



Dog Recreation Needs Study

Adopted - May 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose, Scope and Method

The City of Ryde currently has 13 off-leash facilities, most of which date from the 2010 *Study on the Provision of Recreation Areas for Dogs in the City of Ryde* and the subsequent 2010-11 trialling of proposed sites.

This report documents a review and update of the 2010 Study and provides recommendations in accordance with current 'best practice' in the provision of dog exercise areas and the needs of a population that is now much larger than when the initial Study was undertaken nearly 10 years ago.

The report's conclusions and recommendations are based on detailed reviews of:

- Dog ownership patterns and trends – nationally and locally
- Types and benefits of dog off-leash facilities
- Existing dog off-leash facilities in the City of Ryde
- Benchmarking against Sydney North District Councils
- Best practice in dog off-leash area planning, design and management
- Stakeholder and community engagement



Key findings

Key findings of the reviews include the following:



Dog ownership, both nationally and locally, is high with associated high need for dog exercise opportunities



The provision of dog off-leash facilities is justified by the demonstrated social and health benefits associated with well-designed and located facilities



Ideally, there will be a spectrum of off-leash facilities – with some enclosed, some free running and some with access to water



The City has a relatively low provision of off-leash facilities compared to most North District Councils



56% of the land area of the LGA (i.e. 21.1kms² of a total 38kms²) has 'walkable' access, in terms of a 20 minute walking catchment, to at least one off-leash area



The main provision gaps are in Marsfield, Macquarie Park, Putney and parts of Eastwood, Meadowbank and East Ryde.



None of Council's existing facilities provide water play opportunities



Community and stakeholder consultations confirmed the importance of dog off-leash areas in the community



The consultations also identified strong support (84% of respondents) for additional off-leash areas, strong support (77% of respondents) for off-leash areas with access to recreational water and moderately strong support (69% of respondents) for off-leash areas at natural grass sportsgrounds when not being used by sports groups



The consultations also identified a need for some improvements to existing off-leash areas



Best practice in off-leash planning requires diversity of opportunity (in types and sizes of facility); accessibility (maximum 20 minute walk to a facility); sufficient number and distribution of facilities to avoid congestion, over-use and dog conflicts; recognition of access barriers and safety hazards; and adequate dog owner support facilities.

The New Strategy

Based on the study's key findings, new off-leash network and site selection criteria were identified as the basis for determining the need for new off-leash sites (and where they should be located) and enhancement opportunities for existing facilities.

The criteria include travel distance (20 minute walk), locational attributes, accessibility, asset synergies with other park uses, strength of community support, social and environmental impacts and host park natural features.

Through application of these criteria – and detailed consideration of the health and environmental impacts of access to recreational waterways – a new dog off-leash areas plan has been developed and is documented in this report. It addresses both the need for new off-leash facilities and priority improvement options for existing facilities.

New off-leash facilities

Based on the detailed reviews and findings (on service gaps and demonstrated needs) detailed in the sections below, it is concluded that there is a substantial case for trialling an additional six (6) off-leash areas within the City, including two (2) with access to the Parramatta River foreshore.

The sites offer higher net benefits than other site options in terms of their suitability and/or contribution to improving the distribution, diversity and accessibility of off-leash sites across the LGA.

The 6 preferred sites are as follows:



Precinct	Preferred option	Facility type
Eastwood	Moore Park	Enclosed
Marsfield	Waterloo Park	Time share with sports grounds
Macquarie Park	Fontenoy Park	Time share with sports grounds
Parramatta River foreshore	Meadowbank Park	Unenclosed – with water/ beach access
	Kissing Point Park - off Delange Rd	Unenclosed – with water/ beach access
East Ryde	Monash Park oval	Time share with sports grounds

Existing off-leash facilities

Based on issues and needs identified during the consultations and on the outcomes of the best practice review undertaken for this study, priority improvement works for some existing off-leash facilities have been identified. These relate to the addition of essential site infrastructure and a re-location, as summarised in the body of the report.

Key Outcomes of the Strategy

The proposed strategy is consistent with addressing the issues and needs identified in both the community and stakeholder consultations.

The strategy will improve Council's dog off-leash service in multiple ways, including improved distribution and accessibility of facilities, enhanced diversity of opportunity, more efficient use of space and higher quality experiences for dogs and their owners. This is highlighted in the following comparison of the current and proposed off-leash service:



Criteria	Existing off-leash service	Expanded off-leash service
Distribution and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Walkable access for 66% of the City's residences▪ Walkable access across 56% of the City's total land area▪ The City's off-leash provision ratio is substantially lower than that for the Sydney North District'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Walkable access for 91% of the City's residences▪ Walkable access across 72 % of the City's total land area▪ The 6 additional sites will raise and align the City's off-leash provision ratio with that for the Sydney North District
Diversity of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 4 enclosed off-leash facilities▪ 4 unenclosed - available all times▪ 5 unenclosed - time share facilities▪ Nil water access facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 5 enclosed off-leash facilities▪ 6 unenclosed - available all times▪ 8 unenclosed - time share facilities▪ 2 water access facilities
Efficient use of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 3 off-leash areas that activate and increase the effectiveness of low-use sports space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 4 off-leash areas that activate and increase the effectiveness of low-use sports space
Quality of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 7 off-leash facilities without the full complement of core support facilities (i.e. shade, water, signage and seating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Nil off-leash facilities without the full complement of core support facilities (i.e. shade, water, signage and seating)

1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Background

In early 2010, Council officers undertook a *Study on the Provision of Recreation Areas for Dogs in the City of Ryde*. At the time, the City had two designated dog off-leash areas – at Blenheim and Meadowbank Parks.

The report on the study was completed in July 2010. It identified a shortfall in the provision of dog exercise facilities and recommended 20 additional locations (comprising 7 enclosed free running areas, 4 unenclosed free running areas, 6 shared sports field facilities, 2 dog walking trails and 1 dog water hole).

At its meeting of 20 July 2010, Council considered the report and resolved to undertake a trial of the recommended dog exercise areas. On the basis of the trial outcomes, Council resolved, at its meeting of 14 June 2011, to confirm 10 of the recommended facilities, as follows:

- A further three enclosed off-leash areas (ELS Hall Park, Denistone Park and Olympic Park)
- Three free running off-leash areas (North Ryde Common, Kotara Park and Santa Rosa Park)
- Four shared-use sportsgrounds (Peel Park, Brush Farm Park, Darvall Park, Pidding Park)

Council also resolved to prohibit any further off-leash access to seven of the trial parks due to low community support (Carara Reserve, Fontenoy Park), potential natural area impacts (Waterloo Park, Santa Rosa Park and Forrester Park), user conflicts (Putney Park) and low need due to nearby alternate off-leash area (Cudal Reserve).

In the 8 years since the additional off-leash areas were established, one additional off-leash area has been established (at Ryde Park).

In recognition of changes that have occurred since 2010, Council resolved (12/18, 25 September 2018):

- *That Council acknowledges the increasing amount of dog owners in the Ryde LGA;*
- *That a review of the dog off-leash areas be undertaken by reviewing the City of Ryde Dog Recreation Needs Strategy in 2019-20 and the project be included in the draft 2019-23 Delivery Plan*
- *That as part of the review, community consultation to be undertaken in respect to all parks becoming a dog off-leash area when not used for organised sport, in particular Monash Park.*

Subsequently, at its 26 Feb 2019 Meeting, the following Motion was put to Council:

- *That the General Manager ask staff to include in the future Dog Recreation Needs Study, scheduled to be undertaken in 2019/2020, an analysis of the need and appropriate sites for a dog exercise area that has access to water.*
- *That Kissing Point Park and other City of Ryde Parks along the Parramatta River be considered as a possible site for this area during the preparation of the Study.*

The Motion was Amended with Council resolving (2/19, 26 February 2019) as follows:

That this Motion be deferred pending advice from NSW Health, Sydney Water, Office of Environment and Heritage, Greater Sydney Commission and discussion by the Parramatta River Catchment Group on the health implications of a dog park being built metres from a potential swim site.

1.2 Purpose of the study

In accordance with Council's resolutions, the purpose of this project is to review and update the *Study on the Provision of Recreation Areas for Dogs in the City of Ryde* in accordance with current 'best practice' in the provision of dog exercise areas and the needs of a population that is now much larger than when the initial Study was undertaken 8 years ago.

1.3 Key Issues and challenges

The key issues and challenges addressed in this study are as follows:



Identifying and ranking community views on whether or not off-leash dog recreation areas – enclosed and/or unenclosed – are a legitimate use of public parks and green space



Identifying and responding to specific demands for dog recreation areas – current and future (including increasing use by professional dog walkers)



Identifying the optimal supply of dog recreation areas (i.e. type of facilities x number x hierarchy x distribution and catchment area)



Managing dog recreation space and facilities (i.e. conflict management; dog owner education; enforcement of Companion Animals Act 1998; facility maintenance)



1.4 Structure of the report

The above key issues and challenges are addressed in Sections 2 to 7, as follows:

- Dog ownership patterns and trends – nationally and locally
- Types and benefits of dog off-leash facilities
- Existing dog off-leash facilities in the City of Ryde
- Benchmarking against Sydney North District Councils
- Evaluation of Council's existing dog recreation area strategy (against current best practice and the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations)
- Stakeholder and community engagement
- Best practice in dog off-leash area planning, design and management
- Identification of key issues and service gaps

Following the issues analysis, a new dog recreation areas plan is proposed in Sections 8 & 9, with recommendations provided in Section 10.



2

**STUDY CONTEXT:
DOGS AND DOG
RECREATION
FACILITIES**



2.1 Dog ownership patterns and trends

Dog ownership rates

Australia has one of the highest pet ownership rates in the world – with 62% of Australian households owning a pet, with more than half of these households (38.5%) owning at least one dog.

Dog ownership rates are average in NSW, at 38% of households, compared to a low of 33% in Western Australia and highs of 45% in Tasmania, Northern Territory and South Australia.

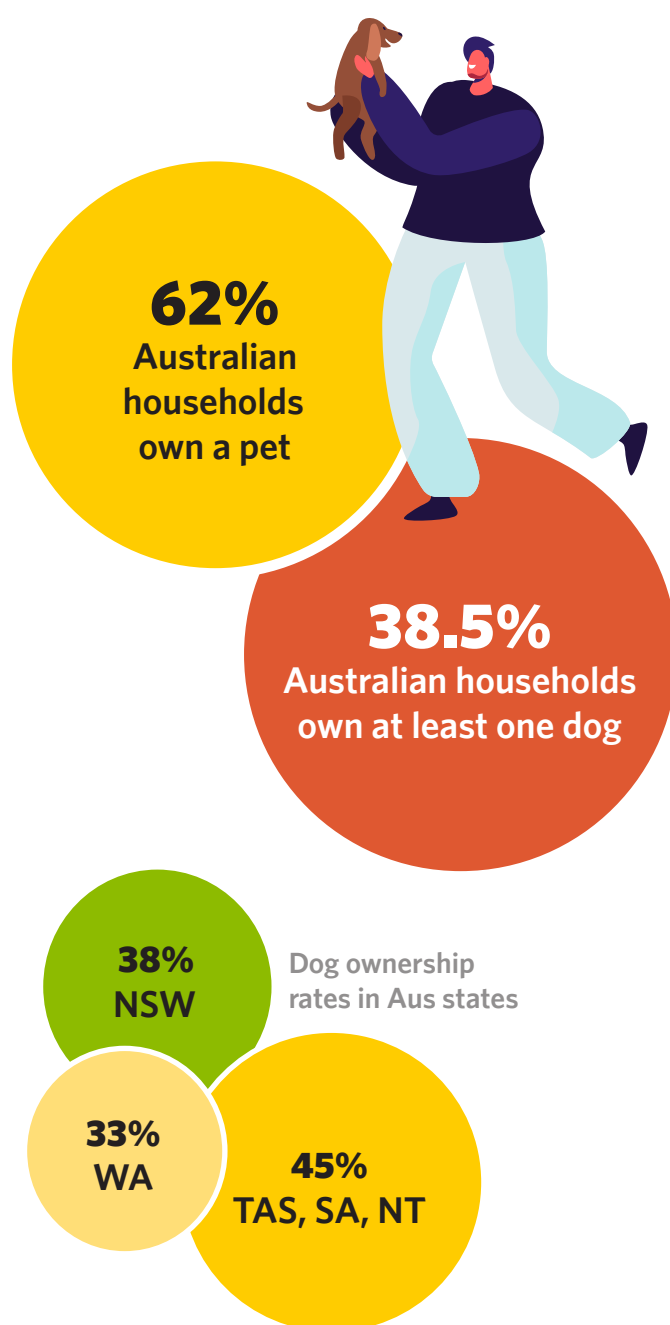
While dog numbers in the City of Ryde have grown in recent years, they do not appear to have followed the national trends. That is, the rate of growth in dog numbers has been less than that for human population.

In 2011, when the six-month off-leash trials were undertaken, as recommended by the 2010 *Study on the Provision of Recreation Areas for Dogs in the City of Ryde*, there were 8,932 registered and/or identified dogs in the City .

Seven years later, in 2018, the registered/identified dog population had grown by less than 2% to 9,091 dogs despite a 23% population growth in the same period .

To some extent, this apparent anomaly reflects the densification of residential growth in the City and the associated lower dog ownership rates in medium and high density developments. But it also reflects the fact that there is an unknown quantity of unregistered and unidentified dogs in the City.

Accordingly, the 'official' dog ownership numbers need to be interpreted with caution.



Barriers to dog ownership

The 2016 Animal Medicines Australia national pet survey found that the main barriers to owning pets were lifestyle incompatibilities (21% of survey respondents), strata/body corporates not allowing them (17%), too much responsibility (14%), cost (13%) and other household members not wanting them (10%).

The increase in higher-density housing in urban areas has been perceived as a threat to pet ownership in, because those living in units and apartments are less likely to own pets (with only 41% owning a pet compared to 68% of those living in a traditional house).

The key reasons for the lower ownership rates at apartment blocks are lack of sufficient and/or suitable space as well as traditional strata/body corporate rules which often exclude pets from multi-dwelling developments.

However due to recognition of the health benefits of companion animals and the sheer number of people moving into higher density developments, the restrictive strata/body corporate rules are now being relaxed or removed across the Australia.

Changing family and household structures (i.e. diminishing family and household sizes) are also perceived as a threat to pet, including dog, ownership because lower levels of pet ownership are associated with smaller households.

The proportion of the Australian population aged 65 years+ is increasing at a rapid rate – up from 12.6% in 2001 to 14% in 2011 and 15.8% in 2016. The proportion is forecast to reach nearly 19% by 2031.

As with the increasing NESB population, this has implications for rates of dog ownership because the older age cohorts are less likely to own pets – with only 34% of 'Baby Boomer' (50-69 years) households and 28% of 'Silent Generation' (70+ years) households owning dogs compared to the much higher 45% of Generation Y (18-29 years) households and 41% of Generation X (30-49 years) households.



Main barriers for owning a dog



21%

Lifestyle
Incompatibility



17%

Strata does not
allow pets



13%

Too much
responsibility



14%

Too expensive



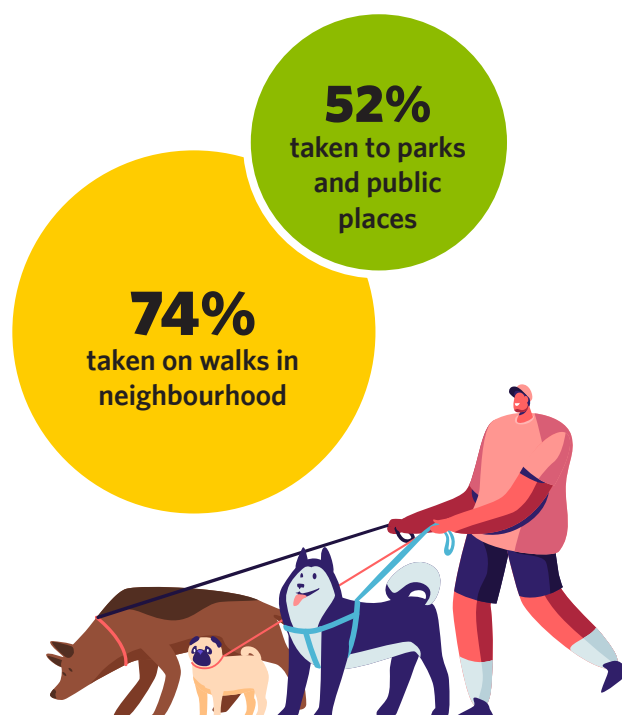
10%

Household
member not
allowing

Dog exercise and recreation

The Animal Medicines Australia survey found that 74% of dogs are taken on walks in their local neighbourhoods. Some of these are just walked on local streets but 52% are taken to 'parks and other public places'.

There is variation between large and small dogs - with only 38% of very small dogs (i.e. less than 4kgs) taken to 'parks and other public places'.



City of Ryde distribution of dog ownership

Dog ownership is not distributed evenly across the City. It is significantly higher in lower density areas - particularly Putney, East Ryde, North Ryde, Chatswood West and Denistone, where 'separate houses' account for at least 75% of all dwellings - as illustrated in Fig 1.

Fig 1 also shows how ownership rates (but not overall dog numbers) have declined between 2011 and 2018 - particularly in areas that have undergone significant densification (i.e. North Ryde, Top Ryde, West Ryde and Marsfield).

Figure 1 - Registered dog population distribution - City of Ryde 2011 and 2018



2.2 Types and benefits of dog recreation facilities



Facility types

During the 1980's and 90's, due to increasing dog-related conflicts in public places and associated community concerns, State Governments across Australia adopted and implemented laws requiring dogs to be on-leash at all times in public areas.

In the wake of the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 adoption, and the adoption of similar legislation in other States, a wide variety of off-leash dog park or dog recreation area types have emerged, as summarised in Table 1.



Table 1 – Off-leash facility types

Facility type	Sub-type	Details
Free running dog park (enclosed) 	Fully enclosed	Exclusive spaces designed just for dogs and their owners with a range of support facilities. Complete separation from other park activities.
	Part enclosed	Similar to 'fully enclosed' dog parks but not quite as 'exclusive', with some potential for multi-use. Near-complete separation from other park activities.
Free running shared space (unenclosed) 	All or most parks – all times	All parks (except environmentally sensitive areas and spaces prohibited under the Companion Animals Act) are declared permissible off-leash areas.
	All or most parks – off-leash when not used for organised sport	All parks (except environmentally sensitive areas and spaces prohibited under the Companion Animals Act) are declared permissible off-leash areas at certain specified hours of the day e.g. early morning, later evening. Access hours may vary from weekend to week days.
	Designated spaces – all times	Suitable (in terms of size, terrain, compatible uses, passive surveillance etc.) parks or spaces within parks – evenly spread over a local government area (or spread according to dog population locations) to enable easy and equitable access.
	Designated spaces – off-leash when not used for organised sport	As for 'designated spaces – all times' but only for certain specified hours of the day/night

In all other areas, other than those areas detailed in Table 1, dogs are either excluded (due to social and/or environmental impacts) or have to be on-leash at all times.

Benefits of dog recreation facilities

The provision of dog off-leash facilities is justified by the demonstrated social and health benefits associated with well-designed and located facilities. The benefits accrue to dogs (socialisation, safe exercise), dog owners (social capital through shared experience) and the general community (reduced conflict in parks, fostering of responsible dog ownership).



3

**STUDY CONTEXT:
EXISTING CITY OF
RYDE OFF-LEASH
FACILITIES**



3.1 Existing off-leash facilities

The City currently has 13 off leash areas – including 4 fully enclosed areas and 9 unenclosed or part enclosed areas – as illustrated at Fig. 2.

All of these off-leash areas were established following the off-leash trials except Blenheim Park and Meadowbank Park which were both established in 2006. The 4 enclosed and 4 of the unenclosed/part enclosed off leash areas are available at all times, while the other 5 are available on a time-share basis with sports use of grounds – as detailed at Table 2.

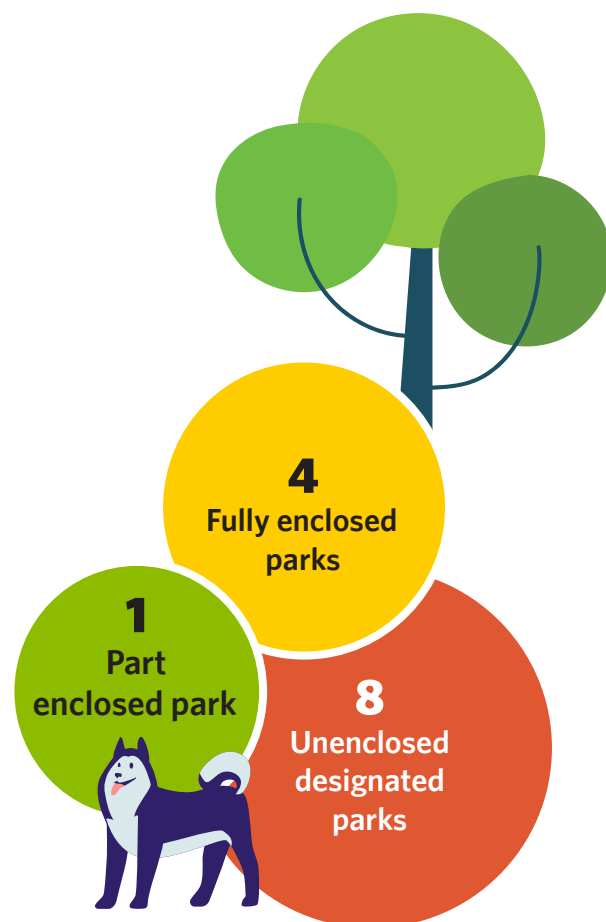
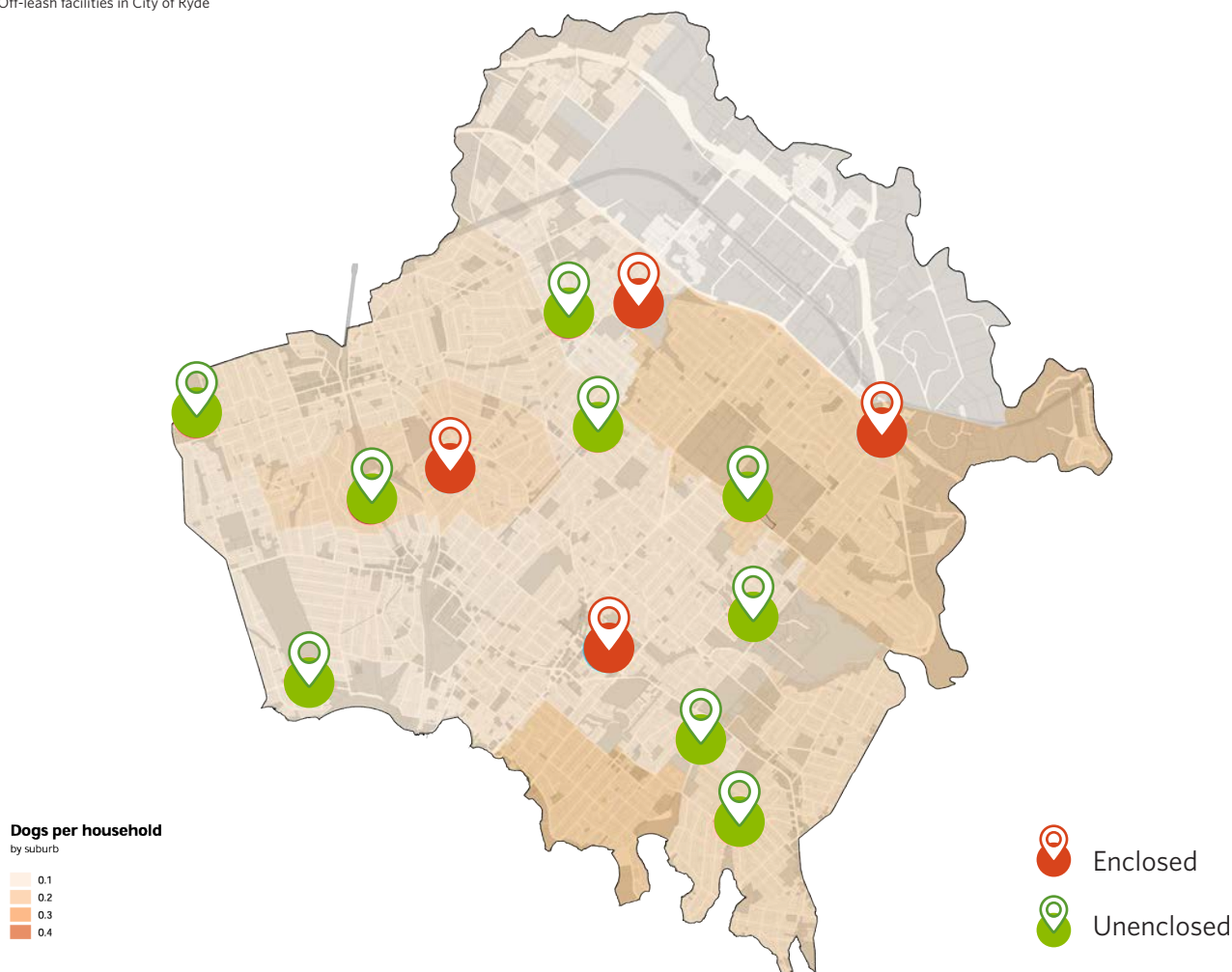


Table 2 – Off-leash facilities in City of Ryde

Facility type	Sub-type	Facilities	Suburb	Year established
Enclosed free running dog park	Fully enclosed	Blenheim Park	North Ryde	2006
		Denistone Park	Denistone	2018
		ELS Hall Park	North Ryde	2014
		Ryde Park	Ryde	2017
Unenclosed/part enclosed free running shared space	Part enclosed	Olympic Park	Gladesville	2017
	Designated parks - all times	North Ryde Com-mon	North Ryde	2011
		Kotara Park	Marsfield	2011
		Santa Rosa Park	Ryde	2011
		Peel Park	Gladesville	2011
	Designated parks - time share	Brush Farm Park	Eastwood	2011
		Darvall Park	West Ryde	2011
		Pidding Park	Ryde	2011
		Meadowbank Park	Meadowbank	2006

Fig 2: Off-leash facilities in City of Ryde



3.2 City of Ryde off-leash facility distribution

While off-leash areas are fairly well distributed across the City, there are some provision disparities in terms of households and dogs per off-leash area.

A 'walkability' assessment of Council's existing 13 off-leash areas was undertaken to identify areas of the City that are currently being serviced by the facilities and those areas that are not.

The assessment was based on the widely accepted provision standard of providing off-leash areas within a 20 minute walk (which translates to an approximate 1.5 kilometre travel distance).

The walkability software used in the analysis calibrates for major walking access barriers (i.e. rail, major road, drainage channel, industrial zone).

Widely accepted standard is to provide at least 1 off-leash area within 20 min walking radius

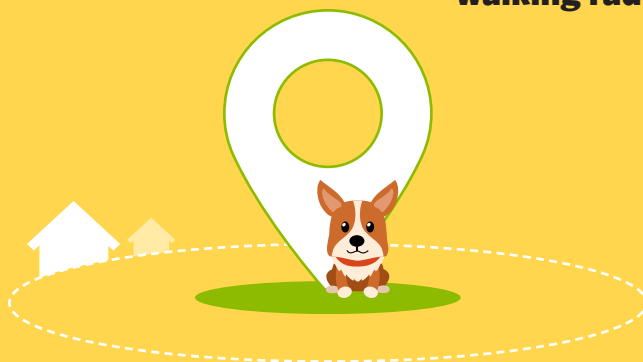
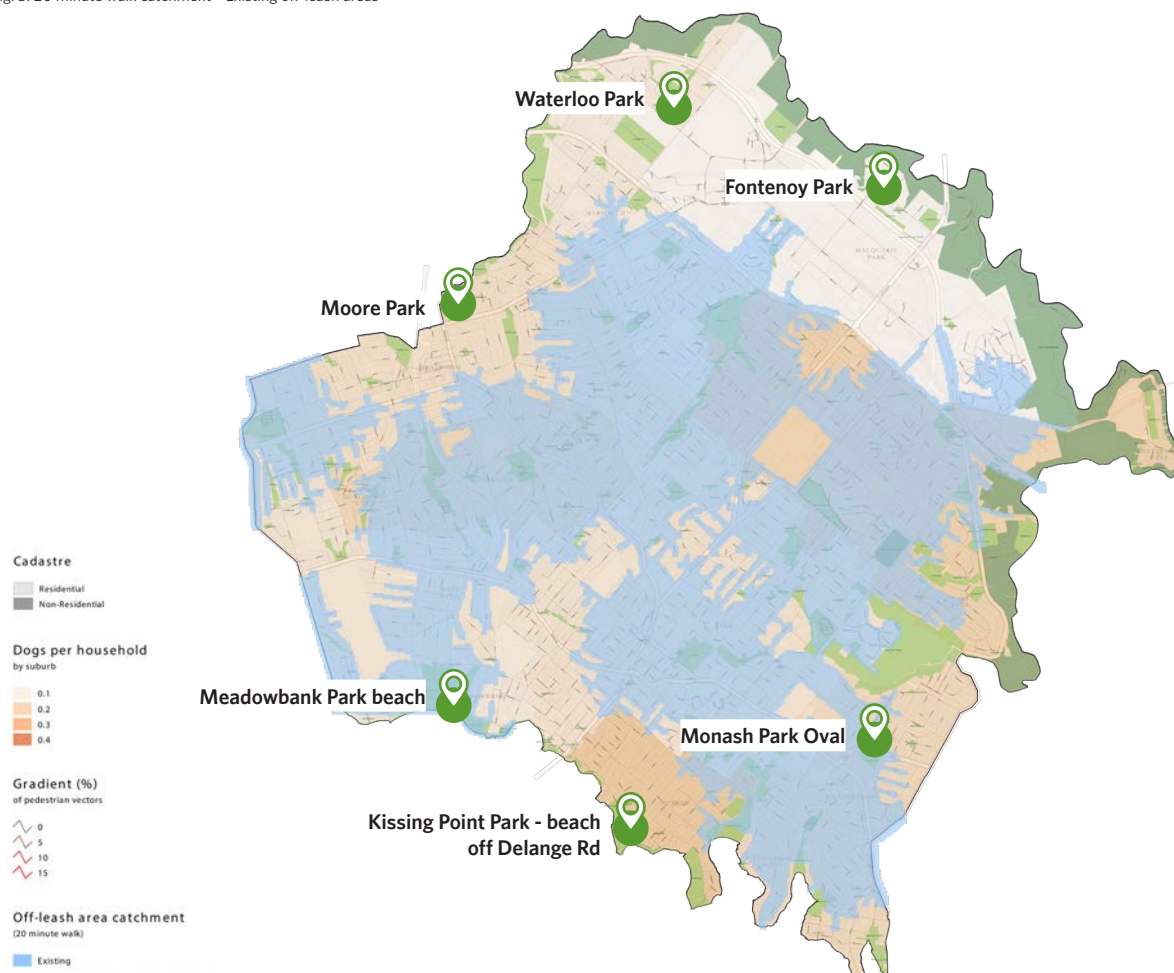


Fig. 3: 20 minute walk catchment - Existing off-leash areas



56%
of the City is serviced
by 13 off-leash areas



The collective 20 minute walking catchments for existing off-leash areas are illustrated (in blue) in fig. 3 above. The map shows that Council's 13 existing off-leash facilities service 56% of the land area of the LGA (i.e. 21.1kms² of a total 38kms²).

The majority of precincts within the LGA are well provided for, with the main service gaps being in Marsfield, Macquarie Park, Putney and parts of Eastwood, Meadowbank and East Ryde. Putney, for example, a primarily low density neighbourhood, has the highest concentration of dog ownership (with one dog for every 2.6 households) but

has no off-leash areas within its boundaries (although it is relatively close to the Ryde Olympic Park facility).

Macquarie Park has the lowest concentration (with one dog for every 23.2 households) but also has no off-leash areas within its boundaries.

Meadowbank- Melrose Park has the highest per capita provision - with just 375 dogs per off-leash area compared to the average across the City of 699 dogs per off-leash area.

3.3 Service provision benchmarks

The existing provision of dog off-leash facilities in the City of Ryde has been benchmarked against Northern District Councils – as detailed at Table 3.



Table 3 – Off-leash facility types and provision ratios: City of Ryde & Northern District Councils

Council	All times				Time limited			Total	Population per off-leash facility (June 2018 ERP)
	Enclosed / fenced OLA	Free running OLA	Beach/ water	Cemetery	Free running OLA	Shared oval	Beach/ water		
Lane Cove	-	11				5		16	2,468
Hunters Hill	-	2	-	-	2	-		4	3,727
Mosman	-	3	-	-	5	-	*3	8	3,860
Kur-ring-gai	4	5				12		21	6,002
Willoughby	-	5	-	-	-	8		13	6,180
Northern Beaches	2	19	1	1	-	5		28	9,688
Ryde	5	3	-	-	1	4		13	9,804
Hornsby	6	1	-	-	-	2		9	16,750
Total	13	54	1	1	8	35	3	112	8,172

* North Sydney not included in the analysis as all parks in the LGA except a few environmentally sensitive sites are off-leash areas

As illustrated in Table 3, City of Ryde has a lower than average provision of off-leash facilities – with one facility per 9,804 residents compared to a Northern District average of one facility per 8,172 residents and a high of one facility per 2,468 residents (in Lane Cove LGA).



4

STUDY CONTEXT: THE EXISTING RECREATION AREAS FOR DOGS PLAN



4 Existing recreational areas for dogs plan

In early 2010, Council requested a review of dog recreation facilities in other local government areas and, based on this, further consideration of facilities to be provided in the City of Ryde. At the time, Council had two designated off-leash areas - Meadowbank Park and Blenheim Park.

The *Study on the Provision of Recreation Areas for Dogs in the City of Ryde* was undertaken to meet this request and was completed in July 2010.

The aims of the Study were to:

- Identify the City's need for dog recreation areas
- Review provisions in surrounding LGA's
- Review trends in provision of dog recreation areas
- Conduct suitability assessment of Council's open space for additional dog recreation areas
- Recommend additional off-leash areas

The Study developed a methodology for the selection of dog recreation areas and applied the methodology to Council's 207 parks and identified 19 sites and 2 linear trail as suitable for off-leash facilities.

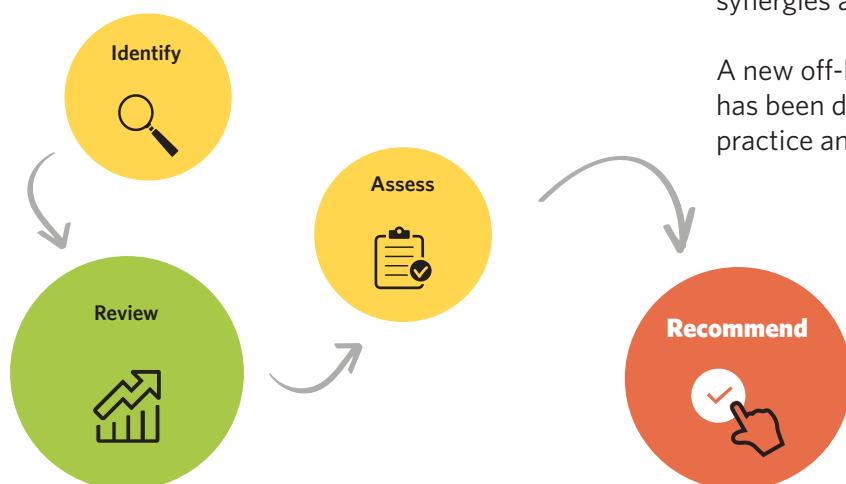
The methodology involved a 2-tier process of assessment for Council's 207 parks, with the first stage eliminating parks that were deemed to be unsuitable for off-leash dog recreation and, the second stage, identifying the most suitable of parks on the basis of various 'constraining' and 'complementary' factors. Based on application of the 'suitability' and 'constraining' factors, a total of 23 parks were rated as suitable for dog off-leash recreation.

These comprised 5 types of off-leash facility (free running – enclosed; free running – unenclosed; sports ground shared; trail; beach/water play) spread evenly across the City.

The site selection methodology used in the 2010 Study used a range of criteria - including host park size, access, social impacts, potential for shared infrastructure and environmental sustainability.

While this methodology was sound at the time, it did not incorporate a range of off-leash suitability criteria now regarded as best practice - including host park natural features, shape and minimum size of off-leash areas, boundaries, connectivity with active transport networks, dog population distribution, co-location synergies and visual impacts.

A new off-leash network and site selection matrix has been developed in accordance with current best practice and is detailed in Section 7.1, below.



5

ISSUES AND NEEDS



5 Community and Stakeholder engagement

Community and stakeholder consultations, including a community on-line survey and targeted workshops, was undertaken to identify community and stakeholder perceptions on existing dog off-leash areas and perceived needs for additional dog off-leash areas.

The consultation methodology and the full consultation findings are detailed in Attachment C of the Technical Report and summarised below.

Existing off-leash areas

Community survey findings of relevance to existing off-leash facilities included:



There is a high level of expressed need for improvements to existing off-leash areas, particularly with respect to shade, fencing, seating, water, size of area and small-large dog separation – as illustrated at Fig.4



The main reasons for not using the City's off-leash areas were 'lack of fence enclosure', 'dog conflicts', 'irresponsible owners', 'parks too far away' and 'lack of large-small dog separation'



Stakeholder group findings of relevance included:



Need for some off-leash facility relocations to avoid user conflicts e.g. some off-leash areas (Pidding Park, Olympic Park) are too close to children's play areas



Need for Improved signage – including pictorial signage that illustrates the boundaries of off-leash areas



Improved education of dog owners (including brochures and electronic signs)

Are there any improvements or changes you would like to see at these dog off-leash parks?

44%

Improved shade

33%

Improved equipment

33%

Full fence enclosure

32%

Additional seating

29%

Availability of water

29%

Improved support services

29%

Larger free running area

25%

Separation areas depending on dog size

20%

More responsible owners / well-behaved dogs

18%

Improved cleanliness and/or maintenance

Additional off-leash areas

Community survey findings of relevance to the provision and location of additional off-leash facilities included:



There is strong support (84% of respondents) for additional off-leash areas



There is strong support (77% of respondents) for off-leash areas with access to recreational water



The most popular locations for additional off-leash areas are all Parramatta River foreshore parks – Meadowbank, Putney, Kissing Point and Morrison Bay



There is moderately strong support (69% of respondents) for off-leash areas at natural grass sportsgrounds when not being used by sports groups

Stakeholder group findings of relevance included:
Any expansion of off-leash facilities should ensure:



An improved distribution of off-leash areas – to take pressure off over-used parks and provide off-leash facilities in under-provided areas (e.g. Gladesville-Tennyson Point)



Large/small dog separation



Improved signage (as above)



The key implications of the community engagement for the off-leash strategy include:

- Council's resolutions to investigate additional off-leash areas – including sports grounds when not being used for sports activities and sites with access to water – are supported by a clear majority of respondents to the on-line community survey
- The Ranger experience generally supports the expansion of off-leash areas due to the potential to reduce conflict at congested sites.

6

PLANNING NEW FACILITIES: PRINCIPLES, CRITERIA AND APPROACH



6.1 Introduction

Planning for new off-leash facilities requires a focus both on the network of facilities and the site selection process for individual components (i.e. specific sites) of that network. The process also needs to be guided by clear planning principles. These aspects are summarised in the following sub-sections.

6.2 Core planning principles

It is essential that the planning of proposed new (and existing) off-leash areas be guided by principles that ensure the following desired outcomes:

- Recognising the legitimacy of dogs and their owners
- Sound understanding of needs
- Equitable access, and
- Integration with other park and surrounding functions and values

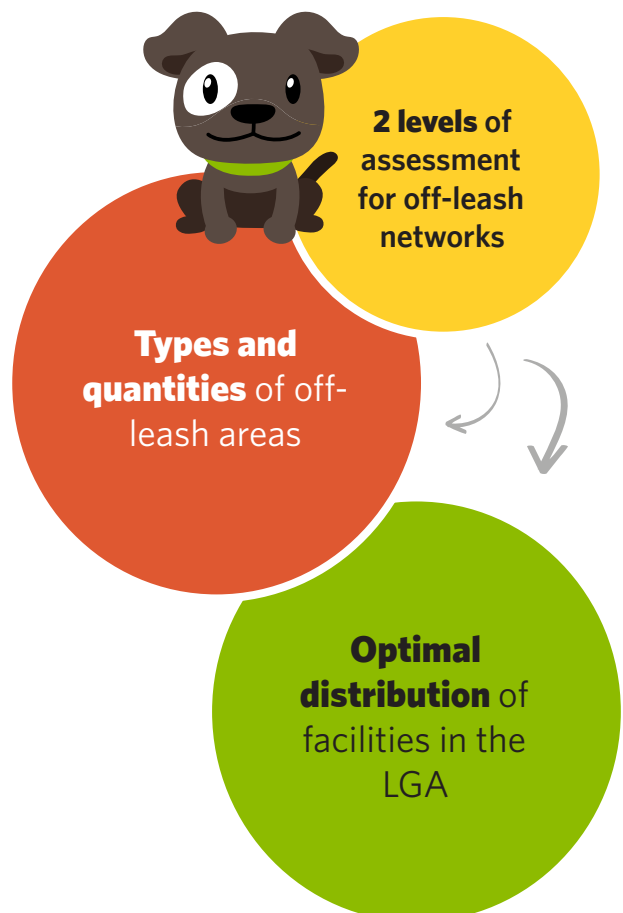
The key relevant principles have been identified and are detailed in Section 6.2 of the Technical Report.

6.3 Network planning and design

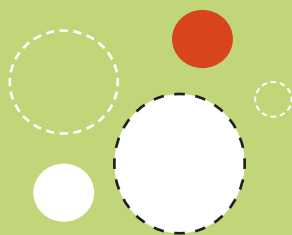
There are two required levels of assessment in off-leash network planning and design, as follows:

- The desired types and quantities of dog off-leash areas, and
- The optimal distribution of these facilities, in terms of hierarchy and equitable access for all dog owners

Current best practice in these two aspects of off-leash network planning is summarised in Table 4.

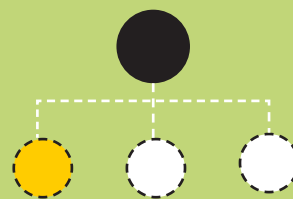


Facility types



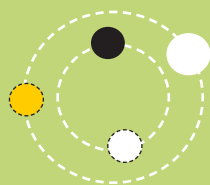
Recognising the preference of dog owners for diversity of opportunity – different types of landscape and terrain and different types of dog exercise opportunity i.e. on-leash; off-leash enclosed, off-leash shared; linear walking trails; separate areas for small dogs (esp. in high density areas); regional facility suitable for events (e.g. Pet Fest); water recreation areas.

Hierarchy



Best practice requires a hierarchy of opportunity from local, on-leash opportunities to neighbourhood off-leash (mainly unenclosed and within a maximum 2km service catchment) to destination/regional facilities (mainly enclosed and with specialist equipment) for occasional visits and events/companion animal education.

Distribution



Dispersal across a district or LGA to:

- Ensure equitable distribution of opportunity
- Provide access for all within easy walk or short drive
- Minimise dog/owner conflicts and over-use damage to facilities, and
- Spread the 'community-building' benefits of dog parks across the district.

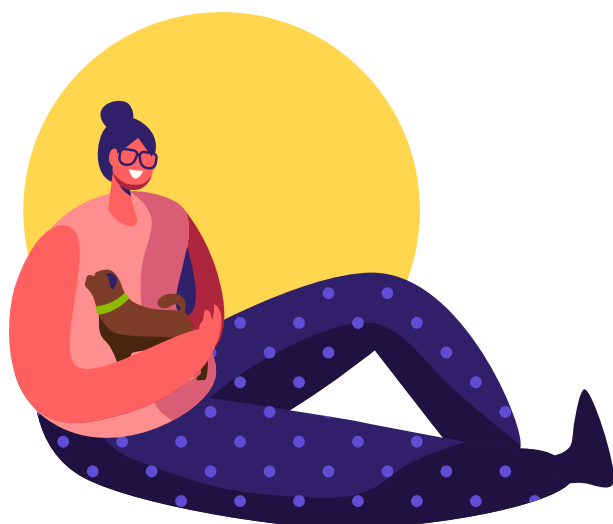
Need to consider:

- Access barriers (busy roads, rail etc.), and
- Dog ownership 'hot spots' for prioritising locations.

Provision ratios



Newcastle 1:8,000 pop (cf. City of Ryde 1:9,800) but no widely recognised population standard. Most standards are based on 'walkability' (i.e. 1.5 to 2km/20min walking distance).



6.4 Revised site selection criteria

The revised site selection criteria are based on the dog population ownership trends, off-leash facility supply benchmarking, the off-leash facility best practice review, the community and stakeholder engagement outcomes and evaluation of Council's existing strategy.

The revised criteria are detailed at Attachment D of the Technical Report and summarised in Table 5, below.

Table 5 – Revised off-leash network and site selection criteria

Issue/requirement		Best practice
Network	Travel distance	Design network to provide an off-leash facility within a 20 minutes (approx.1.5km) walk of all residences
	Dog population	Prioritise sites in suburbs/precincts with high dog populations
Specific sites	Location	Prefer sites in larger, high profile parks
		Prefer sites with good surveillance from public areas
	Accessibility	Prefer sites with high legibility and good connectivity with surrounding neighbourhoods
		Require 'inclusive' access
		Require existing and/or planned on or off-street parking. Off-street preferred for higher hierarchy parks
	Economic sustainability	Prefer sites with potential for shared infrastructure (e.g. lighting, toilets, water, fencing, furniture)
	Community support	Prefer sites with strong local community support/ requests for off-leash facilities
	Social impacts	Prefer sites with minimal impact on surrounding residents
		Prefer sites with no or minimal conflict with other park uses (i.e. playground, food prep areas, BBQ areas, skate parks, cycle trails, sports grounds)
	Dog park size	Most guides and strategies recommend min area of 3,000m ² for a dog parks (ELS Hall Park off-leash area is 3,300m ² ; Blenheim Park is 2,500m ²)
	Park boundaries	While boundary requirements are flexible, there must be sufficient buffer (space, vegetation) or fencing between off-leash areas and major roads
	Host park natural features	Prefer sites with some natural vegetation and mature trees (for amenity and shade)
		Prefer sites with good drainage
		Shape requirements are fairly flexible but some guides recommend irregular shapes to better disperse users through a site
	Environmental sustainability	Avoid sites with high potential for negative impacts on park landscape/visual qualities or natural values. In particular, avoid impacts on sensitive environmental areas (habitat, biodiversity, steep slopes)

7

PLANNING NEW FACILITIES: HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS



7.1 Off-leash areas with access to water

Prior to identifying service gaps and applying the revised site selection criteria to potential new sites, it was necessary to address the potential health impacts of locating off-leash areas in proximity to swimming areas, in accordance with Council's resolution (2/19) of 26 February 2019.

While undertaking this assessment, it became apparent that there are potential environmental impacts of locating off-leash areas on foreshores – particularly the potential impacts on shorebird habitat – which also need to be addressed.

These potential impacts are discussed in the following two sub-sections, respectively.

7.2 Health impact considerations

At the 26 February 2019 Meeting, the following Motion was put to Council:

- *That the General Manager ask staff to include in the future Dog Recreation Needs Study, scheduled to be undertaken in 2019/2020, an analysis of the need and appropriate sites for a dog exercise area that has access to water.*
- *That Kissing Point Park and other City of Ryde Parks along the Parramatta River be considered as a possible site for this area during the preparation of the Study.*



The Motion was Amended with Council resolving (2/19, 26 February 2019) as follows:

That this Motion be deferred pending advice from NSW Health, Sydney Water, OEH, GSC and discussion by the PRCG on the health implications of a dog park being built metres from a potential swim site.

In accordance with Council's resolution, Council officers sought the requested advice by writing to the relevant agencies. Advice has subsequently been received from NSW Health and Parramatta River Catchment Group/Sydney Water.

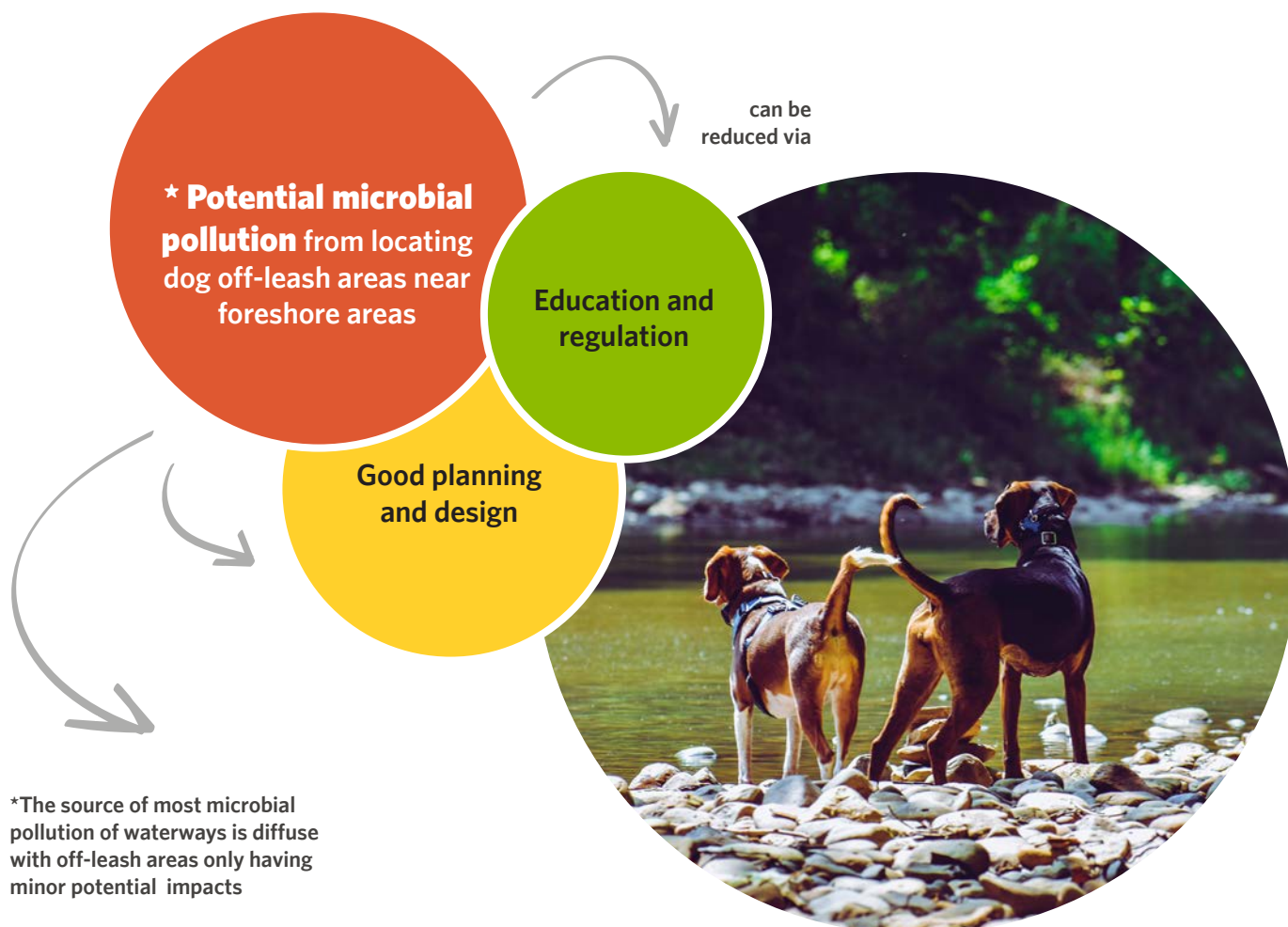
Council officers also sought advice from two Councils (Sydney's Inner West Council and Northern Beaches

Council) with relevant experience in the planning, design and management of off-leash areas adjacent to recreational waterways.

The advice provided by these agencies confirm that, while there is the potential for microbial pollution from dog exercise areas located near the foreshore, this potential can be substantially reduced or eliminated via good planning and design, education and regulation.

The evidence also supports the fact that the major sources of faecal contamination are diffuse, and after heavy rains, rather than from point sources such as dog off-leash areas.

The detailed advice is included in the Technical Report.



7.3 Shorebird impact considerations

In addition to their potential water quality health impacts, off-leash areas also have the potential to negatively impact shorebird foraging and breeding habitats.

Shorebirds are prevalent in the Parramatta River Estuary. The Waterbird Refuge at Olympic Park, for example provides habitat for over 55 species of native birds, including internationally protected migratory shorebirds, including summer visitors such as godwits and sandpipers.

With respect to this, any proposal to provide off-leash areas adjacent to foreshore areas will need to be consistent with the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act (EPBC Act 1999), the Australian Government's Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds and the Australian National Migratory Shorebird Conservation Action Plan.

The Australian National Migratory Shorebird Conservation Action Plan improves coordination and collaboration on research, conservation actions and management for 37 species of migratory shorebirds that regularly visit Australia. Many of these species are endangered and face threats from a range of sources including coastal development (at staging and non-breeding grounds), climate change, pollution, human disturbance, hunting and fisheries by-catch.

The human disturbance threats include impacts from recreational activities such as fishing, off-road driving on beaches, unleashed dogs and jet-skiing. These can have a high energetic cost to shorebirds and may compromise their capacity to build sufficient energy reserves to undertake migration. The birds are most susceptible to disturbance during daytime roosting and foraging periods.

Council officers sought advice from the Parramatta River Catchment Group and two Councils (Brisbane City Council and Northern Beaches Council) with relevant experience in the planning of shorebird protection in conjunction with dog off-leash area planning.

Based on the advice provided (and as detailed in the Technical Report), it is apparent that the provision of dog off-leash areas along the Parramatta River foreshore needs to encompass consideration of potential shorebird habitat.

With respect to this and as is being demonstrated in the Brisbane River Marine Park project, it is possible to combine off-leash dog access to waterways with the protection of shorebird habitats through appropriate planning (site selection and access zoning), regulation, education and compliance.

This approach is being successfully implemented in the Sydney region at, for example, Rose Bay Beach and Rowland Bayview Park/Beach, as detailed in the Technical Report.

Accordingly, the proposal for dog off-leash trial sites within Parramatta River foreshore parks is supported by the research undertaken for this report. However specific site proposals will need to be accompanied by an assessment, by a qualified avifauna consultant, of any potential impacts on shorebird habitat.



Fishing



Jet skiing



Unleashed dogs



Off-road driving

Main human disturbance threats for shorebirds

8

PLANNING NEW FACILITIES: POTENTIAL SITES



8.1 Improving service coverage and diversity

Based on the catchment area gaps illustrated in the walkability map analysis (Section 3.2, above), prospective sites with significant potential to provide 'walkable' off-leash facilities in areas not currently serviced, were identified for further mapping analysis. The sites are consistent with the intent of the two Council resolutions (detailed in Section 1.1, above) are Eastwood, Marsfield, Macquarie Park, Putney, Meadowbank and East Ryde.



Table 6 – Potential sites for additional off-leash facilities

Service gap precinct	Site options	Potential facility type
Eastwood	Eastwood Park – upper oval	Unenclosed/ time share
	Moore Park	Enclosed
Marsfield	Waterloo Park	Unenclosed/ time share
	Marsfield Park	Unenclosed/ time share
Macquarie Park	Tuckwell Park	Unenclosed/ time share
	Fontenoy Park	Unenclosed/ time share
Parramatta River foreshore (Putney and Meadowbank)	Kissing Point Park - beach off Delange Rd	Unenclosed – water access
	Kissing Point Park - beach opposite Douglas St	Unenclosed – water access
	Meadowbank Park beach (adjacent to Memorial Park)	Unenclosed – water access
East Ryde	Monash Park oval	Unenclosed/ time share

The two options identified in each of Eastwood, Marsfield, Macquarie Park and Putney have significantly overlapping walkability catchments and, accordingly, only one of the sites in each of the precincts is required.

Mapping tools have been used to assess and compare the options for their potential to expand the effective coverage of the off-leash service in terms of size of the additional serviced area (m²) and the number of additional residences within the maximum 20 minute walking catchment.

The analysis identified that the proposed sites have the potential to substantially increase the City's 'walkable' access to dog recreation areas - with a range from a 64 Ha (and 620 additional residences) minimum to a 188 Ha (and 4,678 additional residences) maximum.

The detailed analysis is included in the Technical Report.



8.2 Site suitability assessment

Section 6.2, above, detailed the best practice criteria for evaluating existing off-leash sites and selecting potential new facilities.

The criteria are based on the needs of dogs and their owners and were identified from a detailed review of off-leash facility best practice guidelines, benchmarking with other councils, and findings of the community and stakeholder engagements undertaken for this study.

The criteria include host park size, boundaries and natural features, the need for equitable distribution across the LGA, accessibility, potential for shared use of park assets, social impacts, and environmental sustainability.

The 10 potential sites were assessed for their suitability in accordance with these criteria but also with respect to the opportunities and constraints particular to specific off-leash facility types.

The site suitability ratings were undertaken in accordance with these varying constraints and opportunities. The assessment ratings range from 67 to 78 (out of a potential 100) and are detailed in the Technical Report.

8.3 Preferred site options

Based on the core planning principles, the off-leash network planning criteria, the catchment mapping analysis and the site suitability analysis, the preferred sites, for each of the currently under-served precincts in the LGA, are detailed in Table 7.



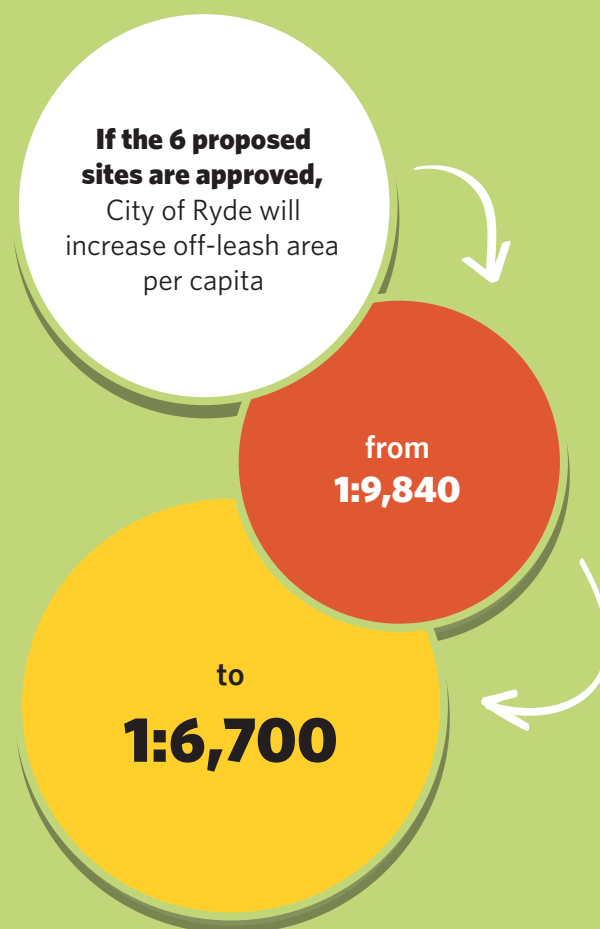
Table 7 – Proposed off-leash areas: site suitability assessment

Precinct	Preferred option	Facility type
Eastwood	Moore Park	Enclosed
Marsfield	Waterloo Park	Time share with sports grounds
Macquarie Park	Fontenoy Park	Time share with sports grounds
Parramatta River foreshore	Meadowbank Park	Unenclosed – with water/ beach access
	Kissing Point Park - off Delange Rd	Unenclosed – with water/ beach access
East Ryde	Monash Park oval	Time share with sports grounds

These six sites offer higher net benefits in terms of their suitability and/or contribution to improving the distribution and accessibility of off-leash sites across the LGA.

If all the proposed sites are accepted, the City's per capita provision of off-leash areas will increase from 1:9,804 to 1:6,700, compared to the North District average of 1:8,170. This compares to current provision levels in Ku-ring-gai (1:6,000) and Willoughby (1:6,180) LGA's but would still be well behind Lane Cove (1:2,468), Hunters Hill (1:3,727) and Mosman (1:3,860).

The selection rationale for each site, potential site layouts and accessibility maps (which illustrate the walkability catchment for each site) are detailed in Section 8.3 of the Technical Report.



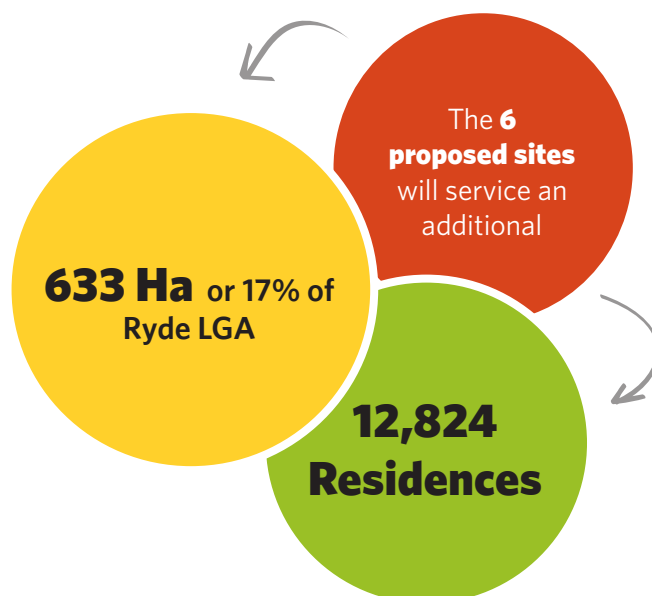
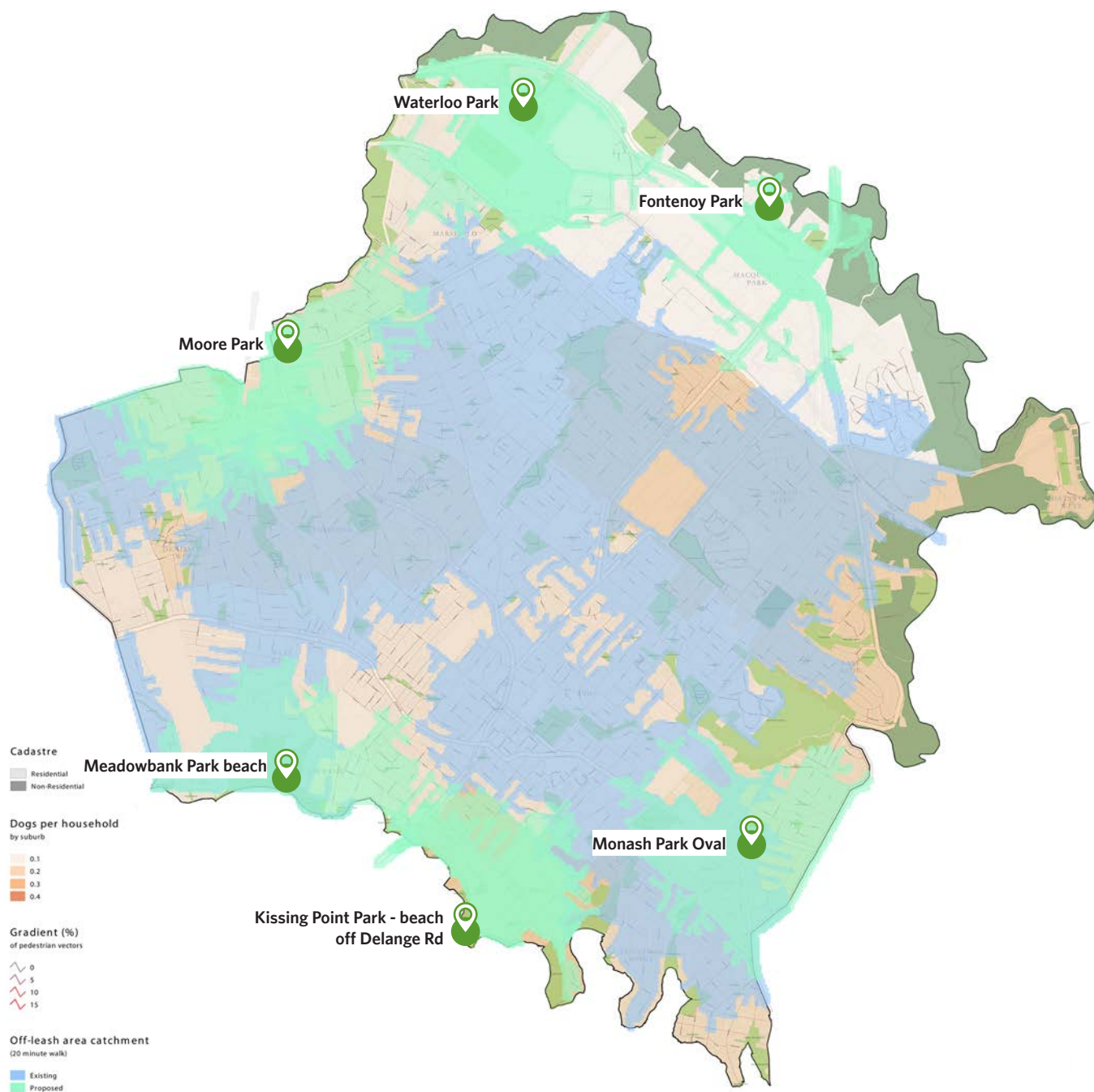
8.4 Summary of improved distribution and walkability

Fig. 5 illustrates how the 20 minute walking catchments for the six (6) proposed facilities (in light green) cater to the existing under-served areas of the LGA and how they relate to the 20 minute walking catchments for the 13 existing off-leash areas (in blue).

With respect to accessibility, the 20 minute walking catchments have taken into account access barriers such as rail lines and busy sections of roads without safe crossings.



Fig. 5: 20 minute walk catchment - Existing and proposed off-leash areas



9

IMPROVING EXISTING FACILITIES



9.1 Introduction

Council's existing 13 off-leash facilities were identified and briefly described in Section 3, above. They were also the subject of discussion and feedback in the community and stakeholder consultations, summarised in Section 5, above.

Based on issues and needs identified during the consultations and on the outcomes of the best practice review undertaken for this study, priority improvement works for some existing off-leash facilities have been identified. These relate to the addition of essential site infrastructure and a re-location, as summarised in the following sub-sections.

9.2 Infrastructure

Current best practice generally classifies dog park infrastructure as either 'standard/core' or 'desirable/optional' facilities.

Standard/core facilities are generally regarded as essential and include information or regulatory signs, perimeter/boundary signs (where off-leash areas are not enclosed), waste bins, waste bag dispensers, drinking water (taps with water bowls), shade and seating (in most guides).

While some of the existing off-leash areas have all or most of these facilities, there are some provision gaps, as summarised in Table 8.



Table 8 – Existing off-leash areas: support infrastructure requirements

Facility type	Parks requiring	No. units	Unit cost (\$)	Total cost (\$)
Information signs	Santa Rosa Park	1	500	500
Perimeter signs	North Ryde Common; Kotara Park; Peel Park; Olympic Park	10	500	5,000
Waste bins	Nil	0	0	0
Waste bag dispensers	Nil	0	0	0
Tap/dog bowl	Kotara Park; Santa Rosa Park (1 additional)	2	7,500	15,000
Seating (flat benches)	North Ryde Common; Kotara Park	2	2,500	5,000
Shade/shelter	North Ryde Common; Kotara Park; Pidding Park; Meadowbank Park	4	33,000	132,000

Desirable/optional facilities include enclosure (fencing/gates), small/large dog separation, lighting, agility equipment, dog wash station, notice board/information kiosk, seating (some guides) and toilets (but outside and near off-leash area).

While the addition of these facilities is not currently recommended for any of Council's existing off-leash areas, the community engagement undertaken for this study did identify strong demand for several of these facilities, as summarised in Table 9.



Table 9 – Existing off-leash areas: expressed demand for optional infrastructure

What do you like most about exercising your dogs at Council's off-leash areas?

54%
Fenced areas

What are the main reasons that you do not use Council's off-leash areas?

49%
Fenced areas

26%
Lack of separation areas depending on dog size

13%
Not enough space/ poor services

11%
Not enough/ poor equipment

Are there any improvements or changes you would like to see at Council's off-leash areas?

33%
Improved equipment

29%
Improved support services

25%
Separation areas depending on dog size

If additional off-leash areas were to be introduced, what features/ facilities would you most like to see included?

38%
Good support services

14%
Good play equipment and spaces for dogs

Given the strength of these expressed needs, it is proposed that the costs and benefits of providing non-core facilities be the subject of a supplementary review as one part of a detailed evaluation of Council's existing 13 off-leash areas.



9.3 Relocation

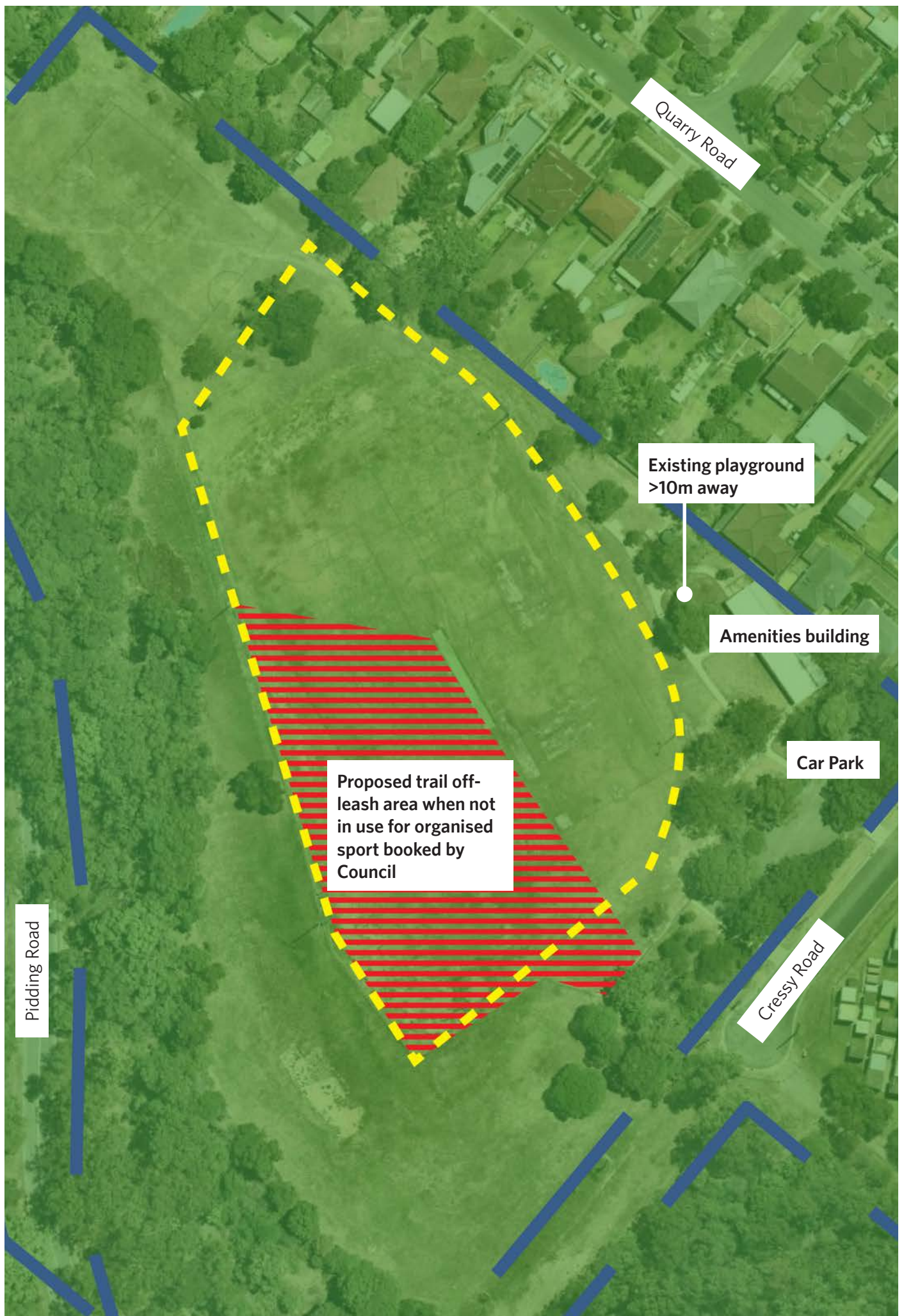
With all off-leash facilities, there is the requirement, under the Companion Animals Act, to avoid proximity to 'sensitive' park attractors such as playgrounds and food preparation areas (such as BBQ facilities).

In the stakeholder engagements undertaken for this study, it was identified that some off-leash areas (i.e. Pidding Park and Olympic Park) are too close to children's play areas.

At Olympic Park, potential conflicts can be reduced by improving boundary markers via clearer signage and/or bollards.

Potential conflicts at Pidding Park could be reduced by moving the off-leash area away from the main field towards the mini-fields. However, the facility would be too close to residential buildings. The preferred approach - to move the off-leash area to the west (as illustrated on the map opposite) - would provide a sufficient distance buffer between the off-leash area and the playground and amenities building.





10

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDED NETWORK AND SITES



10. Proposed off-leash facilities

This report concludes that there is a substantial case – based on service gaps and demonstrated need – in trialling an additional six (6) off-leash areas within the City, including two (2) with access to the Parramatta River foreshore. This conclusion is based on the following findings:



Council's existing 13 off-leash areas are well received and supported by the community.



The addition of just 6 more off-leash areas will place over 90% of City residences within a 20-minute walk of at least one facility (noting that achieving 100% would not be cost-effective as it would result in the substantial overlap of user catchments for several of the facilities).



The proposed 6 additional sites all rated well for suitability against a range of best practice criteria, as documented in the Technical Report, and are the most suitable sites in those areas not currently within 'walkable' access to at least one off-leash facility.



For those residences outside the 20 minute walking catchment, the furthest required travel distance is around a 32 minute walk (from residences on Pittwater Road, East Ryde).



Significant areas of the LGA (comprising 33% of residences) are not adequately serviced by the City's existing 13 off-leash facilities (i.e. in not within a 20-minute walk of a facility).



While there is currently no off-leash water play access for dogs in the City, the research evidence demonstrates the popularity of water access for both dogs and their owners and the ability to manage any potential negative environmental impacts of such access.



The community engagements undertaken for this study identified a strong community desire for additional off-leash areas – particularly off-leash areas with access to recreational water.

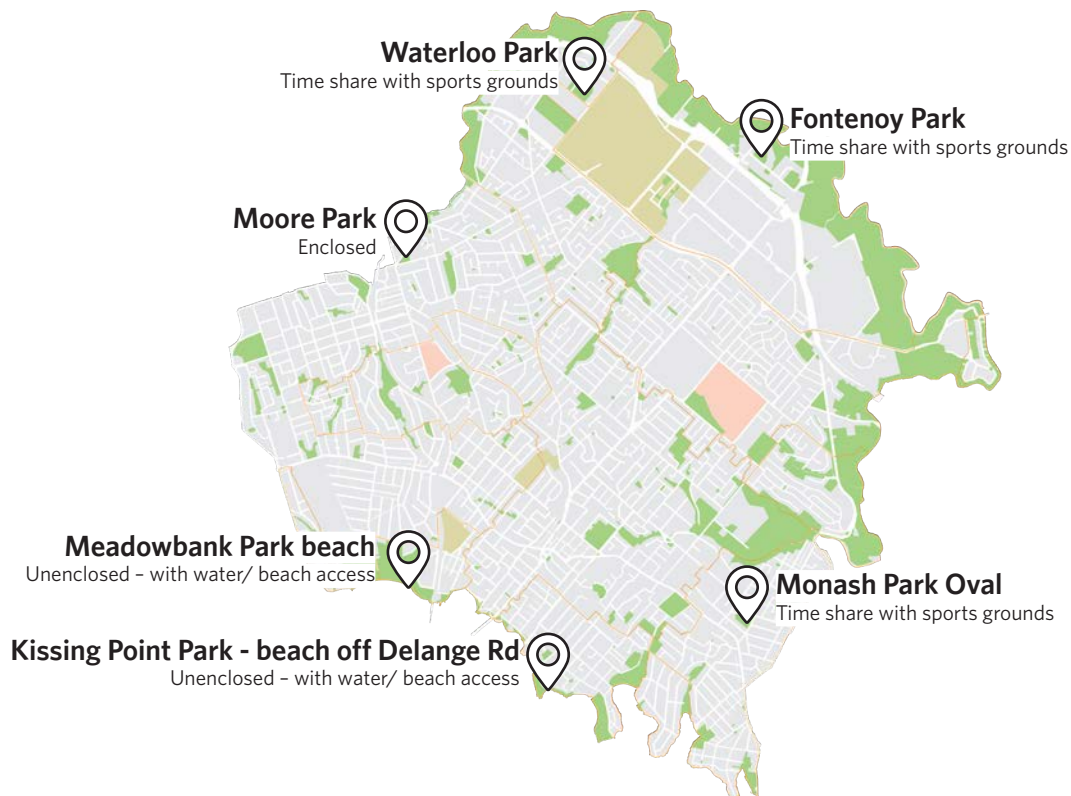


There is a growing number of dogs and dog owners in the LGA.

City of Ryde is recommending to trial **6 new parks for 6 months!!** More space..yayyy!

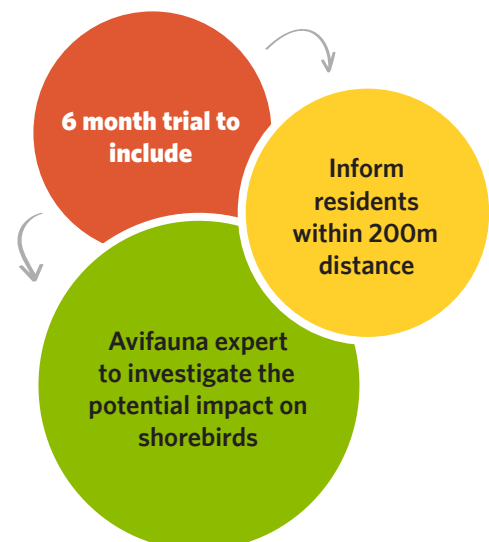


It is therefore recommended that a 6 month trial be undertaken for the addition of 6 new off-leash areas, as shown in the map below:



It is further recommended that, prior to the 6 month trial being undertaken:

- Residents within a 200m distance of the proposed sites be informed of the trial program and provided with appropriate opportunities to have their say about the trial program, and
- An avifauna expert be commissioned to investigate the potential impact of the proposed Parramatta River sites on feeding and foraging habitats of any endangered shorebirds



Existing off-leash facilities

This report, in investigating the need for additional off-leash areas in the City, also identified some infrastructure and locational issues at Council's existing off-leash areas, as detailed in Section 9, above. With respect to these issues, it is recommended that:



Funds be allocated to address the standard/core facility gaps identified in Section 9.2, above



The Pidding Park off-leash area be re-located, as detailed in Section 9.3, above, and



That the design and operational management of Council's existing 13 off-leash areas be reviewed in the light of the outcomes of the community and stakeholder engagements undertaken as part of the current study



