

7. DOG CONTROL WORKING PARTY

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The purpose of this report is to advise on a meeting held at the Brooklands Community Centre to discuss dog control issues in and around the Brooklands Lagoon area in the context of the Council's Dog Control Policy.

BACKGROUND

In 2003 the Council undertook a review of its dog control policy made under the Dog Control Act 1996 and introduced some additional areas in which dogs were prohibited, largely to protect ecological values and bird life, as well as some other minor changes to improve matters of safety to the public.

These areas around or adjacent to the Brooklands area, Styx River mouth, Brooklands Lagoon and Seafield Park were advised to be an area with wilderness qualities which is important both regionally and nationally as a wintering and feeding site for migratory birds such as the Godwit, and for swamp birds such as the globally endangered Australasian Bittern. The lagoon also supports a healthy breeding population of wetland birds and provides feeding and roosting habitats for numerous herons, waders, waterfowl, and swamp birds. Advice was provided that uncontrolled dogs could affect the birds, roosting, moulting, and feeding when nesting in all these areas. The presence of these birds requires minimal levels of disturbance and predation for continued occupation of the area. On this basis the Dog Control Working Party indicated that the areas would be designated as "prohibited" except for some leased dog areas on some walking tracks.

Some submissions objected to these areas being designated as "prohibited" on a number of grounds. These included questioning the need for such controls on the grounds that there was little evidence that dogs were any more of a problem in regard to killing birds than other predators. Given the submissions received on these proposals it was considered that a number of options for the policy could be considered. These were; adopt the above prohibition in the policy but undertake further education of the need for the ban over the whole area rather than immediately place bylaw controls on the area; place a prohibition on a more limited part of the area immediately with an extension of the leashed area to protect wildlife; and merely undertake education regarding the need to control dogs in particular areas or at particular times. It was decided that the Shirley/Papanui Community Board should be requested to host a meeting at Brooklands for the Dog Control Working Party to determine the views of the community regarding this matter. The implementation of this prohibition would be dependant on the further consultation with the local community as referred to above.

THE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

A meeting was held at the Brooklands Community Centre on the 7 April 2004 at which the meeting discussed the matters following a presentation by Andrew Crossland, an ornithologist from the Regional Parks Team of the Parks and Waterways Unit.

While there was some disagreement as to the extent of effects of dogs on the birds present in the area a wider concern was on the restriction of opportunities for free ranging exercise areas for dogs close to the settlement if the prohibitions were enforced. The point was made that the Council had a responsibility under the Dog Control Act 1996 to take into account the exercise and recreational needs of dogs and their owners in developing policies under section 10 of the Act. If the currently proposed prohibitions were implemented the only place for leash-free exercising was some distance from the settlement and would require travel by vehicle in most cases. While this was the reality for dog owners in other parts of the City at some distance from the beaches some of the residents in the Brooklands area considered they had moved to this area for its closeness to the water.

It was agreed that further discussion should take place with the community once a more specific plan of the area had been produced, in draft, along the lines of a Brooklands lagoon concept management plan. Initially the plan would be in map form and would highlight issues relating to:

- Dog free run areas,
- Dog restrained areas,
- Dog prohibited areas,
- The existing use of walking tracks, shoulders, buffer zones and embankments by dogs and owners
- Existing bird nesting, breeding and roosting sites in relation to population numbers and extremes (major significance - minimum significance etc),

- High tide/low tide usage options,
- General disturbance,
- Bird sanctuary areas.

The matter of signage providing further information on the importance of the area for wildlife and the effective use of signs sending correct messages, on walk ways, embankments, was seen to be a significant issue. This could be used to clearly indicate the appropriate directions people could access areas with dogs to minimise disturbance or damage to wildlife or the environment. The difficulty of maintaining signage was mentioned by the Coastal Parks Area Head Ranger, Rodney Chambers, as many signs had to be replaced because they were damaged or taken.

The matter of bird shooting, erratic vehicle usage, over population of Canada geese, and activities of speedboats, wet bikes, and jet boats in the lagoon were raised as additional problems in the area. The area is within the Coastal Marine area controlled by Environment Canterbury but the Waimakariri District Council, through it is understood the Kaiapoi Community Board, is the Harbour authority for the area controlling the use of vessels on the water.

CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that officers from the Animal Control section of the Environmental Services Unit together with those from the Regional Parks section of the Parks and Waterways Unit should develop an initial map of the area as referred to above for further discussion at another meeting of the community.

It was clear to the Working Party that some consideration should be given to developing a management plan for the Brooklands Lagoon area in conjunction with Environment Canterbury who have some responsibility for controlling activities on the water in the area. The development of the "Christchurch Naturally: The Biodiversity Strategy" as proposed indicates the need for further consideration of the bird life and other ecological matters in the area. These are an indication that any changes for the purposes of providing for dog exercise areas must take into account any such issues.

Staff

- Recommendation:**
1. That the joint Animal Control Section and Regional Parks Team prepare a map that identifies the various uses of the area in the context of the controls suggested by the Dog Control Policy within the Brooklands area for presentation and discussion with the Brooklands residents.
 2. That a joint seminar of the Regulatory and Consents and Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committees be held to consider the development of a management plan, in conjunction with Environment Canterbury and the Waimakariri District Council, for the Brooklands Lagoon area.

Chairman's

- Recommendation:** That the above recommendation be adopted.