

# ***Information/Discussion Paper***

## **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**28 November 2016**

### **Update from the Urban Gulls Focus Group**

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 This report from the Urban Gulls Focus Group has come to Scrutiny on request.

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

- 2.1 Urban gull complaints are nuisance related – people being woken by noise in the early hours, being swooped on, attacks on pets, faeces on property (eg balconies and cars) and the fear of infectious disease. Businesses such as car show rooms and cafes with outside seating face clearing faeces daily and nesting materials can block guttering or air conditioning units.
- 2.2 Gulls are wild birds and the council does not have any statutory responsibility to deal with them. However, it is recognised that they do cause considerable disturbance to residents and the public and environmental health team receives a significant number of urban gull complaints each year from residents and businesses.
- 2.3 The budget for gull control work was initially £3500, which was increased to £5000 in 2011. The majority of the budget is spent on hiring two different sized lorry mounted platforms with baskets, to enable access to affected rooftops to treat the eggs. The budget also covers backfilling the days spent on the programme by the council's pest control officer, to ensure cover for other pest control work.
- 2.4 The budget was increased again in 2015 to £9,100, to enable the switch from oiling gulls eggs to replacing them with dummy eggs when the oil was withdrawn from sale. Replacing the eggs with dummy eggs has the same benefits as egg oiling, in that gulls are noisiest when there are hatchlings in the nest, so the noise is reduced over the summer if they don't hatch; it stops the gull population from growing and adults that fail to produce offspring at a site tend to move on in future years. Dummy egg replacement is also more effective than oil as the gulls continue to sit on them for longer, without re-laying. It is more expensive due to the cherry picker hire costs to collect the eggs back at the end of the season, hence the budget increase.
- 2.5 The Urban Gulls Focus Group was set up in 2012 and is attended by residents and councillors from the affected areas. It is used to explain what CBC does and does not do and why in relation to the problem and also what residents can do to help.
- 2.6 CBC currently carries out the annual egg replacement programme (led by the Community Protection Team); issues media releases requesting residents to report

nests and explaining measures residents can take; co-ordinates the focus group and is a member of the Severn Estuary Gulls Group, which is made up of local authorities all around the Severn and is used to compare different methods used and to learn about new methods.

- 2.7 Residents can help by reporting nests to be included in the egg replacement programme (if they can't reach them themselves); removing the nests themselves if they can reach them safely; bird proofing their properties to prevent nesting and being careful not to allow gulls access to food waste. Residents have also helped to deliver leaflets to affected areas.

### 3. Summary of evidence/information

#### 3.1 Number of eggs treated:

2007: 141

2008: 155

2009: 82

2010: 157

2011: 400 (base budget increased from £3500 to £5000).

2012 and 2013: no details

2014: 451

2015: 339 (plus 29 chicks found). Base budget increased to £9100 and switched to egg replacement.

2016: 471

### 4. How the situation could be improved further

- 4.1 The Urban Gulls Focus Group considers that a strategy is needed to deal with the problem more comprehensively, considering all of the following approaches:

- Restricting food sources
- Restricting breeding success
- Restricting nesting places
- Scaring techniques
- Culling – although it is recognised that this is challenging and controversial and not a viable option.

- 4.2 A strategy would need to be developed within the context of budget constraints, operational capacity and the need to generate income.

- 4.3 In terms of **restricting breeding success** and **restricting nesting places**, the Community Protection Team would like to consult about starting to charge for the egg replacement service and offering low cost bird proofing while the officers and cherry pickers are on the roof tops. Bird proofing offers a longer term solution. The Urban Gulls Focus Group was supportive of this approach, dependent on costs.

- 4.4 In terms of **restricting food sources** for the gulls, the Environment Agency at the most recent meeting dispelled the notion that the main food source for gulls is the landfill sites at Bishops Cleeve and Hempsted, as they had done extensive work on it

and the gulls are no longer feeding there at all. This has been monitored and has been the case since 2011 and nor have they been displaced to other sites within a 40 mile radius. There may be opportunities through the Waste and Recycling Service Redesign to help tackle the issue of food waste as a food source for gulls.

**4.5** Other suggestions include:

- Setting up a Scrutiny Task Group to develop a strategy. This would be for the Scrutiny Committee to decide, taking into account other priorities and resources to support it and the focus group already in existence.
- Seeking to increase the budget in line with other authorities such as Bath to allow for more to be done.
- Trialling the use of red and white squares as a deterrent. Anecdotal evidence shows that gulls won't land or nest on red surfaces if the shade is the same as the dot on the beak of a gull.
- Using the media and social media more to raise awareness and gather more community intelligence about the problem.

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<b>Background Papers</b>	n/a
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