

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Executive – 18 March 2020

### Gull Control Programme in Taunton Town Centre 2020

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Federica Smith-Roberts

Report Author: Simon Moon – Case Manager

#### 1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

1.1 To advise on proposals to implement a gull control programme in Taunton Town Centre during the 2020 gull breeding season.

#### 2. Recommendations

2.1 Executive resolve to implement a gull control programme in Taunton Town Centre to reduce the associated noise nuisance and aggressive behaviour along with long-term population reduction.

#### 3. Risk Assessment

Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall
Risk: The Council is challenged on the legality of the gull control programme as gulls are a protected species.	2	2	4
Mitigation: A professional pest control company with a specific license obtained from Natural England to undertake gull control will be used.			
Risk: Negative PR/welfare issues associated with gull control	2	2	4
Mitigation: The programme will be publicised and communicated to businesses before commencement and the most appropriate humane control method used.			

## Risk Scoring Matrix

<b>Likelihood</b>	5	Very Likely	Low (5)	Medium (10)	High (15)	Very High (20)	Very High (25)
	4	Likely	Low (4)	Medium (8)	Medium (12)	High (16)	Very High (20)
	3	Feasible	Low (3)	Low (6)	Medium (9)	Medium (12)	High (15)
	2	Slight	Low (2)	Low (4)	Low (6)	Medium (8)	Medium (10)
	1	Very Unlikely	Low (1)	Low (2)	Low (3)	Low (4)	Low (5)
			1	2	3	4	5
			Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Catastrophic

<b>Impact</b>		
<b>Likelihood of risk occurring</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Chance of occurrence</b>
1. Very Unlikely	May occur in exceptional circumstances	< 10%
2. Slight	Is unlikely to, but could occur at some time	10 – 25%
3. Feasible	Fairly likely to occur at same time	25 – 50%
4. Likely	Likely to occur within the next 1-2 years, or occurs occasionally	50 – 75%
5. Very Likely	Regular occurrence (daily / weekly / monthly)	> 75%

## 4. Background and Full details of the Report

4.1 An increase in customer complaints (noise and physical attacks) lead to the first year of gull control in the town centre in 2006. A private pest control company was instructed to oil eggs over the summer breeding period (April-July) using paraffin oil. Unfortunately over 40% of the oiled eggs hatched. A more successful control method was researched and an in-house method using imitation plastic eggs was introduced in 2007. This method is humane, nuisance is significantly reduced (noise/aggressive behaviour), breeding pairs of gulls in the treated areas decrease each year and the eggs are re-usable for the next season (cost effective).

4.2 Egg replacement was used in the town centre between 2007 – 2013 (carried out in-house with an officer and 2 pest control officers). During that period over 1000 eggs were removed, the breeding population decreased (moved to the industrialised outskirts of town) and importantly nuisance complaints decreased. Significant effort in liaising with food businesses was undertaken during this period (educating re: refuse disposal and storage) as was gaining the necessary permissions to access roof tops – over 50 roof tops were treated.

4.3 Shooting/trapping is ineffective (only kills a few gulls), is inhumane due to risk of injury only and obviously dangerous in an urban environment. Using birds of prey is very expensive and is only effective for a short period of time. Falcons were flown in Taunton for a day's trial and they got 'mobbed' by gulls and refused to fly.

4.4 It is proposed to put in place a gull control programme for the 2020 breeding season using a local pest control company with specialist knowledge of gulls, utilise in-house expertise to implement, monitor and verify the effectiveness of programme and to use plastic replacement eggs as control method (humane and effective) to reduce noise and aggression of the gulls. This will reduce the immediate gull population within the town centre area and decrease population numbers in the long term. Direct intervention is only way to reduce breeding pairs in town centre for an immediate impact, reduced public nuisance whilst creating a safer environment for the public.

#### 4.5 Main points:

- Undertake colony survey in town centre to establish current number of breeding pairs. This is undertaken in April and establishes specific roof tops to target within the town centre and the species split (we have 2 types of gull species in Taunton). Undertaking 'before and after gull numbers' each year will establish and verify effectiveness of control method. This can be carried out with existing in-house expertise.
- Employ pest control firm to undertake actual egg removal/replacement. Mitigates the need for training of officers, insurance issues, provision of risk assessments/H&S requirements etc. The pest control firm would need to apply and hold a specific licence for this work. These licences are issued by Natural England and would be the responsibility of the company to obtain, not the Council. The programme would start at the end of April until the end of June, dependant on weather conditions. Actual site visits/replacing the eggs would occur at three weekly intervals (typical gull incubation is 28+ days). 2 Operatives undertaking risk assessments (working at height), site suitability/access - **£880+vat**. 2 operatives to undertake 4 planned visits to remove/replace eggs - **£3490+vat**.
- The Council to purchase its own stock of plastic eggs to re-use each year (300 – cost **£390+vat** trade price).
- Timescale/Officer time to manage/oversee this project – estimated at one day per week during the breeding season. Cost saving using in-house expertise (£2k). Total cost - **£4760+vat** (£5712).

4.6 Quotation from local Pest Control Company is included in Appendix A, a recent academic study highlighting health concerns to humans from gulls is included in Appendix B and relevant photographs in Appendix C.

## 5. Links to Corporate Strategy

5.1 A link can be made to the priority theme of environment and economy. Specifically, it links to objective 5, enhancing public spaces, by providing a safer environment for the public.

## 6. Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 The plastic eggs are re-useable and considered a one-off cost. The cost of employing a local pest control company will reduce in subsequent years as the risk assessments/site suitability/access will have been undertaken in Year 1. An Officer to manage and oversee the gull control programme is estimated at one day per week during the breeding season.

## 7. Legal Implications

7.1 Gulls are protected under the Wildlife Countryside Act 1981. A specific licence issued by Natural England will need to be obtained by the pest control company to undertake this work (Licence to kill or take wild birds to preserve public health or public safety (GL35)).

## **8. Climate and Sustainability Implications**

8.1 These recommendations will help to counteract the natural increase in gull populations due to climate change (a decrease in migration due to rising temperatures) and improve the immediate urban environment in the town centre with regards to noise and aggression from gulls.

## **9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

9.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report however the recommendations aim to protect the general safety of the public in the town centre.

## **10. Equality and Diversity Implications**

10.1 There are no implications for the main characteristics outlined by the Equalities Act.

## **11. Social Value Implications**

11.1 A local specialist Pest Control Company will be employed.

## **12. Partnership Implications**

12.1 Positive engagement with local town centre businesses and working relationship with a local pest control company.

## **13. Health and Wellbeing Implications**

The preservation of public health and safety for town centre users.

## **14. Asset Management Implications**

None.

## **15. Data Protection Implications**

None.

## **16. Consultation Implications**

Not applicable.

## **17. Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)**

Not applicable.

**Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Executive – Yes – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020**
- **Full Council – No**

**Reporting Frequency:      Once only**

**List of Appendices**

Appendix A	Quotation for Pest Control Company
Appendix B	Academic study on health concerns for humans
Appendix C	Photographs

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