

11 February 2014

Dear Portobello Community Council,

I hope this letter finds you all well.

As a resident in Portobello I have watching closely the discussions surrounding the issue of dogs on Portobello Beach. As a mother to two children (nursery and P1) we spend a lot of time on the beach in all seasons and all weathers.

I raise this issue continuing on from the discussion and debates which took place last year on Porty Forum ([REDACTED]), in Edinburgh Evening News (front pages and letters pages) and on BBC radio with Kaye Adams (I think Maureen Child was interviewed I was asked by the BBC but got the email too late) and following on from the vote that was taken by Porty Online although it was under Dog Fouling it included views on dog access on the beach.

I raise the issue based on the following experiences over the past 12 months from January 2013 where dogs have been OFF their lead and not controlled.

- 1) My two children and I were surrounded on the Promenade near the then Indoor Bowling Centre by 4 huge dogs, all OFF lead, when the owner saw my children were extremely afraid and crying – she didn't pull them away but simply said "oh its ok they wont hurt you they're really friendly"
- 2) Childs Mini Micro Scooter on the prom was urinated on by a dog – OFF lead – 2 young owners didn't apologise but laughed
- 3) Near the public toilets (west end of Promenade) 2 dogs OFF lead came sniffing around my 2 children. Youngest child was in the buggy – and 1 dog jumped up onto the buggy. Both children were hysterical – I was really upset. Dog owner simply pulled dogs away – and walked off. It took us about 20 minutes to recover
- 4) Sunday 21 April 2013. I was on the Promenade; my husband was at the shoreline standing 1 metre away from both children. A dog OFF lead came bounding across the beach. Approached my children, jumped around, eldest child was terrified and ran into the water, dog pursued her, she fell in the water and was completely submerged, my husband went into the water to get her out but then the dog started jumping around my youngest child – my husband was in a horrible situation of trying to protect both children one of whom is underwater. The dog owner was about 40 metres away, he came running over, he was very apologetic and visibly shaken himself but my daughter was completely soaked to the skin and freezing. It was a terrible experience for us all. The afternoon was ruined and though we had planned to walk on the beach we just had to go home.
- 5) I have sat at the Beach House on the steps beside the ramp that leads onto the sand with my handbag right beside me (incidentally talking about dogs on the beach to other Portobello residents) when a dog OFF lead came along and lifted its leg on my handbag and almost urinated on my handbag fortunately I managed to chase off. The owner was 5 metres in front of the dog; he didn't see a thing and was oblivious.
- 6) Have been on the Promenade and seen a dog defecate right in front of me – the owner again 10 metres ahead – didn't see a thing – I shouted to him to come back and pick up his dogs faeces which he did.
- 7) I've been in the park at the bottom of Marlborough Street while a dog owner comes in with a dog OFF the lead, let the dog just roam around the children, eventually the dog went into the bushes (where my children also like to play) it was in there for some 10 minutes, dog then came running back to the owner and off they went. I suspect the dog must have been fouling. The owner stood at the gate – never went near the bushes if the dog did foul it was never picked up. I have seen the same man there several times but I would be afraid to approach this particular man.
- 8) Walking to Toddler Hut summer 2013 to collect my youngest child as I passed Crumbs of Portobello (Coffee/Crepe van) I was surrounded by 12 dogs – racing type dogs coming off the beach with 2 owners not 1 dog was ON a lead. It was a swarm in fact much like a farmer moving sheep down a country lane – the Promenade was completely impassable – it was quite astonishing to see.
- 9) Numerous occasions I have sat on the beach on sunny days with my children having a picnic but pestered by dogs OFF lead, I've had to lay the scooter down to stop dogs lifting their legs against it and pack food away to avoid dogs sniffing about us.
- 10) On numerous occasions I have seen 1 person to 5 or 6 dogs on all different parts of the Promenade. Dogs completely out of control – on those occasions we simply don't go on the beach but just go home.
- 11) This week while passing the Espy with my children there was a dog – a dangerous type of breed with a muzzle on – baring its teeth at us. It was horrible and I got a fright – even though it had a muzzle on it was horrible. The owners – 2 women saw us jolt in fear – one of the women started laughing at us and walked away, very bizarre behaviour.
- 12) On the issue of dog fouling – January 2013 - 5 days out of 7 days (1 week) my children's shoes, my shoes, buggy were covered in dog faeces – 4 of those days it was from being on the beach. 5 days I cleaned dog faeces off our shoes and buggy – really unpleasant.

I would say 75% of dog owners I see are responsible. Many dog owners and professional dog walkers take their dogs to the Seafield end of the beach I guess they feel there are less people and I see lots of dog owners on the Promenade and the main sections of the beach with these extendable leads and when they are near people and children they shorten the lead to control the dog and limit its movement and I really appreciate their consideration. The other 25% let their dog OFF the lead the minute they reach the Promenade. The owner is often many metres away from the dog, sometimes 40 – 50

metres, the dog runs free and the owners just don't give a damn. I think some 15% of these owners are the ones who allow their dogs defecate or conveniently walk metres ahead that that pretend they didn't see it.

The problem is that the beach is a magnet for dogs and dog walkers. There are a higher proportion of dogs on the beach than on pavements and in surrounding parks. The second problem is there is NO choice if you don't want to engage with dogs. I feel residents and children who live in Portobello and visitors to Portobello should have a choice. I don't want dogs jumping up on my clothes with dirty paws, I don't want dogs dripping saliva on my children nor do I want dogs sniffing me and my children but I can't escape because there are so many dogs OFF their lead and roaming freely around. I don't hate dogs I just don't really want to engage with them every day.

I would argue that children should be allowed the space to safely potter around and play at the shore line themselves. I don't want to stand 1 metre away from my children all the time – I want to give them space themselves on the beach to wander and find shells etc but right now I can't.

As the Edinburgh's most popular beach where last summer there must have been tens of thousands of visitors – I heard all languages in Portobello – it was real global village but after having talked to Australians and Americans about their countries control of dogs (dog designated parks in California and bans on dogs on some beaches in Australia) I do think we are quite honestly a bit backward here. Far too tolerant where dogs enjoyment is placed higher than the safety and comfort of humans.

I would like to ask Portobello Community Council to discuss this issue with a view of making bold and progressive changes that would make Portobello Beach feel safer and more pleasant for families and children.

My proposal would be as follows:

Please not it not about banning dogs from the beach but is about areas where dogs are ON and OFF leads.

West End of Beach

Dogs have full access and can be **OFF leads** from Seafield to the breaker at the building site (where Fun City amusements were demolished) before the Public Toilets

East End of Beach

Furthest section at Joppa end dogs **OFF leads**

Middle Sections of Beach

The middle sections of the sandy beach dogs allowed but they must be **ON leads**

Entire Length of Promenade Pavement

Full length dogs **ON leads**

I would further propose and suggest

- This is NOT seasonal but year long
- Position clear sign posting at the bottom of all streets leading onto the Promenade
- Signs should friendly "Your dog is welcome in this section and can be OFF it lead" as well as "Your dog is welcome on this section of beach but must be ON its lead at all times"
- I would imagine any change to the status quo would quickly come to the attention of the Evening News et al so plenty publicity would follow

Implementation of the above would make a huge difference to us as a family. I see dog walkers strolling relaxed and carefree along the beach – I wish I could feel the same! but I don't I'm always cautious.

Every week in the UK there is a story of a child either being mauled or badly bitten and scarred by a dog. Of course many incidents take place in the home and are often the family pet dog – but incidents still occur outside the home in public places and children are bitten by random dogs they don't know. Given the high number of dogs OFF their lead on Portobello Beach and the high number of young children it's simply a matter of time before there is a serious incident. That's not something I want to happen to any child and not the story I want to see on the front page of the Evening News and it will be really unfortunate that we all knew the risks and parents raised the issue but nothing was done.

I look forward to hearing the discussion

Yours sincerely

██████████