Barking dogs

A guide for owners and neighbours

This leaflet provides information and advice on how to be a responsible dog owner, and how to avoid difficulties with dogs barking excessively, and causing a disturbance to their neighbours. The council receives numerous domestic noise complaints each year and noise from barking dogs is one of the most common.

The law

Under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 noise from premises or land may be considered a statutory nuisance and local authorities can take action to stop it. If the barking continues dog owners face the prospect of appearing before a magistrates' court, and could be fined up to £5,000.

Private individuals can also take action under the act by complaint to a magistrates' court.

Dogs at home

Complaints about barking often arise because dogs are left at home alone for most of the day. Dogs will not usually bark when their owners are present, but will start when they leave. The owners may, therefore, be unaware of the problem until someone complains.

Dogs can sometimes resort to destructive behaviour, continuous barking or howling when there is no one around to stop them.

It is better not to keep a dog at home, unless there is someone there to look after it. Dogs, by nature, are very sociable animals and regard their owners as their substitute family. Some dogs may become very distressed if left alone for long periods. Barking obviously has its advantages, when drawing attention to intruders, for example. However if the barking is prolonged this can become extremely tiresome and irritating to owners, neighbours, and anyone else within earshot. Dogs that bark persistently can also suffer from tonsillitis.

What can you do

Dogs should only be left alone for short periods. Dogs get used to a routine. Provided they have been well exercised before you go out they will sleep until you come back. If you or a friend cannot exercise them regularly you may wish to employ a dog walker. Dog psychologists have developed occupational toys for dogs, which they claim can keep bored dogs amused while their owners are absent. If you have to leave your dog outside make sure its kennel is not near a neighbour's fence or another place where it will be tempted to bark (for example next to a street where people are passing).

It is also thought that leaving a radio on during the day will keep a dog occupied, particularly a station with more talking than music. Remember to put the volume at a reasonable level otherwise you may solve one nuisance but create another.

Talk to your vet. Sometimes a dog will bark because it is ill or anxious. Your vet will check for any problems or may refer you to an animal behaviourist who can suggest ways to improve your dog's behaviour. As a last resort anti-bark collars are an alternative solution. The collar is activated by the barking and releases a spray of lemon mist in front of the dog's nose. This is harmless to dogs and humans but is sufficient to distract the dog and stop it barking. These devices can quickly train a dog to stop barking. But you should consult your vet beforehand as some collars are considered unsuitable by the RSPCA.

Useful contacts

Guidance documents 'Is your dog barking too much?', and 'Constant barking can be avoided' are available from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by writing to: DEFRA, Customer Contact Unit, Eastbury House, 30 – 34 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TL or downloadable as pdf files from www.defra.gov.uk.

For information on animal behaviour and training, contact the Association of Pet, Behaviour Counsellors (APBC), PO Box 46 Worcester, WR8 9YS or see www.apbc.org.uk.

For further advice or information see
www.basingstoke.gov.uk/go/noise
email ehteam@basingstoke.gov.uk or call 01256 844844.

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