



# DOG FRIENDLY SPACES STRATEGY

Adopted 24 September 2019



# CONTENTS

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Why do we need a Dog Friendly Spaces Strategy?	2
What the Dog Friendly Spaces Strategy does?	4
What are dog friendly spaces?	4
Who is responsible for dogs in public spaces?	5
How does Council currently manage dog friendly spaces?	6
What does the community of Shellharbour think about dog friendly spaces?	7
Balancing the Needs of Dog Owners and Park Users in the Open Space Network	8
Ancillary Infrastructure	10
Expansion of the Dog Friendly Area Network	15
What to look for when selecting potential dog friendly spaces	16
Site design and infrastructure	17
Funding	18
Periodic Review	18

# WHY DO WE NEED A DOG FRIENDLY SPACES STRATEGY?

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Shellharbour City has almost 30,000 dogs (*NSW Companion Animal Register 2019*) and a population of just over 70,000 people, making dog owners a key user group of our open spaces.

Council currently provides several dog friendly spaces for dogs and owners to spend quality time together and to facilitate opportunities for socialisation and exercise. With limited private open space, the need for Council to plan strategically for the future provision of open space spaces for dogs to exercise is necessary.

Council resolved to prepare a Dog Friendly Spaces Strategy (the Strategy) in response to the success of the existing dog friendly spaces currently in the Shellharbour LGA and to provide a strategic approach to the future provision of our dog friendly spaces.

The formulation of the Strategy is based on the combination of community consultation and best practice learnt from other Council spaces and related documentation.

The Strategy is linked with the Shellharbour Community Strategic Plan objectives and strategies:

## Our City is Active and Healthy

- 1.2.1 Provide access to services and facilities where people can live, learn and play
- 1.2.2 Provide diverse opportunities for sport, recreation and enjoyment in the City's parks, open spaces and facilities.





# WHAT THE DOG FRIENDLY SPACES STRATEGY DOES?

The aim of the Strategy is to guide the provision, improvement and management of dog friendly spaces within Shellharbour Local Government Area (LGA).

Specific objectives have been developed for this strategy:

- To balance the needs of dog owners with the needs of the general community for accessible safe parks
- Identify gaps in the provision of dog friendly spaces and ensure equitable distribution across the LGA
- Plan for dog friendly spaces in line with the expected population growth and ownership trends.

Throughout this Strategy there are a number of Actions identified that will be implemented over the next 10 years. The time frame for delivery of these Actions will be short, medium and longterm. This equates to 1 year, 4 years and 10 years respectively aligning with Council's Operational Plan, Delivery Program and Community Strategic Plan.



# WHAT ARE DOG FRIENDLY SPACES?

**For the purpose of this Strategy:**

**Dog Friendly Spaces** – Council owned public places that allow dogs either on-leash or off-leash under the supervision of their owners.

**Dog Agility Park** – A fenced off area where dogs can exercise off-leash under the supervision of their owners.

**Dog Off-leash area** – An area where dogs can exercise off-leash under the supervision of their owners but it is not fenced.

**Dog On-leash area** – An area where dogs can be on a lead under the supervision of their owners.

**A Public place** – means:

- (a) any pathway, road, bridge, jetty, wharf, road-ferry, reserve, park, beach or garden, and
- (b) any other place,  
that the public are entitled to use. (*Local Government Act 1993*)

# WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DOGS IN PUBLIC SPACES?

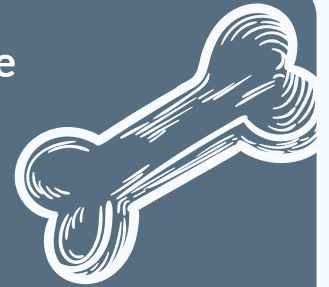
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The *Companion Animals Act 1998* (the Act) legislates requirements for both dog owners and local Councils in managing the presence of dogs in *public places*. The Act can be accessed via the NSW legislation website. The Act therefore is key to the consideration of the most appropriate locations and factors of dog friendly spaces.

Council has a legislative responsibility to provide a minimum of one off-leash area and to provide effective and responsible care and management of dogs within the local government area.

The Act states that you, or the person looking after your dog/s, should not be in control of more than four dogs at the same time and you, or the person looking after your dog/s, should be capable of controlling the dog/s at all times when in an off-leash area.

Where are the dog friendly spaces in the City?



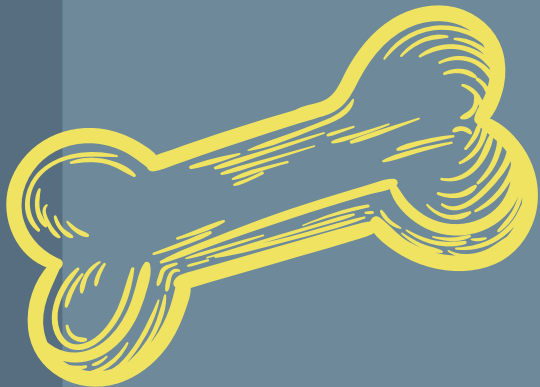
Shellharbour City currently has a variety of dog friendly spaces including two dog agility parks.

Our [Exercising your dog brochure](#) identifies these areas and where they are.



# HOW DOES COUNCIL CURRENTLY MANAGE DOG FRIENDLY SPACES?

Current Approach	Comment / analysis
<b>Dogs permitted only on-leash</b>	Unless spaces are prohibited which will be identified on signage, dogs on a leash can be walked throughout Council's public spaces.
<b>Dog Agility Parks:</b> Dogs are permitted off-leash. Generally only used by dogs and their owners	Council currently has two dog agility parks at Oak Flats and Flinders
<b>Dogs Off-Leash Spaces:</b> Dogs permitted off-leash	Council currently has four designated dog off-leash spaces at Barrack Heights, Albion Park Rail, Mount Warrigal and Shellharbour.
<b>Dog exclusion:</b> Dogs are not permitted in certain spaces.	<p>Under the <i>Companion Animals Act 1998</i>, dogs are prohibited in the following places (whether or not they are leashed or otherwise controlled):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 metres of any children's play spaces in a public place</li> <li>• 10 metres of any food preparation or food consumption spaces</li> <li>• School grounds</li> <li>• Childcare centres</li> </ul> <p>Under the Act, Councils also have the authority to prohibit dogs from other public spaces including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation spaces including sportsfields where organised games are played</li> <li>• Public bathing spaces (including beach spaces)</li> <li>• Shopping complexes</li> <li>• Wildlife protection spaces (such as shorebird nesting habitats on the beaches and rock platforms of the LGA)</li> </ul> <p>In this respect, currently all beach areas of Shellharbour are designated dog prohibited spaces.</p>



Note: In NSW, a Guide Dog in harness is legally allowed to enter all public places, therefore the above does not apply to guide dogs.



# WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY OF SHELLHARBOUR THINK ABOUT DOG FRIENDLY SPACES?

Council undertook a survey to gauge what the community thought of dog friendly spaces and dog agility parks. This was conducted online through Council's website and social media platforms for a period of just over three weeks (11 April – 4 May 2018).

The  
survey  
had



The survey results have provided information that has helped to inform the preparation of this Strategy. In addition to the survey, Council has used previous community consultation outcomes and other correspondence to Council on dogs in public spaces to help inform the Strategy.

Feedback from community consultation and previous correspondence to Council indicates that overall the existing off-leash spaces including the two dog agility parks in Shellharbour are operating well with most concerns being focussed on dog owner responsibility and that there is a desire to increase the dog friendly area network across the LGA. These issues and more are discussed in detail below, and where relevant, are accompanied by recommendations that feed into the implementation plan component of the Strategy.

# BALANCING THE NEEDS OF DOG OWNERS AND PARK USERS IN THE OPEN SPACE NETWORK

As a provider of various public passive and active open space spaces for the community's leisure and recreation, Council must balance the competing interests of a range of public open space users. This includes children, cyclists, sports clubs and dog owners to name a few. The presence of dogs in public open spaces can be perceived to affect the ability of other park users to enjoy the City's reserves, therefore a sustainable long term solution is required to manage the presence of dogs in the open space network.

## The community have highlighted the following main concerns:

- Allowing dogs on sporting fields where children train and play
- People not taking responsibly for their dogs behaviour
- People not picking up after their dog
- Dog attacks
- Non-compliance with Council's relevant laws

The concerns raised demonstrate that more education needs to occur in the community to inform both dog owners and non-dog owners about the rules and responsibilities associated with dogs in public spaces.

A large, dark blue silhouette of a dog, possibly a Labrador, is positioned on the right side of the page. Inside the silhouette, there are three statistics presented in white text. The top statistic is '30%' followed by 'of people liked to walk their dogs around their local neighbourhood'. The middle statistic is '22%' followed by 'take their dogs to the current dog agility parks'. The bottom statistic is '25%' followed by 'use parks, reserves and designated off-leash spaces'.

30%

of people  
liked to  
walk their  
dogs around  
their local  
neighbourhood

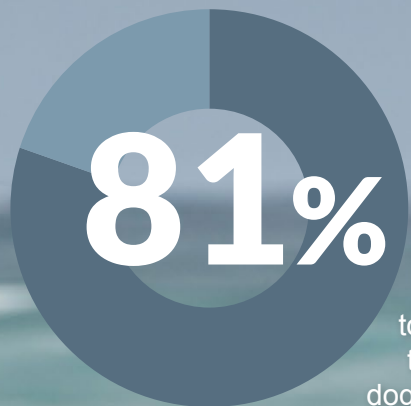
22%

take their dogs to the  
current dog agility parks

25%

use parks, reserves and  
designated off-leash  
spaces





**wanted to see an increase in dog-friendly spaces across the city**


to provide variety and an equal spread to increase everyone's accessibility to dog friendly spaces, particularly off-leash spaces. Albion Park, Shell Cove and Lake Illawarra were all suggested for new spaces.

**A request for an off-leash area on beaches was a common theme from survey respondents. Council currently has no dog friendly areas on any beach.**

Investigations to date have revealed that the community has strong and conflicting views when it comes to allowing dogs on beaches, therefore, consultation with the public in regards to considering off-leash beach access spaces will again will be paramount to any decision making on this topic.




**Action – continue education programs to inform dog owners of their responsibilities and consequences of having their dogs in public spaces.**

 **SHORT/MEDIUM**



**Action – investigate providing an equitable spread of new spaces across the City to provide off-leash and dog agility spaces.**

 **SHORT/MEDIUM**



**Action – investigate the suitability of providing a dog off-leash area on Shellharbour beaches.**

 **SHORT**



**Action – develop a policy position on circumstances where dogs should be allowed or prohibited at sporting fields.**

 **MEDIUM**

# ANCILLARY INFRASTRUCTURE

The community has told Council that there are certain elements to a dog friendly space whether it be an on-leash area, off-leash area or a dog agility park that can enhance the site, increase useability and encourage higher levels of compliance. Council provides fencing, seating, water and natural shade where possible, however, the cost and responsibility to maintain infrastructure falls on Council. Consideration towards the financial life cycle costs and resourcing implications has to occur before placing infrastructure into any public space including dog friendly spaces.

The survey revealed that the top 3 most important features of a dog park were:

- fencing
- drinking water
- dog waste bags and bins.





## Fencing

Fencing is the most important feature to dog owners at dog off-leash spaces. Fencing is used to separate off-leash spaces from other park activities and can provide a clear boundary of the designated area. Fencing however, can also be visually intrusive, limit future long term public open space uses be costly to install and add to maintenance costs. Completely enclosing a dog off-leash area can also increase wear on the park surface and can lead to dog owners taking a more casual approach when supervising their dogs.

The provision of fences and gates will only be undertaken when an audit of a site shows it is suitable. Currently, Council provides fencing at both Oak Flats and Flinders Dog agility parks. Council will endeavour to place fencing at future dog agility parks; however dog off-leash spaces will remain unfenced with the use of signage, bollards or natural features of a site potentially being used as an alternative to achieve visual definition of dog spaces.



## Bins and Managing Dog Waste

Dog owners are responsible for the removal and appropriate disposal of litter and dog waste. Council does currently provide dog waste bag dispensers and bins at existing dog agility parks. An owner can be fined for non-compliance with disposing of dog waste but is often ignored.

The survey responses indicate a strong support for Council to continue to provide dog waste bag dispensers and bins at the dog agility parks and to consider providing bins and bag dispensers at other designated dog spaces. Increasing the number of bins and introducing dog waste bag dispensers incurs a significant capital and ongoing maintenance costs to Council including dealing with vandalism of bag dispensers.

Other Councils have different approaches for dealing with dog waste ranging from placing the onus on dog owners to pick up and dispose of dog waste, to introducing bins, dog waste bags or in-park composting facilities. Each has various levels of success in reducing the waste.



## Drinking Water

The survey revealed that available drinking water was an important feature of a dog park. Currently Council provides drinking water stations at the two dog agility parks. There are also a number of parks and reserves where dogs are permitted off-leash and on-leash where water taps are provided. It is more beneficial to provide infrastructure such as drinking water stations where they can be used by multiple user groups and therefore, planning and design will provide the most efficient and equitable distribution of resources such as this. Council will continue to consider the provision of drinking water at future spaces and include this in the site design and infrastructure criteria when determining future sites.



**Action – implement measures to reduce the impact of dog waste in public spaces.**



MEDIUM





## Seating

The need for seating is a common theme coming out of the survey. Currently the two dog parks at Flinders and Oak Flats have some seating installed. Council will continue to consider the provision of seating at future spaces and include this in the site selection criteria to determine future sites.



## Shade

Having shade in dog friendly spaces enhances the use and amenity of the site. All Council's dog friendly spaces are within natural park locations and therefore have varying elements of natural shade in the form of trees and vegetation. Council will continue to consider natural shade at future spaces and include this in the site selection criteria when determining future sites.



## Dog Agility Equipment

Dog agility equipment adds another activity option to a dog agility park. It provides the opportunity for dogs to develop confidence, competencies and have fun. It also allows dogs to practice skills learned at agility and education training. The Oak Flats and Flinders Dog Agility parks have a number of pieces of equipment installed. Consultation with the community has shown that there is a strong support for dog agility equipment, with the three top choices of equipment being a bridge, long tunnel and high hoop.

Council will continue to consider the installation of equipment at suitable future dog friendly spaces.



**Action** – consider the availability or installation of drinking water stations, lighting, seating, shade and dog agility equipment with the selection criteria to determine new dog friendly spaces





## Signage

Effective signage in parks is the most direct way of advising park users and dog owners the location, boundaries and rules of dog friendly spaces. Well-located, easy to read effective signage can:

- Encourage greater compliance with relevant laws and assist Council to promote responsible ownership; and
- Be instrumental in delineating between on- and off-leash spaces, which may counter the need for extensive fencing and assist with reducing confusion over the boundary spaces therefore minimising conflict with other park users and activities.

Currently Council has various signs indicating; prohibited areas for dogs, off-leash or on-leash and the rules around these spaces such as picking up after your dog. Some are text heavy while others have simple imagery. A level of confusion around different signage has been noted by the community, and is an element of dog friendly space that can be reviewed to provide a more clear image based approach to convey key messages to the public.

### Signage to consider the following functions:

- Educational signage
- Perimeter signage
- On-leash signage / Off-leash signage
- Shared spaces signage
- Environmental protection signage



**Action – review and update the design of the current signage for dog friendly spaces including dog agility parks, off leash and on-leash spaces for consistency across the LGA.**

 MEDIUM/LONG







## Enforcement

In accordance with the *Companion Animals Act 1998* and Council's Enforcement Policy, Council's Regulation Officers manage a range of dog-related issues out in the community. While staff have managed to produce positive results in relation to the enforcement of issues that occur, resourcing of staff to be in the right place and the right time is problematic.

Many of the community concerns raised in relation to the management and control of dogs in public spaces are not necessarily related to particular designated dog friendly spaces, but the broader issue of responsible pet ownership and compliance with Council's local laws. Critical to the success of dog friendly spaces is the need to promote responsible pet ownership and educate dog owners of their responsibilities when managing their dogs in public spaces.

Council's regulation staff will continue to patrol dog friendly spaces regularly and to respond to complaints from the community in relation to dogs in public spaces.



## Community education

A key issue with the operation of dog friendly spaces in the City is that dog owners and non-dog owners are sometimes confused regarding the exact location of dog friendly spaces v's prohibited spaces. This can cause conflict between dog owners and non-dog owners. Confusion can be attributed to; existing signage and information being outdated or unclear and some owners not realising there are designated spaces for off-leash and assuming all parks are off-leash.

Council currently provides information in relation to pet ownership and location of off-leash spaces on its website. Staff have held and supported a number of successful events and education programs such as the 'Dogs Day Out' that involve dog owners and their dogs as well as the community at large.

Council communicates via a range of mediums including brochures, social media, signage, public events and through community consultation.

Survey results highlighted the need for more community education in relation to the Council's regulations for dog owners and the responsibility of dog owners when they have their dogs in public places.



**Action – support annual dog events and dog training activities**

ONGOING



**Action – devise education programs for the community in relation to the requirements of the *Companion Animals Act 1998***

MEDIUM



**Action – review and update the Exercising your Dog brochure every four years**

ONGOING



# EXPANSION OF THE DOG FRIENDLY SPACES NETWORK

Consultation with staff, desktop research and site investigations were conducted to look at the possibility of increasing the number of dog agility parks in Shellharbour LGA. This identified there could be capacity to embellish current off-leash spaces with fencing and agility equipment and also find new spaces for additional dog agility parks around the LGA.

Community consultation with dog park owners at the opening of the dog agility park at Oak Flats and the online survey held in 2018 highlighted the demand for more dog friendly spaces throughout the LGA. Key suburbs identified include Warilla and Albion Park.

The approach to investigating spaces will be based on a number of key factors including:

- Population numbers of registered dogs in each suburb
- Community demand
- Identifying spaces that are forecast for significant growth
- Suitability of sites
- Known native fauna habitat, in particular nesting shorebirds



**Action – prioritise spaces identified for possible dog friendly spaces.**

 **SHORT/MEDIUM**



# WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN SELECTING POTENTIAL DOG FRIENDLY SPACES

The expansion of the dog off-leash network is only feasible if properly supported by enforcement, the provision of ancillary infrastructure to support off-leash activity and intensive community education. The types of factors to take into account for new sites may include:

- Community preference – the selection of dog off-leash spaces takes into account the views of the community;
- A network approach – to ensure a more equitable distribution of dog off-leash spaces across the City;
- Emphasis on District and Citywide reserves (where possible) – as they provide ample space and often, the necessary infrastructure to cater for both dog off-leash spaces and other recreational pursuits;
- Dog registration data – To ensure that spaces with a high concentration of dog ownership are well served by dog off-leash spaces;
- Form and layout of the park;
- Size, Shape and Configuration of the Park and Dog Off-Leash Area;
- Accessibility to the site and while at the site;
- Consideration to Adjacent Park Activities such as organised sporting games;
- Consideration to Spaces of Conservation or Environmental significance (this includes Council's major reserves, wetlands and shorebird habitats);
- Park Usage Levels;
- Appropriate zoning and land classifications.

The use of selection criteria to assess potential dog friendly spaces provides a strategic approach to planning new spaces.



**Action – establish a set of selection criteria to assess potential dog friendly spaces.**

🕒 SHORT/MEDIUM



# SITE DESIGN AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Once a site has been selected for an off-leash or dog agility park, the next step is the design phase and careful consideration of the essential elements for the site. Opportunities will depend on available space and budget.

## A great dog friendly space may include:

- Separate areas for large and small dogs;
- a time out areas for dogs that need a break from the excitement of the park;
- a range of different activity spaces such as ball-play spaces, dog agility equipment spaces etc;
- natural features such as rock scrambles;
- surfaces that will stand up to wear and tear;
- fencing and gateways, the placement of seating, water and shade structures;
- landscaping and the planting of sufficient trees that provide natural shade;
- carparking provision and easy access from the car park to the dog friendly space;
- an area that is accessible and friendly for people of all abilities.



**Action** – design each new identified dog friendly space



MEDIUM/LONG





# FUNDING

Increasing our dog friendly spaces around the LGA will impact on Councils compliance and regulation resources in regards to monitoring places with restricted spaces and time frames. This could potentially result in the need for additional staff to patrol off-leash spaces, particularly if spaces become problematic and create conflict between open space users.

The costs with establishing new dog friendly spaces such as agility parks and off-leash areas will need to be sought from capital works, developer contributions and possibly grant funding.

Council will have to determine whether a new allocation for funding of new areas is created or the funding will be taken from other budget allocations.

# PERIODIC REVIEW

This Strategy will be reviewed 12 months after endorsement and every 2 years after.

DATE	 ACTION TAKEN
September 2019	Strategy Adopted
December 2020	Review Completed

## References

*Blue Mountains City Council Dogs in Public Spaces Strategy 2017 DRAFT*  
*City of Bayside – Dogs, People and Parks. A review of Dog Off-leash spaces.*  
*City of Greater Dandenong Dog Off Leash Strategy 2011*  
*Maitland City Council – Off Leash Dog Exercise Area Strategy 2013*  
*Office of Local Government*  
*Paws for Play*  
*Shellharbour City Council Enforcement Policy (POL- 0026\_V02)*  
*NSW Companion Animals Act 1998*  
*NSW Local Government Act 1993*

## Available on request

Online survey questions / summary  
Oak Flats Dog Park opening consultation summary report





Enquiries and feedback should be made to:  
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