

Place and Resources Overview Committee – 5 October 2023

Agenda item 5 – Public Participation

Questions received

1. Question from Councillor David Sarson on behalf of Lyme Regis Town Councillors

Response from Lyme Regis Town Councillors to the proposed removal of the restriction to have dogs on leads on Lyme Regis Front Town Beach in winter

Lyme Regis town councillors would like to make the strongest possible objection to this proposal which is against our recommendation. We ask Dorset Councillors to reconsider this decision.

The officer's recommendation prioritises the desire of a relatively small number of dog owners to exercise their dogs off-lead in winter on the front beaches over the need of the families of Lyme Regis and our visitors. The small sandy beach and the pebble front beach are the safe areas in Lyme for young children, the elderly and others wanting to dig and play on the beach, and paddle and swim in the water, without fear of being knocked over or frightened by dogs or finding dog excrement and urine polluting the sand, pebbles and water.

The front beaches are used for these leisure purposes throughout the year.

As a Town Council we receive regular complaints about the behaviour of dogs and their owners in the town and on the beach. In particular **people complain about dogs being out of control and frightening and aggressive to young children and older people**. In the light of recent dog attacks in the national and local news, it seems absurd to be removing the on-lead restriction given that most local people voted for a total ban all year round for the front beaches in 2020. At the time, Dorset Council's PSPO to allow dogs on the beach on leads in the winter months seemed a sensible compromise.

Off leads dogs enjoy racing and playing with others and can become very boisterous. They also go into the sea where owners often throw large stones and objects for them to chase.

Lyme's town front beaches are well populated by families all year and are not appropriate for this.

There are two major considerations:

1. **The physical safety of people** (especially small children and older people)
2. **The other is the possibility of infection as faeces and urine are deposited on the beach**

Often it is claimed that faeces and urine will wash into the sea but the top halves of the two man-made front beaches are not reached by high tide so will never be washed clean by the sea.

The Town Council has a responsibility to deliver the best possible care to the people of Lyme and their friends and family, as well as ensuring a good tourist experience.

Given that the officer recommendation goes against the strong view of the town council and ward member, if agreed, will Dorset Council pick up the responsibility for cleaning the beaches and the public liability should any beach goer be attacked, injured or worse, by dogs off lead on our busy front beaches?

2. Question from Councillor Brian Larcombe

Lyme Regis' front beach is not an appropriate place to allow dogs to run out of control off a lead. - To do so is unhealthy and unsafe. While there may be other adjacent places east and west, even north, which may provide alternative areas, - whatever the area I would strongly advocate that dogs must ways be held under proper control. - Sadly, there have been recent and growing numbers of well-publicised incidents and some fatalities across the UK when dogs have been allowed off-lead and out of control.

Question: Over half the land area of the front beach over which LRTC has expressed its view that dogs should at least be kept under proper control on a lead, is pebbles and is non-tidal. This obviously means the dog mess left by dog owners is impossible to pick up and remove, and is not washed away by the sea, - the tide doesn't reach anywhere near this hugely used public beach area. Winter and Spring seasonal weather and seas produces steep slopes at the front edges of the pebble beach and sand which is unsafe for those with less mobility, and regularly has to be significantly re-profiled to make them safe. Once off the lead the dogs are effectively out of control and we've had complaints of dog nuisance and their bounding upon adults and children, attacking other dogs, and even urinating on people's clothes and possessions on the sand and pebble beach areas. - **If** Dorset council grants permission for this, what is Dorset council going to do to remove the mess; what is Dorset going to do to directly manage the distress and nuisance factor and all related complaints, - and importantly the full liability for any and all unfortunate incidents as a direct consequence of their (Dorset council's) decision? - Obviously, the consequences, full obligation and liability will be Dorset council's **if** it grants permission for off-lead, out of control dogs, against the advice and view, the local awareness, and the first-hand knowledge and experience LRTC has of the area concerned. - No one wants to say as a consequence, and in the light of any serious event, 'we told you so' but LRTC cannot be held liable for a decision Dorset makes, against its advice and on its land.

Continued over...

Statements received

1. Statement from Mrs Cynthia Sharp

Re: views on the recommendation to remove the Dogs on Leads restriction for the Lyme Regis front beaches during the winter months

As an older (mid-70's) resident of Lyme Regis, I am extremely concerned about the possibility of dogs being allowed off leads on the sandy beach in the winter months.

I already witness many dogs along the seafront completely ignoring their owners pleas not to jump up, even though they are on leads, and on more than one occasion I have been almost knocked over as I pass them.

My balance is not good and, especially in the colder months, the sandy beach is one place where I can walk safely, alone or with my peers, as pebbles are difficult for me.

I recently saw one young mother yelling at her children as they were scrabbling about on the pebbles in the exact spot where a dog had deposited a dropping just minutes beforehand. Though it was picked up, the surrounding pebbles were wet and of course contaminated with the remains of the faeces.

The sandy beach is known as a safe space locally, and, particularly when the tide is in, there is just not enough space for families, people like myself and loose dogs to enjoy themselves.

I met a local single friend recently who had ended up in hospital after falling on a beach not far from Lyme due to a large dog leaping up at her. She was off work for several weeks and was badly affected mentally. I am very afraid this may happen to me.

There are so many other places to exercise dogs in Lyme including along the River Lym to Uplyme, along Ware cliffs, on Monmouth beach and on Timber Hill.

Please may we keep a few spaces for older residents, many with small grandchildren, where dogs are under control.

2. Statement from Councillor Caroline Aldridge

Recommendation 1.7.3 Lyme Regis Front Town Beach – proposed change in arrangements to allow dogs off leads 1 October to 30 April.

I strongly object to this decision and request that it is reviewed on the grounds that a relatively small number of dogs and their owners have been prioritised over the health, safety and wellbeing of the people of Lyme (and their visitors), many with young children and vulnerable relatives who use this small, sandy beach throughout the year to play in the sand and swim. This is the only sandy beach in Lyme.

I challenge the statement at para 1.1.9 that there was a good representation of respondent dog owners and non-dog owners as para 1.1.13 states that two thirds of responses were from dog owners. PDSA statistics from 2023 state that 29% of UK adults were dog owners. Statistics from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (2016-2019 being most recent statistics) show 25% of households owning a dog. That same agency has 2023 post code information for Lyme Regis (DT7) showing 0.22 dogs per household. It is incorrect to say that a survey where 62% of respondents were dog owners is representative of the local population.

It is untrue that there is limited suitable alternative space to exercise a dog off lead on the flat during the winter months. There is a flat river walk from the sea front to Uplyme through suitable fields and also flat walking from Holmbeach car park out to the land by Ware cliffs.

On what evidence is the statement made “there is no evidence of significant use of this beach by families and children compared with other beaches in Dorset....” ? Families use it regularly in winter because it is quieter than in summer. Those with young children and vulnerable elderly relatives go then because it is accessible and safe – dogs being allowed to race and play among them in that small area will destroy that opportunity for many families as they will fear being knocked over, attacked or pollution from the beach and sea being used as a dog lavatory.

As Chair of LRTC Tourism Committee, and latterly Town Management Committee, I have seen many complaints about poorly controlled dogs being aggressive, knocking people over and sometimes injuring them, frightening small children by grabbing their toys, attacking other dogs and fouling, with their owners often managing this poorly. We need restrictions to keep our vulnerable safe.

This consultation has focused on provision for dogs and their owners but has had no regard at all to the rest of the population who deserve an enjoyable beach experience with their health and safety needs met, this recommendation needs to be withdrawn.

3. Statement from Julia Lawrance

With reference to the latest Dorset Council consultation as to allowing dogs off lead on Lyme Regis front beaches out of season, I wish to voice my view that the current rules should not be changed. This is for a number of reasons, including child safety (some dogs very boisterous and out of control off lead, which leads to them jumping up on both young children and adults causing unnecessary alarm) I have had personal experience when playing with my 2 year old grandson when numerous dogs have come bounding up to us frightening him and jumping around barking. Owners often comment that they are friendly and mean no harm, but this really is not acceptable.

I have also noted in last year or two that many people have more than one dog, which increases the risk of harm when off lead.

Children and adults should always be the priority. There are two other beaches in Lyme where dogs are welcome to run free. Why is this not enough?
Please take into account the percentage of responses from non dog owners and put in perspective with those that are.

I haven't mentioned the dog fouling issue, and the increase in risk of owners not being aware of where they are fouling when dogs roam free.

4. Statement from Councillor Rob Smith

I read with concern that

The one significant change this time is that the current restriction to keep dogs on leads on Lyme Regis's Front Town Beach during the winter is not recommended for inclusion in the new order.

I understand that from your survey, 62% of respondents were dog owners. What statistical modelling did you undertake to make your survey representative of the community rather than a minority pressure group?

Firstly, 54% in favour is a very narrow majority for a small sample size, and should not lead to an automatic revision of restrictions.

Next, let us look at how we could interpret these statistics:

If 62% of respondents were dog owners, and 54% of respondents were in favour of lifting restrictions, then we can estimate that at most $54/64 = 84\%$ of dog owners were in favour, and 16% of dog owners were opposed.

Now, if 25% of households are dog owners, then $84\% \text{ of } 25\% = 21\%$ of the population is actually in favour of "dogs off the lead", as opposed to 79% against.

I do not have the full statistics of your survey, but a rough calculation confirms what those of us in Lyme Regis know; the vast majority of the town are opposed to dogs off the lead on the beach.

The majority of dog owners are responsible people, but a few are not. And we have all had large dogs bound up to us with the owner crying "don't worry about him...." when we're nearly knocked over. This should not happen in the small confined beach area at Lyme.

There are real health and safety concerns about dogs on the beach which is a popular play area for young children. We have had reports of children digging up dog mess, or dogs urinating on sand castles. I urge Dorset Council to prioritise our children's safety over the wishes of dog owners to exercise their dogs on what is a small, compact artificial beach. We do not want to put children at risk, as this proposal will clearly do.

Lastly, I am sure that having dogs running free on the beach will have a detrimental effect on local businesses due to Lyme Regis being a less pleasant and less family safe place to visit in the winter.

For these reasons, Lyme Regis Town Council voted for a complete ban on dogs on the beach, and I urge you to respect their decision.

5. Statement from Mrs W Wilkins-Colijn

Please, don't go back to letting dogs loose on the beach in Lyme Regis.

A lot of people feel unsafe, including older people with dogs on leads, children and swimmers.

I'm an all year round swimmer and had so many issues. Dogs sticking their heads in my bag while getting changed, going off with my clothes and coming back with holes in, jumping on me trying to get out of the water, urinating on my clothes, the list goes on.

My grandchildren crawling on urinated sand..

And no it's not the odd person letting their dog do these things. Most feel very entitled to let their dogs do what they want.

In the last 5 years I met 3 persons who were polite, constraining their dogs and not run riot round me.

I know of people who gave up on swimming, it was too stressful.

And yes if they are allowed loose on the beach again I'm thinking of giving up too, as there are so many more dogs around now!

It use to be in double digits on that small peace of sandy sand (people use to take photographs) it doesn't bear thinking how many there will be now.

You might as well get stalls there, as on Croft's selling dogs collars etc

Please, please reconsider. Many people benefit from cold water swimming, don't let them having to give up.