



# Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Trudy Harrison MP  
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Hilary Winter  
Devon Countryside Access Forum  
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Our ref: PO2023/05273/MO

4 May 2023

Dear Hilary,

Thank you for your letter of 3 March about the concerns you have over the current legal framework for dog control.

As you have pointed out, there are a number of legislative tools and guidance that effectively set out the roles and responsibilities of dog owners when walking their dogs in the countryside. One such tool is the recently updated Countryside Code which makes it clear that owners need to keep their dogs under effective control.

Local authorities also have powers to introduce Public Spaces Protection Orders and it is right that they are able to use such powers in the areas for which they are responsible. Legislation also permits local authorities to introduce various countryside byelaws where it is appropriate to do so, subject to confirmation by the Secretary of State.

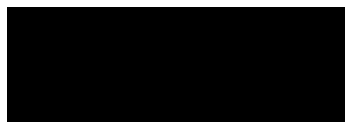
On responsible dog ownership more widely, you may be interested to learn that in December 2021 Defra published research in collaboration with Middlesex University investigating measures to reduce dog attacks and promote responsible dog ownership across all breeds of dog. Further details can be found on Defra's website [here](#).

In response to this research, we have established a Responsible Dog Ownership working group involving police, local authorities and animal welfare organisations. Conclusions and policy reform recommendations are expected later this year. These should address all aspects of tackling irresponsible dog ownership effectively, from prevention to robust, consistent enforcement, focussing on owners as well as on their dogs.

As part of the Responsible Dog Ownership working group, Defra will be considering the role of education and communications in encouraging responsible dog ownership and ensuring that dog owners are aware of their legal responsibilities. We will also be considering how we can refresh our current guidance for enforcement practitioners to support them to apply their powers effectively.

Alongside this, over recent months Defra has been arranging joint sessions with the police and with local authorities about how to make best use of their powers to tackle dog control issues in different scenarios and encourage the consistent application of dog control legislation.

Yours sincerely



TRUDY HARRISON MP

**Email to Defra following letter received 4 May 2023**  
**Sent: 13 June 2023**

**Your reference PO2023/05273/MO**

Dear Under-Secretary

**Dog issues**

Thank you for your letter of 4 May, reference PO2023/05273/MO, received in response to the letter sent by the Devon Countryside Access Forum.

Forum members were interested to read your comments and updates on the issue of dog control. However, the main point of the Forum's letter focussed on the discrepancy in legislation across different types of land and between authority areas, not dog control per se. The variation in legislation is highly complex and difficult for dog owners to understand. The Forum would welcome your thoughts specifically on this issue.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum notes with interest the establishment of the Responsible Dog Ownership working group, a valuable initiative. The Forum requests that its initial communication, re-attached, is forwarded to this group for its consideration as the issues raised are important in trying to establish responsible dog ownership. Furthermore, the Forum requests that the conclusions and recommendations of the national Responsible Dog Ownership working group are put out to consultation with local access forums across the country.

Your response would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely  
Hilary Winter

E-mail sent on behalf of the Devon Countryside Access Forum  
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Our ref: PO2023/11565/EBT

17 July 2023

Dear Hilary

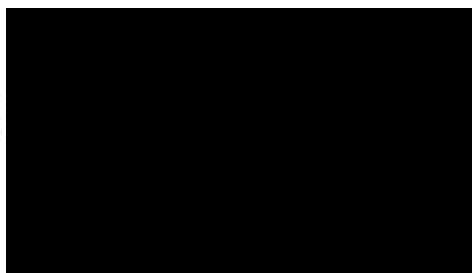
Thank you for your follow up email of 13 June about dog issues.

I am grateful to the Devon Local Access Forum for providing their feedback on the application of the current legal framework for dog control. We currently have no plans to review the current legal framework for dog control. We are focussing our efforts on ensuring that the full range of existing powers to tackle dog control issues are effectively applied.

As I mentioned in my previous letter, we are working with police, local authorities, and animal welfare organisations to consider how the recommendations from the Middlesex University report could be taken forward and to identify ways in which to improve the application of the full range of existing dog control powers. As part of this, we are also considering the role of education and training (for both dogs and their owners) in reducing the risk of dog attacks, as well as considering how we can improve data collection and recording and enforcement practices. Conclusions from this work are expected later this year and any proposed legislative reforms would be subject to public consultation as appropriate.

Your feedback has been passed onto the responsible dog ownership policy team and noted.

Yours sincerely



**TRUDY HARRISON MP**