

PIGEON CONTROL: NEWCASTLE TOWN CENTRE

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Portfolio: Environment & Recycling

Ward(s) affected: Town Centre

Purpose of the Report

To confirm current measures, and propose further action to control pigeon numbers within the town centre.

Recommendations

- (a) That the authority continues to limit available food for pigeons within the town centre through street cleansing and attempts to change residents' behaviour through education, and where appropriate the issuing of littering fixed penalty notices.**
- (b) That works to proof council buildings should continue, and that traders be encouraged to check their buildings and plant to ensure they are not harbouring birds**
- (c) That through the Town Centre Partnership traders support for lethal control is gauged, and an indication obtained as to whether they would be willing to provide treatment sites, independently commission controls, or financially support lethal controls coordinated by the authority**

Reasons

Control requires long-term support of residents, traders, and sustained cleansing and enforcement by the council. No single element will provide a solution, and unless commitment can be obtained to continue actions for at least 12 months, little impact will be seen.

1. Background

- 1.1 Pigeon numbers within the town centre have steadily risen over the last five years since lethal controls have ceased.
- 1.2 Complaints from both individual residents, and also from businesses and landlords are now increasing.
- 1.3 We are currently attempting to control numbers through: encouraging town centre businesses to correctly maintain and proof their buildings; requesting traders display signs and discourage their customers from intentionally feeding town centre pigeons; and by regular street cleansing, and litter enforcement actions. We will continue these actions but are now seeking Members views on additional controls.

2. Issues

- 2.1 Pigeon control is an emotive issue. Some residents enjoy feeding birds in the town centre, whilst others are intimidated by the birds, or concerned about the levels of fouling which can make pavements slippery and seats unusable.

- 2.2 When raised the topic prompts considerable public discussion, and media interest. Control can prompt action by wildlife campaigners.
- 2.3 A variety of options are available to dissuade birds or reduce pigeon numbers.
- 2.4 Any action attempted is unlikely to have an immediate effect, and several weeks of constant work will be required before there is any noticeable reduction in bird numbers. Controls only have short term effect and so would need to be sustained.

3. **Options Considered**

Effective pigeon control is likely to require three elements.

3.1 **Reduce Food Sources**

Pigeons are attracted to our town centre by the availability of food. Birds will feed on fast food dropped inadvertently by shoppers. However there are a growing number of residents who intentionally separate parts of their meal for the birds, and other residents who specifically purchase food items, including bird seed, specifically to throw to the birds.

- 3.1.1 Persons depositing food intentionally can be considered to be littering, and enforcement action is possible, including the issue of fixed penalty notices (S.87 Environmental Protection Act 1990). However as many residents may not associate bird feeding with littering it would be prudent for the authority to heavily promote its intention to issue penalties for bird feeding, and possible erect signage, to mitigate any possible appeals to penalties.
- 3.1.2 The authority must also continue to ensure that litter bins are emptied frequently, and that the area is swept/litter picked regularly.
- 3.1.3 Traders should also be encouraged to discourage bird feeding. Practical steps could range from displaying signs, to declining to sell where they consider the purchaser intends to feed birds in the town centre.
- 3.1.4 The authority has the option to designate specific feeding areas. This approach enables residents who derive pleasure from feeding birds to continue to do so. Dependent upon demand for this it may be possible to identify a site. However, it must be noted that if a feeding site is close to the town centre it is likely that bird numbers in near by areas will remain high. Increasing bird numbers in the feeding site will potentially result in damage to planting, and nearby buildings. High pigeon numbers in an area will reduce the number of other native birds in that locality. Any feeding area will inevitably require enhanced cleansing, and possibly rodent control measures.

3.2 **Remove Roosting/Nesting/Perching Locations**

Our surveys suggest that there are relatively few locations in the town centre where birds nest and roost overnight. Where possible we have already taken action to reduce these. Many buildings in the town centre already have bird proofing (including the Guildhall), and works are ongoing at sites such as The Midway car park to tackle roosting.

- 3.2.1 There may however be additional sites we have not been able to survey, and businesses should be encouraged to check their roof tops, and plant, to ensure that these are not harbouring birds.
- 3.2.2 Proofing is relatively expensive. There are costs associated with maintaining the proofing, and may be additional upkeep costs for buildings where access to carry out repairs may be

more difficult due to netting etc. Whilst the authority has, and will continue to encourage businesses to add proofing measures, in most cases it can not compel them to take action.

3.2.3 The authority is currently looking at how it can dissuade birds from perching on street lightings and hanging baskets.

3.2.4 Proofing works will only ever have a limited effect. Proofing some buildings is impractical, and there will always remain other structures, including trees, where birds may perch.

3.3 Lethal Controls

3.3.1 If bird numbers continue to increase lethal controls may need to be considered. Control measures include shooting and cage trapping.

3.3.2 Lethal control requires specialist services, and the majority of authorities used a specialist contractor for such works.

3.3.3 The controls possible depend on the level of support from traders, as in most cases access to roof tops will be required.

3.3.4 To be effective works need to be sustained. Where cage traps are in use they need to be checked every 24hours.

3.3.5 An initial 12 months pilot project for the town centre has been costed at £6,000

3.3.6 Traders could also individually or collectively commission such works themselves, independently of the authority.

4. Proposal

4.1 The authority proposes to continue its current action to remove litter and discourage littering.

4.2 It aims to educate residents of the problems encouraging pigeons causes, and to confirm that it may issue fixed penalty notices for bird feeding in the future.

4.3 We will attempt to establish if there is a demand to designate a bird feeding area close to the town.

4.4 Through traders groups we will continue to encourage correct maintenance of buildings, and proofing works where appropriate.

4.5 We will attempt to identify trader support for lethal controls, establish those willing to provide treatment sites, and the likelihood that they will either commission works independently of the council, or be willing to contribute to the council's costs if it coordinated lethal controls

5. Reasons for Preferred Solution

5.1 Control requires long-term support of residents, traders, and sustained cleansing and enforcement by the council.

5.2 No single element will provide a solution, and unless commitment can be obtained to continue actions for at least 12 months, little impact will be seen.

4. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Pigeon control aligns with the councils stated priority to maintain clean and safe public places.

5. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 5.1 Pigeon control is legally sanctioned under a general licence issued by DEFRA. The authority is not obliged to act.
- 5.2 It needs to be shown that the works are necessary for public health and public safety, and that controls are not in response to costs (e.g. not to prevent damage to buildings, or specifically reduce street cleansing costs).
- 5.3 Those engaged in control works would need to demonstrate high levels of health and safety, and appropriate animal welfare standards.
- 5.4 The authority has no power to compel traders to control pigeons, and any funding requested would be voluntary.

6. **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 No issues have been identified

7. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 The estimated cost of pigeon control work within the town centre, delivered by a specialist contractor, is £6,000 per annum. There is currently no budget for undertaking this work.
- 7.2 In addition the authority will need to field enquiries and complaints from its residents, and liaise with traders.
- 7.3 Administering the recovery of any voluntary contribution from traders is likely to be complex
- 7.4 Should a decision be made to utilise its own staff to deliver controls, a commitment of approximately 0.2 of a full time pest control officer is required. With associated costs this represents £5,500. This would provide weekday controls only. Delivering this work in-house would reduce the amount other tasks the service could deliver, with a corresponding reduction in income.

8. **Major Risks**

- 8.1 There is a risk that controls may not be supported by residents or traders. If traders are unwilling to provide access to suitable control locations no action will be possible.
- 8.2 There is a reputation risk to the council, and its services if controls are not delivered professionally, and do not represent value for money.
- 8.3 Controls have a number of associated safety risks, and person engaged delivering the controls may be injured (e.g. fall from height) or assaulted.

9. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

- 9.1 Any controls delivered would have only a limited, and local effect on pigeon populations. There is no risk to non-target wildlife.

9.2 Whilst controls may require additional journeys to be made to the treatment site, the treatment itself is non-polluting.

10. **Key Decision Information**

10.2 Town centre pigeon control is not considered a key decision.

11. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

There are no relevant previous resolutions which should influence the matter.

12. **List of Appendices**

None