

Interviewee: Enisha Kilkelly, Quintin Pepler, and Michelle Baker

Title: Animal Control Officers and Compliance Managers

Interview Date: 01/29/24.

Interview Time: 2:30-3:30 PM

Can you please tell us what your role is with the Upper Hutt City Council?

- Michelle and Quintin are Animal Control Officers.
- Been working in this role for 5 years.

Follow up: Do you work with GWRC at all in this position?

- They respond to general complaints about dogs. These include barking complaints, attacks, and submitting permits for families with more than 2 dogs.
- They described their job as very reactive since it is mainly focused on attending the public's concerns. Also, this includes educating the public.
- They make sure the community is safe and report any incidents to the council.

Can you explain how the work you have done relates to the Hutt River Corridor?

Can you explain how your role relates to dog-walking and users that bring their pets into the River Corridor?

- They have dealt with complaints of dogs being off leash or scraps between some dogs, but they don't come often.
- Sometimes they get reports of strays, but because the corridor is so big by the time they get there, the dog is usually not there anymore.
- They have worked with GWRC to inform the public of the algae and highlight it is toxic for dogs. Also, they ensure the doggy poop bags are available.
- They did get one complaint about a biker getting nicked by a dog once.

Follow up: do you consider yourself an advocate for dog walkers in the community?

- They consider themselves advocates of everyone since they are on both sides.

If someone were to have a negative experience with pets or animals within the Corridor who would they report to?

- The report would go to them; however it could escalate to calling the police depending on the incident and severity.

Has there been any incidents or reports about animals by users of the Hutt River Corridor?

- Yes

Follow up if yes: Do you know which users typically submit these complaints?

- Cyclists, walkers, runners, horseback rider once.

Added question: Is there distinction on where dogs are allowed to be off lead?

- On the corridor it depends on what GWRC dictates. Many of their parks connect to the trail where they can be off lead, so sometimes they keep the dog the same way as they were on the park.
- The important thing is that they always have control of the dog. However, there are some discrepancies towards this since some people define having control over their dog differently.

Do you believe recreational use of the River Corridor is important, why or why not?

- Yes, it is important for the dog to get socialized. The more they are, the less incidents occur.
- It is also important for the dog to have good mental health/stimulation and physical health. Therefore, the recreational use of the trail for dogs is quite important.
- This also means the dog comes back home tired and rests, so there are less barking complains.

In your opinion, what are the needs of dog-walkers in any recreational space?

Follow up: More specifically, the River Corridor?

- Carry doggy poop bags.
- Be of age to be able to control the dog and know the dog.
- Clear communication to all users that it is a shared space.

- Be polite to all users so it truly feels shared.
- Be aware that there are things on the trail that might instigate a reaction from a reactive dog.
- More spaces with water since due to the algae being there half the year, dogs can't drink from it.

Are you a user of the Hutt River Corridor?

- Yes, all of them.

Follow up if yes: What activities do you use the corridor for?

- Michelle: dog walker and cyclist.
- Quintin and Enisha: dog walkers and regular walkers.

What is your opinion of dogs being on or off lead in the River Corridor which is a shared space?

Follow up: how does this affect your use of the trail?

- Education and behavior should be the focus.
- The lead doesn't do much if the dog isn't educated.
- The problem is that it takes 1 or 2 incidents for the experience to be affected for all users.

Added question: What is the process and how does it escalate depending on the incident?

- First the most amount of information is gathered from the victim.
- Then the injuries and their severity is recorded.
- Information of the dog and area of the incident is recorded.
- Depending on the severity of the incident, the dog could be put down.
- These are dealt in an individual way, there wouldn't be a group banning.

What is your opinion on cyclists using bells while passing other users?

Follow up: how does this affect your use of the trail?

- Michelle uses the bell and says it is quite helpful to pass people, especially if they are wearing headphones.
- Quintin and Enisha appreciate the bell, so they know people want to pass them.

- They believe the dogs aren't reactive to the bell per se, it is more towards the noise the bike wheels make.

What is your opinion on visitors using headphones in a shared space like the River Corridor?

Follow up: how does this affect your use of the trail?

- Quintin: there is a bit of risk because you aren't fully aware of their surroundings.
- Especially if you have a dog, it isn't a smart choice.

Do you believe there is conflict between the users of the Hutt River Corridor?

Follow up if yes: What do you believe could be a solution for the conflicts between users without excluding any user?

- Enisha: people complain their dogs aren't on leads. It sometimes becomes a small dog vs big dog.
- Quintin: cyclists vs anybody at this point. Dog walkers and cyclists have been respectful so he doesn't believe there is much conflict.

What is your ideal situation for dog-walkers within the River Corridor?

Follow up: what would it take to accomplish this?

- Michelle: it's ok as it is now. In Upper Hutt they are really lucky to have such a beautiful sight.
- Quintin: close to a highway, so it is the only potential risk. More signage for owners to be aware of their dog would be good as well.

Do you believe the trails along the corridor should be expanded? If so, why?

- As long as it doesn't affect the vegetation, but they think it is wide enough now for walkers and dog walkers to move out of the way when cyclists come by.

What are your thoughts on adapting the River Corridor for increased commuter cyclists use?

Follow up: Would this affect you, if so, how?

- Michelle: yes, wouldn't like it to be too busy. Doesn't want bikers jamming up.

- Quintin: Understands it is increasing so he doesn't see it as such a bad idea. As long as it grows with the increase in population.

Added question: How do they educate the public?

- They talk to people during their patrols and post things on their Facebook.
- They sometimes hand poop bags and treats.
- They like to create 1 on 1 conversations to understand how knowledgeable the public is about the issues and the rules.

Do you believe providing more transport opportunities for commuter cyclists is important?

- Quintin: said there is already quite a bit of trains and that he sees cycling as a more recreational thing more than for commuting purposes.

What do you believe is the best way to go about adding a commuter route in the Hutt Valley, and is the River Corridor the space that should be used?

- Michelle: somewhere else.
- Quintin: it's a safe space to cycle so might be good to locate it there. It would need to be wider and more accessible though.

Added questions: What improvements would you like to see on the trail if it were adapted for commuters?

- Michelle: need to be widened so everyone can fit.
- Quintin: Keep left signs would be good.
- Enisha: maybe have a side for commuters and the other for recreational users.

Added questions: How would the dog community react to the increase or adaptation made for commuters?

- Generally dog walkers are quite accepting so they would welcome anybody as long as everyone is respectful of each other.

