



WHITEHORSE

Fenced Dog Park Technical Report

DRAFT

December 2025



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1. The Project

1.1 Introduction

The City of Whitehorse is an established municipality in Melbourne's eastern metropolitan region, covering an area of 64 square kilometres. Home to an estimated 178,477 residents in 2024, the population is projected to grow by more than 20% to approximately 234,000 by 2046. Much of the municipality is now characterised by medium- to high-density residential development, reflecting a trend towards denser living and ongoing population growth.

Across Australia, around 49% of households own at least one dog (Pets in Australia: A National Survey of Pets and People, 2025), and this trend is reflected locally. Whitehorse currently has more than 12,000 registered dogs; however, the actual number is likely to be considerably higher, as many dogs are unregistered. As residential density increases and private open space becomes more limited, more dogs are being exercised in public parks and reserves, leading to increased demand for off-lead areas, including fenced dog parks.

While Council has an existing network of dog off-lead areas, there are currently no dedicated fenced off-lead dog parks. Despite community demand for such facilities, none have been successfully implemented to date. This report draws on community feedback, benchmarks dog parks across Melbourne, and reviews relevant strategies and research and consolidates findings from multiple evidence sources to inform recommendations for the future planning, design, and management of a fenced dog park.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the Fenced Dog Park Technical Report are to:

1. Assess the needs and expectations of the community and Council regarding fenced dog parks within the City of Whitehorse.
1. Review the current provision and management of off-lead areas to highlight challenges and opportunities for delivering dog parks.
2. Benchmark approaches from other municipalities to inform suitable design, siting, and management of dog parks.
3. Provide evidence-based recommendations to guide Council's planning, design, and ongoing management of dog parks.
4. Develop guidelines to inform the site selection and the design of dog parks

1.3 Existing conditions

The Whitehorse Open Space Strategy identifies dog walking as one of the most popular reasons the community uses open space. Dog walking supports health and wellbeing by promoting activity recreation and providing opportunities for social interaction. Dog ownership also provides companionship, particularly for those living alone.

Despite its popularity, the presence of dogs in public spaces can sometimes lead to conflicts with other park users, particularly when dogs are exercised off-lead. In recent years, Council has received increasing community feedback regarding such conflicts. Common concerns include personal safety risks, damage to sporting ovals and open grassed areas, safety risks to cyclists, impacts on the local environment, and issues related to dog waste management.

The City of Whitehorse currently maintains a Domestic Animal Management Plan, with 32 parks and reserves providing off-lead areas across the municipality however there are currently no fenced dog parks in Whitehorse. Whilst there is growing demand for dedicated fenced dog parks, previous proposals have faced significant community opposition and were unable to be delivered. Community views on dog parks remain mixed: some residents actively support new dog parks and are petitioning for their provision, while others oppose them due to potential conflicts with existing park uses, potential environmental impacts, or health and safety concerns where dogs are exercised off-lead on sports fields.

A temporary dog park is proposed in Box Hill as part of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) open space compensation and additional fenced dog parks may be considered within open space master plans currently being prepared by Council, pending the outcomes of this report and subsequent public consultation.

Off-lead areas on sports fields

In Whitehorse, several sports fields permit off-lead activity when organised sporting events are not scheduled. This shared use has led to ongoing conflict between different user groups, particularly between dog owners and sporting clubs.

This conflict centres around damage to playing surfaces (uneven wear, surface damage due to digging, urine damage and faeces contamination creating safety concerns) and restricted access due to sports scheduling. Council has attempted a range of measures to reduce these concerns, such as keeping gates open to make sports fields less enclosed and encourage more active supervision, but these initiatives have been met with community resistance.

1.4 What is a Dog Park?

Defining dog parks

For the purposes of this project, a dog park is defined as a designated, dedicated, fully enclosed fenced area within a park or public space for dog guardians to legally exercise, play and socialise with their dogs off-lead in a secure environment.

In researching dog parks, a wide range of examples from across Australia and internationally were examined to understand the various ways these facilities can be designed and delivered for community use. This review highlighted that dog parks can take many forms, from simple fenced lawn areas to more elaborate spaces with features such as agility equipment, splash pads, or even indoor and rooftop locations. Examining these diverse examples provides insight into how dog parks could be delivered across the municipality. Appendix E includes several case studies that showcase the variety of dog parks. While not all examples may be directly applicable to the context of Whitehorse, they offer inspiration and ideas for how dog parks could be provided. This research helps inform decisions around park location, layout, features, and management approaches, ensuring that any new dog park is both functional and appealing to residents and their dogs.

Defining dog guardians

In this report, the term dog guardians refers to the responsible person accompanying a dog or dogs to the dog park for exercise and socialisation. This may include the dog's owner, a professional dog walker, or another carer.

Defining dog off-lead area

In this report, the term dog off-lead area refers to any designated area where dogs are permitted to be off-lead under the supervision of their guardian. This may include fully fenced dog parks, shared-use or time-shared recreation areas, and other open spaces identified by Council for off-lead activity.



1.5 Benefits and Limitations of Dog Parks

Benefits of dog parks

Dog parks can provide many benefits for dogs, their guardians and the broader community:

For Dogs:

- Physical and mental exercise: Dog parks provide opportunities for dogs to be physically and mentally active.
- Socialisation: Dog parks provide opportunities for dogs to interact with other dogs and people.
- Safe and secure environment: Dog parks offer a secure space for dogs to play off-lead away from hazards (such as cars and bikes).

For People:

- Socialisation: Dog parks often serve as a meeting point for dog guardians, fostering social connections and a sense of community.
- Accessible: Dog parks are valuable facilities for people with limited mobility (such as seniors and people with a disability), offering a safe space to exercise their dogs without the need for extensive walking, and where social connections can be maintained.
- Promotes responsible dog ownership: Dog parks provide an ideal location for dog training in a controlled environment, assisting people to build confidence when walking and socialising their dogs.
- Risk management: Dog parks enable the separation of dog off-lead activities from incompatible activities (eg. playgrounds and trails).

Risks of dog parks

Despite the many benefits of dog parks, there are several limitations and risks that should be carefully considered in their planning and management:

- Equity: Allocating a portion of public open space exclusively for dog use can limit access for other community members, particularly in municipalities where open space is scarce. This can create perceptions of inequity if dog parks are seen to displace other recreation needs or receive disproportionate investment.
- Dog behaviour and supervision: Dog parks can attract dogs that are not under effective control, or guardians who allow off-lead activity without adequate supervision. This can result in conflicts between dogs, aggressive behaviour, or failure to pick up waste. Poorly managed use can also lead to safety and hygiene concerns that deter other users.
- Environmental impacts: Concentrated use by dogs can contribute to soil compaction, vegetation loss, erosion, and water quality impacts, particularly where drainage or maintenance is insufficient.
- Maintenance and cost: Dog parks require regular maintenance of surfaces, fences, and amenities to remain safe and functional. Without adequate resourcing, these areas can deteriorate quickly, leading to user dissatisfaction and higher long-term costs.

Together, these risks highlight the importance of thoughtful site selection, design, community education, and ongoing management to ensure dog parks deliver community benefit without unintended negative outcomes.

2. Dogs In Whitehorse

It is estimated that approximately 40% of Victorian adults own a pet dog (Pet Census, 2023). The management of dogs, including ensuring their welfare and providing opportunities for regular exercise, is a responsibility of local government. This responsibility is reinforced by the Victorian Domestic Animals Act 1994, which sets out requirements for the registration, control, and management of dogs within municipalities. Local councils are therefore tasked with balancing community safety, responsible pet ownership, and the provision of suitable facilities, such as off-lead areas, to meet the exercise and socialisation needs of dogs.



2.1 The People

As of June 2024 the estimated population for the City of Whitehorse was 183,462 (.id informed decisions) <https://id.com.au>. The municipality has consistently experienced steady population growth, a trend that is expected to continue.

Between 2016 and 2021, high-density housing experienced the largest shift in dwelling type, with 3,966 new units added compared to just 542 separate houses. This shift reflects a broader move toward smaller lot sizes and more compact living, particularly in key activity and employment centres such as Box Hill.

The estimated population of Whitehorse is

183,462³



38% of dwellings are medium or high density²



Victorian State Government initiatives such as the Suburban Rail Loop (which is proposed to pass through the City of Whitehorse, with a station at Box Hill and Burwood), the establishment of activity centres, and associated planning policies provide useful context for considering future population growth and higher-density living. These initiatives outline a state-wide approach to guiding development around major transport and activity hubs, which may help inform local planning and decision-making about where and how growth could occur over time. This context can also assist in identifying areas where increased population density may place greater demand on public open space facilities, to support community needs and liveability.

2.2 The Dogs

Key data source

This section draws heavily on the Victorian Pet Census Survey Findings Report (ORIMA Research, 2023), prepared for Animal Welfare Victoria (AWV) and the Pets in Australia: A National Survey of Pets and People prepared by Animal Medicines Australia, to address data gaps in companion animal ownership.

¹ Animal Welfare Victoria Victorian Pet Census Survey Findings Report 2023, Orima 2023

² City of Whitehorse: Dwelling Type, <https://profile.id.com.au/whitehorse/dwellings>

³ City of Whitehorse: Population and Dwellings, <https://profile.id.com.au/whitehorse/population>

The Victorian Pet Census aimed to estimate Victoria's pet population and examine community awareness, attitudes, and behaviours relating to pet ownership. The Census comprised of two survey components; a representative online panel survey (n=5,069), and an open-link survey on the AWW website (n=32,391), which mostly attracted pet owners. Only the panel survey results were used to generate community-level estimates, while the open-link responses were used for pet-owner-specific insights. Due to sampling limitations, all results should be interpreted with caution, and open-link survey findings considered indicative only.

Pets in Australia: A National Survey of Pets and People was conducted by SEC Newgate Research on behalf of Animal Medicines Australia between 25 February and 10 March 2025. The study targeted Australian adults aged 18 years and over and was delivered via an online survey, achieving a total sample size of 2,450 respondents.

Whitehorse dog population

Dogs remain the most common pet in Victoria, according to the 2023 Pet Census, with 41% of pet owners having a pet. In the City of Whitehorse, 12,171 dogs are currently registered with the Council. However, not all residents register their pets. The Pet Census indicates that registration rates decline in households with multiple dogs: 86% of owners with one dog register their pet, compared with 83% for those with two dogs, and 73% for households with three or more. Based on these trends, the actual dog population in Whitehorse is likely higher, estimated to be between 14,000 and 16,500.

Council initiatives, including door-to-door visits to residents without registered pets and the return of lost pets, suggest that approximately 70% of dogs are registered. Applying this figure indicates the total dog population in Whitehorse could exceed 17,000.

Furthermore, the 2023 Pet Census shows that 58% of Victorian adults have a pet, and 41% of those own a dog. With Whitehorse's adult population of 132,000, this suggests the community could collectively own around 32,000 dogs. Similarly, the Pets in Australia: A National Survey of Pets and People (2025) found that 49% of Australian households have a dog. With 65,115 households recorded in Whitehorse in the 2021 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing), this also points to a potential dog population of around 32,000.



It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the available data, which require reliance on broader sources such as state-wide statistics (Animal Welfare Victoria: Victorian Pet Census Survey Findings Report, 2023), nation wide statistics (Pets in Australia: A National Survey of Pets and People, 2025) and incomplete dog registration records. As a result, these figures are unlikely to fully reflect the accurate numbers of dog ownership within the municipality.

2.3 Facilities

Dog owners, according to the Pet Census (2023) are highly engaged in their pets' wellbeing, with 80% participating in training and 68% walking their dogs at least once daily. Off-lead activity is also common, with 71% of owners allowing their dogs to roam freely, most frequently in designated zones (55%), public parks (36%), and beaches (31%). Consistent with these findings, consultation for the recent Whitehorse Open Space Strategy highlighted that walking and exercising dogs is one of the most popular reasons people use open space regularly.

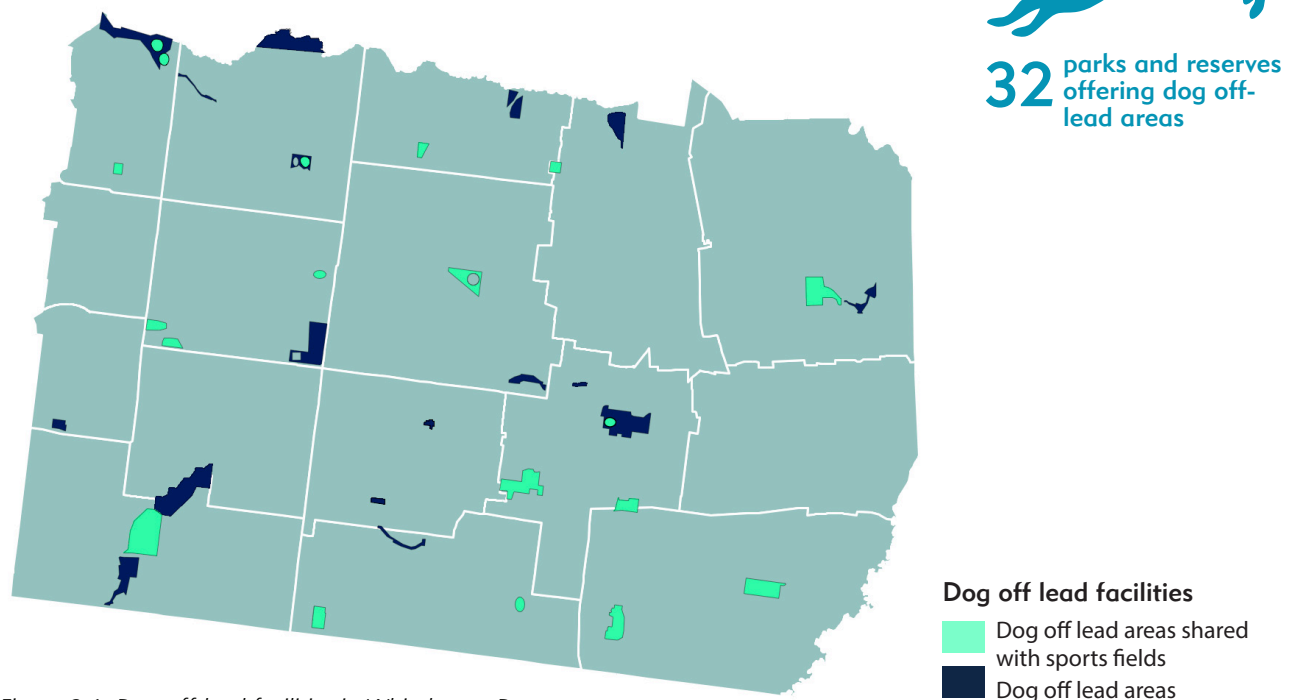


Figure 2.1: Dog off-lead facilities in Whitehorse. Data obtained from City of Whitehorse 22 September 2025

Whilst there are no dedicated fenced dog parks in the City of Whitehorse, the Council provides 32 designated off-lead areas for community members to exercise their dogs, as shown in Figure 2.1. Many of these areas are shared with sports fields, which has resulted in conflicts of use, as noted previously. In particular, ongoing issues have been experienced at sports fields maintained to a higher standard for competition use such as Morton Park and Mahoney's Reserve, where off-lead activity has caused damage to turf, interference with sporting use, and challenges in maintaining field quality. These issues have been identified through past community and engagement and from discussions with Council Officers. Council has unsuccessfully attempted a range of management approaches, including locking sport field gates open.

While it is common across many municipalities for off-lead areas to be shared with sports grounds, fields maintained to a higher standard for competition use are typically designated as dog-prohibited zones to protect surface quality and ensure safe conditions for competitive sport. As fenced dog parks are progressively delivered across Whitehorse, the designation of off-lead areas on sports fields should be reviewed, to reduce conflicts and ensure appropriate spaces are available for both recreational dog use and organised sport. Additionally, there are over 350 parks and reserves across the municipality where dogs can explore open space on-lead.

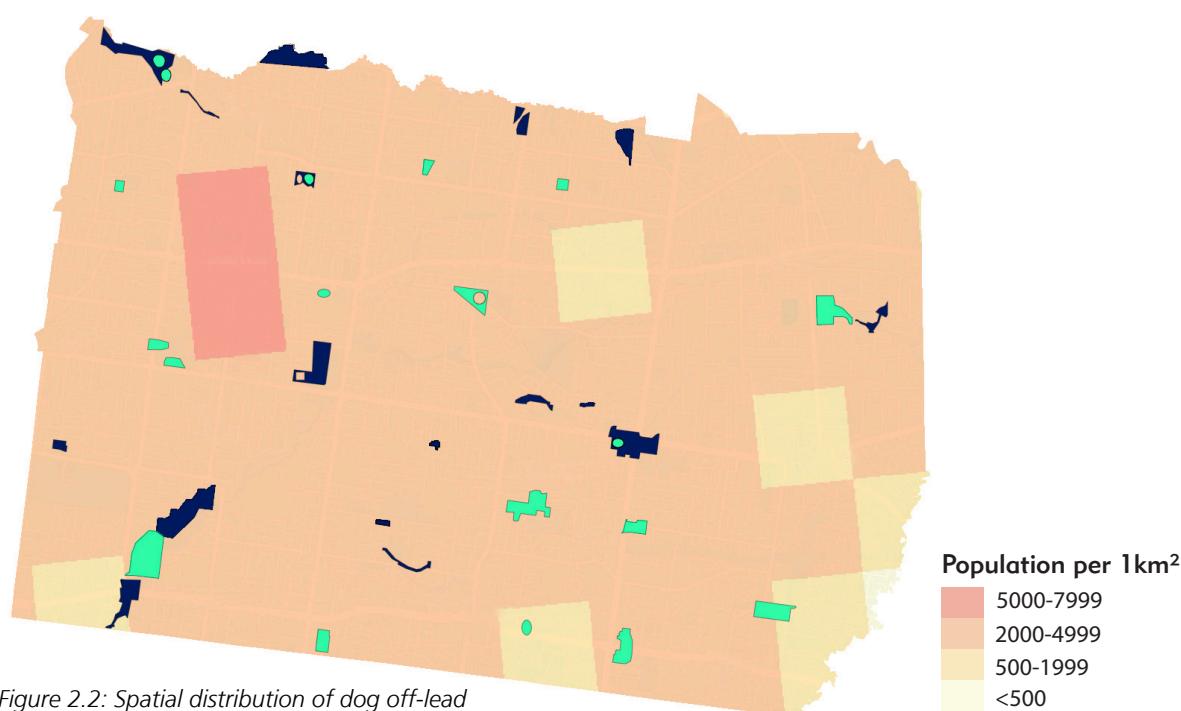


Figure 2.2: Spatial distribution of dog off-lead areas relative to population density (ABS Australian population grid 2022). Accessed 9 September 2025

Figure 2.2 illustrates the distribution of dog off-lead areas in relation to population density. Most off-lead zones are concentrated within medium-density areas, with several larger sites situated in less populated parts of the municipality. While provision is generally well distributed, the map highlights a few minor gaps in off-lead coverage.

The Whitehorse Open Space Strategy (2025) recommends that the provision of dog off-lead areas be reviewed, with consideration given to addressing any gaps in coverage. The report identifies potential areas for review, including:

- The north-eastern extent of Mitcham (north of Whitehorse Road and east of Mitcham Road);
- The central area encompassing Nunawading, Mitcham, and Forest Hill (between Canterbury and Whitehorse Roads and between Springvale and Mitcham Roads); and
- The eastern part of Vermont (north-east of Boronia Road and south of Canterbury Road).

Figure 2.3 illustrates the relationship between dog registration rates and the distribution of off-lead areas. While registration rates are relatively consistent across the municipality, some areas have noticeably fewer designated off-lead spaces. This indicates that, despite similar levels of dog ownership, access to suitable off-lead areas may be more limited in certain locations. Future planning should therefore consider opportunities to achieve a more equitable balance between dog ownership levels and the provision of off-lead spaces across wards.

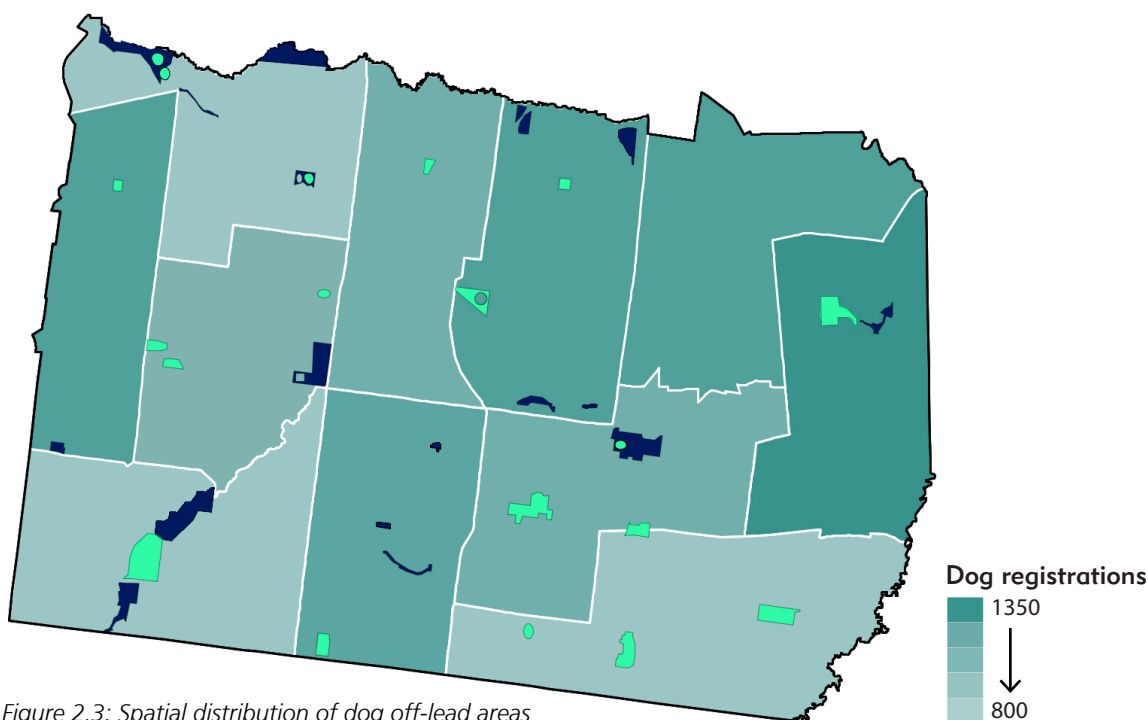


Figure 2.3: Spatial distribution of dog off-lead areas relative to dog registration numbers by ward

2.4 Programs and Enforcement

Whitehorse City Council recognises that education and access to information are important for promoting responsible pet ownership within the community. Council delivers a range of programs and events to provide pet owners with the knowledge and confidence to manage their animals responsibly.

Initiatives include:

- Community engagement stalls at local festivals and events such as 'Pups in Parks', where residents can meet Authorised Officers and access pet ownership information.
- School visits and holiday programs focused on responsible pet ownership and dog bite prevention.
- Partnerships with registered dog trainers to deliver demonstrations and guidance on behavioural issues through free events in parks and public spaces.
- Information sessions hosted by qualified pet behaviourists and other experts, delivered through in-person seminars and online webinars.
- Targeted social media campaigns to raise awareness of responsible pet ownership across the municipality.

Many of these events also include incentives such as giveaways and opportunities for dog registration to encourage engagement.

These activities aim to help owners understand their dogs' behaviour, build confidence when walking and socialising their pets, and prevent conflict and anti-social behaviour.

This approach is supported by the community and reflected in consultation undertaken for the Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP), which highlighted residents' interest in education and awareness initiatives. Continuing these programs helps promote positive behavioural outcomes, reduce incidents, and maintain community understanding of the value of pet registration.

Key findings

- As the population increases and more residents live in medium and high-density homes, the demand for and pressure on public open spaces grows. These shared spaces play a vital role in supporting recreation, social connection, and community wellbeing, often serving as gathering places for residents and their pets alike.
- Conflicts commonly occur on sports fields used for off-lead activity, particularly at premier venues such as Morton Park and Mahoney's Reserve, highlighting the need to review these designations as dedicated dog parks are delivered.
- Dog off-lead areas are generally well distributed but consideration should be given to address any minor gaps in provision including
 - The north-eastern extent of Mitcham (north of Whitehorse Rd and east of Mitcham Rd)
 - The central area encompassing Nunawading, Mitcham, and Forest Hill (between Canterbury and Whitehorse Roads and between Springvale and Mitcham Roads)
 - The eastern extent of Vermont (north-east of Boronia Road and south of Canterbury Rd).
- Registration numbers are fairly consistent across Whitehorse, but are slightly higher in the east, yet these areas have relatively few off-lead spaces, indicating a gap in provision for residents and their dogs.
- Most guardians exercise their dogs off-lead. Designated off-lead zones and public parks are the most popular areas to allow dogs off-lead. This highlights the importance of maintaining and planning off-lead areas to meet community demand.
- Events and programs run by Whitehorse City Council have promoted responsible dog ownership and positive behaviour. These types of events may be critical in the success and management of any future fenced dog parks.

3. Strategic Context

3.1 Strategic Document Review

A range of existing strategies, plans, reports, and data relevant to this study were reviewed as part of the background analysis. This review identifies the relevance of Council's existing strategies, policies, and plans to the Fenced Dog Park Technical Report and highlights how the proposed approach aligns with broader strategic priorities, guiding principles, and objectives. The analysis ensures consistency with Council's vision and reviews the role of fenced dog parks within the wider context of open space planning, community wellbeing, and animal management. Refer to Appendix A for the complete review.

Key findings:

- The Open Space Strategy recommends providing fenced dog parks and off-lead areas at Regional and Municipal level open spaces only.
- Dog parks should promote inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainable, natural design, while integrating features that support recreation, biodiversity, and ecological protection.
- New dog parks should be prioritised in locations where residents have fewer opportunities to access appropriate open space for dog exercise, and where additional facilities can alleviate pressure on sporting fields while addressing the greatest local demand.
- Safe, accessible, and inclusive public spaces support informal recreation and community connection, which includes suitable dog off-lead areas.
- Council strategies highlight the importance of promoting responsible pet ownership and enforcing rules and community laws.
- Strategies recognise growing urban density and population, with dog parks having the potential to help ease pressure on public open spaces.

3.2 Policy, Guideline & Research Review

A review of other councils' strategies and guidelines relating to the provision of dog parks and off-lead areas was undertaken, alongside relevant academic research. This review identified key principles and consistencies in the planning, delivery, and management of dog off-lead facilities, including considerations for design, infrastructure and amenities. It also highlighted approaches to site selection, maintenance, and management, providing valuable insights to guide the development of a consistent, evidence-based approach for Whitehorse.

What the research tells us

A review of academic literature and practitioner articles provides valuable insights into the design, planning, and management of fenced off-lead dog parks. These sources inform best-practice approaches for creating safe, inclusive, and well-maintained spaces for dogs and their carers.

This review analysed the following documents:

- Design, Planning and Management of Off-lead Dog Parks, 2017, Bob Holderness-Roddam
- [Extracts from] Planning, Design and Management of Off-lead Areas Technical Manual 2013-2021, LMH Consulting/Paws4Play
- Dog Parks: Benefits and Liabilities, 2007, Laurel Allen
- Dog Parks: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, Trish King and Terry Long, published in the APDT Chronicle of the Dog (Nov/Dec 2004)

Key themes identified through this research include:

- Benefits:
 - Provide exercise and physical activity for dogs.
 - Support socialisation and behavioural development.
 - Foster community connections among dog guardians and opportunities for socialisation.
 - Offer inclusive recreational opportunities for apartment dwellers, older adults, and families.
- Risks:
 - Dog aggression or conflicts between dogs.
 - Over-stimulation or behavioural challenges in dogs.
 - Environmental impacts, including vegetation damage and waste management issues.
 - Potential conflicts with other park users.
- Design
 - Double-gated entrances, clear signage, and well-maintained fencing are essential.
 - Separate areas for large and small dogs help prevent injuries.
 - Shade, seating, clean water, and safe surfaces improve usability for dogs and carers.
 - Agility equipment, dig pits, varied terrain, and open spaces support exercise and mental stimulation.
 - Fenced areas are particularly useful for dogs with high energy or behavioural needs.
- Environmental Considerations
 - Locations should avoid sensitive wildlife habitats, waterways, playgrounds, and residential areas.
 - Vegetation and surfaces should minimise hazards and environmental degradation.
 - Waste management strategies (bins, bags, composting) are important for sustainability.
- Management and Education
 - Regular maintenance, supervision, and compliance monitoring are key to safety.
 - Owner education, clear behavioural expectations, and, where appropriate, screening contribute to positive outcomes.
 - Signage should be friendly, educational, and informative rather than punitive.
 - Positive reinforcement and behavioural guidance help manage aggression, over-stimulation, and socialisation challenges in dogs.

A complete summary of the research undertaken is provided in Appendix B.

Benchmarking council approaches

The table below summarises the key recommendations and guidelines from other councils' in Victoria and interstate, dog off-lead strategies. This benchmarking exercise serves as a reference point for items that could be incorporated into the recommendations of this report.

	City of Port Phillip	Latrobe City	The City of Greater Geelong	City of Monash	City of Whittlesea	Wyndham City	Yarra Ranges Council	City of Canterbury Bankstown	City of Ryde	Government of South Australia
Strategy name	Dog Off-Lead Strategic Guideline	Fenced Dog Park Guidelines	Fenced Dog Park Siting, Design and Management Guidelines	Dog Off-Lead Policy	Dog Off-lead Area Policy and Management Plan	Dog Off-Lead Plan	People & Dogs in Parks Plan	Off-Lead Dog Park Action Plan	Dog Recreation Needs Study	Unleaded: A guide To Successful Dog Parks
Site selection guidelines	•	•	•			•	•		•	•
Design guidelines	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Infrastructure and amenity guidelines		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Management guidelines	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Maintenance guidelines		•	•	•		•	•	•		•
Recommended number of fenced dog parks or off-lead areas				Increase off lead areas from 31 to 45	1 dog park per suburb	1 dog park per urban suburb	1 per sub-region			
Hierarchy of dog parks or off-lead areas	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		
Minimum size (m ²)		3,000	3,000	3500-5000	3,000	3,000	3000-5000	1500-5000	3,000	
Recommended shape		Round/oval	Rounded/Oval			Oval/bean			Irregular	Linear/irregular
Recommended distance to fenced dog parks		Walking distance					20 min walk for urban, 10 min drive for non-urban	1-5km		Walking distance
Recommended buffer to properties	Yes - distance not stated	Yes - distance not stated	Yes - distance not stated							
Cost estimates		•	•		•				•	
Off-lead area shared with sports field	Yes. Premier sporting surfaces excluded	Yes	Yes. A-grade & synthetic excluded	Yes. A-grade & synthetic excluded	No	Yes	Should be avoided	No	Yes	N/A

Figure 3.1: benchmarking recommendations from other councils' dog off-lead strategies

Key findings:

- Strategies consistently highlight the need for clear design guidelines, strong management, and appropriate infrastructure.
- Gap analysis is often used to determine locations of off-lead facilities, with facilities ideally within walking distance of most residences.
- A minimum fenced size of 3,000m² is common, though larger areas are preferred.
- Sharing dog off-lead areas with sports grounds is often recommended as a way to optimise the use of open space.
- It is common for councils to aim to provide at least one dog off-lead area per urban suburb or sub-planning region, or within walking distance of most residents, to ensure equitable access across the municipality.
- Dog parks are valued for providing safe off-lead exercise, supporting socialisation, and building community among guardians.
- Risks include undesirable behaviours, environmental impacts (e.g., waste), and lack of supervision.
- Common infrastructure features include fencing, double-gates, and natural elements.
- The site selection process typically includes compiling a list of potential sites, narrowing the list by eliminating unsuitable locations, and conducting a detailed analysis of the shortlisted sites.
- Where councils allow dog off-lead activities to occur on sports fields, high-classification, premier, A-grade, or synthetic playing surfaces are typically excluded from off-lead use.

4. Engagement

4.1 Community Engagement Outcomes

As part of this study, past community engagement materials from relevant projects were reviewed. These included findings from engagement activities undertaken for Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan, master plans and concept plans relating to proposed fenced dog parks in parks and reserves, as well as other related projects. In addition, customer service requests and community petitions were examined to provide further insight into community sentiment, key issues, and expectations.

The 2021 consultation on managing dogs in parks and reserves revealed strong community interest in dog-friendly spaces, with over 1,100 survey responses. A majority of respondents were registered dog owners, and many expressed support for dedicated fenced dog parks to improve safety and reduce conflict. Key concerns included uncontrolled off-lead dogs, irresponsible owner behaviour (particularly waste management), and the impact of dogs on wildlife and sports fields. Safety issues, especially around children and shared spaces, were frequently mentioned, along with calls for clearer signage and better enforcement.

Customer service requests echoed these themes, with residents advocating for fenced dog parks to protect small or reactive dogs, improve safety near roads, and improved maintenance. There were also calls for improved infrastructure, such as bins, lighting, and water stations, and frustration over perceived council bias toward sports clubs. Many residents highlighted the social and emotional benefits of dog parks, particularly in the post-COVID context.

Site-specific feedback varied:

- At East Burwood Reserve residents opposed a proposed fenced dog park due to concerns about noise, waste, health risks, and traffic, which led to the proposal being removed from the master plan.
- Eley Park received a petition requesting upgrades to its existing off-lead area, including fencing and amenities.
- At Mahoney's and Morton Reserves, community backlash led Council to reverse a decision to leave the sports fields gates permanently open, citing safety and lack of consultation.
- The Simpson Park proposal for a fenced dog park received mixed feedback, with concerns about design and accessibility. A consultant report recommended broader policy development and better education rather than relying solely on fencing.
- A petition with 70 signatures requested a new off-lead dog park at Box Hill Gardens.
- A petition with 357 signatures requested a new off-lead dog park in Vermont.
- Council received two electronic petitions in relation to dogs at Morton Park, Blackburn. One petition with 318 signatures requested the Council reverse its decision to lock open the perimeter gates at Morton Park. Another petition with 778 signatures was also submitted, supporting the decision to lock the gates open at Morton Park to reduce sports field maintenance, enhance safety, and improve playing conditions. This second petition also noted that council should establish a purpose-built, fully fenced off-leash dog park in the large open space between the Morton Park Pavilion and the railway path, or in another suitable location.

4.2 Internal Engagement with Council Officers

In early September 2025, Council officers from Community Laws, Leisure and Recreation Services, Parks and Natural Environment, and Project Delivery and Assets participated in a series of workshops to explore all aspects of dog off-lead provision. While each department brought its own perspective, the concerns and discussion points were largely consistent, with recurring themes emerging across the sessions. Slight variations in focus reflected the specific responsibilities of each area, but collectively they highlighted a shared set of priorities and challenges. Overall, Council officers highlighted the complexity of balancing community expectations, operational realities, and strategic planning.

- **Conflict and enforcement:** Council officers noted that although laws require dogs to be under effective control and registered, enforcement is limited and complicated by gaps in signage, language barriers, and political sensitivities. Common issues include dogs off-lead in inappropriate areas, uncollected waste, and conflicts with sports clubs and other park users. Officers emphasised that education and community-led self-management are often more effective than fines in addressing these challenges.
- **Guardian responsibilities:** Dog registration is estimated at around 50%, and Council runs a range of outreach programs to improve compliance. Pop-up events, such as puppy training sessions and veterinary check-ups, have been well received, providing opportunities to engage with dog guardians and promote responsible behaviour. Officers also raised concerns that fenced parks may attract users who are less likely to train or control their dogs, potentially increasing complaints and resource demands.
- **Dogs and sports fields:** Council receives frequent complaints regarding shared use of sports fields. Existing off-lead areas, such as Bob Saker Oval, Mont Albert Reserve, Morton Park, and Simpson Park, present ongoing challenges including damage to playing surfaces, limited access due to sports scheduling, and community opposition to fencing proposals. Sporting clubs report frustration over dog-related damage and safety risks, particularly at high standard fields like Mahoney's and Morton Reserves. Mont Albert Reserve, however, is cited as a successful example of shared use with minimal conflict, largely due to community self-regulation.
- **Site selection:** Officers stressed the importance of selecting appropriate sites, ideally away from residential areas. They suggested leveraging land acquisitions or infrastructure projects to create new open space. Any potential future dog parks will require a clearly defined scope, community engagement, and thoughtful design to balance competing interests.
- **Key design considerations:** Recommended design elements include clear visibility between dogs and guardians, adequate lighting, varied terrain, gravel surfaces for easier maintenance, and educational signage. Officers expressed interest in tailoring parks to different dog types (e.g., small or reactive dogs) and using dog parks to promote community wellbeing and responsible ownership.

Key findings

- Overall, the engagement review highlights both strong support and nuanced concerns around fenced dog parks.
- Safety, conflict, and irresponsible guardian behaviour are key concerns.
- Existing spaces need better infrastructure including signage, bins, lighting, water, maintenance.
- Mixed feedback on proposed sites and locations within reserves.
- Education and community self-management seen as more effective than enforcement.
- Tension between dog use and sports field maintenance/safety is an ongoing issue.
- Importance of careful site selection, ideally away from residential areas.
- Design priorities include visibility, lighting, durable surfaces, signage, and options for different dog types.
- Balancing community expectations with operational and strategic realities remains complex.



5. Benchmarking & Precedents

5.1 Benchmarking Dog Parks and Off-Lead Areas

This study benchmarks the provision of dog parks across comparable councils, analysing the number of facilities in relation to population size, municipal land area, and estimated dog ownership.

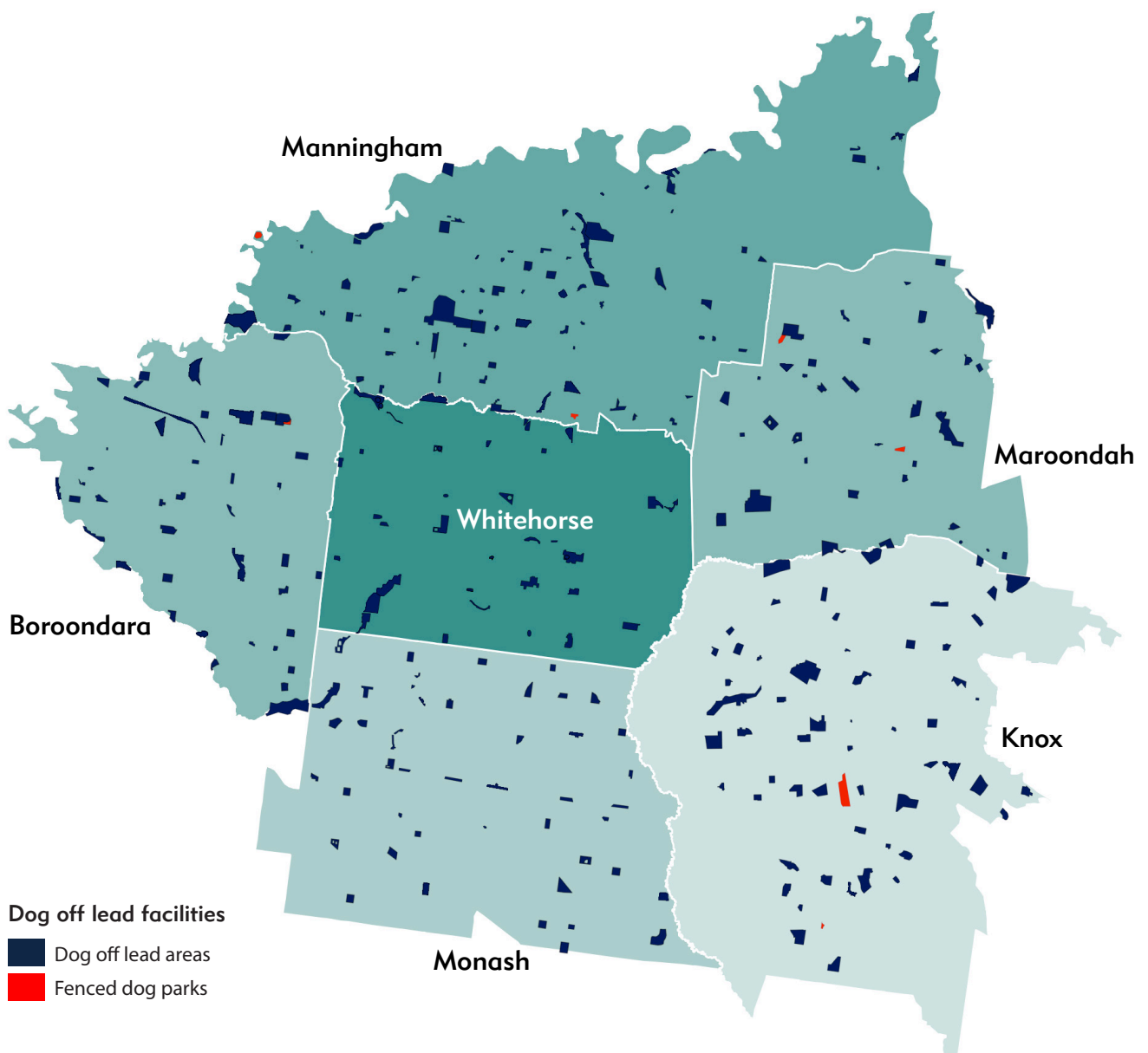


Figure 5.1: Spatial distribution of dog off-lead areas across Whitehorse and the neighbouring Local Government Areas

	Whitehorse	Manningham	Maroondah	Knox	Monash	Boroondara
Registered dogs	12,171	9,305	13,720	18,805	11,624	14,486
Land area	64.2km ²	112.3km ²	61.38km ²	113.8km ²	81.44km ²	60.17km ²
Registered dogs per ha	1.9	0.8	2.2	1.6	1.4	2.4
Population	183,462	131,761	119,354	163,302	209,268	178,008
Registered dogs per population	1 dog for every 15.1 people	1 dog for every 14.1 people	1 dog for every 8.7 people	1 dog for every 8.7 people	1 dog for every 18 people	1 dog for every 12.3 people
Dog off-lead strategy					Monash Dog Off-Lead Policy, 2022	
Dedicated fenced dog park	0	2	2	2 (with 2 more planned)	0	1
Unfenced off-lead areas	32	89	35		47	47
Registered dogs per off-lead area	380	104	392		247	308
Shared sports fields and off-lead areas	18	24	17		22	20
Sports fields with dog restrictions	Some reserves exclude dog off-lead activity	Some reserves exclude dog off-lead activity including synthetic surfaces	Some reserves exclude dog off-lead activity on athletics tracks, netball courts and main ovals	No reserves exclude dog off-lead activity	No dogs on specialised sports fields, premier A grade sports grounds, or leased facilities	Some reserves exclude dog off-lead activity

Table 5.2: Benchmarking the provision of dog parks with neighbouring councils relative to population, dog registrations and land area.

Key findings

- Dog off-lead facilities are scattered across Whitehorse and neighbouring LGAs, which can be considered when identifying sites for dog off-lead facilities including dog parks.
- Neighbouring LGAs, even with bigger human and dog populations, larger land area, and more off-lead facilities, have between 0-2 fenced dog parks (noting that this number is expected to increase in the coming year or two).
- All neighbouring LGAs share off lead areas with sports fields with some sports field types excluded.

5.2 Precedent Study

As part of the study, a number of local examples of dog parks have been analysed to provide insights into how other local government authorities deliver fenced dog parks. These examples, located across different council areas represent a range of different dog parks, examining factors such as size, facilities, infrastructure, surface treatments, and management approaches.

Dog parks across metropolitan Melbourne

The following table outlines a selection of dog parks across metropolitan Melbourne, identified through a review of online resources, including independent blogs and community platforms such as The Yap Pack (www.theyappack.com.au). The Yap Pack highlights key features valued by dog guardians in successful parks, including safety and security, dog-friendly amenities, diverse play areas, location variety, and a welcoming community atmosphere.

Further research undertaken for this report, including consultation with council officers, analysis of other LGAs' strategies, and review of community feedback, also informed the selection of parks for analysis.

The dog parks included in Figure 5.3, were chosen to represent a variety of sizes, locations, and settings across Melbourne, taking into account factors such as proximity to residential areas, availability of car parking, range of facilities, and surface types; factors relevant to understanding what makes a successful dog park in different contexts.

In addition to reviewing examples across metropolitan Melbourne, a range of dog parks from elsewhere in Australia and internationally were also examined to understand the diversity of approaches to dog park design and delivery. This broader review provided insights into how different contexts, such as climate, urban density, available space, and community expectations, influence the planning, design, and management of dog parks. A summary of these case studies is provided in Appendix E, highlighting innovative approaches in providing fenced dog parks.



The quiet zone at Thomas Oval Fenced Dog Park in South Yarra



The agility equipment at Green Gully Reserve, Keilor

	Curtain Square Fenced Dog Park Carlton North	Eades Dog Park, West Melbourne	Pawfield Fenced Dog Park Caulfield	Thomas Oval Fenced Dog Park Como Park	Green Gully Reserve Fenced Dog Park Keilor	Martin Reserve Fenced Dog Park West Footscray	Aranga Reserve Fenced Dog Park Donvale	PA Burns Reserve Altona
Height of fence	1.2m	1.2m	1.2m	1.2m	1.2m	1.5m	1.5m	1.2m
Double gate entry			•	•	•	•	•	•
Size	920m ²	2,200m ²	2,500m ²	4,600m ²	6,550m ²	10,000m ²	10,500m ²	27,500m ²
Surface	Gravel	Grass & gravel	Grass & gravel	Turf & mulch	Grass & gravel	Gravel, mulch & grass	Grass and synthetic turf	Grass
Hardstand at entry		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Natural shade	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Type of vegetation	Trees only	Trees, garden bed to perimeter	Trees, garden bed outside of fence	Trees and garden bed to perimeter	Trees only	Trees, garden bed outside of fence	Trees and garden bed to perimeter	Trees, garden bed mostly outside fence
Rocks & logs		•	•	•	•	•		•
Structured shade				•	•	•		
Seating	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Signage	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Water fountain	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Dog bag dispensers	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Bins	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Walking path				•	•	•		•
Off-street parking					•		•	•
Shared trail access				•	•			•
Area of separate section for small/ quiet dogs			Approx. 500m ² (20%)		Approx. 1500m ² (23%)	Approx. 2000m ² (25%)	Approx. 1900m ² (18%)	
Agility equipment			•	•	•	•	•	
Sand pit/ digging areas		•		•	•	•		
Wash station								•
Lighting	Street lighting	•		•				
Irrigation		•	•	•				
Access restrictions	Quiet time before 8am							
Buffer to residential neighbours	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0m - shared fence with residences	min. 15m	N/A
Splash pad						•		

Figure 5.3: Benchmarking of fenced dog parks and associated facilities within metropolitan Melbourne

5.3 Small scale dog parks

Small scale fenced dog parks, typically those under 3,000 m² in size, can play an important role in filling gaps within the broader network of off-lead areas, particularly in high-density areas where open space is constrained. They are well-suited to busy urban parks, or on unconventional or underutilised parcels of land and in locations where opportunities for dogs to exercise off-lead are limited.

Inner metropolitan councils, such as the City of Yarra and the City of Melbourne, demonstrate how small-scale dog parks can complement larger off-lead facilities. The City of Yarra, with a population of 100,706 and a land area of 19.5 km² (less than one-third the size of Whitehorse and with more than half its population), provides 23 off-lead reserves, including fenced dog parks, off-lead areas, and unfenced sports grounds. Similarly, the City of Melbourne, with a comparable population to Whitehorse (189,381) and just over half its land area (37.3 km²), manages 18 off-lead areas comprising fenced dog parks, off-lead reserves, and selected sports grounds. Both councils also provide small, fenced dog parks, such as Curtain Square Dog Park (920 m²) in Carlton North and Eades Dog Park (2,200 m²) in West Melbourne, that offer localised off-lead opportunities in areas not otherwise serviced by larger facilities. The implementation of these small-scale dog parks is often opportunistic, taking advantage of residual land or smaller open spaces that may be suitable for conversion to a dog park.

Evidence suggests that the preferred size for a dog park is over 3,000 m² as they provide greater capacity, flexibility, and user satisfaction. In contrast, small-scale dog parks carry a higher risk of overcrowding, and surface degradation and may be unable to accommodate a wide range of amenities. Designing small scale dog parks therefore requires careful consideration to manage wear and distribute use. Small scale dog park should be planned to serve a local catchment and short-stay visits rather than act as destination facilities. The presence of other nearby off-lead areas is also important to avoid excessive concentration of dogs in a single location. Small scale dog park may also involve higher management and operational costs for Council.

Given these factors It is therefore recommended that the delivery of larger dog parks be prioritised. Small-scale dog parks should only be considered opportunistic additions in locations where there is a demonstrated gap in off-lead provision, limited availability of larger open spaces, or where they can make effective use of underutilised land to serve a clearly defined local need.



Eades Park in West Melbourne illustrates how a small, urban open space can be adapted to provide a valuable local dog park for nearby residents.



Curtain Square Dog Park is located on a corner of a larger park in Carlton North

Key findings

- Regardless of size, there are a number of consistent amenities and qualities found across dog parks in Melbourne.
- Small scale dog parks (i.e. those under 3,000 m²) can be an effective way to make use of small or underutilised spaces, particularly in municipalities where open space is finite. They can service local catchments that are otherwise under-serviced in terms of access to dog off-lead areas.
- Small scale dog parks should only be established where suitable sites and a demonstrated community need exist. These are considered opportunistic additions that make use of small or underutilised spaces, particularly in areas where open space is limited.

6. Issues and Opportunities

The research outlined in the previous section of the report, provide evidence to inform future decisions regarding dog parks. The review of strategic documents and academic research, consideration of Council's past experiences, feedback gathered from the community, benchmarking, and the analysis of case studies and precedents, provides an understanding of both the challenges and opportunities associated with dog parks.

With this research and understanding, we can now consider whether fenced dog parks are needed in Whitehorse. If so, what qualities would best meet the needs of both dogs and the community? And finally, what management approaches would help ensure their long-term success?

The following section summarises the key issues identified through the background research, highlights evidence-based findings, and outlines opportunities and recommendations to inform the delivery of dog parks.



6.1 Recommendations for Planning, Design, and Operation of Dog Parks

The following issue response summary tables examine whether Whitehorse City Council should provide fenced dog parks and present recommendations for their planning, design, and operation. They consider background research, current challenges faced by Council, community feedback, and dog park provision in neighbouring LGAs to assess whether there is sufficient interest and need to support the development of a dog park. The tables are informed by a combination of data, evidence, and research and are intended to provide clear guidance for the effective delivery of dog parks. Additional analysis, discussion, and detailed references are provided in earlier chapters.



Issue



Data and discussion



Opportunity

Planning

Whether or not Whitehorse Council should provide dog parks

COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITY: Local governments are legislatively responsible for managing dog ownership under the Victorian Domestic Animals Act 1994.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide dog parks as part Council's responsibilities related to pet management.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population growth: According to the ABS, Whitehorse has experienced steady population growth, a trend that is expected to continue. As the population increases, so too will the number of dog owners and dogs, leading to greater demand for open spaces and supporting facilities.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide dog parks in response to population and living trends that indicate growing demand.

High-density living: ABS data shows that 37.9% of dwellings in Whitehorse are medium or high-density. With fewer private outdoor areas available in this type of housing, there is increased reliance on open spaces and the facilities they offer.

Dog population: Data from the Pet Census (2023) and Council estimates suggest that not all dogs are formally registered. Consequently, the actual number of dogs in Whitehorse is likely higher than the 12,171 registrations indicate. Data also show that dog ownership in Australia is increasing (Pets in Australia, 2025).

COMMUNITY DEMAND

Engagement outcomes: The review of engagement materials from recent community consultation undertaken to date reflect support for fenced dog parks (refer to chapter 4). However it is important to note that the majority of respondents were registered dog owners.

Use of sports fields: Continued community use of sports fields for dog activities, despite ongoing conflicts over access and scheduling amongst other issues, indicates a demand for fenced dog parks. Community responses to Council regarding the proposal of leaving gates open at some sports fields further reinforce this.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide dog parks as a way to respond to community interest and potentially reduce conflicts between sports field users and dog walkers by providing an alternative fenced off-lead space. Review the use of sports fields for dog off-lead activity as dedicated dog parks are delivered.

Whether or not Whitehorse Council should provide dog parks (continued)

BENEFITS OF DOG PARKS

Dogs: A review of academic research (see Chapter 3) indicates that dog parks provide a safe, controlled environment for off-lead exercise and socialisation, including for dogs in training or requiring structured activity. They also enable off-lead activity in busy parks or near areas where it would otherwise be incompatible.

People: A review of academic research (see Chapter 3) highlights that dog parks benefit guardians through social interaction and community building. They enable people of all abilities, including those with low mobility, older adults, and people with a disability, to exercise their dogs off-lead. They also provide separation that allows other park users to enjoy nearby spaces without unwanted interaction with dogs.

USE OF SPORTS FIELDS:

Dog walkers frequently use sports fields as off-lead areas, even when these spaces are primarily designated for sporting activities. Despite the issues associated with this shared use (outlined below), this suggests demand for dedicated, fenced dog parks. However, the overlap in use can dilute the value of these sites. A review of neighbouring LGAs (see Chapter 5) indicates that shared use of sports fields for dog off-lead activity is a common practice.

Health and safety: Feedback from the community and Council officers (see Chapter 4) highlights ongoing issues, including damage to sports fields from dogs digging, which can cause injury to players, and dog faeces, which poses health risks.

Access and scheduling: Feedback from the community and Council officers (see Chapter 4) notes tensions between dog walkers and sporting clubs, particularly around limited access during games and training.

Maintenance: Feedback from Council officers (see Chapter 4) highlights ongoing issues, including damage to sports fields and the need for regular upkeep, particularly before training sessions and games. Clubs often provide support for this maintenance, as the frequency and extent of inspections and upkeep can exceed Council's resources.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide dog parks to realise the benefits for dogs and their guardians.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide dog parks as an alternative to the current reliance on sports fields, which has led to a number of issues.

Where off-lead use of sport fields is to be continued, consider principles identified at the end of this section.

Finding the right number of dog parks

BENCHMARKING: A review of neighbouring LGAs shows that they typically have one to two dog parks; however, this is evolving, with several recently opened through state government funding and further developments underway.

EQUITY: With the upcoming SRL-funded dog park in Box Hill, the area will gain a new temporary facility; however, because Box Hill is not centrally located within Whitehorse, resident access will be inequitable.

RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING OFF-LEAD FACILITIES: Dog parks are designed for specific types of dogs and guardians, making them specialised facilities that respond to particular needs. While existing off-lead areas provide convenient access for most users, dog parks offer additional opportunities. Benchmarking shows that dog parks comprise a small proportion of total off-lead facilities and tend to be destinations.

BALANCING DELIVERY, SPACE ALLOCATION AND OPEN SPACE NEEDS: Past experience with dog parks shows the importance of balancing community demand with the need to preserve flexible, open space. While off-lead areas cater to a significant portion of the community, dog parks dedicate valuable open space to a single user group, potentially limiting opportunities for broader recreational use.

SCENARIO TESTING: To determine the recommended number of dog parks, high-level testing of scenarios was conducted:

- Scenario 1 - providing a dog park within 1km of most residents would equate to approximately 15 dog parks
- Scenario 2 - providing a dog park within 2km of most residents would equate to approximately 6 dog parks
- Scenario 3 - providing a dog park within 3-5km of most residents would equate to approximately 2-3 dog parks

Dog parks are specialised facilities, and most users are expected to access them by car. Scenario testing suggests that 3 facilities would provide an effective catchment of approximately 3 - 5 km. Based on benchmarking of neighbouring LGAs, Scenario 3 most closely aligns with typical dog park provision and is considered the most realistic in terms of Council's capacity to deliver the required facilities.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide three large scale dog parks.

Where opportunities are presented and there is an evident need, provide small scale dog parks in addition to the large scale dog parks.

Ongoing monitoring should be implemented to track demand over time, with the data used to guide future planning, including the potential need for additional parks or modifications to existing facilities.

Finding the right locations for dog parks	<p>SITE SELECTION GUIDELINES: A review of dog off-lead strategies for other LGAs, supported by relevant academic research (see Chapter 3), underscores the importance of clear site selection guidelines to assist Council in identifying suitable locations.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION: Develop site selection guidelines that are informed by the Strategic Document Review and address concerns raised by the community.</p> <p>Engage with the community on site selection guidelines and potential future dog park sites. (note that this is currently outside the scope of this project).</p> <p>Refer to Chapter 7: Site Selection Guidelines</p>
	<p>COMMUNITY CONCERNS: Previous attempts to establish a dog park have been unsuccessful, largely due to community concerns about the proposed location, (see Chapter 4). This suggests that clear site selection guidelines could support the successful delivery of future dog parks.</p>	
	<p>ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL STRATEGIES: The Whitehorse Open Space Strategy (2025) recommends establishing dog parks within regional and municipal parks so that large open spaces provide a range of facilities.</p>	
Limited availability of open space	<p>SPACE ALLOCATION: Off-lead facilities serve a significant portion of the community. However, fenced dog parks dedicate sections of public open space to a single user group, which may limit access or use for other recreational activities and community members.</p>	<p>CONSIDERATION: Locate dog parks in underutilised spaces within open spaces so they do not replace high-demand recreation use. Refer to Chapter 7: Site Selection Guidelines</p>
	<p>EXISTING OPEN SPACE: Whitehorse is a relatively densely developed area, and its open spaces are already tied to established uses and values. Introducing a fenced dog park would typically require changes to these uses, which, as noted in discussions with Council officers, are often met with community resistance.</p>	
	<p>ACQUIRING NEW OPEN SPACE: Council officer feedback indicates that there are challenges associated with acquiring significant new parcels of land in order to develop open space.</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION: Provide fenced dog parks as part of the broader network of off-lead and dog facilities.</p> <p>CONSIDERATION: Consider alternative approaches to delivering dog parks, such as partnering with the private sector, advocating for facilities in non-traditional locations (e.g. rooftops), and collaborating with other levels of government and agencies.</p>
	<p>ALTERNATIVE DOG PARKS: A review of case studies (see Appendix E) suggests that there are several approaches to delivering dog parks beyond conventional methods.</p>	



Issue



Data and discussion



Opportunity

Design

Lack of dog supervision

UNSUPERVISED BEHAVIOUR: Feedback from the community and Council officers (see Chapter 4) indicates that some guardians may be unaware of their dogs' actions in fenced or semi fenced off-lead areas (i.e. sports fields), such as toileting or digging.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS: A review of dog parks (see Section 4.2) and academic research (see Chapter 3) indicates that park design influences guardian behaviour. For example, square parks without walking paths tend to encourage guardians to remain stationary and socialise, leading to less attention on their dogs.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop design guidelines that consider how the design of dog parks improve guardian behaviour such by considering the shape of the dog park as well as supporting facilities and infrastructure.

Refer to Chapter 8: Design of Dog Parks.

Potential ecological risks

ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

The implementation of dog parks may give rise to several ecological concerns, including potential impacts on fauna (e.g. dogs chasing or killing wildlife), the influence of dog scents on sensitive habitats (e.g. predator scent making habitats unsuitable), and contamination of waterways from dog waste.

Council's position: The Strategic Document review (refer to section 2.1), highlights Council's desire for open space and associated facilities to promote biodiversity and ecological protection.

Community concerns: Community feedback (see Chapter 4) highlights concerns about potential environmental impacts.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop design guidelines that include measures to address the key issues identified, such as avoiding sensitive ecological locations and ensuring adequate fencing and buffer treatments.

Refer to Chapter 8: Design of Dog Parks.

Wellbeing and socialisation for dogs

BENEFITS OF DOG PARKS: As discussed above, a review of academic research (see Chapter 3) indicates that dog parks offer a safe, secure environment for off-lead exercise. They also support socialisation among dogs and provide a controlled setting where dogs in training or requiring structured activity can be exercised safely.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop design guidelines that include a safe and secure facility, facilitate socialisation, and provide opportunities for exercise for dogs.

Refer to Chapter 8: Design of Dog Parks.

Wellbeing and recreation for dog guardians

PROMOTE RECREATION: The Strategic Document review (refer to section 2.1), highlights Council's desire for open space and associated facilities to promote recreation for the community.

SOCIAL BENEFITS: A review of academic research (see Chapter 3) highlights that dog parks are valued for the benefits they provide to guardians, including opportunities for socialisation and community building.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop design guidelines that consider how the design of dog parks can promote recreation, health and wellbeing for dog guardians.

Refer to Chapter 8: Design of Dog Parks.

Dog park etiquette

BEHAVIOURAL SIGNAGE: Academic research (see Chapter 3) suggest the use of clear readable signs that outline dog and guardian behaviour expectations.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop design guidelines that provide direction on signs that encourage responsible and respectful dog park use.

Refer to Chapter 8: Design of Dog Parks.



Issue



Data and discussion



Opportunity

Management and maintenance

Problematic dog behaviour

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS: Council officer feedback (see Chapter 4) suggests that events and programs, such as 'Pups in Parks,' are effective in promoting responsible dog ownership and behaviour, especially for owners who may not recognise behavioural issues in their dogs.

RECOMMENDATION: Continue to deliver events and educational programs that promote responsible dog ownership and behaviour, with the potential to incorporate incentives. Dog parks offer a suitable setting for these initiatives, serving both as a management tool and a way to encourage their use.

Responsible use of dog parks

DOGS UNDER EFFECTIVE CONTROL: Under Council's community laws, dogs may only be off-lead if they are under effective control by their guardians. This requirement exists because uncontrolled dogs can pose a risk to people, other dogs, and wildlife.

EDUCATION: Council officer feedback (see Chapter 4) suggests that education, rather than enforcement, is more effective in encouraging responsible use of dog off-lead areas, and is also Council's preferred approach.

COMPLIANCE MONITORING: Academic research (see Chapter 3), recommends that Council undertake compliance monitoring to ensure users are using dog parks responsibly.

BEHAVIOURAL SIGNAGE: Academic research (see Chapter 3) suggests using clear, readable signs are successful in communicating expected behaviours for dogs and their guardians.

SELF-MANAGED USE: Feedback from Council officers (see Chapter 4) indicates that community-managed sites generally show lower levels of conflict and damage.

RECOMMENDATION: Undertake compliance monitoring that focuses on education rather than enforcement. This could be further supported by events and programs.

RECOMMENDATION: Install welcoming, clear and readable signs that outline expectations around the respectful use of dog parks.

CONSIDERATION: Encourage dog walkers to contribute to the responsible management of potential new dog parks, guided by insights from other well managed sites.

Recommended principles for off-lead use of sports fields

Where it is proposed that there is to be dog off-lead use of sport fields, it is recommended that the following principles be considered:

1. Off-lead designations should only apply to sports fields that can accommodate dog use without compromising turf quality or scheduled sporting activities.
2. Off-lead areas should be distributed across the municipality to prevent overuse of specific sites and ensure fair access for all residents.
3. Off-lead sports fields should be considered alongside future dedicated dog parks to create a connected network of dog off-lead areas and reduce pressure on sports fields.
4. Appropriate management measures should support safe and responsible use. These may include partial enclosures where suitable, clear signage, and site-specific controls to manage user behaviour. Ongoing monitoring of site conditions and user behaviour should inform adaptive management.
5. All off-lead areas should reflect best practice, comply with relevant legislation, and align with Council's strategic frameworks, including the Domestic Animal Management Plan, reserve master plans, and sports ground classifications.

6.2 Implementation

The preceding tables provide evidence to inform future decisions regarding dog parks. The following proposes actions for implementation based on recommendations listed above.

ACTION		TIMEFRAME
PLANNING	Engage with the community on the site selection guidelines presented in this report.	Short term (0 - 2 years)
	Develop a shortlist of potential sites for dog parks and undertake site selection assessments.	Short term (0 - 2 years)
	Continue to monitor usage patterns and field conditions to inform future management decisions, especially at high conflict off-lead sports fields.	Short term (0 - 2 years)
	Undertake an interim review of off-lead designations at identified conflict hot spots, in conjunction with the planning and delivery of dog parks, and subject to community consultation.	Short term (0 - 2 years)
	Undertake a full review of off-lead designation to identify opportunities to reduce reliance on sports fields and to address gaps in off-lead area provision.	Medium term (2 - 5 years)
	Identify and plan for small scale dog parks where suitable sites are available and a clear community need exists. These parks should be considered opportunistic additions.	Ongoing
	Implement monitoring to track use of established dog parks and demand over time, with the data used to guide future planning, including the potential need for additional parks or modifications to existing facilities.	Ongoing
DESIGN	Design two large scale dog parks in accordance with the adopted design guidelines (refer to Chapter 8). Develop signage that encourages responsible, respectful, and safe dog park use.	Medium term (2 - 5 years)
	Design one additional large scale dog park in accordance with the adopted design guidelines (refer to Chapter 8).	Long term (5 - 10 years)
	Design additional small or large scale dog parks, if monitoring identifies a need, in accordance with the guidelines in Chapter 8.	Ongoing
MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE	Provide community education on appropriate use of sports fields and potential impacts of dog activity on turf quality and user safety.	Short term (0 - 2 years)
	Continue to deliver events and educational programs that promote responsible dog ownership and behaviour, with the potential to incorporate incentives. Dog parks offer a suitable setting for these initiatives, serving both as a management tool and a way to encourage their use.	Ongoing – implemented annually and reviewed periodically to respond to community needs.
	Undertake compliance monitoring that focuses on education rather than enforcement. This could be further supported by events and programs.	Ongoing – integrated into regular ranger or animal management activities.
	Encourage dog walkers to contribute to the responsible management of potential new dog parks, guided by insights from past experience at other well managed sites.	Ongoing - post construction of dog parks.
	Deliver maintenance & management programs for off-lead dog parks.	Ongoing

7. Site Selection Guidelines

7.1 Site Selection

The process for selecting sites for dog parks should follow several key steps. The first step is to identify a range of potential sites for consideration, then refine this list to develop a shortlist. The second step involves assessing each shortlisted site to understand its existing and potential features, qualities, and constraints. Finally, community consultation should be undertaken to ensure the preferred locations align with local needs and preferences. This process is outlined in detail on the following pages.





Process



Key considerations

1. IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SITES

Develop a list of suitable locations for further investigation

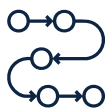
Existing dog park locations: Undertake mapping of existing fenced dog parks to assess current provision and avoid locating new sites too close to existing facilities, which could create issues of equity. Consider potential sites that could help relieve pressure on sports fields currently being used for dog off-lead activities. While there are currently no permanent fenced dog parks in Whitehorse, this is expected to change with the development of a temporary facility associated with the SRL works. This site should be viewed as a trial opportunity to test and monitor community use, management needs, and design outcomes, rather than as part of the long-term provision of dog parks.

Potential sites: Develop an initial list of potential sites for fenced dog parks. Consider underutilised or decommissioned spaces and locations within regional or municipal parks. Explore areas which have been identified as having gaps within the current network of off-lead areas, as noted in section 2.3 of the report 'Key Findings'. Add new sites to the list as they arise, such as through community feedback or formal requests.

Suitability review : Each potential site should be assessed to determine its level of suitability for development as a dog park. Sites can generally be categorised as:

1. **Already Suitable** - The site meets most or all criteria with minimal modification required.
2. **Not Ideal and/or May Need Further Work to Make Suitable** - The site has potential but may require design adjustments, additional infrastructure, or minor mitigation works. These sites may have financial implications that should be considered in future budgeting.
3. **Not Suitable and Unlikely to Be Feasible** - The site contains significant constraints that are not practical or cost-effective to address. Such sites should be eliminated from further consideration.

Sites with unresolvable constraints, such as contamination that cannot be remediated, land within the Public Conservation and Resource Zone (PCRZ), or land affected by Environmental Significance (ESO) or Vegetation Protection (VPO) overlays should be excluded immediately. These overlays typically indicate areas of high environmental value or ecological sensitivity where the development of a dog park would not be appropriate or permissible.



Process



Key considerations

2. ANALYSE SHORTLISTED SITES

Following selection of a preferred site (or sites), assess the existing characteristics and potential of the site to deliver the desired functions and qualities.

Existing uses and values: What is the current use of the site, what impacts would a dog park have on this use, and are these impacts able to be managed by design and management responses? Past experience has shown the kinds of concerns the community has regarding the change of use. Anticipating these early allows for effective design and management responses. Consider the following potential impacts:

1. Primary use / activity conflict - Potential displacement or reduced availability for organised activities, and possible impacts on overall park amenity.
2. Noise and amenity for nearby users - Risk of reduced enjoyment for adjacent park users and neighbours, potentially leading to complaints.
3. Ecological impact - Potential ecological degradation and loss of nature-based experiences for other users, such as birdwatchers and walkers.
4. Circulation and shared path use - Possible conflicts between user groups (e.g. walkers and cyclists)
5. Infrastructure and amenity conflicts - Existing infrastructure capacity may be impacted, with increased demand on facilities such as parking, pathways, and water fountains from dog park users.
6. Cultural and heritage values - Potential damage to heritage values; community opposition.

Accessibility: Is the site easily accessible, or are there barriers that could limit access (e.g. entrance located on a narrow or dead-end street)? Are there existing pedestrian paths, or is there capacity to provide them? Park access should be clearly defined and safe to access (avoiding major road crossings where possible) to encourage use and ensure equitable, inclusive access for all visitors.

Visibility: Is the site visible from surrounding areas? Sites should be visible to make them easy to locate and access. Opportunities for passive surveillance should also be considered.

Shade: Does the site have existing shade, or is there potential to provide it? Shade is a key design consideration and should be provided at all dog parks to benefit both dogs and their guardians. Existing trees or structures can offer immediate relief and reduce the need for additional shade structures.

Electricity connection: Is there existing electricity infrastructure available, or can it be easily provided? Using existing infrastructure helps avoid the cost and complexity of new electrical installations. Most parks in Whitehorse use solar power which can also be considered in place of electrical connections.

Water connection: Is there an existing water connection, or can one be easily provided? Water is an essential provision in a dog park. As installing new or difficult connections can be costly, existing water infrastructure should be considered where possible.

2. ANALYSE SHORTLISTED SITES continued

Adjacent activities: Assess whether nearby activities are compatible with a dog park and identify where design or management measures (such as fencing, landscaping, or buffers) can be used to minimise potential conflicts. Some open space uses (such as cycling trails, BBQ/picnic areas, or playgrounds) may require higher fencing, separation or screening.

Amenities: Consider whether existing facilities such as seating, shade, drinking fountains, or toilets are available to support the dog park. Toilets are not a requirement for dog parks but may be beneficial where an existing toilet block can be conveniently shared. It is acceptable if amenities are not yet in place, provided there is capacity to incorporate them as part of the development. Amenities enhance user comfort and contribute to the overall park experience.



Topography, drainage, and flood risk: Assess whether the site is relatively flat (some variation acceptable) and drains well. Sites with poor drainage, low-lying areas, or prone to occasional flooding can become muddy and unusable; minor issues may be mitigated with raised or well-drained paths, reinforced surfaces, swales, or retention basins. Sites with frequent or severe flooding should generally be avoided, as mitigation may be costly or impractical.

Environmental buffers: Assess whether there is sufficient space to provide appropriate buffers and/or fencing to protect environmentally significant areas. Buffers from biodiversity corridors, fauna habitats, areas with endangered species, significant wetlands, and other high-value habitats may be required to minimise potential impacts from dogs. Buffer distances should be treated as indicative, with each site assessed on its specific environmental features, values, and constraints. Consider the existing circumstances - for example, if an environmentally sensitive area is already used for off-lead activity, introducing a designated fenced area may improve management and reduce impacts compared with current conditions.

1. Low-value habitats: 10–50 m buffer, where a smaller setback may adequately protect fringe vegetation and function.
2. High-value habitats: 50–100 m (or larger) buffer recommended. These sites should be treated as high priority to avoid siting a dog park unless impacts can be avoided or very carefully mitigated.

Residential buffers: Assess the need for buffers to nearby residences on a site-specific basis, recognising that buffer distances may vary depending on context and constraints. Prioritise sites that do not directly border residential properties. Where adequate separation is not possible, mitigation measures should be implemented to minimise potential negative impacts (actual or perceived) on neighbouring residents.

Parking: Is there existing off-street parking, or can it be accommodated if required? Larger or district-level dog parks are likely to attract visitors who drive and should provide adequate parking. Smaller, locally focused dog parks that primarily serve nearby residents may not require dedicated parking, provided there is safe pedestrian access.

 Process	 Key considerations
3. CONSULT THE COMMUNITY Undertake community engagement activities on the preferred sites.	Consult with the community on the preferred site(s). Community consultation is a key step in building support for potential dog parks and ensuring the design meets user needs.

7.2 Alternative Approaches

Given the limited availability of open space and the challenges associated with acquiring new land, Council may consider alternative approaches to the delivery of dog parks. Traditional models that rely solely on re-purposing public open space may not always be feasible, particularly in areas or locations where open space is already highly utilised and has established uses and values. By exploring non-traditional solutions, there is potential to provide high-quality facilities to complement existing off-lead facilities in the municipality. Some examples of different approaches to dog parks is included in Appendix E.

Partnering with the private sector

One potential approach is partnering with the private sector, including collaborations with developers, businesses, and community organisations, to deliver dog parks in spaces that might not traditionally house them.

This could involve advocating for developers to incorporate dog parks within new residential complexes and commercial developments, providing convenient, accessible amenities for residents, employees, and visitors, and supporting the wellbeing of both dogs and their guardians. It could also include working with businesses to establish member-based dog clubs, private dog playgrounds, or fenced dog parks associated with commercial ventures, such as cafes and other public-facing establishments.

This approach enables Council to leverage private development opportunities to deliver additional fenced dog facility.

Transforming underused council facilities into dog parks

There is the potential to transform underused facilities or unconventional spaces into dog parks, making efficient use of existing assets. Sites that are generally underutilised and not considered for traditional open space uses, such as the rooftops of public car parks or spaces beneath bridges, can be adapted to dog parks. For example, the City of Yarra's Curtain Square Street Dog Park demonstrates how urban spaces, in this case an underutilised corner of a park, can be successfully repurposed to a small scale dog park to service the local community.



Figure 7.1: The Curtain Square Dog Park in Carlton North illustrates how an underutilised space in an existing reserve can be transformed into a dog park.

By reimagining these spaces, Council can deliver additional dog parks without re-purposing open space that has existing uses and values assigned to it. This approach creates opportunities to deliver dog parks while promoting the efficient use of open space.

Collaborating across government and agencies

There is potential for Council to explore opportunities to collaborate with other levels of government and government agencies to provide dog parks on land that is not under its direct management. By partnering with the State Government, Melbourne Water, transport authorities, or utility providers for example, Council may be able to identify underutilised or surplus land suitable for dog parks. In addition, there is an opportunity to secure external funding from state or federal government programs, such as the Victorian Government's New and Upgraded Dog Parks Program, to support the delivery of new facilities. These collaborations could enable the development of dog parks in locations that might otherwise remain inaccessible to the community, while potentially sharing responsibilities for planning, delivery, management and maintenance. This approach creates opportunities to deliver dog parks without relying solely on Council's finite public open space network.

There is also an opportunity to deliver a temporary dog park as a community benefit, or 'sweetener,' associated with large and potentially disruptive projects. For example, during the construction of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), part of Box Hill Gardens is being used for project works, and in response, the SRL is creating new temporary open space on another site for the duration of the project. Similar approaches could be explored to offset the impacts of major infrastructure projects while providing new open spaces and facilities.

8. Design of Dog Parks

Design guidelines for dog parks should ensure they are safe, secure, and support both dog exercise and socialisation, while also promoting the health and wellbeing of dog guardians. Based on benchmarking of dog parks across Melbourne and recommendations from strategies developed by other LGAs, an area of approximately 3,000 m² is commonly identified as the preferred size for a traditional dog park comprising mostly grass, as this helps to avoid excessive wear. However, given Whitehorse's limited open space and the challenges Council faces in creating new open space, particularly in higher-density areas, where public open space is even more constrained, smaller dog parks (below 3,000 m²) may also be considered. These smaller parks will require specific design responses to ensure durability and functionality.

The guidelines below are organised according to the two types of dog parks Whitehorse is likely to provide: large scale dog parks (over 3,000 m²) and small scale dog parks (under 3,000 m²). They outline the typical facilities each type should include, as well as potential additional features that may be incorporated depending on budget, site suitability, and community demand.

8.1 Large Scale Dog Parks

The following design guidelines outline the key considerations for large scale dog parks (over 3,000 m²).

A large scale dog park is generally considered to be over 3,000 m² in size and functions as a 'destination' facility. Due to its scale and appeal, it is likely that many visitors will travel to the site by car.

HIGHLY DESIRABLE FEATURES	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
Shape: Dog parks should generally feature rounded or moderately linear layouts. Square or excessively narrow, elongated shapes are not recommended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourages smooth circulation which in turn encourages more active supervision.• Avoiding linear park layouts supports more active supervision, ensuring dog guardians remain engaged and within close proximity to their dogs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not be appropriate for all preferred sites, with area dimensions potentially requiring modification to achieve the preferred layout.
Fence: 1.2m high chain mesh or similar (noting that height will likely depend on site conditions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensures dogs remain contained.• Provides safety for both dogs and nearby pedestrians.• Can reduce off-lead conflicts with other park users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Could be visually intrusive if not well-integrated with landscape.
Entry point: Double gates with hardstand, min. 3.5m wide maintenance access gates. Consider multiple entry points to connect with other paths or nearby features.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevents dogs from escaping when entering/exiting.• Multiple access points improve circulation and connectivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple gates increase construction and maintenance costs.

Surface: Grass and gravel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of surfaces provides interest for the dogs to explore and play • Gravel is durable and aids drainage. • Grass is a soft playing surface for dogs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravel may be uncomfortable for some dogs and will require some maintenance to retain even coverage. • Grass requires high levels of maintenance to reduce degradation due to overuse.
Path: Accessible loop path within the dog park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides safe circulation for owners and dogs. Circulation can also encourage more active dog supervision. • Supports accessibility for all users. • Helps reduce wear on grassed areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional construction and maintenance costs. • Could limit usable play area.
Separate area for small, recovering, older and less confident dogs: Dog parks larger than 4,500 m ² should include a designated area for small, recovering, older and less confident dogs, comprising approximately 20% of the total area. Smaller parks may also consider incorporating a separate space where site conditions and demand make it feasible and beneficial.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces conflicts and injuries between large and small dogs. • Supports shy, older, recovering and less social dogs. • Encourages broader community use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May require additional fencing and maintenance. • Use may be limited if local demand for small-dog area is low.
Vegetation: Trees with small areas of garden bed to perimeter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides shade for users and dogs. • Improves aesthetics and environmental value. • Can act as visual screening or buffer. 	
Features: Rocks and logs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage natural play and exploration. • Enhance sensory and physical stimulation for dogs. 	
Furniture: Shelter and seating at appropriate intervals to meet user needs, taking into account the size and layout of the park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves comfort for owners and carers. • Provides shelter from weather. • Encourages longer visits and social interaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds installation and maintenance costs. • Encouraging socialisation can result in reduce supervision of dogs.
Lighting: Consider on-demand or sensor lighting (for year-round and after business hour use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves usability during early morning/evening. • Supports year-round use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation and maintenance cost. • May disturb nearby residents or wildlife.

Signage: Both behavioral and etiquette signage and well as information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educates users on rules and responsible behaviour. • Reduces conflicts and enhances safety. • Can be inexpensive and easily updated. 	
Water: Drinking fountain with dog bowl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides hydration for dogs and owners. • Encourages longer stays. • Supports animal welfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires regular maintenance and cleaning. • Can be costly to install, especially with plumbing.
Bins: with dog bag dispenser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports hygiene and responsible waste management. • Encourages users to pick up after dogs. • Reduces environmental impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires regular emptying and maintenance. • Can overflow or be vandalised.
Car parking: Where on-site car parking is limited or unavailable, consider providing additional parking nearby to support access to the dog park. Where possible, parking should be located close to the park in safe locations to allow dogs to be easily and safely loaded and unloaded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves accessibility for users from outside the immediate neighbourhood. • Enhances safety for dogs during drop-off/pick-up. • Supports increased visitation and use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased construction costs.
POTENTIAL ADDITIONAL FEATURES	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
Agility equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides mental and physical stimulation for dogs. • Attracts dog owners seeking exercise opportunities. • Can diversify play options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires regular maintenance and inspections. • Can be costly to install. • Usage levels can vary.
Dog wash station	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows owners to clean dogs after visits. • Enhances user satisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High installation and ongoing water costs. • Requires maintenance. • Usage levels can vary.
Splash pad: This could include a paved area with on-demand water jet and bubblers with rain gardens located nearby to capture the run off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages cooling and play in hot weather. • Can be integrated with stormwater management (rain gardens). • Adds visual and experiential interest, enhancing the park's appeal as a destination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High construction and maintenance cost. • Water use considerations and potential runoff issues. • Seasonal use may limit value.
Irrigation: Provision of irrigation for grassed areas should be considered to sustain full coverage and maintain usability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains grass coverage and usability. • Supports aesthetics and environmental benefits. • Reduces soil erosion and mud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation and water costs. • Requires ongoing maintenance.

Digging areas: This may include sand pits, mulch or mulch pits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a safe outlet for natural dog behaviour. Protects other areas from being dug up. Can enhance engagement and play variety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs regular replenishment and cleaning. Can become messy or smelly if not maintained.
Composting dog waste bins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmentally friendly waste management option. Reduces landfill contributions. Encourages responsible owner behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires monitoring, maintenance, and eventual emptying. Can produce odour if not managed properly. May be more costly than standard bins.

Consider providing facilities or additional features outside the dog park fence, such as seating and drinking fountains, so that they are accessible to all park users, not just those visiting the dog park. These amenities can enhance the overall usability and enjoyment of the surrounding park area for the broader community.

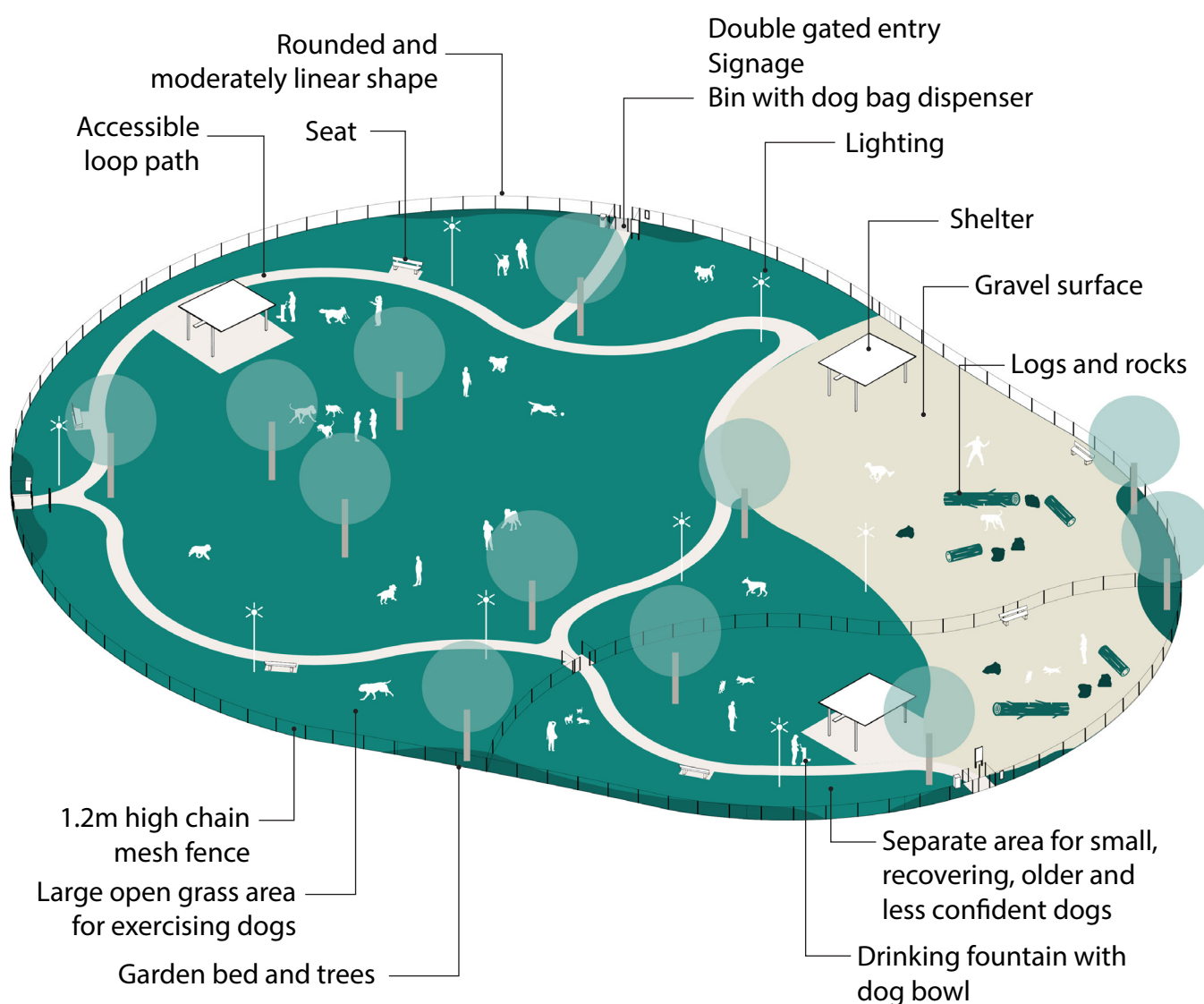


Figure 8.1: Diagram of example of large scale dog park (approximately 5,000m²), incorporating the features outlined in the above.

8.2 Small Scale Dog Parks

The following design guidelines outline the key considerations for small scale dog parks (under 3,000 m²).

A small scale dog park, generally under 3,000 m², is most suitable for areas with high urban density and serves a local catchment. These parks are typically designed for short-stay visits, with most users walking to the site. These parks may also be located in underutilised areas, so their size and layout may be determined by the available space.

HIGHLY DESIRABLE FEATURES	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
Shape: Dog parks should generally feature rounded or moderately linear layouts. However, for small scale dog parks, less optimal or irregular shapes may be acceptable if they can safely accommodate local users and provide basic functionality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages smooth circulation which in turn encourages more active supervision. • Avoiding linear park layouts supports more active supervision, ensuring dog guardians remain engaged and within close proximity to their dogs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be appropriate for all preferred sites, with area dimensions potentially requiring modification to achieve the preferred layout.
Fence: 1.2m high chain mesh or similar (noting that height will likely depend on site conditions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures dogs remain contained. • Provides safety for both dogs and nearby pedestrians. • Can reduce off-lead conflicts with other park users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be visually intrusive if not well-integrated with landscape.
Entry point: Double gates with hardstand, min. 3.5m wide maintenance access gates. Consider multiple entry points to connect with other paths or nearby features.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents dogs from escaping when entering/exiting. • Multiple access points improve circulation and connectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple gates increase construction and maintenance costs.
Surface: Gravel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravel is durable. • Gravel is more permeable than hard paved surfaces, therefore aiding drainage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravel may be uncomfortable for some dogs • Gravel will require some maintenance to retain even coverage.
Vegetation: Trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides shade for users and dogs. • Improves aesthetics and environmental value. • Can act as visual screening or buffer. 	
Features: Rocks and logs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage natural play and exploration. • Enhance sensory and physical stimulation for dogs. 	

Furniture: Shelter and seating at appropriate intervals to meet user needs, taking into account the size and layout of the park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves comfort for dog guardians Provides shelter from sun and rain. Encourages longer visits and social interaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adds installation and maintenance costs. Encouraging socialisation can result in reduce supervision of dogs.
Signage: Both behavioral and etiquette signage and well as information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educates users on rules and responsible behaviour. Reduces conflicts and enhances safety. Can be inexpensive and easily updated. 	
Water: Drinking fountain with dog bowl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides hydration for dogs and owners. Encourages longer stays. Supports animal welfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires regular maintenance and cleaning. Can be costly to install, especially with plumbing.
Bins: with dog bag dispenser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports hygiene and responsible waste management. Encourages users to pick up after dogs. Reduces environmental impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires regular emptying and maintenance. Can overflow or be vandalised.
POTENTIAL ADDITIONAL FEATURES	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
Path: Accessible loop path within the dog park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides safe circulation for owners and dogs. Circulation can also encourage more active dog supervision. Supports accessibility for all users. Helps reduce wear on grassed areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional construction and maintenance costs. Could limit usable play area.
Grass surface: If space allows and irrigation can be provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grass provides comfort and play space for dogs. Relatively low-cost material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires high levels of maintenance to reduce degradation due to overuse, especially in a small space.
Irrigation: Provision of irrigation for grassed areas should be considered to sustain full coverage and maintain usability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains grass coverage and usability. Supports aesthetics and environmental benefits. Reduces soil erosion and mud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation and water costs. Requires ongoing maintenance.
Vegetation: Garden beds - if space allows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves aesthetics and environmental value. Can act as visual screening or buffer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Garden beds require ongoing maintenance. May be damaged by dog activity.
Agility equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides mental and physical stimulation for dogs. Attracts dog owners seeking exercise opportunities. Can diversify play options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires regular maintenance and inspections. Can be costly to install. Usage levels can vary.

Digging areas: This may include sand pits, mulch or mulch pits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a safe outlet for natural dog behaviour. Protects other areas from being dug up. Can enhance engagement and play variety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs regular replenishment and cleaning. Can become messy or smelly if not maintained.
Composting dog waste bins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmentally friendly waste management option. Reduces landfill contributions. Encourages responsible owner behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires monitoring, maintenance, and eventual emptying. Can produce odour if not managed properly. May be more costly than standard bins.
Lighting: Consider on-demand or sensor lighting (for year-round and after business hour use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves usability during early morning/evening. Supports year-round use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation and maintenance cost. May disturb nearby residents or wildlife.

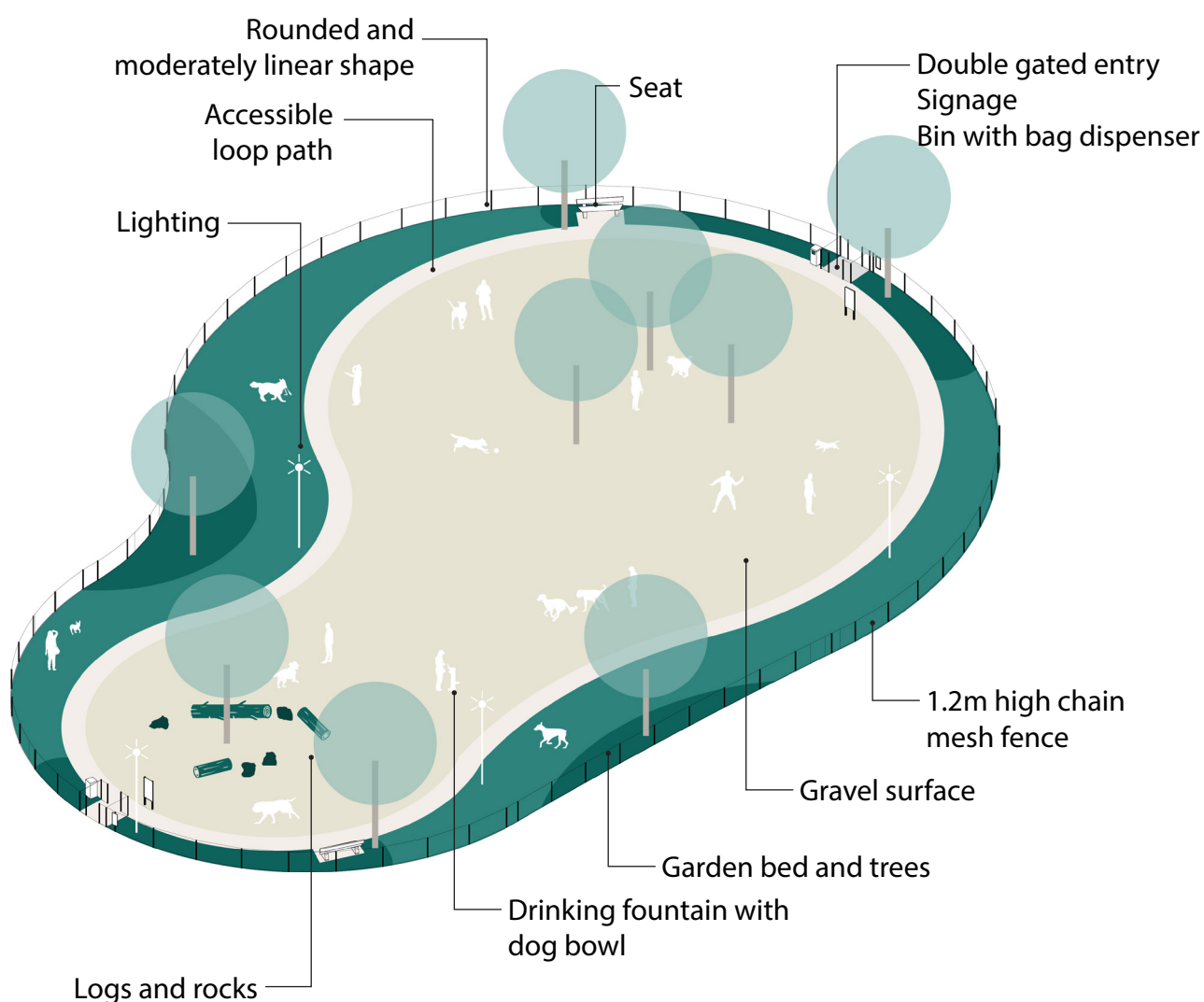


Figure 8.2: Diagram of example of small scale dog park (approximately 2,000m²), incorporating the features outlined in the above.

8.3 Cost estimates

The table below outlines the estimated costs associated with key elements of the construction of a dedicated dog park. It presents unit rates or item costs for typical elements, as well as some potential features. These figures have been informed by benchmarking activities, including reviewing cost estimates from other LGAs and consulting with Council officers, and are indicative only - actual costs may be higher due to cost escalation over time.

ITEM	UNIT	RATE
Preliminaries		
Site preparation (these costs will vary per site depending on any demolition and site preparation that is required)	Item	\$50,000
Highly desirable features		
1.2m high chain mesh fence with top and bottom rail including perimeter fencing and fencing for small dog area if required	Lin. m	\$300
Double gate (airlock)	Item	\$5,000
Maintenance gates (min. 3.5m wide for mowers)	Item	\$5,000
Instant turf including 50mm imported topsoil	m2	\$75
Drainage (allowance)	Item	\$10,000
Granitic gravel	m2	\$100
Concrete surfaces	m2	\$150
Garden bed areas including cultivation topsoil and mulch and 4x 150 pots per m2	m2	\$80
Semi-advanced trees, 45L container including stakes and ties	No.	\$250
Rocks nom. 400-600mm	No.	\$300
Logs nom. 2.5m long	No.	\$1,500
Shelter (4m x 4m)	No.	\$25,000
Seat with back rest and arms located every 100-200m	No.	\$2,500
Lighting including and allowance for electrical supply	Item	\$60,000
Drinking fountain with dog bowl including allowance for water supply	No.	\$15,000
Signage	No.	\$5,000
Bin enclosure with dog bag dispenser	No.	\$2,000
Potential additional features		
Dog agility equipment (allowance)	Item	\$30,000
Dog wash station	Item	\$10,000
Water play area including push button activator, ground spray/ water jets, concrete pad, rain garden, drainage and plumbing.	Item	\$50,000
Automatic irrigation system	Item	\$40,000
Sand including geotextile and drainage layer	m2	\$120
Composting dog waste bins	No.	\$2,000
Maintenance		
Establishment period maintenance	per week	\$600

It should be noted that these costs cover construction only and do not include design services, project management, site acquisition, or other related expenses.

Below is an example of how these costs may be applied in the case of a large scale dog park (example used here is 5,000m²) and a small scale dog park (2,000m²).

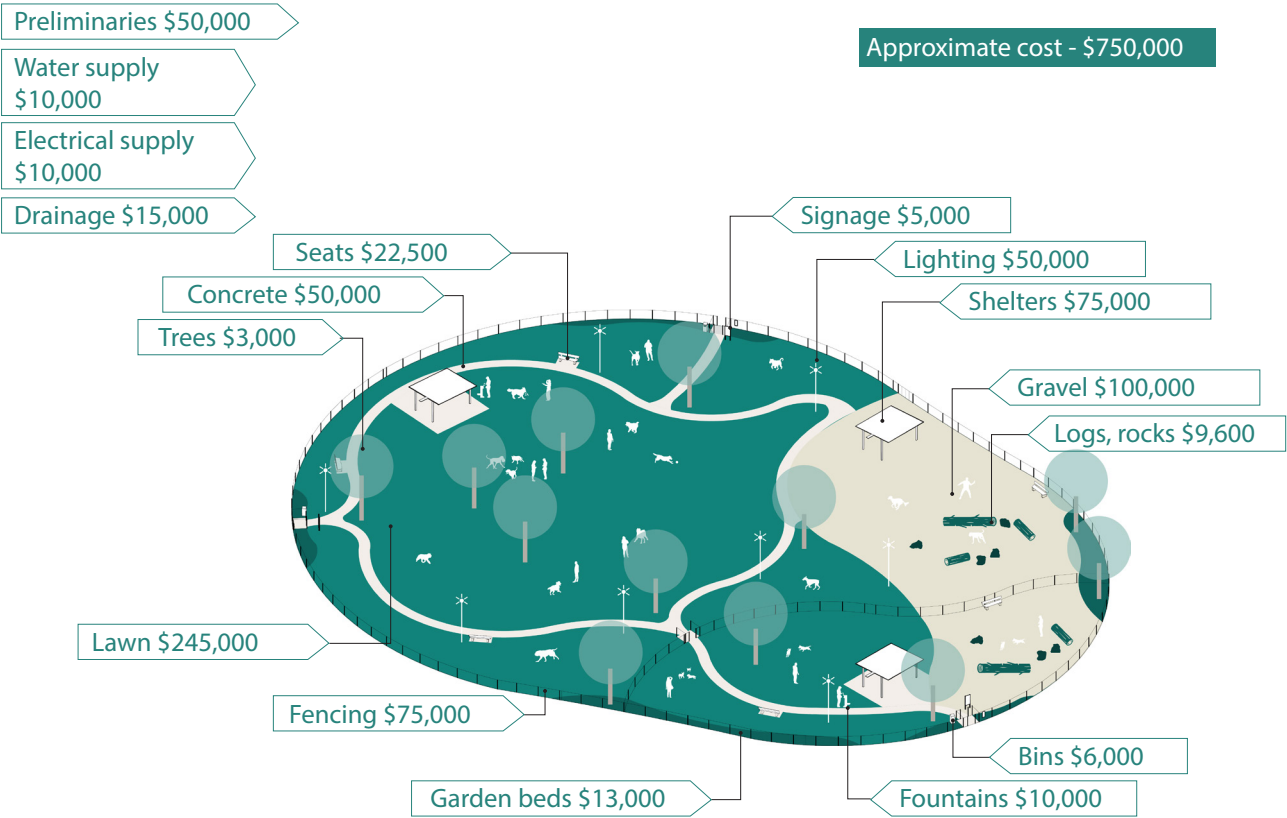


Figure 8.3: Diagram of example of large scale dog park (approximately 5,000m²), with cost estimates applied

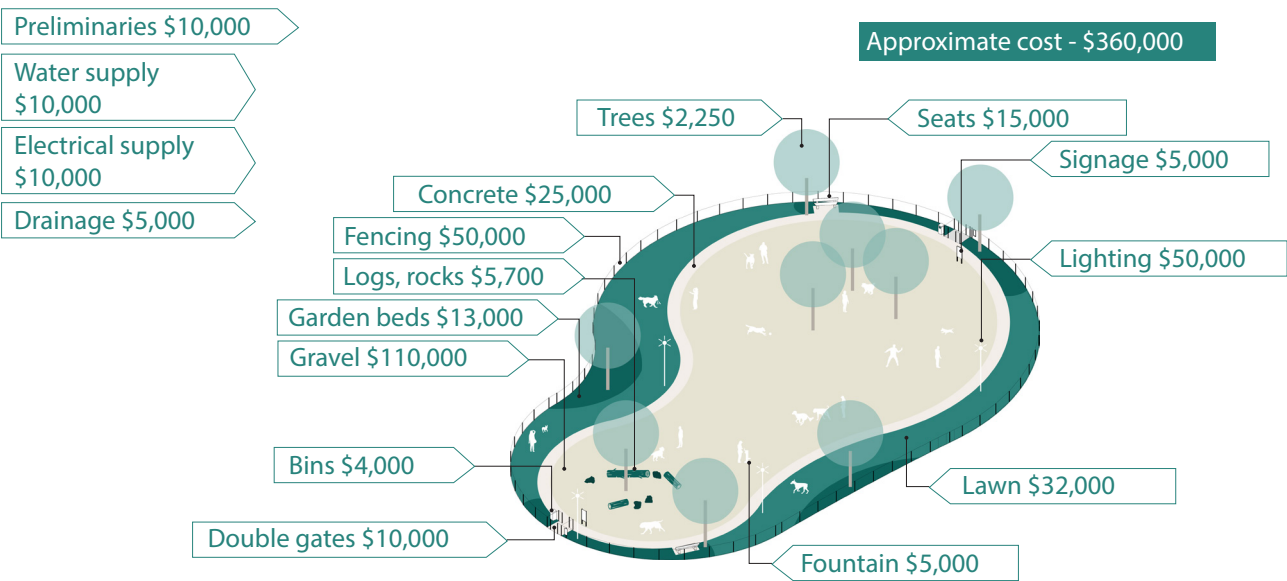


Figure 8.3: Diagram of example of small scale dog park (approximately 2,000m²), with cost estimates applied

Innovative Solutions

Composting bins

Dog waste is an important consideration in public open spaces, given the number of dogs and how frequently they are exercised in parks and reserves. As facilities specifically designed for dog use, dog parks present an opportunity to manage key inputs and outputs on-site. One of the primary outputs of dog parks is dog fecal waste.

Community feedback has identified dog waste as an issue, with an expectation that Council provide appropriate disposal facilities and manage potential odour. In addition to traditional bins, Council may consider alternative approaches, such as on site dog waste disposal/treatment, which have the potential to offer a more environmentally sustainable option.

One example is the Long Drop Dog Toilet (patent pending by Victorian company, Trevilla Engineering and Design), a compact in-ground 'long drop style' composting unit designed for walking tracks and dog exercise areas. Many dog owners use smaller domestic scale versions of this kind of system at home. When installed in grass or soil, it uses natural processes to break down waste, eliminate odour, and produce nutrient-rich soil, reducing the volume of waste sent to landfill. These systems can be paired with biodegradable bag dispensers and positioned at regular intervals to encourage responsible disposal of dog waste.



*The Long Drop Dog Toilet
by Trevilla Engineering and Design*

Etiquette and behavioural signage

One of the risks associated with fenced dog parks is the potential for conflict between dogs and, by extension, their guardians. These conflicts can arise when dogs are not adequately trained, socialised, or under effective control. In an enclosed environment where dogs of varying temperaments and energy levels interact behavioural issues can occur.

To help address these potential issues, the City of Charles Sturt in South Australia developed a series of informative signs designed to help dog park users assess whether the fenced area is suitable for their dog. The signs take a positive and engaging approach, focusing on guidance rather than restrictions, and use clear, visually appealing graphics to encourage visitors to read and interact with the information provided.



Example of the signage developed for dog parks in the City of Charles Sturt, South Australia

9. Maintenance of dog parks

The following outlines the key maintenance tasks to be considered once a dog park has been delivered. In addition to construction costs, ongoing maintenance and management expenses must also be accounted for. Some items, such as lawn, will typically require more intensive maintenance than those in standard parks due to higher wear and usage. Compliance monitoring includes dedicated patrols to oversee appropriate use, address behavioural issues, and respond to community feedback or complaints. It is estimated that these activities will require an additional 0.2 FTE (approximately 8 hours per week) to provide patrols and enforcement across three enclosed dog parks, ensuring a visible presence during peak times, including weekends and after business hours. The table below provides estimated rates for the effective maintenance and management of a dog park. The costs provided are indicative only and may be subject to escalation over time.

ITEM	FREQUENCY					COST PER INSTANCE	ANNUAL COST
	> once a week	fortnightly	monthly	quarterly	annually		
Soft landscaping							
Mowing: Grass should be maintained at approximately 100 mm in height (frequency will depend on season).		•	•			\$175	\$3,033
Landscape maintenance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grass impacted by overuse should be cordoned off to allow rest and restoration, with re-seeding undertaken as needed. Fill holes in the grass areas (resulting from digging or other activity) with sand and/or topsoil and re-seed as required Rake gravel surfaces Collect and remove litter and debris Remove and replace dead or dying plants (if required) Top up mulch Note and report any damaged items to the appropriate Council team for action Weeds: Remove weeds as required			•			\$800	\$9,600
Gravel: Top up low points of gravel areas to ensure a free draining surface					•	\$900	\$1,800
Dog waste management							
Bins: Empty bins (for sites without existing bins only)	•						\$3,500
Dog waste bags: Restock dog waste dispensers.	•					\$50	\$5,200

Long drop dog toilet: If a long-drop dog toilet system is installed (instead of regular bins), the unit should be relocated within the dog park and the existing hole closed.				•		\$1,500	\$6,000
Infrastructure and amenities							
Furniture: Inspect furniture, infrastructure and amenities for their condition. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-coat timber surfaces as required • Re-paint painted elements as required 					•	\$550	\$550
Management							
Compliance monitoring: including dedicated patrols to encourage responsible behaviour, address issues, and respond to community feedback and complaints. To provide a consistent and visible presence across all dog parks, particularly during weekends and after-hours when use is highest. Approximately 8 hours per week is required to undertake patrols, enforcement, and community engagement activities.		•					\$20,000
Events and programs: such as "Pups in Parks"				•			\$3,500