

ORDINARY MEETING

1 MARCH 2010

ITEM NO 6**Peter Bean and Adam Boyle/lp****DOGS IN OPEN SPACE (OFF LEASH PARK STRATEGY)****PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To consider a petition tabled at the Ordinary Council Meeting held on 8 February 2010, regarding the introduction of dog off leash areas within the Shire.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Receive and note the report; and
2. Officers prepare a new initiative to be considered in the 2010/11 budget process for the introduction of dog off leash areas within the Shire.

Cr Ramsey returned to the meeting at 8.08 p.m.

Crs Borg/Cugliari. That the recommendation be adopted.

CARRIED

REPORT**1. Background**

At Council's Ordinary Meeting held on Monday 8 February 2010, an on-line petition was received, requesting Council give consideration to the establishment of 'Dog off Leash' parks in the municipality.

Officers in 2006 developed a strategy to provide guidance towards addressing the development of a healthy and sustainable standard for the inclusion of dogs as a leisure activity in public spaces. Whilst the Strategy was not formally adopted by Council, it may now act as a reference or guide to assist Council in its decision making with regard to this petition. The 'Dogs in Open Space (Off Lead) Strategy' can be found at **Appendix 1**.

Officers at the time considered the provision of dog off leash areas or dog parks to be a positive avenue to encourage increased passive recreation of residents and support social connectivity. Development of these spaces would also provide a greater focus on responsible pet ownership in public places.

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Council is currently investigating the implementation of an Order to have the entire municipality declared a dog on leash zone, where the implementation of dog off leash areas should be considered to ensure that there is balance for dog owners to exercise their animals in a controlled environment.

The strategy, at that time, investigated issues surrounding dog parks and addressed the planning and development required to implement such a concept, which included such issues as:

- Integration principles
- Community consultation
- Conditions of use
- The criteria or design guidelines that identify which areas are to be declared 'dog off leash areas'.

The research and consultation undertaken at that time provided a strategic approach in identifying future recommendations regarding dog off leash area development. Research as part of Council's Leisure and Open Strategy indicated that there was a need to ensure that a positive and co-operative approach be taken in regard to dog ownership issues and opportunities in Melton Shire.

The Strategy identified some proposed locations for dog off leash areas, however this research would need to be reviewed, with appropriate locations to be determined and consulted, should Council wish to advance this form of initiative.

It was considered that the base cost to develop an adequate dog in open space area would be in the vicinity of \$35,000 to \$60,000, with the addition of an ongoing program for management and maintenance of the area.

The strategy also established the requirement for matters such as:

- Waste management;
- Signage;
- Infrastructure;
- Surfaces; and
- Fencing & access requirements as well as size and style.

Although Council is under enormous pressure to provide adequate facilities for structured sporting opportunities, passive recreation remains the most popular form of participation in the community. Recognising the importance of this issue, Council's 2005 Leisure and Open Space Strategy identified 84% of the household survey respondents were supportive of Council investigating off leash areas for dogs. It is important to remember that pets have been and continue to be a significant part of the Australian way of life. Australia has the highest ratio of pet ownership in the world, and changing demographics, including an ageing population and increase in number of people choosing to live alone would suggest that this would remain so.

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Combined with higher density residential developments becoming more common there will be an increase in pressure on public open space to provide for leisure and recreation pursuits involving dogs and an increasing need to approach the issue of responsible pet ownership in a positive manner.

2. Council Plan Reference and Policy Reference

The consideration of the development of 'dog off leash areas' is supported by the 2009-2013 Council Plan through the following objectives:

Community Health and Well Being:

1. Improving health and well being for our diverse community.
 - 1.1 Ensures everyone has access to quality Council services
 - 1.2 Provide opportunities for people to come together, socialise and be involved in their community
 - 1.3 Improve physical, social and mental health and well being for a safe, healthy and active community.

Managing Growth:

- 4 Ensuring our fast growth is well planned and managed and infrastructure is well maintained.
 - 4.1 Proactively consult, plan, build, maintain and upgrade assets.
 - 4.4 Provide access to quality infrastructure and services.

3. Financial Considerations

Research undertaken in the development of the 2006 Dogs in Open Space (Off Lead) Strategy, indicated that to establish a single dog off leash area (or dog park) would cost in the vicinity of \$35,000 to \$60,000 depending on the level of amenity. Scope of works would include:

- Fencing (based on fencing of approximately 1.5 metres in height, black PVC coated mesh)
- Waste Management Disposal Units
- Signage (Promotional and Conditions of Use)
- Water Connection
- General litter bins, seating etc.
- Surface Treatments (Granitic Sand Paths and Access points)
- Dog Agility Equipment
- Plumbing Services (site dependent)

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It is anticipated that to accommodate a 'base' standard dog park, a minimum financial commitment of \$45,000 by Council would be required for the initial setup of the open space, plus an ongoing management and maintenance budget in subsequent years.

4. Consultation/Public Submissions

For the purposes of preparing this report, no consultation has been undertaken, except that the on-line petition of 356 signatories was received.

Previous research undertaken in preparation of the 2005 Leisure & Open Space Strategy identified that 84.1% of the population were in favour of providing 'dog off leash' locations.

More recent research through the 2008 Active Participation Survey confirmed that walking was by far the most regularly participated in form of physical activity (28.3%) by our community. Of this number, 88.9% walk at least once or twice a week. It is considered that dog walking would form a significant percentage of this figure.

The same survey sought specific question on 'factors that would motivate additional park, trail and playground use' with some respondents indicating that an off leash area and dog park would motivate them to be more active and use local open space (see table below):

Factors that would motivate additional park, trail, playground use (Percent of total respondents – respondents could select multiple options)

Response	Overall	Eastern Growth Corridor	Melton Township
Shade	24.1%	27.3%	18.3%
Play equipment for multiple age groups	20.8%	26.0%	12.4%
Points of interest on walking/cycling paths	19.4%	20.8%	17.3%
Exercise equipment	16.9%	20.6%	13.5%
Barbeques	16.4%	19.7%	11.4%
Information on local parks, trails and playgrounds	13.8%	12.9%	12.7%
Off leash area for dogs	10.7%	8.6%	13.7%
Dog park	10.7%	7.7%	14.0%
Information signs on walking paths	9.9%	8.0%	10.9%
Distance signs to local landmarks	9.5%	8.9%	9.7%
Other motivating factors	3.2%	3.9%	2.8%

Melton Shire Council - 2008 Active Participation Survey

Should Council support the introduction of dog off leash areas within the municipality, it is imperative that consultation and public submissions be considered to ensure that the most effective use of open space in the most appropriate location is achieved.

5. Issues

With consideration of having the municipality declared a dog on leash area it is important to provide a balance for dog owners to be able to have some opportunity

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within the municipality to allow their animals to enjoy time off a leash outside of their own residential premises.

Should this not be provided, residents would be forced to seek out dog parks in other municipalities or they may take the risk to exercise their animals off the leash regardless of the implementation of an order that is contrary to that.

6. Options

Council could nominate relevant parks within the municipality as dog off leash areas and simply erect signs without any perimeter fencing and relevant infrastructure, as an easy way of creating off leash areas. Whilst proving to be unproblematic in other municipalities, residents who may exercise or reside in the immediate area of these designated parks may not be comfortable with such an arrangement, as there is no control or barrier to stop a dog potentially rushing them, and people may not see that Council has acted responsibly in providing a controlled designated area for animal exercise. **Appendix 2** highlights possible areas suitable for dog off leash areas.

A further option is for Council to consider providing 'Dog on Leash' signage in open space, together with promotional signage, advising of locations of 'Dog off Leash' parks.

7. Conclusion

It is considered that in light of the fact that Council will be considering an order to designate the whole municipality as an on leash area that Council give consideration to providing designated dog off leash areas for those residents wishing to exercise their dogs off a leash in the municipality.

It is recommended that Council consider a budget new initiative in the 2010/11 budget to commit funds to commence the process of consulting on and implementing dog off leash areas in the municipality.



MELTON SHIRE COUNCIL

Dogs in Open Space (Off Lead) Strategy



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Section One: Executive summary

Melton Shire Council plays a pivotal role in the provision of open space, recreation & leisure pursuits throughout the Shire. Spawned by Local Government trends toward Dogs off Lead areas, a key action of Councils Leisure and Open Space Strategy, regarding planning policy and management, is to establish a position in regard to dogs in public places and investigate options for accommodating dogs in community settings including on and off leash activity areas.

Walking, and passive recreation remains a popular activity for our community as the most participated activity in the Shire, (Active Lifestyle Strategy - 2006). Many residents undertake these activities in partnership with exercising / walking their dog. A major challenge for Council in the short to medium term, should be to encourage a greater focus on responsible pet ownership in public places.

It is important to note that any resident can currently exercise their dog in public open space on a lead or under affective control as per appropriate legislations. Public risk and nuisance issues surrounding dogs in public places are areas of major concern. Strategies for dealing with these issues need to be integrated into an overall strategy, whereby suitable locations be identified may include specific areas where dogs may be exercised "off lead".

This strategy aims to provide guidance towards addressing the development of a healthy, sustainable standard for inclusion of dogs as a leisure activity in public spaces in the future.

The strategic planning for provision of dogs off lead open spaces is vitally important. It requires a policy document, which addresses planning issues, and provides direction governing use, design, and provision of necessary infrastructure. Given precedence of community concern on this issue, a clear community consultation plan is required. This will ensure an acute awareness of the public liability and risk management issues, owner responsibilities and ongoing management and maintenance requirements be carefully considered in the development of the policy.

As a significant ongoing budget commitment will be required to establish and maintain appropriate Dogs Off Lead Open Space areas, broader issues of responsible pet ownership and management of companion animals in public places warrant more immediate attention at this time. Provision of specific "Dogs of Lead" areas should be viewed as supplementary and possibly complimentary but not necessarily a key objective or focus for Council.

This strategy recommends that should potentially suitable open space areas be identified, at the time of implementation of Dogs of lead in Open Space Area, then a formal policy, similar to the draft policy document attached, be finalised and presented to Council for endorsement.

Section Two: Introduction

Melton Shire Councils Leisure and Open Space Strategy outlines a range of actions that will assist Council and the community to achieve its vision by planning for a range of accessible and inspiring leisure and open space facilities and amenities.

A key action of the Leisure and Open Space Strategy regarding planning policy and management is to establish a Council position in regards to dogs in public places.

This strategy aims to provide strategic guidance towards the sustained development of dogs in public spaces, investigate options for accommodating dogs in community settings, including on and off leash activity areas, and address the issues surrounding management and sustainability of these open space assets within the Shire.

2.1 EXISTING ANALYSIS / ISSUES

Currently, residents may exercise their dog in public open space on a lead or under affective control as per existing regulations. Council, in making decisions relating to dogs in public places, I need to consider and balance social, cultural, health, well-being, animal welfare and safety implications, with leisure benefits that provision of specified "off lead" areas may encourage. Public risk and nuisance issues surrounding dogs in public places, and remedies and strategies for dealing with these issues need to be integrated into an overall strategy.

Research as part of Councils Leisure and Open Strategy indicates there is a need to ensure that a positive and cooperative approach is taken in regards to dog ownership issues and opportunities in the Melton Shire. Changing demographics and the changing nature of household types (increasing number of single person households) will potentially add to the already increasing rate of dog ownership. Research demonstrates the positive effects that animal ownership has, particularly for older adults and single person households.

Although Council is under enormous pressure to provide adequate facilities for structured sports opportunities, passive recreation remains the most popular form of participation in the community (Councils Active Lifestyle Strategy 2006). Recognising the importance of this issue, Councils Leisure and Open Space Strategy, identified that 84% of household survey respondents were supportive of Council investigating off leash areas for dogs.

It is important to remember that pets have been and continue to be a significant part of the Australian way of life. Australia has the highest ratio of pet ownership in the world, changing demographics, including an ageing population and increase in number of people choosing to live alone would suggest that this would remain so. Combined with higher density residential developments becoming more common, there will be increasing pressure on public open space to provide for leisure and recreation pursuits involving dogs and an increasing need to approach the issue of responsible pet ownership in a positive manner.

One of the major challenges Council faces, is not necessarily providing Dogs off Lead areas, but in the short to medium term, providing education to ensure a greater focus on responsible pet ownership in public places.

2.2 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The strategic planning and development toward potential establishment of dogs off lead open space is as vitally important as any public open space master planning to accommodate Dogs off Lead areas. It is important to have a policy document that addresses planning and provides, strategic guidelines governing use, design and infrastructure provision, including, a clear

community consultation plan. In addition to formulating policy, an acute awareness of the public liability, risk management and ongoing management and maintenance costs associated with these open space areas is required.

The following provides an overview of the key considerations that need to be given to address the many issues surrounding dogs in public open space off lead.

2.2.1 INTEGRATED PRINCIPLES

The planning and development for Dogs off Lead open spaces needs to be undertaken as an integrated exercise comprising key stakeholders including relevant Council departments including:

- Leisure Services: in coordinating the planning of Council's open space;
- Local Laws: from an implementation, enforcement and regulation perspective;
- Community Support & Development to engage identified potential users;
- Community Infrastructure to ensure appropriate maintenance is committed / undertaken and appropriate compliance of equipment;
- Town Planning: to ensure appropriate implementation of planning scheme principles, and permits obtained where required.

Also of importance to engage is the community including veterinary industry, community groups and resident, along with Councils insurance providers to ensure that the heightened element of risk associated with dogs off lead in public open space is managed appropriately.

The planning and development process requires a strategic basis, relating to policy development and should be aligned with other Council strategy documents and statements.

2.2.2 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

As a result of the broader pet ownership and management issues surrounding Dogs of lead Open Spaces, significant community consultation is required prior to any off lead areas being designated by Council. It is important that if Council pursue off lead open space areas, the community is well informed as to the reasons surrounding all decisions.

Benchmarking shows this to be a contentious issue in the community, therefore, to ensure adequate community consultation is achieved, a marketing strategy will be required to assist in this process. This needs to be included in the budget for establishment costs.

Promotional material should form part of a broader marketing strategy and would include a small brochure detailing Council preferred / proposed locations, infrastructure and conditions of use information.

2.2.3 CONDITIONS OF USE

Clear, effectively communicated conditions of use are essential to ensure awareness and encourage appropriate responsible use of Dogs off lead open space is undertaken. Significant promotional and "conditions of use" signage will be required at specified open space areas forming part of the implementation and marketing strategy.

2.2.3 IDENTIFICATION OF DOGS OFF LEAD AREAS CRITERIA / DESIGN GUIDELINES

It is important that Dogs off Lead Open Space areas are strategically planned, designed and developed to meet the needs of all users. Should Council decide to pursue dogs off lead open

spaces, criteria for identification and design guidelines will need to be adopted in order to assess open space areas as being suitable for these activities.

Amenity may differ between sites to ensure consistency with the themes of each area, however, the following criteria provides a consistent approach to their development and design can be undertaken to ensure a standard of provision is maintained and community expectation met.

Table 1: Criteria and Design Guidelines

Criteria	Standard Provision Design Guidelines
Size and Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 Ha of predominately passive open space in Melton Township - 2acres – 1Ha in the Eastern Growth Corridor given existing open space provision and lot sizes - Direct area not adjacent (distance?) to playground public barbeques or exercise equipment amenities - Serviced on hike and bike path network
<u>Fencing / Entry – Exit Requirements</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fencing to be minimum 1.2m in height surrounding specific dog run area to provide clear boundaries between on and off lead areas - Entrance and Exit gates child proof, and to be shut at all times
<u>Surface</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural Terrain with blend of fine crushed rock - Fine crushed rock preferable at least at entry and exit points to ensure accessibility
<u>Activity Components</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No standard provision. - Agility equipment to be provided.
<u>Infrastructure</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dog litter collection points (poop bags) - Park furniture, seating at regular intervals, shelter structure for all weather use - Water fountains for both handler and animal - Public Toilets
<u>Signage</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Information: Promote responsible pet ownership messages - Directional Information: Outlining areas of off lead use, areas of on lead use etc - Code of behaviour instructional: Clearly outline times of availability for off lead activities, Conditions of use etc.
<u>Essential Services</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water to site - Power to site (preferable, not standard provision)
<u>Waste Management</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bins provided throughout reserve - General litter must be on waste management contract - Enviro disposal of waste process

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For examples, photos of other Dogs Off Lead Areas and equipment please refer **Appendix 1**.

2.2.4 BUDGET MANAGEMENT

The amenity of Dogs Off Lead Open Spaces throughout the industry varies greatly. The important step for any Council in establishing Dogs off Lead Open Spaces is not just identifying the appropriate open space but also developing a standard set of design guidelines to guide development and provision as per Table 1 above.

This also requires careful planning and financial management to ensure this is completed in a strategic and well-planned manner to ensure the best results. Considerations must be given to size and style of open space, fencing issues, surface treatments, and infrastructure required, signage and essential services.

It is anticipated that to accommodate a base standard dogs off lead open space area, a minimum financial commitment of \$45,000 by Council will be required for the initial set up of the open space, as itemised below in **Table 2: Minimum Requirements**, including an ongoing management and maintenance budget installed into the appropriate Council Department budget.

Ideally a further financial commitment of approx \$35,000 to undertake recommended requirements is also suggested as per **Table 3: Recommended Requirements**.

Table 2: Minimum Requirements

Budget Item	Cost
Fencing (based on fencing of approx. 1.5 metres in height, black PVC coated mesh)	\$60 per lineal metre for 400 metres (1Ha) \$25,500
Waste Management Disposal Units	\$5,000
Signage (Promotional and Conditions of Use)	\$5,000
Water Connection	Site Specific unknown
Plus ongoing Yearly Maintenance*	
General litter bins, seating etc.	\$10,000

Table 3: Recommended Requirements

Budget Item	Cost
Surface Treatments (Granitic Sand Paths and Access points)	\$10,000
Dog Agility Equipment	\$15,000
Small sized marketing Brochure	\$10,000
Plumbing Services	Site Specific (unknown value)

Section Three: Future development

3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The research and consultation undertaken to date has provided a strategic approach in identifying future recommendations regarding Dogs off Lead Open Space area development.

Research as part of Councils Leisure and Open Strategy indicates there is a need to ensure that a positive and cooperative approach is taken in regards to dog ownership issues and opportunities in the Melton Shire. Walking and Passive Recreation opportunities are an important recreation and leisure pursuit for residents in the Melton Shire as identified in Councils Active Lifestyle Strategy 2006.

Given Councils competing budget interests, it is important that any future developments are well planned and designed to ensure risk management issues are addressed and the best result for community is achieved.

The following form the key recommendations as part of this strategy to provide strategic guidance in the planning and development of Dogs Off Lead Open Space Areas within the Melton Shire:

1. As part of an integrated need assessment, engage the community and other key stakeholders to further assess the need for Dogs off Lead Open Space areas
2. Engage the community to develop a Dogs off Lead in Open Space Area Council Policy.
3. As part of an ongoing process, investigate and identify sites across the Melton Shire for suitability for Dogs off Lead Open Space Areas. It is recommended as the first stage to assess sites at MacPherson Park, Navan Park and Town Centre Park in the Melton Township and Boronia Drive in the Eastern Growth Corridor, as these are the existing sites that address the required criteria outlined in the strategy.
4. Refer all recommended development sites to Councils long term Capital Works program.

3.2 FUNDING

To establish a Dogs Off Lead Open Space Area would require significant human resource and financial resource commitments to be undertaken in order to manage the many risk management issues associated with such activities.

As a minimum, for base level Dogs in Open Space area, an establishment cost of approximately \$35,000 - \$60,000 plus an ongoing program for ongoing management and maintenance would be required.

4. TIME FRAMES

To ensure the proposed strategy remains relevant to the current environment, the strategy will be reviewed every 12 months prior to the Council Budget Process to reflect changing community needs, as well as provide opportunity to seek funding for proposed areas.

5. SUMMARY

As any resident can currently exercise their dog in public open space on a lead or under affective control as per appropriate legislations, the need for a Dogs off Lead Open Space area requires clear evidence.

A recent broad assessment of appropriate off lead areas indicated that the Melton Shire is limited in its current opportunities to provide the community a range of open space off lead opportunities,

especially in the Eastern Growth Corridor where the provision of open space is severely restricted. Two potential sites have been identified and require further analysis.

This strategy recommends that if the need for Dogs Off Lead Areas becomes greater, then a formal policy, similar to the draft policy document attached be presented to Council for endorsement.

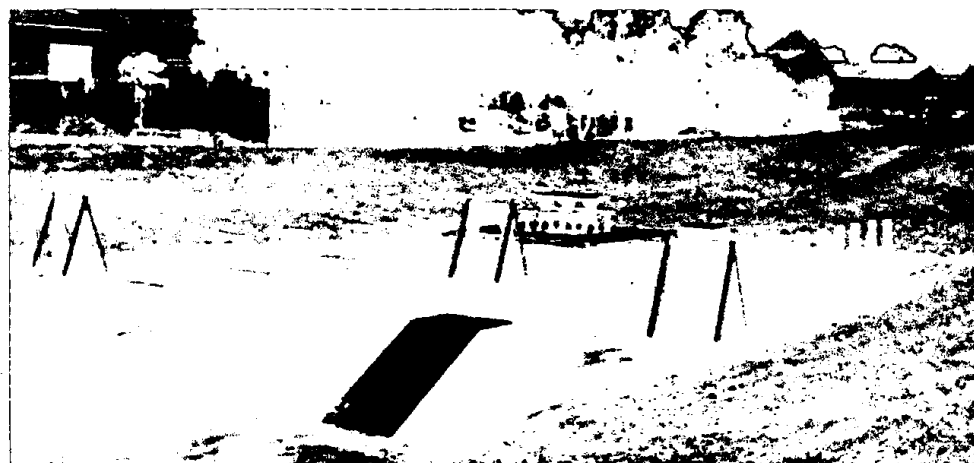
6. REFERENCES

APPENDIX ONE: Examples of Dog off Lead Areas

- **Table One: Criteria and Design Guidelines**
- **Table Two: Minimum Requirements**
- **Table Three: Recommended Requirements**

Appendix 1

Examples of Dog Off Lead Equipment



Design Criteria for Dogs of Lead Open Space Areas

It is important that Dogs off Lead Open Space areas are strategically planned, designed and developed to meet the needs of all users.

Amenity will differ between sites to ensure consistency with the themes of each area, however, with the following criteria addressed, a consistent approach to their development can be undertaken to ensure a standard provision is provided and community expectation met.

Criteria	Standard Provision
<u>Size and Style</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 Ha of predominately passive open space in Melton Township - 2acres – Ha in the Eastern Growth Corridor given open space limitations - Direct area not adjacent (distance?) to playground public barbeques or exercise equipment amenities - Serviced by hike and bike path network
<u>Fencing / Entry – Exit Requirements</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fencing to be minimum 1.2m in height surrounding specific dog run area to provide clear boundaries between on and off lead areas - Entrance and Exit gates child proof, and to be shut at all times
<u>Surface</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural Terrain / Fine crushed rock - Fine crushed rock preferable at least at entry and exit points to ensure accessibility
<u>Activity Components</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not standard provision. - Agility equipment provided, Subject to funding.
<u>Infrastructure</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dog litter collection points (poop bags) - Park furniture, seating at regular intervals, shelter structure for all weather use - Water fountains for both handler and animal - Public Toilets
<u>Signage</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Information: Promote responsible pet ownership messages - Directional Information: Outlining areas of off lead use, areas of on lead use etc - Code of behaviour instructional: Clearly outline times of availability for off lead activities, Conditions of use etc.

<u>Essential Services</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Water to site.- Power to site
<u>Waste Management</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Bins provided throughout reserve- Must be on waste management contract

Attachment Two

Melton Shire Dogs of Lead Areas

These areas have been identified as opportunities for designated Dogs Off Lead Areas, where as per conditions of use in the Dogs off Lead Policy and signage at each location, handlers are able to walk their dogs without a lead.

Melton Township



MacPherson Park

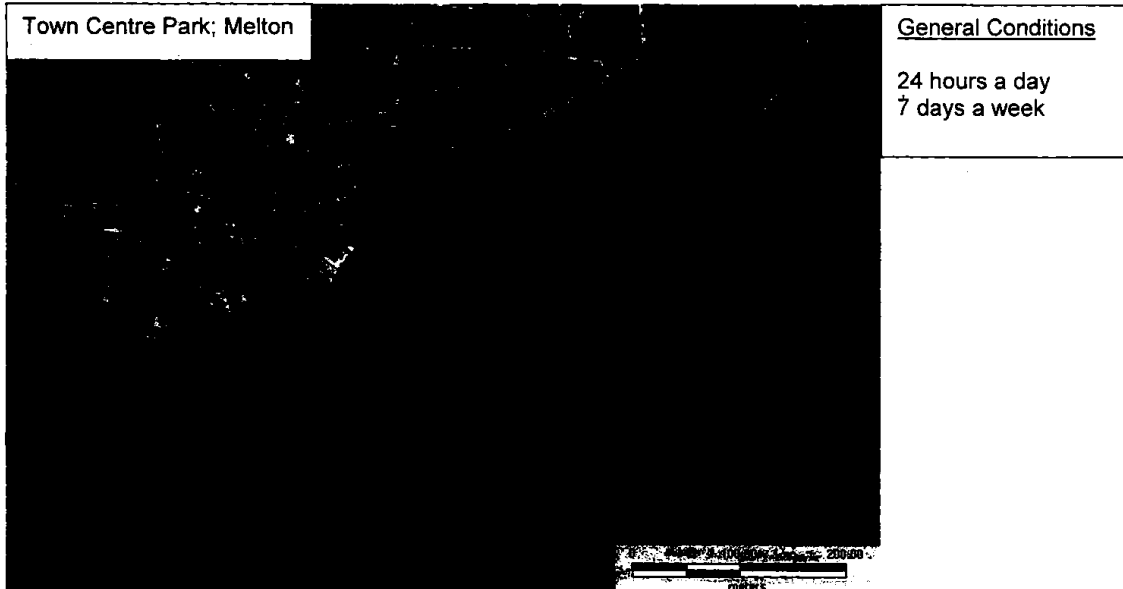
General Conditions
24 hours a day
7 days a week



Navan Park, Melton

General Conditions
24 hours a day
7 days a week

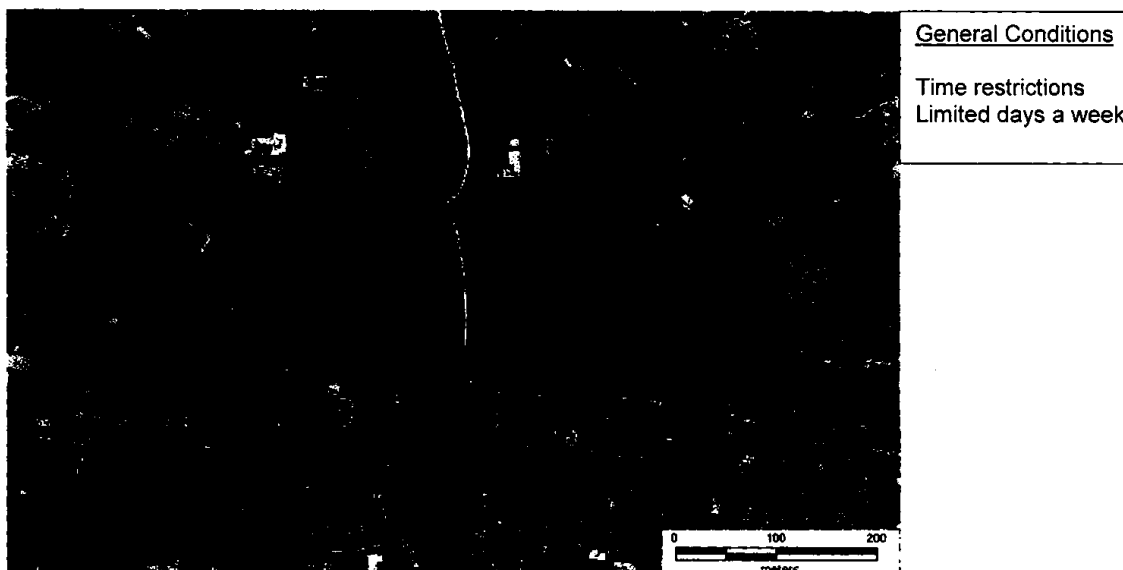
Attachment Two Melton Shire Dogs off Lead Areas



Eastern Growth Corridor

Preliminary research indicates there are very limited sites identified in the Eastern Growth Corridor to establish a Dog Off Lead Park as per the Dog Off Lead Policy Design Criteria, Attachment One.

The open Space reserve at Boronia Drive below provides greatest opportunity however any planned use of this reserve for Dogs Off Lead activities will require careful planning given the demand for active recreation activities being planned for this location as well as existing limited access and residential development issues.



Attachment Two

Melton Shire Dogs off Lead Areas

These areas have been identified as opportunities for designated Dogs Off Lead Areas, where as per conditions of use in the Dogs off Lead Policy and signage at each location, handlers are able to walk their dogs without a lead.

Melton Township

