



Bath & North East Somerset Urban Gull Strategy 2016-2019



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Introduction and Background

Over recent years the UK has seen the gull population moving further inland from coastal areas setting up colonies in urban environments. Now, almost every town and city in Britain has a population of roof-nesting gulls.

It is estimated the growth rate of these urban colonies is between 13% and 20% per year, and increasing [Winsper, J 2014], although the annual increase in the B&NES gull population between 2012 and 2015 is of the order of 1% year on year [Rock, P 2015]. It takes four years for a gull to reach maturity and breed, with many returning to the nest where they were born. The birds are extremely long lived, surviving for over 30 years. Gulls like to nest in colonies and once a pair gains a foothold others follow. If they breed successfully, they will return year on year and problems can escalate rapidly.



There are two main factors which have led to this move inland by gulls; our refuse and waste both on street and in landfill which provide excellent food sources, and buildings which provide safe nesting sites away from natural predators. Gulls flourish in cities and suburban areas as they do not have any predators.



Gulls are real opportunists and will take advantage of whatever food source becomes available. If it is edible, they will eat it! Their major feeding takes place out of town and may be some distance away - principally landfill sites and green fields where they will feed on invertebrates. They move around widely and are often capable of making a round trip of 100km in search of food in only a few hours.

The Local Situation

The gull population in B&NES was last counted in Spring 2015

Ward/Location	No. of breeding pairs			
	2010	2011	2012	2015
Welton Bibby and Baron, MSN (Derelict site)	2	3	1	32
Twerton	7	4	12	20
Newbridge	65	80	90	100
Widcombe	125	125	130	140
Abbey	460	460	455	470
Kingsmead	230	275	290	295
Keynsham	24	34	46	45
Sun Chemicals, Midsomer Norton	7	-	28	29
Westmoreland	65	80	95	90
Westfield	2	13	56	50
Bathwick	15	13	20	16
Oldfield	10	10	15	10
Lansdown	2	0	1	0

[Rock, P 2015]

The Law

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is illegal to capture, injure or destroy any wild bird, or interfere with its nest or eggs. Penalties can be severe, however, the law also provides a general licence system, which allows property owners to take action against gulls nesting on buildings by destroying nests or eggs.

The licence system can only be used for the purpose of preserving public health, public safety and preventing the spread of disease and is specifically for the control of Herring, Great Black Backed and Lesser Black Backed gulls. If action is taken for any other reason, or if other species of gull are targeted, then an offence is committed.



All non-lethal methods must be considered first and only if none are thought suitable, can lethal measures then be considered.

Noise from birds or the fact that they leave droppings or open rubbish bags are not reasons under the Act and, therefore, killing or injuring birds for these reasons is an offence and offenders can be prosecuted.

Research

In 2015/16 there was a call at a national level for a “big conversation” about urban gulls and a proposed budget allocation for research into the problems. However, this was withdrawn following government reprioritisation of resources.



The substantial gaps in scientific knowledge in this field that exist to date place severe limitations on the evidence base to inform specific guidance that can be given to Local Authorities or others with a desire to mitigate the problems associated with urban gulls

Bath & North East Somerset Council propose an innovative and ambitious new community campaign to help tackle the gull problem in Bath by giving a clear steer on future intervention work.

The Council plans to work with two universities on an 18-month research project into gull behaviour. Behavioural science and psychology students from the University of the West of England and Middlesex University will map and track the behaviour of the gulls as they interact with their food sources and nesting sites.



This will include a ‘citizen science’ project involving local schools and residents who will help the project team to gather information about where gulls are eating and being fed, how they are behaving, for example if they are aggressive or noisy.

Update on recent actions

Big belly bins – installation of “Don’t feed the gull posters” on 55 bins, 10 in French, 10 in Mandarin and 35 in English

Operation Sunrise- ran in July, August and September 2015 where enforcement officers tackled businesses who did not present their waste correctly.

Communications-

- Full page story in Spring 2015 Connect magazine about how to present waste correctly in preparation for the return of the Gulls, with ongoing publicity about using food waste containers and traditional dustbins to contain waste. ‘Don’t let your business feed the Gulls’ leaflet distributed to all B&NES trade waste customers in 2014.
- ‘Feed Me and Win’ campaign to encourage residents to use the food waste recycling service, which provides a container to store food waste.
- ‘Urban gulls- how to stop them nesting on your roof’- advisory leaflet produced for householders, developers and businesses
- Ongoing door knocking, education and enforcement activities with residents to advise on presenting their waste correctly to minimise scavenging by gulls and animals.

Re-usable rubbish bags-provided to 5407 properties throughout B&NES.

Treatments- annual roof treatments of 7 City Centre buildings in B&NES ownership.

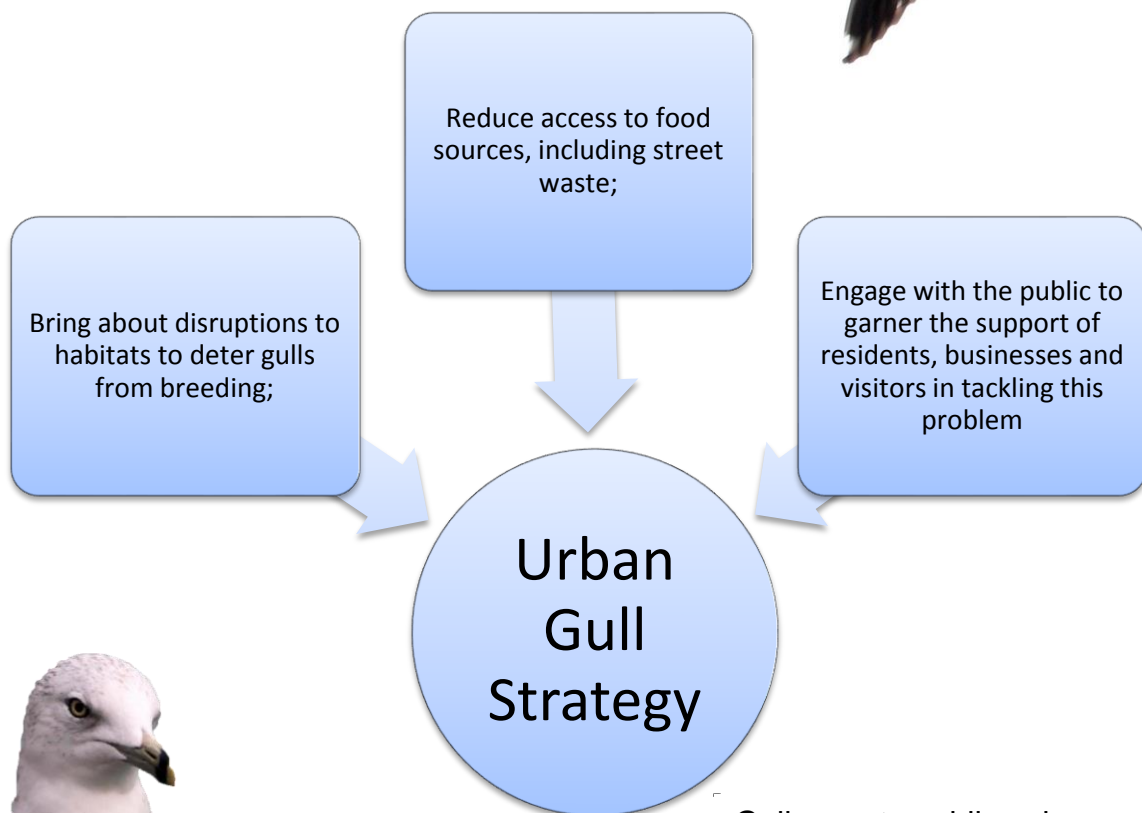


Summary:

Bath, together with the surrounding towns and villages, has experienced problems with urban gulls for at least 10 years. Whilst many theories exist as to why gulls colonise the city, it seems that the existence of tall buildings with parapets, the lack of predators and the proximity of land fill sites and other food sources, presents Bath and its surrounding locations as an attractive breeding location for gulls year after year.

This issue has been high on the agenda for the Council for some time, and mitigating action has already been achieved. But, in the absence of any statutory duty to act and the presence of diminishing budgets there is a need for a partnership approach involving local people building or business owners, tourist and public agencies, neighbouring councils and central government.

Building upon the work which has already been achieved, this strategy proposes 3 key aims to better manage the impacts of urban gulls in B&NES:



Gulls create public nuisance through noise, being aggressive during the breeding season and scavenging waste bags in their search for a food source.

A single, proven successful method for controlling the impacts of urban gulls does not exist, possibly because the issue is so complex and challenging. Of the two common species of gull, the Lesser Black-backed and the Herring Gull, the Herring Gull has protected status which means that under the General Licence issued by Defra, local authorities cannot carry out any lethal interventions. Therefore, any approach to controlling gulls must be both humane and multi-dimensional to bring about improvements for residents, businesses and visitors.

The objectives underpinning these aims inform our action plan:

Confirming the evidence base:

In order to evaluate the success of measures, the gull population must be monitored to identify areas where breeding is increasing, so that resources can be appropriately targeted. More work is required to understand gull behaviour and how disruption techniques to habitats can help mitigate their impact on residents and businesses.

KEY ACTIONS:

Work in partnership with Universities of the West of England and Middlesex on a Behavioural Mapping exercise and a Citizen Science Project to better understand the behaviour of gulls and how we can use effective interventions against them.

A public reporting webpage will be created to gather intelligence

Effective management of waste:

The operation of waste collection services can make a key contribution to reducing gulls access to food sources. The Council will review ways to maximise the proportion of waste which is recycled, reused or composted and reduce the proportion of waste, particularly food waste, which is sent to landfill. It will also explore ways of minimising litter following waste collections.

KEY ACTIONS:

Continue to educate residents and businesses on waste and recycling procedures and how to present waste correctly to minimise its attraction to gulls.
Promote the use of food recycling, traditional dustbins and gull proof sacks (where provided).
6 month programme - education and enforcement programme for businesses in relation to waste

Providing effective treatments:

A control method which can legitimately be delivered under the terms of the General Licence is replacement of gull eggs with plastic ones. The Council has pursued this method for some years however there is a need to encourage greater uptake of treatments. A pilot programme of egg and nest removal can be trialed.

KEY ACTIONS:

In 2016/17 we will run a pilot programme of nest removal in targeted locations.

The Council will continue to lead by example by treating its own property portfolio.

Securing engagement of our key stakeholders:

Secure engagement of the key stakeholders prior to the main breeding season

Provide key messages on what can and can't be done

Create a 'call for action' for residents/businesses/visitors to become involved, help us to collect data and bring about improvements

KEY ACTIONS:

Plan and deliver a strengthened and consistent communications campaign which supports the citizen science project.

Creating the right property design:

The Council will continue to engage with the planning process to ensure that higher risk developments are designed to prevent creating new nesting opportunities for urban gulls

KEY ACTION:

Reinforce messages to developers about the need to design out potential nesting sites.

Lobbying Central Government:

There is no national policy or strategy on how to mitigate the impacts of gulls. Local authorities are allocating diminishing budgets to deal with gulls in the absence of a co-ordinated, national strategy. There is a need to lobby central government to get this issue properly raised and addressed.

KEY ACTIONS:

Linking with local MPs
Membership of the Severn Estuary Gull Action Group