

# Understanding the Psychology of Walkers with Dogs: new approaches to better management



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# Contents

|   | <b>PAGE</b> |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Preface</b>  |             |
| <b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>  | 1           |
| <b>1. BACKGROUND</b>  |             |
| 1.1 Background to the Research                                    | 3           |
| 1.2 Research Aims and Objectives                                  | 4           |
| 1.3 Methodological Approaches                                     | 4           |
| <b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>                                       |             |
| 2.1 Background to the Theory of Planned Behaviour                 | 5           |
| 2.2 The Theory of Planned Behaviour in Applied Settings           | 7           |
| 2.3 Exploring Ways to Change Behaviour                            | 8           |
| 2.4 Summary & Conclusions   | 10          |
| <b>3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS</b>                                 |             |
| 3.1 Generating Data Collection via Focus Groups                   | 11          |
| 3.2 Recruitment   | 11          |
| 3.3 Design  | 12          |
| 3.4 Procedure   | 12          |
| 3.5 Site Managers' Meeting  | 13          |
| 3.6 Follow-up Focus Groups  | 13          |
| 3.7 Analysis  | 13          |
| <b>4. DATA COLLECTION</b>   |             |
| 4.1 Descriptive Data  | 14          |
| 4.2 Summary of Main Themes  | 15          |
| 4.3 Attitudes & Beliefs of Site Managers                          | 23          |
| <b>5. ANALYSIS OF DATA</b>  |             |
| 5.1 Attitudes Towards Dog Ownership                               | 25          |
| 5.2 Attitudes Towards Walking & Sites                             | 26          |
| 5.3 Perceived Behavioural Control Beliefs                         | 27          |
| 5.4 Subjective Norms & Other Dog Walkers                          | 28          |
| 5.5 Returning to the Theory of Planned Behaviour                  | 29          |
| 5.6 Constructing Policy & Practice                                | 32          |
| <b>6. RECOMMENDATIONS</b>   |             |
| 6.1 General Approach  | 33          |
| 6.2 Changing Subjective Norms: dog walker groups                  | 34          |
| 6.3 Changing Attitudes & Beliefs: general awareness raising       | 36          |
| 6.4 Assisting Actual Behavioural Control: management & facilities | 39          |
| 6.5 Conclusion: ideas for further research                        | 42          |
| <b>REFERENCES</b>   | 43          |
| <b>APPENDICES</b>   |             |
| Appendix I Follow-up Letter                                       | 46          |
| Appendix II Screening Questionnaire                               | 47          |
| Appendix III Informed Consent Form                                | 48          |
| Appendix IV De-briefing Note for Participants of Focus Groups     | 49          |
| Appendix V Focus Group Lead-In Questions                          | 50          |



## **PREFACE**

Many agencies are concerned with encouraging people to exercise more as part of a healthy lifestyle and it is widely known that one of the main motivations for people to walk regularly is the need to exercise their dog. Dogs are allowed to access many areas of the countryside, including the whole of the rights of way network and most, if not all, countryside sites and country parks. Dog walkers therefore form a high percentage of countryside users, not only in Hampshire but across the country.

However, issues surrounding dogs out of control and dog fouling are raised time and again by farmers and land managers as key problems when managing the countryside, particularly in areas that are grazed or are of high conservation value. In recognition of these problems most research conducted to date has been concerned with the impact of dogs on wildlife and the effect that dogs have on the enjoyment of non-dog walkers.

The Kennel Club, the Countryside Agency and English Nature recognised the need for a more positive approach a few years ago when they started work on the joint publication 'You and your dog in the countryside'. With the advent of new open access land, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and the associated opportunities and restrictions for dog walking, it seems an appropriate time to develop a new approach to managing dogs in the countryside.

A seminar led by Professor Sam H. Ham explored the theory of planned behaviour; a framework for understanding why people behave the way they do in the countryside. By understanding the reasons why people exhibit certain behaviours, land managers may be able to challenge these beliefs and eventually change behaviour.

This seminar was attended by Hampshire County Council, the Kennel Club and Countryside Agency who then formed a partnership to look at applying this approach to understanding the beliefs and behaviours of dog walkers. In December a research contract was let to University of Portsmouth and a steering group formed chaired by a member of the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum.

The results are fascinating and provide a real insight into how people feel about their dogs, their interaction with fellow dog, and non-dog, walkers and the different ways that they use the countryside. The challenge now is to turn this understanding into actions which manage the countryside in ways that encourage everyone, and their dogs, to enjoy themselves in a responsible manner.

We hope that the results of this study, and the subsequent pilot projects, will provide a valuable and practical tool for anyone who manages access to the countryside in the UK.

### **The Steering Group members**

**Jo Hale**  
**Stephen Jenkinson & Phil Buckley**  
**Abigail Townsend**  
**Mark Braggins**

**Hampshire County Council**  
**The Kennel Club**  
**Countryside Agency**  
**Hampshire Countryside Access Forum**



## Executive Summary

Dog walking is a popular activity; it is reported that approximately one third of all visitors to the countryside are accompanied by a dog (Countryside Agency, 2006). Dog ownership encourages people to exercise, and walking can lead to physical, social and psychological benefits (Data Monitor Report, 2004; Podbersek, Paul, & Serpell, 2000), yet there can be a down side to this. For example, dogs can disrupt people walking without dogs, disturb wildlife, and foul in public areas. Countryside recreational research has tended to observe and report the behaviour of people walking with dogs (in the present research referred to as 'dog walkers'), rather than exploring the antecedents of their actions. The present research aims to: (i) examine the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers that might influence their behaviour; (ii) identify psychological principles that can influence how people think and behave; and (iii) apply these findings to develop recommendations for land management practice that might optimise the benefits and minimise the costs of people walking dogs in the countryside.

A consortium, comprising Hampshire County Council, The Kennel Club and the Countryside Agency, appointed the University of Portsmouth to conduct the present research. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) was used as a conceptual framework in order to explore why people might behave in certain ways. Data was collected from dog walkers who participated in focus group meetings, where they were encouraged to rationalise their attitudes toward dogs and their behaviour when walking with dogs. A group of site managers also met to discuss dog walkers who visit their sites. Preliminary analysis of data identified commonalities and variance in the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers that informed the development of a number of management measures. These measures incorporated psychological principles that can influence attitudes and behaviour, and were tested out during two subsequent focus group discussions.

Data analysis revealed that how dog walkers behave is influenced by attitudes and beliefs relating to their relationships with: (i) their dogs; (ii) those with whom they share dog-walking locations; and (iii) land management officials.

The first of these relationships, *between dog walker and dog*, is one of great importance to dog walkers and a major influence on their behaviour. Associated with physical, psychological and social benefits, the intensity of this relationship impacts on how dog walkers interact with and relate to their dogs, people and the environment. The preferences and needs of dogs influence where people choose to walk; favourite sites are those where dogs are perceived as most happy - where they are permitted to run off lead, where they can socialise with other dogs, where there is little danger of road traffic.

In terms of the relationship *between dog walkers and those with whom they share dog walking locations*, participants reported choosing to walk where they anticipated meeting other dog walkers, because they believed that their dog enjoyed socialising with other dogs. Such environments also provided social opportunities for the walkers themselves to interact with each other - this was perceived as a further benefit of walking a dog. Dog walkers tended to see themselves as members of a group with shared attitudes and norms, and meeting others when out walking provided a sense of safety within this group that was not experienced when walking in more remote areas. As a group, dog walkers reported occasional conflict with other people such as walkers without dogs, cyclists and joggers. There was some ill

feeling toward these other groups that were perceived as at times inconsiderate toward dogs and dog walkers. As a consequence, dog walkers often avoid locations where they are likely to meet people without dogs, and avoid also particular sites at particular times when they are most likely to be visited by such people.

Relationships *between dog walkers and land management officials* were mixed. Dog walkers presented positive attitudes toward site staff but were less so toward more senior officials whom they perceived as often 'anti-dog'. Site managers discussed the negative impact of dogs on their sites (mainly fouling and control issues that affect people, wildlife and livestock), whilst also referring to positive one-to-one communications between themselves and dog walkers. Also acknowledged were the positive aspects of people walking with dogs on their sites; described as unofficial wardens of the countryside, dog walkers were reported to pick up litter and report problems that may not otherwise be identified.

Findings from this project have led to a recommended package of management measures that can convey a positive approach to dog walkers and enhance the enjoyment of walking with a dog in the countryside. This positive approach recognises the relationship between dogs and their walkers and the impact this has on dog walking behaviour. Measures acknowledge the potential of dog walkers as a group to promote norms regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, whilst also recognising the need to bring a range of groups (e.g., walkers, cyclists, joggers) together within a forum where needs and opinions can be shared. Methods to enable communication between dog walkers and land management officials are also recommended.

Specifically, it is advised that policy and practice: (i) open the lines of communication with the dog walking community; (ii) provide clear and consistent messages that communicate how people (dog walkers and other visitors to the countryside) are expected to behave; (iii) encourage dog walkers to take responsibility for their dog's behaviour and promote desired dog walking behaviours within the dog walking community; and (iv) enable dog walkers to feel valued and welcomed at sites via the provision of measures such as dog-related facilities, products and events. The benefits of such an approach may include increased respect for others (other people, dogs, wildlife, livestock, and so on), harmony between different communities visiting the countryside, a cleaner environment, happy customers, and happy dogs. It is hoped that the recommendations contained in this report will be implemented in pilot schemes and that findings will inform future land management that will be both efficient and effective.



# 1.0 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Background to the Research

There are estimated to be around 6.2 million dogs in the UK and approximately 15 million owners taking shared responsibility for their care<sup>1</sup>. One quarter of all leisure trips in England are to the countryside. Walking is the most common activity<sup>2</sup> One third of all visitors to the countryside are accompanied by a dog<sup>3</sup>. Whilst there appears to be a slow decline in dog ownership, dog walking remains a major recreational activity in the countryside. In particular, dog walkers<sup>4</sup> are believed to be the countryside's most frequent visitors and many countryside dwellers choose to own a dog, encouraged by the benefits of their local environment for walking.

Dog walking can have physical, psychological and social benefits. However, land managers and other countryside users have identified dog-related problems (Table 1.1). In spite of considerable information and research about the management of walkers and their dogs,<sup>5</sup> there is very little empirical research into the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers themselves. Most studies and, indeed, management practices, emphasise restrictive measures, such as keeping dogs on leads or keeping dogs out of recreational areas altogether. In contrast, the present study identifies psychological factors underlying behaviours of dog walkers. It uses the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)<sup>6</sup> as its conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. The analysis and findings are then used as the basis for land management policy and practice recommendations contained in the report.

**Table 1.1: Problems of Dogs in the Countryside**

| <b>Unwanted behaviour from dogs</b>        | <b>Potential consequences</b>   |
|--|---|
| Dogs out of control                        | Risk to dogs (e.g. may be shot by land owners, may get caught in barbed wire); risk to other animals (see below)  |
| Dogs disturbing wildlife                   | May chase from habitat; may chase into road; may separate mother from their young; may die of shock; may be dangerous for dogs (e.g. may be attacked by wildlife, or may become ill afterwards) |
| Dogs disturbing livestock                  | May harm livestock; may get harmed by livestock; may be shot by land owner  |
| Disturbance of ground nesting birds        | May not return to nests; eggs won't hatch or chicks will die  |
| Flora damaged or destroyed                 | Plants maybe rare; provide habitat or food for animals/ insects   |
| Not picking up dogs mess                   | Other site users (e.g. school parties of children, wheelchair users) tread in mess; spread of disease; cost of clearing up by others  |
| Picking up mess but not depositing in bins | Cost of clearing up; damage to the environment (bags do not biodegrade); it looks unpleasant for other visitors to the area; hazard for staff working.  |

<sup>1</sup> Kennel Club, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> English Tourism Council, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Countryside Agency, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> A "dog walker" is taken to mean any person who walks, regularly or irregularly, with a dog. As well as dog owners, this might include people walking a dog for a friend or neighbour, professional dog walkers and family members who take turns to walk the same dog.

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive literature review, see English Nature, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975.

## **1.2 Research Aim and Objectives**

Our research was aimed at the following six questions:-

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers in the countryside concerning the benefits and costs of their dog walking activities?
2. What are their attitudes and beliefs concerning the countryside sites in which they walk?
3. What attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers are associated with their walking behaviour and walking intentions?
4. What are the needs of this group?
5. What management approaches can be taken in order to influence behaviour to enhance the experience of dog walkers in these areas, whilst minimising the costs?
6. What are the attitudes and beliefs of site managers in relation to dog walkers?
7. How might communication/interventions with dog walkers be best focused?

## **1.3 Methodological Approach**

### **1.3.1 Literature review**

A literature review was conducted in order to ground the present study within the domain of existing research. The review found no research that assesses the *attitudes, beliefs and needs* of dog walkers; it did find that the Theory of Planned Behaviour would provide a sound conceptual basis for the research and analysis that would address the aims of this research project; and it also identified focus groups as an excellent forum for gathering relevant data on countryside dog walkers.

### **1.3.2 Data collection**

There were, in effect, two stages in the data collection process. First, ten focus groups were set up to gather data on the attitudes and beliefs that underlie dog-walking behaviour. Dog walkers were specifically targeted to be participants. A meeting of site managers was also held at this stage, in order to gather information about the site managers' attitudes and beliefs about dogs, dog walkers, their behaviour and their impact on countryside sites. Analysis of the data collected at both of these platforms formed the basis of a set of land-management recommendations. At stage two, these recommendations were presented to two more focus groups in order to gauge their reaction to the proposed measures. Data analysis from this stage led to a further refined set of land management recommendations.

### **1.3.3 Analysis and recommendations for land management practices**

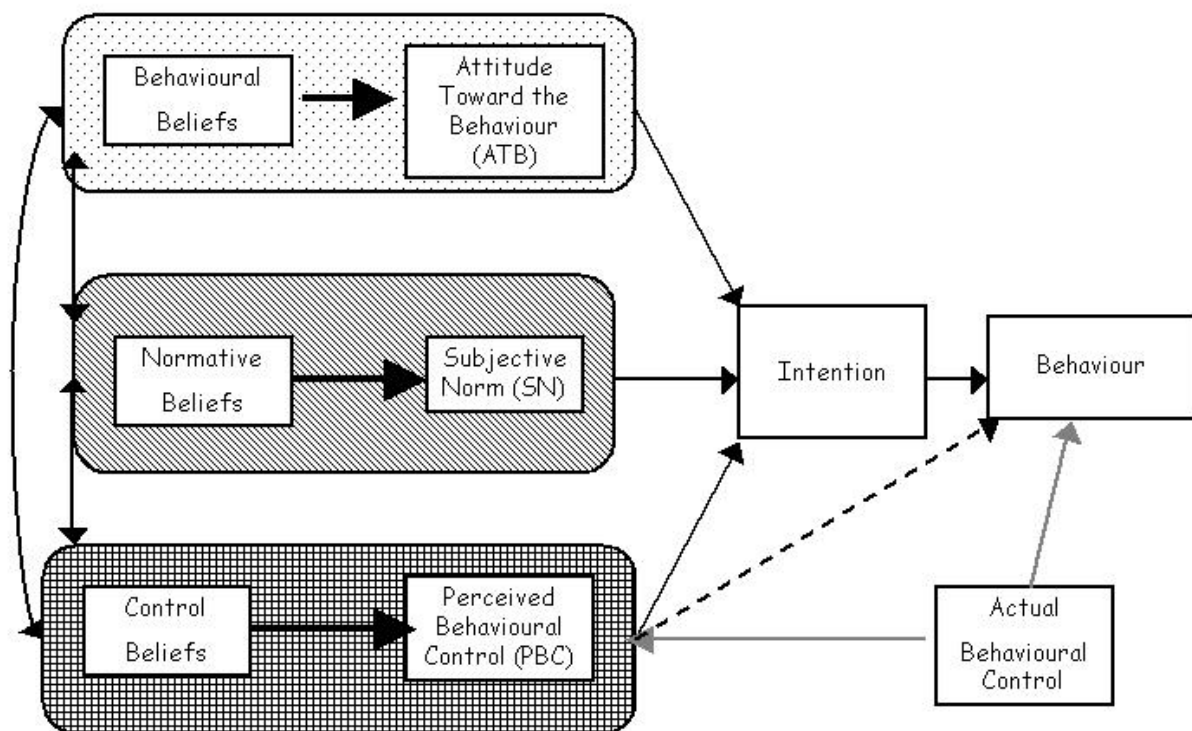
A Grounded Theory approach was used to analyse the data concerning the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers and site managers. Themes, sub-themes and relationships between them were identified. These results were then used in combination with findings from the literature review to generate the land management recommendations.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW: SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS UNDERLYING BEHAVIOUR

### 2.1 Background to the Theory of Planned Behaviour

More than 100 years ago social psychologists began developing models that could help us to understand and predict human behaviour. However, early research failed to identify a significant relationship between attitudes and behaviour. In the 1950s 'expectancy-value models' emerged; the most widely accepted of these being the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)<sup>7</sup> and the more recent Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)<sup>8</sup>.

Fig. 2.1: The Theory of Planned Behaviour



Source: Ajzen, 1991.

Both models assume that behaviour is predicted by *intention* to perform behaviour, with TRA being the first model to reliably demonstrate a link between *attitude* and *action*. Intention represents a motivation that is part of a conscious plan or decision to exert effort to enact a behaviour. The TRA holds that intentions are influenced by attitudes<sup>9</sup> towards the behaviour (ATB) and subjective norm (SN).<sup>10</sup> However, it

<sup>7</sup> Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Ajzen, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Attitudes can vary in strength and are defined as a positive or negative evaluation of a specific behaviour and the perceived consequences of that behaviour. Attitudes reflect internal beliefs and interests, and are neither correct or incorrect, since they are based on personal experience and understanding.

was found that TRA did not perform well in explaining behaviours that require skills, resources or opportunities not freely available to the person. Thus, the TPB added a further determinant of intention particularly relevant in this study: the measure of perceived behavioural control (PBC).

As shown in Figure 2.1, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are all influenced by different types of beliefs. These are known as *behavioural beliefs*, *normative beliefs* and *control beliefs*. That is, human behavior is guided by three kinds of considerations:-

- i. **Behavioural beliefs** - beliefs about the likely outcomes of the behaviour and the evaluations of these outcomes;
- ii. **Normative beliefs** - beliefs about the normative expectations of others and motivation to comply with these expectations; and
- iii. **Control beliefs** - beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behaviour and the perceived power of these factors.

In their respective aggregates (illustrated in Fig 2.1):

- i. Behavioural beliefs produce a favorable or unfavorable **attitude toward the behaviour (ATB)**;
- ii. Normative beliefs result in perceived social pressure or **subjective norm (SN)**; and
- iii. Control beliefs give rise **to perceived behavioural control (PBC)**.

In combination, attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm, and perception of behavioural control lead to the formation of a **behavioural intention** (as illustrated by the box "Intention").

As a general rule, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger is the person's intention to perform the behaviour in question. Finally, given a sufficient degree of *actual* control over the behaviour, people are expected to carry out their intentions when the opportunity arises. Intention is thus assumed to be the immediate antecedent of behaviour. However, because there may be factors that may help or inhibit a person's ability to act in a certain way, actual behavioral control must also be acknowledged as a possible moderator between perceived behavioural control and actual behaviour. Hence, the TPB may be best applied to a person who has a high degree of control over their actions performing a certain behaviour.

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<sup>10</sup> Subjective norms are an individual's belief concerning how they will be evaluated when performing a certain behaviour by people they judge to be important to them. Subjective norms reflect how a person is affected by external, social influences.

## 2.2 The Theory of Planned Behaviour in Applied Settings

The TPB has been used in a vast range of applied settings in order to examine the relationship between attitude and behaviour. Applications that seem closest to the context of the present study include the use of TPB to examine people's inclination to behave in an environmentally-friendly manner, with some interesting results<sup>11</sup>. For example, it has been proposed that environmentally-friendly attitudes and behaviour can be encouraged by educating people in the needs and the uniqueness of that environment<sup>12</sup>. Others have found that pro-environmental attitudes are a strong determinant of attitudes toward recycling, and that pro-environmental behaviours could be encouraged via appropriate opportunities and facilities for recycling, and information regarding how to recycle, and by minimising deterrents such as time, space and resources<sup>13</sup>.

Some researchers have used TPB to examine conservation-related behaviours of farmers, with a specific aim of understanding attitudes and identifying the underlying determinants of behaviour<sup>14</sup>. Results in this case indicated that conservation-friendly behaviour was encouraged by the provision of resources, whilst resource constraints had the opposite effect.

The TPB environmental studies also suggested that desired behaviour might be increased through education and by making it easy for people to behave in the desired way. In this sense, costs and benefits should also be assessed. For example, in the above mentioned study, people complained that recycling boxes often trapped water, and this was cited as a deterrent to recycling<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, promotion of desired behaviours as socially-desirable or socially-acceptable were found to encourage pro-environmental actions. It is proposed that a direct relationship exists between a change in a component of the model, and a change in behavioural intention, and therefore any attempt to alter behaviour must be directed at one or more of the individual's personal beliefs<sup>16</sup>.

The TPB only seems to have been used in the context of walking and outdoor recreation on a few occasions, and more in health campaign research than land management. For example, one study used it to examine the relationships between the TPB constructs and exercise behavior and exercise intention in older women. Perceived control beliefs and behavioural beliefs were seen to be significant predictors of exercise behaviour. Both these constructs and normative beliefs were seen to be significant predictors of exercise behaviour *intention*<sup>17</sup>.

In terms of conservation and site management, TPB was used to examine the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behavioural intentions of boaters toward manatees and their conservation in Tampa Bay, Florida. The results show a strong normative influence on boaters' behavioural intention to follow speed zones and provide a basis for recommendations about public communication interventions<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Beedell & Rehman, 2000; Chan, 1998; Gilg & Barr, 2005; Harland, Staats, & Wilke, 1999; Holden, 1998; Tonglet, Phillips, & Read, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Holden, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Tonglet et al. , 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Beedell & Rehman, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Tonglet et al. , 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein, 1973.

<sup>17</sup> Conn et al. 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Aipanjiguly et al., 2003

## 2.3 Exploring Ways to Change Behaviour

### 2.3.1 Routes to persuasion: Central and peripheral

Every day we are exposed to large amounts of (often contradictory) information, concerning a range of topics. People have to choose which information to examine carefully, which to evaluate using a minimum amount of effort, and which to ignore. Hence people can deal with information either superficially or systematically<sup>19</sup>

Psychologists have identified the *central* and *peripheral* routes to persuasion, which describe how people act in order to reach a judgment concerning a topic<sup>20</sup>.

via the **central route** - diligently considering the issue-relevant arguments; or  
via the **peripheral route** - by not giving the content of the message much thought, rather relying on secondary cues, such as the perceived credibility or attractiveness of the information-provider.

Research has shown that when developing messages aimed to persuade people via the **central route**, it should be noted that (i) first their attention must be gained; (ii) the message should be kept simple yet accurate; and (iii) that a number of strong arguments can increase the persuasiveness of the message<sup>21</sup>.

If aiming to persuade people via the **peripheral route**, effectiveness can be optimized by factors such as: (i) increasing the perceived credibility of the information-provider; (ii) the attractiveness of the message; and/ or the information-provider; (iii) the perceived expertise of the messenger; and (iv) the use of statistics to support arguments.

Research has found that individuals will tend to be influenced by one or the other of these routes to persuasion, depending upon the topic at hand, with topics of high personal relevance usually assessed via the central route, whilst topics of low personal relevance usually assessed via the peripheral route. That is, whilst both the central and peripheral routes to persuasion can be used to influence people, personal relevance is a moderator of the process, with persons who are more involved with a topic processing information more thoroughly than those who are less involved. Furthermore, whilst the central route has been found to have more enduring effects compared to the peripheral route, it does require the cognitive capacity to process information, and the motivation to do so. Hence, the peripheral route to persuasion may be more successful when people are unable or unmotivated to process available information.

Understanding of the different routes to persuasion is important in relation to the present research, since our findings will be used to develop strategies that persuade dog walkers to adopt certain desired behaviours, and avoid other undesired behaviours. In order to change people's actions, we need to first identify their primary beliefs, then construct a message that comprises information that either changes the person's perception of the behaviour, or influences their evaluation of the behaviour. A combination of both central and peripheral routes to persuasion is recommended. A combined route approach will reach parties who perceive information relating to dog walking behaviour as of high relevance, as well as those

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<sup>19</sup> Chaiken, 1980; 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Petty & Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984.

<sup>21</sup> Smith & Mackie, 1995

who perceive it to be of low relevance, and will reach those who are willing and motivated to process information, as well as those who are less inclined to do so.

### **2.3.2 Emotional appeals as routes to persuasion**

Another way of persuading people is by using *emotional appeals* in order to influence attitudes and beliefs. These are messages aimed at eliciting emotions in people which in turn can influence their views and actions<sup>22</sup>. Such affective routes to persuasion are often used in advertising, by using cues such as photographs, film or music to elicit emotion that will then be associated with a product or a behaviour. Emotions elicited may be positive or negative. For example, joyful music accompanied by happy images may be used to sell children's toys or to encourage families to visit a tourist attraction, and attractive females might be used to advertise cars. Conversely, charities might use distressing images in order to encourage donations to their organisation or cause. When applying the emotional route to persuasion, again, messages are most effective when kept simple and direct. Findings from the present study will be considered in relation to the use of emotional appeals when making recommendations for future land management practices.

### **2.3.3 Cognitive dissonance theory and the foot-in-the-door technique**

Cognitive dissonance refers to discomfort experienced when individuals perceive their behaviour to be inconsistent with their attitudes<sup>23</sup>. When such an inconsistency is noticed, negative feelings such as tension and discomfort that occur usually result in a shift in attitudes so that they are no longer inconsistent with behaviour. However, if people can be persuaded to change their *behaviour*, it will create cognitive dissonance. They will then align their *attitudes* with their behaviours. Hence, if people can be persuaded to make a small change in their behaviour, then their attitude may also change, and more changes in behaviour may follow<sup>24</sup>.

Cognitive dissonance may be one factor that underlies the *foot-in-the-door technique*, a method that has been used to successfully persuade people to change their behaviour. This technique encourages people to make a small change in behaviour which can later facilitate a larger change in behaviour. This outcome may be partly due to cognitive dissonance, but is also due to a shift in a person's self-perception. For example, if a person can be persuaded to donate a very small amount of money to a charity, they will perceive themselves as the kind of person who gives to charity. This shift in self-perception means that if they are later asked to donate a larger amount, they are more likely to agree because of the way they see themselves. Stickers often given in return for a donation to charity can be a visual reinforcer of this self-perception. Hence, programmes that aim to shift people's behaviour may be successful if they apply the foot-in-the-door technique as part of the scheme.

### **2.3.4 Group membership, conformity and norms**

Whilst attitudes reflect the views of individuals, social norms reflect the evaluations of groups. When people belong to a group, this membership can give feelings of connectedness, self-worth and self-esteem<sup>25</sup>. Behaviour acquired via group membership can shape future behaviour and self-identity<sup>26</sup>. That is, group membership can be a powerful influence on people's views and behaviours, where

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<sup>22</sup> Smith & Mackie, 1995.

<sup>23</sup> Festinger, 1957.

<sup>24</sup> See Cooper & Fazio, 1984, for excellent review.

<sup>25</sup> Smith & Mackie, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Eagly, 1987.

individual members strive to conform to group norms and act in ways that are endorsed by other group members. Hence, encouraging people to feel part of a group can have a positive impact on behaviour and can be a powerful tool for persuading people to adopt desired behaviours and avoid undesired behaviours. For example, if dog walkers feel that they are part of a group, they will conform to the behaviour that is perceived as desirable by that group. A programme aimed at land management issues concerning dog walkers could promote desired behaviours as the norms of dog walkers as a group, and this should elicit conformity to such desired behaviours. Furthermore, since people learn about the norms of their group most importantly via observation of other group members, the more people are encouraged to behave in a certain way, the more others will join in. Group membership is also part of a person's self-identity, therefore promotion of positive characteristics of the group will be adopted by members of that group and incorporated into a person's identity. For example, promoting dog walkers as 'protectors of the countryside', 'responsible animal lovers', or 'environmentally-friendly', can encourage these people to behave in a way that reflects such labels.

## **2.4 Summary and Conclusions**

Explaining human behaviour in all its complexity is not an easy task, since people can be influenced by physical, psychological, and social factors. Policy-makers wishing to influence people's behaviour need to examine in great detail the fundamental determinants of actions, and it is suggested that a social-psychological framework provides considerable potential to advance academic and practical understanding of the link between attitude and behaviour. The Theory of Planned Behavior provides an optimistic approach to behaviour in that it suggests change is possible. Hence, not only is the TPB a predictive model, but it also provides a framework from which to develop programmes that aim to change human actions. Using the model as a framework for research, data is collected on the attitudes of dog walkers and the beliefs that underlie these attitudes. Results are then used to devise practical land management approaches to dog walkers and their actions, to minimise the costs, maximize the benefits, facilitate desired behaviours, and discourage undesirable behaviours. Recommendations incorporate central and peripheral routes to persuasion and emotional appeals in order to develop methods for encouraging desired behaviours and discouraging undesired behaviours. The promotion of group membership is also considered.



## 3.0 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

### 3.1 Generating and Collecting Data via Focus Groups

Focus groups are the main data source for this study. Focus groups allow the collection of qualitative data that provides a rich and detailed picture of the beliefs and actions of dog walkers, employing a bottom-up approach and allowing data generation to be driven by participants rather than researchers. Focus groups can be used at preliminary or exploratory stages in research, to evaluate or develop a particular programme, and to use after programme completion to assess its impact or to generate further avenues of research<sup>27</sup>. The conversation is focused by a 'Moderator'. Moderators ideally have some involvement with the subject, their role being to guide conversations with specific questions or topic areas, therefore allowing for flexibility within required confines. Hence they set the boundaries and ensure that conversation remains focused on the topic at hand. Within focus groups, communication is a three-part process where the research team decide what topics are to be addressed within focus group discussions, participants create conversation around the chosen topic/s, and the researchers summarise what is learned from the participants.

Interaction between focus group members enables the development of ideas and opinions, since individual participants may have their own views and thoughts on a topic but may not have considered the subject in depth. Group discussions lead to participants sharing and comparing their experiences and opinions, and the data that results from this can give powerful insights into the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and priorities of those involved with an issue. Hence focus groups have been used in psychology to examine attitudes toward a range of topics<sup>28</sup>.

Focus groups can be used to gain several perspectives on the same topic and to examine what issues are salient, why an issue is salient, and what is salient about it. Hence the gap between what people say and what people do is better understood<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, focus groups do not discriminate against people who cannot read or write, whilst the interactive process can enable communication from those who may initially feel they have little to say<sup>30</sup>. Such methods lead to large amounts of concentrated data, analysis of which relies on the strength of qualitative methodology via exploration and discovery, context and depth (background behind ideas and views), and interpretation. Analysis can examine why people think and/or behave in certain ways, resulting in the identification of key themes and specific suggestions for change.

### 3.2 Recruitment

Participants to the focus groups were recruited from 12 popular dog-walking sites in the south Hampshire countryside; these comprise a mixture of nature reserves, country parks, woodland sites and Rights of Way. The sites were categorised into three 'types' according to their dog-walking characteristics: Type A – edge of town sites popular for regular, daily walking; Type B – destination sites, mostly reached by car with some facilities but no manager onsite; Type C – country parks with some facilities and a manager on-site.

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<sup>27</sup> Krueger, 1998; Race, Hotch, & Parker, 1994; Gibbs, 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Gibbs, 1997; Kitzinger, 1995; Guerrero et al., 2000; Long, Johansson, Diwan, & Winkrist, 1999; Mitra, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Gibbs, 1997; Lankshear, 1993.

<sup>30</sup> Kitzinger, 1995.

In early February 2006 an advertising campaign was aimed at all of the sites specified by Hampshire County Council, in order to recruit participants who use a range of dog walking areas (Types A, B & C). Recruitment was both by poster and direct approach to dog walkers at the specific sites. Direct recruitment allowed us to confirm participation and select certain under-represented groups (e.g. male dog walkers and pre-retirement dog walkers). Appropriate focus group venues were booked, and the necessary equipment was obtained. Participants were allocated to meetings scheduled to be held nearest to where they walked regularly, and/or at a time to suit.

A total of 10 focus groups were held on weekdays (day and evening) and weekends, in order to recruit a range of people (e.g. workers, unemployed, retired, etc.). As participants were recruited, follow-up letters were sent out (see Appendix I). A screening questionnaire that collected general data about participants was designed, plus an informed consent form (see Appendices II & III), and a de-brief to be provided at the end of each session (see Appendix IV).

### **3.3 Design**

Before data collection began, certain key topics were identified, based on a review of the literature and discussions with members of the Steering Group. A protocol of topics and prompt questions were generated, to enable participants to lead the conversation in ways that they chose (see Appendix V). Many of the topics identified in the protocol tended to be discussed spontaneously without prompting from moderators, hence the protocol was perceived as an appropriate summary of issues that were important and relevant. Within each focus group participants were encouraged to talk about the positives and negatives of owning a dog and dog walking experiences.

### **3.4 Procedure**

Participants were welcomed, given name badges, and asked to read and complete the informed consent form and screening questionnaire. The moderators introduced themselves and the research project to the participants. Participants were thanked for coming and informed that the research was being conducted by the University of Portsmouth, and funded by Hampshire County Council, the Kennel Club, and the Countryside Agency. It was stated that this was a project that was examining the views and beliefs of people concerning dog walking and their dogs. Participants were told that although there were a number of key topics to be covered within the session, the conversation would be participant-led, in that they would be encouraged to discuss the issues that they perceived to be relevant and important.

Each session began with an 'icebreaker', where participants split into pairs and spent a few minutes finding out about each other and their dogs (most participants had photographs of their dogs for this purpose) and, after several minutes, each participant introduced their 'partner' to the group. Participants were asked to describe how their dogs fit in to their daily routine and then the designed protocol was used in order to cover the key topic areas. When all topics had been discussed and participants agreed that they had discussed all of the issues that they perceived to be important, the sessions were ended. Refreshments were provided during meetings, and afterwards participants were again thanked for participating, de-briefed, and given 'doggy gift bags'.

All focus group meetings lasted between 1.5-2 hours, and ranged in size from 3 - 13 participants. Participants included one partially sighted participant and his guide dog and two puppy walkers with trainee hearing dogs for the deaf. All focus groups were audio recorded. Audio recordings were transcribed and analysed.

### **3.5 Site Managers' Meeting**

In April 2006, a meeting was convened with six site managers (5 male, 1 female) from sites around southern Hampshire that are popular with dog walkers and are managed by different agencies (Hampshire County Council, Eastleigh Borough Council, Forestry Commission, English Nature). The meeting lasted two hours and allowed site managers a chance to discuss how they felt about dog walkers using their sites. Within this group there was one dog owner, one previous dog owner, and one potential dog owner (would like to own a dog but perceived this as inappropriate due to work commitments).

A series of questions was used to stimulate discussion. The session was audio recorded and a full transcript produced. The meeting was analysed to help inform the development of management measures for dog walkers.

### **3.6 Follow-up Focus Groups**

A further 2 'follow-up' focus groups were held *after* analysis of the first focus groups and site managers' meeting to (a) help with the interpretation of results and (b) test ideas for management measures that might improve the experience of dog walkers at sites and of other users at sites. Recruitment was by direct approach to a selection of participants from the first-stage focus groups. An attempt was made to select across age groups and to include male and female participants. A total of 13 people attended; 7 in the first group (6 females, 1 male) and 6 in the second (3 females, 3 males). Both follow-up focus groups were held at the weekend, in order to assure attendance by those working full time during the week. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form, and a de-brief form was provided at the end of each session. Each session lasted approximately two hours. The follow-up focus groups were audio recorded and full transcripts were produced for each session. The results were analysed in order to make recommendations concerning the development of management measures for dog walkers.

### **3.7 Analysis**

The ten 'first-stage' focus groups generated some 800 pages of transcripts. The data was analysed in eight separate stages, in order to identify the beliefs that underlie the attitudes and behaviours of dog walkers, enabling us to build a model for change. Stage 1 involved a read through of all of the transcripts of all ten focus groups, several times, in order to get a gist of the discussions of the focus groups. Stage 2 involved making notes on transcripts of general ideas and relevant material. In Stage 3, the transcripts were edited in order to remove data not relevant to the project. Stage 4 involved making notes on the edited transcripts in order to divide responses into eight separate *issues categories*, according to the eight lead issues questions asked during the focus groups. In Stage 5, the data was edited and categorised into the eight issues categories. Stage 6 involved making notes on the edited transcripts of ideas, themes, relationships between themes, allowing data to be sorted into themes for each of the eight issues categories in Stage 7. Stage 8 involved making sense of the broad picture of the results and constructing a 'story' that fairly represents what participants said during the focus groups.

## 4.0 DATA COLLECTION

### 4.1 Descriptive Data

The total sample size for all ten first-stage focus groups was 65 (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Details on focus groups and participants**

| Venue                       | Date    | Time   | Total     | Females   | Males     |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Royal Victoria Country Park | 23.2.06 | 11-1pm | 13        | 11        | 2         |
|                             | 23.2.06 | 2-4pm  | 8         | 5         | 3         |
| Itchen Valley Country Park  | 24.2.06 | 11-1pm | 6         | 4         | 2         |
|                             | 24.2.06 | 2-4pm  | 9         | 6         | 3         |
| Hook & Warsash              | 02.3.06 | 11-1pm | 7         | 7         | 0         |
| West End                    | 02.3.06 | 7-9pm  | 4         | 2         | 2         |
| Bishop's Waltham            | 04.3.06 | 11-1pm | 4         | 3         | 1         |
|                             | 04.3.06 | 2-4pm  | 5         | 5         | 0         |
| Droxford                    | 19.3.06 | 11-1pm | 6         | 4         | 2         |
|                             | 19.3.06 | 2-4pm  | 3         | 3         | 0         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                |         |        | <b>65</b> | <b>50</b> | <b>15</b> |

[NOTE: Participants often discussed using a number of the sites covered by this project (e.g. country parks at weekends, more local sites during the week)].

62 out of 65 participants completed the screening questionnaire. The average age of participant was 60 years (mean= 60.80, SD= 12.59), with the standard deviation indicating a spread of ages from 28 to 85 years in age. The high mean age indicates only a slight bias when compared with data available for the local population and dog ownership in general in the UK. Gender was unevenly distributed, in that 24.2% were male and 75.8% were female: again, this might be a fair reflection of who regularly walks the dog in a typical household, but no detailed data is available to confirm this observation.

Most participants (N= 52, 83.9%) had owned dogs most of their lives, 6 (9.7%) had owned dogs for between 5-10 years, 3 (4.8%) less than 5 years, and 1 (1.6%) less than one year. Most participants (N= 32, 51.6%) owned only one dog, whilst 23 (37.1%) owned 2 dogs, 4 (6.5%) owned 3, and 1 (1.6%) owned 6. The average age of dog was 6 years (mean= 6.24, SD= 4.49), with the youngest dog owned being 6 months, and the oldest 16 years. A wide variety of dog breeds were represented, with border collies and springer spaniels being the most prevalent (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Participants' Dogs, by Breed**

| Breed of dog                   | Number owned | Breed of dog          | Number owned |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Border Collie                  | 17           | Papillon              | 2            |
| Springer Spaniel <sup>31</sup> | 10           | Bichon                | 1            |
| Golden Retriever <sup>32</sup> | 9            | Boxer                 | 1            |
| German Shepherd                | 7            | Chihuahua             | 1            |
| Labrador                       | 7            | Corgi                 | 1            |
| Terrier                        | 5            | Dalmatian             | 1            |
| Cross                          | 5            | Doberman              | 1            |
| Cocker Spaniel                 | 4            | Lurcher               | 1            |
| Greyhound                      | 3            | Poodle                | 1            |
| Jack Russell                   | 3            | Sheltie               | 1            |
| Schnauzer                      | 3            | West Highland Terrier | 1            |
| Cairn                          | 2            | Whippet               | 1            |

<sup>31</sup> All Springer Spaniel owners owned more than one of this breed.

<sup>32</sup> Includes six owned by one participant.

Most participants (N= 34, 54.8%) walked their dogs once a day, whilst 26 (41.9%) walked them twice a day, and 2 (3.2%) walked them only 3 or 4 times per week. Most participants (N= 30, 48.4%) reported walking only one dog, 25 (40.3) walked 2 dogs, 6 (9.7%) walked 3 dogs, and one person walked 6 dogs at a time.

Most participants (N= 18, 29%) agreed that their favourite place to walk was Royal Victoria Country Park (RVCP). Other popular places included were Hook and Warsash (N= 8, 12.9%), and Itchen Valley Country Park (IVCP) (N= 6, 9.7%), whilst 13 participants (21%) agreed that they had lots of favourite places and could not name one in particular. Other places mentioned were anywhere with woods (N= 6, 9.7%), Telegraph Woods (N= 4, 6.5%), the New Forest (N= 4, 6.5%), Manor Farm (N= 1, 1.6%), West End (N= 1, 1.6%), and Bishops Waltham (N= 1, 1.6%).

## 4.2 Summary of Main Themes

The main themes explored in the focus groups related to the 8 questions devised in the broad protocol:

1. What does your dog mean to you?
2. What are you looking for in a walk?
3. What fears do you have for your dog?
4. What fears do you have for yourself?
5. How do you feel about other dog walkers?
6. How well do you manage your dog?
7. Who is your peer group?
8. What are your hopes for dog walking?

Below, we present the results in relation to the research objectives. The first section explores the attitudes and beliefs of participants concerning the benefits and costs of owning a dog and walking in the countryside. The second section examines the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers associated with their walking behaviour and walking intentions and, specifically, the beliefs that influence where people with dogs choose to walk. The third section examine participant's attitudes and beliefs towards control of their dogs' behaviour, in terms of their attitudes towards the need for control and their perceived control beliefs. Finally, this chapter ends with an exploration of dog walkers' attitudes and beliefs towards *other* dog walkers.

### 4.2.1 Attitudes Towards Dog Ownership

When participants were asked what their dogs mean to them, a wealth of conversation emerged. Health benefits from walking and exercising were discussed, as well as beliefs concerning links between dog ownership and physical health. Dog walking was believed to result in social rewards in terms of meeting other dog walkers, making friends, and providing a conversation point. Psychological benefits were also described, as participants talked about their dog as their motivator, their friend, even their therapist. Dogs gave people a sense of safety and security in their homes and whilst out walking. The importance and value of dogs to their owners was most emphasized when participants discussed what the loss of their pets would mean, the commitment they made to these animals, and the relationships they shared.

### ***Physical benefits***

Dog walking was seen as an invaluable form of exercise and dogs were seen as motivators. For example:

‘Well, the way I look at dogs is, if you don’t have a dog and you get weather like you’re getting now, and you’re retired, all of that, you’re staying at home watching television.... But if you’ve got a dog, you’ve got to come out in all weathers, so it keeps you fit, and do you notice how many old people walking around are as fit as fiddles, never got ailments, you never see it, you know what I mean.’

Participants often said that they would be unlikely to walk as much if it wasn’t for their dogs.

### ***Social benefits***

Participants valued dog walking as a way of meeting people, providing a topic of conversation, a social event. For example:

‘... and they [dogs] just get me up in the morning, they are my friends, companions and I just love them. I have met so many people just through dogs. I know all the dogs’ names, not the people’s names, but people talk to you because you have got a dog. If you just walked past a person without a dog, they probably wouldn’t talk to you, if you have a dog, they have a dog and you stop to talk, it is really great. It must be wonderful for old people to have a dog and go out.’

None of the participants expressed a preference for walking alone, with the exception of those walking dogs that were aggressive toward other dogs; in such cases walkers avoided areas where they anticipated meeting other people. That is, avoidance of sites and other people was driven by the needs or behaviour of their dogs.

Participants also described their dogs as giving them protection, safety, and sense of security, both whilst out walking and whilst at home. In particular, participants who had been victims of burglary discussed how their dogs offered some form of protection against future crimes. For example:

‘Also it gives you protection. I don’t think anybody would break into our house. With two dogs yapping their heads off. Particularly if I am on my own in the evening, I wouldn’t feel the same without them. Because we do live in a horrible world...’

### ***Psychological benefits***

The psychological benefits that emerged from discussion were striking, and emphasized the value of dogs as perceived by participants. They discussed how their lives had been enhanced by talking to their dogs, walking with their dogs, and being comforted by these animals. Also discussed were the protection and sense of security that their pets provided. For example:

‘... and then I was diagnosed with leukaemia and rheumatoid arthritis and they suggested at the hospital that I would get another dog and that has kept me going, I really mean that.’

Dogs were perceived to provide contact and comfort to their owners. The value attached to dogs in terms of psychological benefits was so striking that dogs could be seen as therapists for their owners. For example:

‘No, I, well I lost my wife and I tell you something, I’m glad I had the dogs because they helped me... That’s two years ago... it made a big, big difference when you’ve got your dogs- it gives you a reason for living sometimes.’

The value of dogs to their owners was also emphasized by discussions surrounding the loss of their pets (past, present, and future). Grief was compared to that of losing a family member, and dogs were discussed as irreplaceable. For example:

‘Yes, if you lose your pet, whatever happens to it, you grieve for that pet in the same way you do for any other member of the family.’

### ***Commitment and Responsibility***

Dog ownership was seen as a commitment that required responsibility over the dog’s lifetime. Dog ownership was perceived as a responsibility and sometimes a tie. Several participants discussed commitment to their dogs in terms of going on holiday. The consensus seemed to be that either they took their dogs with them, or didn’t go on holiday at all. Most participants chose not to go on holiday. This appeared to be mainly due to worry and guilt over putting them in kennels. However, whilst dogs were seen to be a responsibility and a tie, participants seldom perceived this to be a reason not to have a dog since the benefits were seen to outweigh such costs.

### ***Beliefs about dogs***

It was clear that participants believed their lives were much richer for the presence of their dogs. For example:

‘You ask the question, “What do dogs mean to us?” They are just such extraordinary creatures aren’t they? You have five people here this afternoon; telling you all these stories, all these idiosyncrasies about these dogs, I mean it is never ending, isn’t it?’

The status of dogs was likened to that of a member of the family, and often dogs were described as replacement or surrogate children. This belief that dogs were members of the family was augmented by the attitudes of others, such as family and friends, who also referred to dogs as if they were family members. For example:

‘I don’t have contact with my grandchildren and I think he [dog] is a substitute grandchild.’

‘When I got him [dog], I sent a picture to my mother-in-law, I emailed her a picture, she knew we were getting a dog, and she printed it out and took it to work and said do you want to see a picture of my new grandchild! She is excited as we are, he is a grandchild!’

Another positive aspect of owning a dog was described as the *unconditional* love that they can give. Such affection was often contrasted to relationships with humans, which are often conditional. For example:

‘They are not moody like human beings. Every day they are exactly the same and you can reflect yourself in them. If you are feeling irritable, they are concerned. They are really concerned. They love you unconditionally don’t they?’

## **4.2.2 Attitudes Towards Walking and Sites**

Even though participants did identify some negative points about the sites where they walked, the positives easily outweighed the negatives. When discussing what their ideal dog walking site would look like, participants expressed appreciation for the sites they were already using. For example, when asked ‘If you could just magic up the most fantastic place that you could visit regularly to walk your dog and describe it’, participants at one focus group replied (in unison):

‘Here!’. [Royal Victoria Country Park]

When participants were asked what they looked for specifically in a site, they discussed factors relating to both themselves and their dogs. If dogs were perceived to enjoying a particular site, then this usually led to similar enjoyment by dog walkers. That is, if their dogs were happy, then they were happy. Thus, how dog walkers perceive their dogs' enjoyment of a site is a large determinant of whether they will walk there. For example:

'When the dogs enjoy themselves, the people enjoy themselves as well. They can relax with their dogs.'

Specifically, several features attract dog walkers to a destination.

### ***Other dogs***

Dog owners enjoy seeing their dog play with other dogs and believe that it is natural and necessary for the well-being of their animals. Of similar importance to participants is being able to socialise with other dog walkers, and such experiences appear to offer social contact and feelings of security. Participants therefore tended to choose sites where they anticipated meeting other dog walkers. However, a few participants who admitted to having dogs that were likely to be aggressive toward other dogs chose sites where they did not anticipate meeting too many other dog walkers. For example:

'Because mine isn't good with other dogs, so, yes, because there are many dogs that just don't leave him alone. I tend not to go there...'

### ***Freedom to run off-lead***

Most participants felt strongly that dogs should be let off leads whenever possible in order to socialize and exercise with other dogs. For example:

'... you want them [dogs] to be running and playing about, that's how you want your dogs to enjoy life - not be on a lead, that's not a walk on a lead, that's just taking the dog to relieve itself, it's not a walk for a dog, is it?'

### ***Weather***

When dog walkers discussed weather as a factor that put them off particular sites, this was usually in terms of how it affected the terrain. The main issues were generally wet weather and mud. The problem with muddy terrain was apparently the inconvenience of dogs getting wet and dirty. However, participants suggested that when the weather changed and the days get longer, choice of dog walking sites could also vary. For example:

'It depends on the weather. If it's nice we'll go to somewhere by the water or something. Because living in Southampton there is a lot of water around. If it's windy, or wet, if it's muddy, been muddy lately... that's a killer, we won't go there.'

### ***Varied Terrain***

Participants discussed how terrain was one factor they considered when deciding where to walk, enjoying sites that offered varied terrain. They also liked the kinds of terrain that their dogs seemed to like, for example, water was a favourite with the walkers whose dogs enjoy swimming. It was clear that participants avoided areas that could be muddy, but chose sites with varied terrain and water, and also that open spaces provide a sense of security.



### **Convenience**

Choice of where to walk their dogs on a day-to-day basis was also influenced by convenience of location and time available to them. Participants preferred to walk close to home when time was limited, and further a field when they had more time. Hence, many participants tended to vary their habits depending upon whether it was a weekday or weekend.

### **Dog bins**

In terms of attitudes towards managing their dogs, a big issue discussed by participants was picking up dog's mess. All participants generally agreed that this was an essential part of owning a dog, agreeing that dog owners must pick up after their pets. Whilst participants appreciated sites that provided bins, this was not expressed as a driving factor for them when deciding where to walk. That is, they did not discuss avoiding particular areas due to a perceived lack of bins. Participants also discussed factors relating to dog bins. The main issues appear to be the number of bins, location of bins, and how often these are emptied. Manor Farm in particular was criticised for lack of dog bins, however, this did not stop people using this site.

### **Facilities**

A few participants also mentioned preferring sites with facilities such as toilets and refreshments. Dog walkers often stressed that they must have somewhere to park, although responses were divided in terms of whether they were happy to pay for this service. In general it seemed that most participants were happy to buy an annual pass, but not pay on a daily basis. Participants also discussed factors relating to whether their cars were safe. Some sites were perceived to be safer than others.

### **Personal safety and security**

Participants were encouraged to discuss whether they had fears for themselves whilst walking their dogs. Most participants felt safer having their dogs with them. Female dog walkers in particular expressed concerns about walking alone and/or in the dark. Male and female participants suggested that they choose to walk in areas where they know they are likely to meet other dog walkers because this gives them a sense of security; this was especially true when they expected to meet people with whom they were familiar. In terms of feeling safer, participants discussed a preference for open spaces. For example:

'...but she enjoys it on a Saturday and I feel safer down here because it's open. You go to Upper Hamble, for instance, you're walking through trees, you can't see, you know, being female on your own I don't like to trust my dog to be the one to protect me from, you know, whatever.'

They also felt safer when there were park rangers and/or wardens on site.

As well as personal safety, participants expressed concerns about the safety of their dogs (see Perceived Behavioural Control, below).

### **Crowding**

Participants avoided places that were likely to be crowded with non-dog walkers, especially those with families and children. For example:

'... it does influence me if I think it is going to be busy and full of children and lots of people.'

### ***Litter***

Participants perceived some of the sites where they walk negatively due to rubbish and litter, which looks unattractive, causes unpleasant odours, and is occasionally dangerous (such as broken glass, syringes).

### **4.2.3 Perceived Behavioural Control Beliefs**

There were a number of attitudes and beliefs that could affect the perceived behavioural control of the dog walkers participating. Specifically, participants admitted to having certain fears for their dogs, mainly centred on aggression from other dogs, traffic, wildlife and livestock, and other people who may try to steal their dog.

### ***Other dogs***

Participants tended to feel safer at sites that they used regularly because they were familiar with most of the dogs that they were likely to encounter. Some participants discussed concerns about their dog's behaviour toward other people and other dogs, for example, when dogs are aggressive toward each other. However, bad behaviour was often excused or minimised by owners and other dog walkers. Other people's dogs were perceived as most threatening when kept on leads. For example:

'But if they [dogs] see a dog on a lead they want to go towards it. Then the dog on the lead thinks it will attack and I had this trouble with a man [down] with a bulldog who always has it on the lead because it is so strong. He can't control it and I find that dogs tend to be much happier with other dogs that aren't on leads. Once the dog is on a lead it tends to think somehow it has got to go and attack other dogs... A dog on a lead is [at] a big disadvantage...it thinks it is being attacked...'

Generally when participants talked about other dog walkers and their dogs, they tended to discuss people's behaviour concerning picking up dog's mess.

### ***Traffic***

Participants expressed fear for their dogs around traffic. Consequently, sites that allowed cars within the area were perceived as more dangerous for dogs. Concerns about traffic are augmented by the fact that most participants agreed that their dogs do not have road sense.

### ***Livestock and wildlife***

Wildlife and livestock were also seen to sometimes be a threat to the safety of dogs. When dogs were described as chasing wildlife and livestock, participants were mainly concerned for their dogs, not the other animals involved. For example:

'If there are sheep, especially lambing, I walk in Wiltshire sometimes and there are certain fields I know the dogs have to be on a lead because the sheep are there.'  
'What would the concern with sheep be?'  
'Well, someone shooting her. I am terrified [of] my dog being shot by a farmer.'

Even participants who showed some concern for wildlife were more worried about their dog's welfare; for example, when a dog is injured or becomes ill after contact with wildlife:

[Participant talking about their dog killing and eating a squirrel]  
'But yes, that poor little dog....He ended up at the vet's, I know that.... Two days.... two days of liquid paraffin.'

Many participants made excuses for their dog's behaviour. Excuses related mostly to either (i) instinct (participants often excused their dogs from chasing wildlife on the basis that it was natural to do so), or (ii) no harm done (participants justified their dogs' behaviour by describing how their dogs would chase wildlife, but rarely catch or kill animals); (ii) many dog walkers excused the behaviour of their dogs in terms of them disturbing wildlife, by suggesting that their dog's behaviour actually benefited wildlife in some way. For example:

'I think they'll only catch rabbits if they have myxomatosis. If they are alert, or fit, they will be gone before our dogs...they both chased deer the other day...one each, but they don't catch them, not unless there's something wrong with them, then it's better for them really, instead of a long painful death...'

While most participants did not seem concerned for the well-being of rabbits, squirrel, and other smaller wild animals, some participants did show respect and concern for deer and birds, especially those that might be nesting. In such cases most participants said they would prefer to avoid areas where they had to put their dogs on a lead for the sake of wildlife.

Likewise, while most participants agreed that if a site was designated as a protected area, this should be respected. They reported that they would rather avoid areas of conservation than walk there with their dogs on leads.

### ***Dognapping***

Another fear that participants expressed for their dogs was dognapping. Stories were conveyed about dogs being stolen, and dog walkers were aware that their dogs were at risk.

### ***Dog mess***

In spite of demonstrating a positive attitude towards picking up after their dogs, when encouraged to talk about this issue it became apparent that not all participants *always* did it. Dog walkers admitted to not picking up if their dogs defecated where people were unlikely to tread, and where it was physically difficult for them to reach. Participants also discussed what they would do about picking up dog mess if there were no bins to put it in. In general, dog walkers tend to move the mess away from where people might tread, or take it home with them. All participants agreed that if people were caught not picking up after their dogs, penalties should be applied.

### ***Dogs 'under control'***

Whilst participants agreed that dogs should be kept under control, there was often a lack of consensus over a definition of 'control'. Regulations often insist that dog owners keep their dogs on leads. However, a number of participants pointed out that there were disadvantages to keeping their dogs on a lead, such as the dog had less exercise. Some also felt that this was not the only way to keep control over the dog. For example:

'... my view is that the legislation or the regulations whatever, ought to be about an obligation of owners to keep their dogs under control rather than to keep them on a lead. This girl of mine, she is hopeless on a lead because she has never been properly trained on a lead. But she will walk to heel beautifully and she'll stay close, won't interfere with anyone else.'

### ***Non-dog walkers and children***

Dog walkers often discussed the behaviour of their dogs when meeting people without dogs and with children. Generally, it was agreed that they would prefer not to meet with non-dog walkers and children because of how they predicted their dogs

might behave. Whilst dog walkers often admitted that their dogs could behave badly around children, they were often intolerant of the children, made excuses for their dog's behaviour, and shifted the blame from their pets. Dog walkers often presented the reactions of non-dog walkers to their dogs in a negative light. For example:

'Yet the child was being more unruly than dog, it wasn't doing anything its parents told it, it was running off and the dog was chasing, of course it was chasing it was a puppy, it thinks you're playing with it.'

'... it was a really stupid thing for a mother to let a child do that.'

### ***Cyclists, joggers and horse riders***

Some participants claimed that their dogs were well behaved around cyclists, joggers and horse riders, whilst others admitted that their dogs were not. A number of participants described conflict between dog walkers and cyclists/ joggers as similar to that between themselves and other dog walkers whom they perceived in a negative light. Participants often discussed the lack of respect and behaviour of cyclists/joggers as justification for their dogs' behaviour, believing them to be inconsiderate, and even antagonistic, to dogs and their owners. For example:

'Oh they [cyclists] are sometimes quite aggressive, yes they are.'

However, participants also stressed that not all cyclists and joggers behaved in an antagonistic manner towards dog walkers, and it was acknowledged that the sites were to be shared between different types of countryside users.

### **4.2.4 Subjective Norms and Other Dog Walkers**

It is clear that dog walkers perceive themselves as belonging to a defined social group or community of dog walkers, and such membership can bring a sense of belonging and increased self-esteem. This also explains why for many dog walkers, socialisation is a vital element of walking dogs. For example, when participants were asked who they turned to for advice about their dogs, only a few responded that they would go to consider their vet useful. Most suggested that fellow dog walkers were their main source of advice.

#### ***Dog walkers' 'in-group'***

Participants discussed other dog walkers in both positive and negative terms. Participants almost always felt that their own behaviour was acceptable and considered themselves to be part of a responsible dog owners group. Other dog walkers appeared to be categorised as either in this responsible group or outside it, according to perceptions of their beliefs, values and behaviours and the behaviour of people's dogs. Those who were perceived to be similar to themselves and 'responsible' dog owners (the 'in-group') were described in a positive light, whilst those who differed from themselves (the 'outgroup') were seen in more negative terms. For example:

'I think if you don't [behave responsibly]... we are all regular dog walkers, we all love our pets and I am sure all of us have brought them up from the very beginning to do as they are told but other people can make it difficult if they are not the same...'

'...we always took our dogs, we've always had dogs since we were children and always walked them right down towards the water, but in the last few years I have been down every single day, but now, it sounds horrible but the dogs that are walked down there seem to be, are not well mannered dogs. How would you put it? Like their owners, let their dogs free...all out of control.'

Some participants felt so strongly about people picking up their dog's mess that often they considered confronting other dog walkers about their behaviour. Participants who had actually confronted others described how this could result in different reactions from people, from anger to embarrassment.

### ***Dog walkers' 'out-group'***

What was particularly interesting was the extent to which participants consistently saw themselves as part of the 'in-group', despite their behaviour sometimes deviating towards what they would recognise in others as the unacceptable behaviour associated with members of the 'out-group'. For example, participants were united in their disdain for people who bagged their dog's mess but did not bin it, one participant, who clearly believed she was part of the 'in-group', admitted to 'flinging' her bag when no bin was nearby. We explain the psychology of this behaviour in Chapter 5.

### ***Negative attitudes towards dog walkers***

As well as gaining value from feeling that they are part of a dog-walking community, participants also expressed the negative effects of being associated with a group that might not be respected by others. In particular, participants discussed how they sometimes felt marginalized and discriminated against by other user groups, as well as park wardens, landowners and local authorities. For example:

'I just get a little bit frightened sometimes that everything is going against dogs: that we are getting too many places where we can't walk. I certainly agree with dogs not going in children's play areas, and all that.....I just worry that it is going too much against the dogs.'

### ***Desire to be listened to***

Participants often felt that, as dog walkers, they were not listened to, despite being a large user group of the countryside. Dog walkers need to feel like they are accepted and respected, and will be heard. Participants felt that they were being pushed out of certain sites by other users, and some suggested particular sites being given to them as 'dog only' sites. That is, since there are sites where dogs are not allowed, they thought that there should also be areas that only dog walkers may use. Other facilities could be provided such as agility courses, fenced in areas for training, social meetings and classes, and so on.

## **4.3 Attitudes and Beliefs of Site Managers**

Six site managers (5 male, 1 female) met for two hours to discuss how they felt about dog walkers using their sites. Within this group there was one dog owner, one previous dog owner, and one potential dog owner (would like to own a dog but can't due to work commitments).

There seemed to be a general lack of communication modes between managers and dog walkers (although one-to-one conversations are reported to occur). It was acknowledged that whereas some dog walkers behaved in ways that were inconsiderate to others, most dog walkers behave appropriately. However, in general, it seemed that site managers, whilst neutral or positive about dogs, were not particularly fond of dog walkers, in fact they expressed disillusionment concerning the behaviour of this user group. As one site manager said:

"I like dogs. It tends to be the owners I dislike."

The main issues site managers are concerned about are dog mess and dogs out of control, particularly because of people walking more than one dog at the same time.

#### **4.3.1 Responsible and other dog walkers**

Site managers acknowledged that there is an increasing number of dog walkers in the region and reduced space in which they can walk. This causes problems for all relevant parties. They also acknowledged differences between local and/or regular walkers and occasional visitors (e.g. weekend walkers), with the latter presenting the majority of problems for their sites.

#### **4.3.2 Perceived behavioural control**

Site managers expressed a general lack of power over dog walkers, in that they felt there was little they could do to control the behaviour of this user group. It was reported that when they did approach dog walkers about unwanted behaviours, this often led to negative, and even aggressive, reactions.

Unwanted behaviours from dog owners and their dogs were perceived to be a result of lack of awareness, ignorance, and resources (e.g. not enough bins for dog mess). However, the behaviour of dog walkers was also attributed to inconsiderateness, laziness, not wanting to share space, valuing their needs or those of their dogs as more important than other issues (such as wildlife, grazing rights, etc.). Hence, site managers believed that unwanted behaviour may also be a choice rather than a result of ignorance or lack of resources.

#### **4.3.3 Subjective norms**

Site managers believed that dog walkers were generally creatures of habit; therefore we need to break these habits. They believed that the behaviour of dog walkers was influenced by social pressure. That is, they will behave differently if someone is watching and can see what they are doing. It was believed that education and awareness-raising, backed up by regulation and fines for unwanted behaviours is the way forward.

Analysis of the above results from the focus groups is presented in Chapter 5.

## 5.0 ANALYSIS OF DATA

This research employs the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in an applied setting, with two central aims. The first is to develop our understanding of the fundamental determinants of the behaviours of dog walkers. These include both internal and external factors such as dog-walkers' beliefs (behavioural, normative and control) and their perceptions of their dogs' needs; and available resources at the relevant sites. The second aim is to make practical recommendations for land management practices that will benefit all land-users.

This chapter presents the analysis of the first-stage focus groups and site managers' meeting by applying the data to the TPB<sup>33</sup>. The research uses the TPB as a framework to examine the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers. This enables the identification of possible ways of managing dog walkers that encourage desired behaviour and discourage undesired behaviour. The analysis in this chapter identifies the fundamental determinants of dog walking behaviours, and uses these as a basis to generate recommendations for site management measures in chapter six.

### 5.1 Attitudes Towards Dog Ownership

Findings from the present study showed that 'owning' a dog was of great significance to participants, since this was perceived by them as leading to physical and psychological well-being. We have used the term 'ownership' hesitantly, since many dog walkers refer to their dogs as a member of the family, a surrogate child, a grandchild, etc. and there appears to be an acceptance that dogs should have a degree of autonomy within the family. In some cases, participants seemed to regard such autonomy as a positive feature that endorses the dog as a true 'animal', retaining some element of self-determination. This concurs with market research that suggests that: "during the past decade there has been a strong trend towards pets being treated as 'one of the family'. Owners are increasingly more prepared to spend more on their cat or dog, including on pet food, veterinary care, pet accessories and other products<sup>34</sup>".

#### ***Responsibility for the dogs***

The consequence of beliefs concerning the physical and psychological benefits of owning a dog, leads walkers to have to positive attitudes toward their own dogs in particular, and dogs as a species in general. These attitudes have an impact on how walkers behave. Dogs play such a significant role in their lives, and they hold such great affection and regard for their dogs, that 'bad' behaviour is often justified or merely excused. The tendency to make such excuses or justifications appears to be two-fold.

First, all participants ultimately believed that their dogs were good-natured and generally 'good' dogs. This underlying belief seemed to create confusion therefore when a dog might be seen as exhibiting 'bad behaviour' (behaviour that caused some sort of nuisance to another user or to wildlife/livestock/property). Since the dog is ultimately a 'good' dog, people seek to justify the behaviour. In all cases of what might be considered less acceptable behaviour by dogs, participants were

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<sup>33</sup> Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975.

<sup>34</sup> Mintel, 2004,

quick to offer explanations for their behaviour and attempt to justify such behaviour. For example, many were quick to point out that other walkers, cyclists and/or joggers often responded 'inappropriately' to dogs that approached them and showed a general lack of understanding about how to behave around dogs. Others would point out that the dog was young, or a rescue dog that had been treated badly before, or that it was essentially good natured and only wanting to play.

Second, all participants expressed very strongly how much benefit their dogs brought to their lives. There seems to be a feeling, therefore, that the negative aspects of their dogs' behaviour are cancelled out by these positive benefits and therefore the dogs should be forgiven for acting badly. In this sense, we need to find some way to address this phenomenon if we want dog walkers to behave differently. We feel that a key issue relates to ultimate responsibility for a dog's behaviour. In general, there did not seem to be recognition that dog walkers are always responsible for the behaviour of the dog in their charge.

### ***Prioritising the dog***

First and foremost in participants' minds when they are walking their dogs is their own dog's welfare. It is clear that in terms of motivating and providing incentive for changes in the behaviours of dog walkers, one must look for the positive effect that such change will have on the *dog*. That is, the significance of dogs to their owners also meant that the needs, safety, and well being of their dogs were paramount over the needs, safety, and well being of other (non-human and human) countryside users. Hence, behaviours exhibited by dogs that may cause problems for others (e.g. jumping up at people, chasing wildlife) were justified and/ or accepted. The exception to this was if the behaviour was believed to put their *dogs* at risk.

## **5.2 Attitudes Towards Walking and Sites**

### ***Dealing with dog's mess***

All participants agreed that dog walkers must pick up after their pets. That is, they believe that it is *their* responsibility. This was perceived as a code of conduct that should be followed by all dog walkers. However, participants also believed that this was not always practical and that there should be some flexibility to this rule; for example, when a dog defecates without its owners noticing, or the faeces cannot be found, or the faeces are too awkward to reach. Many participants also admitted to not picking up if their dogs messed where people were unlikely to tread. Participants also discussed what they would do about picking up dog's mess if there were no bins present. In general, dog walkers tend to move the mess away from where people might tread, or take it home with them and dispose of it there. Hence, beliefs concerning accessibility to picking up, and whether it affected other people, led to different behaviour.

Beliefs concerning the acceptable way to behave with dogs' mess, led to positive attitudes toward those who adhered to this 'rule', and negative attitudes towards those who did not. That is, participants viewed themselves in positive terms, but expressed negative attitudes toward those dog walkers who did not pick up after their dog, and were also united in their disdain for people who bagged the mess of their dogs, but did not bin it.



### ***What dog walkers look for in a walk***

Where dog walkers choose to walk is based on a number of beliefs and attitudes. Participants consider the needs and preferences of both themselves and their dogs when deciding where to walk. Because in general participants believed that their dogs enjoy exercising and socialising with other dogs, they chose to walk in areas where they anticipated meeting other dogs. This explains why country parks, rather than the Rights of Way network, are preferred by those interviewed. Participants believed that they were more secure in areas where there are other people and dogs about. They also believed their dogs to be safer at sites where traffic is not a problem, since they perceived dogs to generally have little or no road sense.

Participants like a variety of terrain (e.g. woods, water, open spaces), but many considered how muddy their dogs might get, with muddy sites often avoided. Participants also discussed factors relating to dogs' mess and bins. The main issues appear to be the number of bins, location of bins, and how often these are emptied. Other site-specific issues that influenced participants' choice of walk included convenient access (i.e. close to where they live and/ or have parking facilities), and security issues concerning parking. Easy access to sites and safe car parking areas lead to more positive attitudes and increased use of certain sites, as do the availability of toilets and refreshment providers.

### ***Dogs and exercise***

Virtually all participants agreed that it was important for them to walk their dogs off a lead. This preference was based on certain beliefs concerning the impact of keeping a dog on or off the lead, the latter being believed to be best for dogs because it allowed them to exercise more (i.e., run freely without restriction from a lead) and socialise with other dogs. It was believed that dogs need and want more exercise than owners could give them if kept on a lead, and that they need and want to run faster than capable when kept on the lead. Hence, walking a dog off the lead was perceived to provide dogs with the opportunity to run free and play with other dogs.

Since owners consider the needs and preferences of their dogs (due to positive attitudes felt for these animals), and believe that off-lead exercise meets those needs and preferences, they will let their dogs off the lead wherever possible, even if this can be to the detriment of other countryside users. Whilst participants indicated that they would prefer to avoid contact with other countryside users (e.g., children, cyclists), any negative consequences of their dogs behaving in an undesirable way toward such users (e.g., jumping up at people, chasing wildlife) will be accepted since their dogs are their primary concern.

## **5.3 Perceived Behavioural Control Beliefs**

With regards to the issue of perceived control over their dogs' behaviour, the main topics of conversation amongst participants related to controlling dogs around other humans, other dogs, wildlife and livestock. Participants often discussed misunderstanding or lack of understanding over what is meant by 'control'. Some participants thought that this meant keeping dogs on the lead, whilst others believed that a dog did not need to be on a lead to be under their control. That is, beliefs differed depending upon the owners and the dogs. Thus, use of the term 'control' invites each dog walker to make their own judgment based on their perceived control beliefs.

### ***Risks and safety***

As stated above, participants believe that their dogs exercise best when kept off a lead. The exception to this off-lead preference is when being off the lead could put dogs at risk. Participants discussed concern for the safety of their dogs in terms of traffic, other dogs, wildlife and livestock. That is, participants reported putting their dogs on the lead when they were concerned for their dogs, such as near roads, near dogs that may be aggressive, or when chasing wildlife or livestock that might result in harm to the dogs. In terms of the consequences to wildlife of their dogs' behaviour, participants generally lacked awareness or understanding. The predominant belief was that dogs chasing wildlife would not cause any harm to the wildlife. In some cases, where it was acknowledged that wildlife might be harmed, dog walkers did not appear to assign any value to the wild animal's welfare, or at least insufficient value to warrant stricter control of their dog's behaviour.

## **5.4 Subjective Norms and Other Dog Walkers**

### ***Sense of group membership***

There seems scope for recognising the potential impact of group membership on dog walkers by promoting dog walkers (as group members) as guardians of the countryside. However, group membership sometimes has the negative consequence of increased conflict with non-members and feelings of being resented or disliked by other users of the countryside, for example cyclists, joggers, and non-dog walkers. In this sense, it is important to break down barriers caused by group membership by bringing together *different* groups who have a vested interest in the countryside. In particular, there seems to be a lack of awareness amongst dog walkers of how their dogs might be perceived by other users who might not want any kind of interaction with a dog.

It is also important to note that not all dog walkers were members of this group: some people are perceived by the participants in this research as outside the membership of the group because of their behaviours. For example, those who did not pick up after their dogs or those who picked up their dog's mess but did not put it in a bin were seen as outsiders.

In terms of other land users such as cyclists, joggers and families, participants believed that dog walkers were more tolerant than all other such groups. They believed that they could accept other users and share use of the countryside, but that dog walkers are often marginalized, as a group, by other countryside users, the media and land managers. As a result of this, and since they perceived themselves to be the largest user of the countryside (due to the frequency and regularity of their activities), dog walkers as a group thought they deserved more consideration from others. Many participants expressed the belief that *other users* must accept *their* responsibility to behave in a certain way around dogs.

### ***In-group attitudes***

As stated in Chapter 4, participants of the focus groups consistently saw themselves as part of the 'in-group' of responsible dog walkers, despite their behaviour sometimes exhibiting what they would recognise as unacceptable in others. It left us questioning how participants categorised other dog walkers. From their comments, it became clear that it was largely to do with attitude towards behaviour. Members of the 'in-group' tended to agree that they occasionally did not behave acceptably, because of a lack of perceived behavioural control. For example, they

might be caught without enough plastic bags to collect all of their dog's mess every now and again. However, because their attitude led to an *intention* to behave well, they categorised themselves and each other as part of the 'in-group' of responsible dog walkers. In contrast, people who behaved unacceptably and showed no *intent* to behave acceptably, revealing a poor attitude towards dog walking behaviour, were categorised as part of the 'out-group' – the irresponsible dog walkers. Such issues can build up quite strong social norms amongst the dog walking community that help to explain otherwise inexplicable behaviour. For example, it was often commented that some members of the 'out-group' would bag their dog's mess, but then fling it into a nearby bush or tree once out of sight of other people. Such walkers appear to be conforming to the subjective norms of the community of dog walkers (the 'in-group') in order to be accepted by that group and/or not reported by their peers to a site warden. Once out of sight, their own beliefs and attitudes concerning how to deal with their dog's mess prevail.

The fact that the 'bag it and fling it' dog walkers want at least to be seen to be part of the 'in-group' suggests that there is scope for promoting groups and group norms. It also substantiates the need for agreement on what *is* acceptable behaviour amongst the group and the extent to which deviant behaviour should be tolerated in 'exceptional' circumstances or exposed as not conforming to the group norm. For example, at one site, a participant had independently erected simple notices to the effect that 'bag it and fling it' behaviour was not acceptable to other dog walkers, with some noticeable improvement in reducing the activity as a result.

## **5.5 Returning to the Theory of Planned Behaviour**

It is useful at this point to return to the Theory of Planned Behaviour and provide examples of how we might apply the TPB to changing dog walkers' behaviour.

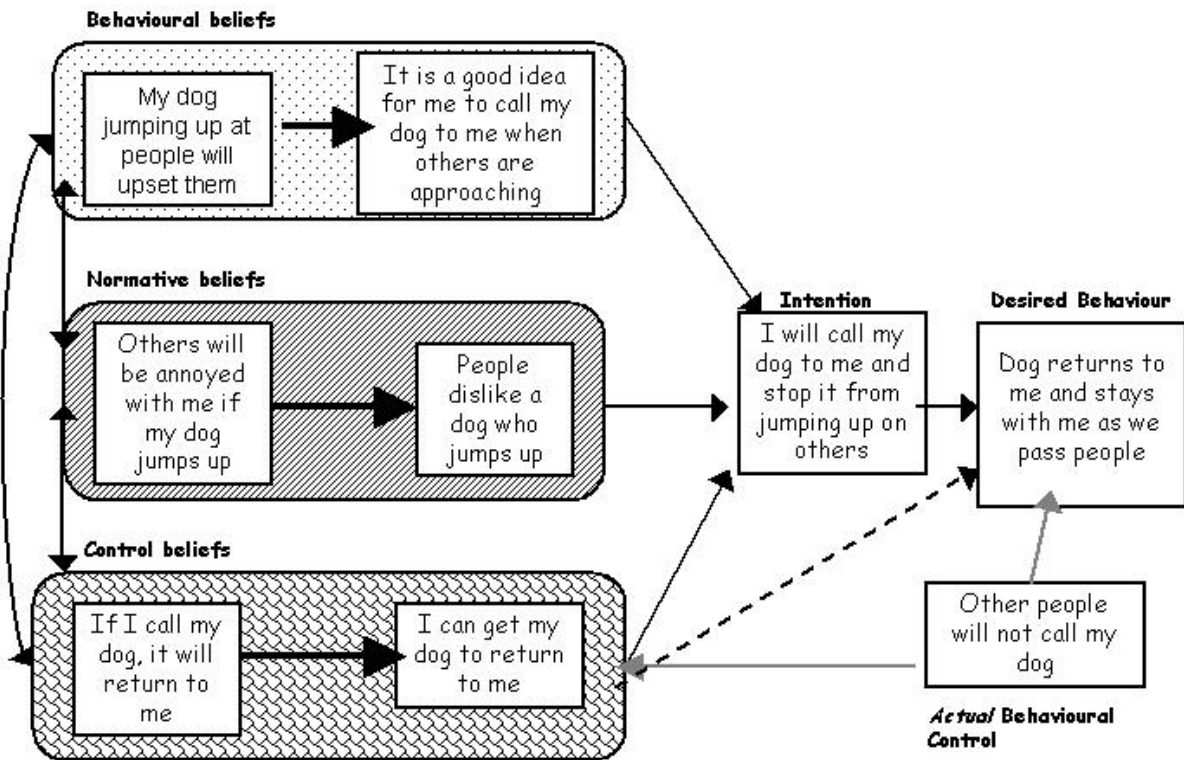
### ***Understanding Behaviour***

Figure 5.1 provides such a scenario, where a dog walker might act in such a way as to try to stop their young and boisterous dog from jumping up on fellow visitors to a site. The behavioural beliefs of the dog walker (in this case that if their dog jumps up on people it will upset them), the normative beliefs (that other visitors will expect the dog walker to stop their dog from jumping up on people and will appreciate such consideration and/or be annoyed by such lack of consideration) and the control beliefs (that if they call their dog then it will return to them), might combine to lead to an intention to call the dog back and keep it at heel or on a lead when other visitors are approaching and exhibit considerate behaviour. If all three beliefs are strong, then there is a good chance that the dog walker will behave in this manner. However, we must acknowledge the possible presence of factors that may help or inhibit a person's ability to act in a certain way. This, actual behavioural control must also be acknowledged as a possible moderator between perceived behavioural control and actual behaviour; for example, another walker might call the dog to *them*. Hence, the TPB may be best applied to a person who has a high degree of control over their actions in performing a certain behaviour.

As can be seen by this example, although the TPB can be applied to activities such as dog walking and that the presence of other humans in the activity is not especially unusual or challenging for TPB applications, the inclusion of a companion *animal* and *its* behaviour as part of the model is certainly challenging. Perhaps the most notable aspect of applying the model to dog walking is the need to

acknowledge that dog walkers' intentions will be influenced by their perceptions of not only *other* users' intentions but also the behaviour of their *dogs*.

**Figure 5.1: TPB and a Dog Walker's Behaviour**



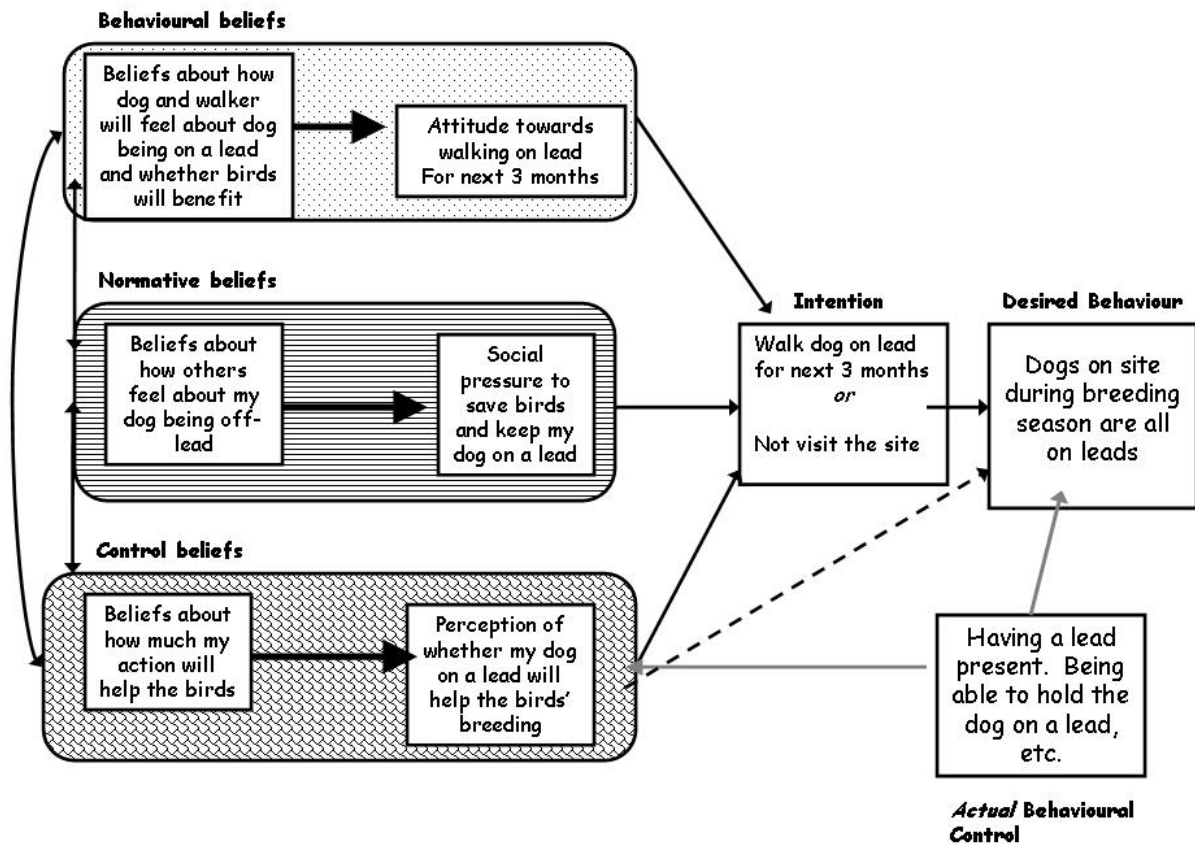
**Source: Adapted from Ajzen, 1991**

**Changing behaviour**

If we apply the Theory of Planned Behaviour *backwards*, starting with desired behaviour, we can see that there are multiple variables that can be tackled in terms of achieving the desired behaviour. Figure 5.2 uses the example of a site manager who wants all dog walkers to put dogs on a lead and stick to a path during a 3-month period of breeding for ground nesting birds at the site.

The **desired behaviour** is no bird disturbance at all and it is agreed that this can only be achieved through dogs walking on the path, closely to heel, on lead, next to their walkers. This will be successfully achieved if the dog walkers have a strong **intention** to walk their dogs in this way *or* not to use this site at all. Such intentions will come about through the dog walkers' **behavioural beliefs**, **normative beliefs** and **control beliefs**. The beliefs will be complex and multiple, rather than singular and simple. Table 5.1 provides an example, and not necessarily exhaustive, list of possible beliefs for each category, in order to illustrate the complex and multiple nature.

**Figure 5.2: Example of Desired Behaviour for Ground Nesting Bird Sites**



**Source: Adapted from Ajzen, 1991**

The contents of Table 5.1 identify, by one simple example, the vast scope for addressing dog walkers' behaviour. Essentially, it demonstrates that dog walkers might be persuaded to change their behaviour by:

- I. persuading them to have a favourable attitude towards the desired behaviour and so alter their behavioural beliefs;
- II. applying social pressure that will inform them about the normative expectations of others and motivate them to comply with these expectations; and
- III. making them feel that they have behavioural control, by reducing some of the uncertainties associated with their behaviour, other people's behaviour and their dogs' behaviour.

**Table 5.1 Examples of Beliefs of a Dog Walker at a Ground-nesting Bird Site**

| <b>Examples of complex, multiple beliefs that might be present amongst walkers</b>   |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Behavioural Beliefs</b>   | <b>Normative Beliefs</b>   | <b>Control Beliefs</b>  |
| <b><i>Beliefs leading to Undesirable Behaviour</i></b>   |  |   |
| <p><b>Leading to <i>negative</i> attitudes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ My dog will hate being on lead.</li> <li>♦ I will not enjoy walking my dog on a lead.</li> <li>♦ Keeping my dog on a lead will not stop him/her disturbing the birds.</li> <li>♦ Dogs do not disturb birds.</li> <li>♦ Birds nest in trees, not on the ground.</li> <li>♦ My dog never disturbs birds.</li> <li>♦ People disturb birds as much as dogs.</li> <li>♦ There are lots of birds in the countryside so it doesn't matter if they don't breed.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Leading to <i>negative</i> perception</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ No one cares about the birds.</li> <li>♦ People prefer dogs to birds.</li> <li>♦ People think birds are dirty.</li> <li>♦ Other people will think my dog is a bad dog if it is on a lead.</li> <li>♦ Other people will think that I am a bad owner if my dog is on a lead.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Leading to <i>lack of confidence</i> in control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ No one else will keep their dog on a lead.</li> <li>♦ My dog and I will disturb the birds anyway just by being here.</li> <li>♦ Cyclists and children screaming will disturb the birds just as much as me.</li> <li>♦ I can't hold my dog on a lead.</li> <li>♦ I don't know how to train my dog not to pull on a lead.</li> </ul> |
| <b><i>Beliefs leading to Desirable Behaviour</i></b>   |  |   |
| <p><b>Leading to <i>positive</i> attitudes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ My dog can still have a good walk on the lead.</li> <li>♦ I will be able to keep my dog cleaner on a lead.</li> <li>♦ I will get more exercise if I walk my dog on a lead.</li> <li>♦ Eggs will not hatch if dogs disturb them.</li> <li>♦ Hatchlings will die if dogs disturb them.</li> <li>♦ I feel like a welcomed visitor and know that restrictions are only used when necessary.</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Leading to <i>positive</i> perception</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ People want to protect the birds.</li> <li>♦ People think the birds are precious.</li> <li>♦ People are worried about birds getting harmed.</li> <li>♦ People get angry if dogs disturb the birds.</li> <li>♦ I will be embarrassed or saddened if my dog harms the birds.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Leading to <i>confidence</i> in control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ I can hold my dog well on a lead.</li> <li>♦ If we walk on the path then the birds are less likely to be disturbed.</li> <li>♦ Everyone else will stop their dog from disturbing the birds also.</li> <li>♦ I know where I can safely walk my dog off lead at this time.</li> </ul>  |

## **5.6 Constructing Policy and Practice**

In terms of seeking management approaches to deal with problems such as the example given in Table 5.1, it is vital to recognise that the most effective measures will employ a holistic approach that seeks to address:

- (i) changing attitudes and beliefs to positive attitudes that lead to desirable behaviour (as shown in Table 5.1); and
- (ii) that actual behavioural control is maximised for dog walkers by providing appropriate and sufficient information and facilities and removing any obstacles to desirable behaviour.

Subsequent to the above analysis, two follow-up focus groups were held in May 2006 in order to test such an extensive package of management practice measures. The recommendations tested at our follow-up focus groups are presented in Chapter 6.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

There is great scope for improving the management of dog walking in the countryside. On the one hand, some behaviours need to be changed to improve relations between dog walkers and other users; on the other hand, there are things that can improve the experience for dogs and their walkers. We believe that these two angles must be approached concurrently, so that what is offered is an approach and overall 'package' for dog walkers, which seeks to improve the quality of their dog walking overall, and which is presented as such.

As part of this approach, we recommend that site managers use a variety of means to communicate with dog walkers in a positive way. Leaflets, maps, notice boards, websites, and direct contact via a forum of land users may be the most effective. Site managers might consider different routes to persuasion, for example, by emphasising management practices from the perspective of the dog, explaining restrictions, providing more facilities, and opening communication channels. Central and peripheral routes to persuasion, foot-in-the-door techniques and emotional appeals may be applied in order to develop methods for encouraging desired behaviours, by influencing behavioural, normative and control beliefs. The influence of group membership may also be utilized.

Our recommendations have been tested at two follow-up focus groups, held in May 2006. A variety of prompts were used to test a package of recommendations. In general, the participants confirmed that they would welcome more facilities and communication, and are willing to take part in a forum where they can inform others of their needs. Their specific reactions to suggested management practices have been incorporated in the recommendations presented below.

### 6.1 General Approach

The relationship between dog walkers, their dogs, and control over their behaviour is similar to that between parent and child. Children are children, and hence cannot be held responsible for many of their actions; therefore it is the parent's responsibility to ensure that the behaviour of their child does not inconvenience others. Dog walkers are precious about their dogs, and do not respond well to criticisms of them. Therefore we must acknowledge the value and importance of dogs, whilst stressing that dogs will be dogs, therefore it is up to their *walkers* to behave considerately toward others. It is the responsibility of the dog *walker*, not the dog or other visitors, to ensure that dogs are not perceived as nuisances. Dog walkers can be encouraged to accept such responsibility through messages, support and facilities as recommended in subsequent sections of this report.

We stress the need to emphasise to dog walkers that their lack of responsibility leads to negative consequences for their dogs; this is unfair to these lovely animals. For example, dogs jumping up at people, chasing wildlife, or leaving dogs' mess behind, can result in giving dogs a bad reputation, dislike of dogs, dog bans in certain areas, physical harm to dogs, and so on. In addition, it gives other dog walkers (their friends and social group) a bad name. Hence dog walkers can avoid such consequences by controlling their dogs and behaving in appropriate ways.

Overall, we feel that management of dog walkers should be presented and perceived as being *for the good of the dogs*. Dog walkers *do* acknowledge the

responsibility that comes with owning a dog, but there is scope for extending this further. Dog walkers take great pleasure in seeing their dogs enjoy themselves; there is scope for improving further the dog's benefits from a walk. Dog walkers often feel singled-out as a group as having a negative impact on the countryside and country parks, whereas they believe they contribute more financially *and* emotionally to such sites, in terms of loyalty and attachment, through their regular attendance and payment of car parking fees. We believe there is scope for recognising, rewarding and encouraging such loyalty. Hence, it is recommended that dog management practices generally adopt an approach that:

- acknowledges the significance of dogs to their owners;
- provides positive, dog-friendly messages to dog owners;
- emphasises that it is the dog owners' responsibility to protect their dogs from harm;
- plays on the social aspect of dog walking and peer pressure by promoting desired dog walking behaviours as group norms;
- points out how certain dog behaviour can put *dogs* at risk;
- promotes management practices as being good for dogs in some way; and
- encourages greater understanding of dog behaviour amongst *all* users of the countryside.

## **6.2 Changing Subjective Norms: dog walker groups**

Individuals can hold multiple situationally-dependent attitudes toward an action (Wood, 2000), and subjective norms are linked to specific reference groups. Therefore the salient reference group determines the strength and direction of the normative component. Hence, when walking their dogs, dog walkers may be more influenced by other dog walkers who might observe their actions, compared to significant others such as family and friends who are not present (i.e., not salient) at the time.

The formation of dog walkers' groups has a number of advantages for site management. From a practical perspective, it affords a point of contact for communication (both ways) and engagement, whilst also providing useful resources in the form of members donating their time for specific tasks (litter clear-ups, campaigns, maintaining facilities, notice boards, etc.). Perhaps more importantly, however, dog walkers' groups might be used to build social capital and to provide a point of reference for desired behaviour. Dog walkers' attitudes will not influence their behaviour unless they are salient – that is clearly apparent - therefore lots of accessible visual cues might assist in continually reminding members to conform to the group norms. Thus messages about desired behaviour should be salient, using newsletters, signage, meetings, etc..

Similarly, group membership itself should be salient, using car stickers, badges, dog tags, etc. as cues to remind dog walkers of their membership. These might also be seen as 'foot-in-the-door' techniques; for example, a group member might be asked to put a sticker in their car or a coloured disc on their dog's collar. This can lead to larger changes and can encourage group membership, which in turn will increase conformity to group norms. Small behaviours will require people to adjust their attitudes accordingly (to avoid cognitive dissonance), therefore a shift in behaviour and attitudes can occur.



The follow-up focus groups welcomed the idea of a dog walkers' group and being able to have a forum where dog walkers would have a voice. It was stressed, however, that they would need to feel that they were listened to and not merely used as a dissemination vehicle for 'new rules'. It is crucial that representatives from dog walking groups are brought together with other user groups (e.g. cyclists, walkers, etc.) in order to break down barriers and lack of awareness of each other's needs. To facilitate this, and to ensure that dog walkers have access to appropriate policy levels, it would be sensible for dog walkers to have representation on Local Access Forums.

The focus groups also discussed the possibility of a voluntary warden scheme, where responsible dog owners might oversee the behaviour of others. However, there was general concern that such a scheme might put people at risk from verbal or physical abuse from other people.

### **6.2.1 Involvement of site managers**

Dog walkers' groups might also improve the lines of communication between site managers and dog walkers. Engagement of site managers with the general public appears to be low nationally. The responses of 77 site managers in a survey of 150 sites across England and Scotland conducted on behalf of English Nature revealed that only 11 site managers had engaged with the public at all, but that eight of those believed their engagement to have been successful (English Nature, 2005). In the meeting held with site managers for this survey, there seemed to be a general lack of communication modes between managers and dog walkers, although one-to-one conversations between site managers and dog walkers were reported to occur by both parties. Indeed, it appeared that some managers currently engage with dog walkers more than other user groups, because of their regular attendance and subsequent familiarity. Nevertheless, it was felt that more contact with dog walkers would be welcomed. One country park management team reported that the regular dog walkers, who hold a key to the gate of the park, actually open the park each morning.

It is proposed that site managers might help the formation of dog friendly dog walking groups by providing:

- help in forming the group;
- facilities for meetings;
- regular meetings with site managers; and
- meetings/links with other users.

In order to elicit feelings of connectedness and self-worth, group meetings might be convened especially for dog walkers to deal with specific topics from time to time. For example, during wildlife breeding periods, site managers might spend some time explaining the importance of minimising dog and wildlife interaction and emphasise the positive contribution that the group can make. The group session should help to reinforce conformity of desired behaviours. As with all separate issues, the group membership can continually reinforce positive, desired behaviour concerning all dog walking issues.

Participants in the follow-up focus groups felt generally welcomed by site managers and park rangers and enjoyed engagement with them. In particular, it was

suggested that a specific manager/ranger might act as a 'champion for dog walkers' at a specific site; especially one who might have his/her own dog on site.

### **6.2.2 Providing reinforcing messages**

It is possible to use group cohesion and peer pressure to encourage people to behave in a desirable manner. However, messages need to be constructed in a way that reinforces group norms. For example, on the issue of dog mess, norms might be communicated via appropriate signage, such as:

*“All of our responsible dog walkers pick up after their dogs, please join in”,*

or, together with picture of someone walking away from dogs mess:

*“What makes you special? Please pick up after your dog”*

## **6.3 Changing Attitudes and Beliefs: general awareness raising**

Our research showed that there is still a lot of work to do in:

- I. informing dog walkers about their behaviour, in terms of the consequences of that behaviour and how it is perceived by others;
- II. informing other site users of the consequences of their behaviour in relation to dogs; and
- III. increasing the lines of communication between site managers and dog walkers.

Beliefs need to be salient in order for them to affect behavioural intent. Interventions need to consider this and make persuasive messages that will be remembered, therefore pictorial memory cues might be used as well as detailed educational material.

### **6.3.1 Clear messages**

Linked to the general positive approach towards dogs, dog walkers need clear messages about what is acceptable and not acceptable to other users. Having another person's dog approach at a high speed, or jump up, is not acceptable. Some walkers may subsequently need assistance in training a dog to behave in an acceptable manner (see below). Some dog walkers will need more informal, friendly interaction with non-dog walkers in order to learn about limits of behaviour and what is desired behaviour (see below). Similarly, dog walkers need to be made fully aware of their dog's impact on wildlife, livestock and habitat: we found levels of such awareness to be noticeably low. Dog walkers will also need constant reinforcement of desired behaviour through recognition from other dog walkers and other users when their dog behaves well.

### **6.3.2 Inclusion of other users**

Dog walkers perceive that their intentions to act in a desirable manner can often be sabotaged by the behaviours of others. For example, a dog walker might intend to put their dog on a lead as a cyclist approaches, for the safety of the dog and the cyclist. However, there was a consensus amongst dog walkers that cyclists would often prevent such desired behaviour by approaching a dog at high speed and without warning and so scaring it into running, and sometimes chasing the cyclist,

before the walker could control the dog. All dog walkers said that they would prefer a cyclist to call out in a friendly manner as they were approaching, or use a bell to warn of their approach. Similarly, dog walkers noted that some other users would unintentionally encourage a dog to jump up on them by raising their arms to their chest as the dog was approaching – a signal sometimes used in dog training classes as a welcome for the dog to place its paws on the person calling it.

The general consensus was that other users of countryside sites can intentionally, and unintentionally, affect the dog walker's perceived control beliefs and/or interfere with their actual behavioural control. Whilst it should remain the responsibility of the dog walker to control the dog, it is important to acknowledge that shared countryside space puts some responsibility on other users not to jeopardise the control a dog walker has over that dog. It would be useful, therefore, for information and awareness-raising to address other users and their interactions with dogs. The approach to take might be that dog walkers are trying to be responsible users of this shared space, but that they need the help of other users in giving consistent messages to their dogs. The bringing together of dog walkers and other users is an essential part of a communication process that will help each group to appreciate the social norms of others *and* assist in clarifying desired and undesired behaviour around dogs.

It is also important to show dog walkers that other users' behaviour is being questioned, in order that dog walkers do not feel unjustly singled out and become defiant.

### **6.3.3 Routes to persuasion**

Information and awareness-raising can change *beliefs that underlie behaviours* concerning issues such as dogs' mess and lack of control. For example, warning notices, information boards, leaflets, websites and help lines can explain why and when dogs must be kept on leads and under control (for wildlife, ground nesting birds, livestock, other land users, etc.) and explain the consequences of desired behaviour and undesired behaviour.

Whatever type of signage and message display is used, message construction will be most persuasive when it is meticulous in detail and focuses on the positive consequences of desired behaviours. This was confirmed by follow-up focus groups, who felt that signage must be welcoming, with a positive message and be polite (i.e., say 'please' and 'thank you'), asking people to cooperate rather than dictating how they should behave. For example:

***“Children are using this area for environmental awareness activities, please do not leave dogs mess where they might tread in it.”***

***“Some birds nest on or near the ground – such as lapwings, skylarks, curlews, redshanks and snipe, so we are trying to help them.”***

In terms of providing messages via the peripheral route, the information needs to be credible, authoritative and attractive:

***“Recent surveys have shown that numbers of ground nesting birds are declining (state data) and that our help is needed in their recovery.....before it's too late.”***

Participants felt that messages should be clear and succinct and specific: for example, explicitly state whether dogs should be 'walking to heel or 'on a lead'

rather than 'under control'. However, information will have to tackle behavioural beliefs not only about the effect of dog walkers' behaviour on the birds, but also on their own behaviour and their dogs. Thus, other messages are needed:

***"Your dog can still enjoy this walk whilst on a lead. Try to vary your pace and keep your dog engaged by talking to it."***

***"You are more likely to see and hear these precious birds if your dog is close to you and on a lead. Look out for ..... Listen out for....."***

In order for routes to persuasion to be successful, people must believe that consequences will actually occur, and that these are relevant to their behaviour. For example, a sign about the harm that dogs can cause to dormice might stress:

***"Our dormice are breeding and need to stay quietly with their young. Allowing YOUR dog to run off the path here will disturb them. Please help your dog to help the dormice"***

The sign might carry a picture of disrupted fauna. The use of upper case for "YOUR" dog will attract a person to read the notice in the first place.

For this reason, signage must be appropriate for relative times of year (e.g. nesting seasons, lambing time). It was felt that wardens must be responsible for ensuring that signs are left on site only for the period for which they apply.

Participants felt that they might be given suggestions for other walks when they are asked to put their dogs on a lead:

***"Sheep are grazing in the next field, please keep dogs on leads or follow path to the right."***

Dog walkers in the follow-up focus groups confirmed that they felt that signs should be directed at *other* users as well:

***"Cyclists please dismount or call out to walkers and dogs in your path."***

They also confirmed that signs that provided information to help with ensuring their dogs' safety are most welcome, such as signs warning of adders, unfenced roads and livestock that might be out of sight. It was generally agreed that signs emphasising any risk to dogs were most likely to be adhered to:

***"Grazing cattle might hurt your dog: please keep it on a lead"***

Reinforcement of messages might use emotional appeals to deter the undesirable behaviour associated with dogs not kept under control. Attitudes will not influence dog walkers' and other users' behaviour unless the messages are salient; therefore lots of accessible, visual cues will help. For example, photographs might be used to elicit positive emotions (e.g. dormice, chicks, nesting animals, other young fauna) and negative emotions (e.g. features of the environment damaged by dogs out-of-control, such as broken nests/eggs, dead/injured wildlife and livestock, etc.).

A whole host of cognitive dissonance measures might also be employed in this situation. For example, dog walkers might be given car stickers with ground nesting bird pictures and messages such as:-

***“I’m helping to protect the sky larks at XXX”***

Given the affection that people feel for their dogs, it might even be sensible to distribute coloured dog tags with a similar message – evoking feelings of a rosette-type reward for the dog. Such measures might act as a visual reinforcement of the dog walker’s perception of themselves as a bird-caring person.

Visual cues must be simple and obvious, however, and not too cryptic. Comment was made at the follow-up focus groups that some of the pictorial signs at Itchen Valley Country Park were perceived as being incomprehensible.

Finally, ‘Foot-in-the-door’ techniques may be used to start a process of awareness-raising. For example, dog walkers might be asked to place a sticker in their car or a coloured disc on their dog’s collar to indicate their membership in the ‘responsible dog walkers’ group/club. This in turn can lead to larger changes in attitudes and behaviour and can encourage a sense of group membership, which in turn will increase conformity to group norms.

**6.3.4 Dog walker notice boards**

The follow-up focus groups discussed the provision of dedicated dog-walker notice boards at country parks. Generally, they were welcomed and it was felt that such notice boards might be used to advertise events; provide an emergency contact number for park rangers; provide information about other recommended sites; notify walkers of any seasonal restrictions (and reasons for those restrictions); provide telephone numbers of local vets; provide information on where dog bins are located on site; and act as a notice for dog lost and found posters.

**6.4 Assisting Actual Behavioural Control: management and facilities**

As well as changing the attitudes and beliefs of dog walkers, and hence their behaviours, it is crucial to ensure that they are assisted in their actual behavioural control by reducing obstacles to desirable behaviour and facilitating good behaviour through appropriate facilities. Obstacles to desirable behaviour might include the behaviour of other users (such as cyclists frightening dogs) or lack of appropriate facilities (such as dog bins in an area where walkers are expected to pick up).

There are other advantages to the provision of good facilities for dog walkers. All dog walkers take great pleasure in seeing their dogs enjoy a good walk. Dog walkers are not always made to feel welcome in the countryside and country parks, by other users, by managers, by the messages given through notices, etc.. Facilities that are currently provided, such as dog bins, can be seen as mitigating the negative effects of dogs, rather than improving their benefits. We feel that there is great scope for extending the hand of friendship to dog walkers by providing facilities in country park settings that will positively increase the quality of their experience. Dog walkers need recognition that their presence, and specifically the presence of their *dogs*, is valued as much children, cyclists, etc.. Provision of superior facilities might also be used to attract dog walkers to specific sites.

Generally the follow-up focus group participants welcomed the idea of superior facilities at sites, specifically:

- provision of drinking water for dogs wherever possible;

- somewhere to tie dogs up;
- an enclosed area for exercise and training;
- agility courses; and
- a wash-down area for dogs.

#### **6.4.1 Zoning**

Whilst we have stressed above the need for dog walkers to take more responsibility for their dogs, dog walkers have expressed the desire to allow their dogs to 'run free' and essentially mimic a former wild time in their evolution. Clearly, many dog walkers take great pleasure in seeing their dogs run off-lead and believe that they are happiest when allowed to exercise in this way. Thus, in making dog walkers feel welcome in country parks, the dog walkers need the reassurance of dedicated dog areas where they can train and experiment with dog behaviour in a safe setting and areas where dogs can exercise without fear of interaction with other users, wildlife or livestock.

The follow-up focus groups considered that separate zones for dog walkers should not exclude others, but should be identified as primarily set aside for dog walkers. Follow-up focus groups also suggested that colour coded areas might be used to indicate where it is safe to let a dog off the lead and where it is not. This could also be a gentle way of introducing new behaviours.

#### **6.4.2 Dog bins**

The most frequent management request made by participants was help in dealing with their dogs' mess. There appears to be confusion as to when dog walkers are expected to pick up after their dogs and when it is acceptable to leave a mess. The lack of clear-cut rules has resulted in improvisation that in most cases is logical, but might be developed further.

For example, people generally pick up and bag their dog's mess if they see a bin present. However, this has led to a belief that if no bin is present, or if the bin is some distance away, then it is not the dog walker's responsibility to deal with the mess. There appears to be general acceptance that mess should not be left anywhere it might be stepped in by other humans, regardless of whether a bin is present. However, strategies for dealing with such circumstances vary considerably, from bagging it and then depositing it in the open, to knocking it to one side, to covering it with sticks, etc.. It is worth noting that the strategy selected is often influenced by whether the act is being witnessed by another person.

In essence (i) most dog walkers *do* consider others and the result of their actions on others; (ii) dog walkers are influenced by peer pressure and possible confrontation as a result of their chosen action. Thus, in approaching problems such as dog mess, the dog walkers need clear messages (via **central routes**<sup>35</sup>). As above, whatever type of signage and message display is used, message construction will be most persuasive when it is meticulous in detail and focuses on the positive consequences of desired behaviours. For example, the practice of bagging and flinging mess into nearby bushes and trees might be discouraged by the environmental health problems caused by such action and/or damage to wildlife habitat. Such messages can be reinforced with emotional appeals about degrading beautiful,

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<sup>35</sup> See page 8 of this report for full explanation of central routes, etc..

wildlife-rich sites, and messages that acknowledge that such behaviour breaks the social norm.

Dog walkers also need more information on site management costs and logistical problems of providing bins *everywhere*. Provision of resources (e.g. bins and bags for disposing of faeces, fencing to keep dogs off vulnerable areas) that will optimise *perceived behavioural control* and *actual behavioural control* are needed. That is, dog mess facilities should optimise features that facilitate desired behaviours and minimise features that constrain undesired behaviours.

Ultimately, the follow-up focus groups participants confirmed that they believed that fines are perceived as a real deterrent to not dealing with dog mess.

### **6.4.3 Dog events**

It was felt that various dog events might be useful to encourage a feeling of "Dogs Welcome" at country sites and in raising awareness of others' needs amongst users of shared countryside space. Training sessions, obedience classes, fun days at sites, and socialising opportunities (e.g., 'Happy Dog Hour') were seen favourably. In particular, it was felt that events that encourage non-dog walkers, cyclists, families, and so on to get to know dogs and break down the barriers between different user groups would be welcome. Other suggested events included wildlife workshops specifically for dog walkers and provision of training 'taster' days (at country parks).

### **6.4.4 Dog websites and other media**

The follow-up focus groups tested the desirability of web-based information for dog walkers. Generally this was very well received and it was seen to have multiple applications. For example, some felt that a website might be sponsored by Kennel Club, or other dog-related companies such as pet insurance companies, pet food manufacturers, etc.. It was suggested that the website might communicate available sites, where to walk, what facilities are provided, parking available, any restrictions on dog walkers, stiles, gates, terrain, quality of footpaths, etc.. This concept was taken further and it was suggested that posters, maps, a DVD, doggy newspaper, etc. might be produced to communicate similar information. In particular, it was felt that all such media might be used to encourage people to walk in the countryside and use the RoW network more.

There was a real sense that people needed to be properly informed about what to expect at 'new' walking areas (the wider countryside) and what is expected of *them*. Many participants said that they did not walk in the wider countryside with their dog because of a lack of such information.

### **6.4.5 Doggy shuttle bus**

A concept that was raised at one of the follow-up focus groups was a shuttle bus from residential areas to country parks, for dog walkers who cannot drive and might be too elderly or infirm to walk long distances with their dogs. Although it might not get regular uptake, a pilot scheme might test the demand for such a service. It was felt that the concept could be developed further and take people from residential areas to countryside walks that form part of the RoW network, as a means of familiarising them with new locations.

## **6.5 Conclusions: ideas for further research**

The short term nature of this research project has, amongst other things, limited the outcome of this study. First, applied work on the Theory of Planned Behaviour normally employs quantitative methods that allow for a large number of questions covering a broad spectrum of issues with a larger, more representative sample. The small sample size presented here prohibited the possibility of making intra-group comparisons (e.g., male versus female, or owners of different breeds of dogs).

The nature of the method employed, that where participants volunteered to participate, might also have encouraged a bias towards people who were comfortable being part of a group and recognised themselves as 'responsible' dog walkers. This bias is partly supported by the fact that participants in the study stated that they value dog walking as a way of meeting people, providing a topic of conversation and a social event. None of the participants expressed a preference for walking alone, with the exception of participants who discussed walking dogs that were aggressive toward other dogs. It is likely that there is a population of 'lone' dog walkers who were not reached by this study. Similarly, there is a population of dog walkers who regularly behave in unacceptable manner, who were not reached by this study. Ideally, findings from the present study could inform the development of an appropriate questionnaire for a large quantitative survey of dog walkers, which might reach such people and help to provide evidence of the statistical significance of the attitudes and behaviours suggested by this study.

Second, thought might be given to taking the results of this study and using it to raise awareness in the broad media of the benefits of dog walking. Dog walking can provide social interaction for people, psychological comfort, health benefits from exercise, and encourage family-oriented activities, etc.. It is disappointing to see that changing lifestyles are leading to a decline in dog ownership in the UK, whilst obesity figures (for adults and children) rise and the mental health of the nation generally deteriorates. Certainly, more can be made of the positive benefits of dog walking in the media and used to reinforce the overall portrayal of responsible dog ownership.

Finally, in spite of the limitations of the study, the distribution of gender present in this study, and ownership of a wide range of dogs, helped provide a variety of opinions at focus groups. Whilst findings from this research may be criticised for being specific to a small population of dog walkers, the overarching psychological principles that form the basis for our recommendations mean that these can be applied in a range of situations and therefore have wider application. Many of the recommendations contained in this report lend themselves to pilot studies in one or two locations. Enormous benefit could be derived from testing the recommendations in a field setting and evaluating their practical worth.



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## APPENDIX I: Follow-Up Letter

Address

Date

Dear [name of participant].

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in our research. The discussion group that you will attend is at [location of focus group], on [date of focus group] at [time of focus group]. If you are unsure of where this is, please feel free to contact me beforehand for directions. Please bring a photo of your dog with you.

If for any reason you are not able to attend the meeting, please contact us as soon as possible. This is very important because if we do not have enough people turn up on the day, we will not be able to run the discussion group, which means everybody's time is wasted.

The group will consist of between 5-8 people who walk regularly with their dog in the [name of area] area. At the meeting we will encourage people to discuss informally and openly about their dogs and dog walking. We are very interested in hearing about your views on this topic. We will be recording the discussions with audio equipment. Recordings will be used for research analysis purposes (to save us making notes of what everybody says).

The session will last for a maximum of 2 hours. Since your time is valuable, we will respect everybody's schedule by starting and finishing on time. So please allow yourself plenty of time to park etc. before the meeting is due to take place. If parking charges are in place, please come and find one of us and we will give you a ticket to put on your car.

We will provide refreshments and everyone will be given a generous gift bag full of goodies for your dog, as thanks for your help.

Once again, thank you very much for your help- we are really pleased you have agreed to take part. We look forward to meeting you on [date].

Best wishes,

Ann Coats,  
Project Administrator.

## APPENDIX II: Screening Questionnaire

### ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURS OF DOG WALKERS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

**As part of this research, we would like to first collect some general details about you. Please answer the questions below.**

Gender:      Male       OR      Female

How old are you?

How many dogs do you own?:

What breed of dog(s) do you own?:

What is the age of your dog(s)?:

How often do you walk your dog(s)?

*Twice a day*       *3 or 4 times week*       *Occasionally*

*Once a day*       *Once a week*       *Never*

How many dogs do you normally walk at one time?:

*One*       *Three*       *Five*

*Two*       *Four*       *Six plus*

What is your favourite place to walk your dog(s)?:

On average, how long does each of your walks last?

Throughout your life, how many years have you owned a dog?

Most of my life       5-10 years       Less than 5 years       Less than 1 year

## APPENDIX III: Informed Consent Form

### ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURS OF DOG WALKERS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of research:** Assessment of the needs and behaviours of dog walkers in the countryside

**Purpose of research:** *Research funded for Hampshire County Council, the Kennel Club and the Countryside Agency*

**Investigators:** Dr Victoria Edwards, OBE, Sarah Knight, BSc., PgDip..

This research aims to examine the needs and behaviours of dog walkers in the countryside. If you agree to take part you will be required to provide some general details about yourself (via a short questionnaire), then take part in a focus group that involves a small number of people discussing issues concerning dog walking. This will last for a maximum of two hours. This discussion will be recorded using audio equipment. Afterwards you will be given details of how you may find out more about this project if required. Data gained from this study will be presented to sponsors of this project, and may also be published in appropriate scientific journals. All data will be kept in a secure place at the University of Portsmouth.

**PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING AND SIGN YOUR NAME AT THE BOTTOM OF THE FORM IF YOU AGREE ALL OF THE STATEMENTS**

I understand that:

- ~ the focus group will last for a maximum of two hours
- ~ I may refuse to answer any question
- ~ I may choose to leave the discussion at any point
- ~ the focus group will be recorded using video and audio equipment
- ~ I may ask to have my data withdrawn from this research if I contact the researcher within two weeks of this focus group
- ~ participation in the study is confidential and my name will not be used in connection with the results in any way
- ~ all data will be kept for a minimum of five years in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Portsmouth
- ~ findings will be used as part of a report for sponsors of this research and may be included in scientific publications
- ~ I have the right to obtain information about the findings of the study by contacting the researcher at the University of Portsmouth.

I agree to participate in this study.

**Name of participant (PLEASE PRINT)** .....

**Signature**

**Date**

## **APPENDIX IV: De-briefing Note for Participants of Focus Groups**

### **ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURS OF DOG WALKERS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: DEBRIEF**

This research aims to examine what people think about dog walking in the countryside. Your data (i.e. what you have said during the focus group) will be analysed together with that from other people for the purpose of this study. Data will be presented to sponsors of this research in a way that summarises the key issues discussed in the focus groups. Findings may be used to inform other research projects, and may be published in appropriate journals. If you decide that you wish to withdraw from this study, you must contact us within two weeks of completing the questionnaire (see contact details below), and we can eliminate your data from analysis. You can also contact us if you would like a summary of the results once the study is completed. Many thanks for participating in this study.

***If you need to speak with us about this research, please feel free to contact Victoria Edwards or Sarah Knight at the University of Portsmouth (email [victoria.edwards@port.ac.uk](mailto:victoria.edwards@port.ac.uk) or [sarah.knight@port.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.knight@port.ac.uk), or telephone 02392 8462918 or 02392 846334).***

## **APPENDIX V: Focus Group Lead-In Questions**

### **#1 - AIM: What does your dog mean to you?**

1. Tell me about your dog (name, type, why & how you got him/her)?
2. How does your dog fit into your daily/weekly life? What time do you spend together?

### **#2 - AIM. What are you looking for on a walk?**

1. Tell me about your weekly walking habits?
2. Do you always walk your dog yourself?
3. How often do you walk your dog?
4. Does the pattern differ at weekends? In what way?
5. Which walks do you think your dog prefers? Why?

### **#3 - AIM. What fears do you have for your dog?**

1. What worries do you have about your dog?
2. Are you comfortable with him/her close to roads and traffic?
3. Are you comfortable with your dog around livestock? Wildlife?
4. Are you concerned when you meet other dogs? When and why?
5. Is your dog happy around children?

### **#4 - AIM: What fears do you have for yourself?**

1. What concerns you when you are out walking?
2. Does being with your dog make you feel safer?

### **#5 - AIM: How do you feel about other dog walkers?**

1. Do you often meet other dog walkers on your walks?
2. Do you look for other dog walkers on your walks?
3. How often do you stop and talk to other dog walkers? What about?
4. Do you try to avoid other dog walkers? Why?
5. Which dog walkers do you most enjoy meeting? Why?
6. Do you have problems with other dog walkers and their dogs?
7. What irritates you about other dog walkers?

### **#6 – AIM: How well do you manage you dog?**

1. Do you always walk with your dog on a lead?
2. Why do you like to let your dog off lead?
3. Is your dog good with cyclists, joggers, children, etc.?
4. Has your dog ever embarrassed you/really let you down?
5. What is the worst thing your dog has ever done?

### **#7 - AIM: Who are your Peer Group?**

1. Who do you look to for advice about your dog?
2. Whose opinions do you value?
3. Are other dog walkers a good source of knowledge & guidance?
4. Is your vet a good source of knowledge and guidance? When?

### **#8 - AIM: What are your hopes for dog walking?**

1. What sort of place would be the ideal place to walk with your dog?
2. What would make it more special for your dog?
3. Describe your ideal walk in terms of what it looks like, what facilities it has, how your dog acts, etc.