

DesignWorks Presentation
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Comhairle na Tuaithe

Positive dog ownership in our shared outdoors

Summary

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Key Objectives

1. Define **positioning** on responsible dog ownership.
2. Address **challenges, opportunities, and core beliefs.**
3. Establish **behavioural principles** and **tone** for communication.



Empathy Mapping Understanding the Insights

The Unaware
(Ignorant) →

Need education and
awareness

Communications strategies

Educational content,
awareness campaigns

The Unengaged
(Lazy) →

Require motivation
and simple actions

Communications strategies

Simple actions,
motivational approaches

Reminder

The Uncaring
(Irresponsible) →

Must recognise
consequences

Communications strategies

Persuasive narratives,
accountability measures

Emerging Themes / Challenges & Problems

Group 1.

Dog Owners and Public Behaviour *Challenges and Mindsets*

- Unadapted Habits in the Countryside.
- *“It’s Not a Big Deal”* Mentality.
- Lack of Awareness of Land and Law.
- Overconfidence in Their Dog & Need for Freedom.



Emerging Themes / Challenges & Problems

Group 2.

Land & Livelihood – Farmer and Landowner Perspectives

- Attacks on Livestock.
- Confrontations and Disrespect.
- Inadequate Legal Protection.
- All-or-Nothing Solutions.

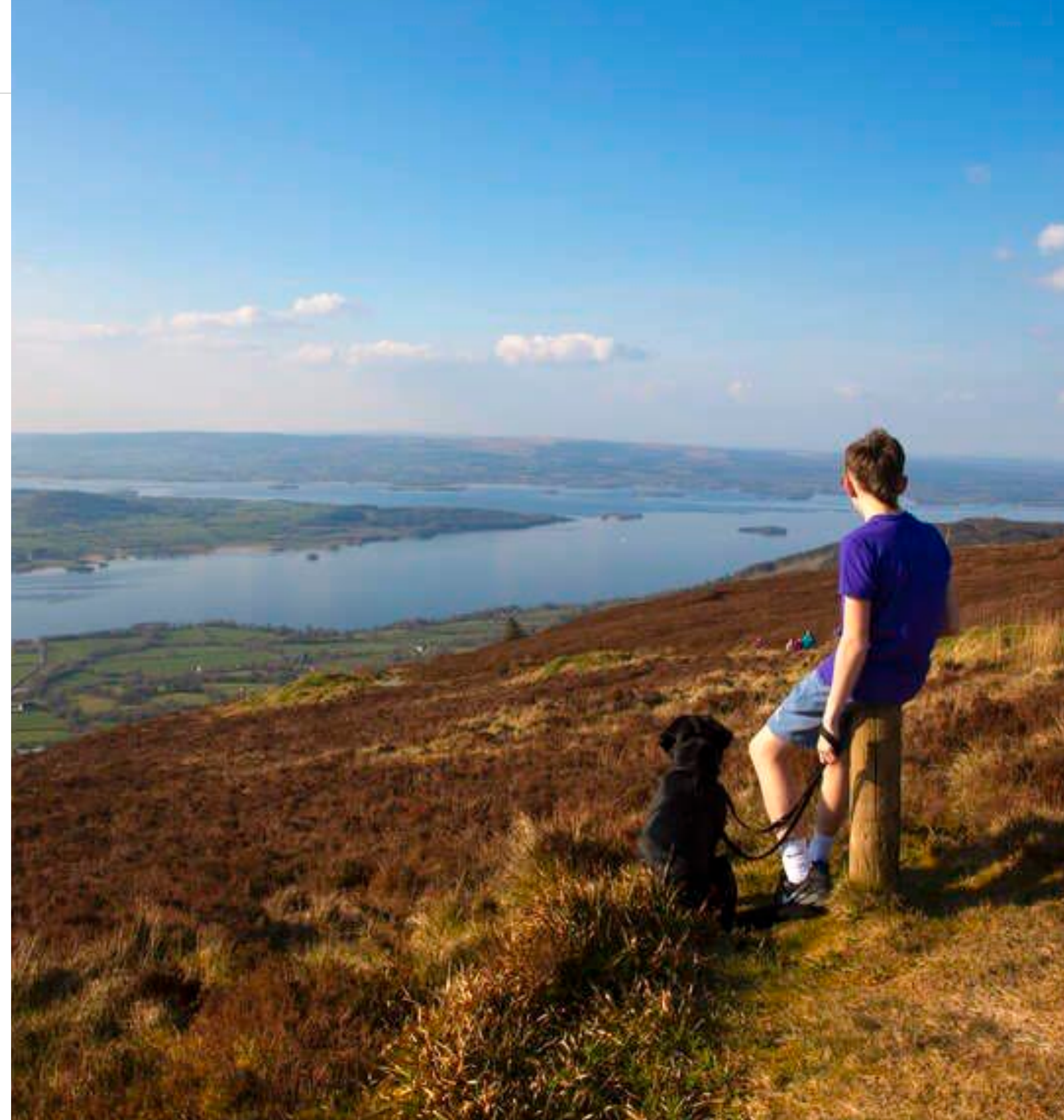


Emerging Themes / Challenges & Problems

Group 3.

Wildlife and Nature – Environmental Impacts of Uncontrolled Dogs

- Disturbance and Destruction of Wildlife.
- Ripple Effects on Ecosystems.
- Speaking for the Voiceless.
- Value-Based Language.
- Balancing Negative and Positive Appeals.



Cross-Cutting Issues: Education, Culture Change, and Enforcement

- Urgency and Unified Action.
- Consistency and Clarity.
- Education and Early Intervention.
- Changing Social Norms and Self-Regulation.
- Infrastructure and Support.
- Empathy and Inclusion.
- Backbone of Enforcement.



Desired Behaviours of Responsible Dog Owners

1. Keep Your Dog on a Lead.
2. Pick Up After Your Dog.
3. Know and Follow the Rules of the Area.
4. Prevent Your Dog from Chasing or Harassing Animals.
5. Be Considerate to Others.
6. Equip and Identify Your Dog Properly.
7. Accept Limits and Adjust Plans if Needed.



Core Beliefs & Values

Respect For farmland, livestock, wildlife, and each other.

Responsibility Owners must act, dogs don't self-regulate.

Education Teach owners (and children) about positive dog ownership and consequences.

Protection Preserve access rights by preventing abuse.



Proposed Solutions

Strengthening the Legal Toolkit

- Consistent framework (whether through bylaws or otherwise) mandating leashes in countryside.
- Stricter penalties, more enforcement.

Education & Awareness: A National Priority

- Integrate dog responsibility into the national school curriculum to foster a culture of respect and care from a young age.
- Launch sustained public awareness campaigns (e.g., *"Leave No Trace"*, *"If you love them, leash them"*) using clear, value-based messaging.
- Develop targeted educational materials for new dog owners, including mandatory information on rights and responsibilities in shared outdoor spaces.

- Collaborate with organisations like Green-Schools, DSPCA, and Mountaineering Ireland to amplify reach and credibility.
- Public messaging (e.g., *"Your dog = your responsibility"*).

Alternative Spaces

- More designated dog parks, agility courses, and *"Bark in the Park"* zones.

Farmer & Wildlife Protection

- Total ban on non-working dogs in sensitive areas.
- Multi-agency enforcement (rangers, wardens).

Tone for Communication

Firm & Urgent *"This is a crisis"*

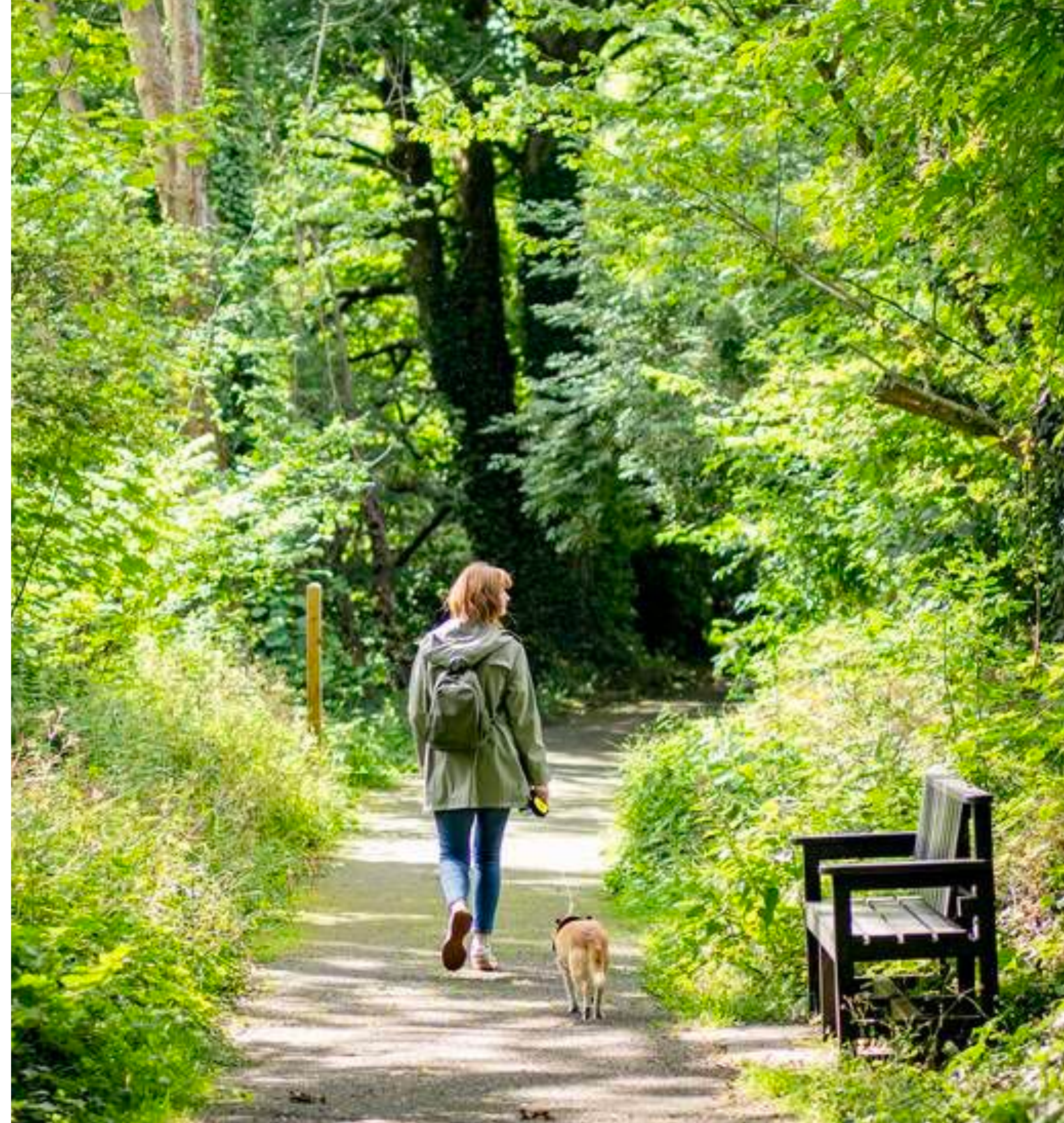
Strong Enforcement

Evidence-Based Show real impacts (e.g., *"Silent Forest"* campaign).

Empathetic but Direct

"Your dog will be happier on a lead"

"Would you kill a bird? Then why let your dog?"



Draft Positioning Statement

Protecting the countryside is a collective challenge for all of us. Whether dog owners, farmers, land managers, or visitors, understanding that different rules apply is crucial.

The consequences of irresponsible dog behaviour are severe, and addressing them requires a united effort from every user of the land.

From danger to livestock and habitat destruction, every uncontrolled dog adds to the growing threat against farmland, wildlife, and public access.

We believe in respect for farmers, animals, the land, and fellow outdoor users.

We stand for protection—defending the countryside we love by taking responsibility for our dogs.

Education is fundamental. We must ensure every dog owner—especially those new to the countryside—understands their responsibilities. This requires clear, accessible, and ongoing communication through schools, community groups, digital platforms, and on-the-ground signage.

Awareness alone isn't enough—but it's the essential first step. We need a coordinated national effort to educate all users of the outdoors on the importance of responsible dog ownership.

By working together, we can foster **a culture of responsible dog ownership** that protects livelihoods and biodiversity while enriching the outdoor experience for everyone.

This is about collective action. The problem worsens every day; if we don't act now, we risk losing access, livelihoods, and the landscapes we cherish.

Think of others first, control your dog. Protect our countryside. Before it's too late.

Next Steps

Draft Messaging 1

“It’s not your dog’s fault – it’s yours”

This blunt message **directly confronts denial and blame-shifting**. It targets owners who think “my dog can do no harm” by making it clear that responsibility for any harm lies with the owner, not the pet.

“Your dog’s mess, your responsibility”

This message targets a common apathetic or dismissive behaviour – owners leaving dog faeces behind on trails or farmland because they assume it’s not a big issue (or hope someone else will deal with it). It **addresses the mindset of apathy/avoidance**.

“If you love them, leash them”

This message appeals to owners’ **affection and sense of care for their dogs**, countering the mindset that letting a dog run free is an act of love. It addresses those who are overconfident or sentimental, believing that keeping a dog on a lead is cruel or unnecessary.

“Keep them safe – keep them on lead”

This message speaks to owners who may **underestimate risks** and believe their dog is safe (or “having fun”) off leash. It flips the script by emphasising that a leash actually ensures the dog’s safety – along with the safety of wildlife, livestock, and other people.

Next Steps

Draft Messaging 2

“One loose dog, many consequences”

This message aims to open the eyes of indifferent owners to the **cascade of harm** a single uncontrolled dog can cause. It challenges the mindset “what’s the big deal if my dog runs free for a bit?” by hinting at the **serious ripple effects** – from livestock attacks and wildlife disturbance to lost access and broken trust in the community.

“Leash up or lose out”

This message delivers an **urgent ultimatum** to complacent owners who assume their current behaviour has no consequences. It speaks to a mindset of “nothing bad has happened yet, so it’s fine” by warning of very real losses.

“Don’t trust your dog, trust the leash.”

This message tackles the **overconfidence bias** in many dog owners who insist “It’s okay, I trust my dog off leash” or “My dog would never chase livestock/bite someone.” It delivers a reality check that no dog is 100% predictable, echoing the workshop mantra “Never trust what a dog will do (they have good days and bad days)”. The emotional trigger is primarily rational caution, sprinkled with a bit of fear of the unknown.

Next Steps

1. Launch a National Education & Comms Campaign

- Develop a multi-channel campaign (social media, TV, radio, signage) targeting dog owners, schools, and outdoor users.
- Use messaging tested in workshops (e.g., *“If you love them, leash them”*, *“One loose dog, many consequences”*).

2. Integrate Education into Policy

- Work with the Department of Education to include responsible dog ownership in the CSPE or Social Education curriculum.
- Develop mandatory educational resources for new dog owners at point of purchase/adoption.

3. Behavioural Insight & Messaging

- Partner with behavioural psychologists to refine messaging and intervention strategies.
- Use positive framing and empathetic language to encourage compliance without alienation.



Next Steps

A Coordinated National Education & Communications Strategy

Objective: Shift social norms through clear, consistent, and empathetic messaging.

Audiences: Dog owners, children, farmers, recreational users, new residents.

Channels:

- Schools (Green-Schools program, curriculum integration).
- Social media & digital campaigns.
- On-the-ground signage & dog ambassador programs.
- Collaboration with vet clinics, pet stores, adoption centres.

Key Messages:

“Your dog, your responsibility”.

“If you love them, leash them”.

“Protect our countryside—control your dog”.

Partnerships:

Farming organisations, recreational users of the countryside, community groups, DSPCA, Local Authority’s & state bodies.

Success Metrics:

- Increased awareness of laws and responsibilities.
- Reduction in dog-related incidents.
- Improved perception of responsibility among dog owners.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir
Thank you for your time

