

# Agenda Item 14

Executive Board

30 April 2008

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## Control of seagulls and pigeons

### Summary

A review of options for the control of seagulls and pigeons in East Devon Towns. Recommendations for a two year programme to control the growth of pigeon and seagull populations.

### Recommendation

**That the Head of Environmental Health and Health Equalities be authorised in principle to implement a two-year programme of bird control measures in Seaton, Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth and Axminster starting in April 2009 in order to control increasing populations of sea gulls (Herring Gulls) and Feral Pigeons subject to securing a 50% contribution of costs from the respective Town Councils.**

#### a) Reasons for Recommendation

In March 2006 the Council considered this issue and decided that it ought to be reviewed in two years (March 2008). In response to numerous complaints, the Council's present pest control contractor has been asked to conduct a survey and to review the previous advice given to the council and to provide suggestions for possible action to address complaints about nuisance being caused.

#### b) Alternative Options

1. To do nothing and allow the seagull and pigeon populations continue to grow into whatever numbers can be sustained locally. This is likely to result in an increase in the number of complaints.
2. To consider large scale culling, proofing and deterrent exercises to significantly reduce current populations. It is suggested that this would be largely impractical and involve enormous costs. It would also be viewed by many as unnecessary and would possibly contravene the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

#### c) Risk Considerations

The success of any actions, such as those recommended here, would be dependent on the continuing effective management of litter and refuse in the towns.

#### d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

##### **Positive Impact Overall**

Safe Environment.

Clean Environment.

Excellent Customer Service.

Inspirational Council

These are described in the report and amount to a commitment to expenditure of the order of £80,000 to £90,000 over a two year period. The District Council has not previously made any allocation of funds for this. It is suggested that as gull or pigeon control is not a statutory duty on the Council that this work be subject to securing a 50% contribution from respective Town Councils.

**e) Date for Review of Decision**

March 2010

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Members have considered, on a number of occasions, problems associated with urban gulls and their control. A presentation by a leading expert to the Overview Committee in November 2006 confirmed that this was a national and growing problem which required the government to take a lead on devising effective control measures. Representations were made to the government following this meeting but the responses merely referred to existing powers and indicated that there were no plans to carry out further research.
- 1.2 The Council continues to receive a steady stream of complaints about gulls and pigeons and callers have been advised of the measures which the Council has taken to date particularly centring on the removal of easy food sources.
- 1.3 The Neighbourhood Assessments carried out in Axminster, Seaton, Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth confirmed the concerns that many residents have.
- 1.4 The Council's pest control contractor (Rentokil Pest Control) has recently conducted a survey and made recommendations for action in controlling herring gull and feral pigeon populations in Seaton, Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth and Axminster. They visited these towns in February 2008 to observe where pest birds were living, nesting, feeding and breeding and have produced a report suggesting appropriate measures that the Council may wish to take.
- 1.5 We are aware of course that, anecdotally at least, these birds are a popular feature of our towns. However, we do feel that there is a need to respond to the legitimate concerns of residents who are suffering as a result of their presence in ever increasing numbers. We feel that, on balance, this recommendation is a good compromise. This is not a seagull cull, rather it is suggesting steps to prevent further growth of the problem and to bring the situation under control whilst retaining the presence of a reasonable and sustainable number of birds.

2. Control measures

- 2.1 The findings have been summarised below and are explained in more detail in the relevant appendices:

I. Axminster – see appendix A

There is a “common flock” of feral pigeons in the town centre that causes problems because of fouling. A trapping exercise is suggested to reduce numbers.

## II. Seaton – see appendix B

There is a problem with gulls causing nuisance because of noise, fouling and their aggressive behaviour towards people. There are a number of breeding and nesting sites in the town and the suggestion is to disrupt their presence in the town with a programme of nest and egg removal.

## III. Sidmouth – see appendix C

Similar to Seaton but it has been noted that Sidmouth has a larger number of smaller, inaccessible nesting sites in gutters and behind parapet walls. The contractor has recommended the use of a 'cherry-picker' to gain access to sites for the purposes of nest and egg removal.

## IV Budleigh Salterton – see appendix D

The gull problem here appears to be localised and although there may be other smaller sites, only one major nesting site has been identified so far, that being the Rolle flats on the High Street. Contractors are proposing to interrupt egg laying and incubation by 3-weekly visits between April and September.

## V. Exmouth – see appendix E

There are numerous sites and problems with both pigeons and gulls in Exmouth. The contractor is proposing a programme of trapping for pigeons and nest and egg disruption for gulls.

### 3. Additional Matters

3.1 EDDC to issue all residents with bins and make sure all bins are seagull proofed etc  
Also more advertising and education etc

3.2 Although a link has yet to be proven with feral pigeons, Gulls and other pest birds, members of the public are becoming increasingly concerned with those risks surrounding Avian Flu, and the build up of any dead birds / debris.

3.3 Rentokil Pest Control have agreed to work in partnership with EDDC to continue to manage pest issues within its boundaries and too continually review existing procedures and programs so as to best provide viable solutions to pest bird infestation.

3.4 New methods of control will be brought to the attention of EDDC for review as and when they become available.

3.5 All costs within this report are estimates and are approximate. A final site survey and exact quotation for any or all works instructed will be obtained by officers prior to commencement.

3.6 Awareness raising and promotional activities to be implemented

### 4 Legal considerations

4.1 The contractor will require consent from the owner or occupier of any business or residential property to carry out treatment on their property i.e. their roof. The Council would make it clear that it is the responsibility of the contractor to obtain all necessary consents prior to commencement of any works.

4.2 The Council is satisfied that the contractor will act in accordance with the law in general and in particular, will comply with any licence issued under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. However, a copy of any such a licence shall be provided to the Council and works shall not commence until said licence has been approved by the Head of Legal and Member Services.

4.3 The contractor is expected to comply with all relevant health and safety legislation in accordance with their own policies that were submitted to the Council and approved as part of the tendering process for award of the contract in 2007.

5. Costs

#### 5.1. Feral Pigeons in Axminster and Exmouth

##### Initial Six Week Job

- The **estimated** cost (subject to a site survey) to carry out the above pigeon trapping program with one technician attending the site over the course of a six week period would amount to **£2571.26 + VAT** and includes all materials and equipment, but excludes any form of access equipment that may be required.

##### Four Times per Year Program

- The **estimated** cost ( subject to a site survey) to carry out the above pigeon trapping program with one technician attending the site over the course of a four week period, four times per year, would amount to **£5957.51 + VAT** and includes all materials and equipment, but excludes any form of access equipment that may be required.

#### 5.2 Seaton (Gulls)

- The **estimated** cost for gull works would be **£6465.27 + vat**, based upon eight visits to the town by two technicians, each visit lasting 1 working day, visiting up to ten properties.
- Access would require no specialist equipment.
- Access to all properties would be available upon the same day.

#### 5.3 Sidmouth (Gulls)

##### With Access Equipment

- The **estimated** cost for these works would be **£7539.00 + vat**, based upon four visits to the town by two technicians, each visit lasting 1 working day. (Split over two mornings)
- Access would be via a lorry mounted cherry picker.
- Access to all properties would be available upon the same day.

##### Without Access Equipment

- The **estimated** cost for these works would be **£3352.44 + vat**, based upon eight visits to the town by two technicians, each visit lasting 1/2 working day, visiting up to 10 properties.
- Access would require no specialist equipment.
- Access to all properties would be available upon the same day.

#### 5.4 Budleigh Salterton (Gulls)

- The **estimated** cost for these works would be **£1462.44 + vat**, based upon eight visits to the town by two technicians, each visit lasting 1.5 hours, visiting up to 2 properties.

- Access would require no specialist equipment.
- Access to all properties would be available upon the same day.

#### 5.5 Exmouth (Gulls)

- The **estimated** cost for these works would be **£12,871.32 + vat**, based upon eight visits to the town by two technicians, each visit lasting 2 working days, visiting up to twenty properties.
- Access would require no specialist equipment.
- Access to all properties would be available upon the chosen day.

#### 5.6 Promotional and awareness raising activities

- A series of events, particularly on sea fronts to raise awareness of the problems associated with feeding birds - c£1500

5.7 In view of the fact that there is no legal duty on the Council to carry out bird control it is suggested that, if the control measures are approved, the cost be shared with the relevant Town Council

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#### Legal Implications

Contractual issues are commented upon in the report.

#### Financial Implications

There has been no provision made in the 2008/09 revenue budget for this programme

#### Consultation on Reports to the Executive

#### Background Papers

- Executive Board Minutes, 15 March 2006
- Proposal letter from Rentokil Pest Control.

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Andrew Ennis  
Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection)

Executive Board  
30 April 2008

**Axminster**

Feral pigeons have been active within the town for many years and use various areas of the many historical and town centre buildings for nesting, roosting and daytime perching.

This habituation of the pest birds has resulted in a common flock, which due to their fierce territorial nature will be difficult to move on. This could be achieved by totally denying them access to all existing and likely vantage points upon the affected areas. An extremely costly proposal, alternatively, a town centre trapping program can be implemented to reduce existing flock size and maintain it at a far more manageable level going forward.

The town centre is also beginning to experience gull problems with many individuals currently moving into the town, this situation will need to be monitored to ensure it can be kept under control.

**Recommended options:**

- That a town centre pigeon trapping program is undertaken to reduce existing flock size.
- Trapping sites would be located out of site from the public and residents and which provide a safe access for the technicians to the rooftops to be used.
- The more trapping locations used the higher the success rate of each program.
- The sites would be pre-baited for a period of two weeks with a further 4 weeks of trapping to occur after this.
- This would be done on an initial, one off, six week job basis with the activity monitored after the program to determine the frequency of any future trapping programs.
- Historically this would result in a four times per year, four week trapping program being carried out to maintain the reduction in numbers and prevent territorial nature within the birds.
- This kind of work can be controversial to some residents as well as staff within any premises upon which the trapping sites were located, they would have to be carefully chosen to minimise this likelihood but also to maintain optimum trapping potential.

**Seaton**

Within Seaton town centre many of the large flat roof areas are already experiencing gulls using them as nesting and breeding/courtship sites; it is because of this activity that the noisy and aggressive behaviour of the pest bird's starts and the protectiveness of the birds is brought into extremely close proximity with residents and members of the public.

Whilst some residents and commercial properties are already carrying out nest and egg removal programs and many have had proofing measures installed, the gull population has remained and more than likely increased (although Rentokil has carried out no long term study of this)

Whilst egg and nest removal can limit the increase in pest bird population it does not deter the real problems associated with the birds, that is the noise, it has been shown in some recent studies, that in historical nesting sites, egg replacement (with fake eggs) or oiling is far more successful as this deters the birds from relaying.

Birds on the nest are quieter than those having to re-lay and/or re-nest.

**Recommended options:**

- Carry out a program of nest / egg removal from new nesting locations and egg replacement within established nesting sites.
- This would be dependant upon rooftop access and accessibility as well as co-operation from residents and commercial property managers/owners.
- A team of two men would visit each site within the town every 3 weeks (to interrupt egg laying/incubation periods 23/27days) during the breeding period (April to September) and carry out nest/egg removal from new sites and egg replacement at existing sites.

**Sidmouth**

One of the main factors influencing the prevention of nesting sites and the control of gulls is accessibility, flat roofs are easily accessible whereas one off nesting sites in gutters and/or behind parapet walls are not, often in town centres such as this there is no access at all other than to use a lorry mounted cherry picker with a swing boom and to carry out searches and treatment methods during the breeding season.

To also carry out periodical nest inspections throughout the streets in the town centre to either replace eggs with fakes or remove the nests entirely.

Within Sidmouth town centre this would be the recommendation. This would be dependant upon resident consent and also accessibility.

All nesting sites would be recorded for year on year analysis

**Recommended options:**

- Carry out a series of nest/egg removal from those premises adjacent to the main streets.

**With Access Equipment**

- A team of two men would visit each site within the town every 6 weeks (to minimise disruption during the busy summer season) during the breeding period (April to September) and carry out nest/egg removal from new sites.
- This would be carried out via a lorry mounted cherry picker and strictly dependant upon resident and commercial property owner permission.
- The program would be carried out early morning with prior warning given to all premises to be actioned.
- A full list of the premises would be put together by EDDC prior to the works being carried out.

**Without Access Equipment**

- Easily accessible (no specialist access equipment needed) nesting sites can be treated as for Seaton.
- A team of two men would visit each site within the town every 3 weeks (to interrupt egg laying/incubation periods 23/27days) during the breeding period (April to September) and carry out nest/egg removal from new sites and egg replacement at existing sites.

**Budleigh Salterton**

Budleigh Salterton appears to have only one major roof top nesting site being The Rolle, on the High Street, there are probably individual cases close by, but this roof seems to contain the majority of the towns breeding pairs.

**Recommended options:**

- Easily accessible (no specialist access equipment needed) nesting sites can be treated
- A team of two men would visit each site within the town every 3 weeks (to interrupt egg laying/incubation periods 23/27days) during the breeding period (April to September) and carry out nest/egg removal from new sites and egg replacement at existing sites.

**Exmouth**

The Town of Exmouth is different again from all the other towns previously referred to. Due to its sheer size and complexity (access to rooftops) it would become a far too great an undertaking for the Council to provide a gull program on this scale. Quite literally this would be a full time position within the town.

A partnership approach between EDDC and Rentokil to provide preferential;

- Proofing Recommendations
- Nest/Egg Removal
- Egg Replacement
- Gull Awareness campaigns

These can be complemented by a Council funded egg replacement scheme during the breeding period if access is unrestricted and safe.

It must be pointed out that all these methods discussed so far for the control of gulls are to limit the future growth of any chosen population, they may have little or no affect upon reducing any current population size.

This can only be done by significantly reducing the availability of nesting locations either at building planning stage, by designing them out of buildings and from rooftops, or by installing approved methods of proofing to deny the pest bird access.

Further to this it is imperative that EDDC make a concerted effort to reduce the availability of foodstuffs to the pest birds and to alert the residents and public within the towns of the efforts being undertaken and to welcome their support and participation within any chosen scheme.

Any actions would need to be in conjunction with the management of refuse in the subject towns.

**Recommended options for Pigeons:**

- It is recommended that a town centre pigeon trapping program is undertaken to reduce existing flock size.
- First of all trapping sites would be located out of site from the public and residents and which provide a safe access for the technicians to the rooftops to be used.
- The more trapping locations used the higher the success rate of each program.
- The sites would be pre-baited for a period of two weeks with a further 4 weeks of trapping to occur after this.
- This would be done on an initial, one off, six week job basis with the activity monitored after the program to determine the frequency of any future trapping programs.
- Historically this would result in a four times per year, four week trapping program being carried out to maintain the reduction in numbers and prevent territorial nature within the birds.
- This kind of work can be controversial to some residents as well as staff within any premises upon which the trapping sites were located, they would have to be carefully chosen to minimise this likelihood but also to maintain optimum trapping potential.

### **Recommended options for Gulls:**

- Further consultation will have to be made between EDDC and Rentokil before a full program of events and costings can be put together
- Within Exmouth it would be recommended to carry out a program of nest / egg removal from new nesting locations and egg replacement within established nesting sites.
- This would be dependant upon rooftop access and accessibility as well as co-operation from residents and commercial property managers/owners.
- A team of two men would visit each site within the town every 3 weeks (to interrupt egg laying/incubation periods 23/27days) during the breeding period (April to September) and carry out nest/egg removal from new sites and egg replacement at existing sites.