

Pooch Parks

Why do we need them?

It has been widely documented that there is an increasing number of dog thefts in England ...in the Mirror Newspaper (1.6.15) it states a 20% rise in dog thefts as pets are being stolen and exported to be sold overseas.

The chairman of the Dog Theft Action Charity (Sylvia Tabor) states that for thieves the rewards can be high and the risk low, so it's sadly seen as easy money. The figures show that Kent is the dog napping hotspot of the country, averaging two canine thefts a week in the last yearwith only 29% being recovered. Police believe the county's proximity to the Channel Tunnel may encourage thieves to steal dogs to order and quickly smuggle them out of the country.

Whilst pedigree pets are at the greatest risk due to the cost of purchasing pedigree puppies, non pedigree dogs can also be at risk as thieves wait for a reward to be offered.

Direct line Pet Insurance reveals that almost 1 in 20 dog owners who have lost their pet believe it was stolen and more than a third say they are worried that their dog will be snatched. 22% of owners admit they never let their dogs off the lead for fear of them being snatched and 13% never venture out with their pets after dark.

So are dogs getting enough exercise?

PetsatHome state that many people overfeed their dogs goes hand in hand with the fact that we also now lead more sedentary lifestyles, and that counts for our canine companions too! Just 50 years ago, there were double the numbers of working dogs in the UK than there are today, meaning most dogs lead a comparatively pampered life to their ancestors. A dog's body is like a human's - it needs to move and expend energy to remain healthy. Of course, there is a difference in energy requirements in different breeds of dog - a highly energetic Border Collie may need over 2 hours of exercise a day, whereas a Pomeranian will need considerably less. According to research published online in Veterinary Record, 26% or just over one in four dogs shown at the world famous Crufts dog show are overweight,

In our part of East Sussex we have some beautiful country side and farmingwhich is a contradiction for dog walking , The scale of the problem of dog attacks on sheep has been highlighted by new figures that show more than 600 sheep have been killed by dogs already this year. The figures have been issued by a group called SheepWatch UK, which was set up in February in response to the growing problem of sheep worrying. Also dog faeces, if not disposed of responsibly by owners, can carry Neospora Caninum which if ingested by cattle can cause a pregnant cow to abort her calf.

So what is a Pooch Park?

The first dog park was established in California in 1979: they are now widespread across the USA and Canada, and they are starting to be set up in the UK. (Indoor one in Cardiff)

A dog park is a facility set aside for dogs and their owners to exercise and play off-leash in a controlled environment. Parks vary in setups, but a typically is fenced, has separate, double-gated entry and exit points, a place to get water, and bags to pick up and dispose of waste. Dog parks are a great way to get the exercise your dog needs and to tire them. They are also a great way to meet other dog lovers and hear about upcoming dog events.

Dog parks are increasing in popularity: local authorities are frustrated by the ongoing issue of dog faeces contaminating public areas, as well as occasional complaints by dog-fearing members of the public about dogs running out of control, off the lead. There are stories about rampant dogs disrupting peaceful picnics and over-exuberant mutts knocking young children over. The confinement of all dogs to designated areas ("dog parks") seems like a logical response.

Another thought that if a dog runs off and is picked up by a dog warden there is time and money spent trying to locate the owner. Another concern is road safety. If dogs are in an enclosed area it not only protects the dogs but road users as well. If there is an enclosure any dog waste can easily be removed by the owner and binned, which in turn protects children playing anywhere near. Also, this should decrease pavement fouling. (Dog Thief Action Group)

SELECTING THE SITE

Here are some basic hints for making sure the Dog Park is in the correct location. You may not be lucky enough to satisfy all of these at your preferred site. But at least you know what issues you have to address.

So here is some general rule of thumb advice or questions you may need to deal with:

- * Decide who needs to be involved in the site selection process and how they are best involved - Council recreation, local laws, parks staff; residents; dog owners; non-dog people; community interest groups?
- * What do you want the Dog Park to achieve now? in the future? Is it to be a local Dog Park or will it be council's site for a regional Dog Park in the future? This will determine a number of requirements such as size, car parking provision, the number of different activity areas etc.
- * Make sure the location is attractive or has the potential to be made attractive. Dog owners want to go somewhere attractive and pleasant as do other park users.
- * Don't compromise on size if you can help it the Dog Park won't get the use, will look 'fenced in'

and a small park will limit possibilities associated with events, community responsible pet ownership programs etc.

- * Minimise intensive activity on residential fence lines.

- * The site should not be hidden away or isolated. It must be a site where people feel safe and can relax.

- * Consider the relationship of the Dog Park with other activities at the proposed site - be on the front foot with this. This will ensure existing users don't feel they are being excluded from decision making, and heresay doesn't undermine the process.

- * Are there sensitive issues to be considered such as the presence of a playground or wildlife areas. These may impact on access e.g. pathways and adjoining fence lines.

- * How will any increased traffic to the site be managed? Is there an opportunity for off-street car-parking if required in the future?

- * Is it a site that will encourage people to walk to get to it? Is there good trail or footpath access or good access through residential areas?

- * Is it a site with good topography for drainage, wind shelter, maintenance?

(Paws4Play - Planning for Dogs in Open Space info@paws4play.com.au)