

Countryside Service

## Taking the lead managing walkers with dogs on your site

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

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

### Who is it for?

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

### Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the Hampshire County Council officers who have assisted with this and to Stephen Jenkinson, the Kennel Club Access Advisor.

More information on all this work is available at [www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs)

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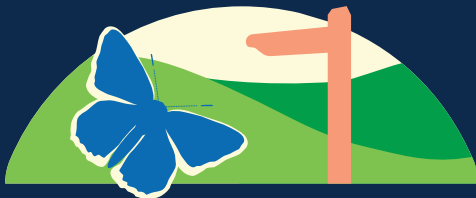
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# Section I Walkers with dogs uncovered

**Dog walking is a very popular activity with approximately one third of all visitors to the countryside accompanied by a dog.** Dog ownership encourages people to exercise and explore the outdoors and provides social and psychological benefits. It is important to remember that dog walkers are not all the same and have different needs and attitudes as well as different relationships with dogs (they may not be a dog owner but care for one or walk with other people that have dogs).



### **I. Intensive users**

Walkers with dogs are very regular, intensive users of the countryside with three quarters walking their dog more than once a day. The site survey showed that walkers with dogs visited the site on average of 4 times more than other user of the same site. Clearly indicating that, if not the largest group, they are certainly our most regular users of the services we offer.

### **II. Diverse communities**

Dog walkers come from a wide spectrum of society and from all socio-economic backgrounds, although dog ownership is highest amongst family groups.

The only aspect that walkers with dogs have in common is the fact that they own or walk a dog. For many their dog is a member of the family, for some owning a dog is a serious hobby and for others caring, walking or owning a dog may be a way of earning a living.

### **III. The professionals**

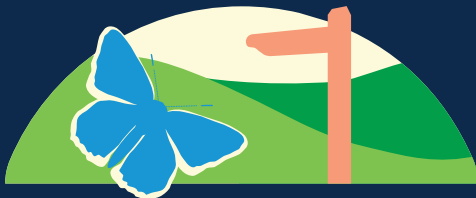
The increasing number of 'professional' dog walkers (i.e those who earn money from walking dogs) is an issue often raised by site/land managers. Of particular concern can be the large number of dogs that they walk and their ability to control and pick up after them. Site surveys showed that

only 1-2% of dog walkers were walking more than 5 dogs. This does suggest that although the number of people walking 5 or more dogs is quite low, the impact that they have in terms of their behaviour or perceived behaviour can be quite significant.

There is the potential to adopt a different approach to professional dog walkers than to the rest of the dog walking community. For example they could be targeted more directly as often their contact details are displayed on vans or can be found in directories. You may have existing byelaws that can be used to tackle commercial use of your particular site.



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## Section 2

# Why do walkers with **dogs** do the things they do?

This section will take a look at the behaviour exhibited by dog walkers and examine some of the reasons or beliefs that may lead walkers with dogs to act a certain way. Most dog walkers want to have an enjoyable visit to the countryside and do not seek conflict. Those that wish to behave responsibly can find themselves uncertain over what this actually means and how this applies to the area they are visiting. In Section 3 we look at your role and in Section 4 consider language and communication as the key to influencing the behaviour of walkers.



### 1. What do dog walkers do?

Typically the problems and concerns raised by land managers and other countryside users regarding dogs are:

- Poo not being picked up
- Poo picked up, bagged then slung in a hedge or left on site
- Dogs disturbing, chasing or injuring wildlife or livestock
- Dogs approaching people uninvited

The reality may differ from the perception regarding the nature,

frequency and extent of these problems and is discussed in more detail in Section 4.

Most land managers realise that it is not all dog walkers that allow unwanted behaviours and many recognise the benefits that dog walkers can bring to site management, particularly as they are there so frequently and know the sites well, such as reporting crime or problems with stock.

The site managers we interviewed found it difficult to understand the actions of some dog walkers and felt



that they had little power to influence their behaviour. This may be as a result of a lack of knowledge and hopefully this guide will show that you can. However, in order to challenge and potentially change behaviour we must first understand the reasons why dog walkers do the things they do.



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## II. What's the theory?

There are a number of behavioural theories that provide a framework for understanding and influencing behaviour. Our research is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) which was highlighted by Professor Sam.H.Ham at a seminar held in the New Forest in 2005.

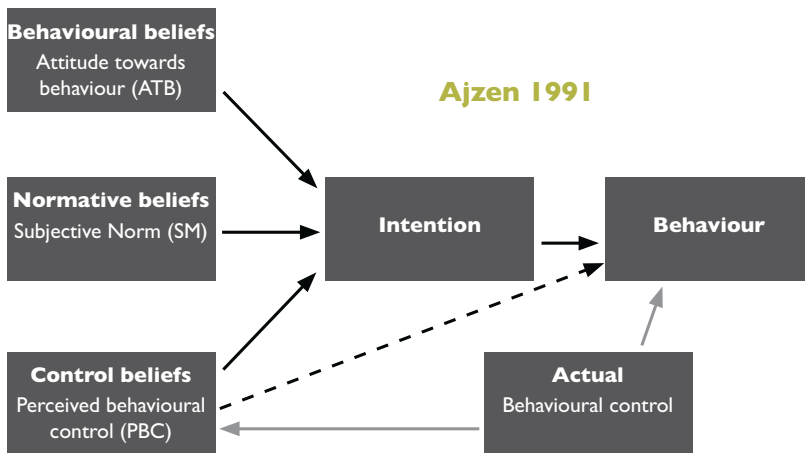
The basis of this theory is that behavioural intent is influenced by a belief system that includes;

**Behavioural beliefs** – what do I believe will happen as a result of my behaviour

**Normative beliefs** – what do other dog walkers do and what do they expect of me

**Control beliefs** – is there a reason why I cannot carry out what I intend to do e.g. cannot hold dog when it pulls

Added to this is the ability to carry out the action which finally leads to the actual behaviour.



## III. Thinking like a dog walker

The University of Portsmouth research revealed that dog walkers are influenced by attitudes and beliefs relating to their relationships with their dog, other dog walkers and non dog walkers and with land/site managers.

### 'I love my dog'

Dog owners and walkers get great pleasure, as well as social, physical and psychological benefits, from their dog so it is no wonder that this is the main factor to influence behaviour.

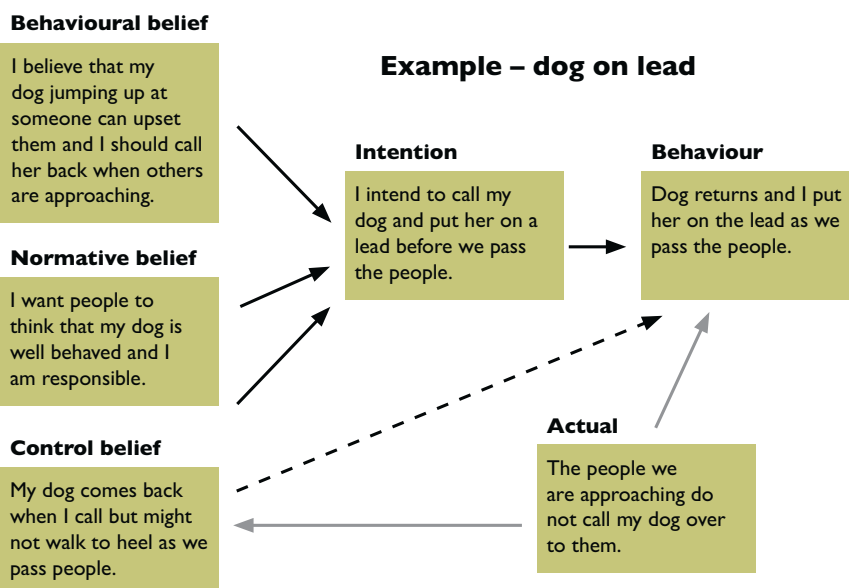
This depth of feeling, illustrated by the quotes below, may explain why there is often a strong reaction when their dog is criticised:

*'I don't have contact with my grandchildren and I think he [dog] is a substitute grandchild'*

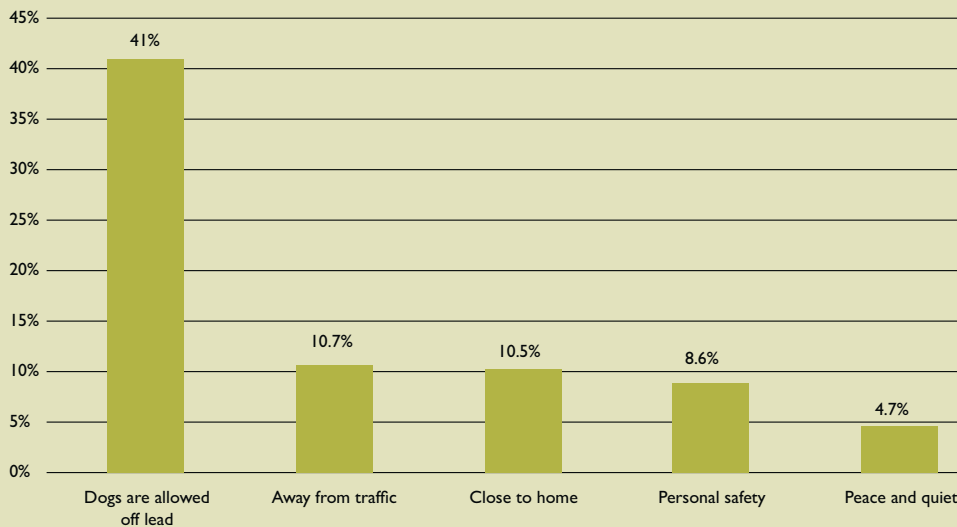
*'...and then I was diagnosed with leukaemia and rheumatoid arthritis and they suggested at the hospital that I should get another dog and that has kept me going, I really mean that'*

Extracted from University of Portsmouth, 2006, Understanding the Psychology of Walkers with Dogs: new approaches to better management.

Why do walkers with dogs do the things they do?



## The top 5 main influences for dog walkers



# FACTS

It is very important to dog walkers that their dogs enjoy themselves and many feel that dogs have more fun off lead. Not surprisingly then, when deciding where to walk, the single most important feature for walkers with dogs is the opportunity for dogs to be off lead. Places that are safe for dogs and their walkers, close to home and convenient were also key influencing factors.

People may also make exceptions for their dog; whilst they understand it is unacceptable behaviour for a dog to approach a person without a dog, they may feel that this doesn't apply to their dog as he/she is very friendly.

### What does this mean for you?

Traffic free areas where dogs are allowed off lead are likely to be popular with dog walkers and, if provided in a positive way, can encourage people into less sensitive areas of the site. Communication with dog walkers will be to be more effective if it relates to their dog in some way, particularly their safety and wellbeing.

### 'People like us'

Many dog walkers choose to walk where there are other walkers with dogs, partly as they believe that their dog enjoys socialising with other dogs, but also as it provides opportunities to interact with other dog walkers. There is quite a strong sense of community amongst dog walkers with some meeting up every day to walk their dogs together. Often people know the dog's name long before they find out the name of the person walking it.

Dog walkers do tend to notice the behaviours of other dog walkers more than non dog walkers do. Indeed we found that the second most important factor to influence the behaviour of dog walkers is the good behaviour of other dog walkers.

### What does this mean for you?

Influencing the behaviour of some dog walkers may have a positive impact on other dog walkers. There might be the potential to create an informal club or sense of belonging that will help to encourage dog walkers to feel part of a community and make it easier to get across key messages about site management. Responsible dog ownership can be promoted by giving discounts to those that have good citizenship awards.

### Other people

There is evidence of conflict between walkers with dogs and other users including walkers, cyclists and horse riders which may well be strengthened by their sense of belonging to the dog walking fraternity – a type of 'sticking together'. There may also be some feeling that other people only use the site at the weekend or when the sun is shining yet dog walkers are there day in day out with very little consideration of their requirements and in some cases feel less welcomed than other users.

### What does this mean for you?

All users of the site need to be aware of the type of behaviour they are likely to come across when they are visiting the site to help avoid confrontation. For example if there are areas where dogs are allowed off lead other people will need to know their location so that they can avoid these areas if they wish.

### Site managers

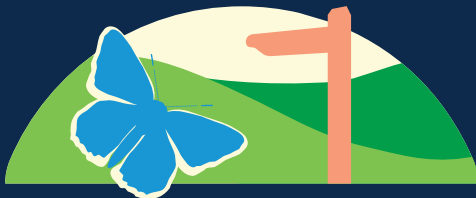
Anecdotally the relationship between dog walkers and site staff, such as rangers, is positive. On sites where people are likely to come across staff whether on the entrance gate or in the park/site the degree of welcome is higher than on other sites or rights of way where they are unlikely to meet officers.

There is, however, a feeling amongst the dog walkers we interviewed that senior officials, those that are responsible for decisions over providing dog bins etc, are anti-dog and concerns have been raised about continuing restrictions over where dogs can be walked.

### What does this mean for you?

There may be more opportunities to meet face to face with dog walkers even on sites without staff by organising events or guided walks targeted at dog walkers. Many dog walkers are very appreciative of the places where they can walk their dog and could be willing to get more involved in site management by volunteering. At Danebury Hill Fort nearly a third of those that came to the Danebury Dog Day expressed a willingness to volunteer in some capacity.

Why do walkers with dogs  
do the things they do?



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## Section 3

# Why do **you** do the things you do?



This section will take a brief look at your role, in particular the actions some of them take when managing land that has public access, and why this might not be helping you to influence behaviour.

### I. Balancing act

Whether you are managing country parks, nature reserves, shoots or farm land with rights of way, you will have different constraints to work with. But will generally be providing access for the public which certainly means that you are managing walkers with dogs.

Your job is to balance the requirement to grow crops, keep livestock, conserve and enhance habitats, for wildlife or game, whilst enabling the public to explore and enjoy the countryside, connect with nature and exercise outdoors. Often this has to be achieved with a very small compliment of staff and meagre funding.

### II. Confusing communications

You will have an idea about the behaviour you desire from people visiting your site or using the

paths across your land however communicating this desired behaviour effectively might be a different matter.

The frequently used phrase to instruct people about controlling their dog is 'please keep your dog under close control' but what does this actually mean and do your visitors have the same interpretation as you?

In some places the behaviour is expected with absolutely no communication and others have been known to resort to threats. In the case of no information, dog walkers are likely to use other clues to indicate what they are supposed to do:

'The country park hasn't got many bins. I think because they don't expect you to pick up everywhere. They say on the paths and the open spaces but in the woods, they don't expect you to.'

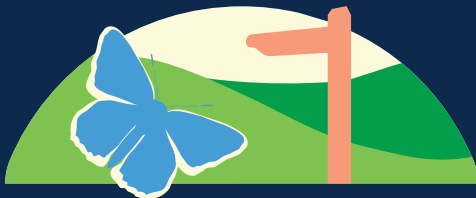
In this case this dog walker was right but not because there was any information saying that it was ok not to pick up in the woods. There are signs that say dogs on lead but very rarely signs that indicate when and where dogs can be off lead. Signs are sometimes left up long after there has ever been sheep or cattle in the field which reduces their efficacy and people start to ignore them.

**So, if what you are doing now is not working... change it!**

In Section 4 we consider how.



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## Section 4

# Eight steps to change



This section outlines a series of steps and questions that might be useful when considering changing the approach to managing sites/land for walkers with dogs. For a quick reference guide go to the flowchart at the end of this section.

### Step I – What is the problem?

Existing problems on site generally fall into one of four categories as described in Section 2.

- Poo not being picked up
- Poo picked up, bagged then left on site
- Dogs disturbing, chasing or injuring wildlife or livestock
- Dogs jumping up at people uninvited

It is important to precisely define the nature and extent of the problem, indeed to question whether it is a problem at all. Remember it is human nature for negative behaviour to be remembered and reported more readily than positive actions. If you look

at things objectively, there may not be a problem – great!

Some basic research may help to get an idea of the extent of the issue and can also provide baseline data to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of any changes that are made. This could be as simple as flagging and counting the amount of poo left on site or conducting a visitor survey. Site surveys have the added benefit of providing an opportunity to engage with dog walkers and other site users.

Of course, changes to site management may be required to meet other objectives, such as improving biodiversity, with the potential of

creating problems where none currently exist.

### Step II – What do you want the outcomes to be?

Once the existing issues or likely future concerns have been identified and quantified you need to determine what you want the outcomes of change in management to achieve, for example:

- a reduction in dog poo left on site,
- fewer complaints from other users of dogs approaching or jumping up,
- a reduction in incidents of livestock being chased or injured,
- an improved relationship with walkers with dogs.



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### Step III – What are the desired behaviours?

These should be considered not only in light of the site requirements but also in terms of the needs of visitors. Any change in management is likely to be successful if:

- a. there is clarity about the desired behaviours and the reasons behind them and
- b. the desired behaviours are realistic and are easy to comply with.

Certain behaviours may be desired in different areas of the site or on particular paths. By zoning a site in this way you may be able to meet both the requirements of the site management and the people that use it. The traffic light system employed at Danebury Hillfort (Case Study 1) is a flexible zoning scheme that requires dogs on lead in fields when there are livestock present and promotes fields, without stock, as off lead exercise fields.

It may have been simpler to ask for dogs to be on lead throughout the site however, this would have been overly restrictive and not necessary for the site requirements. A restrictive approach, without good evidence and reasoning, may lead to non compliance, create conflict and result in other negative consequences (see Step VI).

### Step IV – Adapting site management

The aim of adapting site management is not to ‘pander’ to dog walkers but to improve the visitor experience for all as well as contributing to the biodiversity/ conservation objectives of the site.

#### Provision and location of dog bins

The provision of dog bins is a common issue for land managers to struggle with. It may not be realistic to expect dog walkers to pick up poo and bin it without providing a bin but the ongoing emptying costs, and the landscape impact of bins, are very real reasons for not installing them.

Locating dog poo bins can also provide a challenge. They need to be sited where they can easily be emptied but this may not be the best place for walkers with dogs. Dog walkers do not always realise the constraints associated with providing and locating dog bins but then it is not often spelt out to them. At Danebury a bin was located, after much negotiation with the contactors, in a more appropriate place for dog walkers which contributed to a significant reduction in the dog poo left on site.

There is some confusion over the use of litter bins for bagged poo. It is often unclear whether this is acceptable and there are misunderstandings about how dog waste is treated after collection. Some authorities are now making it much more obvious when bins are dual use.



#### Dog exercise areas

Providing specific areas for walkers with dogs or encouraging them to use particular paths can be a very positive approach to meeting the site management objectives as well as the needs of walkers with dogs and other users of the site. This should be safe, attractive and seen as a positive facility for walkers with dogs and not an area of tatty, neglected space or a ‘dog



walking ghetto’. Manor Farm Country Park (Case Study 3) has successfully implemented a safe dog exercise field and recently the Forestry Commission has installed a dog activity trail at Coatham Wood, Teeside to help dogs and their walkers to get fit.

#### Car parks

Car parks are areas of potential conflict. Some dog walkers just open the boot and let the dog ‘escape’ and not long after leaving the car most dogs will poo.

Serious consideration should be given to the siting of car parks, locating them close to less sensitive, more robust, habitats. There are examples where car parks are positioned right on the edge of species rich chalk grassland. Car parks close to woodland areas are more appropriate but may feel unsafe to dog walkers using the site early in the morning or in the evenings. At Manor Farm Country Park dog walkers are encouraged to park close to the flick it areas although these are quite densely wooded and enclosed.

#### Other facilities

There may be other facilities that are worth considering such as water bowls, dog wash off areas and dog hitching posts. Dog poo bags can be made available at visitor centres and other items such as leads and toys could also be sold. This will make dog walkers feel more welcomed and appreciated and possibly more likely to comply with site requirements.



## Step V – Clever communications

According to dog walkers themselves the factor that is most likely to influence behaviour is signage providing clear explanations. The challenge is to communicate what you want dog walkers to do using language that is both friendly and unambiguous. It is important to try and describe the behaviour that is required and explain the reason why, it is not always necessary to include how people should go about doing it.

For example it may be better to say 'please keep your dog on the path, use a lead if necessary' rather than 'please keep your dog on a lead'. This will be much more acceptable to people who are able to walk their dog to heel off lead. Besides a dog on a lead may still cause problems particularly if it is a long extendable lead.

Good, clear explanations help dog walkers to understand the reason why the behaviour is necessary but can be even more effective if references are made to the effect on the health and wellbeing of their dog:

*Please do not let your dog approach or chase any livestock in this field.*

*It can cause serious harm and your dog can get lost or injured.*

More examples of different wording for leaflets and signs can be found in the case studies. Please note that these are only examples, deciding on the appropriate wording for each situation requires quite a bit of thought and discussion (we are still working on it).

Explanations of expected behaviour can also assist walkers without dogs and other users so that they are aware of the permitted behaviour and can make informed decisions on how they would like to use the site.

Dog events or walks provide positive ways of communicating key messages with dog walkers. This could be as simple as setting a table up on site with some dog biscuits; other examples can be found in the case studies.

Good behaviour by other dog walkers is the second most important factor for influencing behaviour. Known 'good' dog walkers could be recruited to act as unofficial wardens to help reinforce positive behaviour messages. We have not tried this approach yet but are looking into piloting something along these lines.



## Step VI – Consequences of implementing change

Change is implemented to make a difference so of course there must be consequences when implementing change. The consequences beyond the gate of the land or site you manage may not be so apparent but will still need some consideration.

## Step VIII – The last resort

If after implementing a positive campaign to influence the behaviour of walkers with dogs, there are still problems at unacceptable levels it will be useful to have a course of action planned. Firstly, it might be worth trying to check if there is anything that could be improved but other than that it might be time for the metaphorical 'stick'. The research did find that dog walkers themselves felt that it was acceptable to fine dog walkers, particularly for not picking up. However, it is important to ensure you have



## Step VII – Has it worked?

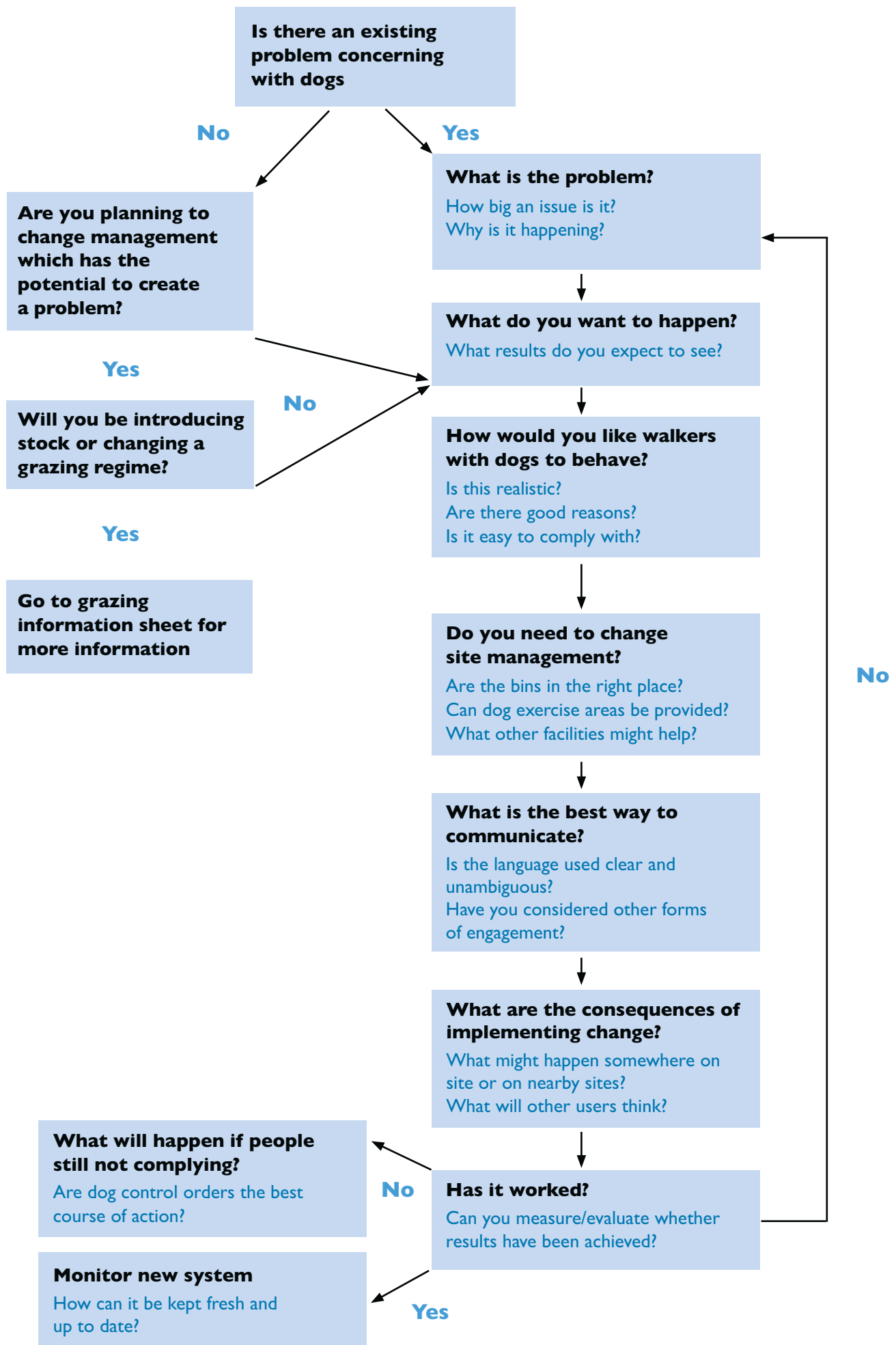
To determine whether the changes you have implemented have actually worked will depend on the outcomes you decided on in Step II and may require a repeat of any surveys that you carried out at the initial stage of the project.

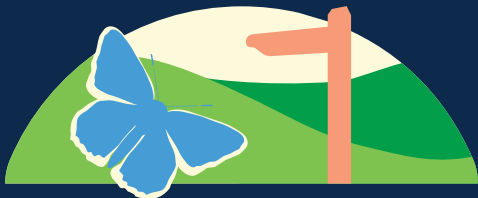
If it hasn't or it is only partially effective you may need to go back to Step I again or progress to Step VIII. Even if it has been successful it is good practice to consider anything else that could be implemented or keep it fresh by changing the signs, holding a different event etc.

organisational/political backing to proceed with sanctions and fines.

Dog Control Orders were introduced by the Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 are often considered to be a panacea for problems associated with dog walkers. However as a last resort a Dog Control Order may be the mechanism which allows you to be able to fine walkers with dogs. There is useful guidance published by Defra if you are considering going down this route.

## Section 4 – Flowchart

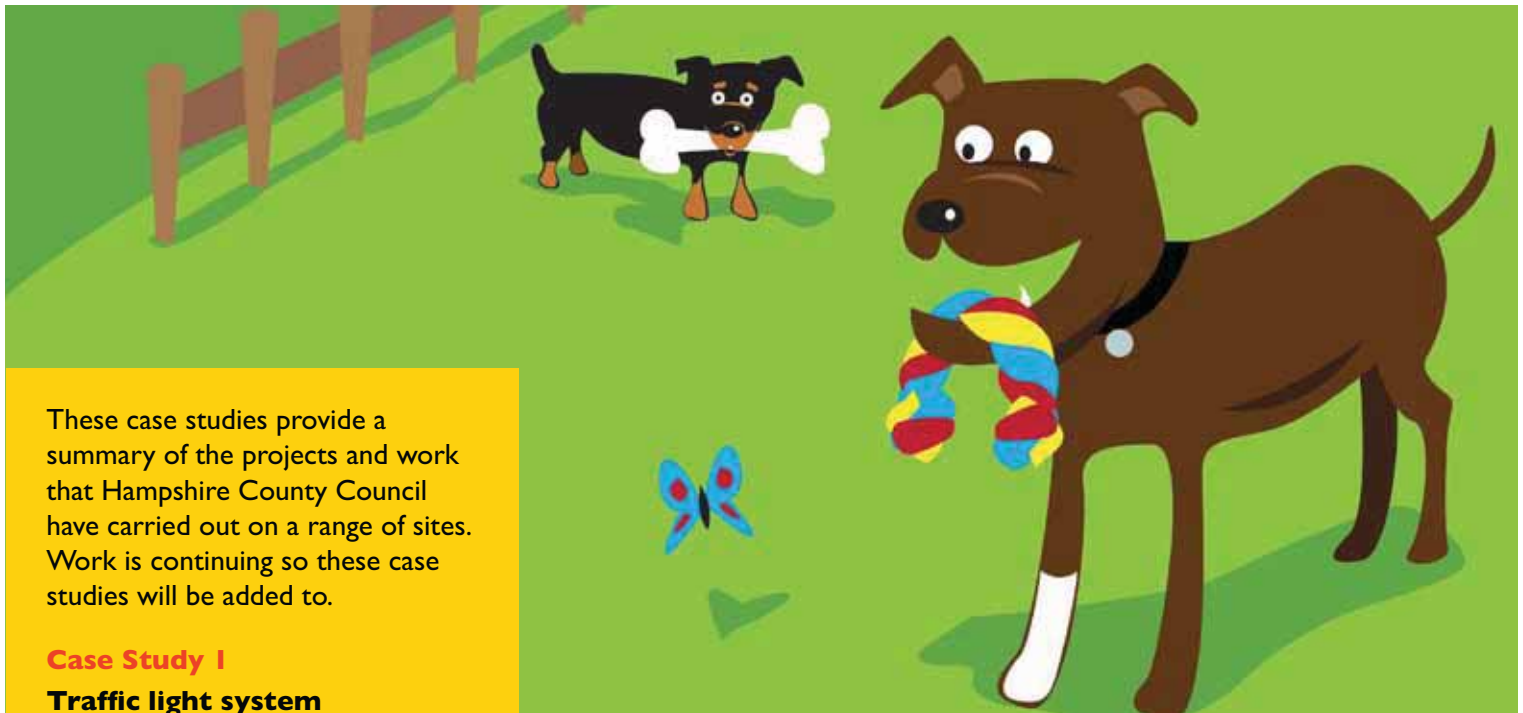




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## Section 5

# Case studies



These case studies provide a summary of the projects and work that Hampshire County Council have carried out on a range of sites. Work is continuing so these case studies will be added to.

### Case Study 1

**Traffic light system**  
Danebury Hill Fort

### Case Study 2

**Paws on the Common**  
Yateley Country Park

### Case Study 3

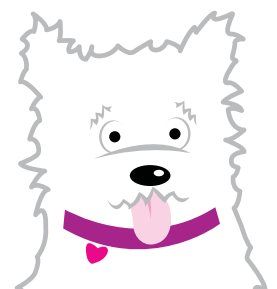
**You and your dog,**  
Welcome to Manor  
Farm Country Park

Hampshire County Council was awarded the KC Dog 'Local Authority of the Year' award for providing information for dog walkers to get the most out of their visit. The Council has held events such as the Big Doggy Do at Manor Farm Country Park, which attracted over 1,500 people with a range of activities to highlight responsible dog walking.

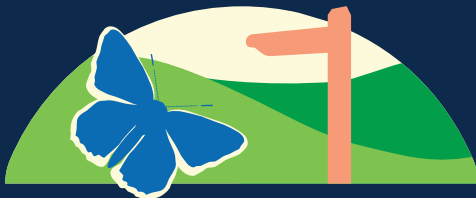
Hampshire County Council also helped to organise the Barking Beach Bonanza with KC Dog to highlight the important issue of dogs being banned

unnecessarily from beaches as a result of overly restrictive dog control orders. They also work as an example to other councils by producing attention grabbing leaflets and posters that appeal to young and old alike to pass on information about dog walking sites and best practice in public areas.

An extract from the Kennel Club Press releases concerning our award for 2008



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## Case Study I

### Traffic light system

**Site name:** Danebury Iron Age Hill Fort

**Site description:** Danebury is a 40 hectare of chalk down land site including an Iron Age Hillfort that is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). This Hillfort is flanked by woodland, scrubland and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) chalk grassland. The site is grazed by 65 Manx Loughtan sheep and between 10-20 cattle. Existing facilities include toilets, notice board, signage and one poo bin.

#### The need for change

The problems encountered by the ranger team who manage Danebury included:

- Uncontrolled dogs and the subsequent disturbance to wildlife and other site users.
- Dog poo not being picked up and binned.
- Worrying and occasional killing of sheep.
- Misunderstandings and heated confrontations with dog walkers over access and signage.

To get an idea of the extent of the issue with regard to dog poo the ranger flagged the poo left on site, counted it and took a photo.

#### The outcomes

The ranger team identified the following outcomes for the project:

- a) To improve communications between the ranger team and walkers with dogs, with respect to appropriate behaviour, livestock movements and access restrictions/limitations.

- b) To increase the amount of dog poo collected and appropriately disposed of by dog walkers at the chosen site. As such improving the overall experience for all visitors and helping in its conservation management.
- c) To aid in reducing the erosion pressure experienced at Danebury.

#### Desired behaviours

The desired behaviour from dog walkers were identified as:

- Sheep not approached, chased, injured or killed by dogs.
- Dog poo picked up and binned everywhere on site.
- Dogs not approaching or jumping up at visitors uninvited.



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The Danebury Dog Day was held to launch the new system...

### **Adapting site management**

As Danebury has a number of fenced fields, stocked at different times, the most appropriate approach to adopt was considered to be zoning, using a traffic light system (which had been tried elsewhere).

Each field or area was either red, amber or green depending on the behaviour required: Red – no dogs allowed, Amber – dogs on lead, Green – off lead dog exercise area.

The system needed to be flexible as the zones change depending on the location of the sheep. The only red area was within the ring of the hillfort where dog walkers had not been allowed for years so this was effectively no change.

The existing dog bin was located in the car park which was not the most convenient location for dog walkers, as dogs tend to defecate a few minutes after leaving the car in which case the bin is behind them. An extra bin was added and, after some negotiation with the contractors who empty the bins, located further into the site, although not as far as the rangers would have liked.

### **Communication**

**Signs** with paws denoting the different zones were produced and fixed to the access points. These were small 3”x 3” signs that could be easily unscrewed and relocated.

**A map** was produced and put on the notice boards. This shows the location of the different zones and has to be changed when the stock are moved round.

**A leaflet** explaining the system and the reasons for the different zones as well as showing the location of the dog bins was produced.

**An event** for dog walkers (the Danebury Dog Day) was held to launch the new signage and to find out how people use the site through questionnaires. A guided walk for dog walkers in the red zone gave people the chance to find out why dogs are not allowed in that area.

### **Did it work?**

A questionnaire was used to gain feedback on the new system by having a meeting point and giving out doggy bags (sponsored by a pet shop). The results showed that:

- 83% of dog walkers felt it had improved the clarity of where they could walk
- 92% expressed that it had improved their understanding of where their dog should be on lead
- 75% felt it had made the location of grazing animals more obvious

The survey of dog poo was revisited and found that the amount of poo left on site had reduced by 82%.

### **Lessons learnt**

There were a number of lessons learnt from the project which can be found in detail in the report (see further information). The main one however was that the paw signs needed a little explanation rather than relying on the leaflet and for those who are colour blind. The other issue about signage was that when the large negative sign for the red zone was replaced by a small paw sign it was overlooked and dog walkers entered the area. This was rectified by putting a larger more explanatory sign up for a while. The rangers are now considering how to refresh the system to keep it interesting.



### **Further information**

For the evaluation report about this project go to [www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs) for the information to dog walkers visit [www.hants.gov.uk/danebury](http://www.hants.gov.uk/danebury)



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## Case Study 2

### Dogs on the Common

**Site name:** Yateley Common Country Park

**Site description:** Yateley Common is nearly 200 hectares of woodland, heathland and ponds. Most of the site is SSSI and SPA and designated open country. There are several car parks but no visitor centre, toilets, notice boards or dog bins.

#### The need for change

The problems encountered by the ranger team who manage Yateley included:

- Disturbance to ground nesting birds.
- Dog poo left on site around car parks and picnic areas.
- Potential problems as the site may be grazed in the future.

#### The outcomes

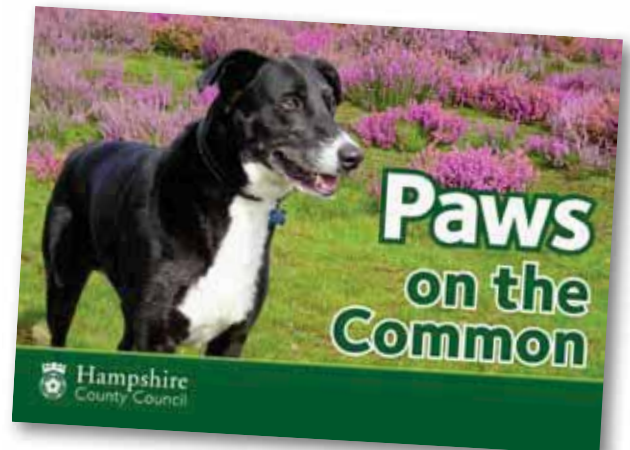
The ranger team identified the following outcomes for the project:

- a) To reduce the disturbance to ground nesting birds.
- b) To reduce the amount of dog poo left around the car parks and picnic areas but without providing dog bins.

#### Desired behaviours

The desired behaviour from dog walkers were identified as:

- Dog poo picked up and taken home around car parks and picnic areas.
- Dog poo flicked off the path elsewhere on the site.
- Dogs to be kept to the paths during the nesting season.



#### Adapting site management

No changes

#### Communication

A credit card sized guide or 'passport' was produced that contained information on the expected behaviours with good explanations and a section to record the dogs details. This was adapted from a similar publication produced by Westonbirt Arboretum. This was distributed at local events and online as well as by the rangers going about their normal duties.

The wording we used was developed with The Kennel Club which took some time but it meant that we could have The Kennel Club logo on the guide to give it some credence with dog walkers.

#### Did it work?

The guides were really well received by dog walkers.

#### Lessons learnt

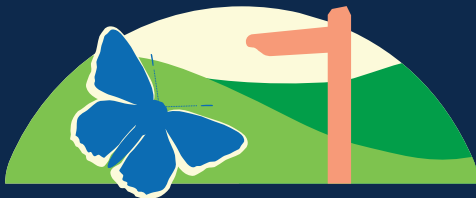
The credit card guide was referred to as a 'passport' due to the spaces available to record doggy information. Unfortunately the press interpreted this as meaning a passport was needed to go to Yateley Common Country Park.

#### Further information

For the information for dog walkers and copy of the leaflet go to [www.hants.gov.uk/yateley-country-park.htm](http://www.hants.gov.uk/yateley-country-park.htm)



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## Case Study 3

# You and Your Dog Welcome to Manor Farm Country Park

**Site name:** Manor Farm Country Park

**Site description:** Manor Farm Country Park includes 400 acres of grassland, riverside and agricultural land including SSSI woodland. There is a visitor centre, tea rooms and a shop, toilets and a working farm within a pay zone. The site has car parks signed to encourage dog walkers to use them, a dog hitching post and water bowl near the pay zone and had recently added a dog exercise field.

### The need for change

The problems encountered by the ranger team who manage Manor Farm included:

- Dog poo picked up, bagged and left in the bushes.
- Complaints about dogs approaching people uninvited.

Change was precipitated not only by problems but because the site staff recognised that there were a large number of dog walkers using the park and an opportunity to provide a more positive experience for them. The staff had already implemented a safe dog exercise field to encourage dog walkers to use a particular area of the park.

### The outcomes

A survey of visitors to the park was conducted by Sheffield Hallam University in 2007 as part of wider research into the perceptions, behaviours and understanding of walkers with dogs. There were two particular questions that we were interested in obtaining baseline data so that once

changes had been made to the park management could be revisited to test effectiveness:

1. How welcome dog walkers felt, and
2. Awareness of facilities and what behaviour is expected in certain areas of the park.

We found that the degree of welcome was high (71%) but there was a lack of awareness of certain facilities and a lack of clarity about what behaviour was expected. The outcome of the project at Manor Farm Country Park was to improve the awareness of facilities and the level of understanding of the expected behaviours whilst maintaining a high degree of welcome.

Additional outcomes were to reduce the amount of poo bagged but not binned and reduce complaints from other users about dogs approaching uninvited.

### Desired behaviours

The desired behaviour from dog walkers were identified as:

- Dog poo flicked off the path in the woodland areas but picked up and binned everywhere else on site.
- Increased use of the dog exercise field.
- Dogs not approaching people particularly in the picnic areas.
- Dogs on the lead close to the farm area.



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The Big Doggy Do was a huge success, over 1500 people and their dogs attended

### **Adapting site management**

The site had two dog poo bins serving a very large site. By designating the woodland as a flick it area it was thought that only one more bin would be needed to assist people in complying with picking it up and binning it.

The site was zoned so that in the picnic areas dog walkers are required to have dogs on a lead between Easter and the end of September and along the path next to the farm. The rest of the site dogs were required to be in sight but could be off lead.

The flick it zones were in the woodland and dog walkers required to pick up and bin it in all other areas.

The exercise field was already set up as a fenced field with dog bins which is safe for dogs to be exercised off lead. The field can be booked exclusively for dog training classes and for doggy parties (for a fee) and was already proving popular.

### **Communication**

As this was a pilot project some specific graphics were used to assist in getting the messages across in a friendly manner. Dog walkers were interviewed about the zones on site and the names and breeds of their dogs noted. These were then used to develop some cartoons for use in a leaflet and signage.

The leaflet contained information on the zones but also some key messages that had arisen as part of the interviews. For example there were some misunderstandings about the opening times as one ranger opened the site slightly earlier than the 'official' opening time. The leaflet clarified the

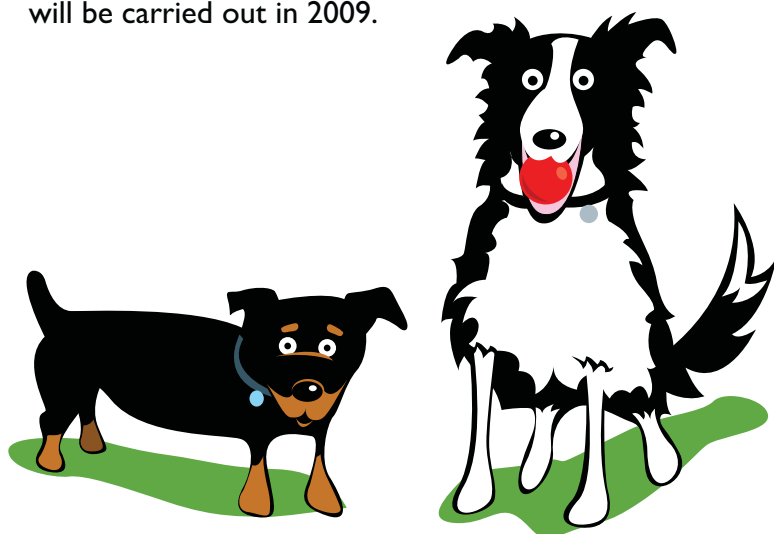
opening time but recognised their need to get in earlier which was accommodated when possible.

The signs depicted two dog characters and were written from the dog's perspective. There were a number of different signs produced for different areas and to be rotated to keep the messages fresh. An example of the signs can be found in Appendix 1.

An event 'The Big Doggy Do' was held in partnership with a local dog training group who use the exercise field. It was quite a large event with trade stand marquee and a roped off arena for classes that were fun but also promoted responsible behaviour e.g. fastest recall, musical sit. This event was held in September 2008 and launched the new management at Manor Farm Country Park. It was a huge success as over 1,500 people attended with their dogs with no problems and all had a great day. Quite a number of people had not visited Manor Farm previously and were pleasantly surprised at the welcome afforded dog walkers.

### **Did it work?**

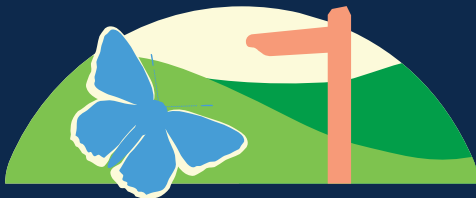
Evaluation of the system will be carried out in 2009.



### **Further information**

For the research information go to [www.hants.gov.uk/dogs](http://www.hants.gov.uk/dogs) and for the information for dog walkers visit [www.hants.gov.uk/manorfarm.htm](http://www.hants.gov.uk/manorfarm.htm)





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# Stock Grazing Information

This grazing information sheet is meant to provide a few pointers and questions to assist when thinking about introducing grazing to a site. It presents some of the things we have learnt along the way and is in no way comprehensive or exhaustive.

## I. Initial considerations when introducing stock to your site

### Infrastructure requirements:

- new stock fencing,
- water provision,
- vehicle access required.

### Consultation with stakeholders such as:

- Parish Council, Local members.
- Neighbours, visitors/users of site (especially dog walkers).
- Statutory bodies (Natural England, English Heritage).
- Landlord.
- Rights of Way Officers, Dog Wardens.
- Commoners or grazier.
- Natural England for Higher Level Stewardship funding.

### Funding may be required for:

- New fencing, including gates, water trough, holding pen.
- Livestock.
- Livestock transport.
- Staff training.



## II. Introducing stock onto a site

- Consider the type of stock required, the timing of grazing and the stocking levels. What type of stock were grazing the site in the past? Will grazing at certain times of the year remove the flowers of important plants or damage the site through poaching? Is long term grazing with few animals better than short term grazing with more stock? Are you able to move animals around at short notice to protect features of the site from over grazing? Inappropriate grazing can be more damaging to the biodiversity of a site than not grazing at all.

permanent management technique the site is definitely overgrazed and will lack many of the components, such as flower rich areas and diverse structure, which are desired in a well managed site.



- Grazing is not a substitute to all other management. Stock may be "pushed" during initial grazing period to have more of an impact on scrub, thick grass tussocks or dense thatch. If a site, however, is so heavily grazed as to remove scrub from the site as a

- Please remember that abrupt changes from ungrazed grassland to very short turf may cause the site to lose all its invertebrates of long-grass habitat without gaining any species that require short turf. Slow gradual changes in habitat management are preferential.



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## II. Introducing stock onto a site

- Site used as dog exercise area or Access Land (CRoW2000)? This will make it difficult to bring livestock grazing onto the site without extensive consultations. The grazing of common land also requires more work with stakeholders and permission to fence, refer to “A Common Purpose”. <http://naturalengland.communisis.com/naturalenglandshop/docs/CPI.pdf> Using cattle as the grazing tool will not place so many restrictions on dog-walkers.
- Having yew trees or steep archaeological earthworks on site will force the use of sheep as the grazing tool. Cattle whether young or old can cause damage to earthworks. Yew is poisonous to cattle, however Manx Loghtan sheep happily eat the leaves and bark.
- Fencing- cattle can be controlled by just 2 strands of barbed wire. Sheep, however require stock netting and better quality gates, adding substantially to the costs. Dog walkers like sheep type stock fencing as it stops their pets running out onto nearby roads.
- Permanent v temporary fencing: Temporary electric fencing will control cattle and sheep, however if they are attacked by dogs or frightened by fireworks etc. they will break through and escape. Always try and use permanent fencing for all boundaries and if affordable for internal fencing.

## III. What stock to use

- If possible always use cattle unless other features or habitat requirements force the use of sheep. Cattle provide a more diverse grassland structure with tussocks, bare areas, paths and most importantly flowering plants. Generally sheep eat all orchids immediately, then any flowers and you end up with a short turf (30-40mm) with low forbs that can hold less invertebrate interest. Ponies will graze differently again and can produce short turf similar to sheep, but may browse more on trees and bushes, including holly and gorse. Combinations of grazing animals, such as cattle and ponies, can result in a very diverse habitat structure. Cattle and ponies are more able to break up rank vegetation than sheep.
- Sheep can be ‘pushed’ to eat a greater proportion of dead or matted grass tussocks, however, cattle will break through fences well before this.
- Different grazing animals have differing grazing preferences. Sheep can be used to eat small amounts of roseate ragwort plants and Manx Loghtan sheep will control docks and stop thistles from flowering. Highland cattle preferentially eat wild parsnip plants and sapling oak trees.
- Ponies, which are not ruminants, extract less energy from the plant matter they consume and need to graze more plant matter. The dung resulting from different stock may support different species of invertebrate, for example the larvae of Hornet Robberfly *Asilus crabroniformis* feed on dung beetle larvae most commonly associated with cattle and horse dung. Where sheep are shepherded and kept in a fold overnight most of the dung is deposited here. This can be used as a nutrient transfer method, reducing the fertility in the daytime grazing areas which can be useful in some grassland systems.
- Stock already owned or nearby grazier? This depends greatly on fertility of site, as poor heathland/chalk grassland grazing cannot support fattening animals for commercial production. HCC has moved into owning its own stock as nobody else was interested in grazing small chalk grassland and heathland sites. However this puts a burden on site resources for funding stock, looking, movements, transport, handling stock, veterinary treatments and associated livestock regulation paperwork. Local graziers are better in that they supply animals, do the paperwork and vet medicines, however they are using the site to fatten or grow commercial livestock. They therefore come at the grazing problem from a completely different viewpoint that can cause damage to site biodiversity i.e. the use of Ivermec wormers.
- Rare breeds v commercial type? Animals with horns & ‘presence’ usually more readily accepted by public, well before commercial types. Livestock with large horns tend to keep visitors and their dogs away although often without actually being dangerous. Horned breeds may pose some extra risk with stock handling and wide horned breeds, e.g. Highland cattle, may not fit into smaller stock handling systems.
- Young versus old stock, young cattle are curious and will follow visitors and their dogs around the site, sometimes causing fear and complaints. They will also run around the site perimeter or charge over to visitors. Old cattle are slower, quickly become accustomed to dogs, visitors and become ‘bombproof’. Cows with young calves will ‘protect’ their offspring against dogs or visitors who approach too closely. Some continental breeds are known for this. Ponies may also be very curious and can be habituated to pestering site visitors if fed by the public, this can lead to intimidation of the public and other conflicts such as biting or kicking site visitors.
- The public perception of the health of the stock may vary with type. A ribby, but still healthy, pony may cause more complaints from the public than a cow in a similar condition.
- When kept in a more natural state livestock will lose weight/condition during the winter and early spring and then regain this during the spring flush. They possibly are more healthy for this however, when they lose too much weight it takes a great deal of extra food to regain condition and they become more open to diseases such as pneumonia. Don’t let any animal get into poor condition as it raises animal welfare problems. When ruminants are grazing poor quality herbage during the winter, always provide high energy (molasses/sugar beet) licks to keep their rumens working. Consider extra feed such as hay if conditions become bad i.e. heavy snow.
- Always provide some shelter for livestock, some breeds will require winter housing whilst others such as Highland cattle need shade from the summer sun. This is easily provided by leaving trees and scrub around the periphery of grassland sites.
- Sheep can be grazed on busy sites, however this requires a greater input by staff into separating sheep from dogs, i.e. the Danebury Dog ‘traffic light’ system. If problems still occur consider closing nearby car parks whilst livestock are on site?