

ITEM 2. OFF-LEASH PARK PROPOSALS**FILE NO: S046409****SUMMARY**

In May 2007, Council adopted the Companion Animals Policy and also resolved to review 45 parks and open spaces that may be suitable for designation as off-leash areas on a full time basis (see Attachment A).

The Companion Animals Policy requires that any changes to existing off-leash arrangements must be referred to Council for determination following public consultation.

The public exhibition period for the proposed parks was held from 1 December 2007 to 1 February 2008, with 1,527 submissions received, including 2 petitions. Of these submissions, **73% supported the off-leash proposals; 24% were opposed; and 3% offered conditional support** (specifically time-share and/or fenced enclosures).

There are 350 parks in the City of Sydney, of which three (3) parks are currently off-leash at all times: Edmund Resch Reserve, Redfern, Joynton Park, Zetland, and Embarkation Park, Potts Point. However, Embarkation Park is closed at night.

In addition, there are 18 parks in which a portion of the park is declared off-leash (eg Sydney Park) or are off-leash on a time-share basis. With few exceptions, the off-leash times in these parks are 6pm until 8am

The parks which are currently off-leash, either full time or time share, represent 6% of all parks (21 of 350 parks).

If Council endorses the recommendations in this report, the proportion of off-leash parks will increase to 13% (47 of 350 parks), providing greater equity in obtaining local access to off-leash parks.

The total area of off-leash parks will increase to 102Ha, representing 55% of all Council parks (187 Ha). However, it should be noted that 4 of the larger parks comprise 40% (76Ha) in area of the parks proposed as off-leash.

The public exhibition process provided valuable feedback and many of the suggestions will be implemented to address community concerns – such as installation of fencing around playgrounds where appropriate; installation of additional dog-tidy stations (bag dispensers fitted to park waste bin enclosures) and water bubblers to provide drinking water for people and dogs; and increased enforcement against dog owners who fail to pick up their dog's faeces.

Staff have also considered the significant local opposition to designating Paradise Reserve, Ultimo as off-leash, and have recommended this park remain on leash at all times.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) approve 18 parks that are currently off-leash (time share) to be off-leash areas at all times, as detailed in Attachment B to the subject report;
- (B) approve 26 additional parks that are currently on-leash to be off-leash areas at all times, as detailed in Attachment C to the subject report; and
- (C) retain Paradise Reserve, Ultimo as an on-leash park.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Resolution of Council on 7 May 2007

Attachment B: Existing off-leash parks (time share)

Attachment C: Proposed off-leash parks (currently on leash)

Attachment D: Map of existing and proposed off-leash parks

Attachment E: Assessment of submissions in support

Attachment F: Assessment of submissions not in support

BACKGROUND

1. In May 2007, Council adopted the Companion Animals Policy, to promote and reinforce responsible pet ownership. Council also resolved to:
 - (a) endorse a process of community consultation, to consider if existing off-leash parks (time share) should become off-leash at all times; and
 - (b) endorse a process of community consultation to consider the designation of additional parks and open spaces to become off-leash areas at all times.
2. The proposal to declare 45 parks off-leash at all times (18 of which are currently off-leash on a time share basis) was placed on public exhibition from 1 December 2007 to 1 February 2008. A total of 1,527 submissions were received including two (2) petitions. Of these submissions, 73% supported the off-leash proposals; 24% were opposed; and 3% offered conditional support (specifically time-share and/or fenced enclosures).
3. There are 350 parks in the City of Sydney, of which three (3) parks are currently off-leash at all times: Edmund Resch Reserve, Redfern, Joynton Park, Zetland, and Embarkation Park, Potts Point. However, Embarkation Park is closed at night.
4. In addition, there are 18 parks in which a portion of the park is declared off-leash (eg Sydney Park) or are off-leash on a time-share basis. With few exceptions, the off-leash times in these parks are 6pm until 8am.
5. A map showing the existing and proposed off-leash parks is included in Attachment D.
6. The parks which are currently off-leash, either full time or time share, represent 6% of all parks (18 of 350 parks).
7. If Council endorses the recommendations in this report, the proportion of off-leash parks will increase to 13% (47 of 350 parks), providing greater equity in obtaining local access to off-leash parks.
8. The Companion Animals Policy requires a review of parks to provide equitable local access to residents with dogs. Section 2.3 of the Policy notes the City's preference for declaring areas off-leash at all times, rather than on a time-share basis, and the preference for whole parks to be declared off-leash, rather than restrictive sections within parks.
9. The existing arrangements for off-leash parks do not provide equitable access for dog owners across the City of Sydney LGA. Furthermore the time share arrangements, where dogs are allowed off-leash between 6pm and 8am can disadvantage shift workers and those who prefer to exercise dogs in daylight hours.
10. Companion animals have significant social and health benefits for their owners. Pets provide comfort, companionship and security to their owners, particularly older people and those who live alone.

11. The City has appointed a dedicated Companion Animals Liaison Officer to implement the Policy, which includes a community education program. Program elements include:
 - (a) free dog obedience training classes, which have been attended by over 900 residents;
 - (b) free micro-chipping for residents' dogs;
 - (c) 'Pet Taxi' service for low income earners and pensioners to transport pets for de-sexing;
 - (d) A series of educational factsheets on responsible pet ownership; and
 - (e) bike patrols conducted by the City Rangers in the larger parks, providing educational information, and enforcement when appropriate.

PROPOSAL

12. The proposal is to declare 44 of the 45 parks that were on public exhibition as off-leash at all times. This will leave 304 parks as on-leash parks.
13. As there was significant local opposition to Paradise Park being declared off-leash, it is proposed that this remain as an on-leash park.
14. Parks declared as off-leash will be equipped with dog-tidy stations (bag dispensers fitted to park waste bin enclosures) and water bubblers to provide drinking water for people and dogs.
15. Where appropriate, playgrounds in parks that are declared off-leash will be fenced. Proposed off-leash sites where playground fencing will be considered are:
 - (a) Bannerman Crescent Reserve*
 - (b) Beare Park*
 - (c) Foley Park*
 - (d) Jubilee Park
 - (e) Kimberley Grove Reserve
 - (f) Perry Park
 - (g) Prince Alfred Park*
 - (h) Rushcutters Bay Park
 - (i) Waterloo Park
 - (j) Wentworth Park

(* fencing proposed in current Capital Works Program Upgrade)

16. Installation of new standard park signage is expected to commence from May 2008. Temporary welcoming and informative signage detailing the off-leash status and responsible dog ownership messages will be installed at the main entry points at all off-leash parks. The off-leash status of parks will come into effect upon the installation of relevant signage.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

17. In total the City received 1,527 submissions, including 2 petitions. Of these 73% supported the off-leash proposals; 24% were opposed and 3% offered conditional support (specifically time-share and/or fenced enclosures).
18. Comments supporting the proposals included:
 - (a) off-leash parks are essential to the optimal health of dogs and assist in reducing nuisance behaviour e.g. barking;
 - (b) opportunities to exercise dogs off-leash, has health and fitness benefits for owners and dogs;
 - (c) off-leash parks facilitate community interaction;
 - (d) the majority of dog owners act responsibly and are considerate of other park users;
 - (e) off-leash use of parks assists with displacing and discouraging anti-social elements and gives visitors a sense of security; and
 - (f) meeting an identified need for locally accessible off-leash parks.
19. Comments opposing the proposals included:
 - (a) concerns about dog attacks, safety of children, the aged, people with disabilities, collisions with cyclists and pedestrians;
 - (b) concerns about uncollected dog faeces; unwanted intrusions to public diners (e.g. picnics, bbqs); impacts on health (e.g. asthma, allergies, noise);
 - (c) concerns about the use of off-leash areas on other user groups e.g. families;
 - (d) some owners are irresponsible and inconsiderate to others;
 - (e) adverse impacts on urban wildlife e.g. birds, damage to parks;
 - (f) the scale, location or features of specific parks are incompatible with off-leash activities; and
 - (g) concern that enforcement and monitoring is deficient.
20. Analysis of the key issues raised and the City's response is contained in Attachments E and F.

21. To address concerns raised in the submissions, the following actions are proposed:
- (a) Rangers to increase patrols in off-leash parks and undertake enforcement where dog owners fail to clean up after their dog or control its behaviour;
 - (b) Companion Animals Liaison Officer to target off-leash parks to educate dog owners and increase their awareness, knowledge and responsibility for controlling their pets behaviour;
 - (c) where appropriate, install fencing around children's playgrounds. The fencing will be installed, where possible, prior to the commencement of the park being used for off-leash activity; and
 - (d) clear and unambiguous signage will be installed at all off-leash areas welcoming all residents and reminding dog owners of their responsibilities. The City's Call Centre number will be provided so that the Rangers can be contacted if required.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

22. Funds for temporary signage, playground fencing, educational resources, dog tidy stations and water fountains are available in the existing 2007/08 Budget.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

23. Companion Animals Act 1998.
24. Local Government Act 1993.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

25. Nil.

OPTIONS

26. Council has the option to:
- (a) approve the parks recommended to become off-leash at all times; or
 - (b) approve selected parks to become off-leash at all times; or
 - (c) not approve proposed changes to off-leash arrangements in the City's parks. This option is not recommended due to the uneven and inequitable distribution of off-leash parks and off-leash times across the City.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

27. The public exhibition period for off-leash proposals was from 1 December 2007 to 1 February 2008.
28. Temporary signage (175 signs) was installed at the main entrances to the parks, to notify the community and park visitors of the off-leash proposals.
29. The City's media release generated extensive media coverage on national, local and specialised print publications.

30. The City's website detailed the off-leash proposals and included a list of existing and proposed off-leash parks, a map illustrating their locations and a list of frequently asked questions.

GARRY HARDING

Director City, Community and Cultural Services

Joel Johnson, Manager Parks, Trees & Aquatic Facilities

Mark Driver, Recreation Planner