

Consultation Feedback - PSPO

Theme:	Comment:
<b>Anti-Social behaviour</b>	<p>“This is much needed. I am a resident of Northgate [text deleted to protect anonymity]. <i>Inserted text – There is a heritage bandstand in North Park and 100’s of events take place in the park.</i></p> <p>This Summer has been appalling in the park with underage people consuming alcohol, especially in the bandstand. Large amounts of cans and broken glass have been thrown from the bandstand almost daily at times in the Summer, which some residents have conscientiously cleared away and repeatedly reported. This is a danger for dog walkers. For cyclists.</p> <p>Children cannot play safely in the park. People do not feel safe.</p> <p>At times this has included, music and loud behaviour until the early hours, and people living opposite the park have been unable to sleep at the front of the homes.</p> <p>A fire was started in the bandstand towards the end of the summer. And no-one seems to know what happened, how it was thankfully put out, and who is responsible.</p> <p>Comments have been made on Social Media from people who use the park to walk into town about the amount of people drinking at all times of the days, at times occupying all of the benches.</p> <p>As there are no toilets in the park, the smell of urine near St Georges Hall is noticeable. Also in the bushes approaching the bandstand.</p> <p>St Georges Hall was converted into a hostel some years ago, against very strong local feeling, when people, including the Friends of the park and the Bangladeshi community wanted to use it as a community space.</p> <p>Great efforts were taken to reassure people that the residents would be short term people with low level needs and there would be little nuisance or poor behaviour. It seems that the place now houses people with alcohol problems and their issues are apparent to park users.</p> <p>There is a tree on the fountain field which is used for some kind of drug use, as tiny clear plastic sealed bags litter the ground underneath.</p> <p>These bags are found in other places in the park, and needles on litter picks.</p> <p>The area around North Lodge house, around the back has been used as a sleeping place or dumping ground as personal possessions, including children’s toys have been found there when litter picking.</p> <p>The park is the only green space for residents of this area.</p>

Theme:	Comment:
	<p>Around 2000 homes in the immediate vicinity have no gardens whatsoever, in the most densely populated area of town.</p> <p>The park is our garden.</p> <p>I very much hope this Order will be enacted and the park become a safe place for all to enjoy and respect.”</p>
	<p>“I think that the creation of a public space protection order is a good idea to reduce the anti-social behaviour in the town. However, I would like to see the area increased to include South Park and Victoria Embankment. As a resident of Victoria Embankment I am tired of the anti-social behaviour we receive from teenagers coming down the street to go to the park. Since moving in I have had damage caused to my car on 4 separate occasions from teenagers, 3 times I have had my wing mirror kicked and once my door kicked. Something needs to be done to stop this anti-social behaviour from a small minority of teenagers in the town.</p>
	<p>“A reasonable start but the introduction of the PSPO need to coincide with additional law enforcement patrols covering the whole of the town. Anti-Social behaviour is no way limited to the town centre”.</p>
	<p>“I fully support this proposal. I work in the town centre &amp; witness anti-social behaviour on a daily basis in &amp; around the town centre. Anything that can be done to make the town centre better place has my support.</p> <p>Currently, gangs of teenagers outside the Dolphin Centre shouting, swearing and generally intimidating the public is unacceptable. Groups of teens are often gathered outside the Dolphin Centre when families are trying to access swimming lessons etc. I believe this puts families off using these facilities.</p> <p>The gangs of adults drinking alcohol, and shouting abuse in &amp; around St Cuthbert’s Church is also unacceptable. What could be a nice seating area at the bottom of the market square is currently labelled a ‘no go’ area for the fear of abuse or intimidating behaviour from adults who are drinking alcohol on a daily basis.</p> <p>We need to do all we can to make Darlington a place people want to visit. We need to make it a pleasant experience for locals. As much as I have some sympathy for addicts, the poor, bored teens...we have to draw a line and start to lay down some ground rules to bring about the changes needed for our Town Centre.”</p>
	<p>“I am fully supportive of the PSPO as it will enhance Darlington Town Centre and make the Town a safer place for the public to visit”.</p>

Theme:	Comment:
	<p>"I don't like religious zealots obstructing High Row with their leaflet stand. Will they be asked to move on?"</p>
	<p>"I have read the draft wording of the order and agree with every element of it.</p> <p>Darlington town centre has become an intimidating place to be.</p> <p>During business hours there are alcohol-related issues in the town centre, as well as begging. This should be rectified.</p> <p>During evening hours there are large groups of intimidating youths who tend to loiter mostly outside the Dolphin Centre, but not exclusively in that location. I would suggest that the order also provide scope for dealing with large groups of loitering youths – unless the "threatening behaviour" element would cover this. The town centre does not feel like a safe place to be once the shops and offices have closed for the day.</p> <p>I only hope that if the order is implemented, there will be sufficient numbers of police officers available to enforce the order. There is no point having an order in place if there are no police officers or PCSOs are in the immediate vicinity. If I were to feel intimidated by gangs of youths in the town centre and there are no police officers present, what is the point in the order? I would have to call the police and wait for them to come to the town centre to move the culprits on. By that time, the damage is done and any decent person who reported them will have long since disappeared and had their evening spoiled".</p>
	<p>"yes I agree with tackling the anti-social behaviour in the town centre</p> <p>the alcoholics :</p> <p>there should be a zero tolerance on drinking alcohol in public places - signs should be put in place they should be moved on from there perch beside the boot and shoe on the arched seats -as the weather gets colder they move to the shelters of the coach stop opposite the town hall what must travellers think coming to Darlington and leaving Darlington when you wouldn't feel safe sitting waiting for your coach they sit outside the banks waiting for hand out .</p> <p>Today they are sat on the wall in the entrance of st Cuthbert's ( sunday 16th sept)as the market square holds a music festival - this shows they hold no respect for anything . the lane behind the boot and shoe which has an entrance to st Cuthbert's is also used as a toilet it stinks</p>

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	<p>youths no cycling signs need to be erected in the town centre to curb the youths. You are talking of issuing fines - but how can you fine people who don't have any money to start with.?</p> <p>also this youth problem spills just out of the town centre ie gladstone street which has a number of off licenses / run down shops that cater to youths where they can send someone older in to buy there alcohol and cigarettes and hang around on their bikes."</p>
	<p>"I am in complete support of this order, something like this is needed for the Town."</p>
<b>Begging</b>	<p>"I am writing to input 2 comments into the consultation".</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) It is dreadful to criminalise people driven to begging on the streets, due to hardship &amp; poverty. When did our Labour Council start caring so little about the citizens that it chooses to persecute desperation and poverty? Shameful.</li> <li>2) How do you propose to implement this order – a raft of PSCO's looking for people swearing!! Haven't you got more important things to do with the limited funding available? I would have thought in the current woefully underfunded era of public spending – money could be better directed towards providing services rather than persecuting what is likely to be the young, the desperate and substance dependant amongst us.</li> <li>3)</li> </ol>
	<p>"Whilst I think measures to reduce anti-social behaviour and threatening behaviour in the town are a good idea I am shocked to see begging included in this category. People beg out of desperation and proposing to fine them and criminalise them is heartless and has no place in civilised society. We should be introducing measures to help them not make their lives even more miserable. All of the people I have given assistance to have been appreciative and very well-mannered towards me, we do not need 'protecting' from people who are so unfortunate. There but for the grace of God go any of us."</p>
	<p>"I think this is a great idea as I'm sick of seeing 'homeless' people asleep in the town centre looking like they are dead! It's not nice walking past them with my 7 year old daughter getting scared thinking they are dead! And all the drunks who sit around town makes me want to move. It's disgusting when they shout &amp; swear, falling asleep wherever they want to."</p>

Theme:	Comment:
	<p>“Growing numbers of vulnerable homeless people are being fined, given criminal convictions and even imprisoned for begging and rough sleeping for up to FIVE YEARS.</p> <p>Yet Home Office guidance a year ago instructed councils not to target people for being homeless and sleeping rough. Now there are more than 50 local authorities with public space protection orders (PSPOs) in place.</p> <p>Homeless people are banned from town centres, routinely fined hundreds of pounds and sent to prison if caught repeatedly asking for money. Local authorities have issued hundreds of fixed-penalty notices and pursued criminal convictions for “begging”, “persistent and aggressive begging” and “loitering”.</p> <p>In Gloucester, a man was jailed for four months for breaching a PSPO issued for begging – about which the judge admitted “I will be sending a man to prison for asking for food when he was hungry” – and a man was fined £100 after a child dropped £2 in his sleeping bag.</p> <p>Lawyers, charities and campaigners have described PSPOs as “grotesque inhumanity”, saying disadvantaged groups were fined for being poor. They said civil powers were being used by overzealous councils who wanted to sweep inconveniences off their streets and sanitise town centres.</p> <p>Rosie Brighthouse, a lawyer for Liberty: “Now we see dozens of local authorities using them to target marginalised groups and fine people for being poor. This approach just pushes people into debt or the criminal justice system.”</p> <p>Last December, then Home Secretary Rudd, a Conservative, told councils not to misuse antisocial behaviour laws by targeting homeless people. New guidance says PSPOs “should not be used to target people based solely on the fact that someone is homeless or rough sleeping, as this in itself is unlikely to mean that such behaviour is having an unreasonably detrimental effect on the community’s quality of life which justifies the restrictions imposed”.</p> <p>Some charities have called on the government to scrap PSPOs entirely, arguing they are an example of abuse of power and do not help take people off the streets, but push them further into debt and the criminal justice system.</p> <p>The Home Office has said: “We are clear that PSPOs should be used proportionately to tackle antisocial behaviour, and not to target specific groups or the most vulnerable in our communities.”</p> <p>What is particularly concerning to us, though, are four things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Rough sleepers are vulnerable to attack by “vigilantes”. We met one this week who had been taken to A&amp;E after around ten lads set on him. Our fear is that PSPOs give official credence to such bigotry, legitimising hatred of homeless people. And god knows we could do with less of that. Demonising all beggars this way ... not just those who are not as hard-up as they claim ... makes it seem OK for some people to take what they see as vigilante action.</li> <li>2) Our council is currently controlled by the Labour Party, for God’s sake. The party of the poor, powerless and destitute. The party of the downtrodden. Not the party that treads down the poorest.</li> </ol>

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	<p>3) often, by companies with an incentive to hand out as many PSPOs as possible.</p> <p>4) Those issued with PSPOs receive no real justice. The case is not tested in a court. They are at the mercy of the individual who issues the order. With no public scrutiny. They are guilty and do not have the chance to plead innocence. Yes, they can appeal a fine, but who pays their legal fees and how long does that take? These are largely people without the capacity to take such action. If “an agent of the council” says they are guilty, off they have to trot.</p> <p>We have been accused of being naïve because of our opposition to PSPOs. On the contrary: we are extremely cynical about the reasons behind someone at Darlington Council, either official or elected member, putting PSPOs on the agenda. We suspect it has little to do with justice but much more to do with “tidying up” the central area. Because beggars don’t look very nice, do they? If it’s not about hiding beggars from view in the centre, why are Yarm Road and Victoria Road outside the prohibited area? Are people around the Hippodrome and the station not important enough to protect from harassment? What about people in Cockerton? For, under the proposed PSPO map, beggars will be allowed to continue operations there.</p> <p>Most importantly, though, the plan does not address the underlying causes of rough sleeping. It fails to take into account the steep rise in homelessness and the policy of austerity which feeds that. It just hides the scandal from the public’s view and therefore the public’s concern for the individuals. It will legitimise the kind of bigotry that resulted in Middlesbrough man [<i>name deleted to protect anonymity</i>] being spray painted as he sat in the street this summer. Next time, it might not be a paint gun, but a shotgun”.</p>
<b>Alcohol/Adults</b>	<p>“I have a small business in the town centre, I also live in the town centre [<i>text deleted to protect anonymity</i>] Skinnergate, in both areas I feel unsafe and vulnerable despite the CCTV. The relentless loud music this summer coming from the Old English Gentleman and the Turks Head pubs, although not in the market these pubs bring their fair share of undesirable prolonged drinkers, that then bring people who fight, argue, unsociable and very often violent behaviour outside my home where the taxi’s trade all night long much to my disapproval.</p> <p>We have had men using our doorway as a public convenience, and kicking the door in once they are kicked out of the Turks Head because they are so drunk &amp; disorientated. As I sit and write this to you one person is sat opposite in the Up &amp; Running doorway and another man has bounced off the window several times too drunk to walk and it is only 9pm. I would also like to add that the abuse associated with alcohol is unbelievable I cannot bring myself to repeat what I have heard, sobbing young women, which I am sure they will be damaged and many suffer from PTSD.</p> <p>So I support whole heartedly the implementation of PSPO. Although your plan may be a challenge, I look forward to a more safer and pleasant place to live and work, with a less rough, down trodden, scary town centre”.</p>

Theme:	Comment:
	<p>“I support the proposed PSPO. The snicket/wynd between the Boot &amp; Shoe pub and the church hall is regularly used as a toilet by the resident ‘drinkers’. I would also include a small parcel of land behind Halfords down to the River Skerne, including under Russell Street bridge. The bushes, grass lawn, concrete bank and space under the bridge are regularly used by substance abusers to consume their substance of choice and occasionally a place to go to the toilet.</p> <p>There also needs to be measures to ensure that substance abusers do not just ‘relocate’ to residential areas and public spaces in the town fringe area. Be aware that the proposed PSPO includes residential areas to the west of the town centre but not to the east across the ring road. This could be interpreted as neglect to the town fringe area, an area which is being ‘talked up’ as a ‘cultural hub’ being left to fend for itself. This issue needs to be addressed.</p>
	<p>“I have considered the Draft proposal for the proposed Public Spaces Protection Order, and feel it necessary to respond.</p> <p>I am a [<i>deleted to protect anonymity</i>] Solicitor based in the town centre. I deal routinely with people who are the subject of the suggested Order. I have to say that I find the proposal mean-spirited in part, unnecessary, and likely to create increased problems of criminality.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Does the prohibition on public drinking take into account the “pavement cafe” culture previously encouraged, and events from time to time put on in the town centre? Or is it the case that it is designed to victimise certain known individuals? There is potential for challenge if not administered fairly.</li> <li>ii. Taking alcohol from a person in drink is liable to aggravate, rather than ameliorate, a situation. I can foresee greater Public Order offences being committed in response to such demands, particularly if the demands are made by ill-trained Council employees.</li> <li>iii. The prohibition on begging is a draconian way of dealing with vulnerable people. I have personal knowledge of some beggars, who are genuinely homeless and seek to raise funds for B and B accommodation. One, in particular, has spent the last few nights sleeping rough in significantly cold weather. Begging for this purpose, often where Benefits are sanctioned or delayed, is a “necessary evil”. Where the Council denies opportunities to accept donations from willing contributors, you will inevitable see a rise in town centre shoplifting and crimes of acquisition, if people are desperate to raise cash. In addition, there are offences in existence, under both the Vagrancy and Fraud Acts, that cover any concerns raised regarding begging.</li> </ul>

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Comment:</b>
	<p data-bbox="526 162 1998 233">iv. Threatening/intimidating Behaviour is an offence under s.4 Public Order Act, making this prohibition pointless.</p> <p data-bbox="526 239 1323 274">v. Obstructing a Public Highway is also an offence.</p> <p data-bbox="479 319 2042 469">I think Due process is also important, and I have serious concerns about the increase of such powers to Officers and untrained employees. I suspect, as is often the case when powers are extended to Police and other bodies, they become a sledgehammer to crack a nut. As indicated above, I can foresee an escalation in town centre offending by virtue of attempts to enforce the Order.</p> <p data-bbox="479 513 1164 549">I am happy to discuss this further if the need arises.”</p>