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 the largest national dog owners group KC Dog with approximately 5,000 members, which was established to monitor and keep dog owners up to date about dog related access issues.

Although we appreciate the Kennel Club may not be the target audience for a consultation on rural tourism, via KC Dog we are responding to an increasing number of local authority consultations regarding Public Spaces Protection Orders in relation to dogs – some of which are in popular tourist destinations. We believe that the existence of some of these restrictions may affect tourism in these areas which would have once been considered more ‘dog friendly’ than they are currently.

In addition to this, it is typical that dogs aren’t allowed in many business premises including restaurants, cafes, pubs and hotels/B&Bs even though there is often no reason why they should not be. Of course dogs are not allowed to enter areas where food is prepared, handled and stored, but it is fine for them to be in an area where food is served (according to the Food Standards Agency).

**The benefits to tourism of being ‘Dog Friendly’**

If businesses were more dog friendly, and areas were more open for dogs, this could really boost the tourism economy – much of which is in rural areas. Key findings from a number of Kennel Club surveys\(^1\) are as follow:

- UK tourism could benefit from an extra £5.8bn annually if more businesses opened their doors to dogs
- Last year 26.2% of the population planned to take a trip abroad and spend on average £2000. The research carried out by the Kennel Club found that 2.9 million dog owners would consider swapping overseas plans for a dog friendly option
- 72% of dog-owners said they would holiday in the UK more frequently if there were more options for their dog. This rose to 77% when looking solely at the high earners (£40k+ salary)
- 96% of people surveyed said the atmosphere in an establishment notably improved when dogs were present

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\(^1\) Kennel Club ‘Out and About Survey 2015; Kennel Club ‘Open for Dogs Survey’ and; Kennel Club ‘Holidaying with your Dogs Survey’.
• Four out of five companies say that they noticed business (including income) improve after expanding their customer base to include canines

• Dog owners spend 16% more on eating out and drinking in pubs than cat or non-pet owners

• It has been proven that those who own dogs are almost twice as likely to regularly visit local shops and businesses as those who do not own a dog. If these businesses allow dogs inside this is likely to increase further.

These findings are supported by the large number of websites dedicated to listing dog friendly businesses such as hotels, pubs and restaurants to help dog owners plan their day trips and longer holidays. A number of websites provide listings for the whole of the UK such as Dog Friendly, Dog Friendly Britain, Dog People and Pets Pyjamas. Others sites specialise in certain regions such as Dog Friendly Cotswolds and Dog Friendly Carmarthenshire.

The problem of access restrictions

Naturally it is down to individual businesses as to whether they choose to allow dogs on their premises, however when it comes to the outdoors, it is often local authorities that can render an area unsuitable as a holiday destination for people to go to with their dogs.

Since the introduction of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 local authorities have been able to ban dogs from areas and/or insist that they are kept on leads via Dog Control Orders (though prior to this they would have been able to introduce byelaws). Dog Control Orders still apply but may no longer be introduced as they are being replaced with Public Spaces Protection Orders introduced under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Public Spaces Protection Orders can affect dog owners in many ways - as well as banning dogs and requiring them to be kept on leads in parks and on beaches for example, some local authorities are seeking to use them to require dog owners to have their dog registered on a DNA database prior to entering a park or require dog owners to be able to provide, on request, a receptacle for picking up dog faeces. Normally these requirements are disproportionate to the supposed problems encountered.

In most cases local authorities do consult with local people, however in many areas, the consultations are in the form of online questionnaires with yes/no responses which do not allow for people to express their wishes – for example if people are asked if there should be dog bans, there will most likely always be a desire for dogs to be banned in some areas (such as fenced off children’s play areas) but not usually from an entire park or an entire beach – but this basic level of detail is not often accounted for in questionnaires. This can lead to restrictions being imposed ‘by accident’ and impacting on how many people with dogs subsequently visit the area.
Examples of access restrictions which could negatively impact upon the desirability of rural tourist destinations for dog owners

1. **Burnham Beeches**

   1. **Schedule 1**: Picking up fouling across the whole site
   2. **Schedule 2**: Dogs on lead all year round across 59% of the site
   3. **Schedule 3**: Dogs on lead by direction
   4. **Schedule 4**: No dogs area
   5. **Schedule 5**: Maximum number of dogs

The Kennel Club supports **Schedule 1** as every dog owner should always pick up after their dog. This would also help in reducing problems caused to a wide range of interests when dog faeces are not picked up or left behind in bags.

However, the Kennel Club **strongly opposes Schedule 2** as it is more extensive and restrictive than any other dog control order, national law or local bylaw in the UK, including on sites with much higher levels of nature conservation designation than Burnham Beeches.

The proposal has chosen a percentage-based approach to restrictions rather than focusing any restrictions on specific issues, features and sensitivities which would be a far more valid and credible way forward and one that is used in other dog control order proposals across the UK.

In addition, the proposed off-lead area includes land where cattle will be grazed at a time when national effort is being made to have dogs on leads around livestock due to both animal and human fatalities. Furthermore, the off-lead access will be near an unfenced area with public roads, which increases the danger of injuries for all road users if a dog related incident occurs.

The justification given for Schedule 2’s proposal is to protect wildlife, the government’s nature conservation agency, Natural England explicitly does not support this proposal. In addition, Burnham Beeches site is primarily designated for its ancient trees, which the Kennel Club does not believe are threatened by off-lead dogs. On other more sensitive sites, restrictions are timed to coincide with the nesting season, and not year round as proposed in Burnham Beeches. The Kennel Club would support targeted and proportionate restrictions.

Lastly, this proposal is likely to displace off-lead access onto other land in the vicinity, which may lead to further restrictions in surrounding areas. As an additional consequence, this would mean that people would need to use their cars to get to places on a daily basis which would have an impact on the environment in both the short and long term.

**Schedule 3** is a proposal whose principle the Kennel Club would support as it allows targeting restrictions at the people causing problems. However, without a policy defined in writing
with regards to how it would be applied, the Kennel Club would not be able to support it as it has the potential to be applied unfairly and inconsistently.

With regards to Schedule 4, while there is no legal or health and safety requirement to exclude dogs from where food is being consumed, the Kennel Club recognises and supports choice being given to people who prefer to eat in dog-free areas.

Lastly, the Kennel Club believes that taking action against dog owners who are causing problems (irrespective of how many dogs they have) is a better way forward than an arbitrary limit on the number of dogs one person can walk as is proposed in Schedule 5. For example, three out of control off-lead Labradors can be more of a problem than six Chihuahuas on leads. The Kennel Club supports the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’ (Defra) recommended number of six dogs, which is clearly stated in its 2006 guidance on Dog Control Orders.

2. Cornwall Council

In July 2015 we were contacted by one of our KC Dog members who took his dog with him on a holiday to Cornwall. He reported to us that “one of the reasons why I was holidaying in Cornwall is because it is marketed as a dog friendly area. However, the reality is that all the best and most accessible beaches have seasonal restrictions on them.” Despite this he was advised that one beach had no restrictions. However the path to that beach was closed due to a landslip and he was directed to the Gwithan beach access path. Although there was a restriction sign, it was assumed by him and other dog walkers, that under the circumstances it would be permissible for dog walkers to cross a brief stretch of restricted beach (with their dogs on leads) for the purpose of getting to the dog friendly part, especially because the beach was not busy at the time. However our KC Dog member and other dog walkers were approached by dog wardens who asked that they leave the beach immediately and issued a fixed penalty notice.

3. Coventry

Dogs to be kept on leads in all council controlled parks and green spaces.

The Kennel Club strongly opposed this measure along with local dog walkers on the basis that it was unnecessary and could have implications for dog welfare if there was nowhere for off lead exercise.

Councillors later admitted: “We used a hammer to crack a walnut” (Ann Lucas, Council Leader) and now the on lead restrictions apply only to certain areas such as cemeteries and sports pitches when they are in use.

4. Barking and Dagenham
There is currently a trial whereby dog owners register their dogs on a DNA database – this means if their dog fouls and it is not picked up they could be prosecuted.

There are many problems associated with this – firstly, the cost of enforcement and whether this could be better spent tackling a supposed dog fouling problem by another means. The cost and red tape of complying with such a restriction would completely deter most dog owners from visiting an area with this type of restriction.

Conclusion

In many instances KC Dog is able to work with dog owners and local authorities to amend proposed Public Spaces Protection Orders so that both sides are content – however this requires much resource. We would therefore like to see regulations and guidance surrounding Public Spaces Protection Orders amended in order that certain ‘tests’ are met and factors considered, prior to their introduction – one of which should be a proper impact assessment with regards to tourism revenues. We would be delighted to give oral evidence before the committee to go into more detail if required.

August 2016