



Kennel Club Response to Oadby and Wigston Borough Council Public Spaces Protection Order Consultation

Submitted on 14 January 2021 by: The Kennel Club, Clarges Street, Piccadilly, London W1J 8AB, email: kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk

The Kennel Club is the largest organisation in the UK devoted to dog health, welfare and training, whose main objective is to ensure that dogs live healthy, happy lives with responsible owners. As part of its External Affairs activities, The Kennel Club runs KC Dog, which was established to monitor and keep dog owners up to date about dog related issues, including Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) being introduced across the country.

As a general principle, we would like to highlight the importance for all PSPOs to be necessary and proportionate responses to problems caused by dogs and irresponsible owners. It is also important that authorities balance the interests of dog owners with the interests of other access users.

Response to proposed measures

Dog fouling

The Kennel Club strongly promotes responsible dog ownership, and believes that dog owners should always pick up after their dogs wherever they are, including fields and woods in the wider countryside, and especially where farm animals graze to reduce the risk of passing Neospora and Sarcocystosis to cattle and sheep respectively.

We would like to take this opportunity to encourage the local authority to employ further proactive measures to help promote responsible dog ownership throughout the local area in addition to introducing Orders in this respect.

These proactive measures can include: increasing the number of bins available for dog owners to use; communicating to local dog owners that bagged dog faeces can be disposed of in normal litter bins; running responsible ownership and training events; or using poster campaigns to encourage dog owners to pick up after their dog.

Exclusions

The Kennel Club does not typically oppose Orders to exclude dogs from playgrounds or enclosed recreational grounds, such as skate parks or tennis courts, as long as alternative provisions are made for dog walkers in the vicinity. Children and dogs should be able to socialise together quite safely under adult supervision, with having a child in the home the biggest predictor for a family owning a dog.

Leads

We can support reasonable 'dogs on lead' Orders which can, when used in a proportionate and evidence-based way, include areas such as cemeteries, picnic areas, or on pavements in proximity to cars and other road traffic.

Dogs on lead by direction

The Kennel Club strongly welcomes 'dogs on lead by direction' Orders. These allow responsible dog owners to exercise their dogs off lead without restriction providing their dogs

are under control, whilst simultaneously giving the local authority powers to restrict dogs not under control.

We recommend that the authorised officer enforcing the Order is familiar with dog behaviour in order to determine whether restraint is necessary. There exists the possibility that a dog, through no fault of its own, could be considered a 'nuisance' or 'annoyance' to someone who simply does not like dogs.

We encourage local authorities to make use of more flexible and targeted measures at their disposal, including Acceptable Behavioural Contracts and Community Protection Notices. Kennel Club Good Citizen Training Clubs and our accredited trainers can assist owners whose dogs run out of control due to them not having the ability to train a reliable recall.

Means to pick up

Whilst we support proactive efforts on behalf of local authorities to encourage responsible dog ownership, measures to require owners to pick up after their dogs must be fair and proportionate. We would not like to see responsible dog owners penalised unfairly.

The Kennel Club has concerns regarding the proposal to introduce an offence of not having the means to pick up. Responsible owners will usually have dog waste bags or other means to clear up after their pets. However, if dog owners are approached at the end of a walk they may have already used the bags that they have taken out or given a spare bag to someone who has run out, for example. Such behaviour is encouraged by Green Dog Walker schemes.

It is also plausible that such proposals could, in certain circumstances, perversely incentivise dog walkers to not pick up after their dog. Dog walkers could be made to decide between using their final waste bag and risk being caught without means to pick up, or risk not picking up in order to have a means to pick up should they be stopped later on their walk. It is reasonable to assume a proportion of dog walkers would choose the second option if they believed this was the least likely route to being caught, especially if the penalty for not picking up was the same as not being in possession of a means to pick up. Local authorities may wish to consider introducing a clause which provides an exemption for those who have run out of bags but are able to prove that they were in possession of and made use of these during their walk.

It is essential that an effective communication campaign is launched in the local area to ensure that people are aware of the plans and have an excess supply of dog waste bags with them. Additionally, appropriate signage should be erected to inform that those who are not familiar with the local rules are not unfairly caught out.

The most effective spot checks that the local authority could carry out are those which catch offenders in the act of not picking up, rather than guessing behaviours on the basis of what dog owners are or are not carrying with them. For example, in the absence of waste bags, owners trying to flout the measures could theoretically point to any number of items on their person that they intend to use. This gives rise to concerns about the ease with which local authorities could successfully enforce this law when trying to define whether or not dog owners have a means of picking up.

Alternatively, an irresponsible owner looking to avoid a fine could simply tie one bag to their dog's lead or collar but not actually use it.

Cornwall Council considered introducing a similar means to pick up measure, but subsequently decided against doing so as they deemed it to be disproportionate and

concluded that the requirement would be ‘toothless’, as it would be highly unlikely to be enforceable in a magistrates court.

If the Council proceeds to introduce such a measure, it is essential it provides greater clarity to dog walkers on how to comply with the Order.

Appropriate signage

It is important to note that in relation to PSPOs, The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Publication of Public Spaces Protection Orders) Regulations 2014 makes it a legal requirement for local authorities to –

“cause to be erected on or adjacent to the public place to which the order relates such notice (or notices) as it considers sufficient to draw the attention of any member of the public using that place to -

- (i) the fact that the order has been made, extended or varied (as the case may be); and
- (ii) the effect of that order being made, extended or varied (as the case may be).”

Regarding dog access restrictions, such as a ‘Dogs on Lead’ Order, on-site signage should clearly state where such restrictions begin and end. This can be achieved with signs that say on one side, for example, ‘You are entering [type of area]’ and ‘You are leaving [type of area]’ on the reverse.

While all dog walkers should be aware of their requirement to pick up after their dog, signage must be erected for the PSPO to be compliant with the legislation.

Assistance dogs

The Kennel Club welcomes the exemptions proposed in this Order for assistance dogs. We urge the Council to review the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s guidance for businesses and service providers when providing any exemptions for those who rely on assistance dogs. The guidance can be viewed here:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/assistance-dogs-a-guide-for-all-businesses.pdf>

However, we would suggest further consideration of the wording contained within the Order, specifically with reference to ‘prescribed charity’. While a proportion of assistance dogs relied upon by disabled people are trained by charities, many are not. A number of reputable assistance dog providers are members of Assistance Dogs UK. This umbrella group currently has eight member organisations, which can be viewed here:

<http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/>. It is important to note that the membership of Assistance Dogs UK is not a definitive list of all UK assistance dog organisations and may change during the currency of the PSPO. It also does not provide for owner trained assistance dogs.

We would therefore encourage the Council to allow for some flexibility when considering whether a disabled person’s dog is acting as an assistance dog. The Council could consider adopting the definitions of assistance dogs used by Mole Valley District Council, which can be found here:

https://www.molevalley.gov.uk/media/pdf/1/b/83072_-_Completed_PSPO.pdf

or that of Northumberland County Council:

“(4) The term “Assistance Dog” shall mean a dog which has been trained to assist a person with a disability.

(5) The expression “disability” shall have the meaning prescribed in section 6 of the Equality Act 2010 or as may be defined in any subsequent amendment or re-enactment of that legislation”.