

REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
20TH FEBRUARY 2006

REPORT ON: SEAGULL/PIGEON SURVEY

REPORT BY: HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & TRADING STANDARDS

REPORT NO: 126-2006

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the committee of the outcome of a survey of residents /commercial businesses in Dundee city centre about the seagull/pigeon issue and potential further action.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the findings of the survey contained within Appendix 1 of this report and approves the implementation of the proposals detailed in paragraph 6.6 to be led by the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The expenditure required for implementing the above recommendations can be met from the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department's revenue budget.
- 3.2 The cost of the provision of the bird proofing and other bird control measures will be charged to those owners that instruct the works. Efforts will be made to source any additional costs through existing or new funding bodies.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report addresses the key sustainability themes:
- Pollution is limited to levels at which natural systems can cope
 - Health is protected by creating a safe, clean, pleasant environment
 - The diversity of nature is valued and protected

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None

6.0 REPORT

- 6.1 In July 2004 the Scottish Executive issued details of a research project to identify the reasons behind the growing number of gulls in Scotland's towns and cities. Evidence in Dundee during 2003/04 confirmed that complaints were increasing regarding litter problems, noise, fouling, damage to property and a number of reports of gulls intimidating or attacking members of the public.
- 6.2 The research project was undertaken by British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Scotland and the Centre for Conservation Science at the University of Stirling. The aim of the research was to:
- Examine why gulls are attracted to towns and cities
 - Identify where they are most prevalent
 - Review efficiency of control measures and

- Produce guidelines on how best to manage the problem

Although a formal report with recommendations was expected to be put before Scottish Ministers in March 2005, the results have not yet been published.

- 6.3 The Council's Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department (EHTS) actively participated in the working group that was formed to assist this project along with six other local authorities experiencing problems with urban gulls. While waiting on the results of the research project, EHTS decided to undertake its own survey within the confines of Dundee City Centre, stretching from St Andrews Street to Union Street and extending to Dundee High School to the north.
- 6.4 The results of this survey can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. The main findings of the survey were:
- A significant majority of the respondents consider Dundee to have a serious problem with seagulls and pigeons in its city centre
 - Two thirds of the concerns related to refuse issues and fouling
 - Other significant concerns related to gull noise (17%) and swooping /aggressive behaviour (13%)
 - A significant number of respondents felt that the problem had increased in the last 5 years
 - 42% of the respondents were aware that some gulls are protected and recognition was given that gulls are a natural inhabitant of coastal areas
 - 71% of the respondents were unaware of the bird proofing measures that have been carried out. Recognition was given that the new wheelie bins in the city centre had made a big improvement to refuse caused by seagulls tearing open bags
 - Properties were identified where seagulls/pigeons were perceived to be a problem
 - 36% of the respondents claimed to have seen persons deliberately feeding seagulls/pigeons at various locations in the city centre
 - 56% of the respondents were interested in the Council's Pest Control Service undertaking a survey of their property and providing an estimate for regular egg/nest removal in 2006
- 6.5 Under the Wildlife Countryside Act 1981, local authorities are issued with a general licence for killing or taking of certain named species of wild birds under restricted conditions including preserving public health or public safety or air safety. All other measures of control should be taken prior to killing.
- 6.6 The further actions that are proposed to tackle this complex problem are:
- liaise with the Waste Management Department with regard to improving the refuse collection procedures within the city centre
 - encourage city centre traders particularly food premises to dispose of waste food in the appropriate manner and at the correct time
 - Signs instructing the public not to feed the pigeons have proved to be very successful in City Square. Examine the potential of extending this initiative to other areas and raise awareness in schools
 - Examine possible sanctions to be taken against persistent bird feeders who deliberately feed large quantities of seeds, grain, bread, peanuts etc to wild birds in public areas
 - Pest Control Service to approach owners of affected properties with regard the provision of bird proofing and other control measures
 - Identify and apply for funding to undertake bird proofing and other control measures in targeted areas where the main problems exist

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Chief Executive
Depute Chief Executive (Support Services)

Depute Chief Executive (Finance)
Director of Economic Development
Head of Waste Management

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None

Albert Oswald
Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards

8th February 2006

Seagull/Pigeon Survey Results Dundee City Centre 2005

**Environmental Health and
Trading Standards Department**

BACKGROUND

- In 2004 the Scottish Executive commissioned a £20,000 research project to identify the reasons behind the growing number of gulls in Scotland's towns and cities to:-
 - examine why gulls are attracted to towns and cities;
 - identify where they are most prevalent;
 - review the efficiency of control measures;
 - produce guidelines on how best to manage the problem.

The results haven't been published.

- In Dundee the gull population appears to have been rising leading to problems in relation to litter, noise, fouling, damage to property and reports of people being attacked or intimidated.
- Surprisingly, relatively few complaints are received so we decided to carry out our own research to establish a baseline.

METHODOLOGY

- Complete a number of forms by face to face interview where time permits to boost return rate.
- Distribution commenced during week beginning 22 August 2005.
- Actual number of questionnaires put out was 500.
- Number of questionnaires returned was 185.
- Return rate = 37%.

AIMS AND OBJECTIONS

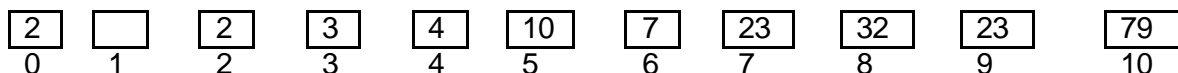
- Raise awareness/improve communications about bird problems.
- Gauge strength of feeling amongst people who live and work in the City Centre.
- Highlight good bird proofing work that has been done in the City Centre.
- Gather intelligence about "hot spots" to target resources next year.
- To identify buildings for pilot proofing on a trial basis.
- Liaise with Waste Management where there are perceived to be refuse problems.
- Product guidelines for waste presentation techniques.
- Prepare a report and publish findings on Council web site.

Question 1

To what extent do you consider Dundee to be affected by seagulls/pigeons in the City Centre?

No problem

Serious Problem



Main Concerns

Extensive noise problems affecting quality of life/causing sleepless nights.

Damage to property - blocked gutterings causing serious leaks/car paintwork affected by droppings.

Degradation of City Centre - refuse bags torn open and litter strewn around streets and pavements. Beautiful buildings and windows stained by seagull and pigeon excrement.

Public safety issues - people have been hit by excrement, had food snatched or been attacked. Low flying seagulls/pigeons could result in pedestrians avoiding the area or lead to road traffic accidents.

Question 2

If you consider that there is a problem, what are your concerns?

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 169 | Bags of refuse burst open causing litter/attracting vermin (22%) |
| 89 | Poor litter management of open air eating areas/take-away establishments (11%) |
| 129 | Noise from gulls (17%) |
| 119 | Pigeons roosting/creating mess by fouling (droppings) (15%) |
| 145 | Seagulls roosting/cause mess by fouling (droppings) (19%) |
| 105 | Seagulls swooping/aggressive behaviour (13%) |
| 24 | Other, please specify (3%) |

Selected further comments

Structural damage to buildings and car paintwork.

Seagulls and pigeons enter closes and stairwells when entrance doors are left ajar.

Blocked gutterings.

Wiper blades ripped off a car.

Danger on the roads because they don't move for traffic.

Multiple attacks on people.

Nesting on window sills/pecking windows.

Refuse bags burst open.

Anti-roost netting required on flats.

Worst seagull noise seems to coincide with take-aways closing at 3 am.

People are still feeding the birds in the town centre!

Public discarding kebabs, pizza and chips.

Birds also feed on vomit.

Seagulls steal food from people sitting outside.

Pigeons are a pest, carry disease, look unhealthy and we wouldn't put up with similar amounts of rats.

Bin lorries drive past bags of refuse at 1700 hrs knowing these will be burst open during the night.

Question 3

Are the problems described in Question 2 seasonal in nature?

YES (31%)

DON'T KNOW (5%)

NO (59%)

UNSURE (1%)

BOTH (1%)

DID NOT ANSWER (3%)

Consensus from comments

The litter problem is year round.

Cars affected by seagull mess all year.

Pigeons continual.

Seagull noise worse during breeding/nesting season (May - September).

Question 4

Do you think these problems have changed in the last 5 years?

Increased

Decreased

No Change

N/A

Don't Know

Did Not Answer/Unsure

Selected comments

The last three years have been truly terrible.

Question 5

Have you made a complaint to Dundee City Council about seagulls/pigeons in the past 5 years?

YES

NO

DON'T KNOW

Did not answer

POSSIBLY

Yes Comments

Numerous to no avail - nothing done.

No Comments

Didn't know we could.

But I meant to on a daily basis.

Not yet but I intend to.

Waste of time.

General Comments

Due to the fact that I assumed seagulls to be a protected species and that culling by the Council would not occur.

Others have told me nothing can be done.

Question 6

Are you aware of any bird proofing measures that have been carried out in the City Centre?

YES

NO

DID NOT ANSWER

Yes Comments

New wheelie bins have recently been provided all over the City Centre.

No feeding policy in City Square/Don't feed the pigeons signs.

Spikes to stop pigeons landing on ledges etc., in City Square and on Overgate Centre.

Netting on certain roofs.

Bird proof lids on some litter bins.

No Comments

Rubbish is not removed promptly enough and no penalties appear to be in place for businesses who repeatedly leave refuse bags on the street. These outlets should be targeted and penalties imposed.

Some effort is made to remove eggs. However, if you do this the seagulls just lay again.

Question 7

Are you aware of any pigeon/seagull nesting sites on your own or adjacent building(s)?

YES

NO

DON'T KNOW

A list of addresses which are perceived to have a problem has been compiled.

Question 8

Are you aware of any person(s) who deliberately feed seagulls/pigeons?

YES

NO

Did not answer

Comments

Old man outside the Overgate/City Churches in the mornings - big bag of nuts.

At night in front of Clydesdale bank and beside Admiral Duncan statue.

Two women regularly feed birds at corner in Murraygate.

A man goes round at night with two large bags of bird feed spreading it all over the town centre.

Some residents of Candle Lane - remonstrations makes no difference.

At least two men feed bird seed to gulls in Murraygate 6.30 - 9.30 pm.

When night clubs close people throw chips for them.

Eating establishments deliberately put food waste out in insecure containers despite seeing results.

Question 9

Were you aware that gulls are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which, except under the terms of a general licence issued by the Scottish Executive, makes it illegal to intentionally injure or kill any gull, or to take, damage or destroy an active nest or its contents?

YES

NO

Yes Comments

Ridiculous.

Unfortunately - how can you apply for a licence?

Can the general public do this.

No Comments

But I am sorely tempted to break the law when I have not been able to sleep for nights on end!

But town seagulls are arguably different "species" and we should be lobbying for a relaxation of the regulations.

Question 10

Did you know that Dundee City Council's Pest control Unit can in some situations carry out bird treatment work such as removal of eggs under the terms of this licence?

YES

NO

Yes Comments

Serious approach required

No Comments

What situations?

Totally ineffective, what's the point of removing eggs when food supply and nesting sites mean breeding seems to be all year round. Gulls continue to use sites and lay eggs.

Question 11

Would you be interested in Dundee City Council's Pest Control Unit doing a survey of your building and providing an estimate for regular egg/nest removal in 2006?

104	YES
70	NO
1	MAYBE
1	N/A
1	DON'T KNOW
8	DID NOT ANSWER

Yes Comments

Extremely interested.
Asked countless times but no response from Housing Association.
Owners would have to give permission.

No Comment

This is a public health issue and such pest control should be free for all living and working and visiting the city.

Question 12 - Additional Comments

- Do something about people throwing down rubbish/not using litter bins.
- Resolve the refuse problems and they'll have nothing to eat.
- More closed bins and more signs to make people aware of the problem.
- Find a way of stopping the noise of the gulls.
- Gulls and pigeons have a right to live out a natural life but a balance must be struck.
- In favour of a nest/egg removal regime for long term improvement.
- Street bins in city centre have helped - less bags being ripped open.
- Food refuse should be sure from birds, not in cheap black bags.
- Although currently illegal surely a seagull kill annually would be beneficial.
- Find predators that kill seagulls and pigeons.

Selected additional points

Dundee's problem no worse than other cities.

The wheelie bins on the street have made a big improvement.

Bags that are put on the pavement are still getting burst.

The noise is constant through the night as well as day.

We don't have a problem with pigeons - they can't get near us for the seagulls.

Provide more litter bins, particularly outside takeaways.

I accept that seagulls are a fact of life in a coastal area and have no wish to see them culled.

Thanks for the new wheelie bins for householders they were much needed.

A campaign by the Council to highlight the issues and health related aspects of too many birds so that people are more careful of litter dropping, etc.

People in city centre feeding birds - could CCTV not be used to catch them?

Ask residents not to put their bins out at night because disco goers kick them over and seagulls pick through the rubbish.

Takeaway premises should put refuse in wheelie bins not in plastic bags.

The birds are very big and menacing to people and are not deterred by crowds of shoppers. Someone is going to get hurt.

Feeding seagulls or pigeons should attract fixed penalty anti-social notices and these should be issued by either wardens or police.

Last week a hawk caught a pigeon in my garden. Maybe introducing a few birds of prey might help.

Empty bins on Saturday/Sunday because by Monday it's all over the pavement.

Please find predators that kill seagulls and pigeons.

Please, please is there some way of stopping the noise of gulls in the early hours of the morning?

Profile of Respondents

Gender

MALE

FEMALE

DID NOT ANSWER

Survey Findings

YES

NO

DID NOT ANSWER

Respondent's Occupancy Status

OWNER (DOMESTIC)

OCCUPIER (DOMESTIC)

OWNER (COMMERCIAL)

OCCUPIER (COMMERCIAL)

OTHER

DID NOT ANSWER

Proposed Action

1. Prepare a Report to Environmental Services and Sustainability Committee with recommendations which will focus on the following areas:
 - Since 33% of respondents considered refuse to be a problem - review waste management measures in city centre;
 - Take action to stop bird feeders in city centre;
 - Ask Pest Control Team to approach owners of buildings where there is perceived to be a problem to undertake pilot trial.
2. Seek funding to undertake appropriate bird proofing measures throughout the city.