Dogs in Open Space Plan

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City of Newcastle

Acknowledgment

City of Newcastle acknowledges the traditional country of the Awabakal and Worimi peoples. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continuing relationship with the land, and that they are the proud survivors of more than two hundred years of dispossession. We're committed to addressing disadvantages and attaining justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this community.

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY v

1 Introduction 1

1.1 Why have dog off leash areas? 1

1.2 The value of the Plan 1

1.3 How the Plan was developed 2

2 Dog off leash principles 7

2.1 Provision and location 7

2.2 Design and management 8

3 The Strategies 9

3.1 Dog off leash opportunities 10

3.2 Fenced dog park opportunities 11

3.3 Enhancing existing off leash areas 12

3.4 Managing dogs in public places 13

3.5 Community awareness and education 15

4 Recommended Sites 17

4.1 Potential fenced dog parks 19

4.2 Other off leash areas 23

5 Implementation 25

5.1 Recommended action plan 26

5.2 Other areas of focus 27

5.3 Managing the new and improved provision 29

5.4 Partnership opportunities 29

5.5 Review and monitoring 29

6 Supporting background information 31

6.1 Relevance to other planning 31

6.2 NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 33

6.3 Community needs and concerns 34

6.4 Key site analysis findings 36

6.5 The main gaps and issues 39

6.6 Industry considerations 40

Executive Summary

Open Spaces for Dogs are a priority in the City of Newcastle (CN) Local Government Area (LGA) with 44,309 registered dogs across 31,904 households (as at 2016). This has been confirmed by the community interest in the Dogs in Open Space Plan with 1,076 survey respondents and over 300 interviews and written submissions. People are passionate about their dogs, with many people considering dogs to be part of their family or valued companions, and they wish to have places for their dogs to run free.

The Dogs in Open Space Plan (the Plan) will guide the provision, improvement and management of dog off leash areas over the next 10 years. This includes the development of strategically located fenced dog parks.

The Plan is based on five themes including:

Dog Off Leash Opportunities

Enhancing Existing Off Leash Areas

Fenced Dog Park Opportunities

Managing Dogs in Public Places

Community Education and Information

Strategies and recommendations are provided for each theme. Overriding principles relating to 'provision and location' and 'design and management' are also provided.

The recommendations are mapped on the following page and detailed in the report. The priority actions identified in the Plan are:

1. Establish additional dog off leash areas where provision is lacking.
2. Provide some fenced dog parks at key locations.
3. Enhance existing off leash areas.
4. Provide community education and information on responsibilities for dogs in public places.

The main items addressed in the Plan are summarised as follows.

Provision

Whilst CN currently has 17 off leash areas, there is a gap in provision in the central, southern and far western areas. Opportunities for additional off leash areas are considered.

Fenced Dog Parks

Currently there are no fenced dog parks in Newcastle and the community has highlighted a strong desire for facilities. Suggestions for potential fenced dog parks are provided, including Lambton Park, Acacia Avenue Reserve, Carrington Foreshore (Honeysuckle Reserve), Maryland Drive Reserve, Stevenson Park and O'Connell Reserve. In addition, part fencing of Islington Park is suggested to improve the safety of dogs. There could be potential to provide a separate area for small dogs and puppies or 'quieter dogs' at some locations.

Design and Function

There is a need to improve the appeal and function of a number of the existing off leash areas. This includes better defining off leash areas, reviewing the space allocated at some sites and improving infrastructure and landscapes (shade, seating, shelter, drinking water for dogs, bins). There is also a need for areas that can be dedicated to specific groups and activities at certain times, such as for dog training, and dog events.

Sportsground Use

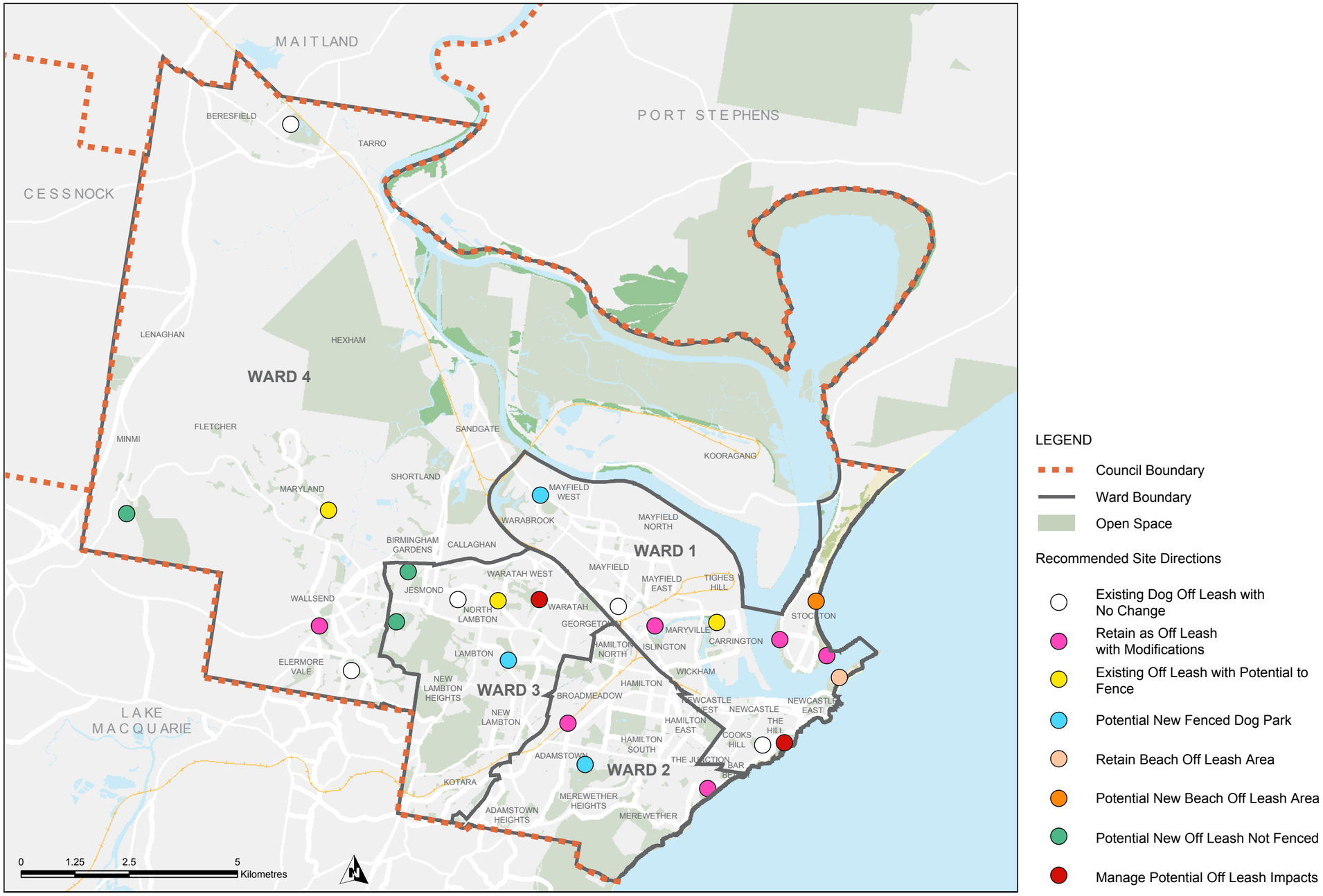
The Plan recommends that dogs remain on leash at sportsgrounds. Dogs have the potential to impact on the quality of field surfaces, there are safety issues associated with dogs around people playing sport and some dog owners do not pick up after their dog, which raises health concerns. This has been highlighted through community engagement as well as industry information.

Nature and Beaches

The natural environment requires protection and this raises questions about the appropriate use of these areas as off leash sites. Whilst the community is keen to have access to additional beaches, the opportunities are limited. However, timed use of Stockton Beach could be an option and other options could be investigated over time if there is demand and where there are minimal impacts.

Community Awareness and Education

The community and dog interest groups have identified the need for increased management of dogs through community education and awareness. An awareness and education program that includes information, signage, training opportunities in partnership with interest groups and the promotion of key messages is recommended to maximise successful delivery of the Plan.


MAITLAND
PORT STEPHENS
CESSNOCK
BERESFIELD
TARRO
LENAGHAN
HEXHAM
WARD 4
FLETCHER
MINMI
SANDGATE
KOORAGANG
SHORTLAND
MARYLAND
MAYFIELD WEST
WARABROOK
MAYFIELD NORTH
BIRMINGHAM GARDENS
CALLAGHAN
WARD 1
MAYFIELD
WARATAH WEST
MAYFIELD EAST
TIGHES HILL
JESMOND
WALLSEND
NORTH LAMBTON
WARATAH
GEORGETOWN
MARYVILLE
CARRINGTON
STOCKTON
HAMILTON NORTH
ISLINGTON
LAMBTON
ELERMORE VALE
WICKHAM
NEW LAMBTON HEIGHTS
WARD 3
HAMILTON
BROADMEADOW
NEWCASTLE WEST
NEWCASTLE
NEWCASTLE EAST
NEW LAMBTON
HAMILTON EAST
THE HILL
COOKS HILL
LAKE MACQUARIE
HAMILTON SOUTH
ADAMSTOWN
THE JUNCTION
BAR BEACH
WARD 2
KOTARA
MEREWETHER HEIGHTS
ADAMSTOWN HEIGHTS
MEREWETHER
0
1.25
2.5
5
Kilometres
N
LEGEND
Council Boundary
Ward Boundary
Open Space
Recommended Site Directions
Existing Dog Off Leash with No Change
Retain as Off Leash with Modifications
Existing Off Leash with Potential to Fence
Potential New Fenced Dog Park
Retain Beach Off Leash Area
Potential New Beach Off Leash Area
Potential New Off Leash Not Fenced
Manage Potential Off Leash Impacts

Introduction

1.1 Why have dog off leash areas?

National surveys have found that an increasing number of people consider their dogs to be part of the family and walking the dog is a key recreation activity. Dogs provide companionship, a reason to exercise and socialise.

In 2016, Newcastle had 31,904 households with 44,309 registered dogs (based on the NSW Companion Animals Register and sourced by CN). This represents 51.2% of households and 28.5 dogs per 100 people compared to 38% and 19 dogs per 100 people for NSW as a whole.

Young people and families with children are more likely to own a dog and this is a likely reason for dog ownership being high in the Newcastle LGA. Dog ownership is even greater in Lake Macquarie and Cessnock where there are even larger numbers of families.

Dogs are also important companions for older people and people living alone as they provide company and give people a reason to socialise with other people, which contributes to the health and well-being of these groups in the community.

Formalised dog off leash areas enable people to take their dogs to a place where dogs can legally run free, exert energy and socialise with other dogs. Off leash areas also provide people with a meeting place and an opportunity to connect with others in the community.

The Plan will contribute to recognising and achieving the sections of the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 that relate to open space and public places.

1.2 The value of the Plan

The Dogs in Open Space Plan will guide the future provision, development and management of dog off leash areas in the Newcastle LGA over the next 10 years. It will support the provision of off leash areas, whilst minimising impacts on public open space and surrounding residents.

The Plan considers the needs of communities across the city and aims to address gaps in provision and improve the quality and function of existing off leash areas. The Plan also provides a direction on the future provision of fenced off leash dog parks and identifies specific site opportunities.

The Plan will contribute to achieving broader Council directions included in the City of Newcastle Community Strategic Plan: Newcastle 2030 and the Newcastle Parkland and Recreation Strategy.

The City of Newcastle Parkland and Recreation Strategy specifically recommends the need to "Review existing and investigate the establishment of additional dog leash free areas" (Action 1.18).

The Plan will benefit the broader community as it will improve the clarity regarding off leash areas, define areas that should not be off leash and encourage responsible behaviour by dog owners.

Consultations undertaken have highlighted community concerns regarding dog behaviour and a lack of responsible dog management in public places by some people. The Plan aims to address this issue and other community concerns in addition to the provision of off leash areas.

1.3 How the Plan was developed

A consultative approach has been adopted in developing the Plan. This includes:

An on-line community survey, with 1,076 respondents. 34% of these respondents did not own a dog.

On-site interviews of 143 people across four sites including Islington Park, Dixon Park, Upper Reserve and Ballast Ground at Stockton.

Targeted planning sessions with community interest groups including dog trainers and other service providers, parks committee representatives and sporting groups.

122 community interviews as part of 'Pups in the Park' at Lambton Park.

Submissions received from 42 residents expressing concerns and making suggestions.

Collaboration across business units at CN.

A 12 week public exhibition period of the draft Plan to enable community feedback. This involved community engagement with interest groups and community members.

In addition, the study involved:

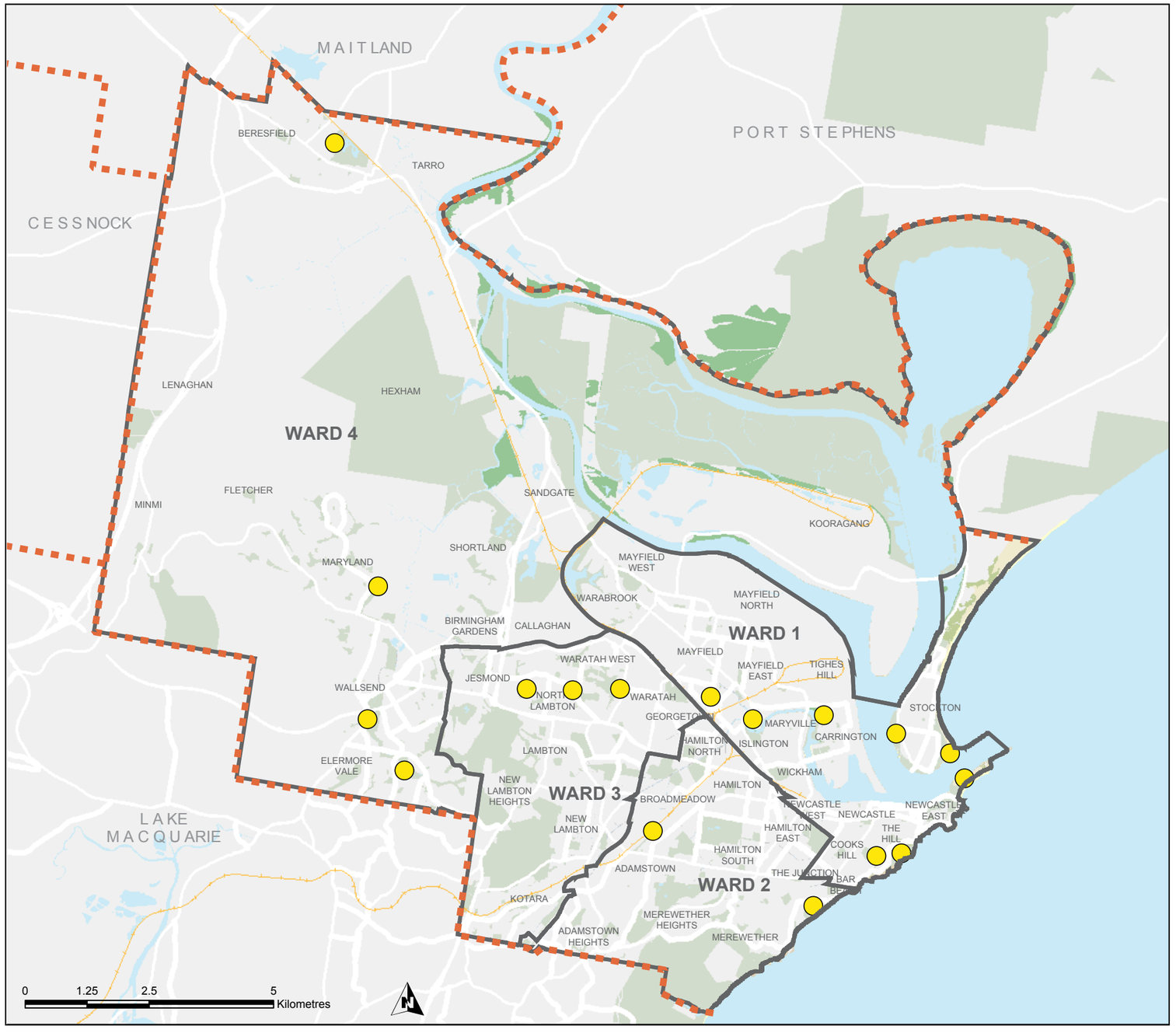
consideration of other planning and industry approaches

a strategic analysis of the sites and options

a strategic analysis of the needs and findings

A map of the existing off leash sites is provided on the following page. The findings of the consultations, the site analysis and other relevant information is provided as supporting information in Section 6.

Existing off leash areas



Dog off leash principles

2.1 Provision and location

Key principles to guide the provision and location of dog off leash areas are below.

1. A spread of dog off leash areas will be provided across the Newcastle LGA, using an indicative 'one dog off leash area per 8,000 people' ratio as a guide.
2. Fenced off leash dog parks will be strategically located across the city, using an indicative 'one fenced dog park per 30,000 people' as a guide and at least one fenced dog park in each CN Ward.
3. Dog off leash areas will be located on publicly accessible open space, including CN owned and Crown land.
4. Dog off leash areas will not be located adjacent to high traffic roadways for the safety of dogs and people.
5. Sportsgrounds and playing fields will be designated as on leash due to the potential impacts on playing surfaces and conflicts of use.
6. Sites with high natural value, including sites with endangered ecological communities, will be designated as on leash or dogs prohibited.
7. The site suitability criteria (Section 2) will be used to determine the location of new off leash areas and review existing sites.
8. The requirements of the NSW Companion Animal Act regarding 'dogs prohibited in some public places' must be adhered to including:

- playgrounds and play spaces (within 10 metres)
- food preparation areas for humans (within 10 metres)
- recreation and sport areas defined as prohibited by the local authority
- places used for bathing (including beaches) defined as prohibited by the local authority
- places set aside by the local authority for the protection of wildlife

2.2 Design and management

Key dog off leash design and management principles are below.

1. Dog off leash areas in the Newcastle LGA shall be at least 0.3ha in size and fenced dog parks shall be at least 0.5ha.
2. Dog off leash areas will be well defined, clearly mapped and sign posted to limit confusion of the off leash area within a public place.
3. Dog off leash areas will be of a quality that will sustain use by dogs, including sound and functional surface, basic infrastructure including bins, drinking water for dogs and natural shade, and landscaping.
4. The design of dog off leash areas will reflect the City of Newcastle Disability Inclusion Action Plan and universal design principles to support a range of age groups and abilities.
5. Fenced dog parks will incorporate features that contribute to a safe and appealing environment for dogs and owners, such as bins, drinking water for dogs, natural shade, double gates, shelter, seating and mounds and landscape features that support dogs to investigate spaces will be considered. Picnic settings (eating areas) and children's play will not be provided.
6. Perimeter fencing around a fenced dog park should be safe for dogs and consistent with current industry approaches and CPTED principles (permeability, passive surveillance). The design and height of a fence will complement the site character.
7. Signage will be provided where dogs are prohibited or required to be on leash in a sporting reserve, beach or high profile public place.
8. Consideration will be given to dedicating dog off leash areas for specific groups and activities at certain times, for example, hire for dog training or dog events, providing the impact on other users is minimal.
9. Community awareness and education will be undertaken to encourage positive dog behaviour and increase dog owners' sense of responsibility.

Dog Off Leash Site Suitability Criteria

Focus	Criteria
Profile and Access	The site should be central to the population, accessible to vehicles and pedestrians and be easily seen and known by the community. However, dogs off leash may not be appropriate at high profile sites (due to potential impacts on the site character or other users).
Size	The area available for dogs off leash must be at least 0.3ha in size and the whole site should be at least double this size to allow for other uses, support infrastructure and landscaping.
Character Suitability	The site must be public open space with an open reserve or park character. The site must not be a sportsground or a natural area.
Impacts on People	Potential impacts on residents and other reserve users must be minimal, including no risk to children and adults playing sport, walking and cycling, using a play space or pursuing other recreation activities.
Impacts on Site Character	There should be minimal impact on the visual appeal, landscape and function of the reserve due to the dedication of an off leash area or the inclusion of a fenced dog park. This includes ensuring any potential future enhancements to a reserve for recreation, sport or linear connections are not affected by a dog off leash area.
Impacts on Natural Environment	Sensitive natural environments should not be impacted on. This includes sites with high biodiversity and environmentally sensitive natural watercourses, wetlands and coastal vegetation, endangered ecological communities and threatened species habitat.

The strategies

Strategies have been developed for five themes that collectively respond to community needs and the findings of the Plan. The themes include:

1. Dog Off Leash Opportunities
2. Fenced Dog Park Opportunities
3. Enhancing Existing Off Leash Areas
4. Managing Dogs in Public Places
5. Community Awareness and Education

This section outlines strategies for each theme to address specific needs and issues. A rationale is provided for each strategy.

An Action Plan that lists potential capital works and related priorities is provided in section five.

3.1 Dog off leash opportunities

Strategy Focus	Strategy Details	Rationale
3.1a New Off Leash in Gap Areas	Establish new off leash areas in those areas that are lacking provision and particularly in the central and southern parts of the Newcastle LGA. Potential options for additional off leash areas include: - Lambton Park, Lambton - O'Connell Reserve, Adamstown - Stevenson Park, Mayfield West - Mayo Street Reserve, Jesmond - Brickworks Park, Elermore Vale - Other reserves where there is high demand and a lack of provision	The areas of Lambton, New Lambton, Adamstown and Mayfield are particularly lacking in opportunities for dogs off leash. Residents around Lambton have expressed strong desire for a dog park and Adamstown residents are dissatisfied with the existing provision at West End Park.
3.1b New Off Leash in Growth Areas	Investigate the need and potential for dog off leash areas in the western growth area as the area is developed (including a fenced dog park).	The western growth area will attract families and people with dogs and off leash areas will be required as a result.
3.1c Infrastructure Provision	Establish good support infrastructure in existing and new dog off leash areas including: - trees for shade and landscaping in all off leash areas - pathway connections to all off leash areas - bins and drinking water for dogs in all off leash areas - shelter and seats in key off leash areas (includes fenced) - pathways within key off leash areas - dog bag dispensers in fenced dog parks	There is a lack of support infrastructure in existing dog off leash areas. Consultation undertaken and other research highlight that communities are seeking basic infrastructure and shade in off leash areas.
3.1d Review of Existing Off Leash	Review the appropriateness of existing dog off leash areas that do not meet the site suitability criteria in Section 2. This involves assessing potential impacts on the following sites in consultation with the community: - Braye Park, North Lambton, with the need to consider options for minimising impacts on the natural area - King Edward Park, Cooks Hill, with the need to assess the potential impact on the Themeda grassland ecological community The reviews may find that off leash areas should be removed from the reserves if impacts on the environment are considered to be an issue and solutions cannot be determined.	A large part of Braye Park is a natural area with potential impacts on fauna and an alternative, Acacia Avenue Reserve is located nearby. The existing off leash area at King Edward Park is located around Themeda grassland on a coastal headland, which is determined as an endangered ecological community in accordance with the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. CN will need to determine if dogs off leash are likely to significantly affect the threatened species, population or ecological community.
3.1e Beaches Off Leash	Consider allowing timed off leash use of Stockton Beach at all times of the year to broaden the opportunities for people to take dogs off leash at beaches. The suitability of timed off leash (including seasonal timed use) at other beaches could be investigated if there is sufficient demand. However, impacts on the wider use of beaches would need to be minimal.	There is high community demand for additional beach areas for off leash, but limited opportunities. Ideally the northern part of Stockton Beach could be designated as off leash at all times. However, erosion and environmental issues limit this opportunity. Timed access to the whole beach is an alternative option. Other beaches are considered inappropriate due to user numbers.

3.2 Fenced dog park opportunities

Strategy Focus	Strategy Details	Rationale
3.2a Fencing of Existing Off Leash	Consider creating fenced dog parks at the following existing off leash areas, as part of providing up to six fenced dog parks across the Newcastle LGA: - Carrington Foreshore (Honeysuckle Reserve), Carrington - Maryland Drive Reserve, Maryland (investigate the potential to integrate a fenced off leash area as part of the Maryland Creek realignment design) - Acacia Avenue Reserve, North Lambton (also consider the potential to provide a separate area for small dogs and puppies or an area for 'quieter dogs')	The identified sites are spread across Newcastle and would service different CN Wards. The sites are large, have a good profile and should have minimal impact on other reserve users or residents. CN is currently planning a realignment of Maryland Creek to achieve stormwater management and environmental objectives, and this will limit the area available for dogs off leash. However, other open spaces suitable for dogs off leash in the area are limited. Lambton Park (a suggested new fenced dog park), is located in the same Ward as Acacia Avenue Reserve. However, Acacia Avenue Reserve is centrally located and could be large enough to incorporate a separate area for small dogs and puppies or quieter dogs as well as an area for larger or more active dogs. Determining the size and design of a dog park at Acacia Avenue Reserve will require further consultation with the community given the residential character of the area.
3.2b New Fenced Dog Parks	Consider establishing new fenced dog parks at the following reserves in consultation with surrounding residents and potential users: - Lambton Park, Lambton - Stevenson Park (north western corner), Mayfield West - O'Connell Reserve, Adamstown - The western growth area as the area is developed and subject to demand (specific site to be determined)	The residents around Lambton have expressed strong desire for a fenced dog park. Master planning for Stevenson Park has highlighted community interest in the establishment of a fenced dog park. Ward 2 is lacking opportunities for a new fenced dog park and O'Connell Reserve could be the best option. The existing West End Park is too small and poorly located and land at the higher profile Gregson Park is limited and the park already receives high use. There could be demand and justification for a fenced dog park in the western growth area in the future.
3.2c Part Fencing Needs	Undertake part fencing where there is a need to reduce the risk of dogs running onto a road or car park (but where the site is not suitable for full fencing). This includes: - Islington Park, Islington (fence the northern end along the car park edge through to the existing canal fencing and backyard fencing to protect dogs from the road)	Islington Park does not require full fencing as most of the park is away from traffic and fencing would impact on the open and natural character of the site. However, the northern end near the car park is close to Pacific Highway and dogs can cross the canal to the Highway near the car park.
3.2d Puppies and Small Dogs Focus	Create at least one fenced dog park in the Newcastle LGA that provides a separate space for puppies and small dogs (separate from the larger dogs). Acacia Avenue Reserve could be an option due to the land area and central location of this site.	A desire for the separation of large and small dogs has been raised by the community as part of consultation. There are some good practice examples of separated areas for small and larger dogs around Australia.

3.3 Enhancing existing off leash areas

Strategy Focus	Strategy Details	Rationale
3.3a Improved Site Definition	Better define the existing off leash areas through accurate site maps, pathways, landscaping and signage. This will involve replacing signs and creating paths and landscaping at some sites.	It is difficult to determine where many of the existing dog off leash areas are located within reserves and the boundaries need to be better defined. The site maps and GIS maps differ for a number of sites.
3.3b Re-Design Requirements	Redesign off leash areas that would ideally be increased or reduced in size and have a potential impact on other users or facilities. This includes: - Dixon Park, Merewether (increase the off leash area to create a larger space and move dogs away from the road and at least 10m from the play and food preparation areas. Define the off leash area with pathways and landscape. Also consider fencing the play and connected recreation spaces to address safety issues - West End Park, Adamstown (increase the off leash area to create a larger space for dogs to run) - Rawson Reserve, Stockton (reduce the off leash area to draw dogs away from the swimming pool and skate area) - Ballast Ground, Stockton (reduce the off leash area if and when the playing fields are required for sport)	Boundary realignments are suggested for a number of sites for the following reasons: - The off leash area in Dixon Park is too small and people already use a larger area. However, an expansion should not impact on other activities in the park and a 10 metre distance from the play and food preparation areas is required. Fencing the play space would address child safety concerns. - West End Park is too small and there is land to the north east that would enable an expansion of the off leash area - The off leash area in Rawson Reserve is too close to the swimming pool and skate facility - The area allowed for Ballast Ground is very large and there may be a need for additional sports fields in the future
3.3c Relocated Sites	Relocate the Upper Reserve, Wallsend off leash area to the south eastern side of Ironbark Creek (Toohrnbing) to move dogs away from the heavy traffic on Lake Road and reflect existing usage patterns.	The existing site is not used due to the traffic volume and high level of risk to dogs. Access to the site is difficult and the site is therefore only local level. As such, shifting the off leash area to the other side of Ironbark Creek (Toohrnbing) where most locals already take their dogs is suggested.

3.4 Managing dogs in public places

Strategy Focus	Strategy Details	Rationale
3.4a Managing Risks	Reduce the risks associated with dogs off leash through design, signage and information, such as: - investigate fencing the play space at Dixon Park for child safety and landscape near the road edge to deter dogs from running onto the road - signage at high use areas such as Islington Park highlighting the potential behaviour patterns of dogs, and how to reduce risk	Risks associated with dogs should be managed and avoided where possible. Children playing with dogs are at risk of dog bites.
3.4b Dogs on Sports Fields	Install signage at all sportsgrounds and playing fields advising that dogs must be on leash and dog owners' responsibility to pick up after their dogs. A program of community awareness, education and enforcement will be required to support behaviour change.	There is evidence that dogs off leash have the potential to impact on the quality of a sports field including deteriorating surface quality through dogs running and digging and faeces being left on fields (which becomes a health and safety issue). Sports groups have raised concerns about the existing impact of dogs off leash on some sports fields, and particularly those that are fenced.
3.4c Timed Dog Off Leash Areas	Review the appropriateness of existing timed dog off leash areas as follows: - Retain, implement and enforce timed use where a site has high use (e.g. Dixon Park) - Consider removing timed use at smaller and lower key sites where the potential impact on other users is limited (e.g. West End Park, Elermore Vale Park and Purdue Park)	Timed use should reduce the risk of conflicts of use and should therefore be retained at Dixon Park. Where a reserve has less use, timed use may not be required. Removing timed use at smaller and quieter reserves should benefit local residents and activate these reserves.
3.4d Dedicated Allocation of Off Leash Areas	Consider allocating one or two off leash areas that are available for hire for specific groups or activities such as dog training, dog events or running greyhounds for recreation, providing impacts on other users is minimal. This could include a fenced dog park or another suitable site, but should not include a sports field.	Demand for the dedicated use of off leash areas has been raised by rescue greyhound owners and there is a need for spaces suitable for dog training and events. The recommendation for all dogs to be on leash at sportsgrounds should relate to organised activities as well as general community use.
3.4e Dogs in Natural Environments	Manage dogs to protect natural environments to consider: - On leash where flora and fauna requires protection and threatened species will not be impacted if dogs are controlled - Dogs prohibited where flora and fauna and particularly a threatened species is at risk of being impacted by dogs, either off or on leash	Where natural areas are significant and dogs off leash can impact on flora and fauna and site biodiversity, dogs should be on leash. Some natural sites may justify dogs being prohibited including to protect threatened species where required in accordance with the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.
3.4f Dog Prohibited Areas	Identify and define dog prohibited areas, including: - Beaches and Conservation Areas, e.g. Blackbutt Reserve - Sites defined as having an Endangered Ecological Communities such as Themeda grassland on seacliffs and coastal headlands if dogs are considered to have significant impact - Other natural areas that are ecologically sensitive or have high biodiversity - Playgrounds and food preparation areas - The Anzac Memorial Walk	Existing dog prohibited areas that protect natural resources should be retained. If dogs could significantly affect a threatened species, population or ecological community, dogs should be prohibited. An ecological analysis of sites has not been undertaken as part of this study and specific sites will need to be determined.
3.4g Council's Enforcement Approach	Continue to adopt an "inform and educate" approach to the enforcement of dogs in public places. Where the safety and health of other park users is at risk stronger enforcement should be adopted including fines.	An "inform and educate" approach is consistent with current available CN resources and more likely to receive support from the community than an aggressive enforcement approach. During consultation the need for stronger enforcement to address inappropriate dog management by some owners was raised.

3.5 Community awareness and education

Strategy Focus	Strategy Details	Rationale
3.5a Community Awareness and Education Program	Develop and promote a community education and awareness program that provides the community with key messages and information relating to: - appropriate dog behaviour and owner responsibilities to manage dogs in public places - dog owner and walker health and safety responsibilities including the need to pick up after dogs - the promotion of on leash and dog prohibited areas - dog and puppy training opportunities	Dog owners, people without dogs, dog trainers and service providers have all highlighted the need for increased community education to encourage responsible dog ownership hygiene. Increased community education has the potential to raise awareness and encourage increased self-policing by other dog owners and residents.
3.5b Signage and Regulations	Establish and improve signage to better define off leash areas, on leash sites and dog prohibited areas. The signage should be appropriately positioned in reserves and be (clear, bold & simple).	Clear, bold and simple signage is more likely to be seen by reserve users, which should reduce the risk of conflicts and inappropriate behaviours.
3.5c Partnerships	Establish partnerships for educating the community and promoting appropriate dog and owner behaviour. This includes: - input to the design and development of the community education program and signage by dog interest groups - promotion of the community education program through dog interest groups and government bodies - shared development and adoption of the community education program and signage by adjoining local councils - free and organised programs run in parks by dog trainers that are supported by Council and other government bodies	Partnerships with dog interest groups, adjoining Councils and other levels of government will increase the potential outcomes aimed at addressing issues associated with dogs. CN is unlikely to have the resources to provide all programs and services relating to dogs. The ability to provide the proposed programs will be based on resources.

Recommended sites

The recommended sites for existing and potential off leash areas are provided on the following pages for:

potential fenced dog parks

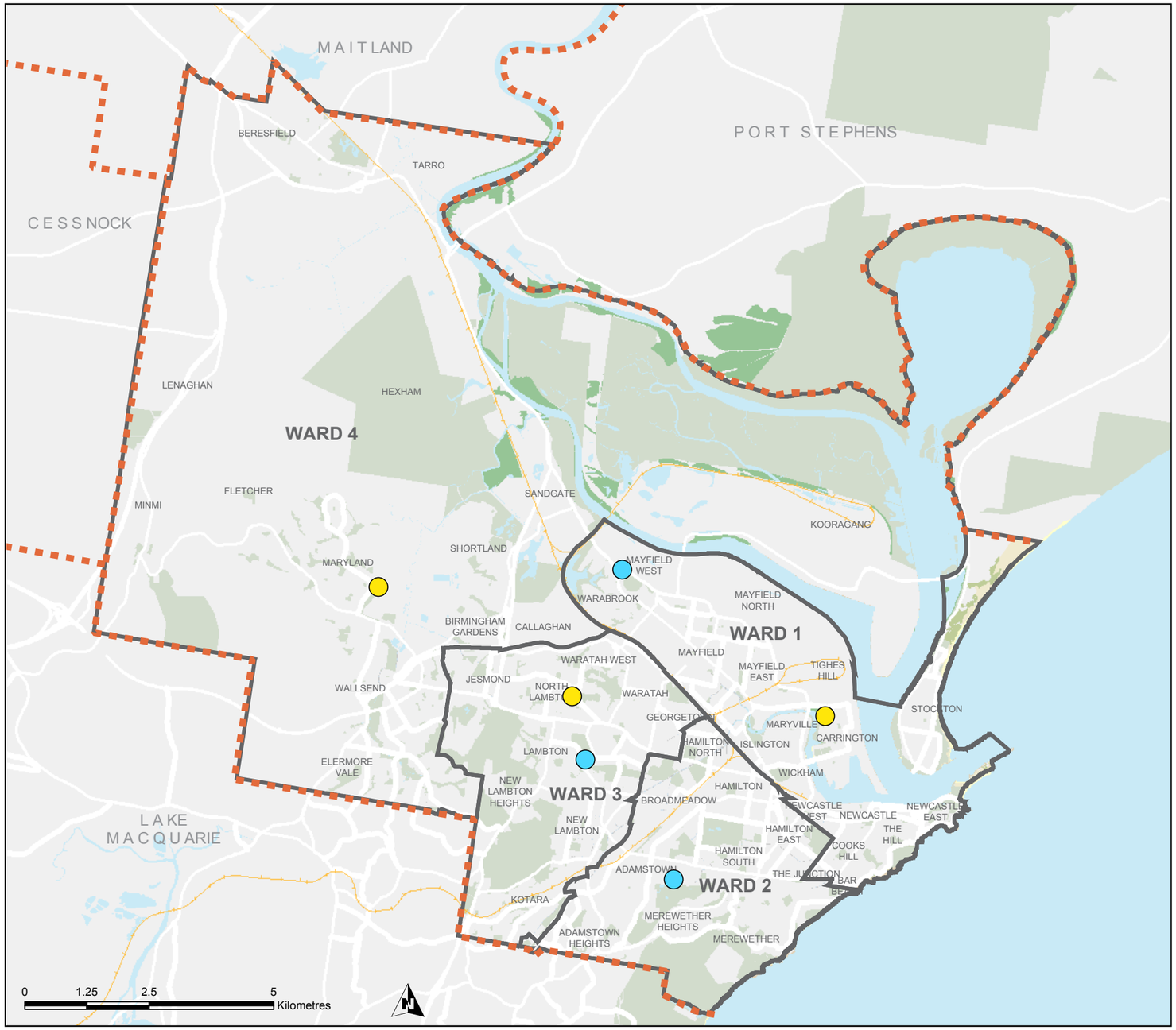
other off leash areas (not fenced)

The recommendations are based on site visits, aerial analysis and the findings of community engagement.

A detailed analysis of each site is provided in Appendix B.

A map of the recommended sites is provided on page 18.

Potential fenced dog parks



4.1 Potential fenced dog parks

Fence Existing Off Leash Areas

Site	Precinct	Reserve Size (ha)	Potential Dog Park Area	Recommended Site Direction
Acacia Avenue Reserve	Waratah, North Lambton	3.9	at least 1.5ha in size	Consider Acacia Avenue Reserve for a fenced dog park due to site character and central location. Provide additional natural shade, shelter, seating and drinking water for dogs and consider a defined car park area within the reserve. Consider the option of creating a separate area for small dogs and puppies as well as an area for larger dogs.
Carrington Foreshore (Honeysuckle Reserve)	Wickham, Tighes Hill, Carrington	1.1	0.7ha	Develop as a fenced dog park but design the fencing along the waterway to be a lower but safe height to minimise impacts on the waterfront appeal of the site (the dog park could be promoted for smaller dogs and dogs that don't jump). Keep the pathway outside the fenced dog park and maintain a linear open space for general community use.
Maryland Drive Reserve	Maryland, Fletcher, Minmi	1.3	Subject to creekline reconstruction but ideally around 0.5ha	Establish a fenced dog park that is designed to allow for the Maryland Creek realignment. Undertake site enhancements including increased trees, seating, shelter and a circulation pathway. However, if an area of at least 0.3ha cannot be achieved, investigate other site options in the area.

Potential New Fenced Dog Parks

Site	Precinct	Reserve Size (ha)	Potential Dog Park Area	Recommended Site Direction
Lambton Park	Lambton, New Lambton	14.5	0.6ha	Create a fenced dog park on the south western part of Lambton Park. The dog park should include additional trees for shade, shelter, seating and a circulation pathway as well as bins and drinking water for dogs. A grassed area for sports training or community use could be retained to the north of the dog park (on the western side of the pathway connection). The existing pathway should remain out of the dog park for broader community use.
O'Connell Reserve	Adamstown, Kotara	2.1	at least 0.9 ha in size pending removal of substation compound	Pending removal of the substation compound, consider establishing a fenced dog park with a minimum 10 metre offset to housing and the playground. Include a pathway, seating, shelter, drinking water for dogs and bins. Assess need through engagement.
Stevenson Park	Mayfield West	13.0	0.5ha (subject to Master Plan)	Create a fenced dog off leash area in the north western corner of the park as part of master planning for the Park, with the aim to remove dogs from the sports fields and service the wider area. Include a pathway connection, trees for shade, seating, shelter, drinking water for dogs and bins.

4.2 Other off leash areas

Existing Dog Off Leash Areas

Site	Precinct	Reserve Size (ha)	Recommended Site Direction
Ballast Ground	Stockton, Fullerton	10.3	The entire Ballast Ground Reserve is currently designated off leash. Review if the southern fields are required for sport and consider reducing the Ballast Ground to the northern end only or allow timed use of the southern end, when not being used for sport. Undertake improvements to the car park and toilets.
Braye Park	Waratah, North Lambton	11.8	Review Braye Park as an off leash area due to the bushland character of the site and the proximity to Acacia Avenue Reserve. This could involve removing the off leash area or managing potential environmental impacts, including by redefining the area available for dogs off leash.
Dixon Park Reserve	Merewether, The Junction	0.5	Retain Dixon Park as a timed off leash area to enable other recreation activities at other times. However, better define and increase the off leash area (defined through signage, paths, landscape), provide some additional seating and a shelter within the off leash area and improve the surface quality where possible. The safety of children at the playspace must also be considered as part of any redesign, including the option of fencing the play and connected recreation spaces.
Elermore Vale Park	Wallsend, Elermore Vale	0.8	Maintain the site as an off leash area (not fenced) and remove the timed use restriction.
Horseshoe Beach	Newcastle. Cooks Hill	0.7	Encourage Roads and Maritime Services to maintain Horseshoe Beach as an off leash area. CN taking responsibility for the management of the site is not recommended.
Islington Park (east of Throsby Creek)	Wickham, Tighes Hill, Carrington	2.1	Develop a dog park that is partly fenced along the car park end of the park through to the canal fencing and includes a double gate entrance to reduce the risks of dogs running onto Pacific Highway and into the car park. Improve the surface, plant additional trees for shade, provide infrastructure (seating, shelter, dog drinking water) and consider the frequency of bin collection.
King Edward Park	Newcastle, Cooks Hill	2.2	Review the appropriateness of dogs off leash at this site if CN finds that dogs are significantly affecting the threatened species, population or ecological community in accordance with the requirements of the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. Otherwise, continue to manage potential environmental impacts.
Michael/ Pilkington Street Reserve	Waratah, North Lambton	1.3	Maintain the site as an off leash area (not fenced) and remove the timed use restriction. Improve the site amenity with tree planting and seating.
Nesca Park	Newcastle, Cooks Hill	2.1	Retain as an off leash area. Better define the boundaries and improve seating, shelter and shade.
Purdue Park	Mayfield, Warabrook	0.6	Retain as an off leash are. Due to the residential setting and limited open space in the area for the local community, extending dog use & facilities is not recommended.
Rawson Reserve	Stockton, Fullerton	5.0	Consider reducing the grassed area allocated for dogs off leash and shift the edge away from the skate park and swimming pool. Retain access to the beach as part of the off leash opportunity.
Tarro Recreation Area	Beresfield Hexham	10.0	Maintain as an off leash area within a natural space with informal paths and a treed setting.
Upper Reserve	Wallsend, Elermore Vale	2.7	Relocate the off leash area to south eastern end of Ironbark Creek within Upper Reserve. Use signage to discourage dogs on the sports fields.
West End Park	Adamstown, Kotara	0.7	Expand the site to the north to increase the space and usability of the off leash area and increase the appeal of the site through trees for shade, paths and seating. Allow off leash use at all times (rather than timed use) but do not fence or invest significantly in the site as its local isolated location is not ideal.

Potential Additional Off Leash Areas (not fenced)

Site	Precinct	Reserve Size (ha)	Site Direction
Brickworks Park	Wallsend, Elermore Vale	13.7	Consider creating an off leash area in the south west part of the reserve (the swale area). Limited improvements would be required, but ideally the play space would be relocated to the picnic area.
Mayo Street Reserve	Shortland - Jesmond	2.7	Create a dog off leash area on Mayo Street Reserve (ideally the whole reserve area to provide a good sized space), with trees for shade, seating, drinking water for dogs, a bin and shelter.
Minmi	Maryland, Fletcher, Minmi	TBD	Create a dog off leash area as part of urban development requirements for community open spaces.

Implementation

5.1 Works action plan

A 10 year Action Plan has been developed for items in the strategies that are works related (and could require an allocation of capital funds) is provided on the following page. The priorities in the Action Plan are based on the following time frames:

Priority	**Indicative Timing** (Commence by)
High	within 3 years
Medium	3-6 years
Lower	after 6 years

Improvements and new facilities will need to occur as resources become available and in accordance with other CN priorities. It is important to note that the strategies and priorities in the Plan are only a guide and do not commit CN or any other organisation to allocate resources or achieve any action.

The costing of the actions should occur as part of detailed design and works program identification undertaken by CN.

Recommended Action Plan

Strategy	Action*	Priority	Responsibility
THEME – DOG OFF LEASH OPPORTUNITIES			
New Off Leash in Gap Areas	Establish the southwest corner of Lambton Park as an off leash area (refer 2.3).	High	Parks and Recreation
	Establish O'Connell Reserve as an off leash area (refer 2.3).	High	Parks and Recreation
	Establish Mayo Street Reserve as an off leash area (not fenced, all of reserve).	High	Parks and Recreation
	Establish part of Brickworks Park as an off leash area (not fenced, south west swale area).	Medium	Parks and Recreation
	Establish the north western part of Stevenson Park as an off leash area (refer 2.3)	Lower	Parks and Recreation
Infrastructure Provision	Establish good support infrastructure in existing off leash areas.	Variable	Parks and Recreation
THEME – FENCED DOG PARK OPPORTUNITIES			
Fencing of Existing Off Leash	Create a fenced dog park at Acacia Avenue Reserve (at least 1ha in size) and consider two separate areas to service different types of dogs (e.g. small dogs and puppies vs larger dogs or quieter vs more active dogs).	High	Parks and Recreation
	Create a fenced dog park at Carrington Foreshore (Honeysuckle Reserve, around 0.7ha).	Medium	Parks and Recreation
	Create a fenced dog park at Maryland Drive Reserve that integrates with the Maryland Creek realignment (up to 0.5ha in size depending on land availability following the creek realignment). (Timing dependent on creek works)	Medium	Parks and Recreation
New Fenced Dog Parks	Establish O'Connell Reserve as a fenced dog park (around 0.5ha).	High	Parks and Recreation
	Establish Lambton Park as a fenced dog park (around 0.6ha).	Medium	Parks and Recreation
	Establish the north western part of Stevenson Park a fenced dog park (around 0.5ha).	Low	Parks and Recreation
Part Fencing Needs	Part fencing of Islington Park (car park edge to canal fence).	High	Parks and Recreation
THEME – ENHANCING EXISTING OFF LEASH AREAS			
Improved Site Definition	Better define the existing dog off leash areas.	High	Parks and Recreation
Re-Design Requirements	Redesign Dixon Park off leash area to increase the space and move dogs away from the road, play and food preparation. This includes fencing the play space to increase child safety.	High	Parks and Recreation
	Increase West End Park off leash area to create a larger space.	Medium	Parks and Recreation
THEME – MANAGING DOGS IN PUBLIC PLACES			
Dogs on Sports Fields	Establish on leash signage at all sportsgrounds and sports fields.	High	Parks and Recreation, Regulatory &Assessment
THEME – COMMUNITY AWARENESS & EDUCATION			
Signage and Regulations	Establish and improve signage to better define off leash areas, on leash sites and dog prohibited areas.	High to Medium	Parks and Recreation, Regulatory &Assessment

* Further details are included in the strategy, section 3.

5.2 Other areas of focus

Other high priorities that may not be included in Council's Works programs but could require people or resource commitments are as follows:

Dogs in Natural Environments
Manage dogs to protect natural environments where required, including through the allocation of reserves as on leash or dogs prohibited.

CN's Enforcement Approach
Continue to adopt an inform and educate approach to the enforcement of dogs off and on leash. However, where the safety and health of other park users is at risk such as dogs near play and on sports fields, stronger enforcement should be adopted including through fines.

Community Awareness and Education Program
Develop and promote a community education and awareness program for the Newcastle LGA.

Partnerships
Establish partnerships for educating the community and promoting appropriate dog and owner behaviour.

5.3 Managing new and improved areas

Providing additional off leash areas, enhancing existing off leash areas and establishing some fenced dog parks will require a commitment of resources through CN funding and grant funding opportunities.

A staged approach will be required over a 10 year period, with an initial focus on the recommended priorities. Items that add greatest value and have a lower cost such as enhancing existing off leash areas (i.e. tree planting and bins) could be considered in the earlier years.

CN is considering the allocation of funds to enable the development of four fenced dog parks over a period of four years, and as such these will be an early priority. This includes fencing, shade, seating and amenities. CN will determine which fenced dog parks are developed first based on community priorities and the availability of resources.

Establishing fenced dog parks and additional off leash areas will have an ongoing maintenance implication for CN, including the likely need for additional funds and staff resources. The recommended community education program and partnerships could also have a resource implication.

The new and improved off leash areas and the community awareness and education program will add value to a large proportion of people in the community.

5.4 Partnership opportunities

The community engagement undertaken as part of the Plan highlighted there is potential for CN to establish partnerships with dog interest groups such as the RSPCA, other dog welfare groups, trainers and dog care organisations, as well as broader members of the community. There is a strong interest within the community to achieve quality off leash areas and to encourage appropriate behaviour by dogs and their owners.

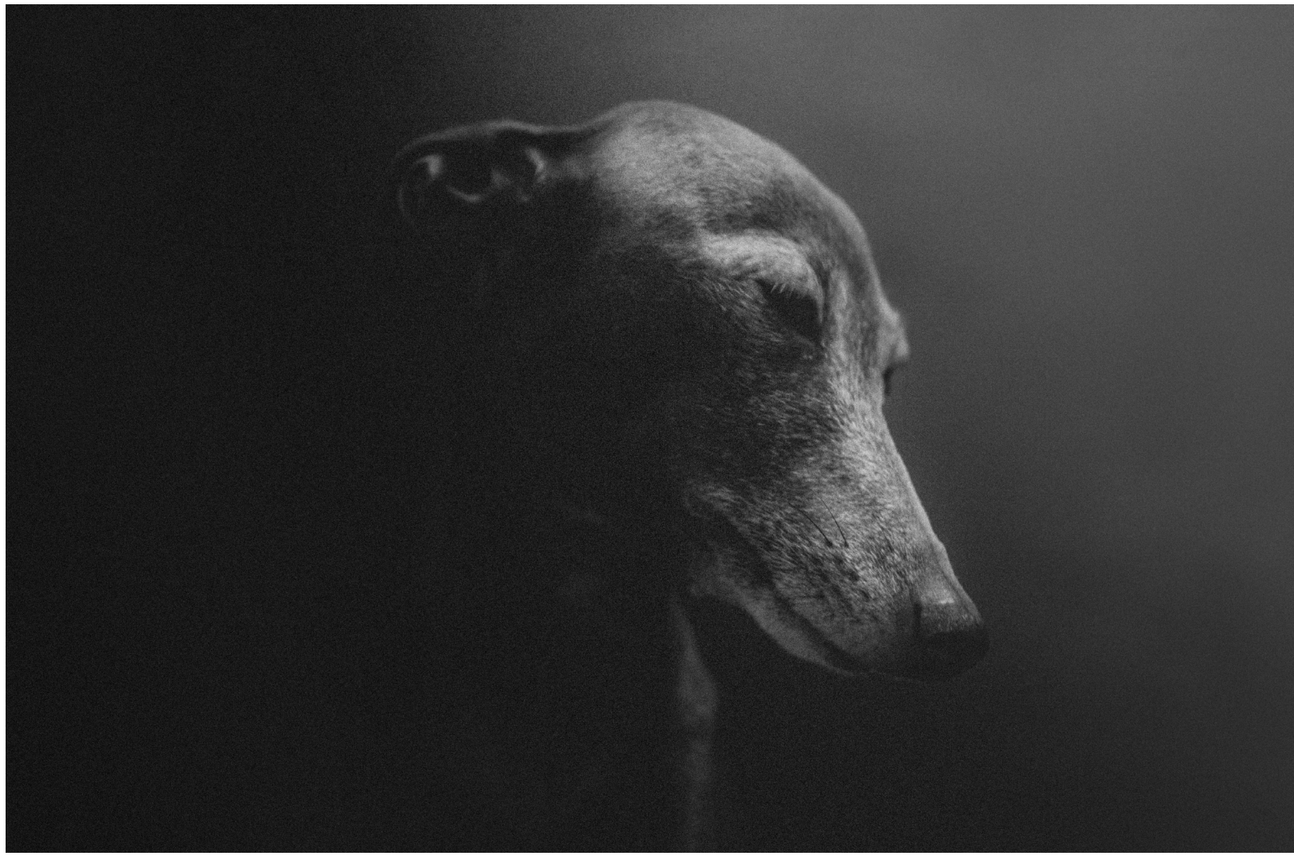
In particular, there is potential to involve community groups in promoting the Plan and achieving specific strategies such as community awareness and education and improvements to existing off leash areas. Partnerships could be established and maintained through a Community Dogs Off Leash Implementation Group as well as targeted partner activities such as dog training and information sessions in off leash areas sponsored by CN.

5.5 Review and monitoring

The Action Plan should be reviewed annually in association with the development of future budgets and operational plans. Needs, priorities and resource availability could change over time and other potential sites could be considered if there is demand.

The success and suitability of off leash areas and the impacts on residents and natural environments should be monitored and modifications made to directions if required.

In addition, the use and value of each new fenced dog park and off leash area should be reviewed in consultation with users to guide the development of other future dog off leash areas.



Supporting background information

6.1 Strategic alignment

The Plan will contribute to achieving CN's strategic plans.

Newcastle 2030

The Community Strategic Plan Newcastle 2030 is CN's overriding strategic document that determines commitments and priorities. The vision is for Newcastle is to be a Smart, Liveable and Sustainable city. The strategic direction and objectives that are most relevant to the Plan are below.

Strategic Directions	Objectives
Vibrant and Activated Public Places A city of great public places and neighbourhoods promoting people's health, happiness and wellbeing	- Public places that provide for diverse activity and strengthen our social connections - Culture, heritage and place are valued, shared and celebrated - Safe and activated places that are used by people day and night

Parkland and Recreation Strategy

The CN Parkland and Recreation Strategy (2014) provides a framework for open space and recreation.

Vision

The City of Newcastle will provide, promote and support a range of facilities, events and programs aimed at:

Meeting the diverse parkland and recreational needs and interests of residents, visitors, students and workers;

Creating vibrant, activated and sustainable public places; and

Promoting health, happiness, community connections and wellbeing.

Strategic Objective

Equitable Provision and Development of Facilities: Quality parkland and recreation facilities that are diverse, accessible and responsive to changing needs and will provide positive experiences for current and future residents and visitors. A clear decision making framework is essential to guide development and sustainable provision.

Specific action relating to off leash areas:

1.18 Review existing and investigate the establishment of additional dog leash free areas.

Other Plans and Objectives

Various other Council planning is relevant to dogs in open spaces including the Community Assets and Open Space Policy 2012, Sportslands Plan of Management, Sports Policy 1998, Neighbourhood Parks Plan of Management, General Community Use Plan of Management, Newcastle Local Environmental Plan 2012, Newcastle Cycling Strategy and Action Plan 2012, Newcastle Urban Forest Policy 2007, Disability and Inclusion Action Plan 2016-2019 and other relevant and future Plans of Management.

In addition, the 2036 Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan and the Hunter Regional Plan 2036 provide overriding directions for the City of Newcastle.

The Plan aims to be consistent with other CN and regional planning and objectives.

6.2 NSW Companion Animals Act 1998

Particularly relevant sections in the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 are summarised below:

Section 13 Responsibilities while dog in public place

(6) A local authority can declare a public place to be an off-leash area. This can be limited to apply during a particular period or periods of the day or to different periods of different days. However, there must at all times be at least one public place in the area of a local authority that is an off-leash area.

Section 14 Dogs prohibited in some public places

(1) Dogs are prohibited in the following places (whether or not they are leashed or otherwise controlled):

(a) within 10 metres of any playing apparatus provided for the use of children

(b) within 10 metres of any apparatus for the preparation of food for human consumption or for the consumption of food by humans

(c) a public place used for public recreation or the playing of organised games and in which the local authority has ordered that dogs are prohibited

(d) a public place used for or in conjunction with public bathing or public recreation (including a beach), in which the local authority has ordered that dogs are prohibited

(h) a public place set apart by the local authority for the protection of wildlife and in which the local authority has ordered that dogs are prohibited for the purposes of the protection of wildlife

Section 20 Dogs defecating in public place

(1) If a dog defecates in a public place:

(a) the owner of the dog, or (b) another person who is of or above the age of 16 years is in charge of the dog at that time must immediately remove the dog's faeces and properly dispose of them.

(2) Proper disposal includes disposal in a rubbish receptacle designated for the purpose by the local authority. It is the duty of a local authority for a place that is commonly used for exercising dogs (including an off-leash area) to provide sufficient rubbish receptacles for the proper disposal of the faeces of dogs that defecate in the place.

Note the Companion Animal Regulation 2008 is currently under review and any new requirements will need to be considered as appropriate in future reviews of this Plan.

6.3 Community needs and concerns

The Plan has involved considerable community engagement including:

An on-line survey, with 1,076 respondents.

On site interviews of 143 people across four sites including Islington Park, Dixon Park, Upper Reserve and Ballast Ground at Stockton.

122 interviews by Council staff at a 'Pups in the Park' event at Lambton Park.

Targeted planning sessions with community interest groups, parks committee representatives and sporting groups.

Submissions received from 42 interested residents expressing concerns and suggestions.

The main community needs, concerns and desired directions highlighted by the community engagement are summarised below.

1. Having designated spaces for dogs off leash is important to the community, including people without dogs and sports groups. Off leash areas enable dogs to run free and socialise, and also reduces the likelihood of people allowing their dogs to run free in areas that are less suitable. Popular existing off leash areas include Islington Park, Carrington Foreshore, King Edward Park and Dixon Park. Large dog off leash areas are also desired.

2. The community has expressed a need for additional off leash areas, particularly in areas that are lacking provision. Lambton Park is a key site that has been identified for an off leash area by the community. In addition Council received a community petition regarding the use of Claremont Park for off leash (although there was also some community resistance to this).

3. Some existing off leash areas are considered to be too small, are poorly located near main roads or lack definition (people do not know which area can be used).

4. There is a desire for fenced dog parks to protect dogs from running onto roads. People also feel more comfortable with their dogs being in a contained area. Particular sites suggested by the community include Lambton Park, Carrington Foreshore (Honeysuckle Reserve), Stevenson Park, Acacia Avenue Reserve and Maryland Drive Reserve. The need for some fenced dog parks that separate small dogs and large dogs has been requested.

5. Improvements to existing off leash areas are needed including:

- Improved amenity such as shade, seating and shelter
- Improved services such as bins, poo bags and drinking water for dogs

6. There is a desire for access to additional beaches for dogs off leash. Horseshoe Beach is valuable but is too small and there are conflicts between dogs at the beach.

7. Whilst a number of dog owners are keen to have access to sports fields for dogs off leash and some already use sports fields, concerns have been raised by the community about dogs on sports fields and the health and safety risks for people using the fields. Sports groups are particularly concerned about potential impacts.

8. People not picking up after their dogs has been raised as a key issue including by dog owners and users of existing off leash areas.

9. There are concerns about aggressive dogs in off leash areas and people not appropriately managing their dogs, and the need for increased awareness of dog owner responsibilities is desired.

Community Engagement Findings Summary

Key Findings	Community Interviews	Community Survey	Interest Groups	Submissions and Sports
Importance of dogs and off leash provision	X	X	X	X
Importance of large areas for dogs to run	X	X	X	X
Need for additional off leash	X	X	X	X
Better definition of existing off leash	X	X	X	
Review of location and main road issues	X	X	X	
Need for fenced dog parks	X	X	X	X
Need to cater for small dogs and puppies	X		X	
Need for enhancements to existing (shade, seating, surface, bins, poobags, water)	X	X	X	X
Increase access to beaches (on and off leash)	X		X	
Address issues with use of Sportsgrounds	X	X	X	X
Need to improve dog behaviour and owner responsibility	X	X	X	X
Need to improve education and information	X	X	X	X

6.4 Key site analysis findings

The Newcastle LGA currently has 17 off leash areas, which represents one off leash area per 9,142 people as at 2016 (based on a population of 155,416). By 2041, the population is projected to be around 200,000 and if no additional off leash areas are provided the provision will be 1: 11,764 in 2041.

Despite this provision there are some areas that lack access to off leash areas, particularly in the central area around Adamstown and the far west growth area around Maryland. In addition, none of the existing off leash areas are fenced and the need for some fenced dog parks has been raised by the community.

An analysis of each existing off leash area based on site visits was undertaken as part of the development of this Plan and is summarised on the following pages.

Main Site Analysis Findings

Site Information	Key Findings
Acacia Avenue Reserve (3.9ha), Waratah, North Lambton Precinct	- good location central to the population - large size that could include fenced off leash (upper area most suitable)
Ballast Ground, Stockton (10.3ha), Fullerton Precinct	- large open area along water not suitable for fencing - Hunter River crossing constraint creates smaller local catchment - uncertainty regarding off leash area (conflicting information) - sports and trail potential conflicts
Braye Park (11.8ha), Waratah, North Lambton Precinct	- high profile site linked to main roads - poor park quality and design - large area allocated for off leash - potential impacts on nature and other activities
Carrington Foreshore (Honeysuckle Reserve, 1.1ha), Wickham, Tighes Hill, Carrington Precinct	- large site behind industrial - connected to Throsby Creek, key recreation area, pathway network and wetlands - potential conflicts with path users - potential for fenced off leash due to size and location
Dixon Park Reserve (0.5ha), Merewether, The Junction Precinct	- park within coastal zone that is high profile and well used - timed use (early mornings and evenings) for off leash - off leash area is poorly defined - lack of amenities to support off leash - potential conflict with other recreational uses - off leash should not be fenced due to other uses and visual impacts - play space could be fenced
Elermore Vale Park (0.8ha), Wallsend, Elermore Vale Precinct	- current timed use may not be necessary (could be used any time) due to local/low profile location
Horseshoe Beach (0.7ha), Newcastle. Cooks Hill Precinct	- small beach area managed by Roads and Maritime Services - high use as off leash area
Islington Park (east of Throsby Creek, 2.1ha), Wickham, Tighes Hill, Carrington Precinct	- good profile site off Pacific Highway - large, open well used off leash area with link to canal (water) - parking area and northern end of reserve is close to traffic (risk for dogs) - lack of amenities (shade, seating, shelter)
King Edward Park (2.2ha), Newcastle, Cooks Hill Precinct	- significant park within coastal zone - off leash area includes Themeda Grasslands (protected species) - need to review environmental impacts and appropriateness of off leash

Site	Precinct
Maryland Drive Reserve, Maryland (1.3ha), Fletcher, Minmi Precinct	- large open site along Maryland Creek and Maryland Drive - site is undeveloped and unappealing, with traffic risks for off leash - potential to create fenced off leash - consideration needs to be given to the Maryland Creek realignment design
Michael/ Pilkington Street Reserve (1.3ha), Waratah, North Lambton Precinct	- local setting with grass quarry area suitable for off leash - timed off leash could be reviewed to enable greater use
Nesca Park (2.1ha), Newcastle, Cooks Hill Precinct	- lower profile site accessed through local streets - steep topography around off leash area - off leash area could be better defined - lack of amenities (shade, seating, shelter)
Purdue Park (0.6ha), Mayfield, Warabrook Precinct	- local park adjacent to housing with only one access point - not suitable as dedicated dogs only (fenced) due to lack of other open space in the area
Rawson Reserve (5.0ha), Stockton, Fullerton Precinct	- large open area along water not suitable for fencing - Hunter River crossing creates smaller local catchment in Stockton - beach area included in off leash - potential conflict with swimming pool and skate park (off leash is too close)
Tarro Recreation Area (10ha), Beresfield Hexham Precinct	- part of significant sport and recreation reserve - large open area not suitable for fencing - suitable as is, with minimal development
Upper Reserve (2.7ha), Wallsend, Elermore Vale Precinct	- adjoins Lake Road with traffic risks to dogs - difficult access to the site and therefore local use - could review location of off leash within the reserve
West End Park (0.7ha), Adamstown, Kotara Precinct	- relatively isolated and low profile site along railway line - unappealing site with a lack of shade, seating and shelter - the off leash area would ideally be larger in size

6.5 The main gaps and issues

The main gaps and issues identified through the Dogs in Open Space Plan are outlined below.

Whilst there are currently 17 off leash areas across the Newcastle LGA, there is a gap in provision around the central, southern and far western parts of the City (Lambton, Adamstown, Adamstown Heights, Kotara, Maryland, Fletcher).

Some of the existing off leash sites are not ideal for the following reasons:

King Edward Park incorporates Themeda grassland, which is an endangered ecological community that requires protection in accordance with the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. In addition, the site has a steep slope which could limit use. However, the community survey suggests this off leash area is popular.

The Dixon Park off leash area is small and adjoins a main road and busy car park. The off leash area is poorly defined and generally people do not contain their dogs within the allocated space. The park is high profile and well used for other passive recreation activities. As such, there is potential conflict in use and potential safety issues, although this is partly managed through timed off leash use (early mornings and evenings).

Braye Park is a large reserve that includes a large bushland component, a large gassed area, recreation spaces and a central roadway. It has a hilly topography and issues with site quality and use. The off leash area covers a considerable part of the reserve and there could be potential impacts on nature and other users.

The West End Park off leash area is small and unappealing. It is relatively isolated with poor passive surveillance, being located alongside a railway line and adjoining backyards. However, there is a lack of potential for other off leash areas in the surrounding suburbs.

There is potential to improve the quality and function of a number of the existing off leash areas, with the consistent issues being:

- ground surface quality issues (due to a lack of irrigation and impacts by dogs, e.g. digging and worn areas)
- a lack of bins or the need to service bins more regularly
- a lack of seating and shelter for dog owners and walkers
- the need for drinking water for dogs

At most parks it is difficult to determine the specific areas that are off leash with little definition of the areas such as through landscapes or paths. In some instances the off leash maps at parks do not match Council's web site.

Some off leash areas are too close to busy roads such as at Upper Reserve, Dixon Park, Islington Park, Carrington (Honeysuckle) Reserve and Maryland Drive Reserve. Opportunities for addressing dog safety need to be considered.

There is a desire by the community to have access to other beaches besides Horseshoe Beach and the beach connected to Rawson Park. Both beaches are very small and there is potential for dog conflicts due to the tightness of the sites. However, other beach opportunities are limited due to the high use of beaches by the wider community or natural values (e.g. National Park links). Stockton Beach could be a possibility, although impacts on the wider community would need to be considered. The northern part of Stockton Beach, which is further from other users, has erosion and environmental issues.

Sportsgrounds are at risk of being impacted on by dogs off leash with people not picking up after their dogs and surface quality issues. Whilst no sportsground is defined as off leash, they are used by some people particularly where fields are fenced. This has an impact on the quality and safety of fields. Sports and community members have suggested that fields should not be available for dogs off leash.

Some people do not manage their dogs in public places or pick up after their dogs, and a program of community awareness and education is required to address these issues. This has been raised by organisations with an interest in dogs and the community, and observed during the study.

6.6 Industry considerations

Councils across Australia are supporting dogs off leash through the provision of dedicated off leash areas and fenced dog parks. This is in accordance with various State legislation and in recognition that dogs and having places to walk dogs is becoming increasingly important to communities.

The success and use of an off leash areas have been found to be influenced by various factors, including:

1. The importance of location, with the need for dog off leash areas to be accessible and visual to passing traffic whilst also being safe for dogs.
2. The need for a good size area for dogs off leash as it is not realistic to expect dogs to run within a small open space and there are potential conflicts between dogs if small spaces are fenced.
3. The need for dog off leash areas to be good quality spaces with trees for shade, seating and other amenities. Both fenced and unfenced off leash areas need to be an appealing place for people and dogs.
4. The importance of defining dog off leash areas through signs, paths, landscapes, clear information and where appropriate fencing.

Fenced dog parks are usually designed to cater for regional or district catchments and are located in higher profile sites. The number of fenced dog parks is generally fewer than unfenced due to the cost of provision and the need to isolate part of open space to achieve a fenced dog park.

Fenced dog parks are more developed, with fencing and double gates, paths, landscapes, drinking water for dogs, seating, shelter and features for dogs to play or investigate.

The appropriateness of dogs off leash at sportsgrounds is an issue across Australia and many Councils have determined that dogs should either be on leash or are prohibited. The main reasons for such a response are to protect the quality of sportsgrounds and also to minimise the risks associated with dogs being near children and adults playing sport. There are a number of examples of where dogs have been allowed on a sportsground through a shared use approach, but sports have had to leave the ground due to the impacts on the playing surface, people not picking up after their dogs and potential conflicts. Islington Park is one such example.

A document that draws together the approaches and principles relating to dog off leash areas and would be a useful further resource for City of Newcastle is Unleashed A Guide to successful dog parks, SA Dog & Cat Management Board. The document includes a guide for dog park planning, design, and management and operations. Key findings are summarised in Appendix A and have been reflected in the recommendations in the Plan.

In addition to providing well located and good quality off leash areas and some fenced dog parks, it is important to promote off leash areas and create a positive and respectful environment for dogs and people through community awareness and education. This includes advising people of where dogs need to be on leash or where dogs are prohibited in accordance with the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998.

How our community can get involved

We have been involving community in decision making, and providing effective communications to ensure we have an informed community for many years.

Stay connected
You can find out about our news and events through a variety of communication channels by visiting newcastle.nsw.gov.au or calling 02 4974 2000 for hard copy options.

Our community has helped shape the future of Newcastle in the following areas:

- Arts, entertainment and culture
- Beaches, parks and recreation
- Budgets and rates
- Building and planning
- Environmental / water / waste
- Roads and traffic
- Tourism and economy

You can actively get involved, or see how your input has influenced our decision making by visiting our website **newcastle.nsw.gov.au/getinvolved**

Thank you

City of Newcastle prepared this plan on behalf of the Newcastle community and would like to thank:

Many people have given their time freely and contributed a strong body of knowledge and research necessary to the development of this document. City of Newcastle would like to thank all community music industry members and CN staff that engaged with us during the research and development process.

Special thanks to the Newcastle Live Music Task Force members who have not only given their time willingly, but also reached out to the wider music industry to engage and seek their views. We look forward to working together further to deliver the actions in the document to keep the conversation going as well make progress towards nurturing the live music scene in Newcastle.

newcastle.nsw.gov.au