

Statement on Urban Gulls in the City of Bath
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I first moved to Bath in 1997 and have witnessed the increasing number of gulls in the city and their increasingly aggressive behaviour. I have had a sandwich snatched from my hand, drawing blood, I have been hit on the head by a gull whilst walking, and I have witnessed a gull take ducklings from the canal.

I speak as an individual but also represent a gull action group of the Bath Riverside residents' association, which represents the interests of hundreds of residents.

I moved to the Riverside development early last year but was not prepared for the serious impact that these creatures have upon me and many other residents. Similarly to last year, from March through until very recently, I was awoken every morning from around 3am by an extraordinary amount of noise and was unable to get back to sleep.

This sustained period of around four hours of sleep a night leaves me unable to function properly in a social and professional capacity. With a demanding job and often working from home, it has been impossible to escape the situation and I have had to seek refuge with friends and family.

I know, from other residents, that the collective anxiety of the Riverside community grows as each nesting season approaches and the torture of sleep deprivation begins.

I have been divebombed by gulls on my balcony and have endured large quantities of their waste being deposited onto my property.

In small numbers you might consider these issues to be manageable, so it is important to put them into context. The former Homebase site neighbours the Riverside development and, with the building demolished, gulls returned to the same location and nested on the ground. I recently walked past and counted in excess of forty juvenile gulls.

This year on the roof of the building adjacent to me, at the level of my windows and at a distance of no more than 50 feet, there were often ten or twelve adult gulls. There were often four or five on my balcony, two on the parapet above me, and three or four on a second neighbouring building. Given the proximity and numbers, I leave it to you to consider the consequences.

My health and wellbeing have suffered as a result of lack of sleep, anxiety, and being unable to concentrate with windows open even in the stifling heat of summer.

I have been very grateful for the support of Gordon Dugan, the council's Gull Officer, who has been attentive and reasonable. Gordon has collected evidence from a number of residents on the development and was able to agree some targeted nest removals with Natural England.

I contacted Natural England to ask about the protection afforded to gulls, their impact upon human health, and the rationale behind a general licencing framework that does not appear to consider local issues and impacts. Their response referred me to general licence terms and the protection of gulls as species of birds. On repeating my specific questions I was advised that they would provide no further information and would not respond to further correspondence from me.

I also contacted Wera Hobhouse who has in turn contacted Natural England, but unfortunately I understand that the position in which our MP finds herself is similar to mine.

I recently contacted the UK Health Security Agency to ask for their advice on the impact of urban gulls upon human health. It is obvious that a pragmatic approach is needed with input from multiple organisations to provide a proper framework for sustaining and controlling the gull population.

We are fortunate on the Riverside development to have a supportive management company which is, through engagement with Gordon Dugan to devise a strategy, implementing a series of proofing measures on key buildings on the development. However, the issue and impacts extend far beyond these buildings.

I note that the council is reviewing rubbish collections in the city centre and, as something within its control, this is welcome. However, it does not provide a silver bullet solution. As an individual I am tired and frustrated, and I am hugely disappointed not to have been heard by the public body that regulates this issue.