

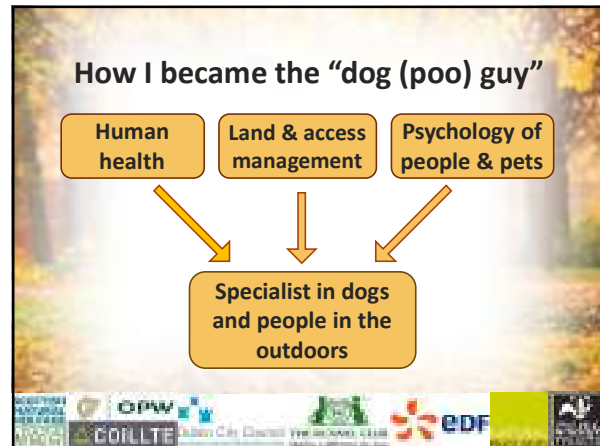


OUTDOOR RECREATION

Managing visitors with dogs in the New Normal

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland
19 October 2021

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The New Normal...

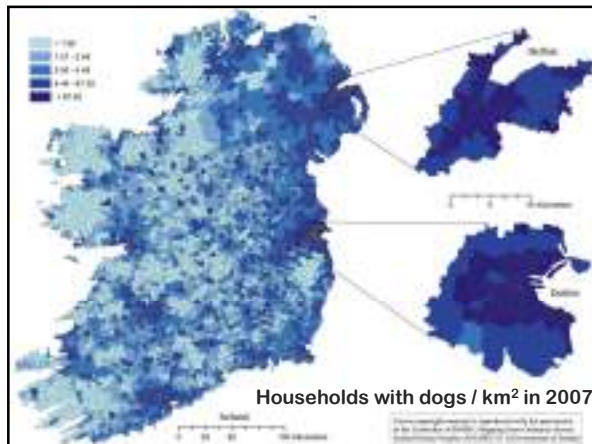


Dog walking demographics

Dog ownership and walking

- All socio-economic groups
- 2019: 31% homes with dogs North, 36% South.
- 33% increase during covid
- Children in home best predictor
- Fully fledged family member
- Taken on around half all visits to rural & urban greenspace
- Residents, visitors and tourists
- Active people doing dog sports
- People only walking due to dog





Dog walking: human health benefits

- ✓ Motivation to exercise in all weathers
- ✓ Confidence in the outdoors
- ✓ Daily connection with the environment
- ✓ More social contact with others
- ✓ Enhanced physical and mental health
- ✓ Happier & healthier pets

There's still problems too

Poll # 1

Angels
A few of us

Fallen Angels
Most of us

Devils
Rare

What dog walkers seek

- To feel welcome and safe
- Daily walks: approx 1 hour, 2.7km long, close to home, and away from traffic
- 85% seek off-lead exercise
- Trips to different coast and countryside further afield
- Avoid conflict when given an informed choice
- Restrictions balanced by accessible alternatives

The best management ethos now

Reducing negative impacts → Promoting the benefits

Happy, healthy, hassle-free dog walks

The New Normal...

An end to displacement denial

Traditional response to problems: say NO!

Just use the law, say "no" and if by magic...

Problem solved... ?

Simply saying "no" is ineffective because:

- 72% people will still walk their dogs as much
- 66% people drive elsewhere
- 14% dog walkers unable / unwilling to go elsewhere
- It can discriminate against assistance dog users
- It alienates dog owners as customers and advocates
- Displacement to more sensitive sites

Displacement is a key issue

- Most dog owners can drive elsewhere for off-lead exercise
- Displacement can increase off-lead on previously little-visited sensitive sites
- Displacement onto farmland increases practical and political conflict
- Intensification of other sites causes further displacement



The need to manage the demand

Visitors with dogs have 4 main responses to management changes on a given site:

1. Keep visiting if needs still met
2. Go somewhere else
3. Practically and/or politically challenge any restriction
4. Ignore restrictions etc, given a low likelihood of being caught/fined



Access planning is needed to avoid simply increasing or displacing conflict.

The New Normal...



Making it easier to do the right thing

www.dorsetdogs.org.uk

Love Dogs... Love Nature



NEWSFLASH! Click Alert! NEWSFLASH! Eyes open! right eye!

Technology to support good choices



www.brighton-hove.gov.uk

Some NI initiatives already embracing key principles



Timely advice & signage helps majority of dog walkers (Angels and Fallen Angels)

DO THE RIGHT THING



Self help: signage

- ✓ Be Clear, Credible & Consistent
- ✓ Get someone 'doggy' to check meaning & understanding
- ✓ Ideally 3 points max / sign
- ✓ Locally-relevant signage best
- ✓ Change / cover / remove
- ✓ Offer alternatives routes
- ✓ Use 'doggy' image to engage
- ✓ Say what you do want, rather than what you don't want




- ✗ Not apparent it's about dogs
- ✗ Graphic images have limited effect on target audience
- ✗ "Always on a lead" (ie everywhere) not effective nor credible
- ✗ Undermines off-lead exercise in appropriate areas



- ✗ Official signs on same post ask for different things
- ✗ "close control" is a vague and very poor term to use
- ✗ Left up outside lambing and bird nesting times



Poll # 2



Some other things that are done 'under control':

- a) cycling fast along a public footpath
- b) galloping a horse towards pedestrians
- c) driving at 40mph in a 20mph limit
- d) shooting a bird of prey
- e) stealing wild birds' eggs
- f) discharging effluent into a watercourse

Instead of 'close' or 'control', say what you want:

Dog walkers, please

- Keep your dog calm, quiet and at your side around horses.
- Make sure you and your dog can always be seen.

Horse riders, please

- Slow down to a walk when passing dogs and walkers.
- Make sure dog walkers can see you approaching.

✔

You do not let your dog off the lead unless you keep it in sight and close enough to come back to you on command.

Prevent your dog from approaching horse riders, cyclists, or other people and their dogs uninvited.

✔

Question: what's better wording for the text in red?

Shorebird nesting and roosting area

To protect the wildlife of this site
please keep your dog under close control at all times.

Some better alternative behavioural wording

Shorebird nesting and roosting area

Please prevent your dog from making the birds fly away

or

Please prevent your dog from approaching the birds

✔



Top tips for reducing fouling:

- Be clear about what you want, when, where and why
- Explain poo safest when fresh
- "any waste bin will do for bagged dog poo"
- Place bins where most needed
- Indicate how far to the next bin
- Raise awareness in rural areas
- Complaints can rise as problem numerically decreases



The New Normal...



Planning-out conflict from the start

Solutions within the planning system

- “Where are new residents going to walk their dogs?”
- Banning dogs from new homes doesn't work
- So provide safe, nearby, one hour, off-lead dog walks
- 20 acres per 1,000 people = 1 acre per 5 dogs.
- Can be developer funded: £7k/home
- (was) underpinned by EU law

www.dogfriendlyhousing.org.uk



Former 46 acre farm:
new dog-friendly greenspace




Enhancing greenspace: fencing against roads



Good design: reduces conflict & increases income

Dog walking fields

- Fast growing sector: 450+ sites UK wide
- Paying: £6 to £20 p/h
- Size: 1 acre upwards
- 58% commercial dog walkers would pay
- Opportunity to educate
- Rent to local dog trainers
- Farmers increasing income while also reducing problems



The New Normal...



Partnership working is vital



Poll # 3



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Dog owners are most influenced by:

- other dog owners
- canine professionals

So it's best to have the canine community at the heart of any management



Dog walkers providing support & surveillance

Lookers - volunteer shepherds

Most of our downland sites are on the edge of the city so we need to make more regular checks on our sheep. If the shepherd had to make all of these checks it would take up a large amount of time and make grazing many small sites impractical.

We have volunteers, known as lookers, that help keep an eye on our sheep.

Lookers need to be able to

- attend a lookering course so that you know what to do.
- check the sheep, making a report or ensuring another looker has.
- spend around one hour a week while the sheep are on site.
- get around on quite steep uneven slopes, as that is where the sheep graze.
- be available in the winter months - we normally graze our sites in the winter so that the sheep do not 'fleece'.
- have a mobile phone so that you can receive any updates on the sheep, phone in your report and come in if necessary.



Outcome of commercial dog walker workshops

- 78% more likely to advise clients on responsible dog walking
- 84% feel accreditation can be good for business
- 56% wanted to help set up accreditation scheme
- 63% wanted a Green Dog Walker scheme



Summary: working with the New Normal

- Make it easier to do the right thing
- Promote the good, while reducing the bad
- Manage the demand: don't try to suppress it
- Foster the political and commercial opportunities
- Plan for dogs in new housing
- Collaborate across sectors



Working with you: how I can help

- Developing local projects on international best-practice
- Site audits & policy review
- Greenspace & access design
- Training and workshops
- Credibility with dog owners
- Scrutiny of proposed contracts & partnerships
- Signage, Codes of Conduct & communications



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Questions?

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