

## **Seagulls - statement to Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel - 10 Oct 22**

I speak for the Bath Alliance for Transport and Public Realm, as our current Seagull situation is a Public Realm problem for this World Heritage City. I support the Council's efforts to lessen the birds' impact. Aled Williams, from whom we shall hear shortly, has been doing his very best to serve the people of Bath, but under the current draconian restrictions, there is a limit to what he can do. Gull numbers will continue to rise unless there is a change of policy nationally.

Bath, in common with an increasing number of inland towns, suffers from an infestation of seagulls in the breeding season. These cause damage to the Georgian buildings, and affect the health of our citizens due to their prolific faeces (often infected) and disturbance to citizens' sleep in the early mornings. Many people believe they come here for food, scattered on the pavements, but in reality they began nesting in towns long before they began feeding in them. Georgian rooftops provide perfect nesting sites: sheltered, and immune from predators. The adult birds can range 50 miles to find food, though if we leave rations for them in our public realm they will certainly take advantage.

Their numbers are still increasing. Natural England does not accept this, despite ample scientific evidence, much of it collated by the noted biologist and scientific author, Linda Gamlin, who lives near St James's Square (and we're very lucky to have her).

Until 2019, the 'General Licence' allowed eggs of herring gulls and lesser black-backed gulls to be removed or treated by Local Authorities, at their discretion. The current 'Organizational Licence', as granted to BANES, drastically curtails the number of eggs that can be prevented from hatching. It also requires Councils to justify each action on a specific health-risk basis. The gull team at Natural England, despite having no medical expertise, decides what constitutes a health risk, and has set the bar very high. Across the country, urban gull numbers are rocketing as a result. So impractical and ineffective is this procedure, that the Council in Gloucester (one of the places most affected) has refused to have anything to do with it.

Accordingly, Linda has been campaigning specifically for 'roof-nesting gulls' of the two pest species to be put back on the General Licence. This is a simple decision that DEFRA could make, putting an end to all Natural England's red tape.

On the bright side, I can report that our MP, Wera Hobhouse, has been campaigning to have DEFRA acknowledge that these gulls are not Endangered Species, and to have them better controlled. She has joined with her fellow MPs in a host of other historic places, similarly affected, including Gloucester, Worcester, Devizes, York, Cheltenham, Canterbury and others, to lobby the DEFRA Secretary of State. Some progress is now being made.