

Dynamic Dunescapes Dune Engagement Case Study

Dogs in the Dunes - 2021

Sand dune system	Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe NNR, Lincolnshire
Case Study Subject	Working with dog walkers and the Paws for Thought campaign
The Engagement Intervention	

Site background information

Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe is an important site for a number of rare dune species, including natterjack toads, the crucifix ground beetle, sea aster mining bee and narrow mouthed whorl snail. Many people use the site to walk their dogs and are mindful of the wildlife and other visitors. But unfortunately, there are the few who continue to let their dogs run off lead and chase wildlife, swim in freshwater pools which negatively impacts invertebrate diversity (flea and tick treatment on dogs' fur leaches into the water) and fail to pick up after their dog.

What was the issue/change you hoped to make?

To change the behaviour of dog walkers, reducing the impact of dogs on the reserve e.g. dogs swimming in freshwater pools, dog poo, dogs on leads, disturbance to ground nesting birds and livestock.

What was the suggested intervention?

To offer a dog-focused consultation (dog cafe) to inform understanding of key dog owner motivations and using the findings to develop a dog walking facility on site.

150 people attend 6 events.

What did you do and how?

I first considered recommendations, findings and best practice from site specific reports^{1 2}, and previous projects, e.g. Humber Hounds and the Heathlands Reunited Project³, and created a framework for delivery based on Defra's '4Es' behaviour change model⁴.

¹ Steven Jenkinson (2019). *England Coast Path: Tetney Marshes and Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe National Nature Reserve. Management of visitors with dogs. Personal comms.*

² Steven Jenkinson (2019). *Managing visitors with dogs within The Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership Area. Case study led review of current policy and practice with recommendations for partnership-wide improvements to protect nature and culture. Personal comms.*

³ Southdowns National Park Authority (2020). *Heathlands Reunited. Personal comms.*

⁴ HM Government. (2005). *Securing the Future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy. The Stationery Office. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69412/pb10589-securing-the-future-050307.pdf.*

I delivered training for site managers, staff and volunteers on how to effectively work or engage with dog walkers at coastal sites, and help transform partnership approach. Training materials were created with support from Natalie Light, an ASAB accredited Clinical Animal Behaviourist.

4 training events, including 19 volunteers in total at Gibraltar Point, Far Ings and online.

I worked with the national PEO/comms team to create the '[Paws for Thought](#)' campaign, which includes consistent messaging on responsible dog walking. I contributed to the webpage design and produced resources for use at events, including the national [pledge certificate](#) and site-specific information / conversation cues.

The Pop-up dune den was used as a central point to engage with local dog walkers and help people understand the sensitivity of this habitat / why keeping dogs on leads / picking up poo is important.

A catering van provided free hot drinks for dog visitors / dog walkers who signed the pledge. We created a friendly space for conversation where people could share their opinions and we could raise awareness in a positive manner.

Information from professional dog trainer (Peta Brandwood) and animal behaviour specialist (Julia Pounder from Lincoln University Animal Behaviour Clinic) provided training tips and advice to help owners control their dog on the dunes.

Who did you work with? / How did you engage with different groups?

- I contacted dog behaviour experts and members of the community, and promoted collaboration between multiple stakeholders.
 - I delivered 5 pop-up dog friendly café events between April - Aug 2021, engaging 217 frequent and seasonal dog walkers. I shared information about Dynamic Dunescapes and the Paws for Thought campaign with local networks.
 - The 6th event will be a dog-friendly walk delivered as part of the guided walks programme in March 2022. It will be led by the NE Engagement Warden who will show local dog walkers what routes they can take to best avoid disturbing ground nesting birds. An accredited animal behaviourist will also be available to provide dog training tips for walking in the dunes.
 - I developed a partnership with Burns pet foods who supplied free merchandise and goody bags for our events. These helped initiate conversations with dog walkers and positive engagement at events.
 - The pledge encouraged people to set a good example in responsible dog walking behaviour. Owners were encouraged to take photos of their dogs for social media, and help promote key messages.
 - I worked with the reserves team at Natural England to develop a questionnaire for dog walkers. We handed these out at events and collected data on dog owner motivations, key metrics and performance indicators. Results will be used by NE to inform accessibility plans on the reserve.
 - I shared information and learning with partner organisations and external stakeholders, including Dorset Dogs who are interested to use a similar approach at their sites.
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How was the site / intervention monitored?

By the number of dog walkers engaged and verbal feedback from attendees.

What modifications, if any, did you make to your initial plan and why?

Messaging about where dog walkers can go on/off lead, and how to be a responsible dog walker on the Lincolnshire coast is very inconsistent between platforms and organisations. I originally wanted to help standardize this, working with NE, LWT, NELC, ELDC, Lincolnshire Live, tourist websites and other stakeholder groups, to increase outreach and deliver the programme county-wide. I soon realised the complexity of the situation, and that managing this would be a full-time job in itself.

I planned to deliver Paws for Thought events at Gibraltar Point NNR too, but the LWT Reserve Manager and Head of Reserves expressed their concerns that a 'dog-friendly' approach would attract, rather than change the behaviour of dog walkers. I therefore delivered the events at Saltfleetby NNR only.

Highlight any issues/obstacles & how you overcame them?

Traditional thinking within LWT about how to best engage dog walkers made delivering Dunescapes targets more complicated. I overcame this by delivering opportunities at an NE site instead.

How much did the intervention cost?

£855 for dog trainer / behavioural specialist and production of training materials. £1000 for catering at events

What size was the area of the intervention?

Across Lincolnshire, training at Far Ings and Gibraltar Point, events at Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe NNR.

Did the intervention work?

Please describe how. What has changed?

In the beginning, some people responded quite negatively, sometimes aggressively to our request that they put their dog(s) on a lead. However overall, the events were received well, and many regular visitors expressed their gladness seeing action being taken to address issues associated with dogs. Approximate figures:

<10% walkers had their dogs on a lead at the first two events, however at the 3rd event, ~95% walkers had their dogs on a lead. This may be attributed as much to the Paws for Thought events

and campaign, as the two engagement wardens employed by NE. Having staff on site was essential to reinforce messaging and noticeably impact dog walker behaviour.

External feedback

Comments from attendees

- “its about time” and “keep up the good work, it’s brilliant thank you.”
- “Thank you for putting this on”
- “Lots of people look at the Dunescapes website, its really informative”
- “We live nearby and its really nice to see a presence now on the reserve. People are reacting positively to it”

Survey answers

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16jkffb1OM0LqoEFrKeYZevjVx-YoHSA/edit#gid=1725443000>

What could be done differently next time?

Events have been great at starting conversations with dog walkers, but staff/volunteer presence on site is important to promote responsible dog walking behaviour going forward.

Media & Reports

Images of the intervention



