

Consultation response

Conwy County Borough Council: Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) - Dog Control

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to Conwy County Borough Council's review of its Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) relevant to dog control. PSPOs provide local authorities with a means of tackling dog fouling and other dog-related issues, such as access to public spaces. While RSPCA Cymru understands that local authorities have a duty to improve the communities they serve and protect human health, we would always urge any council to consider whether a PSPO is needed to achieve this. PSPOs relevant to dog ownership risk punishing responsible dog owners for the actions of the less responsible, while potentially creating less spaces for dogs to exercise and express their natural behaviours.

Dog fouling in public areas

RSPCA Cymru understands that dog fouling can be a major issue for towns and communities across Wales. The RSPCA agrees that local authorities should require owners to clean up their dog's waste, and we also support measures that require all dog owners to carry a bag or other appropriate means to pick up their dog's feces.

The previous PSPO set out conditions for dog owners to collect and dispose of dog faeces immediately from the ground at public locations. RSPCA Cymru believes similar ongoing action from Conwy County Borough Council would encourage responsible dog ownership and protect human and animal welfare while also facilitating more harmonious relationships between canine owners and the wider community. For this to be successful, it is important that adequate signage in place along with the provision of bins that are accessible and regularly emptied.

Other dog-related issues

Conwy County Borough Council's current PSPO on dog control requires owners to put their dog on a lead when requested to do so by an authorised officer. We understand that the current PSPO stipulates that authorised officers could only direct dogs to be put on leads on public land if the dog is considered to be out of control or causing alarm and distress, which we agree with. To ensure that this condition is administered appropriately if continued, RSPCA Cymru believes the experience and knowledge of the officer imposing the condition should be sufficient enough to prevent dog welfare from being compromised and that such requirements should only be made when necessary for public safety, the safety of the dog/s themselves and/or other animals'.

With regards to extending the PSPO to include dog exclusion zones on Betws yn Rhos Sports and Recreation ground and the area of beach fronting the Cayley Promenade, we encourage Conwy County Borough Council to consider a more flexible approach. Giving dogs an opportunity to exercise and interact with new animals and people in appropriate places is important in terms of ensuring they are well-socialised. Interaction with others is particularly important for puppies and younger dogs to ensure they develop into well adjusted adults. However, RSPCA Cymru recognises that not all dogs will be

well-socialised and some may find other animals or people threatening, therefore not all places will be appropriate for dogs. Still, we would encourage a flexible approach towards dogs being allowed areas of council-owned land such as commons, fields, marked sports pitches and beaches, as opposed to the introduction of blanket bans or exclusions.

With dogs already restricted in many public places, any additional exclusions on dogs - seasonally or otherwise - will inevitably leave local and visiting dog owners with fewer options to exercise their animal/s in a responsible manner. The exclusion of dogs on an area of beach fronting the Cayley Promenade, as well as the Betws yn Rhos Sports and Recreation ground, could be considered both restrictive and limiting to responsible owners, especially those with accessibility issues. The former has shown to be particularly unpopular with members of the local community previously, which led to such proposals not being progressed by Conwy CBC in the past. As such, we would consider allowing dogs to be kept on leads in the aforementioned areas to be a better proposal than a blanket ban. Such approaches have been adopted by other local authorities in Wales, with many considering this sufficient. Should a general on-lead approach not be favourable, we call for Conwy County Borough Council to consider allowing owners and their dogs access to these areas during certain hours when it is likely to be less busy, such as early in the morning or later in the evening.

We understand that Conwy County Borough Council is proposing the addition of designated dog exercise areas on the Oval in Llandudno as well as Maesdu Road Recreation Ground, also in Llandudno. Such action would provide local and visiting dog owners with specific spaces to exercise their animals in a responsible and social manner, which is encouraging. However, these proposed spaces are not within a close vicinity of, or immediately accessible to, dog owners that will be affected by the new exclusions on the beach in Rhos on Sea and the sports and recreation ground in Betws yn Rhos. Therefore, they should not be seen as an alternative or compromise in this respect. Should Conwy County Borough Council decide against allowing dogs on leads on the areas which may become dog exclusion zones or time-based measures as suggested above, we encourage further designated dog exercise zones to be considered nearer to Llandudno and other places throughout the county.

In conclusion, it is our view that the proposed dog exclusion zones would be limiting and restrictive to responsible dog owners and those visiting the area in the months when tourism is at its highest. As such, we would encourage Conwy County Borough Council to trial allowing dogs on lead on the beach and relevant recreation ground during the summer months. Similar approaches have been adopted by other local authorities which cover similar spaces in Wales, with many considering this a sufficient means of tackling dog-related issues in their communities. We would also encourage Conwy County Borough Council to refrain from introducing year-round measures relevant to marked sports pitches/recreation grounds and beaches, as we are concerned that this will prove overly restrictive for local dog owners and provide less opportunity for dogs to be exercised in an appropriate place, compromising their welfare as a result.