



DOGS IN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2022

Engagement Report

September 2022



Table of contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Purpose of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy	4
2	Phase One: internal stakeholder engagement	5
2.1	Workshops	5
2.1.1	What is working well – general feedback	5
2.1.2	What isn’t working well – general feedback.....	5
2.1.3	What is working well – location-specific.....	6
2.1.4	What isn’t working well – location specific and possible solutions.....	6
2.1.5	Potential new or upgrade of off-leash locations	7
2.1.6	Dog prohibited areas	7
2.1.7	Vision for dog off-leash areas.....	8
3	Phase One: community engagement	9
3.1	Community survey	10
3.1.1	Respondent profile.....	10
3.1.2	Dog owner/carer responses.....	12
3.1.3	Non-dog owner/carer responses.....	18
3.2	Social Pinpoint.....	19
3.2.1	What does and doesn’t work well at current off-leash dog facilities	19
3.2.2	Potential new dog off-leash areas	22
3.2.3	Dog prohibited areas	22
3.3	Drop-in sessions.....	23
3.3.1	Feedback on existing off-leash area.....	23
3.3.2	Potential new off-leash locations	23
3.4	Sports Management Committee Survey.....	24
3.4.1	Issues with dog off-leash activity.....	24
3.4.2	Suggestions to address issues	24
3.5	Written feedback	25
3.5.1	Feedback on existing off-leash locations	25
3.5.2	Potential new off-leash locations	25
3.5.3	Dog prohibited areas	26
3.6	Issues identified with dogs off-leash - summary	26
3.7	Potential new dog off-leash areas	28
4	Phase two community engagement	30
4.1	Community survey	32

4.1.1	Respondent profile	32
4.1.2	Responses to off-leash areas with no changes proposed	32
4.1.3	Response to proposed changes for off-leash areas	33
4.1.4	Response to proposed relocation of existing off-leash areas.....	36
4.1.5	Response to proposed new off-leash areas	37
4.1.6	General comments	39
4.2	Drop-in sessions	39
4.3	Written feedback	40
5	Next steps.....	41

Index of tables

Table 1 - What is working well at specific locations	6
Table 2 - What isn't working well and possible solutions	6
Table 3 - What works well, doesn't work well and recommendations for improvement.....	20
Table 4 - What does and doesn't work well	25
Table 5 - Compiled issues and improvement comments.....	26
Table 6 - Potential new off-leash locations	28
Table 7 - Comments for sites with no changes proposed.....	32
Table 8 - Level of support for proposed changes to existing off-leash areas.....	35
Table 9 - Level of support for proposed new off-leash areas.....	37

Index of figures

Figure 1 - Respondent profile.....	10
Figure 2 - Number of Dogs Owned.....	11
Figure 3 - Dog size	11
Figure 4 - Off-leash area frequency of use	12
Figure 5 - Days of the week used.....	12
Figure 6 - Time of the day used	12
Figure 7 - Length of stay.....	13
Figure 8 - Travel time via car to off-leash area	14
Figure 9 - Travel time via walking to off-leash area.....	14
Figure 10 - Mode of travel to access primary off-leash areas	15
Figure 11 - Mode of travel to access secondary off-leash areas.....	16
Figure 12 - Interactive mapping tool.....	31
Figure 13 - Level of support for proposed changes to existing off-leash areas (top five most commented sites)	34
Figure 14 - Level of support for proposed relocated sites	37

1 Introduction

This report provides an overview of the engagement undertaken to inform the development of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy for Lake Macquarie City Council. It is part of a suite of documents, which together comprise the overall Dogs in Open Space Strategy project.

The documents that will be completed to inform the development of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy are:

- Background Report
- Community Engagement Report (this report)
- Analysis Report.

1.1 Purpose of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy

The purpose of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy is to:

Create a 10-year strategic direction that will plan for and enhance the dogs in open space experience for dogs and carers, while balancing the broader use of open space for all Lake Macquarie residents and visitors.

Objectives

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- Balance the needs of dog owners with the needs of the general community in accessing and using open space.
- Assess the adequacy of Lake Macquarie's dog off-leash area provision and identify future needs, ensuring equitable distribution across Lake Macquarie.
- Provide a clear framework to guide levels of infrastructure development and service level provision for dog off-leash areas.
- Identify the priorities for the development, management and use of dog off-leash areas that respond to constraints, opportunities and the changing needs of the community over time.
- Define natural habitats and wildlife areas that are not suitable for dogs to access.

2 Phase One: internal stakeholder engagement

2.1 Workshops

Two workshops were held with internal stakeholders involved in the planning, management, maintenance and compliance of dogs in open space and/or public open space more generally including environmental management.

The aim of the workshops were to inform stakeholders about the project and seek their early input into the planning process. This included:

- What is and isn't working well regarding dogs in Council's public open spaces
- Potential solutions to address issues
- Considerations in the upgrade of existing or provision of new off-leash facilities
- Factors to consider in the identification of dog prohibited areas
- A future vision for how Council will provide and manage dogs in open space.

2.1.1 What is working well – general feedback

The following general feedback, stating what is working well in existing dog off-leash locations, was provided. This included:

- Dog off-leash areas separated from other park uses have a better amenity and generally work better than the shared off-leash areas
- There is a good distribution of off-leash facilities across the LGA
- The number of dog attacks is relatively low, given the dog population
- There is a good spread of use in unfenced areas with multiple points of entry
- More patrols are being undertaken
- Community often police off-leash areas themselves
- It is good that we are providing these spaces.

2.1.2 What isn't working well – general feedback

The following general feedback, stating what is not working well in existing dog off-leash locations, was provided. This included:

- A higher level of conflict between dog owner/carers and the public where off-leash areas share space with other recreational uses
- There is conflict between small and large dogs within all dog off-leash areas, regardless of type
- The maintenance levels of off-leash areas vary significantly, providing inconsistent quality for off-leash areas
- There are not enough off-leash areas to meet demand, given the very high dog population in the LGA
- Dog faeces are not picked up by many owners
- There are many off-leash dogs in on-leash areas that are adjacent to a shared off-leash area
- Off-leash dogs often frequent dog prohibited areas such as patrolled beaches and Green Point Foreshore Reserve
- Where there are time restrictions, these aren't complied with, particularly on sportsground off-leash areas.

2.1.3 What is working well – location-specific

Table 1 - What is working well at specific locations

Location	Working well
Thomas H Halton (unfenced)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well maintained Footpaths for the elderly Bins and shelters well located Functions well in wet weather
Thomas H Halton (fenced)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fenced area works well to complement unfenced area and could work well for timid dogs
Speers Point Dog Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-presented and maintained Good support infrastructure Not many reported dog attacks Ability to close area during maintenance
Hams Beach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has good parking area Access is separated from main beach area
Acacia Ave, Waratah West (in Newcastle LGA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides separated fenced area for small and large dogs Self-policed well

2.1.4 What isn't working well – location specific and possible solutions

The following table provides information on what isn't working well at specific dog off-leash areas and possible solutions.

Table 2 - What isn't working well and possible solutions

Location	What isn't working well	Possible solutions
Thomas H Halton	Location of cycleway through dog exercise area (DEA).	Better signage to define DEA. Better separation of cyclists/pedestrians to DEA.
Cardiff No.3	DEA is only in No.3 Oval, but No.1 oval is used as off-leash area.	Improved signage to identify off-leash and on-leash areas.
Speers Point Dog Park	Lots of owners won't take their dogs due to larger dogs.	Create a small dog area in Speers Point Dog Park.
Redhead Beach	People have dogs off-leash in dog on-leash areas and prohibited areas. People leave dogs on beach whilst swimming.	Improved signage or other mechanism to delineate off-leash, on-leash and prohibited areas, including through Webb Park.
Catherine Hill Bay Beach	There is no signage to indicate whether dogs are permitted on/off-leash or prohibited.	Improved signage at beach access points.
Hams Beach	No clear distinction between dog off-leash and dog prohibited areas.	Improved signage or markers (coloured) i.e. zoned rather than relying on signage at the multiple access points.

Location	What isn't working well	Possible solutions
General comments – not site specific	Education and signage highlighting dog on-leash and off-leash areas.	Improved signage at all off-leash locations that identify where dog off-leash areas start and finish. Currently looking into traffic coloured signage opportunities to distinguish between the three areas. Suggestions to use coloured zone signage (like South Coast Council) to identify off-leash, on-leash and prohibited areas.
Goundry Street, Gateshead.	Goundry St can't play junior cricket anymore due to dog faeces on the ground.	Review the need for both sport and dog use during analysis phase.
Charlestown (netball courts)	Not sticking to allocated off-leash times.	Undertake education program to ensure people understand on-leash and off-leash areas. Improve signage to identify this. If problems persist undertake ranger patrols to inform people of the permitted activities for dogs in open space.
Molly O'Connor Redhead	Near a busy street.	Potentially incorporate barrier fencing.
Black Neds Bay Lisle Carr Oval, end of Recreation Avenue in Whitebridge Neegulbah Park Macquarie Hills. Behind Belmont sporting club	On-leash parks where people are often caught off-leash.	Undertake education program to ensure people understand on-leash and off-leash areas. Improve signage to identify this. If problems persist at a specific site undertake ranger patrols to inform people of the permitted activities for dogs in open space.

2.1.5 Potential new or upgrade of off-leash locations

Internal stakeholders provided feedback on upgrades to existing off-leash areas or potential new off-leash areas for consideration in the development of the strategy. Rathmines Park off-leash area was identified for potential fencing. Possible new locations were identified below:

- Myuna Bay - away from the main road and playground area
- Cardiff near Fifth Street – would require separation from the cycleway
- Additional location in Morisset
- More off-leash areas on the west side of the lake
- Power easements around the lake, however there would be a need to address risk and ownership issues
- Additional lake access for dogs to swim, however Council would need to consider environment impacts.

2.1.6 Dog prohibited areas

Internal stakeholders provided feedback on areas that they believed should be considered dog prohibited

- Councils needs to look at appropriateness of off-leash areas on sportsgrounds, and if removed, equity of access.
- Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC) around the lake needs to be considered, however it may need to be fenced off.
- Consideration of dunes and rehabilitation work undertaken and if appropriate for dogs on or off-leash. Quality of EEC will determine level of prohibition, e.g. dogs or more broadly.

2.1.7 Vision for dog off-leash areas

Internal stakeholders were asked to create their own vision statements on how they would like dog off-leash areas to look, feel, be used and located and managed in 10 years from now. Their responses were varied, as outlined below.

Thinking ahead in the next 10 years, what should the dog off-leash network in Lake Macquarie look like?

“A well-educated public being respectful of facilities that are appropriately sign posted and serviced with amenities/infrastructure.”

“A more educated public.”

“All dogs need to be scanned into dog parks, confirm registration, previous issues, good behaviour. User pays, community or commercial managed parks.”

“All off-leash areas be fenced and potential for volunteers to manage.”

“Dog owners who obey the rules and use well maintained and distributed spaces that cater for a variety of experiences for their animals.”

“The community and Council value our open spaces and wish to share them with dogs in a way that is safe, inclusive and respectful of others and the natural environment.”

“Policing of parks for inappropriate and unauthorised dog use.”

“Flexible open animal space strategy that can change depending on needs.”








“At each facility Council would have running water, chairs, shade cover, bins and all owners to be compliant with legislation.”

3 Phase One: community engagement

Phase One of community engagement was conducted from 21 February to 14 March 2022. This consultation phase was seeking information from the Lake Macquarie community on:

- How people currently use Council’s existing off-leash areas
- Which off-leash areas are used most and why
- How people get to off-leash areas and how far they are prepared to travel
- What is valued most about off-leash areas
- Issues experienced when using off-leash areas
- If off-leash areas outside the Lake Macquarie LGA area are used and why
- Non-dog owners’ experiences with dogs in open spaces and off-leash areas
- Identification of open space areas that should be prohibited to dogs.

Engagement snapshot

-  25,000+ subscribers reached via Council newsletters
-  21,000+ people reached via Council’s social media
-  2200+ visits to Council’s online engagement platform Shape Lake Mac
-  560 surveys completed
-  57 written submissions
-  200+ online mapping tool comments
-  30 attendees at drop in session

Engagement methods

To obtain this information, various methods were used, resulting in 825 responses. These methods included:

- An online community survey
- Social Pinpoint
- Hard copy feedback forms
- Sporting Committee survey
- Drop-in sessions at dog off-leash areas.

This community engagement phase was promoted by:

- Council’s Shape Lake Mac website
- Posters erected at 10 dog off-leash locations. These included Speers Point Dog Park, Gregory Park, West Wallsend, Redhead Beach, Hams Beach, Charlestown Netball Courts, Cardiff Oval No.3, Pasterfield Complex, Cameron Park, Thomas H Halton Park, Rathmines Park, Pendlebury Park, Bonnells Bay
- Posters and postcards at Lake Mac Libraries
- Direct email to community members who engaged with Council over the previous six months on dog off-leash areas

- Direct email to all sporting committees on Council-managed sportsgrounds and netball courts
- Direct email to dog clubs/trainers, dog related businesses, veterinaries, progress associations, wildlife/conservation groups and surf lifesaving clubs
- Council’s enewsletter channels, including Your City Online, Shape Lake Mac and Eco Advocate
- Social media, including Facebook and Instagram.

Council’s Shape Lake Mac webpage provided background information about the project, the timeframe for the project, a FAQs page and access to complete the online community survey and Social Pinpoint.

Key findings

Key findings from the first phase of the community consultation are summarised below:

- The most valued aspects of existing off-leash areas were the large size of areas, access to water, openness of areas, access to car parking and fencing.
- More than two-thirds of off-leash users travel by car to get there.
- Most respondents are prepared to travel up to 10 minutes by car to both a dog park and shared off-leash area and up to 20 minutes to a beach off-leash area.
- Most respondents are prepared to walk up to 10 minutes for all three off-leash area types.
- Almost 40 per cent of off-leash area users visit daily, with weekends most popular and 3-6pm the most popular time to visit.
- Redhead Beach was identified by both dog and non-dog owners as a key location where compliance is an issue.
- The most significant dog related issue for sports committees managing Council’s sports fields is dog faeces. This issue was experienced at sporting facilities regardless of whether it was designated as a dog off-leash area.

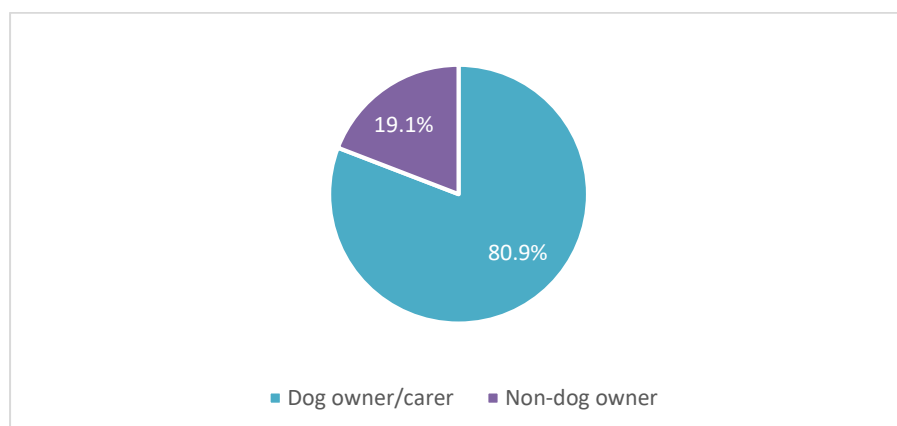
3.1 Community survey

An online community survey was conducted during the community engagement period. This survey provided feedback options for both dog owners/carers and non-dog owners . A total of 564 surveys were completed.

3.1.1 Respondent profile

Survey respondents were represented by dog owners/carers and non-dog owners. The following chart identifies that dog owners/carers represent 80.1 per cent of respondents with non-dog owners at 19.1 per cent.

Figure 1 - Respondent profile

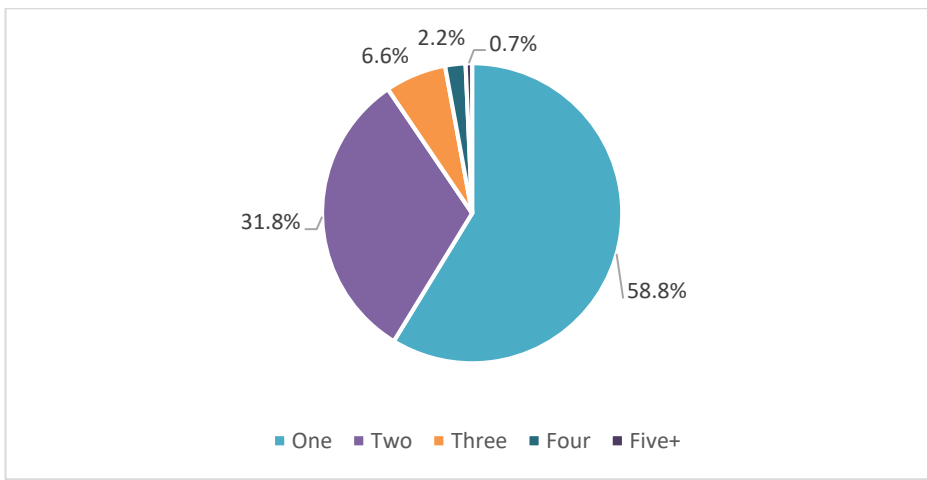


Respondents came from 32 different suburbs in Lake Macquarie. The suburbs with the highest representation were from the north-eastern area of the LGA, totalling for 35.2 per cent of all respondents:

1. Redhead 13.5 per cent
2. Valentine 6.7 per cent
3. Eleebana 6 per cent
4. Charlestown 5.3 per cent
5. Belmont 3.7 per cent

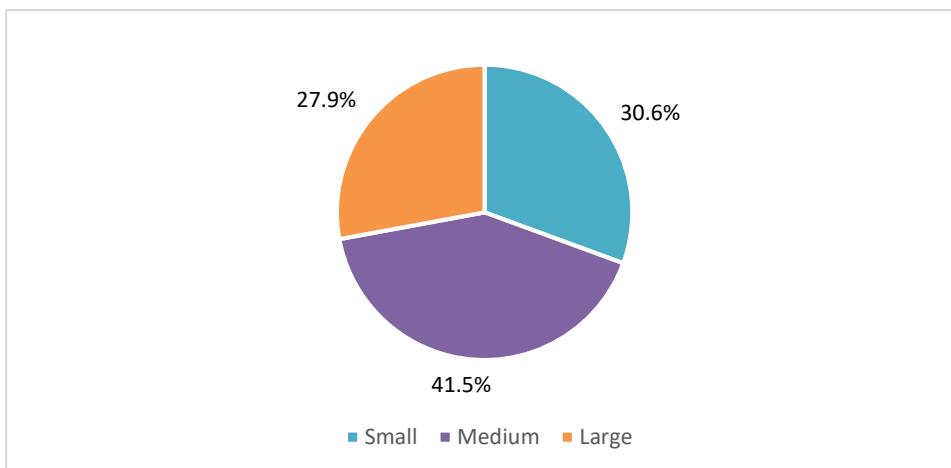
Most dog owners and carers had one or two dogs, but some had five or more.

Figure 2 - Number of Dogs Owned



The size of the dog was represented by three sizes: small up to 12kg, medium 12-24kg and large 25kg+. Medium dogs were most common.

Figure 3 - Dog size



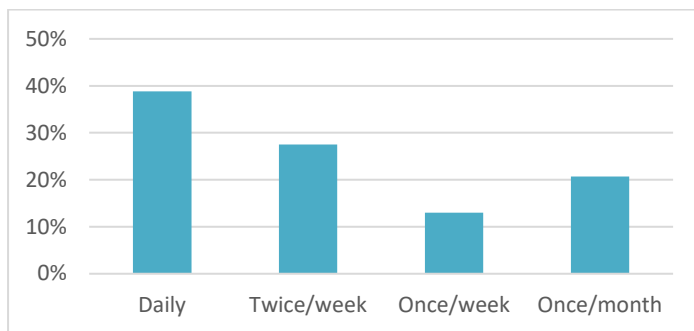
3.1.2 Dog owner/carer responses

3.1.2.1 Dog off-leash area usage general

Of the 456 survey respondents who owned/cared for a dog, 77.4 per cent used an off-leash area in Lake Macquarie.

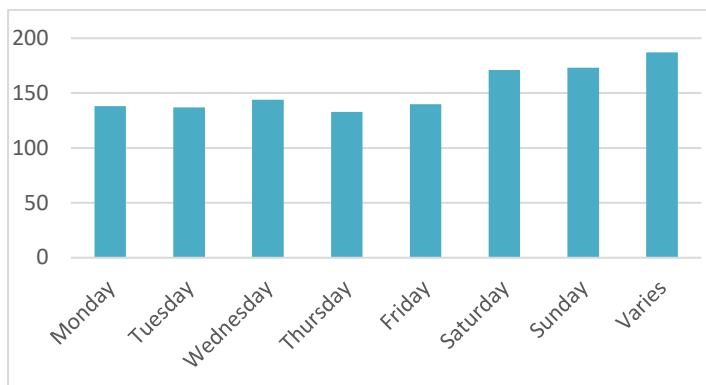
The frequency that dog off-leash areas were used by respondents who owned/cared for a dog varied, with the highest proportion using them daily.

Figure 4 - Off-leash area frequency of use



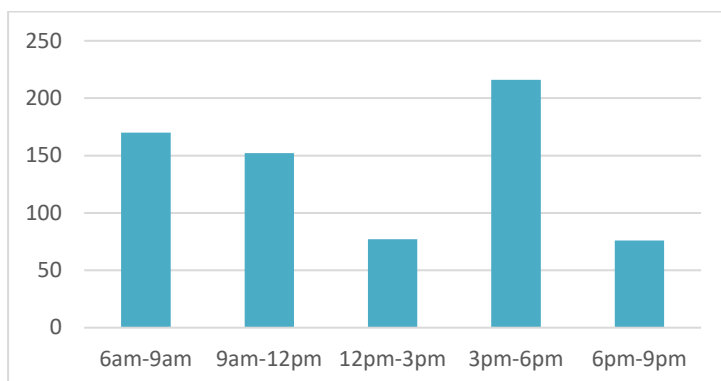
The days of the week off-leash areas were used were Saturdays and Sundays, with a number of respondents stating it varied week to week.

Figure 5 - Days of the week used



Dog off-leash areas were most frequented between 3-6pm and 6-9am.

Figure 6 - Time of the day used



Respondents were asked to select from a list of options, what they value most about visiting off-leash areas. Overall, the top five responses were:

1. My dogs are able to run free and exercise
2. My dogs learn to socialise with other dogs
3. I get to exercise walking to the dog off-leash areas
4. Proximity to my home
5. I get talk to other people.

Respondents were asked to select from a list of options what they like most about the existing off-leash areas. Overall the top five responses were:

1. Large size of areas
2. Access to water (lake/beach)
3. Openness of the areas
4. Access to car parking
5. Dog parks with fencing.

Off-leash areas that received the highest number of comments for the location being a ‘great space’ were:

1. Thomas H Halton (unfenced) (Croudace Bay) (58)
2. Redhead Beach (18) and Speers Point Dog Park (18)
3. Hams Beach (13).

The majority (66 per cent) of respondents stated that they used the off-leash area closest to their home. Of those that did not, the top five reasons given were:

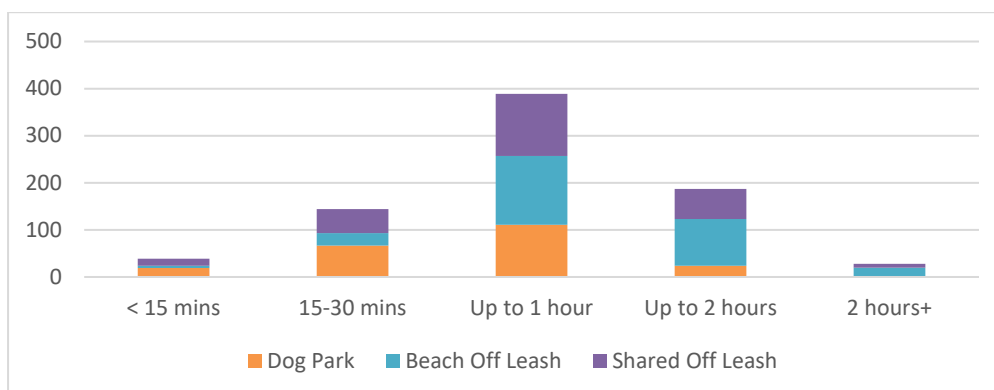
1. No fencing or inadequate fencing
2. Next to busy road
3. Prefer elsewhere
4. Too small
5. Uncontrolled dogs use it.

The off-leash areas most frequently identified as being not used, despite being the closest facility to where respondents live and the reasons why were:

1. Charlestown (near netball courts) – busy road, limited hours
2. Thomas H Halton (fenced) – too small, no grass
3. Speers Point Dog Park – Uncontrolled dogs, don’t like fenced dog parks.

Respondents were asked how long they would stay at the three different types of off-leash areas. All three were most popular for up to an hour, with beach off-leash areas also quite popular for up to two hours.

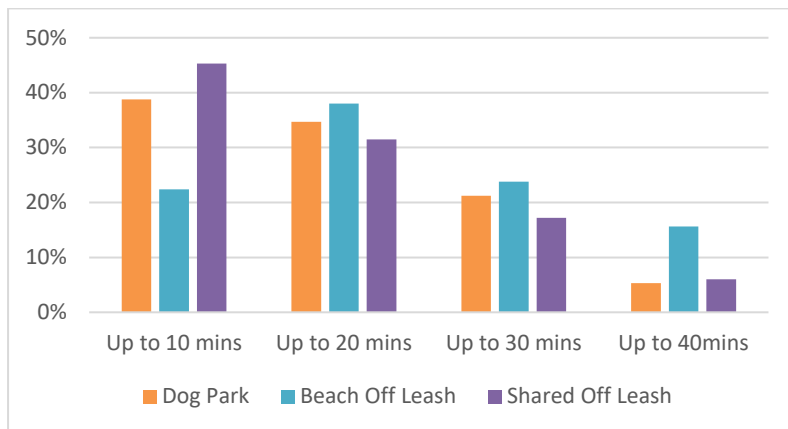
Figure 7 - Length of stay



Respondents were asked to identify how far, measured by time, they are prepared to travel by both car and walking to get to the three different types of off-leash areas.

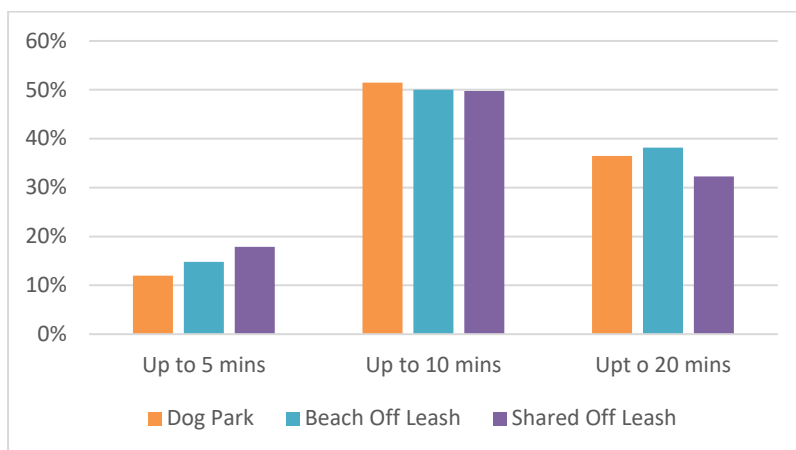
Travelling by car up to ten minutes was the highest selected option for both dog parks and off-leash areas, whilst a higher number of respondents were prepared to travel up to twenty minutes to use a beach off-leash area. The number of respondents prepared to travel over twenty minutes dropped significantly for all types of dog leash areas. Generally, respondents are prepared to travel further to access a beach off-leash area than the other two dog off-leash area types.

Figure 8 - Travel time via car to off-leash area



Walking up to ten minutes was the highest selected option for all three dog off-leash types. Preparedness to walk up to twenty minutes dropped by approximately 16 per cent, 12 per cent and 17 per cent for dog parks, beach off-leash and shared off-leash facilities respectively.

Figure 9 - Travel time via walking to off-leash area



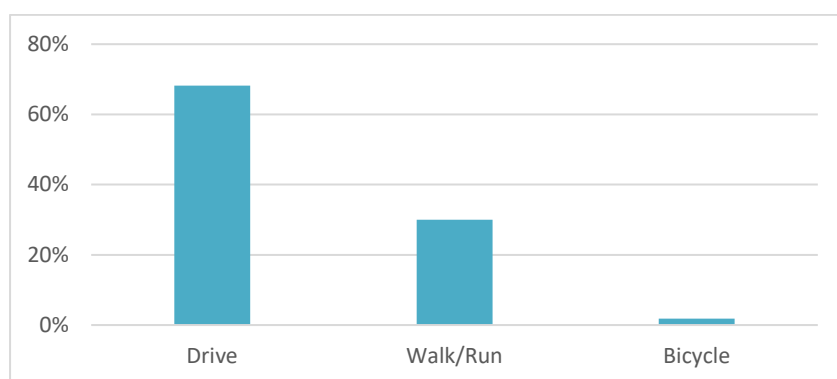
3.1.2.2 Specific dog off-leash area feedback

Respondents were asked to identify which off-leash area in Lake Macquarie they use the most (primary) and how they got there. As identified in Section 3.1.1, more than a third of respondents came from the north east of the LGA, which may account for the dog off-leash areas selected. The top five off-leash areas used by respondents, equating to 58.9 per cent of all responses are:

1. Thomas H Halton (unfenced)
2. Redhead Beach
3. Speers Point Dog Park
4. Thomas H Halton (fenced)
5. Hams Beach.

Driving was the key form of travel used overwhelmingly by respondents (68 per cent) to access the off-leash areas as identified in the graph below.

Figure 10 - Mode of travel to access primary off-leash areas



Respondents were asked to identify how they primarily use the off-leash areas and the main reasons for selecting the site. Almost 57 per cent of respondents identified that they primarily used the site for exercising their dog off-leash, with the next most popular reasons being to recreate themselves/or with others and to walk their dog on-leash.

The top five reasons for using the specific site were:

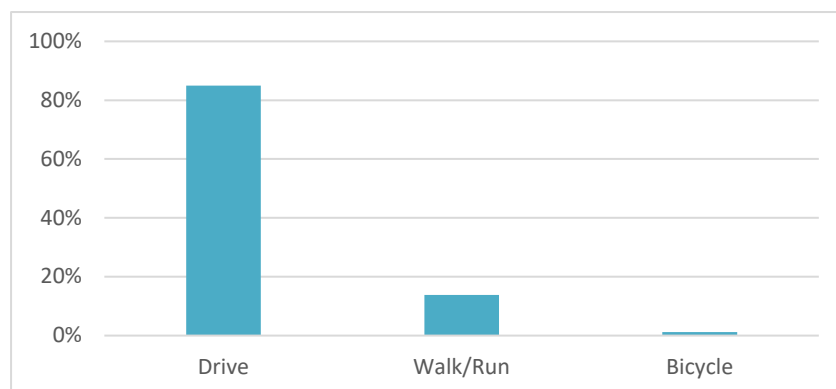
1. Convenience of location
2. Access to water (lake/beach)
3. Size of area
4. Trees and shade
5. Parking access.

Respondents were asked to identify a secondary off-leash area in Lake Macquarie they used and how they got there. 21.5 per cent of all respondents provided information on a secondary off-leash location. The top five secondary off-leash areas used by respondents are:

1. Redhead Beach
2. Speers Point Dog Park
3. Thomas H Halton (unfenced)
4. Thomas H Halton (fenced)
5. Blacksmiths Beach.

Similar to the most used off-leash area, travel by car was the mode of travel used overwhelmingly by respondents (85 per cent) to access secondary off-leash areas as identified in the graph below.

Figure 11 - Mode of travel to access secondary off-leash areas



Respondents were asked to identify how they primarily use the secondary off-leash areas and the main reasons for selecting the site. Almost 59 per cent of respondents identified that they primarily used the site for exercising their dog off-leash, with the next most popular reasons being to recreate themselves/or with others and to walk their dog on-leash.

The top five reasons for using the specific secondary site were:

1. Access to water (beach/lake)
2. Parking access
3. Size of area
4. Convenience of location
5. Good access via footpath/walking connections.

Respondents who owned/cared for a dog were given the opportunity to provide further comments about the sites selected. This opportunity was open ended and not directive. Comments included what was working well and issues that should be addressed.

There were 495 comments overall with 28 per cent providing positive feedback, 72 per cent identifying issues or improvements. Of the positive comments, 80 per cent stated that the off-leash location was a great space. Issue/improvement comments ranged from suggesting improvements, being in a dangerous location, to removal as off-leash area.

Thomas H Halton fenced (9 per cent) and unfenced (21 per cent) off-leash areas attributed for 30 per cent of all comments received followed by Redhead Beach 22 per cent, Speers Point Dog Park 14 per cent and Charlestown and Hams Beach 6 per cent.

Overall the issue/improvement comments focused on:

1. Lack of fencing (either for safety of dogs or other park users)
2. Lack of drinking water for dogs and people
3. Not enough garbage bins
4. Fencing to separate big dogs and small dogs
5. Too many uncontrolled dogs/area is unsafe as next to a busy road.

Key comments received specific to site:

Thomas H Halton (unfenced) Great space and retain as is, reduce extent off-leash area to reduce conflict with shared pathway and recreation use, change off-leash time restrictions, improve signage and ranger patrols.

Thomas H Halton fenced	Great space, too small, not enough grass, surface too hot/cuts dog's paws, doesn't allow for separation of big and small dogs, not enough bins or seating.
Redhead Beach	Great space, uncontrolled dogs, owners don't follow rules/pick up dog faeces, improved signage to identify area and etiquette, provision of dog poo bags and more bins, lack of enforcement, improved parking, access to drinking water and toilets.
Speers Point	Great space, doesn't allow for separation of big and small dogs, too many uncontrolled dogs, irresponsible owners, more seating, shade, water and lighting, too busy, too small and boring.
Hams Beach	Great space, improved signage to identify the area and etiquette, provision of dog poo bags, more bins and drinking water.
Charlestown (adjacent netball courts)	Make safer by having barrier fencing to the road, provision of seating, shade, bins and drinking water.

Section 3.6 identifies all issues and improvements that were raised by respondents across all feedback channels, the specific locations these are occurring at and the number of responses for each.

3.1.2.3 Dog off-leash area issues

Respondents who owned/cared for a dog were asked to identify any open space areas where they have experienced issues with dogs off-leash. Redhead Beach was the location most commonly referenced, followed by Speers Point. A number of general issues not specifically relating to any one site were also identified. The most commonly referenced issue for Redhead Beach was uncontrolled dogs and dog attacks and kennel cough and dog attacks at Speers Point.

The top five issues raised by dog owner/carers were:

1. Uncontrolled dogs
2. Dogs being off-leash in on-leash area
3. Dog attacks
4. Owners not picking up dog faeces
5. Owners disregarding rules and etiquette.

Section 3.6 identifies all issues that were raised by respondents across all feedback channels, the specific locations these are occurring at and the number of responses for each.

3.1.2.4 Dog off-leash areas used outside of Lake Macquarie

Respondents were asked if they utilised dog off-leash areas outside of the Lake Macquarie LGA. One third of dog owner/carers advised that they did. While there were a number of sites identified, two sites within the Newcastle LGA were utilised by more than a third of respondents. The sites were Horseshoe Beach, Newcastle and Acacia Ave, Waratah West¹.

The top five reasons that respondents visited these areas were:

¹ The Acacia Ave off-leash area was upgraded in 2019 and now includes an unfenced off-leash area approximately 11,000 sqm, and a separated dog park for big dogs (6,500 sqm) and small dogs (2,000 sqm).

1. Water access (beach/harbour)
2. Sufficient size
3. Support facilities seating, shade, drinking water
4. There is parking available
5. It is fenced / easy access through the site.

3.1.2.5 Dog prohibited areas

Respondents were asked whether they had suggestions for areas that should be prohibited to dogs. The majority of respondents felt that dogs should not be prohibited from public open space, provided they are kept under control and owners comply with the on/off-leash rules. Other comments included the need for more fenced off-leash areas and better enforcement of the rules.

The most commonly referenced location for prohibition was Redhead Beach, notably between first and second creek. Other areas noted included Thomas H Halton (fencing/reducing existing unfenced leash free area), Green Point, Cardiff sports ovals, Speers Point Park, Pelican Reserve, Salt Bay, Murrays Beach, Glenrock, Dudley and Burwood Beaches and Holford Field at Mount Hutton. More generally, children’s playgrounds, beaches (patrolled), BBQ areas, ecologically sensitive areas were also highlighted as potential areas where dogs might be prohibited.

3.1.3 Non-dog owner/carer responses

Respondents who did not own a dog were provided the opportunity to provide comments about up to two specific off-leash locations. This opportunity was open ended and not directive. There were 165 comments overall with 4 per cent being positive, 96 per cent issue/improvements. Of the positive comments, they all stated that the off-leash location was a great space. Issue/improvements comments ranged from suggesting improvements, too many uncontrolled dogs to removal of off-leash areas.

Redhead Beach attributed for 49 per cent of all comments received followed by Thomas H Halton (unfenced) 21 per cent, Hams Beach 6 per cent, Rathmines 4 per cent and Speers Point 4 per cent.

Overall the top five issues/improvements comments were:

1. Owners disregard for rules / etiquette
2. Uncontrolled dogs
3. Dogs faeces not being picked up
4. Lack of enforcement
5. Concerns for human safety due to uncontrolled dogs.

Comments specific to location are outlines below:

Redhead Beach	Too many uncontrolled dogs, owners disregard to rules/etiquette, dog faeces, lack of enforcement, signage to identify on/off-leash and prohibited areas, too much space dedicated to dogs, negative impact on wildlife, not enough bins, too busy, aggressive dogs.
Thomas H Halton (unfenced)	A great space, too many uncontrolled dogs, owners disregard to rules/ etiquette, safety of people, dog faeces, lack of enforcement, too much space dedicated to dogs, unclear signage, removal of dog off-leash area near playground.

Hams Beach	Too many uncontrolled dogs, lack of enforcement, improved signage to identify area and etiquette, owners disregard to rules/ etiquette.
Rathmines Park	A great space, too may uncontrolled dogs, owners disregard to rules/ etiquette, lack of enforcement.
Speers Point Dog Park	A great space, dog faeces, concern for dog attacks.

3.1.3.1 Dog off-leash area issues – non-dog owners

Respondents that do not own or care for a dog were asked to identify any open space areas where they have experienced issues with dogs off-leash. Redhead Beach was the location most commonly referenced, followed by Thomas H Halton. A number of general issues not specifically relating to any one site were also identified. Section 3.6 identifies all issues that were raised by respondents across all feedback channels, the specific locations these are occurring at and the number of responses for each issue.

The top five issues identified by non-dog owners were:

1. Uncontrolled dogs
2. Owners disregard rules / etiquette
3. Dogs being off-leash in on-leash areas
4. Owners not picking up dog faeces
5. Dog attacks.

3.1.3.2 Dog prohibited areas

Respondents were asked whether they had suggestions for areas that should be prohibited to dogs. The most commonly referenced location was Redhead Beach the reasons for which included; eliminating conflict with other beach users including children playing at first creek, impact on wildlife and health and safety. Specific locations at Redhead Beach included between first and second creek and between the surf club and third creek, Redhead second creek to Redhead Bluff.

There was a diverse range of more generalised comments from restricting off-leash dog exercise within all public areas to fenced dog areas only to less prohibition and more responsible dog owners including adherence to rules and etiquette.

Other areas noted was all beaches and/or in proximity to patrolled areas, bushland, near children’s play areas, Salts Bay, Spoon Rocks, Swansea Heads, Speers Point Park.

3.2 Social Pinpoint

Social Pinpoint was used as a method for the community to provide feedback on specific off-leash locations that work well/don’t work well, potential new locations for off-leash area and locations that should be dog prohibited. A total of 204 comments were received.

3.2.1 What does and doesn’t work well at current off-leash dog facilities

There were 103 comments received that included 265 responses on what does and doesn’t work well with existing off-leash areas. The majority of comments received related to Redhead Beach, Thomas H Halton, Hams Beach and Hampton Street Reserve, followed by Thomas H Halton (fenced). There were a small number

of general comments, including that there is a need for more off-leash sites that are lake accessible and minimise pedestrian/cyclist conflict.

The following table summarises what does and doesn't work well at specific locations, recommendations for improvements and the number of responses received for that location.

Table 3 - What works well, doesn't work well and recommendations for improvement

Location and number of responses	Works well	Doesn't work well	Recommendations
Redhead Beach (23)	Great space Pleasant area to be in Well utilised Keep leash free Keep as is	No access to drinking water Needs bins Needs better signage to delineate off-leash area Lack of bins	Introduce time restrictions South of 3 rd creek should be leash free
Thomas H Halton (unfenced) (35)	Fosters community connections Well utilised Access to the lake Great space keep as is Great access for limited mobility	Time restrictions aren't followed Irresponsible dog owners Limited drinking facilities Off-leash impacts use by whole community Cyclists attacked/impacted Needs bins and fencing Time restrictions are too limiting	Area near playground should be on-leash Better signage to delineate off-leash area, etiquette, and time restrictions Signage to warn cyclists to slow down
Thomas H Halton (fenced) (19)	Great space	Too small Doesn't allow access to lake Don't like space No grass Needs more shade Big rock/drainage areas unsafe Needs more secure fencing	Increase to include adjacent grass area Add separated small dog area
Hams Beach (18)	Great space, keep as is Pleasant area to be in Fosters community connections	Needs access to drinking water Maintenance of pathways	Fence off-leash near entrance to beach
Charlestown (near netball) (21)	Unfenced open space is important – don't fence in	Next to busy road Site is dangerous for dogs Needs shade and seating Needs access to drinking water	Add fencing to make safe
Rathmines Park (20)	Like that there is no fencing Good shade	Next to busy road Site is dangerous for dogs Not suitable for small dogs	Add fencing to make safe Add separate small dog area
Speers Point Dog Park (13)		Too small Gate opens on shared pathway Not suitable for small dogs Faeces not picked up Too many aggressive dogs Isn't pleasant to be in	Add separate small dog area
Dobinson Reserve (16)		Next to busy road Site is dangerous for dogs	Add fencing to make safe Provide dog poo bags Add dog agility equipment

Location and number of responses	Works well	Doesn't work well	Recommendations
Hampton St Reserve (15)	Great space Keep as is – no fencing	Needs to be space for whole community Grass is not maintained More landscaping will impact wildlife and waterways Lack of seating	Improve landscaping Add walking track
Pendlebury Park (20)		Next to busy road Site is dangerous for dogs Off/on-leash rules not followed Lack of shade, bins, seating Grass not maintained Bins always full	Add fencing to make safe Relocate to Bonnells Bay Park Keep dogs away from playground Service bins more often
Toronto Lions Park (6)	Keep as is	Next to busy road Site is dangerous for dogs	Add fencing to make safe
Blacksmiths Beach (4)		Site is dangerous for dogs	Extend off-leash area Remove 4wds and trail bikes from off-leash area
Ruston Ave, Valentine (2)	Great space	Lack of shade	
Lenaghan Oval (5)	Great space	Motorbikes put people off using it Next to busy road	
Bernie Goodwin Oval (4)		Keep off-leash dogs away from playground	Change to fenced dog park
Bolton Point (4)	Great space Access to lake	Lack of fencing	Upgrade toilets
Marks Point (4)	Great space	Lack of bins Grass is not maintained	
Molly O'Connor (7)	Well maintained Great space Great for limited mobility	Next to busy road Lack of shade Site is dangerous for dogs	Add fencing to make safe
Wyee Oval (5)		Lack of fencing Lack of seating and shade Lack of drinking water	
Booragul Foreshore (4)		Needs to balance dogs and people Too many uncontrolled dogs Very busy area with visitors Isn't a pleasant place to be in	
Cardiff Oval No.3 (3)		Site is dangerous for dogs Next to busy road	Add fencing to make safe

Location and number of responses	Works well	Doesn't work well	Recommendations
Dora Creek near Douglas St Oval (3)		Next to busy road Dog escape under the fence	Fencing needs improvement
Buttaba Foreshore (3)		Next to busy road Site is dangerous for dogs	Add fencing to make safe
Gregory Park (2)		Lack of fencing	Add separate small dog area
Taylor Park (2)		Next to busy road	Add fencing to make safe
Thomas Humphreys Reserve (7)		Next to busy road Site is dangerous for dogs No access to lake Lack of seating and shade Not accessible for elderly	Add fencing to make safe

3.2.2 Potential new dog off-leash areas

Respondents were given the option to suggest other locations for future dog off-leash areas. A total of 72 suggestions were received across 33 locations. As the option to suggest potential new locations was provided in the sportsground management committee survey and the hard copy feedback forms, this has been summarised collectively in Section 3.7 of this report.

3.2.3 Dog prohibited areas

Respondents were asked whether they had suggestions for areas that should be prohibited to dogs with 26 comments received, identifying six locations. Of these three are existing dog off-leash areas, Redhead Beach, Thomas H Halton Park, Molly O'Connor Park, with three other areas identified including Bolton Point Foreshore, Warner Park, and Speers Point Park (not the dog park).

Reasons provided for making the space prohibited broadly included irresponsible owners, aggressive dogs, lack of enforcement, safety of people and some areas should just be for people.

3.3 Drop-in sessions

Drop-in sessions were scheduled to further promote the community engagement at four key locations across the city. The intention was to provide opportunities for people to complete hard copy feedback forms and speak directly with Council officers. Drop-in sessions were scheduled for Hams Beach; Speers Point Dog Park; Thomas H Halton Park; and Pendlebury Park.

Unfortunately, due to the significant rainfall experienced during the consultation period, all four drop-in sessions were cancelled, with only one drop-in-session at Hams Beach being able to be rescheduled. A total of 30 people attended this session. A number had already completed the online survey and a further seven completed hardcopy feedback forms at the venue.

3.3.1 Feedback on existing off-leash area

Feedback from the Hams Beach drop-in session, specifically on the Hams Beach off-leash area is summarised below. Positive feedback included:

- Majority enjoyed the beach off-leash area and had no or minimal issues when using it
- Is a good space to meet like-minded people
- Liked having access to water at the beach
- Liked having a car parking area close by
- Some believed the toilets near Caves Beach SLSC were adequate to service the off-leash area also.

Improvement suggestions included:

- Opportunity to provide some seating in the park off-leash area before the beach entrance
- Provision of dog poo bags at the site
- Provision of dog bowl or drinking water
- Clearer signage identifying the off-leash and etiquette
- Some wanted new toilets provided to service this area directly and more car parking
- Potential to fence in some of the park off-leash areas.

One attendee also provided feedback for the off-leash area at Toronto Lions Park, requesting clear signage that dogs are not permitted within the playground.

3.3.2 Potential new off-leash locations

Attendees were given the option to suggest other locations for future dog off-leash areas. Reid's Reserve and Salts Bay Swansea Heads were identified as potential new off-leash locations. These potential new locations have been added to the summarised table from all feedback channels in Section 3.7 of this report.

3.4 Sports Management Committee Survey

A Sports Management Committee Survey was sent to the 75 delegated Sports Management Committees that manage Council sportsgrounds and netball courts. These committees were identified due to the high interaction experienced with dogs being exercised on and off-leash on these fields and adjacent to the courts. A total of 40 surveys were completed and returned. The information below summarises the key themes received from the responses. This survey focused on:

- Issues experienced with dog off-leash activity at their facility
- Suggestions for ways to address these issues
- A park or reserve nearby that could be a potential dog off-leash area in the future
- Any further comments.

Currently there are 63 sports field complexes with 144 rectangular grass fields owned/managed by Council across the Lake Macquarie LGA. At this time there are twelve sports fields at eight sporting complexes that are designated as off-leash areas.

3.4.1 Issues with dog off-leash activity

Respondents were asked what issues they experienced with dog off-leash activity at their sporting facility. The most significant issue (60 per cent of respondents) was the failure of owners to pick up their dog's faeces. Other issues raised included conflict with young players, dogs damaging the sportsground and damaging sporting equipment such as turf wicket covers.

These issues were experienced at a high number of sportsgrounds regardless if they were designated as an off-leash area or not, as well as a number of netball courts. Three of the existing eight designated off-leash areas on sportsground complexes identified issues. These were located at Taylor Park, Lenaghan Oval, and Douglas St Oval.

Section 3.6 identifies all issues that were raised by respondents across all feedback channels, the specific locations these are occurring at and the number of responses for each issue.

3.4.2 Suggestions to address issues

Respondents were asked whether they had any suggestions for ways to address issues at their facilities. There was a broad range of suggestions including more rangers policing fields, prohibition of dogs on sportsgrounds, restricted to on-leash only, owner education, fencing and more/improved signage.

3.5 Written feedback

Hard copy feedback forms were provided for people to complete as an alternate to the online community survey. A total of thirteen feedback forms were completed and four emails sent to Council staff. The feedback form focused on three points:

- Comments on any existing off-leash areas
- Any areas to be considered for new off-leash areas
- Any areas that should be considered for dogs to be prohibited from accessing.

3.5.1 Feedback on existing off-leash locations

Feedback on existing off-leash areas is summarised below.

Table 4 - What does and doesn't work well

Location	Works well	Doesn't work well / needs improvement
Redhead Beach		Dogs only allowed from second creek Irresponsible owners Dogs off-leash in car park and on beach access paths Needs better signage to delineate off-leash area Lack of bins The area smells and is ruined by dogs
Thomas H Halton (unfenced)	Fosters community connections Access to the lake	Needs additional bins near footpath
Rathmines Park		Needs better support facilities including poo bags, bins and water station with swivel dog bowl Needs a separated small dog fenced area
Hampton St Reserve	Is a good size	Needs fencing Lack of shade and seating
Blacksmiths Beach	Important for health and well being	4wd ruin the beach and don't follow rules making it dangerous for dogs and people Should be off-leash north of Bockton St

A number of sites were identified as being used off-leash but are not designated off-leash, and shouldn't be. These included:

- Green Point Foreshore (currently prohibited, but should be on-leash for dogs)
- Belmont Lions Park Playground
- Peritta Island walking track and swimming area.

3.5.2 Potential new off-leash locations

Respondents were given the option to suggest other locations for future dog off-leash areas. Sunshine Park (should be fenced dog park), Myuna Bay Foreshore, and Catherine Hill Bay Northern Beach were identified as potential new off-leash locations. These potential new locations have been added to the summarised table from all feedback channels in Section 3.7 of this report.

3.5.3 Dog prohibited areas

Respondents were asked whether they had suggestions for areas that should be prohibited to dogs with feedback summarised below:

- All surfing and swimming areas for people
- Dogs should be enclosed away from all recreation areas.

3.6 Issues identified with dogs off-leash - summary

Issues were raised across all channels used from community feedback. These were identified specifically in an issues section or in comments for specific locations. The table below is a summary of the issues raised where there were at least five responses of the same issue. The table also includes the locations that were specifically identified and the combined number of responses for each issue. Locations include both designated off-leash areas and those that are not designated.

Table 5 - Compiled issues and improvement comments

Issue	Number of responses	Location
Need better signage – delineate, time, etiquette	30	Redhead Beach, Buttaba Foreshore, Blackalls Park, Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Rathmines Park
Uncontrolled dogs	58	Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Speers Point, Booragul Foreshore, Blackalls Park, Taylor Park, Molly O'Connor, Redhead Beach, Lenaghan Oval, unspecified locations
Irresponsible owners/don't follow etiquette	72	Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Redhead Beach, Speers Point Dog Park, Pelican Foreshore, Blackalls Park, Hams Beach, Pendlebury Park, Rathmines Park, Blacksmiths Beach
Off-leash outside designated area	34	Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Pendlebury Park, Redhead Beach, Catherine Hill Bay Beach, Lake Macquarie Conservation Area, Morisset Park, Swansea Heads, Charlestown netball courts, Munibung Hill, between Shingle Splitters Point and Bay St Balcolyn, Speers Point Park, Sunshine Park, Johnny's Point, Wangi Wangi foreshore, Caves Beach (trails), Lake side reserve Bolton Point, Mirrabooka, Brightwaters, Sunshine Park, No. 1 and 2 Cardiff Ovals
Lack of Fencing/need improved fencing	86	Charlestown netball, Rathmines Park, Dobinson Reserve, Pendlebury Park, Lions Park Toronto, Bernie Goodwin, Bolton Point, Molly O'Connor, Wye Oval, Cardiff No.3, Dora Creek Oval, Buttaba Foreshore, Taylor Park, Thomas Humphreys, Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Pendlebury, Bernie Goodwin
Change to DEA boundary	3	Redhead Beach, Thomas H Halton (both), Blacksmiths Beach, Hams Beach
Cyclist/pedestrian conflict	28	Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Speers Point, unspecified locations

Issue	Number of responses	Location
Poor shade	19	Thomas H Halton (fenced), Charlestown netball, Pendlebury Park, Valentine (Ruston Ave), Molly O'Connor, Thomas Humphreys, Rathmines Park, Hampton St Reserve
Faeces not picked up	72	Majority sportsground DEA, Speers Point, Redhead Beach
Limited or no access to drinking water	32	Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Hams Beach, Wyee Oval, Pendlebury Park, Booragul Foreshore, Buttaba Foreshore, Rathmines Park, Molly O'Connor, Cardiff No.3, Dobinson Reserve
Lack of support infrastructure (bins, seating, lighting)	60	Redhead Beach, Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Charlestown netball, Hampton St Reserve, Pendlebury Park, Marks Point, Wyee Oval, Thomas Humphreys, Booragul Foreshore, Rathmines Park, Dobinson Reserve
Dog attacks	24	Redhead Beach, Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Speers Point, unspecified locations
Area too small	16	Thomas H Halton (fenced), Speers Point, Valentine (Ruston Ave), Blackalls Park, Buttaba Foreshore, Bernie Goodwin
Separated areas for big/small dogs	31	Non-specified locations, Rathmines Park, Speers Point, Gregory Park, Thomas H Halton (fenced), Dobinson Reserve
Area not maintained, e.g. mow, bins	13	Hampton St Reserve, Pendlebury Park, Mark Point, Booragul Foreshore, Molly O'Connor, Rathmines Park
Human safety	28	Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Redhead Beach, Dobinson Reserve, Parbury Park, Croudace Bay Sporting Complex, Lance York Field, Lenaghan Oval, Chapman Oval
Site is dangerous for dogs, e.g. next to busy road	70	Dobinson Reserve, Charlestown netball, Rathmines Park, Lions Park Toronto, Blacksmiths Beach, Lenaghan Ave, Molly O'Connor, Cardiff No.3, Buttaba Foreshore, Thomas Humphreys, Bernie Goodwin
Time Restrictions need changing	12	Valentine (Ruston Ave), Thomas H Halton (unfenced)
Lack of policing	35	Redhead Beach, Thomas H Halton (unfenced), Bennett Park, Spoon Rock, Blacksmiths Beach, Douglas St Oval, Rathmines Park, Blackalls Park
Need to provide poo bags	16	Hams Beach, Rathmines Park, Redhead Beach, Dobinson Reserve, Cardiff Ovals
Inappropriate surface/landscaping	19	Thomas H Halton (fenced)
Need fenced area in west of LGA	9	General comment not specific to location
Nearby recreation facilities should be on-leash or fenced in	6	General comment not specific to location
Damage to wildlife	5	General comment not specific to location

Issue	Number of responses	Location
Damage to sportsground or equipment	11	Les Miller Field, Belmont Ovals, Pat Cahill Oval, Douglas St Oval, Ulinga Oval

3.7 Potential new dog off-leash areas

The following are the locations for potential future off-leash facilities provided through Social Pinpoint, the sports management committee survey and hard copy feedback forms.

Table 6 - Potential new off-leash locations

Suburb	Area
Catherine Hill Bay	Northern end of the beach (Cemetery north)
Cooranbong	Cooranbong playground
	Corner of Whistler Drive and Wainman Drive
	Land between Freemans Drive and Meyers Crescent
Bonnells Bay	Corner of Station and Albert Street (in lieu of Pendlebury Park)
	Pendlebury Park
Cardiff North	Reserve accessed by Adephi Lane
	Wilkinson Park, Myall Road
Dora Creek	Corner of Gardiner Street and Gradwells Road
	Dora Street, adjacent to the canal
	Adjacent to Dora Creek Ovals, Douglass Street
Dudley	Dudley Beach
	Reay Park
Wangi	Wangi Foreshore
	Eastern side of Dobell Park
Boolaroo	Weemala Estate (behind Costco)
Morisset	Vacant land off Kirra Road
	Bernie Goodwin
Pinny Beach	Beach between Stinky Point and Quarry Beach
Cameron Park	Pasterfield sports complex
Cams Wharf	Land between Crangan Bay Road and the lake
Morisset Park	At point where Morisset Park turns into Charles Avenue







Suburb	Area
	Bird Cage Point (Woods Point)
Myuna Bay	Southern Myuna Bay carpark to Rocky Point Road
Swansea	Along lake side of Swansea
	Parbury Park
	Rear of Chapman Oval
Swansea Heads	On the water near entrance to Black Neds Walking Trail
Valentine	Bennett Park
Balcolyn	Shingle Splitters Point
Caves Beach	Caves Beach Playground
	Area between Macquarie Grove and Pacific Street
Glendale	By Winding Creek next to oval
Martinsville	Behind the cricket ground
Sunshine	Sunshine Park
Warners Bay	Near Watagan Track via Vermont Place
West Wallsend	Near Kevin Evans Oval
Whitebridge	Outside of the surrounding fence of Lisle Carr Oval
Adamstown Heights	Russell Reserve Playground
Belmont	Barden and Lumsden Fields (Belmont Ovals)
	Across the road from Aitchison Reserve
Blacksmiths	Trianna Street
Charlestown	Area currently being used as an unofficial dog play area (next to Dudley Road)
Garden Suburb	Area outside the ground to the West of Lance Yorke field
Kahibah	Kahibah Memorial Park

4 Phase two community engagement

Community feedback from the first phase of engagement was used by Council staff to complete a comprehensive review of all dog off-leash areas across the city. The review looked at the suitability of the current sites, including the issues and opportunities raised during consultation.

Phase two community engagement was conducted between 1-22 August 2022. This was an opportunity to test a number of proposals with the community prior to developing the draft strategy. The proposals included changes to existing off-leash areas, relocation of existing areas and potential sites for new off-leash areas.

Engagement snapshot

-  28,000+ subscribers reached via Council newsletters
-  12,700+ people reached via Council's social media
-  4800+ visits to Council's online engagement platform Shape Lake Mac
-  1189 surveys completed
-  57 written submissions
-  57 attendees at drop in session

Engagement methods

An interactive mapping tool was developed to illustrate the proposals, as shown in the map below. A Discussion Paper provided further detail for each of the proposals and outlined the guiding principles underpinning them.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for the proposals via the online survey or hard copy feedback forms.

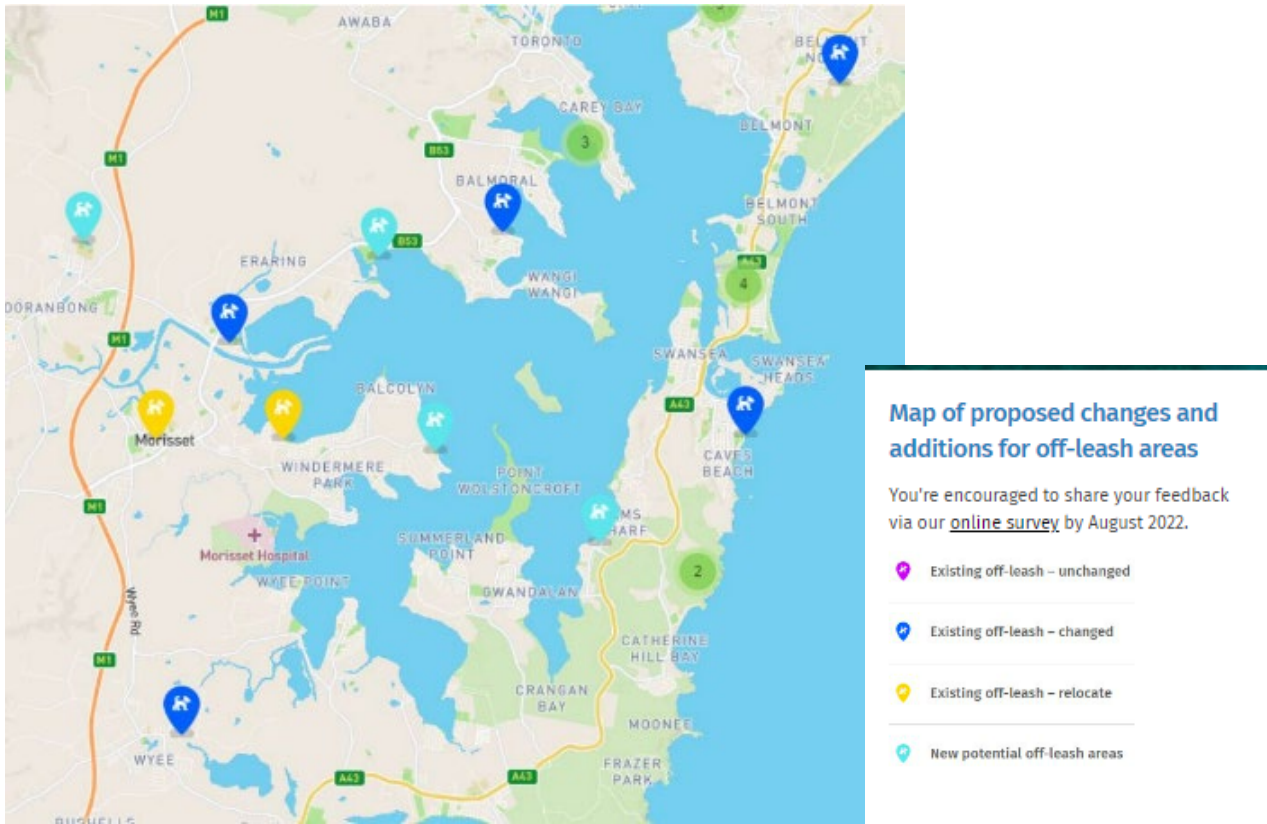
Drop-in sessions were also held at three locations across the City, to provide an opportunity for the community to ask questions and further discuss the proposals with the project team.

- Belmont Library – Wednesday 10 August, 5pm to 7pm
- Pasterfield Sports Complex, Cameron Park – Saturday 13 August, 12pm to 2pm
- Morisset Multi-Purpose Centre – Wednesday 17 August, 5pm to 7pm

This community engagement phase was promoted by:

- Council's Shape Lake Mac website
- Posters and postcards at Lake Mac Libraries
- Direct email to community members who engaged with Council over the previous six months on dog off-leash areas
- Direct email to key stakeholders including all sporting committees on Council-managed sportsgrounds and netball courts, dog clubs/trainers, dog related businesses, veterinarians, progress associations, wildlife/conservation groups, surf lifesaving clubs,
- Council's e-news channels, including Your City Online, Shape Lake Mac and Eco Advocate
- Social media, including Facebook and Instagram.

Figure 12 - Interactive mapping tool



Map of proposed changes and additions for off-leash areas

You're encouraged to share your feedback via our [online survey](#) by August 2022.

- 📍 Existing off-leash – unchanged
- 📍 Existing off-leash – changed
- 📍 Existing off-leash – relocate
- 📍 New potential off-leash areas

Hampton Street Reserve, Carey Bay dog off-leash area

Removal of natural areas from off-leash areas:

Current off-leash area (green) encompasses open area and natural area bushland. Propose to remove the natural area from the current off-leash area. Propose to reduce the open area to allow for identified future recreation embellishments.

Proposed new dog off-leash area (orange)
Dog off-leash at all times
New area approximately 14,000sqm
Unfenced



📍 Existing off-leash – changed

Thomas Humphrey's Reserve, Swansea
No changes proposed.



📍 Existing off-leash – unchanged

Myuna Bay Foreshore, Myuna Bay

Proposed new dog off-leash area:
Shared unfenced off-leash area
Area approximately 14,000sqm
Dog off-leash at all times.



📍 New potential off-leash areas

4.1 Community survey

A total of 1189 surveys were completed as part of this engagement phase.

An online community survey sought feedback on a number of proposals for existing and new off-leash areas, outlined in a Discussion Paper and illustrated via interactive map. Both dog owners and non-dog owners were encouraged to provide feedback. A total of 1176 online surveys were completed.

Hard copy feedback forms were provided at drop-in sessions for people to complete as an alternate to the online community survey. A total of 13 feedback forms were completed and the results of these have been included in the results below.

4.1.1 Respondent profile

Online survey respondents represented 78 suburbs in Lake Macquarie. The suburbs with the highest representation were Redhead, Valentine and Eleebana. Respondents living outside of the Lake Macquarie Local Government Area (LGA) including Newcastle and Cessnock LGAs accounted for 3 per cent of responses. Most respondents (77 per cent) owned one or more dogs with non-dog owners representing 13 per cent of responses. This demographic information was not captured on the 13 hard copy surveys collected.

4.1.2 Responses to off-leash areas with no changes proposed

No changes were proposed to seven of Council's 30 existing off-leash areas. In total, 349 respondents commented on these facilities. The key themes are outlined below.

Table 7 - Comments for sites with no changes proposed

Location and number of responses	Key comments	
Blackalls Park Reserve (8)	Unclear boundaries Supply bins	No off-leash near children's play area/ picnic area
Gurranbah Reserve, Coal Point	Support for off-leash area Opportunity for dogs to swim	Requires infrastructure including bins
Thomas H Halton (fenced), Croudace Bay (233)	Site is too small Poor design Don't like surface or rocks	Requires grass Water pond is dirty
Marks Point (7)	Site is too small	Requires fencing
Speers Point (59)	Needs separated area for small dogs Irresponsible dog owners	Dog faeces left on the grounds Site is too small
Thomas Humphrey Reserve, Swansea (15)	Requires fencing from road	Clearer signage required
Ruston Avenue, Valentine (20)	Site is too small Site is unsafe	Site needs maintenance

4.1.3 Response to proposed changes for off-leash areas

Respondents were asked to identify their level of support for proposed changes to 21 existing off-leash areas.

The majority of site changes were supported in the feedback or had an even split of support and opposition. This was with the exception of the following off-leash areas, which received higher levels of opposition:

- Thomas H Halton Park (Unfenced) Croudace Bay
- Redhead Beach
- Hampton Street Reserve, Carey Bay
- Booragul Foreshore
- Nine Mile Beach, Blacksmiths.

Thomas H Halton Park (Unfenced), Croudace Bay

Thomas H Halton Park received the most community feedback, with 555 respondents (46 per cent) commenting on the proposed changes to the unfenced off-leash area. The proposal to reduce the off-leash area in conjunction with removing the current time restrictions was not supported by 85 per cent of respondents who commented on the site. The key comments received by those not supportive of the proposal included:

- Removal of the shared pathway from the off-leash area would prevent dog owners/carers from walking a circuit with their dogs. Access to the pathways was considered particularly important to older members of the community and those with mobility issues. It was disagreed that there were adverse interactions between dogs and other users in the park, and that the problem on the shared pathway was the high speed of cyclists.
- The proposed area was too small and would remove access to the best swimming location and has very limited support infrastructure.
- The selected off-leash area is focused on the wettest area of the foreshore, identified as having poor drainage.

Those that were supportive of the proposal (12 per cent) or neutral (3 per cent), highlighted that there were too many uncontrolled dogs and irresponsible dog owners, creating unwanted interactions with dogs when they are picnicking. Comments were also received included bike riders and children being chased and/or bit by dogs and that not all dog owners pick up after their dogs.

Redhead Beach

A total of 427 respondents (39 per cent) gave feedback about the proposed changes to Redhead Beach off-leash area. The proposal to remove the dog on-leash section of Redhead Beach with dog prohibited was not supported by 63 per cent of respondents. The key concern with the proposal was the impact of parking on Cain Street. Other comments made in opposition to the proposal included:

- The importance of Redhead Beach as an off-leash area, drawing people from a wide area
- The use of the on-leash area by dogs and their owners that don't want to mix with dogs off-leash
- Accessibility issues for those with mobility issues wanting to access the beach with their dogs.

Those supportive of the proposal (33 per cent) or neutral (4 per cent) identified issues with dogs off-leash within the on-leash area interacting with children and families, notably at First Creek and dog faeces.

General comments included the need for Council to enforce the rules, improved education and signage, consideration to applying the proposed changes on a seasonal basis and considering prohibiting dogs from the dune areas between the residential areas and the beach.

Hampton Street Reserve, Carey Bay

A total of 20 respondents gave feedback on this site. The proposal to reduce the current off-leash area at Hampton Street Reserve to allow for future recreation facilities identified in Council plans and strategies and land categorised natural area bushland was unsupported by 63 per cent of respondents. The key issue for those opposing the proposal was in relation to the inclusion of a possible half court in the reserve noting the potential increase in traffic, crime and noise. Other comments included the need to fence the area and concerns for wildlife/environment.

Booragul Foreshore

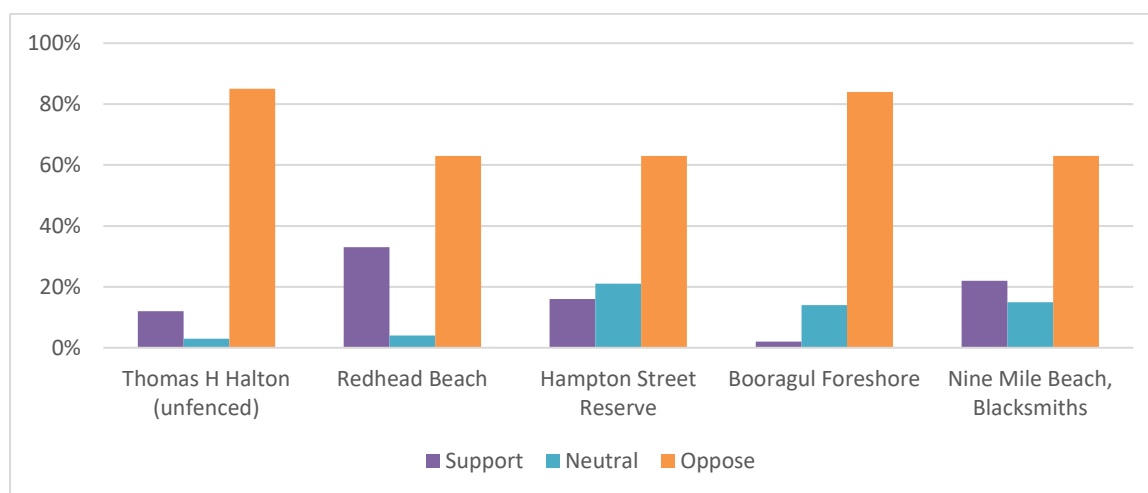
Of the 37 respondents, the majority (84 per cent) were unsupportive of the proposal to reduce the off-leash area at Booragul Foreshore to remove land categorised as natural area and encompassing Endangered Ecological Communities. Comments included:

- The natural area provides interest for the dogs and is already disturbed by cyclists and not maintained
- The linear space provides an opportunity for owners to walk with their dogs off lead
- A reduction in space will provide conflict.

Nine Mile Beach Blacksmiths

A total of 33 respondents provided feedback on the proposed changes. More than two thirds (63 per cent) of respondents were unsupportive of the proposal to address the functionality constraints with the off-leash area at Nine Mile Beach, Blacksmiths. However, the feedback indicates a degree of confusion as to what was being proposed at this location. Comments included conflicts with 4WDs in addition to suggested alternative locations including within proximity to the Granny Pool and extending the off-leash area south.

Figure 13 - Level of support for proposed changes to existing off-leash areas (top five most commented sites)



Remaining Areas

Levels of support and associated comments for the remaining 16 sites is outlined below. Given the lower level of responses to these sites, the numbers have not been translated into percentages.

Table 8 - Level of support for proposed changes to existing off-leash areas

Location and number of responses	Support	Neutral	Oppose	Comments
Bahloo Reserve, Windale (2)	1	1	-	-
Bolton Point (4)	2	-	2	Unsupportive comments include that it is too close to busy road, has no amenities and Council doesn't enforce the rules
Buttaba Foreshore (8)	7	-	1	Unsupportive comments included too close to busy road, requires fencing
Cardiff No. 3 (19)	14	1	4	Generally supportive of changes to extend off-leash times Unsupportive comments included too close to busy road and need for fence
Charlestown (25)	23	1	1	Supportive on the basis that it is too close to a busy road and need for a fence General comments included the need for amenities, signage, shade and addressing drainage
Dobinson Reserve, Blacksmiths (15)	7	1	7	Unsupportive comments included proximity to the road, requires fencing, playground is underutilised, site is boggy
Dora Creek	8	1	2	Requires fencing
Goundry Street, Gateshead (4)	2	1	1	Prefer a playground at the site
Gregory Park, west Wallsend (25)	15	5	5	Unsupportive comments included requires fencing, move elsewhere, separate from children Support for dogs to access facilities when field not in use
Hams Beach (78)	25	13	40	Unsupportive comments included the need to retain the grass area for those physically unable to access the beach and the dunes within the off-leash area and that dogs should be prohibited from beaches and to protect dunes Support to extend off-leash area to the northern extent of the beach rather than at a random point
Lenaghan Park,	8	-	5	Unsupportive comments included requires fencing near busy roads, too many uncontrolled dogs, concern for flora and fauna

Location and number of responses	Support	Neutral	Oppose	Comments
Belmont North (13)				
Molly O'Connor, Redhead (27)	15	6	6	Supportive comments included the need to fence the area Those unsupportive noted that the site was not used and should be used for something else
Rathmines Park (25)	15	5	5	Supportive comments included the need to fence the area from adjacent road Those unsupportive/neutral noted too many uncontrolled dogs
Taylor Park (7)	6	-	1	Allow off-leash activity when grounds are not in use
Toronto Lions Park (12)	7	2	3	Supportive comments included the need to fence and promote the area Unsupportive comments highlighted the space as a busy pedestrian area and concerns for wildlife/ environment
Wye Oval (12)	6	3	3	Unsupportive comments included the need for dog off-leash area with the Radcliffe Estate

4.1.4 Response to proposed relocation of existing off-leash areas

The proposals tested included the potential relocation of two existing off-leash areas.

1. Relocation of the off-leash area at Bernie Goodwin Reserve to Gibson Oval, Morisset

A total of 18 respondents gave feedback on the proposed to relocation. It received support from 57 per cent respondents, with 29 per cent neither supportive or unsupportive and 14 per cent opposed.

2. Relocation of off the leash area at Pendlebury Park to Bonnells Bay Park, Bonnells Bay

A total of 43 respondents gave feedback on the proposed relocation. The response was mixed, with 50 per cent opposing and 44 per cent in support with 6 per cent neutral. Comments opposing the proposal included:

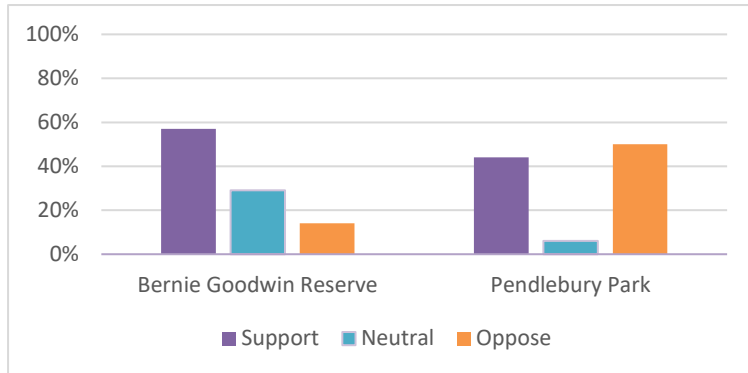
- A preference for Pendlebury Park due to better lake access
- Concerns for the impacts of traffic on surrounding residents of Bonnells Bay Park
- Concerns that an off-leash area at Bonnells Bay would be too far away from existing facilities
- Feedback that moving the area would not solve the problems of dogs off-leash in dog on-leash areas at Pendlebury Park.

Those in support of the proposal to relocate the off-leash area highlighted:

- Benefits of separating dogs from children's parks,
- Availability of off street parking and
- The current underutilisation of Bonnells Bay Park.

General comments included the need for an off-leash area at Bonnells Bay Park to be fenced and the toilets re-established.

Figure 14 - Level of support for proposed relocated sites



4.1.5 Response to proposed new off-leash areas

Respondents were asked to consider their level of support for ten proposed new off-leash areas to address identified gaps in provision. A total of 431 responses were received.

There was general support for the off-leash areas with Cameron Park, Edgeworth and Nords Wharf receiving the highest level of support.

There was a degree of confusion with regards the location of the Pinny Beach off-leash area. A number of comments unsupportive of the proposed site, referred to beach off-leash use. The off-leash area proposed for Pinny Beach will be a dog park within a reserve.

Table 9 - Level of support for proposed new off-leash areas

Location and number of responses	Support	Neutral	Oppose	Comments
Cameron Park, Pasterfield (35)	85%	6%	9%	Supportive comments included off-leash area would be great, growing community needs this, implement fenced separated big/small dogs areas, would provide a safe area to exercise dogs Unsupportive comments included taking space away from kids to play, Too close to the playground and sportsfields
Catherine Hill Bay – northern beach (134)	78%	9%	13%	Supportive comments included it is already a popular area for off-leash, provides an area for CHB residents, provides opportunity for dogs and people to socialise, good for swimming Unsupportive comments included there is no support infrastructure, uncontrolled dogs, dogs should not be on any beach, will require clear signage to recognise start and end, prefer it to be timed to early mornings, late afternoons, will require enforcement
Cooranbong (22)	71%	10%	19%	Supportive comments included needed for growing community, great it will be fenced, implement fenced separated big/small dogs areas Unsupportive comments included that this should not be located on the new sportsfield complex

Location and number of responses	Support	Neutral	Oppose	Comments
Edgeworth, Turnbull Street (21)	87%	-	13%	Supportive comments included need for off-leash area in Edgeworth, should be fenced, will need support infrastructure
Hillsborough (105)	47%	13%	39%	Supportive comments included the need for an off-leash area for community, will require fencing from busy roads, ensure bushland is protected from dogs, will require drainage and parking, should be a dog park, good for dog socialisation Unsupportive comments included that is too close to busy roads, no support infrastructure, oppose off-leash areas generally, dangerous pedestrian access, traffic near access road, poor access, co-location with public school, mosquitoes.
Kindyerra Park Argenton (25)	68%	18%	14%	Supportive comments included that it would alleviate pressure on Speers Point dog park, and like having an additional off-leash areas Unsupportive comments included that it is too close to the main road/ requires fencing, area needs to be of an adequate size, no support infrastructure
Myuna Bay Foreshore (33)	67%	7%	26%	Supportive comments included be good to have off-leash area close to home, nice area, good swimming Unsupportive comments included fencing required from road and recreation uses, impact on native fauna and flora, proximity to play and BBQ area, needs bins, already used for dogs off-leash with confrontations occurring
Nords Wharf Oval (23)	86%	-	14%	Supportive comments included good swimming area, but may need fencing from road
Pinny Beach* (58)	58%	16%	26%	Supportive comments included area needs to be fenced and of adequate size, would require bins Unsupportive comments included dogs should not be on beaches, and that this beach is dangerous
Sunshine Park, Morisset Peninsula (33)	61%	7%	33%	Supportive comments included that the area is already used and would be supported, it would need to be fenced, will require signage and poo bags Unsupportive comments included owners don't control their dogs and would be dangerous to small dogs and children, too close to a very popular BBQ, playground and boat ramps area, impact on adjacent bushland/wildlife, would need to be fenced, area proposed is used a playing area by kids and adults

*The feedback shows lack of clarity in the community regarding the location of the proposed off-leash area at Pinny Beach. The off-leash area was proposed as a fenced dog park to sit within the residential subdivision of Pinny Beach. It is not proposed to be located at the actual beach.

4.1.6 General comments

A total of 528 respondents provided general comments in the survey. The top three themes that emerged in the feedback were:

- Lack of support for the proposed changes at Thomas H Halton off-leash area / concern for potential impacts
- Lack of support for the changes at Redhead Beach off-leash area / concern for potential impacts
- Requests for Council to provide better enforcement of current rules and restrictions at off-leash areas.

4.2 Drop-in sessions

Drop-in sessions were held at three locations during the phase two community engagement, with 57 people attending. The sessions provided an opportunity to discuss the proposals with the project team and ask questions. Hard copy survey forms were provided for those that did not want to complete an online survey. A total of eight hard copy survey forms were collected at the drop-in sessions.

Belmont Library

Discussions were mostly focused on the proposed changes to Thomas H Halton, with those in attendance generally unresponsive. The key messages were:

- Drainage issues associated with the off-leash area
- Address cyclists speeding through the space
- The importance of the off-leash area for socialising
- Retain the off-leash area as previously promised.

Pasterfield Community Centre, Cameron Park

Discussion with attendees focused on concerns with the proposed changes at Booragul Foreshore with regards reducing the size of the space and access to natural area.

Morisset Multipurpose Centre

Discussions were largely focused on the proposed relocation of the current off-leash area at Pendlebury Park to Bonnells Bay Park. The key discussion points were:

- Unsuitability of Bonnells Bay Park on the basis of:
 - Being poorly maintained
 - Boggy ground
 - No existing facilities
 - Attracting too much traffic for a quiet street
 - Poor lake access
 - Impacts on wildlife
 - Being too close to the main road.
- Suggestions to fence Pendlebury Park to reduce conflict with children.

4.3 Written feedback

A total of 57 email submissions were sent to Council. The majority of email submissions received had already completed the online survey, but wanted to provide more detailed feedback than was permitted in the survey. The feedback has been summarised below.

Thomas H Halton Park (Unfenced), Croudace Bay

Opposing changes to Thomas H Halton Park for reasons including: it removes the circuit walk from the off-leash area; no longer permits disability access; the new area being wet and boggy; removing the best lake access for swimming; the significant reduction of the off-leash area and the capacity for a large number of dogs at one time; not agreeing with conflict with dogs off-leash with other users of the shared pathway; the park provides a great opportunity for community connection and social outings with other dog owners; and fast speed of cyclist on shared pathway are the problem not the dogs.

Those that supported the changes identified: dogs have too much freedom in the park; you can't picnic in peace; they chase bike riders and dog poo isn't picked up. Suggestions included improved signage and stencilling on the paths to ensure dog owners know the rules and the times that can be used for off-leash; that there should be a large fenced dog park and the rest of the reserve is on lead only.

General feedback included dogs are off-leash more than the time restrictions allow; dogs should be permitted in undercover shelters; there needs to be more seating along the pathway for people to rest; lock the gates between the shared pathway and the playground to reduce the risk potential; restrict cyclist access or speed on the shared pathway; fence off the outdoor gym, court area and BBQ areas so dogs can't access; concerns that the 10m radius from playgrounds and BBQS and shelters would make then new area inaccessible.

Redhead Beach

Oppose removal of on lead area between 1st and 2nd creek.

Support for removal of dog on-leash area to dog prohibited feedback included: that a greater separation from the patrolled beach area would take away the nuisance of uncontrolled dogs around other beach users;

Suggestion to make the wetland and dune areas dog prohibited.

General feedback included will need to control dog access via Webb Park due to proximity to playground; availability for car parking to access off-leash area; could increase car parking by linking with Molly O'Connor Park and creating more angle parking; liaise with Belmont State Wetlands to provide dog off-leash beyond third creek.

Hampton Street Reserve, Carey Bay

Opposed to the reduction of the off-leash area to allow for half court development that will: create anti-social behaviour; increase traffic and parking in a no through road; will stop kids playing ball and riding bikes where court will go; impact on the water catchment.

Support for the changes included removing the natural area; reducing the dog off-leash to allow for provision of new recreation facilities;

It was suggested that a fence should be installed to stop dogs accessing the natural area for the protection of flora and fauna; provision of new signage, seating, bin and a bubbler;

Booragul Foreshore

Opposed removal of bushland area from the off-leash area.

Nine Mile Beach Blacksmiths

Opposed feedback included: desire for the off-leash area to be in the patrolled area of the beach with time restrictions of early mornings and late afternoons.

Relocation of Pendlebury Park to Bonnells Bay Park

Oppose relocation feedback included: Pendlebury off-leash is well used; Bonnells Bay Park is secluded; dogs in Bonnells Bay Park would be detrimental to the birdlife there; poor access for swimming at Bonnells Bay Park compared to Pendlebury Park; Bonnells Bay Park is used for picnics and ball games and this being overlaid with off-leash would impact this; there are no support facilities at Bonnells Bay Park like seats and toilets; youths gather in Bonnells Bay Park, with fights often occurring.

Rathmines Park

General feedback identified that the site has little shade, no seating, puddles throughout, and busy roads on two sides.

Suggestions included allowing timed off-leash (early mornings and late afternoons) throughout whole park to provide opportunity for dogs and owners to have meaningful exercise.

Sunshine Park

Opposed to the creation of a new shared off-leash area due to: permitting unrestricted dogs off-leash (that currently already occurs); that people will not stay within the off-leash area and this will impact other park and playground users; no provision of additional sealed car parking to increased use; contradiction to principles within the report for off-leash areas due to multi-user conflicts.

Propose this should be a fenced dog park.

Other feedback

Provision for segregated dog parks that include separate fenced areas for big dogs and small dogs; more ranger presence to enforce rules; access to risk assessments undertaken for off-leash areas; providing dog poo bag dispensers.

Feedback was also received on the dogs in open space framework including links to data sources, be broadened for environmental /cultural considerations to beyond EEC and also suggesting EEC areas should be a blanket exclusion for dog off-leash areas.

A petition with 1286 signatures opposing the proposed changes to Thomas H Halton was also received. Of this petition 31 per cent were residents of Lake Macquarie LGA, 15 per cent from the Newcastle LGA, 36 per cent from the remaining areas of New South Wales, 11 per cent interstate and 7 per cent were based internationally.

5 Next steps

Community feedback has been used to inform the development of the draft Dogs in Open Space Strategy and guide the provision of off-leash spaces in Lake Macquarie over the next ten year. Council will open a third phase of community feedback in November 2022, when the draft strategy is placed on public exhibition.

Please refer to shape.lakemac.com.au/dogs for more information.