

## **Public Consultation (December 2025 – January 2026): Public Spaces Protection Orders (2026) for Stockton Town Centre & Norton Town Centre**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

#### **What does a PSPO mean?**

A Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) is an enforcement tool, under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. A PSPO aims to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in a specific area, that is having a detrimental effect to the local community's quality of life. PSPOs can contain conditions to prohibit activity which is known to occur in a certain area. PSPOs are intended to help ensure that the law-abiding majority can use and enjoy public spaces, safe from anti-social behaviour (ASB). Breach of PSPO is a criminal offence.

#### **Why does the PSPO not cover the whole council area of Stockton-on-Tees?**

The legislation states that proposals to introduce a PSPO need to meet certain legal tests; the legal tests focus on the impact that ASB is having on victims and communities. A PSPO can be made by the Council if they are satisfied on reasonable grounds that the activity or behaviour concerned, carried out, or likely to be carried out, in a public space:

- has had, or is likely to have, a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality,
- is, or is likely to be, persistent or continuing in nature,
- is, or is likely to be, unreasonable, and;
- therefore justifies the restrictions imposed.

A range of information has been assessed in drafting these Orders, and those areas which are deemed to meet the legal threshold are being consulted on. Those areas not included right now, are not deemed to meet the threshold currently.

#### **Have you consulted with local charities and support & recovery organisations about the draft Orders?**

Yes – several major support & recovery partner organisations, who already work alongside us on Operation Shield, have been consulted over the draft proposals. They will be consulted again in the new year too, with regards to how we would proportionately & compassionately implement any new Order.

### **Under the proposed PSPOs, would it be illegal to drink alcohol on the streets of Stockton & Norton Town Centres?**

The proposed Stockton & Norton Town Centre PSPOs (2026), prohibit the consumption of alcohol in public places within the PSPO zone. A person commits a criminal offence if they fail to comply with a request to cease drinking from a Police Constable, Police Community Support Officer, or Civic Enforcement Officer. Any person who consumes alcohol in an area where street drinking is prohibited could also be required to hand over any items believed to contain alcohol. If alcohol is confiscated, it can also be disposed of by the officer who confiscates it. Failing to comply with such a request to stop drinking or hand over any sealed or unsealed container of alcohol is a criminal offence. Note though, that as per Section 63 of the Act, if a person – when requested to do so – hands over their alcohol which they had been street drinking, they do not breach the Order or commit a criminal offence.

### **Can I be prosecuted or issued a Fixed Penalty Notice if a CCTV operator observes me street drinking within the PSPO zone?**

No – the legislation does not allow this to occur, as the offence is failing to comply with related requests from an authorised person enforcing the PSPO, not the act of street drinking itself. Therefore, you will only be liable for prosecution/a fine, if that CCTV operator deploys an officer to speak to you, and during the conversation, you refuse to cease drinking and/or hand over your alcohol. This applies to both Stockton and Norton. Note that under these proposals, we do expect Civic Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to deploy to all instances/public calls regarding alleged street drinking (where an exemption is not present).

### **Does the street drinking prohibition apply to premises licensed to sell alcohol?**

No, premises licensed to sell alcohol will not be impacted, nor will customers consuming alcohol on the premises.

### **What about street parties and events?**

Events within a public place which have an authorised premises license, or a Temporary Event Notice (TEN), will be exempt from the PSPO during the time for which the license is approved. A full exemptions list can be found in the draft Order. Strong PSPOs can work in harmony with areas that have an events culture – this is evidenced in other council areas nationally.

### **Why do we need a prohibition on street drinking in Stockton & Norton Town Centres?**

Excessive drinking can lead to behaviours that make people feel intimidated and unsafe. Such behaviour includes, but is not limited to: rowdy activity, noise nuisance, public urination, and littering. When these behaviours arise, we need to be able to respond decisively to prevent matters from escalating.

### **Why is the wording on the Norton Town Centre PSPO different to Stockton Town Centre?**

The PSPO evaluation carried out in 2025, found that Norton didn't have the same level of evidence as Stockton to lawfully justify certain conditions being imposed.

### **Does the PSPO apply to alleyways, residential streets, parks, car parks and shopping areas?**

Yes – a ‘public place’ is any place in which the public have access, on payment or otherwise. The PSPO will not interfere with activity conducted in private clubs or dwellings/gardens, or any licensed premises (where an exemption is present).

### **Will there be any extra police to enforce the PSPO?**

No – Police Constables and Police Community Support Officers will continue to patrol and respond to incidents as part of their day-to-day duties, but they will now be responsible for enforcing the Order too, alongside the Council. Note that allegations of breach of PSPO must only be phoned into the Council’s Civic Enforcement service, not the police.

### **Why do we need two different PSPOs, one applying to Stockton Town Centre only, and one applying to Norton Town Centre only?**

In establishing PSPOs, we must be sure the legal tests are met – this is done by gathering evidence on the issues within each area. Through evaluating the 2023 PSPO, we felt it was necessary to split the 2026 Order and revise the conditions, acknowledging that Stockton Town Centre and Norton Town Centre are different places with different concerns and issues.

### **Why is the fine amount (£) different between alcohol related breaches to the PSPO, and non-alcohol related breaches?**

Legislation dictates the difference in penalty.

### **Why have you changed the definition of begging in the 2026 Order, compared to the 2023 Order?**

The 2023 Order didn’t define begging, as the prohibition was actually against ‘aggressive begging,’ which is a higher threshold to prove. By prohibiting just ‘begging,’ and defining it as causing a person to feel ‘harassed, alarmed, or distressed,’ we can be more robust in tackling all types of begging incidents regularly experienced in both town centre areas.

### **How do I get a permit exemption for the begging prohibition?**

‘Street Collection Permits’ are either covered by central government or local licensing teams. For advice on these permits or the exemption, please contact SBC Licensing on 01642 524802 or [licensing@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@stockton.gov.uk).

### **What is ‘ASB loitering’ and why is it in your PSPO?**

The 2025 evaluation of the existing PSPO included looking at other areas across the country at how they use Orders effectively to combat a wide range of issues faced by town centres. One such condition found elsewhere, was that of prohibiting loitering and its associated ASB elements, when it causes harassment, alarm, or distress.

Examples of when this PSPO condition may be used include: cases where a person who refuses help from services causes an obstruction to a doorway repeatedly, where said doorway is used by a town centre business; help from our support services will be offered, and cooperation sought first, before this condition is enforced. It may also be applied in scenarios where a group of people are loitering and are intoxicated, spitting and swearing, causing others to feel intimidated.

### **Why do we need a PSPO to manage the use of motor vehicles (including off-road bikes, quad bikes, e-scooters and e-bikes) in communities, parks, and open spaces?**

Illegal surnon (e-bike), off-road bike, and quad bike riding, blights many of our communities, open spaces, and town centres. Members of the public should be able to walk freely along our streets and explore our open spaces without expecting to come across such vehicles. As well as being dangerous, this behaviour is anti-social and intimidating, and can often be linked to crimes such as drugs supply. For example this year, in cases at Trinity Gardens, we have linked the use of surnons (e-bikes) and off-road bikes – who drive in an anti-social manner – to the supply of controlled drugs.

### **Why do we need a PSPO for public urination and defecation in Stockton Town Centre?**

It is not acceptable for anyone to either urinate or defecate in a public place, where there is plenty of toilet provision in the area and in commercial buildings. As well as the obvious public health and environmental concerns, persons who are relieving themselves at will in public are often drunk, or under the influence of other such substances, causing others to feel intimidated. Medical conditions will be considered when investigating an alleged breach to this condition.

### **Why do we need a PSPO to manage temporary structures in Stockton Town Centre?**

Many city and town centres nationally are impacted by unauthorised encampments in green spaces. Indeed, Stockton Town Centre, specifically Trinity Gardens, has been particularly impacted by this kind of activity recently, which we have linked to general ASB, drugs supply and street drinking. We have received many complaints from nearby residents to Trinity Gardens, about the ASB associated with the tents cropping up there. This condition will allow us to challenge repeat offenders of this issue, when said offender continually refuses to comply with our reasonable requests, support from ourselves, or support from our partner agencies. This condition is only intended to keep our green spaces and the new Urban Park free from unauthorised encampments, which may attract environmental and ASB issues, whereby the persons involved refuse help with housing, addiction, cost of living, etc.. Help from our support services will be offered, and cooperation sought first, before this condition is enforced.

### **Why does Stockton Town Centre require a 'dogs on lead' and 'dog foul' condition?**

We understand that dogs need exercise and want to encourage the use of our green spaces, but it is recognised that this needs to be balanced with the rights of other people to enjoy public spaces without dogs being out of control. To clarify, there is no ban on dogs being in any place in the PSPO zone, but we will ask that you keep your dog on a lead (except when exercising your dog in Trinity Gardens). We will use this condition proportionally and seek cooperation & compliance through dialogue first, before looking at enforcement. Note that outside of the proposed PSPO zone in Stockton, there are no lawful orders preventing the exercise of dogs when off-lead in the

Borough (although there will be voluntary schemes in place at some of our parks). And finally; dog foul is not pleasant, and there are environmental and hygiene concerns over it being left in public places.

### **Under the proposals, when should I give my details to an Authorised Person?**

The proposed 2026 PSPO includes a power for an officer enforcing the order to request your name, date of birth, and current address, if they suspect you have breached any condition of the Order, or if they think you have committed ASB. These details will be stored securely in line with legislation and policy. The details will be used by us to pursue fines, prosecutions, and for the general prevention and detection of crime, as defined in legislation. Failing to provide your details when asked, or providing false details, will constitute a breach of the PSPO.

### **Why have you attached a 'dispersal order'/'direction to leave' condition to this PSPO?**

This is an innovative and effective means of 'clearing' town & city centres of persons committing ASB. As ASB alone is not a crime, we must be able to come up with new methods of combatting it – this condition is in use elsewhere nationally and has seen great success. This power will be used proportionately and applied only to the most serious and/or prolific town centre ASB offenders.

### **What will the impact of this be?**

The impact of issuing someone with a proposed PSPO Dispersal Notice could be them leaving as requested – thus ending the ASB, and/or us 'nipping the issue in the bud' before it escalates, such as preventing fights or shopliftings. A negative impact could be the person failing to disperse or returning to the area when they are not supposed to. This is a breach of the PSPO, which is a criminal offence. A police constable enforcing the order, may decide to effect an arrest for this, thus removing the person's problematic behaviour from the locality altogether. From that arrest, we may also seek court orders (e.g. a Criminal Behaviour Order) upon conviction, aimed at banning the person from certain areas for several years, and/or supporting rehabilitation. This would also apply when they are not arrested, as the breach could be used as evidence for an argument at court for a more serious sentence – or again, a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO). When using the dispersal power, officers will also ensure they signpost – where appropriate – a person to several of our great support services across Stockton Town Centre. Patrols along the borders of the zone will take place too, as to mitigate against any risk of a problem being 'pushed' elsewhere.

### **How are you going to enforce the new PSPO?**

- Under Operation Shield, patrols take place daily in Stockton Town Centre by the Council's dedicated Civic Enforcement Officers. These patrols are frequently accompanied by Cleveland Police colleagues. Officers from both the Council and Cleveland Police will be authorised to enforce the PSPO. Patrols also take place every day as part of our daily business in Norton.
- Failure to adhere to the PSPO is a criminal offence, for which someone can be prosecuted in court for. We will build up an evidential package for this, in cases of repeat offenders.
- Officers who observe PSPO breaches are also authorised to issue offenders with Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN). Payment of the FPN discharges liability to conviction for the original

offence. However, where someone repeatedly breaches the Order, we may look at court proceedings with a mind to apply for a CBO, rather than going down the FPN route