



**CITY OF
PARRAMATTA**

COWELLS LANE TEMPORARY FENCE TRIAL CONSULT

Engagement Evaluation

March 2021

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1. Project background

Cowells Lane Reserve in Ermington is a popular off-leash dog exercise area and is much loved by the community. It is approximately 15 hectares in size and includes creeks, a stormwater detention basin, a small playground, a Council-owned nursery, bushland, walking tracks and exercise stations.

Originally, dogs were only allowed off-leash in the central basin area, however in 2009, the off-leash area was expanded to include the whole of Cowells Lane Reserve. Since the expansion, Cowells Lane Reserve has seen upgrades including the construction of a concrete circuit path, a playground upgrade, the addition of fitness stations and the upgrade of walking paths.

An increase in usage of the park over the years has led to biodiversity degradation, incidents with unleashed dogs and requests from the community to designate a fenced, safe dog off-leash area. In addition to this, the fencing around the children's play equipment does not currently comply with the Companion Animals Act 1998 - Section 14, where dogs are prohibited from being within 10m of any children's playing apparatus.

Council has reviewed the off-leash area and feedback received during the March 2020 community consultation and has proposed to install a temporary fence to be trialled for six (6) months. The park will remain predominately as an off-leash area, whilst providing a clearly defined section of Cowells Lane Reserve as an on-leash area around the popular playground and parking area.

The aim is to create a safer environment for all park user groups whilst ensuring that Cowells Lane Reserve remains one of Sydney's best off-leash dog parks.

Engagement response

Community members could provide feedback via an online survey hosted on Council's engagement platform Participate Parramatta. The consultation was open for a period of six (6) months.

This engagement was live during the COVID-19 pandemic so face to face engagement was limited.

This report considers the reach and effectiveness of the communications and engagement channels, with an overview of submissions and feedback.

2. Methodology

Engagement Objectives

The levels of participation for the engagement program (based on the IAP2 Spectrum) were 'Inform' and 'Consult'. The table below outlines the objectives of the program for each engagement level.

Engagement Level	Objectives
Inform	Communicate that City of Parramatta Council is installing a temporary fence as a part of a trial to create a clear area for on-leash and off-leash animals.
Consult	Obtain feedback to inform the final decision on whether to install a permanent fence. Understand how the temporary fence has impacted community members.

Communication and Engagement Methods

The following platforms were used to promote and encourage feedback from the community:

1. Participate Parramatta engagement portal.
2. Social media.
3. Electronic direct email.
4. Onsite promotion.
5. Letter box drop.

3. Engagement Activities

Overall, the opportunity to share ideas and feedback for the Cowells Lane Reserve Temporary Fence Trial was presented to an estimated 65,878 persons culminating in 386 submissions of feedback from the community.

Opportunity	Reach	Project Page views	Contributions
65,878	39,737	2,976	386*

**Contributions also includes 12 phone calls and 15 emails received by the Place Services Team during the consult.*

The opportunity and reach numbers are based on social media reach, web traffic, email recipients and other channels as detailed below.

3.1. Participate Parramatta!

The project was featured on the platform during the consultation period, resulting in 2,976 views during the exhibition period. The page included the following:

- Project background
- Online survey
- Contact details for the Place Services Project team

Events on project page	Total
Page views	2,976
Contributions via survey	396
Unique Contributions via Survey	359

You can view the page here: participate.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/cowellslanereserve

3.2. Social media channels

The opportunity to provide feedback was presented to 53,153 social media followers and reached approximately 29,984 people, cumulating in 1,530 clicks through to the project page.

1. Participate Parramatta Facebook Page – 6,992 followers
2. City of Parramatta Facebook Page – 37,403 followers
3. City of Parramatta Twitter Page – 8,758 followers

Platform	Link Clicks	Total Engagements	Total Reach
Facebook PAID	1463	1,647	19,892
Facebook	60	120	5,921
Twitter	7	31	2144 * <i>impressions</i>
Instagram	0	64	2027
Total	1,530	1,892	29,984

The paid campaign hosted via the City of Parramatta corporate Facebook page totalled \$250 over the six-month period split into two campaigns.

**Impressions:* Impressions are different to reach, Reach is singular, and impressions is multiple, so *reach* just calculates the first time a user has seen the message whereas the *impressions* measure counts all the times a user has seen the message.

3.3. Electronic Direct Mail (EDM's sent)

Three (3) electronic direct mail was sent to a total of 15,229 recipients.

1. Participate Parramatta Research Panel newsletter
2. Parramatta Open Space and Recreation Newsletter
3. February 2020 Consultation Participants - Notification

Resources

Posters and postcards were developed to support the promotion of the consultation.

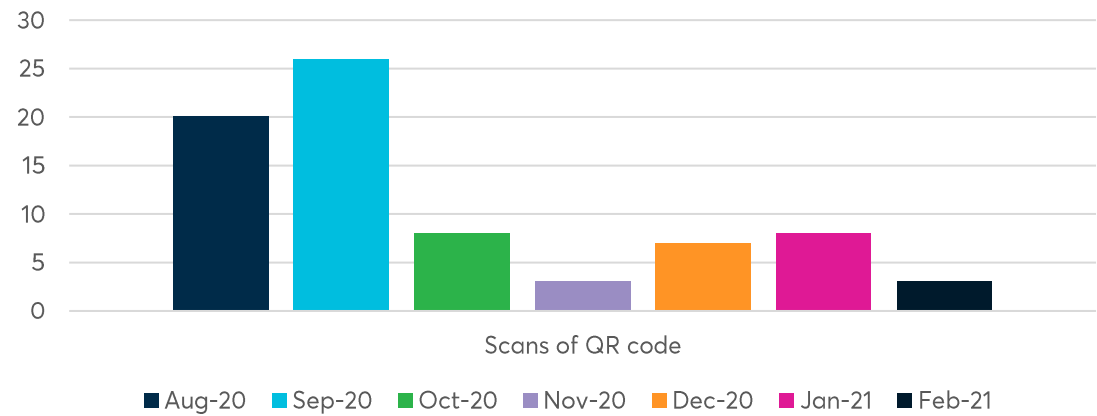
- 1. 10 at all entrances and along the fence
- 2. 750 postcards printed and distributed.

Collateral was distributed on site and the residents and businesses mapped below:



QR Code

The QR code on the posters and post cards generated 75 scans.



4. What did we hear?

Online Survey

The main channel for feedback was via an online survey hosted on the Participate Parramatta platform which included 5 questions and the opportunity to provide an email address to receive project updates. Overall, Council received 396 completed surveys by 359 contributors.

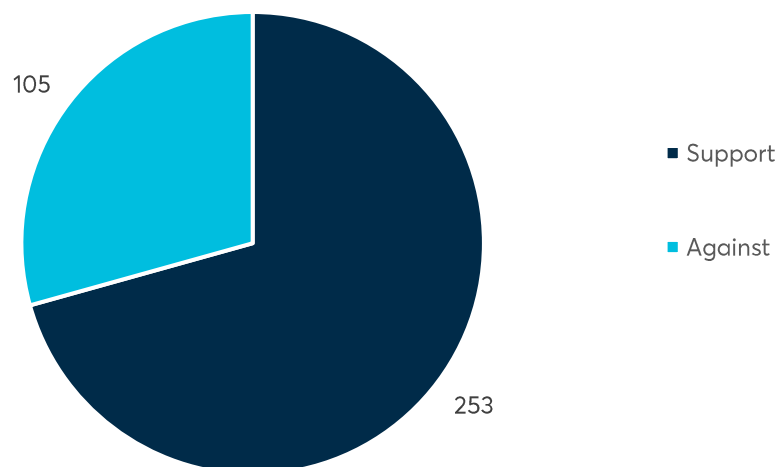
NOTE: There is a discrepancy between 'completed surveys' and 'contributors' on this project which is due to participants responding to the online survey multiple times. To address this, the data has been cleansed by only providing analysis on one submission per IP address for Quantitative questions, all comments have been considered in the qualitative analysis. Learn more in Appendix 1.

Quantitative Data

4.1. The Trial Fence

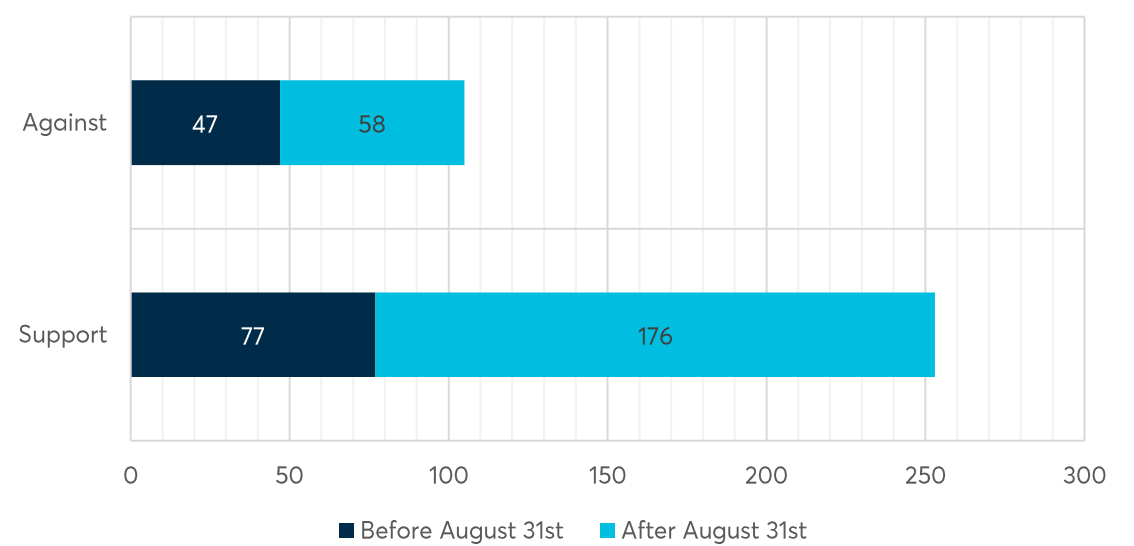
The first question was "To help ensure all park users can enjoy the reserve and feel safe, is the trial fence a viable permanent option for Cowells Lane Reserve?". Overall, **71%** (253/359) voted in support of the fence with **29%** (105/359) not in favour of the fence becoming permanent as seen in figure 1.

Fig. 1 Support of Trial Fence as a Permanent Option



It is important to note that this consultation was open for a period of six month and the temporary fence was not erected on site until 31 August after delays due to weather and ground conditions.

Fig. 2 Comparison of support pre and post fence

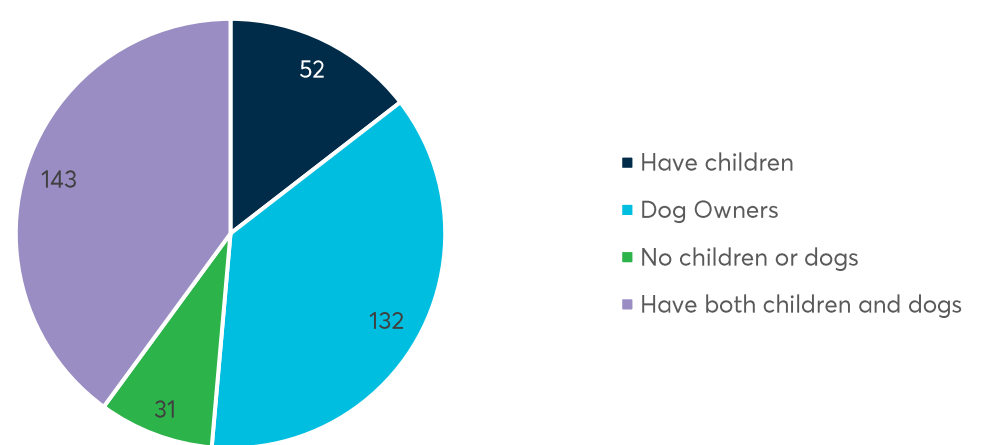


From this graph above we can see that support grew for the temporary fence trial post the construction of the temporary fence.

4.2. Who Participated?

This consultation did not ask participants to specifically provide demographic information, the team did however want to better understand what groups in the community were providing feedback. For example, mostly people without kids, with dogs and so on.

Fig. 3 Breakdown of Participant Groups



Overall, 76% of respondents identified that they have dogs, representing the largest groups of participants in this survey. Of those participants, 52% have children and dogs.

Those who have children and dogs (42% or 143/358) voted in support of the fence becoming a permanent option (99 to 44 votes).

Fig. 4 Comparison of Respondent Composition:
Support/Against

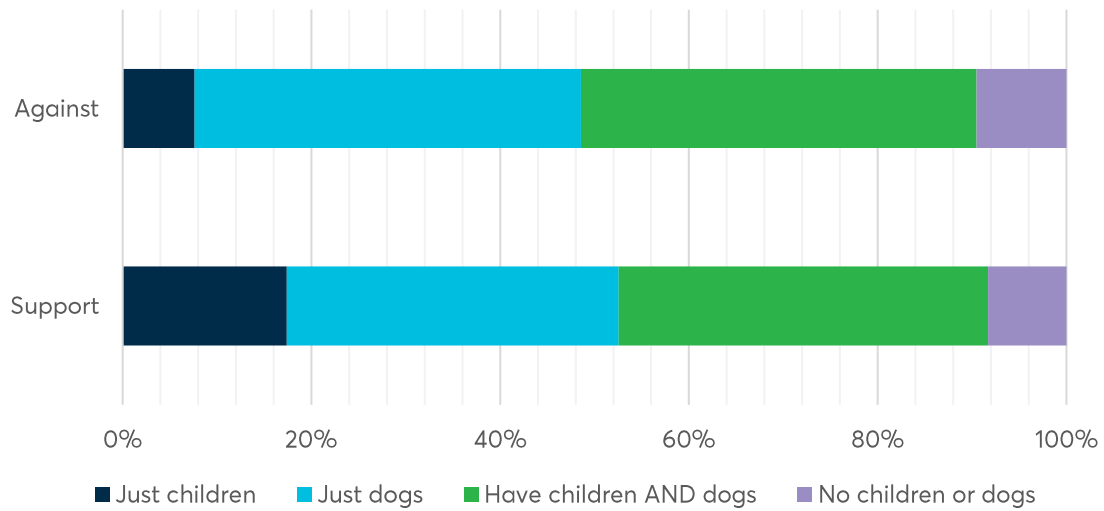


Fig. 5 Support for Permanent Fence

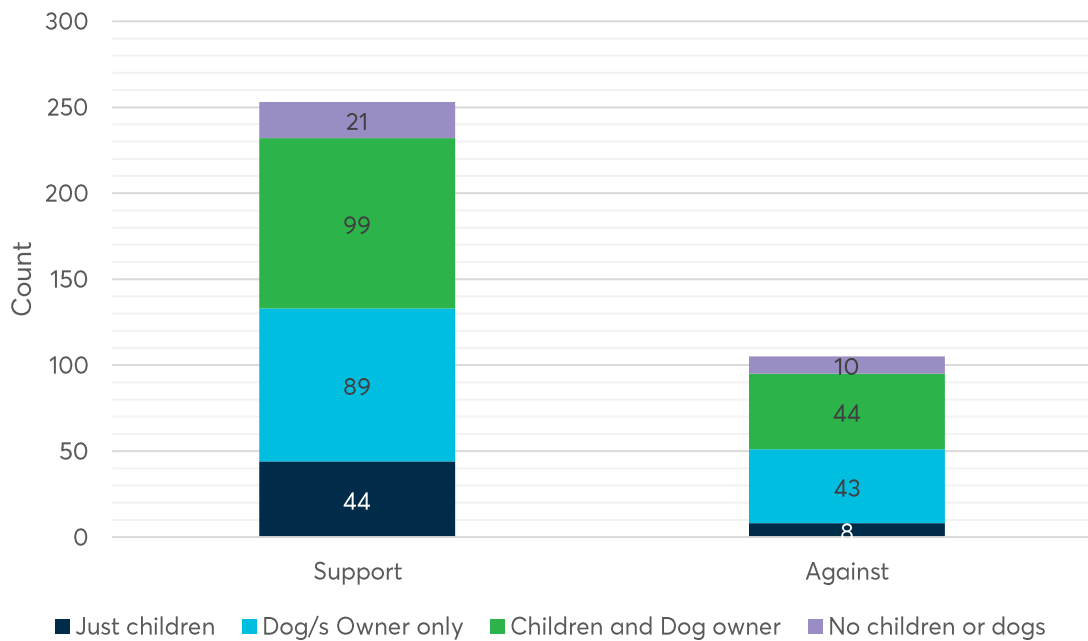


Figure 4 and 5 (above) has been included to convey the breakdown of the participant groups, showing a fair and even spread of those in support and those against. For example, the previous consultation for the Cowells Lane Reserve exhibiting a very different idea, saw the dog owners' segment *against* the fence and people with children only segment in *support* of the fence.

Qualitative Data

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to explain why they do or do not support the fence trial. In addition to this, respondents were also asked how the temporary fence has change their experience at Cowells lanes Reserve.

Overall, those who are in support found that their experience has not been negatively impacted with a clear separation between off-leash and on-leash now provided. Whereas those who did not support the fence trial found that their experience has changed with many citing they visit the park less or not at all now due to the fence.

It should be noted here that people who support and do not support the fence did raise difficulties in terms of access, as the gate mechanism is hard to open for elderly and disabled patrons of the park.

All comments can be found in the attached appendix.

4.3. Why do respondents support the fence?

- Provides options for exercise and socialisation for dogs and people.

"Allows for a safe place to exercise without dogs running towards you. Has been stress free."

- Provides a safety barrier for children who are not comfortable with dogs.

"My daughter can now do physical activity without being concerned about dogs approaching her (as she is not comfortable around unknown dogs). Before this fence she would not go to this park even though it is right on our doorstep."

- Provides a safety barrier for dogs from the parking/road.
- Great compromise if there must be a fence.

"I'm finally feeling safe to leave my pet dog off lead, this is such a beautiful initiative that a park both children and pets can enjoy themselves."

Many who supported the fence agreed that it has not negatively altered their experience and usage of Cowells Lane Reserve. Majority of comments did note that it has changed the way they enter Cowells Lane, where they park and may have created a small inconvenience however the compromise is appreciated if most of the reserve remains off-leash.

Other notes from this comments section include:

- It gives a good option for leash training without being distracted by off leash dogs wandering over.
- Participants also advised that the signage was appropriate and helped distinguish the two areas.

"The separation has resulted in me accessing the playground less due to the fact I bring children and dogs down to the park together. However, this has meant the kids are walking through the bush and experiencing the beautiful trees and bird life instead of swinging back and forth on the swing. So I have taken this as a positive.

I have also seen a significant drop in altercations between runners and dog owners. I find those not comfortable around dogs are staying in the on-leash area and the clear delineation seems to be really working."

There was one lengthy submission outlining that although this is a good compromise, the top oval (now – on- leash area) used to be the area where dog owners would socialise whilst their dogs played. The new off-leash area has no-where (according to submissions) for people to sit and socialise with their dogs off-leash.

4.4. Why do respondents NOT support the fence?

Overall, there are many themes that came through in the 124 comments:

- New off-leash area is hard to access and does not have appropriate pathways for people with different mobility needs.
- No facilities in the new off-leash area for humans such as, shade, seating, exercise equipment.
- Dog bowl and bins are not adequate in new off-leash area.
- Off-leash area is concentrating dog activity closer to residents.
- Respondents want a public toilet.
- Off-leash area turns to a swamp after rain attracting insects, and soft terrain which inhibits dogs and their owners from safely walking around.
 - a. Unlike the well maintained fenced off area, regular cutting of the grass appears to be impeded due to the poor drainage of the lower 'basin' area. Participants concerned that this creates a breeding ground for ticks and weeds.

"The proposed off leash area is always muddy and full of mosquitos. When it rains, most of the proposed area becomes a swamp. There is no way that dogs and kids could play there without getting all filthy and disgusting. Let alone there is no lights, no water tap for dogs and no bench for people to rest on. All the open space in the proposed off leash area are too close to residence. While I played fetch with my dog, I was screamed at and cursed by people living there."

- The kids play area is already fenced off and the new on-leash area is underutilised.
- The current gates and fences create an inaccessible barrier for differently abled people to enjoy the off leash area

"Being disabled (wheelchair) I can no longer take my dogs to the park"

Those who were against the fence advised that they have reduced their visitation of the reserve or stopped going all together, stating:

- The basin is a swamp and is not a safe place to exercise dogs.
- People (most identify themselves as female) feel unsafe walking in the off-leash area in early morning or late evening for exercise.

It should be noted that a small portion of those who do NOT support the fence are calling for more of the reserve to be on-leash.

Other Submissions

In addition to the online survey, the project team received:

- 15 emails
- 12 phone calls

Most phone calls received were in opposition to the project, raising the following issues:

- The fence impedes disabled access with specific regard to additional distance required to be travelled by disabled users from the off-streetcar parking to the on-leash area and that the gate on the fence is difficult to use for disabled users.
- The introduction of a fence with the need to touch a gate to gain access increases the risk of COVID-19 spreading in the community.
- The fence has sharp uncovered pickets that present a safety risk for the community.
- That the previous setup of the park was adequate, and no changes are required.
- Recommendations for other upgrades throughout the park, including at the playground and availability of water stations.

There were a smaller number of emails and phone calls received in support of the project. The following points were raised by those community members in support:

- That the fence is a great initiative and has led to a better operation of the park.
- That the fence is a good compromise to ensure the enjoyment of the park for all user groups.

5. Recommendations

This report presents and analyses the key findings and sentiment from community consultation regarding the temporary fence trial. It is recommended that these are closely considered and reflected in the next steps and final designs.

Overall, much of the community supported trial fence as a viable permanent option for Cowells Lane Reserve and agreed generally that it will help ensure all park users can enjoy the reserve and feel safe. However, the off-leash area according to feedback is not accessible for many users, including wheelchairs users and people with disabilities due to the terrain and gate access. **Therefore, the recommended actions are to construct a permanent fence in the current position of the temporary fence that includes a different gate way which is accessible for all users.**

It is also recommended that the project team:

- Give careful consideration and mitigation for those with different accessibility needs to use the off-leash area of the Reserve.
 - a. Provide an alternative gate that is accessible for all park users,
- Provide ample dog etiquette signage and clearly identify the sections and rules of the on-leash and off-leash areas via signage,
- Water station on both sides of fence
 - a. Lower the dog bowls to cater for smaller dogs,
- Provide seating options on off-leash side to promote social activity,
- Investigate lighting to mitigate safety concerns, and
- Provide more bins.

In addition to the above, participants also raised the following issues:

- Pathways in off-leash areas are inaccessible for those with disabilities,
 - a. Sealing/paving the walk path is requested.
- There are no public toilets, and this is constantly raised as an issue,
- Renewal of the wooden bridge is needed,
- Exercise equipment in the off-leash area, and
- Investigate landscaping options for off-leash area (mowing, etc) to help with drainage and insect issues.

We recommend that the project team reviews feedback independently.

These recommendations are in line with Council's engagement principles and commitments outlined in the Community Engagement Strategy and Community and Stakeholder Engagement Policy.

"We make our decisions in an open and transparent way and provide feedback to our stakeholders in order to explain our decisions and let them know how their input has been considered".

A summary of findings and outcomes should also be reported back to the community (when appropriate), highlighting how community feedback has influenced the project including documenting any changes made. The Community Engagement team can assist you with reporting back to the community.

6. Appendix

6.1. IP Address cleansing

This involved all submissions being sorted by IP address with duplicates deleted where there was more than one 'Yes' or 'No' response from an individual IP address to the first question, *"To help ensure all park users can enjoy the reserve and feel safe, is the trial fence a viable permanent option for Cowells Lane Reserve?"*.

Where a respondent has chosen to provide comments across multiple submissions to the second question, *"Why?"* and *"In what way (if at all) has the fence changed the way that you use Cowells Lane Reserve?"*, these comments were all analysed.

6.2. Data Quantitative Raw

Raw data (not filtered by IP address)

Contributions	Date Submitted	Yes - support fence	No - don't support fence	No children	Yes, children between 0 - 5 years	Yes, children between 6 - 12 years	Yes, children between 13 - 18 years	No dogs owned	Yes - dogs owned
144	Pre-fence	85	59	61	47	32	23	46	98
252	Post fence	187	65	131	31	52	59	49	203
396		272	124	192	78	84	82	95	301

6.3. Data Quantitative Clean

Contributions	Yes - support fence	No - don't support fence	No children	Yes, children between 0 - 5 years	Yes, children between 6 - 12 years	Yes, children between 13 - 18 years	No dogs owned	Yes - dogs owned
359	253	105	173	66	75	78	83	275