

# ***Information/Discussion Paper***

## **Social & Community Overview & Scrutiny –**

**16th October 2006**

### **Urban gull control in Cheltenham**

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

#### **1. Why has this come to scrutiny?**

- 1.1 At the request of the committee chairman.

#### **2. Summary of the Issue**

- 2.1 Cheltenham has a population of seagulls (“urban gulls”) surveyed in 2003 at 302 adult birds. They have an established population in town and cause problems with noise, fouling and aggressive behaviour. Complaints were markedly higher in summer 2006.

#### **3. Summary of evidence/information**

- 3.1 Seagulls have colonised urban areas spreading out from the Bristol Channel in recent decades. They were first observed living in Cheltenham in 1996 and since then have established a resident population, mainly in Kingsditch but also in the Lansdown/Park/College areas. This summer CBC received 30 complaints from residents, predominately in Lansdown, about being woken by early morning noise.
- 3.2 The local partnership is the Glos. Gull Action Group, where CBC has met seven times with other local councils, Hempsted tip’s waste company and ornithologists to deal with this matter. In common with other councils, CBC has used egg oiling, which sterilises eggs to prevent them hatching, to control the birds’ population growth and reduce noise disruption. This programme has treated 257 eggs over the last three years. However this does not eliminate all the problems caused by adult birds.

#### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1 Treatment is legally authorised by a general licence from Defra that permits the council to control specific pest gull species to “preserve public health or public safety”. For public health this could include risk of disease to residents from bird droppings, blockage of chimneys by nests or loss of sleep from early-morning gull noise. Public safety may be threatened by people slipping on gull fouling or being swooped on by gulls. Treatment can be by destroying eggs and nests or killing birds. The populations of both gull species of concern (Herring gulls and Lesser black-backed gulls) are in decline and are both on the amber list of birds of conservation concern.

**4.2** If CBC wishes to devote further resources to addressing urban gulls, options include:

- Increased egg oiling (budget bid submitted for £1.5k for FY 2007/08. This would increase the rental period of the cherrypicker truck from two to four days). This would further control population growth but not eliminate “dawn chorus” noise.
- Greater publicity to residents about bird proofing, responsible bird feeding and securing waste. This could be by mailshot, advisory leaflet and increased web presence. Bird proofing of properties prevents local roosting/nesting, although it is costly and mainly a displacement tool. Certain business premises in town have established gull populations on their roofs. We have no legal power to require them to do bird proofing or treatment, but can advise and assist them in them doing this work.
- Programme to cull adult birds. This would directly reduce numbers of adults. Practical considerations include the safe use of air weapons in town, access to bird nesting/roosting sites, humane killing of birds and management of local (or national) public interest. It is plausible that a “gull cull” campaign would result in a challenge to its legal validity by an animal welfare organisation. Additionally, culling birds creates a vacuum that would probably be filled by neighbouring birds relocating to Cheltenham.

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**Background Papers**

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