

## COMMERCIAL DOG WALKING

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<b>Wards affected:</b>	College Ward; Town Ward; Woodcote and Langley Vale Ward;
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	Appendix One - Walkers with dogs at Epsom and Walton Downs Training Grounds - Preliminary assessment notes for The Jockey Club Appendix Two – Dog Control Signs Appendix Three – Joint Press Release

### Summary

To advise Conservators about the Pilot Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme which launches in Nonsuch Park in April 2025 and to discuss impact and options for dog control on Epsom and Walton Downs.

### Recommendation (s)

**The Conservators are asked to:**

- (1) Note the pilot Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme in Nonsuch Park**
- (2) Agree to the proposed actions set out in Section 4 of this report.**

## 1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 A pilot Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme is due to launch in Nonsuch Park in April 2025. This may result in a displacement of commercial and non-commercial dog walkers to other parks and open spaces within the Borough. The Committee is asked to note this, as any increase in commercial or volume dog walking activity on Epsom and Walton Downs may prompt the Conservators to consider implementing their own licensing scheme in the future.
- 1.2 To address recent concerns raised by the Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee regarding a lack of dog control on the Downs, the Conservators are asked to agree to the proposals outlined in section 4 of this report.

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### 2 Background

- 2.1 Dog control on Epsom and Walton Downs has been a significant topic of discussion for many years.
- 2.2 In 2015, the Jockey Club responded to a rising number of complaints from local trainers by commissioning a study by an Access Management Consultant titled "Walkers with dogs at Epsom and Walton Downs Training Grounds – Preliminary assessment notes for The Jockey Club". Please see appendix one.
- 2.3 As a result of this assessment several actions were taken:
  - 2.3.1 New signs were commissioned and placed at strategic locations over the Downs. Please see appendix two.
  - 2.3.2 Press releases and social media posts were issued by the Council and the Jockey Club. Please see appendix three.
  - 2.3.3 The Council's Ranger Service were deployed to carry out a communications exercise on the Downs to launch the new campaign.
- 2.4 Overall, the Dog Control campaign was seen as a success and the majority of dog walkers complied with the polite request to keep their dogs on a lead before 12 noon or when horses were present.

### 3 Current situation

- 3.1 Post-COVID, surveys and reports from organisations like the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) suggest that many households adopted dogs during the pandemic.
- 3.2 Estimates indicate that around 3.2 million dogs were acquired between 2020 and 2021.
- 3.3 All parks and open spaces have seen a significant increase in dog walkers and the number of commercial dog walkers has risen as more people have returned to the workplace.
- 3.4 The recent surge in dog ownership, coupled with media reports of dog attacks and local incidents of inadequate dog control, recently prompted the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee (JMC) to conduct a survey to assess public opinion on this issue, particularly regarding the practice of walking multiple dogs and commercial dog walking.
- 3.5 Just under 1000 people responded to the consultation and the results of the survey were considered at the JMC's meeting in June 2024. At this meeting the committee resolved to set up a Working Group to examine the responses in more detail.

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- 3.6 The Working Group met on several occasions and after further consultation with commercial dog walkers, a proposal was taken to the JMC in October 2024 to establish a Commercial Dog Walker's Licensing scheme in the park. The twelve-month pilot licensing scheme was approved by the Committee and will be launched in April 2025.
- 3.7 The Committee also approved a proposal for a Dog Walking Code of Conduct which will form the basis of publicity campaigns aimed at all dog walkers.
- 3.8 The JMC's approach to managing dog control in Nonsuch Park could have implications for other parks and open spaces in both Sutton and Epsom & Ewell. Commercial dog walkers who opt not to participate in the licensing scheme may shift their business activities to alternative locations as may those who are not professional walkers but still exercise a number of dogs together.
- 3.9 If displacement occurs, this could significantly impact Epsom and Walton Downs, especially given that concerns have already been expressed by the hack riding community and racehorse trainers regarding the number of dogs on the Downs that are deemed to be out of control and have poor recall.

## 4 Proposals

- 4.1 Whilst officers have begun exploring the possibility of implementing a similar Commercial Dog Walking Licensing Scheme for Epsom and Walton Downs, initial guidance from the Council's in-house legal advisor indicates that introducing a licensing scheme on the Downs may not be straightforward due to the Council not being the land owner and the land being subject to an Act of Parliament and Byelaws.
- 4.2 The current legal advice is to carefully monitor the situation on the Downs and if there is evidence to support an increase in commercial/multiple dog walking, then a further report with a proposal should be brought to Conservators at a future meeting.
- 4.3 In the interim, it is proposed that officers collaborate with representatives from the Jockey Club and the Hack Riders to develop a new code of conduct for dog walking on the Downs, review the existing signage, and conduct a publicity campaign like the one carried out in 2015/16, as detailed in section two of this report.
- 4.4 If the committee agrees to this course of action, then details of the above will be brought back to the Conservators for their consideration and for allocation of a budget to carry out the campaign at the January 2025 meeting, with a view to launching the campaign in the spring.

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### 5 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

#### 5.1 Equality Impact Assessment

5.1.1 None for the purpose of this report.

#### 5.2 Crime & Disorder

5.2.1 Regulating dog walking activities on Epsom & Walton Downs will help to prevent anti-social behaviour relating to out of control or dangerous dogs.

#### 5.3 Safeguarding

5.3.1 Developing and promoting a Dog Walking Code of Conduct for Epsom and Walton Downs will help safeguard the public, hack riders and the training community.

#### 5.4 Dependencies

5.4.1 This proposal is dependent on collaborative working with all stakeholders.

#### 5.5 Other

5.5.1 None.

### 6 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no immediate financial implications connected to the proposals in this report.

6.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The costs of any signs, monitoring should be met from the license scheme income budget.

### 7 Legal Implications

7.1 There are no immediate legal implications connected to the proposals in this report.

7.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** None for the purpose of this report, should the committee decide to pursue any further actions relating to dog control in the future, legal will need to be involved.

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### 8 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

8.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- Effective Council
- Safe and Well

8.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

8.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** None

8.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None

8.5 **Partnerships:** These proposals rely on collaborative working with all stakeholders.

### 9 Background papers

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

**Previous reports:**

- None

**Other papers:**

- None