

## Introduction

We are in the process of introducing a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in respect of issues around Dog Control and Responsible Ownership. This process must be completed before January 2024 to avoid the jeopardy of no effective legislation to control dog fouling as a minimum, across North Devon as a whole.

The process involves an assessment of the current provision, the current issues experienced and problems that may need to be addressed.

Part of the regulatory framework relates specifically to the need for ‘adequate signage’ to inform any member of the public using that space. It is timely therefore to consider and decide upon a system of signs and publications that deliver on this need.

It is imperative that we not only meet the legislative requirements but also take the opportunity to ensure the public, whether they be residents or visitors, are absolutely clear about our vision, tactics and tools.

## Overview

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Publication of Public Spaces Protection Orders) Regulations came into force on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014. Basically it was intended they would replace Dog Control Orders (DCO’s)

The framework created scope for PSPO’s to be made and remain in place for three years. They are then reviewed, amended, replaced or withdrawn in a cyclical manner

In October 2017 the only district wide DCO we (NDC) had was dog fouling and this aspect ‘naturally migrated’ to a PSPO. All other DCO controls (exclusions on beaches perhaps most notably) were lost and we missed the opportunity to enhance the levels of control by similar conditions being added within a PSPO.

In 2021 we introduced our first bespoke PSPO and it did include seasonal exclusions for Combe Martin and Croyde Beaches, alongside general exclusion in Children’s Play Parks, and requirement for dogs to be on a lead in Cemeteries.

That provision is due to expire in December 2023 and decisions will need to be made about the formulation of a subsequent PSPO. Proposals have been drafted and will progress through various stages of governance and public consultation before they can be approved and implemented.

The three basic elements of the current PSPO are likely to be commended and remain as the core provision.

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However, a number of additional elements are being considered; the most contentious is likely to be a limit on the number of dogs a person can walk at any one time and the manner in which they can do so.

The core elements are;

- Dog fouling must be cleared
- Dogs must be on a lead as directed
- Dogs are excluded from certain areas

The new areas of exploration;

- A maximum of 6 dogs may be walked at any one time by a single person
- Only 3 dogs may be exercised off lead, or on extendable leads at any time by a single person
- Landowners and land managers empowered to implement controls on private land to which the public has access

As things evolve it is hoped there will be widespread support for the proposals and amendments can be limited to the details and not the overarching control aspects we are seeking to achieve. In any event, it seems sensible to assess the practicalities associated with the PSPO implementation and a significant part of that will be the signage and public information.

It is essential we are in a position to quickly produce and display sufficient notices for public attention in readiness for the start of the PSPO when it is ratified. This will at a minimum include a web based resource as a point of reference and further physical signs erected within the natural environment.

Additional publicity and promotion should ensure a high visible presence to communicate the measures and the broader strategy within which this specific tool is positioned. Planning for this should be coherent prior to, during and after the public consultation period and especially intensive in the immediate period around the launch of the order. A specific communications strategy would be a sensible to cover this period.

Where possible, materials should convey the broad purposes of the PSPO whilst also recognising the importance of these additional intended outcomes in the overall scheme;

- Ensuring responsible owners needs and wishes are catered for
- Dogs exercise needs are met
- Considerations are made for assistance dogs

## Signage Specifics & Public Information Material

Where a Local Authority has made, extended or varied a Public Spaces Protection Order they **must**;

- a) Publish the order as made, extended or varied (as the case may be) on their website
- b) 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 space;
  - (i) The **fact** that the order has been made, extended or varied
  - (ii) The **effect** of that order being made, extended or varied

There is no definitive pattern or format for such notices and there are a wide range of interpretations in existence across the country.

Most Local Authorities appear to have adopted a fixed formal sign as the basic provision. Many have displayed the standard red circle with strike through line although there is some suggestion that these can manifest in ‘public blindness’ as they no longer connect to the content.

Many Local Authorities have utilised stencils and alternative prompts where possible as part of their bid to reduce the impact of over-signage in the street scene.

There is also a considerable weight of opinion to avoid incorporating maps because as the landscape develops these can quickly become out of date and the order may become obsolete.

To assist in the consideration of the options open to us and to inform choices about ‘public facing materials on display we focus attention on some of the key themes that emerged from the Kennel Club “Out of Order” seminars and guidance;

- ✓ There was a strong focus on education and awareness and the importance of clarity around expectation was stressed.
- ✓ There was recognition of the dangers of over-signage and the public’s blindness to standard authoritarian, dogs in red circles was flagged.
- ✓ Southwold were commended for their efforts to use friendlier, clean and contemporary messages and graphics, creating a more positive feel.
- ✓ There was praise for guidance produced on Hampshire County Council website and promotional material directing people to the site.
- ✓ The Dorset model was also highly commended and particular reference was made to the assertion that it was in part funded by 106 money, development mitigation, due to increased use of common land nearby.

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We are impressed by the Hampshire and Dorset adaptations and believe them ideally suited to our needs.

They advocated a simple solution to signage based on traffic light system.

Red = No dogs allowed

Amber = Dogs must be on a lead

Green = Dogs free to roam

They keep red to an absolute minimum and denote areas using simple paw print symbols in the appropriate colour and mark entry and exit changes.

This mechanism has since been taken up by other authorities and is evident on public facing information and signs for consistency and clarity.

### Paw Prints



Dogs are free to run and play whilst receptive to immediate control  
Show additional care and consideration for livestock and nature  
Respect the sensitivities of others



Dogs are permitted if kept on a lead and under control  
A fixed lead of not more than 2m in length  
Respect the sensitivities of others



Dogs are excluded from the area (This may be temporary, seasonal or permanent)  
Assistance dogs may be exempt  
Respect the sensitivities of others

### Principles of our Approach

The Kennel Club are a national significant voice (as well as designated consultee by DEFRA) and they advocate the use of the least restrictive approach when it comes to restrictions and conditions. They are therefore seeking to ensure PSPO's are sharpened tools and ask they be;

- **zoned**
- **seasonal**
- **timed**

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Applying these tests, they believe, will help achieve the greatest impact, smallest imposition, upmost inclusion and opportunity.

They highlight the key to effective controls is education and the importance of the PSPO is the notion of balance and proportionality.

They also declared the importance of positive images and ‘memes’ for social media sharing to communicate the ideals of behaviour expected and a clear expression what to do if breaches were witnessed.

We have set out to uphold those values and this has been and should continue to be reflected in all our promotional material and signage.

The attention to the negative aspects of dogs and their owners may not serve us well.

By acknowledging and promoting responsible dog ownership and the life enhancing benefits of dog walking within our community we would hope to engage more of them in the measures to address irresponsible and anti-social behaviour. This could also promote greater tolerance, understanding and acceptance among those who do not own dogs.

The Kennel Club suggested the benefits in brief include;

- ❖ friendship
- ❖ socialisation
- ❖ custodianship
- ❖ trade/exchange
- ❖ health and wellbeing (human and canine)
- ❖ community vibrancy
- ❖ community investment

We advocate a focus on the positive contributions made by responsible dog owners and a resolve to engage with them and dog walkers in the community. We plan to accentuate and utilise their presence in our streets, parks and open spaces, in a manner similar to that of Neighbourhood Watch schemes. If they are increasingly banned and vilified then we could be losing the very ‘capable guardians’ that are needed to reduce offending and increase public safety, not just in respect of dog controls.

Maintaining and encouraging use of wide open and green space options are significant aspects of meeting exercise needs for dogs and the health (physical and mental) of their owners. Just as important is the awareness of how banning or limiting other routines can have an impact on local trade if people are driven out of the town by over prescriptive practice.

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All the above fits neatly within our overarching strategy of **Challenge it Report it Change it** and can be embedded in our web-based material as well as more targeted public information.

### Links to References

This sections merely highlights selected sources and provides the direct links to some of the case studies mentioned for further exploration should it be required. Numerous others have been accessed and could be referenced as we progress.

**The Kennel Club:** Links to their Out of Order’ Guidance

[http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1057526/kc\\_dog\\_report\\_out\\_of\\_order\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_access\\_restrictions\\_on\\_dogs\\_and\\_their\\_owners.pdf](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1057526/kc_dog_report_out_of_order_the_impact_of_access_restrictions_on_dogs_and_their_owners.pdf)

**Hampshire:** Commended by the Kennel Club for their approach to consultation and partnership and the ‘traffic light system’ specifically.

<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/countryside/walks/TakingtheLead.pdf>

**Dorset:** A similar approach and in many ways to Hampshire although a key difference was they had a website as a point of reference and it incorporates the Doggy Do Code.

[www.dorsetdogs.org.uk](http://www.dorsetdogs.org.uk)

**Doncaster:** The opening paragraph on the website is excellent. The information is clearly laid out and simple to follow. Their FAQ’s is an example we should follow.

<https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/environmental/public-spaces-protection-order-dogs-and-dog-control>

**Staffordshire:** Tamworth has a directly relatable set of conditions to ours and the information is useful but not as clean and sharp as Doncaster perhaps

<https://www.tamworth.gov.uk/pspo-dog-control>

### Placement

It is our intention to ensure the coverage is more than adequate to ensure residents and visitors are clear about the regulations in place. We propose a balance between **reinforcing** the legislation on some signs and **reaffirming** the behaviours required on others.

Choosing the locations and type of signage to be displayed is a huge task to get right in one precise exercise.

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There are some simple considerations that will help us plan and deliver this objective effectively.

1. Ensure we have a universal and comprehensive resource available to everyone via our website. This will provide the foundation upon which all other elements can come together. It should provide absolute clarity about the provisions that are in place. It will serve to provide guidance and advice to any interested parties and should communicate the overall context of the Orders in relation to NDC approach.
2. Compile a suite of signs and notices that provide clear and consistent messages in easily identifiable and relatable formats. They should become familiar through association and collectively create a sense of positivity and commitment to protect our environment and communities.
3. Create sufficient variation in the content, size, construction components and display methods to facilitate widespread display on multiple surfaces and changing settings. Some may need bespoke products, with maps and greater detail to reflect close boundaries between controlled areas. Most will be standard visual prompts fixed, fitted, presented or erected in different ways.
4. Make provision for further and additional signs and notices to be readily available to reinforce as deemed necessary as the situation evolves. This will include those that may be adopted by landowners and managers to support controls they may wish to negotiate and agree over time if that flexibility is provided by the order.

The associated “Paw Print” traffic light system based markers will enable us to reaffirm the expected behaviours in a clear and distinguishable manner without the direct ‘threat’ that can be implied and in particular will help identify areas where the enjoyable exercising of dogs can be carried out freely.

### Conclusions

The preparation of this document has led to the following conclusions being evident to the author and it is recommended they are considered as priorities in the coming days, weeks and months.

1. Immediately begin work to compile the website as a primary point of reference we will rely upon moving forward. This partly needs to be developed ‘in test’ so that at the point of going live it is ready and fit for purpose.

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2. Formulate the website in a considered fashion so it can properly and fully serve to support the consultation process as it is launched. This will help provide a consistent destination for our residents and other interested parties.
3. Go live with the site at the earliest opportunity so it can be promoted and begin to manage expectation, advise on the process to be followed and contextualise our approach and the purpose/use of the PSPO. The current public facing information is not sufficient.
4. The text developed for the website will become the basis for subsequent communications and PR activity and it is vital we are prepared for the challenges and can pre-empt them as much as possible. A communications strategy should be prepared to cover the whole process
5. Parts of this document can be incorporated into, or linked with the subsequent consultation related guidance and can inform the development and production of content in other forms.