

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

Workshops: Dogs and the Countryside

Bristol Conference:

Suzanne Powner, Dorset Dogs
Ellie Stevenson, Natural England

Durham Conference:

Dean Henry, Durham County Council
Ellie Stevenson, Natural England

Speaker's Summary from Bristol and Durham Conferences

The same presentation and format was used for both conferences. Additional case studies by Dorset Dogs (South) and Durham Civic Pride (North) provided illustrative examples of different approaches taken to tackle dog issues. Presentations and further details are provided on Huddle.

Introduction

The introduction to the workshop included figures from the Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) which shows around 50% of all visits to the natural environment are undertaken by dog walkers and around 75% are within 2 miles of home.

Breakout and discussion sessions identified both the challenges and opportunities this large constituency of users represents to land managers, local authorities and LAFs:

Challenges:

- Disturbance of wildlife – ground nesting /feeding birds
- Disturbance of stock – sheep, cattle, game birds
- Spreading disease among livestock – lack of worming, impact on farm assurance schemes
- Conflicts with other users – horse-riders, cyclists
- Commercial dog walkers control of large groups of dogs
- Dog fouling – failure to clear up, pollution of crops, mixed messages – stick and flick
- Poo disposal – secondary problem of bags in hedges, hanging the waste in trees
- Dog waste disposal bins poorly located
- Dog aggression in public parks
- Lack of information of permissive routes or dogs welcome areas
- Misleading signage loses efficacy
- Real issue is dog owners and their poor control of dogs
- Off lead/on lead, the law is poorly understood and the definition of 'under close control' is open to significant interpretation
- Extendable leads can be an issue.
- Remaining on the PRoW, eg if cattle are lying on the RoW user could/should walk around them. Trespass is unlikely to be an issue as the cattle effectively

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

form a block on the PRow. In any case farmers are unlikely to complain in this scenario

- Landowners can generally develop good relations with local regular users, however 'new locals' can cause issues
- Is the law well known by both landowner and PRow user? There is ignorance on both sides
- Dogs and cattle – letting go of the dog if cattle do get aggressive is a difficult principle to communicate
- 'Playing Dogs' there are differences in what is acceptable.
- Farmers do get frustrated and users may be in the wrong place at the wrong time.
- Working or farm dogs can sometimes be intimidating
 - NFU produces guidance for farmers on this issue

Benefits and opportunities to engage with dog walkers:

- Encourages countryside awareness among responsible owners
- Gets people out walking – healthy
- Improves social interaction – benefit of assistance dogs
- Input to rural economy from visitors coming to walk their dogs
- Encouragement of use of rights of way – keeping paths open on people's doorsteps
- Regular users act as informal wardens on dog and other issues
- Engagement with dog owners on wider PRow and other natural environment issues
- Managed accessible land – landowners income from providing off-lead areas eg Fido Fields/unused gallops
- Livestock familiarisation days – eg effective signage eg traffic light system, life-size sheep
- Pilot/share different approaches and partners eg vets, rescue services, local contact for reporting problems, Huddle, IPRow,
- Should we approach this issue be tapping into the wider Dog walking/owning/business/charity community.
- Better understanding of the seasonal use of agricultural land could be promoted through signage.
 - Although this has to be maintained and kept up to date and relevant.
- Some national parks have signage for lambing time.

Dorset Dogs Case Study (LAF Conference South)

Su Powner of Dorset Dogs was able to share the experience of their project in tackling many of these issues through promoting responsible dog ownership and positive management for people with dogs in town, coast & countryside.

Their website, hosted by Dorset County Council and overseen by organisations of the Urban Heaths Partnership, provides a wealth of material and initiatives. The Doggy Do Code provides simple advice promoting responsible dog ownership; an interactive map shows where dog walkers can go and what they need to know about sensitive sites; 1000 owners and their dogs have joined as members and the site features individuals each month to create a community of interest for responsible

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

dog owners. Dorset Dogs attends events and organises walks and seminars and in 2013 was presented with the Kennel Club's Special Recognition award for best positive canine access management.

The Dorset Dogs ethos is supported by many dog owners, dog businesses, and dog, conservation and countryside organisations and charities and currently receives 18.5 hours funding a week from the Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework Mitigation Fund. It was initially set up with additional access management funding from Natural England.

Durham County Council, Civic Pride Team (LAF Conference North)

Dean Henry, outlined their campaign which targets dog fouling including the promotion of Green Dog Walkers.

- Targeting 15 hotspots in the county
- Initially through a measure of complaints
- Now based on a more complex assessment including complaints and enforcement offer feedback
- Financed through the Community Safety Partnership funding
- Dog fouling generates significant tension, so much so that the police are frequently involved.
- The DCC campaign is unique in its depth, bits and pieces of the campaign happen elsewhere but brings all the elements together is unique to DCC.
- Legislation will soon lead to the requirement that all dogs are micro chipped
- Dangerous Dogs Act is generally not well understood by dog walkers (or the general public!)
 - Not much case law (yet) to refer to.

Follow-up

The output from the workshops will be fed into the production of generic advice for walkers with dogs under development by the Dog Advice Working Group.

Research information, examples of approaches used and materials will be added to the Huddle workspace for wider sharing among LAFs as a source of practical assistance and support.

Action: Ellie Stevenson, Natural England

Speaker's Summary – Bristol Conference

Dorset Dogs: championing positive management, promoting responsible ownership

Dorset Dogs believes that having a dog is brilliant for people's physical health, quality of life and well-being, and it can also be brilliant for the value that is given to our countryside and green spaces.

Dorset Dogs recognises both issues and opportunities related to dogs, and works to champion positive management for dogs whilst promoting responsible ownership,

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

working with dog owners, land managers, countryside staff, dog wardens, dog businesses, organisations and charities.

At the conference a whistle-stop tour of Dorset Dogs 'information pit stop' was used to illustrate some of the work carried out. The 'pit stop' is one way in which Dorset Dogs engages with people. Pit stops take place out on sites where people walk with their dogs and at community events. Other key tools include the website www.dorsetdogs.org.uk and Facebook page www.facebook.com/dorsetdogs, the 'doggy do code', printed information and signs, an annual Festival, a membership group, provision of pick-up bags and extensive liaison with a very wide variety of organisations and individuals. There is a huge demand for the work and much scope for more, but staffing at the moment of 2.5 days a week does not enable the demand to be met so alternative funding sources are being sought.

Dorset Dogs' methods are being adopted by others around the country, and in 2013 the organisation was awarded the Kennel Club's Special Recognition Award for best positive canine access management.

Suzanne Powner

Speaker's Summary – Durham Conference

There were plenty of questions about the campaign but as most of the participants were rural landowners what came across was that they were more concerned about dogs worrying livestock than dog fouling being an issue for them.

The only dog fouling related issue that was brought up was one participant was trying to open up a route shared with other landowners to the public but found that this was resisted with the reason given that the other owners didn't want the route to become a dog toilet.

Dean Henry, Durham CC