



# Northumberland

## County Council

### ASHINGTON AND BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

DATE: 12 SEPTEMBER 2018

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Response to Seagull Nuisance in Blyth

Report of Paul Johnston, Executive Director of Place

Cabinet Member : Councillor John Riddle, Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Resilience

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#### **Purpose of report:**

To provide information for consideration by the Local Area Council following receipt of a petition from residents' concerning alleged nuisance caused by seagulls.

#### **Recommendations:**

That Members note the content of the report and the proposals to provide advice to local residents and to work with the Town Council to explore the provision of signage and potential improvements to waste disposal facilities.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan:**

**This report is relevant to the 'Living' and Enjoying' priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021**

#### **Key issues**

1. A petition has been received by the council, signed by fifty eight residents, stating that "We, the undersigned find the local population of seagulls a nuisance and a health hazard and request that the Council take steps to alleviate them from our roof"
2. Each year during the nesting and breeding season there are many problems attributed to the number of seagulls in many of Northumberland's coastal communities.
3. Those problems caused include noise, increased aggression, dirt and damage to property.
4. Seagulls are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which restricts the action that can be taken by councils, businesses and individual householders to reduce the nuisance.

## **Background**

1. In July this year Mrs Sheila Weir wrote to Councillor Eileen Cartie about the nuisance caused by seagulls nesting on her roof and screeching from first light at 03:00 in the summer.
2. Mrs Weir enclosed a petition that had been signed by herself and fifty seven other residents stating that "We, the undersigned find the local population of seagulls a nuisance and a health hazard and request that the Council take steps to alleviate them from our roof"
3. The addresses of those who had signed the petition included Briarwood Road, Woodbine Terrace, Bader Court, Bader House, Woodside, Brinkburn Avenue and Nixon Terrace, all in Blyth.
4. The RSPB identifies two factors that encourage gulls to nest in urban areas rather than in natural surroundings, namely, abundant sources of food and safe, accessible, predator-free nesting sites on rooftops.
5. In considering the petition, whilst not specifying what steps the petitioners would wish the council to take, three possible options have been considered as a means of addressing the problem.

## **Culling and Nest Removal**

6. Seagulls are classed as wild birds and are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Section 1 of which creates an offence prohibiting killing, injuring or taking any wild bird; taking, damaging or destroying the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or taking or destroying an egg of any wild bird.
7. Section 16 of the Act outlines a licensing scheme which would allow a person to carry out the acts prohibited by Section 1 for certain specified purposes such as preserving public health or public or air safety; or for the purpose of preventing the spread of disease.
8. A licence can only be granted by the Secretary of State and is subject to a number of restrictions including a requirement to satisfy himself that there is no other satisfactory solution.
9. It is clear that a licence would only be granted under exceptional circumstances and it is unlikely that the situation in Blyth would be regarded as exceptional as it is replicated in most coastal towns across the country. There is the added matter that if the current seagull population were culled a replacement population would soon move in.

10. It is also important to note that any culling of birds or animals is very likely to be subject to significant criticism from both members of the public and organisations such as the RSPB.

### **Target Hardening**

11. A national pest control company was commissioned to report on gull issues in Berwick in 2012. That report listed similar problems to those identified by Mrs Weir and her neighbours. It discussed a number of solutions, including 'target-hardening', that is making the nesting sites inaccessible and uncomfortable using, for example, netting or bird spikes.
12. Target hardening of this nature should take place after the nesting season to comply with the Wildlife and Countryside Act and to protect the premises for future years.
13. It is likely however that this approach would simply displace the problem to another nearby location but would not remove or reduce the overall number of gulls within Blyth as a whole.
14. Notwithstanding, as the responsibility to undertake and pay for the works would be the responsibility of the owner of the premises, individual owner occupiers may wish to pursue this option.

### **Advice and Signage**

15. The report, previously referred to, also commented upon access to food suggesting more resistant bins and better control of food waste by residents and businesses may have a positive impact. It advised that "The public will require constant reminders not to feed the birds and keep all litter and waste covered to reduce the attraction. This should be done with signage in prominent areas and reminders in local publications." This would be supported by campaigns by the authority and items in local media.

### **Conclusion**

17. Whilst acknowledging the potential problems associated with seagulls and the fact that they may be exacerbated during the nesting and breeding season, the ability of the council to take direct action to reduce those issues are limited.
18. Further, whilst the petition relates to Blyth, the concerns raised are not unique to Northumberland with similar problems being experienced in many other coastal communities and therefore any action must be capable of being replicated elsewhere in the county.
19. It is therefore proposed that any action is limited to the provision of advice to local residents and working with the Town Council to promote measures to reduce

access to food and where appropriate improved waste disposal facilities, either as part of a planned replacement programme or in targeted areas.

20. As a guide, advice in public places could be provided by specific signage stating, 'Do not feed the seagulls. Please dispose of all food waste in the bins provided or take it home with you.' An indicative cost for 2000 adhesive signs would be in the region of £812.
21. It may be that Town and Parish Councils with similar concerns could contribute to the cost of such signs and local volunteers could put them in place.
22. Seasonal press releases carrying similar messages could also be carried in local papers or local publications.

### **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	No change is recommended
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	The Authority cannot financially support target hardening of private residences in Blyth without expecting further identical requests from residents in all coastal towns and villages. There would be costs associated with any 'target hardening' of NCC properties. 2000 lamppost stickers would cost £812. Town and Parish Councils in affected areas could be approached to fund this purchase and to provide volunteers to put the stickers in place.
<b>Legal</b>	N/A
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources</b>	N/A
<b>Property</b>	Some 'target hardening' to NCC owned property may be necessary if giving rise to nesting leading to statutory nuisance
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	N/A
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	N/A
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	N/A

<b>Carbon reduction</b>	N/A
<b>Wards</b>	All wards affected by nuisance caused by seagulls

**Background papers:**

Petition from Mrs Weir

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	initials
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Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	
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