our aims?

- Highlight suitable walking areas rather than sensitive ones
- Highlight responsible behaviours
- Enable owners to train those responsible behaviours
- Bring industry professionals and businesses on board
- Build a community of dog owners who feel included and empowered - and have a sense of ownerships and responsibility to shared natural spaces



DEDICATED DOG FACILITIES

In addition to our parks and other natural areas, we also provide dedicated facilities to enhance your experience

What do we offer?

Dog washes - available at Queen Elizabeth Country Park, River Hamble Country Park, Royal Victoria Country Park

Dog activity areas - rentable - available at Queen Elizabeth Country Park, (costs £3 per half hour), River Hamble Country Park (available to book between the hours of 10.30 - 15.30 on Saturdays and Sundays)

Dog activity areas - available at River Hamble Country Park - free unless booked

Dog activity course - free - available at Queen Elizabeth Country Park,

We will identify locations within the wider countryside estate that can be used for dedicated dog facilities to complement our already wide offer.



In Conclusion

We seek support for:

- The development of a proactive approach to our management of Visitors with dogs on our Countryside Estate and wider.
- Working in partnership with other land managers to produce consistent messaging.
- The adoption of our 'Dog Walking Code'
- The development of a 'Commercial Dog Walking Charter'
- The adoption of our 'Petiquette' approach





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STAFF PROCEDURES



1. ADVISE

Advised that this behaviour is not acceptable on the site and asked to stop - offer advice, leaflet and wider and signposting

2. WARN

Warn that this behaviour is against our policy, and will be escalated to Local Dog Warden



3. ESCALATE

Escalate to local dog warden, Police or appropriate body according to type of incident, with any details gathered



4. IF USE AND BEHAVIOUR PERSISTS

If use and behaviour persists - work with appropriate organisations to deliver further action.



STAFF TRAINING

Staff training with a focus on how to be safe around dogs and how to approach and talk to dog owners in a productive way.

Using videos of stress signals and other examples of dog behaviour, staff will learn to identify key behavioural indications that dogs give and how to interpret them. Then we move onto putting this into practise and how to approach dogs in a safe way and what to do in emergencies such as finding a lost dog.

Training can be expanded to include:

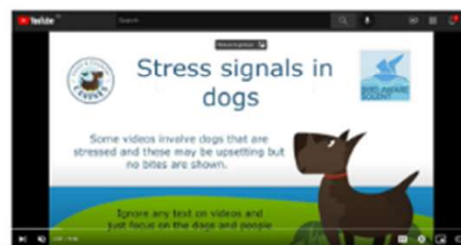
- Starting conversations with dog owners
- How to have difficult conversations
- How dog walkers can be more responsible
- Training and engagement tips to give dog walkers
- What is Coast and Country Canines and how could it help?
- How dog walkers can help

and for different audiences such as:

- Land owners and farmers
- Volunteers
- Partnering organisations
- Other industry professionals - dog trainers, vets, commercial dog walkers

Training can be over teams/zoom or in person, tailored to fit the audience and we have plenty of accompanying resources such as videos and training guides.

Video discussion



Approaching dogs



Ask the owner? Yes, but also use your own judgement

Don't feel like you have to – talking and taking an interest can be just as effective

Don't distract service dogs

Approaching dogs

- Let them come to you
- Let them explore/sniff and offer a hand
- Don't crouch or loom over
- Don't stare
- Move away if needed
- **Enthusiasm and Consent**

