

People and Dogs in Parks Plan

2025-2035



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Acknowledgement of Country



Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nation peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways.

We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region. We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

Glossary

All definitions must be read in conjunction with the latest version of Domestic Animal Management Act (DAA) and the Council Order (The Order) (currently Order 1/2013), which take precedence.

Council

Yarra Ranges Council

DAM or DAMP

Yarra Ranges Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026

Dog off-leash areas

A designated open space where dogs are allowed to run or roam freely with no physical restraint or leash. The area may be either dedicated or shared with other open space activities. In dog off-leash areas, owners must:

- › Carry a leash and immediately leash their dog if circumstances require;
- › Remain in 'effective control' of the dog (see separate glossary definition);
- › Not allow the dog to worry, threaten, rush, or attack another person or animal;
- › Obey all rules displayed on signs for use of an off-leash area.

Dog on-leash area

Any area not specifically designated as a dog off-leash area, such as streets, footpaths, parks, and reserves. In essence the dog must be physically restrained by a leash or equivalent device held by the owner or tethered securely where appropriate. (Refer to DAA and The Order).

Dog owner

The Domestic Animal Act 1994 (DAA) defines this as: "owner in respect of a dog or cat, includes a person who keeps or harbours the animal or has the animal in his or her care for the time being whether the animal is at large or in confinement."

Dog park

A fully fenced, off-leash area created to be both functional for dogs and welcoming for visitors.

Dog prohibited area

A location where dogs are prohibited at all times, whether on- or off-leash, typically due to its high environmental significance, the need for preservation, or activities that are incompatible with dogs. Requirements are set out in Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026.

Effective control

Per the DAMP, effective control means dog owners have the dog on a leash or under voice command, can see what the dog is doing, and can demonstrate that the dog will return promptly on command.

Local Laws/ Council Order

A Local Law is a regulation put in place by Council to address specific community needs or issues, and is tailored to the unique circumstances of the municipality.

One of the purposes of the Council Order is to impose conditions on the presence of dogs in any public place of the municipal district.

Park / reserve / open space

Land that is owned or managed by Council or other public land manager and set aside, zoned or reserved for public parkland or recreation. This may also include land that does not have a primary function of open space (i.e. drainage reserves) that can still provide open space as a secondary function.

Plan / the Plan

Yarra Ranges People and Dogs in Parks Plan.

Urban areas

For the purposes of this Plan, urban areas refers to areas of built up development that are contained by the Melbourne Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). Townships outside the Melbourne UGB are assessed based on rural population and catchment measures even though they have some urbanised areas.



Our vision

People and dogs
can enjoy public
open space in Yarra
Ranges, in harmony
with each other and
the environment.



Introduction

The People and Dogs in Parks Plan establishes principles for the distribution and scope that can be included when planning for dog off-leash areas. It will be the basis for planning and decision making for existing or new spaces on Council-owned or managed land.

It outlines standards for the provision, development, enhancement, and management of dog off-leash areas across Yarra Ranges over the next 10 years. It provides a tool to assess current provision, and recommend improvements where shortfalls are identified. It combines community feedback about what they would like to see in dog off-leash areas with expert research and industry standards to form a clear plan.

This Plan aims to achieve a balance between the diverse use of open spaces by all Yarra Ranges residents and visitors, catering to both dog owners and non-dog owners.

The Plan supports the achievement of broader Council Plan objectives, specifically:

- › Connected and Healthy Communities
- › Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places
- › Protected and Enhanced Natural Environment.

Requirements for other areas, such as dog on-leash areas and areas where dogs are prohibited, are set out in Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026 (p.18 Local Laws and Orders) and sit outside the scope of this Plan.



Image: Stock image

The objectives of this Plan are to:

01

Ensure an adequate number of dog off-leash areas to meet the community's needs.

02

Support healthy and well socialised pet dogs.

03

Establish standards to address user needs, through enhancement and maintenance of existing parks and facilities and creation of new assets, balanced with Council's capital and maintenance financial capacity.

04

Support the safety, health and amenity of other park users, minimising and managing the potential conflicts between dog-owners' needs and other open space priorities.

05

Protect environmental values.

06

Support education and regulation for responsible dog use in open space.

The People and Dogs in Parks Plan has drawn on research and input commissioned through LMH Consulting.

Principles

Throughout community engagement and research for the development of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan, three clear principles emerged:



Dog off-leash areas should be sufficient in quantity, quality, and variety

There should be an appropriate quantity and distribution of dog off-leash areas.

The provision of dog off-leash areas plays a supporting role in ensuring the public open space network meets the needs of all that inhabit it – dog owners, non-dog owners, dogs, plants and other animals and wildlife and waterways.

Dog off-leash areas are designed and maintained to an appropriate standard.

A need to offer a variety of dog off-leash areas to provide different experiences, training progression and opportunities for dogs to exercise. Dog off-leash areas will be delivered in diverse landscapes and settings, and where suitable, may feature water access. The design and development of each dog off-leash area will be tailored to the unique opportunities provided by the specific site and landscape.



Dog off-leash areas should be accessible, inclusive, and safe

They can be readily accessed by the community – consideration is given to location, modes of transport, wayfinding, size and layout.

They are not only accessible to, but actively support use by people with disability, diverse genders, backgrounds and ages.

Dog off-leash areas facilitate fair and equitable access to public open space, by non-dog owners and dog-owners alike.

They provide opportunity for regulation, education and promoting responsible dog ownership, as well as socialisation and recreation.

Dog off-leash areas will be designed for the health and safety of both dogs and people.

Provide improved community information and education about the availability and proper use of dog off-leash areas.



Dog off-leash areas are sustainable

Given the high biodiversity and ecological value of the public open space network, dog off-leash areas must be provided in a way to protect, enhance and maximise environmental sustainability.

Dog off-leash areas are considered to be an important service for the community. Council aims to balance provision of these spaces, while maintaining financial sustainability. Council resources will be allocated to manage and maintain dog off-leash areas to agreed service levels and remain fit-for-purpose.

Framework

Provision and hierarchy

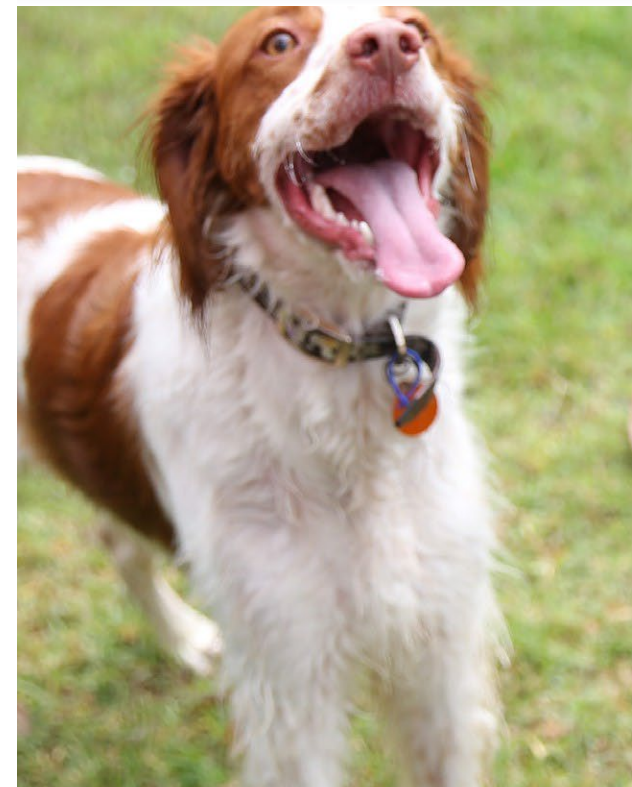
At least one dog off-leash area should be available to the majority of Yarra Ranges residents within a 10-minute drive from home. In urban areas, this should be available within a 20-minute walk for most residents (approx. 2 kilometres).

This provision measure may be varied due to factors such as a lack of suitable open space in a priority area, Council budgeting, or other factors.

The selection of sites will reflect anticipated need, based on a range of factors such as:

- › Existing public open space provision.
- › Number of people and dogs within the catchment.
- › Quantity, types, and proximity of existing dog off-leash areas. Generally, dog off-leash areas should be spatially separated by at least 2km in urban areas.
- › Customer requests for additional areas, or improvement of existing areas.

When assessing whether an existing or proposed site is suitable for a dog off-leash area, the attributes outlined in the Level of Service will be applied. Some parts of the municipality may be underserved by dog off-leash areas. Consideration will be given to improving provision in under-served areas, subject to the above factors.



Framework

Site suitability and selection

Site qualities

This includes factors such as the topography of the site, drainage, and opportunities for natural shade. Safety concerns such as the ease of surveillance should be considered. A further consideration is environmental risks arising from flood, bushfire or landslip risk, or land contamination.

Sloping sites can provide a diversity and interest at the site but need to allow appropriate access as well as maintenance.

Landscape significance needs to be considered in the design of any dog off-leash areas and supporting infrastructure.

Visibility and safety

Passive surveillance (a sense of 'eyes of the park') from surrounding areas is important for the safety of dog off-leash areas, and public open space generally.

Adjacent uses and activities

Dog off-leash opportunities need to be complementary to adjacent land uses and open space types, including:

- › The needs of other park users in the area, and ability to provide equity for both dog and non-dog use.
- › The potential for environmentally significant areas that may be compromised.
- › Proximity to other uses/functions (sports, playspaces, residential development, conservation, biodiversity, heritage).
- › Siting dog off-leash areas on a sports field of play should generally be avoided, except where suitable alternative options do not exist.

Adjacent uses and activities may preclude the provision of dog off-leash areas, at existing and proposed sites.



Framework

Design

Design principles for dog off-leash areas are:



Safety

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.

Design of all planting and features to be dog safe.

Landscaping in dog off-leash areas should be kept at either low level understorey plants and ground covers or canopy trees, avoiding mid-level planting and shrubs to maintain high levels of visibility in and out of the area. Remove low level branches from canopy trees as they mature to lift the canopy to nominal 3m.

Break up fence lines through planting, features and deviating paths to avoid 'fence running'.

Areas should be provided to encourage breaks in fast chasing and running, and discourage forming of packs.

Provide areas for retreat from play.

Avoid conflict with other uses such as footpaths and cyclists, through barriers or location.



Accessibility

Apply Universal Design principles to support a range of age groups and mobility levels.

In fenced dog parks, locate seating and amenities away from entries to discourage people and dogs from congregating at entryways.

Create connectivity to and within the dog off-leash area (i.e. does the parking bay connect easily and safely to the pathways).

Include appropriate footpath widths for easy movement of mobility aids.

Seating to include options with backs and arms.



Diversity

Design should consider opportunities to create visually separate spaces, encourage dogs and their owners to move around the site and include a variety of seated areas around the site rather than one congregation point.

Design should seek to encourage social interaction between people of various ages and mobility levels, such as through adequate shade, seating and shelter.



Engaging spaces

Landscape elements, including rocks, planting and other features, that are appealing and stimulating for dogs.

Include options for different dog activities, including running, climbing, digging and exploring.

Formalised or constructed elements may also be considered for some sites.

Preference is given to natural materials to complement the natural surrounds of open space.

Framework

Design

Design principles for dog off-leash areas are:



Clarity

Signage and other design elements to clearly demarcate the boundaries of dog off-leash areas.

Provide clear signage to delineate dog off-leash areas and ensure consistent regulation.



Environmental sustainability

Incorporate environmentally sustainable design, with consideration to planting location and species selection, energy and resource use, and contribution to local climate and biodiversity.

Manage onsite animal waste to protect biodiversity and waterways.



Durability

Smaller, heavily used areas need more robust surfaces and design elements that encourage a variety of off-leash activities for dogs, promoting mental stimulation and reducing potential conflicts.

Dog off-leash areas should be designed to ensure efficient, cost-effective and ease of maintenance.

A variety of surface materials may be considered, to optimise use and minimise surface degradation and maintenance inputs.

Disperse play and activity elements throughout the space to spread usage more evenly and prevent heavy compaction in isolated areas.



Barriers and enclosures

Many existing dog off-leash areas have natural boundaries that help define the area.

Further barrier treatments may be required to articulate the boundary of the dog off-leash area, manage proximity to hazards or other open space functions, or enhance user experience.

Treatments can include but are not limited to existing features (i.e. mounds or retaining walls), landscaping, chicanes, or constructed fencing.

Dog off-leash areas are not required to be fenced, however some circumstances may trigger the need for part-full fencing or other enclosure treatments, which may include:

- › Proximity to existing playspaces, recreational facilities or other incompatible uses that attract significant use and may cause a safety issue for users.
- › Proximity to areas which may cause a safety issue for dogs, such as busy roads, drains and hazardous areas.

- › Proximity to areas with environmental conservation value, and/or potential for conflict with wildlife.
- › Where boundaries of dog off-leash areas are unclear, and other options for delineating spaces are not feasible or effective (i.e. natural topography).

Where there an assessment recommends providing a fully enclosed space, a 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.

The need for barrier treatments (natural or constructed) will be determined on a site-by-site basis by Council, and subject to a risk assessment.

Framework

Level of service

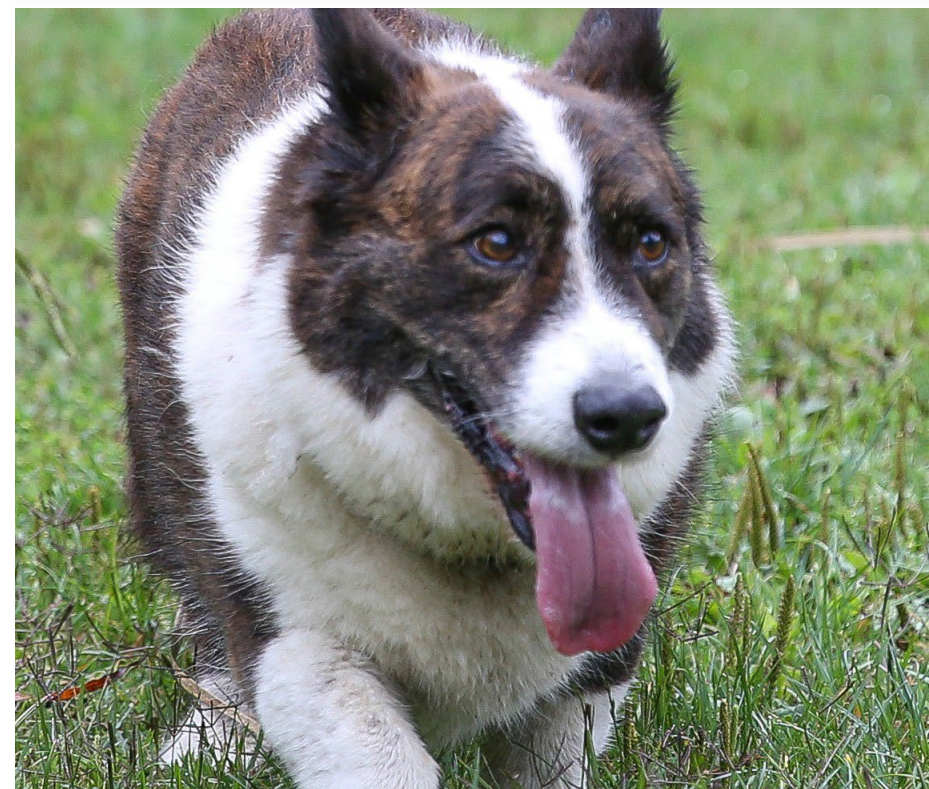
Dog off-leash areas will be varied in their size and level of service, according to local opportunities and need. The level of service itself may also be varied as required by demand, availability of public open space, budget or other factors.

Table 1 describes core features to be expected at any dog off-leash area, some of which may be shared with broader open space areas nearby. Table 1 also describes optional, additional features that may apply to District-level facilities.

These areas will be embellished with a range of features, which will vary by location and will be determined by need and a site analysis.

Dog off-leash spaces will be provided to a Local and District level only (servicing the municipality), and not Regional (servicing beyond the municipality).

[See Table 01 overleaf](#) →



Framework

Table 01 — Level of service

Feature	Local	District	Comment
Overview	<p>Provided to service a local catchment, and shorter but more frequent use (i.e. <1 hour, daily or weekly).</p> <p>May service a walkable catchment.</p> <p>Will have lower levels of infrastructure.</p>	<p>Provided to service a larger catchment of multiple suburbs.</p> <p>Usage may be less frequent, however higher levels of infrastructure will encourage longer stays.</p> <p>May be co-located with other uses or functions (i.e. playspace or sporting facilities).</p>	
Size (including geometry and layout)	<p>As an indicative guide, dog off-leash areas should be 0.3 hectares at a minimum.</p> <p>For fenced dog parks, the size should be a preferred minimum of 0.5 hectares.</p>		<p>A dog off-leash area should be large enough to meet demand without becoming degraded from overuse.</p> <p>The ultimate size, geometry and layout of the dog off-leash area must ensure fair and equitable use of open space by other users and functions.</p>
Location/ Catchment	<p>Provide at least one within:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 20-minute walk of most suburban households within the Urban region of Yarra Ranges. › 10-minute drive of most households within the Hills, Valley and Upper Yarra regions, and non-suburban households in the Urban region of Council. 	<p>Provide one per Council sub-planning region, where demand and a suitable site are present.</p>	
Paths	<p>Accessible paths connecting to the dog off-leash area should be provided.</p> <p>Internal paths generally not provided.</p>	<p>Accessible paths connecting to dog off-leash area must be provided.</p> <p>District-level sites should have the necessary supporting infrastructure to enable car access, such as pedestrian path connections from car parking.</p> <p>Internal paths within dog off-leash area should be provided.</p>	<p>There should be opportunities for pedestrian access, such as linkages to pedestrian paths and trails.</p> <p>Path surfacing to be determined on a site-by-site basis.</p>

Table 01 — Level of service

Feature	Local	District	Comment
Barriers and enclosures	May only be provided to manage proximity to hazards.	Fully-enclosed sites may be provided at selected District-level sites: two in the Urban area, and one each in the Hills, Upper Yarra and Valley areas. May only be provided at other sites to manage proximity to hazards.	Barriers and enclosures must not be provided to control dogs that cannot be kept under effective control by their owners. Where constructed fencing is required, provision must consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Double layer of entry gates › Service vehicle access gates › Emergency services access › Gate must be accessible to people with limited mobility/using mobility aids.
Landscaping/ Planting	May be provided while maintaining sightlines.	Must be provided while maintaining sightlines.	Ensure species selection is non-toxic to dogs.
Shade	Shade may be provided.	A designated shade location must be provided within the off leash area	Preference for natural shade instead of constructed, where possible. Weather protection should consider rain and wind while preserving sightlines.
Seating	Seating generally provided, with some seating that includes a back and arm supports		
Lighting	Generally not provided.	May be provided.	Where lighting is provided, it should be time limited with consideration should be given to lower lux levels, warm colour temperature for nocturnal animals and perceptions of safety. Provide baffles to prevent skyglow and light spill.
Drinking water	Generally not provided.	May be provided (for people and dogs). Provision for rinsing taps may be considered.	Drinking facilities should include dog bowl feature from overflow.

Table 01 — Level of service

Feature	Local	District	Comment
Rubbish bins	Generally not provided.	May be provided as part of broader District or Regional-level public open space.	New waste bag dispensers generally not provided. Council will consider maintaining existing dog waste bag dispensers where they are shown to increase compliance.
Equipment	Generally not provided.	Activity zones may be provided. Design elements to address dogs' sensory needs, such as varied terrain, mounds, sensory planting.	May include informal equipment (such as mounds or large rocks) or formal equipment (such as agility). Preference for natural materials and landscape treatments.
Water entry points	Generally not provided.	May be provided, where feasible and without negative impact to waterway and wildlife.	Water entry not permissible in areas of high ecological value. No new artificial water bodies will be created for dog off-leash areas.
Signage	Signage must be provided to and within dog off-leash areas. Signage and features must clearly delineate extent of dog off leash areas.		Signage may include wayfinding, educational and compliance, with preference for pictograms. Dog control signage in on-leash areas generally not provided.
Confident/not confident dog zones	Generally not provided.	May be provided where size allows (minimum 0.8 – 1 hectares).	Consideration will be given to zoned areas, initially on a trial basis.
Car parking	Use of existing local parking provisions only	May be provided as part of broader District or Regional-level public open space. Inclusion of accessible parking bays.	
Toilets	Generally not provided.	May be provided as part of broader District or Regional-level public open space.	
Irrigation and drainage	Generally not provided, although landscape treatments may assist in addressing drainage issues.	May be provided. Preference for passive irrigation and drainage – constructed irrigation and drainage generally not provided	Provision to be considered on a site-by-site basis, subject to budget. May not be feasible where a site's primary purpose is for water detention.

Framework

Operation of dog off-leash areas

Good management and maintenance of dog off-leash spaces includes:

- › Maintenance requirements of dog off-leash areas and associated infrastructure and features.
- › Patrolling and enforcement.
- › Educational initiatives for users of dog off-leash areas on responsible dog ownership.

These needs are addressed further in section four - Implementation.

Dog off-leash areas are intended for informal community use only. Use by organised or commercial groups is subject to prior agreement by Council.

Community education will encourage positive dog behaviour and increase dog owners' understanding of responsibility in dog off-leash areas, including but not limited to signage at dog off-leash locations, information on Council's website and other channels.

This will target:

Reasonable control of dogs and behaviours



Supervision of dogs



Disposal of waste



Restrictions for dog off-leash areas are outlined in the Council Order. The Council Order will be periodically reviewed, to keep pace with community needs. Where repeated compliance issues are identified at a particular site, Council will review whether a dog off-leash area continues to be provided.

Additional operating costs may be associated with education and enforcement activities. These costs will be considered as part of annual reviews of the Council Budget.

Asset management

The ongoing management of Council's dog off-leash areas is guided by documents such as the Asset Plan 2022-2032, which identifies the need to maintain assets to keep them in good shape for years to come, and replacing, upgrading and providing new assets where required.

Implementation of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan will include a focus on planning for the cost of maintaining, renewing and upgrading of Council's dog off-leash area network, in a manner that meets community needs whilst also delivering value for money and durability for reduced maintenance.

Implementation

The People and Dogs in Parks Plan will be implemented by undertaking the below actions.

The actions have each been allocated a priority level, which equates to the following timing goals for completion of implementation:

Short term	0–5 years
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Medium term	5–10 years
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Ongoing	Continual (as need arises)
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The delivery of the action plan is subject to change based on available resourcing and evolving organisational priorities.



Implementation

Table 02 — Action Plan

Action		Responsibility	Priority	Resourcing
01	Complete a review of the provision, access, and level of service of dog off-leash areas throughout Yarra Ranges.	Open Space Strategy and Planning	Immediate	Within operational budget
02	<p>Based on the results of Action 1, develop a priority list for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Upgrade or relocation of existing dog off-leash areas.› Provision of new dog off-leash areas. <p>This will consider an assessment of the overall network, shortfalls in provision and levels of service and community feedback and recommend an appropriate infrastructure response. The priority list of projects will be referred to Council's capital expenditure program planning and budgeting. The priority list will consider the existing preliminary site assessment list, and community engagement feedback.</p>	Open Space Strategy and Planning Capital Investment Planning Strategic Asset Management Parks, Trees and Trails Recreation and Sport	Immediate	<p>Priority list development resourced within operational budget.</p> <p>Capital upgrade, new and renewal projects to be costed and referred to annual Council Budget process.</p> <p>Operational budgets updated to reflect improvements to dog off-leash areas.</p>
03	Undertake a review of dog-prohibited areas.	Open Space Strategy and Planning Community Safety	Short	Within operational budget
04	Following the review of dog off-leash areas, provision and boundary changes will be proposed and the community invited to provide feedback. Following consideration of the feedback, Council will finalise the boundaries, amend the Council Order and gazette any changes.	Open Space Strategy and Planning Community Safety	Short	Within operational budget
05	Complete a review of signage at dog off-leash areas regarding signage function, content, placement, and legibility, and develop a new consistent signage suite.	Open Space Strategy and Planning	Short	Additional operational budget required for signage suite development

Implementation

Table 02 — Action Plan

	Action	Responsibility	Priority	Resourcing
06	Update information on Council's website and other Council information sources regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Locations of dog off-leash areas › Expectations of owners and dogs › Relevant regulations. 	Open Space Strategy and Planning Community Safety	Medium	Within operational budget
07	Ensure a scheduled presence of Authorised Officers at dog off-leash areas.	Community Safety	Ongoing	Additional operational budget required

Implementation

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan is critical to confirm progress of the Plan's implementation, and check and adjust its settings and priorities. Review and monitoring will be conducted on a regular basis.

We will conduct a major review of the priorities and implementation of the People and Dogs in Parks Plan at year four of the Plan's lifespan.

Any proposed update that materially changes the content or intent of the Plan will be subject to engagement with the community, and approval by Council.



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