

Dorset Dogs: championing positive management, promoting responsible ownership

Amalgamated transcript of Dorset Dogs workshop presentations given at LAF Conference 4 Feb 2014. The presentation was given using the 'information pit stop' (photos of the pit stop out on Dorset sites below).



Finding out more at a Dorset Dogs pit stop



Practising - with plasticine!

1. Dorset Dogs believes that having a dog is brilliant for people's physical health, quality of life and well-being, and it can also be brilliant for the value that is given to our countryside and green spaces.

2. What we do is to champion positive management for dogs and promote responsible ownership, working with dog owners, land managers, countryside staff, dog wardens, dog businesses, organisations and charities. We do this work in multiple ways but as we have limited time we are going to do a whistle-stop tour of our information pit stop to illustrate just some of what we do.

3. So we take our 'Dorset Dogs' gazebo, display, new member packs, goody bags and activities out on site. Some of these 'pit stops' take place out on sites where people walk with their dogs at the times when they are there (though not usually early morning as people are in a hurry). At sensitive sites the pit stops will just be advertised beforehand on that site, at other places the pit stops will be advertised more widely. The pit stops also go to fun dog shows and countryside or community events and we get invited to more of those than we can actually attend!

4. There is a whole range of information on the display but people often come over first of all to look at all these photos of dogs*, who are some of Dorset Dogs members. There are now well over 1000 members, people can join Dorset Dogs free as a member, they get a membership pack* with responsible ownership and other useful information, vouchers and special offers and freebies like these dog identity tags. They can also have their dog's photo on the 'new members' page of the website. People can join whether they live in Dorset or visit Dorset with their dogs and we get lots of enquiries about dog-friendly places from visitors planning to come to Dorset (we'd like to get dog friendly pages on the website and it might have potential to help a little with funding, but there isn't enough time at the moment).

5. The website is a really important tool for the work we do, and we also have a Facebook site, which is a great forum for consultation and discussion with and between members and other people too. It can also signpost people back to the main website for further information. The Facebook site is very popular, with 100s of people often seeing each post.

6. The website [www.dorsetdogs.org.uk] has lots of information, including events and news pages, information pages, members photos and 'Out & About' pages*, which have an interactive map and give information about different sites and routes, such as what they are like, whether they have pushchair/wheelchair friendly paths, grazing animals, sensitive wildlife at certain time, dog bins, on/off lead areas, secure fencing, dog activity/agility areas etc. The out & about pages are an important part of the website.

7. The 'doggy do code'* is something that we promote widely, in poster form, in leaflets and as A4 rigid outdoor signs, and also A5 so that they can be put up on existing posts on countryside areas without becoming too obtrusive too. The headings are simple and clear and easy to remember and on the website version of the doggy do code you can click through to more detailed explanations about each, for example the 'bag it and bin it' click-through also explains about 'stick & flick', so that people can understand all the reasons why bag it and bin it is important in some areas whilst stick and flick may be appropriate in others.

8. The paw print system* was something we adopted from Hampshire's example, which we first heard about at a training seminar we set up for land managers and countryside staff, delivered by national access and dogs expert Steve Jenkinson in the very early days leading up to Dorset Dogs getting set up. The paw print roundels* are a simple way to show people different areas of a site, where dogs can be off lead, on lead or areas they need to steer clear of.

9. The nitty-gritty of what is shown on the display changes from one pit stop to another – as you can see the pit stop is quite rough & ready in a way and I don't apologise for that, as it means it's flexible, easy to change and produce information that's very specific to the place and issues.

10. The example we've got on this panel* is the heathland information, so we can discuss the wildlife* – people often think heath is 'wasteland' and say that's why they don't pick up after their dog there, once they know more about it, the effects on the habitat and therefore the wildlife, they often say they will pick up in future. We can discuss the management too* – for example why trees are being cut down which is often not popular or why there are grazing animals* for conservation and we can talk about how used they are to dogs or tell people about 'meet the cattle' events – land managers and countryside staff may also like to come along to pit stops and take the opportunity to talk to people about other things, not just dogs. We can ask people to help as volunteers on the site. We can also show people other areas nearby* where they might like to take their dog when birds are nesting on the ground on the heath so they can still have off lead runs.

11. At other times the focus of the display might for example be grazing farm animals*, or overwintering birds*, or something else, it depends on the site, we can also advertise

other events, like the recent dog first aid evening we hosted with a local vet or the annual Dorset Dogs Festival.

12. Poop* - this section of the display always goes everywhere though the information focus may be slightly different depending where we're going. It's an issue everywhere. (This is why I've sometimes been known as 'the poo lady'). We also have this 'pick up a (plasticine) poop' activity* for children when the pit stop is going somewhere that children are likely to be – though adults often like to do it too! It's very popular, we know it works as parents have come to me at other pit stops afterwards and said their children now happily pick up. We give a demonstration [*demo picking up plasticine poop with bag*] “..are we going to throw it under a bush... hang it in a tree... (*shaking head vigorously whilst waving poop bag or might get wrong answer!*) NO that's right, – we're going to put it in the bin – and here's our bin today!” then they have a go to win a small prize.

13. One of the things that has been very successful recently has been this 'Enjoying s-e Dorset with your Dog' leaflet*. We produced 5000 of these in the autumn and had to re-order – we have just taken delivery of a further 5000, they have gone down a storm, going out to places like libraries, visitor centres and tourist information centres and to our new members and through dog trainers and others that we work with. There is a map with 17 different dog-welcoming places you can go with your dog on one side, with further information about all of them on the website, and on the other side information like the doggy do code and other useful positive information.

14. We also take goody bags out to our pit stops, so if people don't want to join at the pit stop or haven't got time to stop and talk they can go away with the goody bag with the web address in there on the leaflet, there's also dog treat biscuits, supplied free by a local dog treat supplier, and other little goodies including a couple of free pick-up bags (which we also sell at cost price). If people join and go on our website and Facebook it means we can have an ongoing relationship with them into the future.

15. So that's the whistle-stop tour of the Dorset Dogs information pit stop! [*Goody bags were offered to those at the workshops*]

There wasn't a lot of time after the presentation as Dorset Dogs bit was just the final section of a longer workshop session which had discussed the issues and potential benefits of people with dogs, but issues/questions raised at the workshops immediately following the pit stop presentation included:

- How funded? Dorset Dogs was originally set up with funding from Natural England's access management grant scheme via Dorset County Council's Countryside Access team as well as development mitigation funding which addresses the special international value of the heaths of south-east Dorset, delivered via the Urban Heaths Partnership, this combined funding enabled the original set up of Dorset Dogs and the website to be set up to cover the whole of Dorset, unfortunately for the last few years there has only been limited development mitigation funding for Dorset Dogs and that is under review, so the focus of work under that funding can only be south-east Dorset currently. The only paid time is 18.5 hours a week whilst many more hours are worked by the post holder and the demand really requires a full-time post and there is a lot of

demand to do more across the rest of Dorset but there is no funding for this. Other funding sources have been sought but it isn't a good time to try to find funding either as a local authority hosted organisation or from businesses.

- Dorset Dogs is cited as a 'best practice' example. The Humber Estuary are closely imitating the set-up and there have been enquiries from all over the country. There's so much more that Dorset Dogs could do if more time resource were available. The time is the key thing needing resource, other costs are relatively low and further funding opportunities could be sought with more time too.
- Dorset Dogs works now through the Urban Heaths Partnership, with only one half-time post directly funded for Dorset Dogs, but without the UHP wardens manning it the popular Dorset Dogs Annual Festival would not be possible.
- The work done by Dorset Dogs addresses lots of the issues raised earlier at the workshop in a positive way and would be a good model for elsewhere?