

PEOPLE AND DOGS IN PARKS PLAN SEEK ENDORSEMENT FOR PUBLIC EXHIBITION

Report Author: Coordinator Open Space Strategy and Planning

Responsible Officer: Director Planning & Sustainable Futures

Ward(s) affected: All Wards;

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

Yarra Ranges provides a variety of public open spaces, which accommodate numerous functions including dog off-leash areas. Dog off-leash areas offer flexible opportunities for physical activity, social connections and practising of responsible dog ownership. Providing dog off-leash areas can at times present challenges. These include conflicting uses of public open space, issues with dog and owner behaviour, health and amenity concerns such as animal waste, and the financial burden on Council to build, maintain, and renew a network of such facilities. Council has not previously had a plan governing these spaces.

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan 2025 responds to these opportunities and issues. It outlines standards for the provision, development, and management of dog off-leash areas across the municipality over the next 10 years. The draft Plan is informed by industry practice and extensive community input, specific to a Yarra Ranges' context.

The draft Plan establishes principles for dog off-leash areas to inform specific locations and a hierarchy (Local or District level) for each dog off-leash area. It also considers where fully enclosed sites may be provided. The Plan includes a preliminary list of where Local, District or District fully enclosed areas are proposed.

Initial community engagement was undertaken between 11 July – 13 August 2024, to understand issues and opportunities concerning dog off-leash areas in the municipality to assist in shaping the draft plan. It is proposed that the community be further consulted on the principles, the level of service outlined in the Plan, and the proposed locations and hierarchy for each dog off-leash area.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Approves the release of the draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan for community engagement.***
- 2. Notes that community engagement findings will be presented to a future Council Meeting.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

At the 22 November 2022 Council Meeting, Council endorsed the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026 (DAMP). The report highlighted the development of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan as a supporting activity in achieving the social, health and wellbeing objectives of the DAMP.

DISCUSSION

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan and seek Council endorsement to commence community engagement on the Plan.

Background

Councils have legislative obligations regarding domestic animals. These obligations are accompanied by powers to create Council Orders, including Orders relating to management, safety and amenity. Councils are also legislatively required to prepare a domestic animal management plan every four years.

Plans and studies such as the Domestic Animal Management Plan have highlighted the value that the community places on companion animals such as dogs. They also identify that dog ownership provides a range of health and wellbeing benefits. This is reinforced by Yarra Ranges having nearly 32,000 registered dogs, the highest in Greater Melbourne.

In addition to providing a community safety service, Council also provides recreation and open space to residents and visitors. Dog off-leash areas in public open space are a vehicle to maximise the benefits arising from dog ownership, such as:

- Access to public open space by owners and dogs, particularly where private open space is limited.
- Physical activity for owners and dogs.
- Social connection and gathering for owners and dogs.

- Practising of responsible dog ownership.
- Aiding the management of multiple functions and uses of public open space.
- Providing a focal point for community engagement and education.

Council currently provides 23 dog off-leash areas, however there is no guidance or plan that sets agreed standards for their distribution, placement, design and management. Many existing dog off-leash areas occupy significant portions of the park leading to conflict between users, which is often exacerbated by a lack of definition of the space and lack of supporting infrastructure.

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan 2025 has been developed to address this gap in current guidance. It applies to existing and future dog off-leash areas owned or managed by Council. It outlines standards for the provision, development and management of dog off-leash areas for the next 10 years and aims to achieve a balance between the diverse uses of open spaces by all Yarra Ranges residents and visitors, catering to both dog owners and non-dog owners.

The draft Plan has been informed by research, benchmarking and community engagement, which enables Council to address community views whilst using an evidence-based approach where competing priorities emerge.

Issues

Types of dog off-leash areas

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan proposes a hierarchy for dog off-leash areas, and the level of service that can be expected. This hierarchy and level of service is aligned to the settings in Council's adopted Recreation and Open Space Strategy (ROSS) which is currently under review. Dog off-leash areas will be varied in their size and level of service, according to local opportunities and need. The level of service itself may also be varied as required by demand, availability of public open space, budget or other factors.

In addition to consistency with the ROSS, the Plan proposes improvements to dog off-leash areas in a manner that is financially sustainable for Council. This approach guides decision making and will help to respond to community enquiries for improvements to parks.

Council's existing dog off-leash areas are maintained and monitored within existing resource allocations. Where new or improved parks are introduced, additional funding is likely to be required for their construction and operation.

Based on the level of service proposed in the draft Plan, the potential locations for Local, District and fully enclosed dog off-leash areas are outlined below. However, these are subject to change, based on detailed site assessments and community feedback.

The hierarchy of dog off-leash areas includes:

Local-level dog off-leash areas

These areas service a smaller catchment and have lower levels of infrastructure such as landscaping, natural shade and seating. Proposed locations for Local-level parks are:

- Don Road Recreation Reserve, Healesville
- Johns Hill Lookout Reserve, Kallista
- Lakeview Reserve, Lilydale
- Mooroolbark Retarding Basin, Mooroolbark
- Mount Evelyn Aqueduct Trail Reserve, Mount Evelyn
- Mount Morton Reserve, Belgrave South
- Pembroke Retarding Basin, Mooroolbark
- Richards Reserve, Montrose
- Seville Recreation Reserve, Seville
- Yarra Glen Showgrounds, Yarra Glen.

District-level dog off-leash areas

These parks service a larger catchment and encourage longer stays. They may be co-located with other uses or functions, to leverage existing reserve infrastructure such as rubbish bins, toilets and car parking, rather than providing this infrastructure only for the dog off-leash area.

They may include more features than Local-level sites, such as internal paths, landscaping, shade, drinking water, and equipment (informal such as mounds, or formal agility equipment). They may also include trunk infrastructure, such as water connections and drainage to drinking fountains, and optional features such as lighting.

Proposed locations for District-level areas are:

- Belgrave Lake Park, Belgrave
- Coronation Park, Healesville
- Elizabeth Bridge Reserve, Kilsyth
- Kalorama Memorial Reserve, Kalorama
- Kimberley Reserve, Chirnside Park
- Lillydale Lake, Lilydale

- Margaret Lewis Reserve, Coldstream
- Wesburn Park, Wesburn.

Fully enclosed dog off-leash areas

During consultation, the community expressed a strong desire to see more fully enclosed (fenced) sites. Whilst fully enclosing a site presents additional costs and challenges, they are highly valued by the community and have been successfully trialled at Kimberley Reserve, Chirnside Park.

These areas may also provide other benefits such as better articulating the boundaries of the space and providing dog training progression opportunities.

In balancing community demand with feasibility and the viability of fully enclosing spaces, selected sites are proposed to be fully enclosed: two in the Urban areas of the municipality, and one in each in the Hills, Valley and Upper Yarra areas. The proposed locations for fully enclosed sites are:

- Belgrave Lake Park, Belgrave
- Coronation Park, Healesville
- Elizabeth Bridge Reserve, Kilsyth
- Kimberley Reserve, Chirnside Park
- Wesburn Park*, Wesburn.

*A partial fence only is proposed for Wesburn Park, due to clearance required to the existing helipad on the site.

Part or full enclosure of other sites may also be warranted due to proximity to hazards, or other incompatible land uses and functions (such as environmental sensitivity).

Sites requiring review

Several existing dog off-leash sites in the municipality are within proximity to each other and may be servicing similar catchments. Therefore, it is proposed to review the need and utilisation of these sites, and where there is low demand consider disestablishing dog off-leash areas. Please refer to Attachment 3 – Preliminary Site Assessment.

Existing Gaps

There may be some parts of the municipality that are currently not served well or at all by dog off-leash areas. Consideration will be given to improving provision in under-served areas where there is demonstrated need and availability of suitable public open space.

However, comments made by community during consultation suggested that improvements to existing dog off-leash areas should be prioritised above creation of new spaces.

Community Consultation Feedback

The development of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan commenced in 2019, with an independent study commissioned to inform the Plan. However, the project was subsequently deferred as other priorities and initiatives took precedence. In resuming the project, the community was re-engaged in mid-2024, with feedback used to inform this draft Plan.

The primary theme arising from initial consultation undertaken in 2024 was whether Council should offer fully enclosed or fenced dog off-leash areas (occasionally referred to as dog parks or destination spaces).

Council's first trial site was established in 2023, with a fully enclosed dog off-leash area at Kimberley Reserve in Chirnside Park. It has been very well received by the local community as well as residents elsewhere in the municipality seeking similar opportunities closer to home. However, fully enclosing the area has, at times, led to inappropriate use. Common issues include unsupervised dogs and children, overcrowding, and reliance on the enclosure in place of effective dog control. This requires Council to now proactively patrol this site on a frequent basis.

Fully enclosed dog off-leash areas have not been previously provided by Council due to their increased capital and operating needs and reported increases in inappropriate use of the spaces.

However, given the volume of requests from dog off-leash area users and non-dog owners alike seeking fully enclosed spaces, it is reasonable for Council to explore their viability. Should Council decide to provide fully enclosed spaces, a preferred minimum area of 0.5 hectares should be adopted in alignment with industry standards. This benchmark has been established to address issues associated with smaller enclosed sites, which have been linked to increased incidents of conflict and aggression among dogs due to insufficient space.

Options considered

Option 1: Release the draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan for public exhibition.

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan aggregates community feedback, industry practice, and research into a Plan that provides a vision, principles and standards for dog off-leash areas in Yarra Ranges. It provides a tool to assess and recommend efficiencies and improvements in the network.

The draft Plan also explores issues and opportunities in relation to the provision of fully enclosed dog off-leash areas, which has been strongly supported by community. The draft Plan allows for fully enclosed spaces where required to manage risk (i.e. proximity to hazards or incompatible uses). However, given strong community demand for fully enclosed sites, there is the potential for Council to also consider providing fully enclosed dog off-leash areas to other sites where risk is not the only factor. This level

of service would respond to community demand, enhances these spaces, and mirrors provision in several neighbouring municipalities. Fully enclosed spaces are associated with increased capital, maintenance and renewal requirements, and possible increase in patrols by Community Safety in these areas.

Option 2: Do not proceed with a People and Dogs in Parks Plan.

The absence of a plan for dog off-leash areas in Yarra Ranges has led to inconsistent provision, and uncertainty for community and Council alike regarding where off-leash areas should be located and what amenities they should include. The People and Dogs in Parks Plan has been keenly anticipated by the community to provide greater certainty in response to their requests for enhanced dog off-leash area provision.

There has also been an absence of a prioritised pipeline of dog-off leash area improvements. This has created inconsistency in delivery of capital projects and missed opportunities concerning grant funding for dog off-leash areas.

Furthermore, the preparation of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan was identified as an action of the Yarra Ranges Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026. Therefore, this option is not recommended.

Recommended option and justification

Option 1 is recommended, as it balances community demand with feasibility and viability considerations. It is likely to be more publicly favourable with some community representatives advocating to Councillors for this model. However, it requires higher capital, operating and renewal costs. There are also heightened health and safety risks associated with fully enclosed sites, arising from unsupervised dogs and children, overcrowding, and lack of effective control. Therefore, this option should be considered in the context of additional operating resource requirements, outlined in the Financial Analysis.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Operating and Capital Cost of Implementing the People and Dogs in Parks Plan

Council's existing dog off-leash areas are maintained and monitored within existing resource allocations. Where new or improved parks are introduced, additional funding is likely to be required for their construction and operation.

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan recommends a range of actions to implement the Plan. Most of the actions do not include physical works and therefore can be undertaken within existing operational budget.

These actions include review of the dog off-leash area network against proposed levels of service, and subsequent preparation of a prioritised list of site-specific projects. A preliminary, high-level assessment has been undertaken and is included as Attachment 3. This assessment will be used as an initial discussion tool with community. Projects arising from a detailed assessment would need capital funding to deliver and may include new, upgrade, review or decommissioning of dog off-leash areas.

Capital costs

If Council adopts the level of service proposed in the current draft, the total capital cost for full implementation is estimated at \$4.9 million. Delivery may be staged over the ten-year life of the Plan, with flexibility to adjust the pace based on available funding.

Currently, these projects are unfunded and will be considered during annual Council Budget reviews. Where projects are prioritised, funding is expected to come primarily from Public Open Space Funds (POSF). In wards with limited POSF, alternative sources such as rates will be required. Regardless of POSF availability, all projects will be submitted to external funding programs where they align strongly with the funding criteria.

The cost of capital renewal of existing assets is not included in the above estimate. However, the draft Plan includes an action to assess these costs based on the adopted level of service, with renewal projects to be considered in future budget reviews.

Operating costs

When a dog off-leash area is upgraded to a higher level of service (i.e. from Local-level to District-level), an increase in maintenance costs is expected. The estimated additional cost is approximately \$18,000 per site per year.

Fully enclosed dog off-leash areas incur further capital and operational expenses beyond those mentioned above. Although it is difficult to assign a fixed cost to ongoing education, engagement and enforcement activities, it is anticipated that 1EFT would be sufficient to support these functions across the proposed new fully-enclosed sites. This resource would also help meet community expectations for proactive monitoring of other sites, including non-enclosed dog off-leash areas, general public open space, and high-attendance tourist locations.

Fully enclosed sites also require more intensive maintenance, with costs estimated at \$20,000 per site per year. If all proposed projects are delivered by the end of the Plan's 10-year timeframe, the total additional annual maintenance cost is expected to be approximately \$208,000 per year across the network (unindexed). This estimate is based on the assumption that the draft Plan is adopted, and projects are implemented according to the preliminary site assessment.

The cost of providing dog waste bag dispensers is excluded. Whilst provision of dog waste bag dispensers is frequently requested by the community, there is mixed feedback regarding their effectiveness. There is a significant cost associated with maintaining, checking and replenishing bags, of approximately \$15,000 per site, per year. This cost has been reduced at Belgrave Lake Park where checking and replenishing of bags is undertaken by community volunteers, however this is unique and reliant on the commitment of individuals and can shift back to Council if there is a change in personnel.

All figures outlined in the Financial Analysis are benchmarked costs and are subject to change.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

Yarra Ranges Council Plan 2021-2025 (under review)

The development of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan is related to a major initiative of the Council Plan:

- Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places: Quality facilities and infrastructure meets current and future needs. Places are well planned and are hubs of activity that foster wellbeing, creativity and innovation.

The draft Plan supports the aim to activate our community spaces and provide a variety of recreational opportunities. It outlines an infrastructure response that meets current and future community need, supporting wellbeing.

Yarra Ranges Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026

The Domestic Animal Management Plan provides Council and the community with a framework for identifying and addressing matters associated with the management and wellbeing of cats and dogs.

With respect to dogs and people in parks, the current DAMP identifies that:

- There is a need to recognise dog owners and their dogs as legitimate users of open space.
- Local government authorities face significant challenges in terms of dog owner non-compliance with on and off-leash regulations, as well as in areas where dogs are prohibited. These challenges have been corroborated by community feedback and Council officer observations.
- Planning for off-leash areas needs to be consistent with space allocated in a defined catchment or on demand.

The development of the draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan is an action of the current DAMP.

Yarra Ranges Recreation and Open Space Strategy 2013-2023 (under review)

The Recreation and Open Space Strategy (ROSS) sets out directions for creating a healthy and active community and environment. It provides a framework for managing and improving sport and recreation facilities, parks, community spaces and recreation services, including the provision of dog off-leash areas.

The Strategy is currently under review and will include details of service levels across the municipality, the supply of public open space and the principles for decisions on how public open space is used. The People and Dogs in Parks Plan is a key strategic document that sits under the overarching Open Space Strategy.

Other relevant Yarra Ranges strategies and policies include but are not limited to:

- Asset Plan 2022-2032 (under review)

- Active Recreation Plan 2023
- Nature Plan 2024-2034
- Health and Wellbeing Plan (currently in development)
- Disability Action Plan (currently in development).

RELEVANT LAW

Whilst there is no legislative requirement for local government authorities to provide dog off-leash areas, once a council opts to provide this service there is legislative and statutory context that applies.

In addition to requiring councils to prepare domestic animal management plans, the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* permits councils to establish local laws and orders concerning domestic animals such as dogs. The Council Order, amongst other things, sets out dog owner responsibilities including within public spaces such as dog off-leash areas. The *Local Government Act 2020* also confers powers to authorised officers to administer and/or enforce legislation.

In accordance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, a gender impact assessment has been completed. This process has enabled Council officers to determine how use of these spaces by community members is influenced by gender and any other intersecting aspects of their identity. The needs of diverse users have been incorporated into the level of service and design guidelines in the draft Plan, to better support the use of public open space where dog off-leash areas are provided.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan will initiate improvements to the network of dog off-leash areas. Given the location of some of these areas at Regional-level sites and tourist destinations, there are opportunities to enhance the current visitor offering and experience. Additionally, fit-for-purpose sites encourage residents to stay within the municipality, rather than travelling outside to other dog off-leash areas as is currently reported by the community. The draft Plan represents a unique opportunity to maximise economic activity and expenditure by both local and visiting communities, supporting Council in meeting its economic development objectives.

Open spaces near street-based activity centres may benefit from dog users visiting and making discretionary spends as part of the walk and exercise outing, however internal malls prevent pets and do not offer any complementary economic value.

Capital and operating expenditure has been identified as enabling mechanisms to implement the draft Plan. Construction, maintenance and management activities are expected to generate supplementary economic benefits through procurement of labour and materials.

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan also supports a wellbeing economy, through the provision of quality, accessible infrastructure that encourages health and wellbeing outcomes.

Social Implications

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan supports a range of social benefits, including but not limited to:

- Providing places for gathering and socialisation, fostering connection, a sense of community, and participation in civic life.
- Informal, flexible physical activity and recreation options.
- Promotion and reinforcement of responsible dog ownership practices, and exchange of information and advice.
- Access to public open space and nature.
- Equitable and inclusive participation opportunities for community.

Whilst the People and Dogs in Parks Plan offers a variety of health and wellbeing benefits, the provision of dog off-leash areas also introduces several difficult social challenges, including:

- Dogs that are not under effective supervision or control.
- Park users who do not own a dog being negatively impacted through intrusive behaviours, noise, and enjoyment of the open space.
- Dogs being in off-leash areas when it is not suitable for them (i.e. unneutered dogs, dangerous breeds, dogs that are too young).
- Dog faeces and urine creating health and amenity detriment to park users.
- Conflicts with child safety and dangerous proximity to play spaces.
- Risk of conflict between dog off-leash area users, and other users within public open space.
- Risk of dog rush and bites.

In addition to these challenges, there are additional social issues posed by fully enclosed sites including:

- Overcrowding.
- Inappropriate use of the space (i.e. children and/or dogs left unsupervised).
- Fully enclosed dog off leash areas being used to contain and control dogs that cannot be kept under effective control by their owners.

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan seeks to maximise social benefits, whilst managing risks and paving the way for an infrastructure and management response that creates more positive outcomes. Further discussion of challenges is outlined under *Risk Assessment*.

Environmental Implications

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan establishes a level of service for dog off-leash areas, including landscaping. There are dog off-leash areas in the Yarra Ranges network with minimal tree canopy coverage and planting, and no containment of dogs when near sensitive biodiversity areas. Implementation of the Plan will result in protection and enhancement of biodiversity as well as user experience.

The provision of dog off-leash areas equally represents challenges in protecting existing biodiversity, such as managing the effects of dog waste and protection of animals, vegetation and waterways from dogs. In addition to the infrastructure response recommended under the draft Plan to minimise these impacts, Council officers have commenced review of environmentally sensitive spaces within dog off-leash areas that require protection. A further action of the Plan is to review sites within the municipality where dogs are prohibited and consider the introduction of new sites.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement was undertaken in developing the draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan, to understand issues and opportunities concerning dog off-leash areas in the municipality.

Community engagement was conducted between 11 July – 13 August 2024, using a variety of methods to ensure ample opportunities for the community to participate. These included online surveys, on-site drop-in sessions at dog off-leash areas, and promotion via social media and newsletters.

Council received:

- 223 survey responses
- 50 online budgeting tool responses
- 5 direct emails/phone calls.

Whilst non-dog owners were encouraged to contribute, the overwhelming majority of submissions were from dog owners (93%). Of these, 65 per cent indicated that they use dog off-leash areas. Respondents commented on what is working well at dog off-leash areas, challenges, and suggestions for improvements.

Fencing of dog off-leash areas was a dominant theme and cited by both dog owners and non-dog owners as a desired improvement. Other common themes included:

- Dog off-leash areas are highly valued by the community for socialisation, physical activity, and connection with nature, for urban and non-urban owners alike.

- Dog off-leash areas are not always readily accessible.
- Dogs that are not effectively controlled, poorly socialised or have a poor temperament, as well as poor owner supervision and etiquette, were a challenge in enjoyment of these spaces.
- Clearer articulation of dog off-leash area boundaries is needed, with the current lack of clear boundaries creating confusion and conflict.
- A desire to see better barrier treatments to dog off-leash areas.
- More fully fenced opportunities.
- Poor drainage within existing dog off-leash areas.
- Greater embellishment and landscaping of dog off-leash areas (such as seating, drinking fountains and waste disposal).
- Education regarding dog owner responsibilities, non-dog-owner responsibilities, and information regarding dog off-leash locations and features.
- Desire for enhanced monitoring and enforcement of dog off-leash area etiquette and regulations.

The draft Plan incorporates the views expressed by the community, striving to balance this feedback with Council's responsibilities in providing, developing, and maintaining these spaces. It also seeks to balance the needs of dog off-leash area users, and other public open space users.

Further details on the community engagement undertaken to date is in Attachment 5 – People and Dogs in Parks Plan Community Engagement Report.

If endorsed by Council, the draft Plan will be placed on public exhibition in August 2025 for a minimum of four weeks. This round of engagement will socialise the draft Plan with the community and invite their feedback. A range of engagement methods will be used, including but not limited to Council's Shaping Yarra Ranges platform that will seek feedback about the principles and standards and if have we missed anything, pop-ups at selected dog off-leash areas for the community to speak to officers, and promotion of engagement opportunities via social media.

Should Council adopt the draft Plan in the future, any specific projects and actions may require additional, site-specific community engagement.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan is the product of significant internal collaboration between relevant service owners and teams. A collaborative approach has been adopted to ensure that:

- The service need is thoroughly understood and met with an appropriate infrastructure response.

- The implications of providing, designing, developing, maintaining and managing the service have been considered.

Council officers have also worked with neighbouring councils, leading industry experts and relevant State Government bodies to seek advice, identify issues and opportunities, and apply best practice to the draft Plan.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Risks are associated with the provision of dog off-leash areas, which are heightened in the absence of a plan or standards for these spaces. Risks include:

Assets: the draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan outlines provision and development levels of service, which in turn informs the maintenance of dog off-leash areas and priorities for capital improvement. A lack of a plan creates uncertainty and risk to assets where there is no clear guidance for development and maintenance of these spaces and leaves the door open to reactive decision making.

Environment: dogs off-leash can pose risks to the environment, particularly in environmentally sensitive places. The draft Plan establishes standards, priorities and actions to mitigate this risk.

Financial: in a constrained funding environment, Council's ability to construct and maintain public amenities is increasingly hampered. As well as limitations on rates income and diminishing grants, there is a current downturn in housing development which has slowed the rate of Public Open Space Contributions to Council. However, the implementation of the draft Plan has a relatively modest cost when compared to other recreational projects, which can be spread out over the life of the Plan and adjusted according to funding availability.

Health and Safety: there are numerous risks arising from dogs off leash, with both owners and non-dog owners reporting that the current presentation of dog off-leash areas results in conflict between people and dogs. These risks are compounded by spaces that are too small or not carefully designed. Risks are also presented by inappropriate use of dog off-leash areas. The standards proposed by the draft Plan will assist Council in mitigating these risks with appropriate infrastructure. There are also biological risks to humans and other fauna and waterways arising from dog faeces and urine.

Additionally, consideration must be given to education and enforcement, with community members expressing a desire to see more initiatives in this vein. Whilst pet registration fees are not currently specifically allocated towards infrastructure, the fees – beyond their use for essential community safety and animal management – can be used to support initiatives that encourage responsible pet ownership.

Reputation and Stakeholder Relationship: reputational risks concerning the draft Plan include:

- Reputational risk if Council is perceived to have not adequately responded to feedback, particularly regarding the provision of barrier treatments, fully enclosed spaces, and upgrades of dog off-leash areas.
- Localised, site-specific feedback is anticipated when applying the proposed level of service. Initially, the community will be invited to comment on the proposed principles and standards during public exhibition of the draft Plan, before Council attempts to conduct a detailed assessment and apply these principles and standards to individual sites. The preliminary assessment at Attachment 3 will assist the community when considering the draft Plan. This does create a risk that progress of the draft Plan could be disrupted by localised, site-specific feedback rather than constructive feedback on the overarching principles and standards.

Once the draft Plan is adopted officers will, as included in the actions in the draft Plan, conduct a detailed assessment of the dog off-leash area network. Officers will then engage directly with any impacted local communities, to test proposals and invite feedback before proceeding with site-specific projects.

Regulation and Compliance: dog off-leash areas are highly valued by the community and provide numerous benefits – however, ensuring compliance with Council Orders and regulations requires operational resourcing for enforcement and education.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan
2. Draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan – Background and Research Findings
3. Draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan – Preliminary Site Assessment
4. Draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan – Summary
5. People and Dogs in Parks Plan – Community Engagement Report.