

REPORT TO WARMINSTER AREA BOARD

COUNTERING DOG FOULING ON PUBLIC OPEN SPACES – A STUDY OF WARMINSTER COMMON

INTRODUCTION

Dog fouling is a significant form of anti-social behaviour that reduces the public's enjoyment of public open space. It is also a health hazard. In a Keep Britain Tidy survey of 1,500 people weighted for region, age and class, dog fouling was the second most significant cleansing problem.

Issue	Importance of Issue (High = 10)	Seriousness of Existing Problem (Most Serious = 10)	Significance ((b) x (c))
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Litter	8.2	5.0	41
Dog fouling	8.0	5.0	40
Fly-tipping	7.8	3.5	27
Abandoned vehicles	7.7	3.5	27
Graffiti	7.1	3.2	23
Discarded syringes	8.1	2.6	21
Weed growth	6.5	3.3	21
Chewing gum	6.8	2.8	19
Fly posting	5.5	2.4	13

Nationally Perceived Areas of Service Significance

Warminster Area Board has run a Dog Fouling Working Group since 2010. Progress was delayed by loss of the Area Board Manager and a lack of funds. However, progress has been made on a pilot site at Warminster Common where ideas for reducing dog fouling (see Annex A) were tested:

- a. Providing litter bins at all entrances and exits.
- b. Installing "poop scoop" signs at all entrances.
- c. Improving the surface on two paths onto the site (using recycled tarmac).
- d. Installing a section of fence and a self closing gate to stop stray dogs entering the Common from the Heathlands Estate.
- e. Spraying dog faeces with brightly coloured paint to highlight their presence.

The Common¹ was claimed by Warminster Town Council as Wiltshire's first new Town Green². It is a well maintained area of public open space and is a "best case". To test the ideas and measure trends, the number of fresh dog faeces on and within 1 metre of paths was counted once a week and converted to a daily rate of fouling (see graph overleaf).

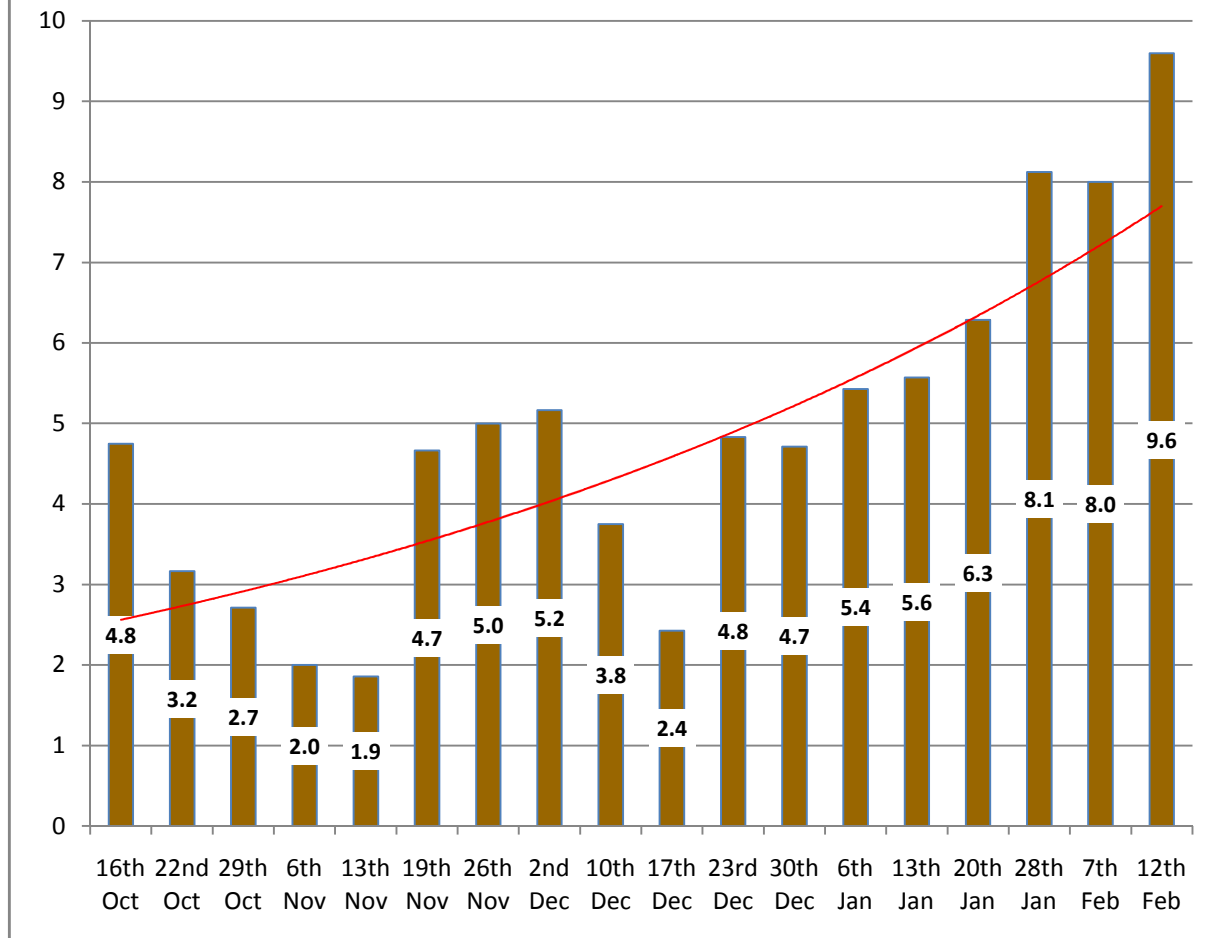
Constraints. This paper does not consider:

- a. The legal aspects of fouling including Dog Control Orders.
- b. Fouling on areas of long grass more than 1 metre away from maintained grass this means that there is significant under reporting of "off the lead fouling".
- c. Severe littering and fly tipping on the adjoining Bradley Road as they were reported on the Wiltshire Council web site and the processes worked well.
- d. Public Health as the Author has already written to Wiltshire's Director of Public Health and Public Protection.

¹ Warminster Common is a misnomer. All Rights of Common were extinguished in 1780 and the name comes from the adjacent settlement. The site is the southern half of the former Tynings (Work House) Allotments.

² A Town Green is very different to a Common and an exemption for fouling on Commons does not apply to Town Greens.

**Average Fresh Dog Faeces Per Day On or Beside Paths on
Warminster Common Between
16th October 2011 & 12th February 2012
(Total 662 Faeces)**



Results of Dog Fouling Surveys on Warminster Common in Winter 2011/12³

Method. The author followed a fixed 1500m route once a week (see Annex B), picked litter, counted and sprayed faeces. The process took just under one hour and generated on average one supermarket bag of litter. Although he would go “off piste” to pick up litter and sprayed all faeces seen, no faeces more than a metre from the edge of the path were counted.

Spraying Paint on Dog Faeces. Spraying faeces drew attention to the problem but in the long term may be counter productive. Paint was only used on soil or grass. Painting faeces:

- Shows that the fouling has been seen and someone is reacting to it.
- Discourages weak willed offenders.
- Shows children & walkers the hazard.
- Makes it easier for WC staff to find & remove faeces.
- Prevents “Double Accounting” & shows new & missed faeces.
- Aids photography & demonstrates the scale of the problem.
- Allows the person spraying to engage with the public and gain intelligence on known foulers.
- Allows dating of faeces (by changing paint colour).

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

³ Six surveys over same period in 2010/11 identified at least 736 faeces and a significant number were in bags. Because of the time between surveys it is likely some were missed. 18 x Litter picks in 2011/12 recovered no new bags of faeces.

As few as five offenders can produce 2,000 faeces per year. If all dog walkers failed to “scoop” the fouling rate could be 5 to 10 times higher. The results demonstrate that:

- a. Providing combined bins at all exits significantly reduces litter and greatly reduces bagged faeces being thrown away on site (See Annex A). This was extremely effective.
- b. A fence can prevent “pushed out of the house dogs” from fouling public open space. This was probably the most cost effective technique (see Annex A).
- c. If litter is removed regularly the rate of littering remains low and fairly constant.
- d. In cold weather faeces can remain visible for up to 3 months and although there is an increase in fouling as days grow shorter it does not reduce as the days get longer.
- e. If dog faeces are not removed the rate of fouling accelerates as more people fail to remove faeces. The bulk of initial fouling was around site entry points and the acceleration in fouling was from new foulers in different areas (See Annex B).
- f. The rate of fouling can be significantly reduced if dog faeces are not allowed to build up. It is “practicable⁴” to “pick” this large site in under an hour (a contract requirement under WWDC). Even if litter and faeces were “picked” only every 2 or 3 weeks and then only from the “hot spots” around entry points, it would significantly reduce the total⁵.
- g. There is now a good intelligence picture to target the site for enforcement action (See Annex B). Changes in trends could then be reviewed.
- h. There is a commonly held belief that it is acceptable to foul beside a path. Nearly all faeces counted came from dogs on leads. Those individuals generally avoid fouling on the path surface but need to be motivated to pick up.



Entry Point - Byway Warminster 89



Entry Point - The Allotment Path

- i. New “poop scoop” signs had an impact but did not stop determined individuals; however, new surfaces, signs and spraying account for the dip in fouling in the first 4 weeks.

⁴ The Litter Authority must show it is not “practicable” to avoid Section 90 action under the EPA.

⁵ West Wiltshire District Council contract for this site was for a weekly litter pick.



Allotment Path (Orange)



Byway 89 (Blue)

- j. Staff emptying bins do not report or pick up nearby faeces. The faeces pictured below must have been obvious to the person emptying bins but it is probable that removing faeces was not one of their allotted tasks.



- k. Most “on the lead foulers” go “off surface” and there is less fouling on short grass and hard paths. In summer there appear to be less faeces, as they are less easily seen in uncut grass or macerated by the gang mowers on cut grass.

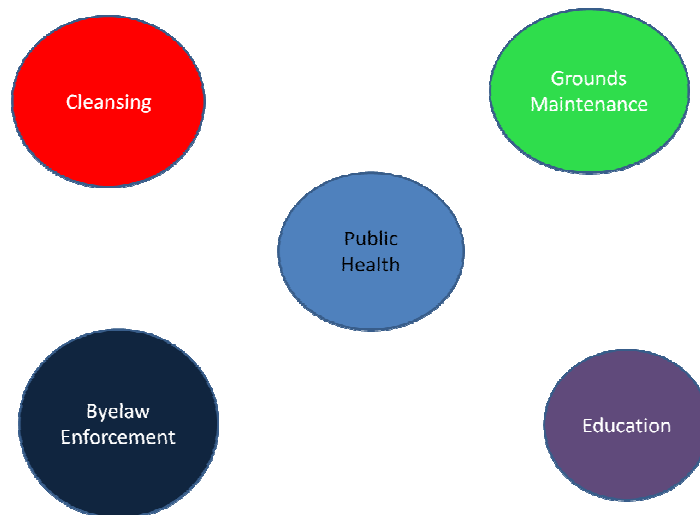


Byway 89 Before Surfacing



Byway 89 After Surfacing

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Wiltshire Council Functions in Countering Dog Fouling

Dog fouling is regarded as a problem for dog wardens. Unless canine pollution is seen as a health hazard, subjected to formal risk assessment and proper scrutiny of processes then the problem will not get better. The “bubbles” above must be made to overlap using all the strategies below.

	Strategy						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Type of Fouling	Install Poop Scoop Signs & Bins	Ensure Proper Cleansing	Improve Surface	Spray Paint	Education	Active Enforcement	Install Physical Barrier
On the Lead	Improve	Improve	Improve	Improve	Improve	Effective	Effective
Running Free	Improve	Improve	Improve	Improve	Improve	Effective	Effective
Pushed Out of the House	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	Improve	Improve	Effective	Effective
Comments	Gives Clarity, Certainty & Convenient Disposal.	Litter & fouling are less likely in clean areas.	Cutting grass and surfacing paths reduces OTL fouling.	See below.		Needs high publicity prosecutions.	Already used for play areas.

Strategy Table

Types of Fouling and Fouling Countermeasures. There are three types of fouling and the Strategy Table (above) shows where a technique is likely to be effective. In this study only Strategies 1, 3, 4 and 7 were attempted throughout. All showed a degree of success but failed to counter an increase in fouling through the winter. Three fundamental strategies were lacking:

Strategy 2 - Cleansing. Litter picking was much better this summer but stopped when grass cutting finished in the autumn; it needs to continue and faeces must also be picked up. There is a tendency in winter to empty bins and not pick up litter and dog faeces. The problem is exacerbated if sites are only visited in darkness.

Note. The maximum reaction time for removing reported faeces is 14 days⁶. Faeces reported on the web page were not removed on 30% of occasions in 2010/11. This winter they were not reported at all in order to determine patterns of fouling.

Strategy 5 - Education. Education has yet to be exploited. The Council has the resources to pass the message via schools, its own magazine and wardens.

⁶ DEFRA Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse Apr 2006

Strategy 6 - Enforcement. The commonest complaint from law abiding dog walkers is that there is no enforcement. As the Dog Warden's area is from Warminster to Chippenham enforcement is sadly lacking. Dog wardens have an important role in countering fouling and irresponsible dog ownership but can not do it all. Effort must be put into:

- a. **Identifying heavily fouled areas.** Reports from the public, contractors and council staff.
- b. **Identifying offenders.** Reports from the public, contractors and council staff.
- c. **Making well publicised prosecutions.** Watertight name and shame prosecutions.

Annexes:

- A. Site Improvements.
- B. Detailed Results.

Distribution:

Action: Warminster Area Board

Information:

Warminster Town Council (for Mayor Pip Ridout & Heather Abernethie)

Selwood Housing (for Howard Phillips)

Wiltshire Council: Steve Pooler, Rebecca Reid, Sebastian Williams.

Tenants & Residents' Association: May Law