



Barracluff Park Dog Off-leash Area

Feasibility Study

Project Name:	Barracluff Park Dog Off-leash Area - Feasibility Study		
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Introduction

This feasibility study was initiated in response to clashes between sportsfield users and dog owners on the Reserve, Council motions seeking resolutions to dog management issues in the North Bondi area and Actions outlined in the recently adopted Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2021 – 2031 to investigate options for a dog off-leash area within the North Bondi area.

The following report sets out the feasibility scope and details the four (4) options identified through the study which proposes to manage dog off-leash activities that are impacting the use and enjoyment of Barracluff Park. For further detail refer illustrated options in appendix 1 – Barracluff Park – Dog Off-leash Area Options.

Data produced by Sport Australia and the ABS show that passive recreation, including play, general recreation and dog walking are growth physical activities. The activity of walking has been the number one physical activity for Australians for many years. Walking with dogs is a component of that activity and is highly popular all over Australia, including in Waverley. Visitation to all Waverley parks has been increasing over the last 5 years, as indicated in the Waverley Open Space & Recreation Strategy. All of these competing uses and increased demand is affecting the quality of our parks and reserves and needs to be sustainably managed.

The goals of the Waverley Community Strategic Plan are achieved by improving community engagement in recreation, as well as improving recreation infrastructure.

The Waverley Open Space and Recreation Strategy (OSRS) 2021 – 2031 is a strategic document which examines existing services and current demand to guide our approach to planning and managing open space and recreation facilities, to best meet the community's open space and recreation needs over the next 10 years.

Consultation findings from the OSRS demonstrated that open and recreation space is an important asset valued by our community as essential to contributing to our health and wellbeing. Waverley's parks, reserves, beaches and recreation facilities provide spaces for people to exercise, socialise and relax. These spaces also provide us with a connection to natural landscapes, which is increasingly important for the urban environments we live in.

Our community highly values open and recreation space:

- To access nature and greenery
- To walk the dog
- Where children can play
- To play sport
- For the community and somewhere to connect with friends and family.

Consultation findings from the OSRS identified the need for more dog off-leash areas, particularly in the North Bondi area. When allowing dog off-leash areas, conflicts and risks with children's play spaces, organised sports activities, and maintenance of turf and vegetation including bushland and remnant vegetation needs to be carefully managed.

To address the identified need for a dog off-leash area in North Bondi area, the OSRS Action plan supports the investigation of timed dog off-leash access at Barracluff Park. The Strategy states:

There is a gap in the provision of dog off-leash areas in the Bondi Basin area. Currently Barracluff Park is being used to exercise dogs. This is reflective of a need for off-leash areas in this neighbourhood.

Direction A2: Increase the capacity of existing spaces through embellishment and upgrade works

A2.2 Investigate opportunities to extend the size of the field at Barracluff Park to increase the capacity of the field for match play and training activities. While supporting a broader mix of activities, such as casual play and

dog off-leash (timed access), and providing amenities such as toilets to support an increase of users. Short term (deliver)

Barracluff Park

Barracluff Park is classified as a Local open space. It has this classification because of the limited embellishment of the park, not its size. Embellishments include one junior sized sports field and a District play space. The Park also has sports lighting and irrigation to the junior field. However, due to the ongoing unauthorised use of the field as a dog off-leash area the playing field surface has become unsafe making it unviable as a sport field without a major upgrade of the field and management of dog use activity.

With the provision of the new District play space at Barracluff Park visitation has increased significantly, and national trend data indicates that this facility will eventuate in an increase of 750,000 visitations per year. With the sports field brought back online, and a dog facility provided It could be expected that yearly visitation to Barracluff Park would be in the vicinity of 1,000,000 – 1,500,000 per year.

The classification of Barracluff is also dependant on the catchment of the park. Because the space has limited embellishment its Pedshed (the distance that a person will walk to access a facility) is only 400m radius from the park. This means that an average of 1,500 people live within the Pedshed and hence will access the park. This extrapolates to 200,000 to 250,000 visitations per year. The provision of the District play space will have changed visitation significantly by attracting more visitors to the park who travel there by car. A dog facility at the park would also see another cohort of users, they being residents who are seeking a controlled dog facility. These people would also drive to the park. This then would see an expansion of the parks pedshed out to the boundary limits or beyond of the municipality.

Adaptive management of open spaces now supports strategies that inter-lock facilities together, such as providing a Fenced Dog Off-leash Area (FOLA) to protect a nearby sports field. As part of the feasibility study three projects were considered for the park. These three potential projects have been identified to improve park facilities for current users:

- Sports field, irrigation and drainage upgrade
- Dedicated off-leash dog area
- Amenity building, including toilets

The amenity building will be addressed in another report.

Providing high quality recreation infrastructure is primary to healthy and active community outcomes advocated by both adopted strategies. At present the state of Barracluff Park field is not conducive to providing those outcomes.

Dog Issues at Barracluff Park

There are approximately 10,857 registered dogs in Waverley LGA. Residents with dogs, value the open flat space that parks and reserves provide for their dogs to get some activity, particularly off -leash. Within the LGA we have 7 dedicated off-leash areas and 2 timed dog off-leash areas. None of these spaces are shared with sporting activities, primarily due to the conflict of uses.

Although dogs are allowed on-leash in most parts of the public domain across the LGA, anecdotal evidence, including complaints to Council, indicates that the majority of dog owners are allowing off-leash dog walking to take place on the majority of Waverley Council open spaces, whether they are designated off-leash or not. This indicates a desire by these members of the community to have access to more dog off-leash areas.

There are a number of strategies for the management of dogs in public open space. They include on-leash, off-leash area, timed off-leash and Fenced Off-Leash Area (FOLA). The most effective option to manage dogs is to provide a dedicated dog area or dog park, known as a Fenced Off-Leash dog Area (FOLA). A FOLA is a constructed contained area where dog owners can allow their dogs to move freely off-leash. There are a number of examples in Attachment 4. A FOLA is not to be confused with a designated off-leash dog area,

which is just an open space that has been designated where dogs can be allowed off-leash. A FOLA is normally constructed on at least 400m² of open space and includes a 1200mm high fence, with “air-lock” double gates, open area, seating, and can include dog obstacle courses. Around Australia FOLA are being built by councils who are facing dog management issues.

Paws4play are the leading peak body for dogs in Australia. Attached to this report are the design guidelines presentation by Paws4play, which gives design guidelines, as well as case studies for design of FOLA’s (Attachment 4).

Also attached are the design guidelines produced by the Local Government Association of Tasmania, which are a guide for local governments who wish to provide FOLA for their community (Attachment 5). Both these guides and their production indicate that the provision of a District or Regional FOLA can address many issues associated with illegal off-leash dog walking.

There is currently no dedicated or timed dog off-leash parks in the North Bondi area. Therefore, most dog walking that is taking place is either on-leash, people are having to travel to access off-leash designated areas or is being undertaken illegally, as it does not comply with the Companion Animal Act (1998), or Council by-laws.

Barracluff Park is not designated for off-leash dog walking. However, this is an example of where demand and a lack of supply is driving policy i.e., people are using the park for off-leash dog walking, even though it is not authorised, and now Council needs to respond to that demand.

Current state of the sports field

Council, in the first half of 2021, commissioned the production of the Sports Field Improvement Program. This plan outlined the state of all Waverley sports fields, identified issues and made recommendations to improve their surfaces. The plan, when addressing Barracluff Park, acknowledged that high impact off-leash dog walking was causing the majority of the damage to the playing surface. This over-use by dogs had led to bare patches, holes and uneven surface, along with overall compaction of the sub-soil base. All these factors make the field unplayable for sport.

This has resulted in the resident junior club, the Maccabi-Hakoah Juniors Football Club moving their activities to another facility in Woollahra. In communicating with Council, the Club representative stated:

“I need to let you know that we are trying to move kids off Barracluff for term 2 - the potholes are too dangerous and the dog situation is unbearable for our coaches - they can't even do any passing drills etc without dogs running everywhere and we know you guys have tried to help us but we will lose our members if we stay there.” - Maccabi-Hakoah Juniors FC, 11 April 2022

Just recently two other clubs, Waverley Old Boys Football Club and UTS Bats have contacted Council to cancel their hire agreement at Barracluff Park due to the condition of the field caused by dogs.

“Our Mens over 35s have been having some trouble with Barracluff. It has pot holes and lumps all over it. A number of players have injured themselves, including one who rolled his ankle in a hole and is now out for 6 weeks. This team played on the same pitch last year and it was not great, but it is way worse this year.” - Waverley Old Boys Football Club, 12 May 2022.

Can I please cancel the remaining bookings we have for Barracluff Park? We’ve tried to persevere with it but feedback from the playing group is that the surface just isn’t suitable for training.” - UTS Bats, 15 July 2022

Council has undertaken a number of field rectification measures, including topdressing to try to manage the impact of dog use. These measures provide short-term solutions only. Without a permanent solution to manage the dog issue at Barracluff Park the field will remain unviable.

Undertaking a full upgrade of the field, as recommended in the Sports Field Improvement Program, without providing a solution to manage the dog issue, the field will just continue to adversely impact wasting significant funds spent of upgrading the playing surface.

Waverley Council has introduced an Adaptive Management framework in its recent plans of management. The purpose of this framework, and the Thresholds of Change Impact Assessment model that forms the basis of its decision-making process is to more effectively manage our public open spaces in the face of challenges such as over-use or incompatible uses. The management of dogs falls perfectly within this Adaptive Management approach. The options identified have been formed with adaptive management in mind.

Barracluff Park Dog Off-leash Area Options

The feasibility Study was undertaken to consider what areas would be suitable to accommodate dog off-leash use in North Bondi, including at Barracluff Park.

The Feasibility Study included site analysis, master planning, and option consideration with pros and cons for each option. The feasibility study considered the following options:

- Option 1 – Fenced Sports Field and Timed Off-leash
- Option 2 – Barracluff Park Dog Off-leash Area (excluding Sportsfield)
- Option 3 – Beach Road Reserve Fenced Off-leash Area (FOLA)
- Option 4 - Beach Road Reserve & Simpson Street Road Closure – 2 x Fenced Off-leash Areas (FOLA)
- Option 5 – New Dog Off-leash Area in another Park

The area referred to in the options 3 & 4 is titled Beach Road Reserve and an undeveloped section of Simpson St Road closure.

In considering the options available to Council to manage the dogs, the following options were discounted:

- Provision of a timed off-leash area at another park in the vicinity of Barracluff Park
- Provision of a fenced off-leash area at another park in the vicinity of Barracluff Park
- Provision of a fenced off-leash area on the picnic area used for passive recreation activities to the west of the sports field at Barracluff Park

The picnic area to the west of the sports field, and to the south of the playspace, was considered. Taken as a total area this location would be large enough for a FOLA, even considering such factors such as the requirement in the Companion Animals Act (1993) to not allow dogs within 10m of a playspace, and also safety run-off areas for the sports field. However, the area was discounted due to it being the only passive recreation space within the whole park.

This area is currently used by the public to enjoy for picnic and social gatherings outside of structured sport or the district level playground. This area is a particularly popular break out space for all users including the synagogue, sporting groups and playground users and so is a compatible use of this space. This area has recently been upgraded with new picnic settings, bin enclosure, tree plantings and turf with the key goal to support this passive recreation use in accordance with community consultation undertaken as part of the Barracluff Park and Playground Upgrade project.

The smaller triangular grass space on the northern side provides a nice slope for spectating but is insufficient as a passive park space particularly to support the level of visitation being generated by the district level playground.

The provision of a FOLA will not solve all unauthorised off-leash dog activity in Barracluff Park. Like other parks and reserves, there is no means to physically control illegal dog off-leash activity within Barracluff Park and on the sports field. Unauthorised dog off-leash activity will continue, but not to the extent that is currently taking place if effective management controls are implemented. Ongoing compliance of dog activities at Barracluff Park by ranger staff is still required.

Both sites identified as possible locations for a FOLA, as identified below, are underutilised open spaces in, Beach Road Reserve and Simpson Street Road Closure. The open space areas have no facilities on them and no obvious activation by the community.

The provision of a FOLA in these areas will see significant increases in visitation as well as the type of activation of the park and the experience offering to the community, whilst also removing the majority of the unauthorised dog walking from the sports field, allowing Council to upgrade the field.

The option of building a FOLA in these spaces will also address the concerns and petitions of the Bondi Mizrahi Synagogue, who have approached Council to fence or bollard the area, to address their own security concerns.

A Risk Analysis matrix was produced as part of the Feasibility Study. This risk analysis has considered all risks to the park and the risk associated with each of the options. Importantly, it considers the risk of no action, and what impact this will have on the community and to Council.

All options could include the provision of a walking path around the sports field, which links to the path around the play space and fencing the perimeter of the sportsfield.

Option 1 - Fenced Sportsfield with Timed Dog Off-leash

Option 1 recommends providing a defined space for dog off-leash activities within Barracluff Park at certain times.

This option would see the upgrade to the natural surface of the sports field with a traditional 900mm fence with pedestrian gates built around the field. A full laser level and surface renewal would be undertaken including irrigation and drainage upgrade works in accordance with the Sports Field Improvement Program.

The fence would define the boundaries of the field space and would allow for timed off-leash dog use when sport was not being played. Appropriate signage would be included at each pedestrian entry gate to inform dog owners of the times of usage.

Pro

- This option would provide a high-quality natural turf surface for the training / junior sports field in the short-term.
- This option will see a fenced timed off-leash area provided at the park. Fencing provides greater control of animals within the space.
- There would need to be a consideration of the carrying capacity of the field and appropriate times of use for dog off-leash activities.

Con

- Combining of the sports fields and the off-leash dog area would see the surface quickly degrade from overuse to a point that the surface would be unsafe for active sporting activities. Field upgrade works would only provide a short-term benefit and Council would need to accept absorb the cost of continually upgrading the playing surface.
- This option would provide a dog off-leash area at certain times, but with none of the benefits gained from a dedicated full-time dog off-leash area such as a Fence Off Leash Area (FOLA) development which includes such as dog obstacle courses and shade.
- Like other parks and reserves, there is no means to physically control illegal dog off-leash activity on the sports field and unauthorised dog off-leash activity will continue.
- Ongoing compliance of dog activities and the timed off-lead use of the space by ranger staff is still required.

Option 2 - Barracluff Park Dog Off-leash Area (excluding Sportfield)

Option 2 recommends permitting dog off-leash activities at all times within Barracluff Park with the exception of defined areas in the park where dogs will be prohibited at all times in accordance with the Companion Animals Act 1998 (*Part 3, Division 1, Clause 14*).

In this option it is recommended that Council (the local authority) include prohibiting dogs from the sportsfield at all times in accordance with the Act *Part 3, Division 1, Clause 14 (c)*:

Recreation areas where dogs are prohibited (meaning any public place, or part of a public place, provided or set apart by a local authority for public recreation or the playing of organised games and in which the local authority has ordered that dogs are prohibited and in which, or near the boundaries of which, there are conspicuously exhibited by the local authority at reasonable intervals notices to the effect that dogs are prohibited in or on that public place or part).

This option includes the upgrade to the natural surface of the sports field with a traditional 900mm fence with pedestrian gates built around the field. A full laser level and surface renewal would be undertaken including irrigation and drainage upgrade works in accordance with the Sports Field Improvement Program.

The fence would define the boundaries of the field space and appropriate signage would be included at each pedestrian entry gate to inform dog owners that dogs are not allowed on the sportsfield at any time.

Casual recreation use of the sportsfield would still be allowed outside of clubs hire agreement times.

Pro

- This option would provide a high-quality natural turf surface for the training / junior sports field over several years with a standard seasonal maintenance program.
- This option will legalise off-leash dog walking activities in the park except for prohibited spaces.
- The separation of uses will enable sustainable management of the park and sportsfield.
- The separation of uses will remove clashes between users groups

Con

- The option lacks the benefits gained from a dedicated full-time dog off-leash area such as a Fence Off Leash Area (FOLA) development which includes greater control of animals within a fenced space and dog obstacle courses. However naturally shaded spaces are available in the park.
- Like other parks and reserves, there is no means to physically control illegal dog off-leash activity on the sports field and unauthorised dog off-leash activity will continue.
- Ongoing compliance of the dog prohibited spaces by ranger staff is still required.

Option 3 - Beach Road Reserve Fenced Off-leash Area (FOLA)

Option 3 recommends converting Beach Road Reserve from an underutilised small park to a full time, dedicated, purpose built Fenced Off-leash Area (FOLA). Barracluff Park would remain as a dog on-leash walking area only accept where dogs will be prohibited at all times in accordance with the Companion Animals Act 1998 (*Part 3, Division 1, Clause 14*), such as the playground and within 10m of the playground.

In this option it is recommended that Council (the local authority) include prohibiting dogs from the sportsfield at all times in accordance with the Act *Part 3, Division 1, Clause 14 (c)* – as quoted above, to separate these uses and protect the sportsfield surface.

This option would include constructing a fully enclosed 1200mm high fence with air-lock style entry gates. The proposed FOLA would take up the majority of space within the reserve. The FOLA would include multi-element obstacle course, natural shaded areas, dog bubblers and other features determined with community consultation input and detailed design work.

Entry points to the FOLA would be provided on Old South Head Road and Beach Road ends.

Existing footpaths would be retained outside the fenced area to maintain pedestrian through traffic between the roads, to the bus stop and synagogue.

The provision of a FOLA on Beach Road Reserve will allow the sportsfield on Barracluff Park to be upgraded to make it safe and bring it back to training / junior competition level. A full lazer level and surface renewal would be undertaken including irrigation and drainage upgrade works in accordance with the Sports Field Improvement Program.

Pro

- This option would provide a high-quality natural turf surface for the training / junior sports field over several years
- This option aims to significantly reduce the amount of dog walking currently taking place on the sportsfield to ensure that any upgraded surface would remain at a high level over many years reducing the ongoing field maintenance costs.
- This option will provided a full time dedicated dog off-leash facility in close proximity to Barracluff Park to service the needs of the surrounding community.
- The option includes the benefits gained from a Fence Off Leash Area (FOLA) development which includes greater control of animals within a fenced space, natural shade and dog obstacle courses.
- This option would see the activation of underutilised open space at Beach Road Reserve.
- This option will provide the Bondi Mizrahi Synagogue with a more secure southern frontage to the synagogue building inline with increased security outcomes the synagogue are negotiating with Council to achieve.

Con

- The proposed Beach Road Reserve FOLA may not satisfy the expectations of all dog owners with large and small dogs combined into one space.
- The nature of use of a FOLA will require increased maintenance regime to maintain the quality of the facility. This is a new asset type for Council which will require an ongoing budget to maintain.
- Council will need to negotiate with directly impacted stakeholders, such as adjoining residential / commercial properties and the Bondi Mizrahi Synagogue, to gain their support for the FOLA.
- Like other parks and reserves, there is no means to physically control illegal dog off-leash activity within Barracluff Park and on the sports field. Unauthorised dog off-leash activity will continue, but not to the extent that is currently taking place.
- Ongoing compliance of dog activities at Barracluff Park by ranger staff is still required.

Option 4 - Beach Road Reserve & Simpson Street Road Closure 2 x Fenced Off-leash Areas (FOLA)

Option 4 recommends providing two (2) full time, dedicated, purpose built Fenced Off-leash Areas (FOLA) by converting Beach Road Reserve and Simpson Street Road Closure small park areas. The intention is to provide a large dog FOLA, in Beach Road Reserve, and a sperate small dog FOLA, in Simpson Street Road Closure, in close proximity to each other.

Barracluff Park would remain as a dog on-leash walking area only accept where dogs will be prohibited at all times in accordance with the Companions Animals Act 1998 (*Part 3, Division 1, Clause 14*), such as the playground and within 10m of the playground.

In this option it is recommended that Council (the local authority) include prohibiting dogs from the sportsfield at all times in accordance with the Act Part 3, Division 1, Clause 14 (c) – as quoted above, to sperate these uses and protect the sportsfield surface.

This option would include constructing two separate fully enclosed 1200mm high fence with air-lock style entry gates. The proposed FOLA would take up the majority of space within both small parks. The FOLA would include multi-element obstacle course, natural shaded areas, dog bubblers and other features determined with community consultation input and detailed design work.

Existing footpaths would be retained outside the fenced area to maintain pedestrian through traffic between the roads, to the bus stop, synagogue and Barracluff Park.

The provision of a FOLA on Beach Road Reserve will allow the sportsfield on Barracluff Park to be upgraded to make it safe and bring it back to training / junior competition level. A full laser level and surface renewal would be undertaken including irrigation and drainage upgrade works in accordance with the Sports Field Improvement Program.

Simpson Street Road Closure is currently classified as local road reserve. It is recommended that this portion of Simpson Street be formally closed and zoned RE1 as part of future planning work.

The pros and cons of this option are similar to Option 3.

Pro

- This option would provide a high-quality natural turf surface for the training / junior sports field over several years
- This option aims to significantly reduce the amount of dog walking currently taking place on the sportsfield to ensure that any upgraded surface would remain at a high level over many years reducing the ongoing field maintenance costs.
- This option will provide a full time dedicated dog off-leash facility in close proximity to Barracluff Park to service the needs of the surrounding community.
- The option includes the benefits gained from a Fence Off Leash Area (FOLA) development which includes greater control of animals within a fenced space, natural shade and dog obstacle courses.
- Two separate FOLA's will separate large and small dog owners
- This option would see the activation of underutilised open space at Beach Road Reserve and Simpson Street Road Closure.
- This option will provide the Bondi Mizrahi Synagogue with a more secure to both the eastern and southern frontages of the synagogue building inline with increased security outcomes the synagogue are negotiating with Council to achieve.

Con

- The nature of use of a FOLA will require increased maintenance regime to maintain the quality of the facility. This is a new asset type for Council which will require an ongoing budget to maintain.
- Council will need to negotiate with directly impacted stakeholders, such as adjoining residential / commercial properties and the Bondi Mizrahi Synagogue, to gain their support for the FOLA.
- Like other parks and reserves, there is no means to physically control illegal dog off-leash activity within Barracluff Park and on the sports field. Unauthorised dog off-leash activity will continue, but not to the extent that is currently taking place.
- Ongoing compliance of dog activities at Barracluff Park by ranger staff is still required.

Option 5. New Off-leash Dog Area or FOLA in another park

Option 4 investigated what other parks in the North Bondi area may be suitable to accommodate a off-leash dog area and to reduce the pressure being experienced at Barracluff Park and allow the sportsfield to be upgraded in accordance with the Sports Field Improvement Program.

Two nearby local parks were identified that would be capable of accommodating a FOLA being Niblick Street Reserve or Gilgandra Reserve.

Pro

- Both Niblick Street Reserve and Gilgandra Reserve, located within the North Bondi area and catchment of Barracluff Park
- A dedicated FOLA in close proximity would mean that some dog walking may be removed from Barracluff Park.

Con

- Both Reserves contain play spaces that would need to be removed to convert their use as dog off-leash areas that meet the requirements of the Companion Animals Act 1998. This change of use is unlikely to be supported by the local community.
- Both Reserves would require the whole park to be converted to a FOLA to provide the optimal size.
- This option would mean that either Niblick Street Reserve or Gilgandra Reserve would no longer be available for general passive recreation to their local communities. Both these reserves have a small 400m path for access and the installation of a FOLA would in effect be removing one of these reserves
- Both Niblick and Gilgandra Reserves have very limited parking options. This will see parking issues in the narrow streets fronting the parks.
- Council will need to negotiate with directly impacted stakeholders, such as adjoining properties, to gain their support for the FOLA.
- Local people who want to walk their dogs would choose to go to one of these two smaller parks in close proximity to home. However, most residents in the greater North Bondi area will choose to continue to use the sports field at Barracluff Park.
- Like other parks and reserves, there is no means to physically control illegal dog off-leash activity within Barracluff Park and on the sports field. Unauthorised dog off-leash activity will continue, but not to the extent that is currently taking place.
- Ongoing compliance of dog activities at Barracluff Park by ranger staff is still required.

Given the limited catchment Niblick Street Reserve and Gilgandra Reserve would service and the current uses of the reserves for play spaces and passive local parks, both these locations have been discounted as providing an adequate off-leash area to service the needs of North Bondi area residents.

Conclusion

The Feasibility Study identified the best option to address dog management on the sportsfield is the construction of a dedicated Fenced Off-leash Area (FOLA), either Option 3 or Option 4.