

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Planning Transport and Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	15 January 2013
TITLE:	Urban Gulls
WARD:	ALL
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	
<b>List of attachments to this report: None</b>	

### **1 THE ISSUE**

1.1 The Panel has requested an update regarding action being taken to mitigate the impacts of urban gulls in Bath and North East Somerset.

### **2 RECOMMENDATION**

The Planning Transport and Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel are asked to:

2.1 Note the report and presentation

2.2 Provide any recommendations for future work having regard to the proposals identified in the MTRSP for the pest control service

### **3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The work undertaken by the Pest Control team with respect to urban gulls was estimated to cost approximately £6k in 2011/12. This includes the commissioning of a report on the size and location of the gull population, the flying of a bird of prey, an egg replacement programme for accessible roofs and Officer resourcing in dealing with customer enquiries. This work is funded by a budget of approximately £3.5k and supported by other income generation within the pest control service.

### **4 THE REPORT**

- 4.1 The Panel will be provided with a presentation which will explore the following areas:

#### **The urban gull population in Bath and North East Somerset:**

The Council has monitored the gull population using a consultant ornithologist since 1995. The most recent survey suggests that the growth of the population continues to decrease for the 3<sup>rd</sup> successive year- the current rate is 5.8%. Whilst Bath city centre has historically been the area where the population has been concentrated, there is evidence to suggest that the number of breeding pairs here is decreasing, whilst other areas outside of the centre are now experiencing increases.

#### **What are the Council's statutory obligations with respect to urban gulls including information on the legal constraints placed upon the Council?**

The Council has no statutory responsibility to deal with urban gulls, however the issue continues to have a high profile with residents and businesses.

It is often suggested that the Council could carry out a programme of culling urban gulls. Even if the legislation allowed for this, the practicalities of shooting gulls in a busy city centre which is visited by hundreds of tourists every day are such that this option is unviable. In addition, it is very unlikely that a sufficient level of culling could be achieved to make any long term impact as other birds would soon take up the vacated territories.

#### **What work has been ongoing and what has been the impact of this?**

In addition to officer time, the Council spends money on ornithologist's advice, the flying of a bird of prey prior to the breeding season and an egg replacement programme carried out under a general licence issued by Defra.

During 2012/13 there has also been greater focus on food waste containerisation and a trial of using gull-proof bags by residents in the city centre. This trial has proved successful in helping to keep the streets cleaner and many participants have commented on how the bags have helped in reducing the mess created by animals and birds trying to scavenge household waste.

The slowing of the gull population growth could suggest that these measures have collectively, over a period of time, been making a positive impact. It is also considered that the redevelopment that has taken place in the Southgate and Bath Western Riverside areas of the city have had an impact in reducing breeding pairs

in these areas due to disturbance caused by demolition and building works. Whilst however there is a general reduction, displacement of breeding pairs is now taking place outside of the city centre.

## **The future**

Unfortunately there is no simple solution to the impact of urban gulls. The methods that the Council currently employ are similar to those being used in other local authorities within the region. As this is an issue for cities and towns throughout the Severn Estuary, a more effective response may be to adopt a co-ordinated strategy involving affected local authorities. This might then mitigate the risk that interventions by one local authority to displace gulls may have a detrimental effect on surrounding local authorities.

A further possibility is to support research into finding out the location of the main food sources for gulls. This knowledge would enable limited resources to be targeted in the right places. An application for government funding for research was made in 2010 but this was unsuccessful. Don Foster MP has recently voiced an ambition for funding to come from alternative public and private sector sources.

Unless prevented by legislative changes, it is currently intended to continue the existing interventions to control and monitor the population of gulls in Bath. However these interventions could be affected in the future by the proposals within the Medium Term Service and Resources Plan savings regarding the pest control service.

Additional funding could be made available from the award recently made by the government's Weekly Collections Support Scheme (which is designed to support weekly refuse collections). Subject to Cabinet approval, c. £60K may be used to roll out the use of re-usable bags which would help prevent scavenging of food waste by gulls and reduce cleansing costs.

## **5 RISK MANAGEMENT**

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## **6 EQUALITIES**

6.1 An EqIA has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were found.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

7.1 Consultation will be carried out by way of this report.

## **8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION**

8.1 Customer Focus; Other Legal Considerations

## **9 ADVICE SOUGHT**

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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<b>Background papers</b>	None
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	