

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 13th January 2020

Urban Gulls

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 paper has come to scrutiny to update on implemented measures and plans for the coming year regarding the work officers are undertaking in respect of controlling urban gulls.

2. Summary of the Issue

- 2.1 A review of urban gulls was initiated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2018 following dissatisfaction about the Council's response to controlling the urban gull population in residential areas. The Task Group set up reported in November 2018 with various recommendations to control the urban gull population in Cheltenham.
- 2.2 An update of officer actions and plans to control urban gulls in Cheltenham was given to this Committee in August 2019 and this discussion paper further updates the Committee in this respect.
- 2.3 The context of urban gull control is highlighted by the key challenges faced as a result of urban gulls, as set out by the Chartered Institution of Environmental Health and reported in the last update to this Committee. These include:
- **Scavenging and Waste Spillage** – Gulls are attracted by food waste spillages.
 - **Contaminated Objectionable Environment** – caused by gull droppings
 - **Potential Health Risk** – Birds are known to carry disease
 - **Building Damage and Additional Maintenance and Cleaning** – from nests and droppings.
 - **Food Safety and Health** – Ariel droppings can contaminate food, food processing and the home.
 - **Noise Nuisance** – including sleep deprivation.
 - **Gull Attacks** – by aggressive gulls
 - **Reputational damage** – for places where people visit and live.

3. Summary of evidence/information

3.1 The following recommendations are from the November 2018 Scrutiny Task Group report with updates on action taken to date:

- **Recommendation – Replace the food waste storage bins at the Swindon Road depot and ensure the ‘spotting compound’ is cleared frequently. Review if moving the food waste bins into the shed area has made a difference during the nesting season 2019**

Update: Food waste bins have been relocated into the shed area and the spotting compound is cleared more regularly. It is intended that gull nests in the depot area will be treated as part of the egg oiling programme this year.

- **Recommendation – Place a condition on planning consent for takeaways (in new buildings or change of use applications) that they must provide a gull proof bin outside of the premises**

Update: As reported, the Planning team advised that new food establishments tend to come about through the change of use of existing buildings, where the options to ‘design in’ gull proofing measures are limited. Secure waste and recycling storage facilities are always sought on these types of applications which should limit gull-activity. Buildings with large expanses of flat roof can attract nesting gulls they advised that they had attached conditions to schemes of that nature requiring gull-proofing measures. However, the planning department acknowledged that they would need to be careful that such conditions comply with the tests set out in the legislation so it would very much need to be dealt with on a case by case basis.

- **Recommendation – Conduct a review of the existing bins in Cheltenham to determine how many of Cheltenham’s existing bins can be retro-fitted with gull proof flaps or changes to the aperture (opening). When litter bins are due to be replaced , they are replaced with gull proof and the cabinet consider whether “Belly bins” might be value for money longer term investment.**

Update: As reported previously various types of bins are being trialled. A type of gull / animal proof bin has been rolled out for use on the High Street. These bins will prevent gulls scavenging food within bins.

- **Recommendation – Work with the BID and other business organisations to encourage traders to present their waste correctly**
- **Recommendation – CBC produce an educational leaflet aimed at town centre and commercial businesses to be distributed via email by the BID as well as other interested business organisations around January time**
- **Recommendation – Work alongside the Cheltenham BID and other businesses organisations to consider the possibility of sponsorship of gull proof litter bins**
- **Recommendation – Support Cheltenham BID to find a location for businesses in Montpellier or the town centre to trial the use of hessian sacks to store bin bags for presenting at kerbside**

Update on recommendations: An educational leaflet has been produced to include advice and important information for traders in the town centre area including the negative impacts of the gull population. This will be distributed prior to the next gull nesting season, working in partnership with the BID.

It is also hoped that the monthly newsletter circulated by Cheltenham Bid will contain educational messages for businesses in March and April, leading up to the gull nesting season

The trial use of reusable gull proof hessian sacks for rubbish containment of traditional non-gull proof plastic refuse sacks is also proposed for an area to be identified by the BID.

This trial proposal will be planned in consultation with the Council's client officer for waste management, who will help decide on their feasibility for long term use including their practicality and the associated cost implications.

- **Recommendation – Place a condition on licensing permissions for mobile catering units that they have a gull proof bin whilst trading**
- **Recommendation – Through the planning process seek to 'design out' opportunity sites for gulls to nest on new buildings, either by design of roofs or conditions seeking gull proofing**
- **Recommendation – Produce a Supplementary Planning Document (as B&NES and Gloucester City Councils have) with advice on gull proofing buildings**

Update: Relevant Council Departments have been consulted and a further update has been requested.

- **Recommendation – Use part of the increase in urban gull budget to develop a media plan that will raise awareness of the issues around gulls**

Update: Sufficient budget is available in the current financial year (2019/20) to pay for a media plan designed to create awareness of the issues around gulls. This would involve press releases, using the Council's media platform and leaflet distribution to targeted businesses and residential properties. Leaflets have been designed and officers are planning the media campaign.

- **Recommendation – Purchase a drone to survey for nests subject to necessary regulations, any unplanned for costs associated with this to be met by the increase in overall gull budget**

Update: As previously reported, the purchase and use of a drone by the Council has been ruled out due to the restrictions of use imposed within 5km of any UK airport runways and the complications of use associated with privacy impact.

Although the use of drones has been ruled out, last year a new method of initial survey using cherry pickers to identify nests prior to the commencement of the egg oiling was used for the first time. This method allowed accurate identification of nest locations, which made the oiling programme more efficient, reducing the time wasted in previous years when trying to locate nests which had been reported, but didn't actually exist.

- **Recommendation – Explore whether or not it is possible to seek an informal arrangement with Gloucestershire County Council to get roads closed more easily to allow a more nimble approach to treating nests**

Update: Road closure is subject to set procedures and timescales and officers have been informed that informal arrangements with Gloucestershire County Council are not possible.

- **Recommendation - Recognising that in the short time scale available it will not be possible to find and treat every nest. CBC to take a more proactive approach to treating nests on residential properties. Where CBC cannot safely access the property to treat the nest, give information to property owners about private contractors who may be able to undertake the work**

Update: The initial cherry picker survey, to be carried out before the commencement of the actual oiling programme, means that nest locations can be accurately located and where it will not be possible for eggs to be oiled by council operatives, owners can be informed of alternative options to treat the nests using private contractors, if they so wish. By using the cherry picker for an initial survey, owners can be informed in sufficient time for them to take their own action. This proved problematic in previous years when nests which could not be treated were only identified during the egg oiling programme, leaving insufficient time for owners to arrange for private contractors to treat the nests before the chicks hatched.

3.2 Lessons learnt:

- Egg oiling is an extremely effective method of preventing eggs hatching which breaks the two year cycle of surviving chicks returning to lay their own eggs. It is also recognised that other control initiatives should form part of the gull control strategy.
- The Council's approach to encourage self-help by commercial and residential premise owners to control the gull population is unlikely to work and although this is a discretionary service, without council intervention it is unlikely that any substantial control of the gull population would occur.
- Both the treatment of nests on commercial premises and residential property is important. A substantial amount of eggs are laid in nests on commercial

property and including these properties in the egg oiling programme helps to control the population of gulls in Cheltenham and reduce gull attacks in business areas.

A comparison survey of the amount of chicks hatching on four sample commercial buildings this financial year, forming part of the egg oiling programme in 2018/19 but not in 2019/20, has shown the importance of including commercial buildings in the egg oiling programme. An identical number of nests containing a similar number of eggs were observed each year. In 2018/19, when these properties formed part of the egg oiling programme, only 2 chicks hatched, but in 2019/20 when these properties were not included in the oiling programme, 35 chicks hatched and were seen in nests.

- Although the numbers of eggs on residential buildings are far fewer than on commercial buildings, the potential for noise nuisance is far greater in residential areas. For this reason problematic residential areas where gulls tend to nest need to form part of the egg oiling programme.

The introduction of a cherry picker survey to identify nest location prior to the egg oiling programme is important to maximise the efficiency of programme and allow inaccessible nests to be treated by private contractors employed by residential property owners.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1** For gull control In 2019/20, an extra £10k was funded above base budget from pest control income which exceeded the budgeted pest control income target. This year the pest control service continues to be highly successful and it is predicted to bring in income in excess of this year's target budget. The enforcement manager has proposed that income above pest control income target is again used to fund an expanded egg oiling programme in 2020/21, up to a maximum of £10k. This, combined with base budget (£9.4k), should then provide sufficient funds to provide a comprehensive programme to curb the gull population. This proposal has been agreed by the Director of Environment and Cabinet Member.
- 4.2** The success of the 2020/21 gull control programme and initiatives will determine the content of the emerging Strategy, including the priority actions, which will continue to be determined by budget availability.

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| Background Papers | August 2019 Overview & Scrutiny committee discussion paper / update on gulls. November 2018 Scrutiny Task Group report. |
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