

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 13 SEPTEMBER 2006

REVIEW OF URBAN GULLS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT IN SCOTLAND A REPORT TO THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Report by Executive Director Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise members of the report commissioned by the Scottish Executive on the Review of Urban Gulls and their management in Scotland.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The presence of large colonies of urban gulls in towns and cities is increasingly being flagged up as a problem. The problems reported include the removal of litter from bins and bags, mess from droppings, noise and aggressive behaviour towards the public.
- 2.2 Following a debate in the Scottish Parliament on 07 November 2002 the Deputy Minister for the Environment and Rural Development undertook to look at the problem of urban gulls with a view to producing best practice guidance for Scottish Local Authorities on the management of urban gulls.
- 2.3 As a result of this debate the Deputy Minister instructed the Scottish Executive to commission a report on the management of urban gulls from BTO Scotland & Centre for Conservation Sciences, School of Biological & Environmental Sciences, University of Stirling. A copy of this report has now been published and a copy is available in the members information point.
- 2.4 Members will also recall that the issues relating to urban gulls were debated by this committee at a meeting on the 28 May 2003. At that time it was noted that no resources were available to deal with the problem and that a working group should be established.

3 RESEARCH AIMS

- 3.3 The primary aim of the research was to provide the Scottish Executive with a comprehensive review on the issue of Urban Gulls. Prior to this report no single comprehensive piece of work had been assembled addressing all the issues.
- 3.4 The research team was tasked;

- To produce a comprehensive scientific review of current knowledge of the ecology of urban gulls, why they are attracted to Scottish towns and the relevant key issues and research areas.
- To identify locations throughout Scotland where urban gulls are or are not perceived as a problem (including the extent of the current information on local population sizes and trends and its scientific rigor)
- To review current legislation and powers, how these are used currently through out Scotland, and their perceived effectiveness.
- To identify management practices in operation currently in Scotland and elsewhere, review scientific evidence for their success or failure, and contrast their strengths and weaknesses in specific contexts and
- To propose possible solutions (advise on standard best practice guidance) and highlight areas where further research is likely to be required.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 To produce the report BTO carried out desk research / literature reviews and consultations with every Local Authority and Airport in Scotland.
- 4.2 East Ayrshire Council willingly participated in this research and are mentioned throughout the report. There is particular mention of the Wellpark area of Kilmarnock.

5. FINDINGS

- 5.1 The report addresses each of the 5 project aims in depth and a copy of the report is available for scrutiny in the members lounge.
- 5.2 The major area of interest for East Ayrshire Council is the section on possible solutions to mitigate urban gull problems.
- 5.3 The report focuses on five types of mitigating techniques which include;
- Non lethal disturbance
 - Manipulating of nesting areas
 - Manipulation of food sources
 - Restriction of breeding success and
 - Removal of adult birds
- 5.4 The reports authors conclude that;
- “we note that all of the potential mitigation measures mentioned have associated practical, financial and ethical difficulties. For these

reasons, prevention must always be better than cure: any practical measures that deter gulls from nesting in urban environments in the first place should be a preferred option in areas that currently do not have problems with urban gulls. These might include consideration of specific building designs that do not favour gulls, or where possible, planning by local authorities to site any essential buildings that might attract nesting gulls (such as industrial areas) away from residential area in which gulls might be perceived problematic”

- 5.3 The authors also conclude that a further four high priority studies in the field of urban gulls would be required to successfully mitigate their effect.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Gulls, are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This makes it illegal to intentionally injure or kill any gull or take, damage or destroy an active nest.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council previously considered the matter and effectively agreed to take no action at that time.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 It is felt that, arising from this report , that the Scottish Executive should now commission additional research to allow them to put together a comprehensive best practice guide for local authorities which would ensure best value through focusing resources on effective control measures.

- 9.2 Similarly the Scottish Executive should also make funds available to local authorities for gull control measures.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 It is recommended that the Committee

- (i) Maintain the Councils current approach to the management of urban gulls in East Ayrshire as the Scottish Executive Report doesn't advance any new courses of effective action.
- (ii) Agree that the Chair of Community Services to write to the Minister for the Environment and Rural Development supporting

the additional studies and request resources be made available to the Council for gull control measures.

- (iii) Otherwise note the contents of this report

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WS/JC

22 August 2006

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Natural Scotland Scottish Executive – Review of Urban Gulls and their Management in Scotland.

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