

COMMERCIAL DOG WALKING IN NONSUCH PARK LICENSING SCHEME

Head of Service: Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services
Report Author Samantha Whitehead
Wards affected: Nonsuch Ward;
Appendices (attached):

Summary

To propose a 12 month pilot Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme in Nonsuch Park as set out in this report.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Note the outcome of the Commercial Dog Walking Working Group Meeting and subsequent Commercial Dog Walking Forum.**
- (2) Agree to adopt the proposal for a 12 month pilot Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme for Nonsuch Park as set out in section 3 of this report.**
- (3) Agree to a Dog Walking Code of Conduct to be devised and advertised for all dog walkers in the park.**
- (4) Agree to receive a draft Nonsuch Park Commercial Dog-Walking Licensing Policy and a draft Nonsuch Park Dog Walking Code of Conduct for approval at the January meeting of the Committee.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee is committed to taking reasonable and appropriate action to ensure the safety of all park users. The introduction of a 12 month pilot Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme and a new Dog Walking Code of Conduct for all dog walkers in the park will help to address the public's concerns which were highlighted in the dog walking consultation carried out in April 2024. In addition, the proposals will formalise the arrangements for the use of the park by professional dog walkers to bring this activity in line with other commercial users.

Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee

14 October 2024

2 Background

- 2.1 At the last meeting of the Joint Management Committee in June 2024, the committee resolved to set up a Working Group to review the results of the dog walking consultation in more detail and consider the necessity and/or viability of a possible licence scheme for commercial dog walking in the park and to consider what such a scheme may look like. Further to its considerations, the working group agreed to present their findings to the Joint Management Committee and put forward a recommendation to the Committee for a decision.
- 2.2 The Working Group first met on 15 July 2024 and discussed the results of the consultation. After significant debate the Working Group agreed that before implementing any kind of Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme, they would like to engage directly with the Commercial Dog Walkers so their views could be considered.
- 2.3 As a result, the Working Group hosted a Commercial Dog Walkers Forum on 20 August 2024 at Bourne Hall. An open invitation was circulated to commercial dog walkers to come along, express their views and help shape the future of dog control in the park.
- 2.4 The Forum was well attended by around 25 people who were keen to take part. The group consisted of mainly commercial dog walkers who were actively working in Nonsuch Park and a few members of the public who attended to show their support to the group.
- 2.5 Several issues were discussed and summarised below:

Number of Dogs

This was one of the main issues for debate, all the dog walkers in attendance stated that their insurance covered them for up to six dogs. Members of the Working Group mentioned that this conflicted with the results of our consultation, advice from the RSPCA and Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, a neighbouring borough who had recently changed their Public Space Protection Order and reduced the number of dogs to four. The commercial dog walkers explained that their business was only viable if six dogs could be walked at one time.

The attendees stated that if they had to decrease to four dogs this would have a financial impact on their clients and could result in dogs not being walked due to rising costs. If owners could not afford to employ a dog walker this would have a detrimental effect on the dog's well-being. It was felt that under-exercised dogs had the potential to become unruly and lack socialisation skills, particularly if long walks were limited to weekends when owners were available.

Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee

14 October 2024

Dog Control

The commercial dog walkers stated that they were the professionals, a lot of them had qualifications and they were selective over the dogs they choose to walk. A lot of the walk focussed on training and recall, and they didn't want to take out badly behaved dogs, which didn't respond well to the others in the group and were 'difficult'. The commercial dog walkers felt that they were unfair target for accusations of badly behaved dogs and the badly behaved dogs were often walked by their owners or uninsured commercial dog walkers who turned up in the park with far more than six dogs.

Park Community

The attendees commented on how supportive the Nonsuch Park Dog Walking Community was and how they all felt safe to work and walk there. The Commercial Dog Walkers felt that they were the 'eyes and the ears' of the park, walking there day in and day out and could react immediately to any issues, such as lost dogs, lost items, and instances of anti-social behaviour. Some dog walkers commented that they choose to travel to Nonsuch as it was such a lovely and friendly environment.

It was stated that many of the commercial dog walkers were women who have chosen this career to fit in with their care giving commitments and family circumstances. Therefore, having a safe and supportive space to work was very important to them.

The Commercial Dog Walkers showed an interest in becoming more involved with the park and some offered up their time on a voluntary basis to help with specific projects, such as helping to repair the dog free area at the London Road Gate or helping to raise money for specific projects in the park.

Cost

Several attendees were transparent with their charges and stated that they charged in the region of £17 per hour. However, they were eager to point out that the £17 per hour, per dog, covered pick up and drop off (which added significant time to their day), fuel, cleaning, and maintenance of their vehicles, insurance, taxes, and other overheads. It was felt that other people did not always account for these hidden costs when calculating their hourly rate and that it was not pure profit.

Views on Introducing a Licensing Scheme

When the Working Group directly asked the attendees about introducing a dog walking licensing scheme, the majority were in support if the conditions were right. The commercial dog walkers, would be happy to see some enforcement of irresponsible Commercial Dog Walkers, described as the type that open the back of a van and let the dogs run loose, as these walkers gave the whole profession a bad name.

Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee

14 October 2024

The main concern would be over the cost of the licence, the number of dogs which they would be permitted to walk and how we would enforce those who did not comply with the scheme.

In summary, attendees felt that a sum in the region of £200 per annum would be affordable and that they should be able to walk up to six dogs.

Other Points Raised

- Lack of CCTV in the park
- Fencing and gates need improving on the dog free areas.
- Better signs across the park
- Dog walking code of conduct for all dog walkers

2.6 Overall, members of the Working Group who attended the Forum meeting were pleased with the level of positive engagement and felt that it had given them a better understanding of the profession.

3 Proposal

3.1 The Working Group reconvened on 4 September 2024 to discuss the results of the Forum meeting and agreed to put forward a proposal to the Joint Management Committee based on the results of the Consultation and their findings.

3.2 The overarching proposal is to:

- Introduce a 12 month pilot - Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme to launch in April 2025
- In line with other commercial activities in the park, commercial dog walkers will need to provide proof of public liability insurance and risk assessments and sign an agreement.
- Set the charge at £200 per annum.
- Limit the number of dogs to a maximum of six with a recommendation of four.
- In exchange the Joint Management Committee will provide commercial dog walkers with a coloured Armband or Lanyard and a car sticker so that they can be easily identified.
- Provide targeted enforcement where we have evidence of non-compliance.
- Develop a Dog Walking Code of Conduct in collaboration with the dog walking community.

Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee

14 October 2024

4 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

4.1 Equality Impact Assessment

4.1.1 This proposal will bring commercial dog walking in line with other commercial activities in the park.

4.1.2 The proposed scheme has considered the cost of a license to ensure it remains affordable for Commercial Dog Walkers. This consideration aims to prevent a significant increase in their overheads, which could severely impact end users of this service, such as the elderly, disabled, or those on low incomes who rely on dog walking services for their animals' welfare.

4.1.3 If the Committee sets the license cost too high or restricts Commercial Dog Walkers to fewer than six dogs, professional dog walkers may choose to operate in other parks. This shift could be detrimental to the Nonsuch Park Community and the safety network that this group provides to each other and the wider park community. Research indicates this may particularly impact lone women who use the park.

4.2 Crime & Disorder

4.2.1 This proposal will help to reduce the perception of anti-social behaviour relating to multiple dog walking in the park.

4.3 Safeguarding

4.3.1 This proposal will help to safeguard the public against the fear of unregulated groups of multiple dog walkers in the park.

4.4 Dependencies

4.4.1 The success of this proposal will depend on successful engagement with the dog walking community. A dedicated Nonsuch Park email address has been created and has been shared with the group to keep them updated on progress and decisions.

4.5 Other

4.5.1 None

Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee

14 October 2024

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 If members agree to adopt the proposals as set out in section 3, the pilot licensing scheme will generate some income for the park. However, this will need to be offset against administration of the scheme and provision of targeted enforcement activity. Any additional costs should be managed and limited, so as to be fully funded by the additional income generated.
- 5.2 If there are any surplus funds after costs have been deducted, these will be ring-fenced to the Joint Management Committee budget and used to support the up-keep of the park.
- 5.3 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents in this report.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Support from the legal team will be required to prepare a Commercial Dog Walking Licence agreement and a code of conduct ahead of launching the scheme.
- 6.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** None other than as set out in the report Policies, Plans & Partnerships
- 6.3 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:
- Safe & Well
 - Opportunity & Prosperity
- 6.4 **Service Plans:** The matter is included within the current Service Delivery Plan.
- 6.5 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** None
- 6.6 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:**
- 6.7 **Partnerships:** This success of this proposal will rely on forging robust relationships with commercial dog walkers in Nonsuch Park

7 Background papers

- 7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Commercial Dog Walking Consultation Results – 17 June 2024
- Report on Commercial Dog Walking in Nonsuch Park – 25 March 2024

Other papers:

Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee
14 October 2024

- None