

TOUGH NEW BILL TO REPLACE 'FAILED' DANGEROUS DOGS ACT

Animal welfare organisations, veterinary professionals and local authorities today joined forces to condemn the much criticised Dangerous Dogs Act, demanding that it must be replaced by a hard-hitting new Dog Control Bill focusing on prevention rather than cure.

Existing legislation has failed to reduce the number of dog bite incidents in the UK, which have risen in the past 5 years by 79% in London and 43% nationally*. Meanwhile costs have continued to rise; it was revealed that 10 million pounds has been spent by The Metropolitan Police alone in the past 3 years from simply implementing Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act, relating to the seizure, kennelling and euthanasia of banned breeds.

The Dangerous Dogs Act Study Group (DDASG) has lobbied against the inadequacies of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 for many years and are now backing a new Dog Control Bill proposed by Lib Dem peer Lord Redesdale, which will receive its second reading in the House of Lords on Friday (5th July). This Bill would consolidate previous legislation and better protect the public by targeting the cause of dog attacks – dog owners themselves.

Lord Redesdale commented: "People deserve to feel safe around dogs and this Bill goes a long way towards protecting the public through tougher action against irresponsible dog owners. The current law has done nothing but make banned breeds and their lookalikes more appealing and created the issue of status dogs because they are a status symbol.

"Aggressive or violent dogs of any kind would be able to be brought to account with this Bill which in turn will prevent a large number of attacks by dealing with problem behaviour at the first signs of aggression rather than when an attack has taken place, as in current legislation".

If passed, the Bill will introduce major changes to current dangerous dog legislation, which is widely considered to be one of the most ineffective of government legislation ever brought into force. These changes include:

- **More emphasis on the owner's responsibilities** – the Bill supports the principle that it is the owner who has the potential to make a dog either well behaved or badly behaved. It gives authorised officers the powers to place Dog Control Notices on irresponsible owners at the first signs of dog aggression.
- **Attacks which take place on private property would also become a criminal offence** – a large number of dog attack incidents occur within the home and on private property. The Bill includes various exemptions such as being attacked by another animal, provocation, and attacks on individuals committing an offence for which they could be prosecuted.
- **Legislation will no longer be breed specific** – since the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, public money and resources have been wasted by already overstretched police authorities seizing dogs simply for being of a particular breed. Research now overwhelmingly supports the principle of 'deed not breed', and proves that genetics (breed) play only a part in the temperament of an individual dog, with environment and training having a far greater effect.

The DDASG has been working closely with Lord Redesdale in support of his Dog Control Bill and has long been calling on the government to repeal the current legislation. The Group believes that the breed specific nature of current legislation has caused it to fail, and that focusing on individual breeds has failed to prevent a large number of dog attacks, or reduced the number of Pit Bull Terriers in the UK.

DDASG spokesperson Chris Laurence, Veterinary Director of the Dogs Trust, said: "We firmly believe that the Dangerous Dogs Act needs to be overhauled to better protect the public and that a new dog control regime that emphasises responsible dog ownership should be introduced.

“The Dog Control Bill supports the principle that it is people, not the dogs themselves that make dogs dangerous. Lord Redesdale’s Bill would allow people to be better protected from dangerous dogs with tougher action taken against irresponsible dog owners.”

The Dangerous Dogs Act Study Group has also launched a petition supporting Lord Redesdale’s Dog Control Bill which already has almost 10,000 signatures. The petition can be found at <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/repeal-and-replace-the-dangerous-dogs-act.html>

ENDS

Notes to Editors

*Figures quoted from London Dangerous Dog Forum Evidence Base Research Paper and available on request.

The Dangerous Dogs Act Study Group

The Dangerous Dogs Act Study Group (DDASG) is a wide-ranging group representing animal welfare, local authorities and veterinary professional organisations which includes representation from:

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home
Blue Cross
The Mayhew Animal Home
British Veterinary Association
Dogs Trust
The Kennel Club
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Wandsworth Borough Council
Wood Green Animal Shelters

The DDASG considers that the Dangerous Dogs Act needs to be overhauled to better protect the public and that a new dog control regime which emphasises responsible dog ownership should be introduced.

Lord Redesdale’s Private Members Bill provides for the following:

- Repeal of the Dogs Act 1871, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Act 1997 including breed specific legislation

The police expend significant resources on enforcement of the Dangerous Dogs Act, with large amounts of money being spent on the seizure and kennelling of dogs simply because of their breed type - many of these dogs are returned to their owners once proved to be of good temperament. Removing breed specific legislation would allow resources to be used more effectively elsewhere, and preferably concentrated on those dogs showing unprovoked aggression.

- Introduce Dog Control Notices

The vast majority of dog attacks are a result of the irresponsible actions of dog owners, who have either not taken the time and trouble to train their dog correctly, or have indeed trained the dog to behave aggressively. Dog Control Notices will apply to all types of dog that have acted dangerously without provocation, caused an injury to another animal, caused harm, or caused a person to reasonably believe it will cause harm and aims to prevent serious incidents of aggression occurring by allowing preventative action.

- Apply to both public AND private places

A large proportion of dog attacks occur in the home and involve a dog that is known to the victim. The Dog Control Bill will make attacks that take place on private property a criminal offence. Greater responsibility is therefore placed on owners to ensure that their dogs are not out of control in any place.

Full wording of the DDASG petition:

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/repeal-and-replace-the-dangerous-dogs-act.html>

We, the undersigned, call on the government to repeal the Dogs Act 1871, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Act 1997.

We petition the Government to repeal the Dangerous Dogs Act and replace it with alternative legislation that;

- Protects the public against dogs dangerously out of control without compromising any individual dog's welfare.
- Embodies the principle of '**deed not breed**' and **opposes breed specific legislation** on the grounds that a dog's behaviour is influenced more by its environment, the training it receives and the responsibility of its owner, than it is by genetics (i.e. its breed or type).

We support the Dog Control Bill which seeks to better protect the public, place greater responsibility on dog owners and remove the huge welfare implications affecting dogs deemed to be of a certain type.