



Report to: Cabinet, 14th February 2017

Report of: Councillor Joy Squires, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources

Subject: INVESTMENT IN GULL CONTROL

1. Recommendation

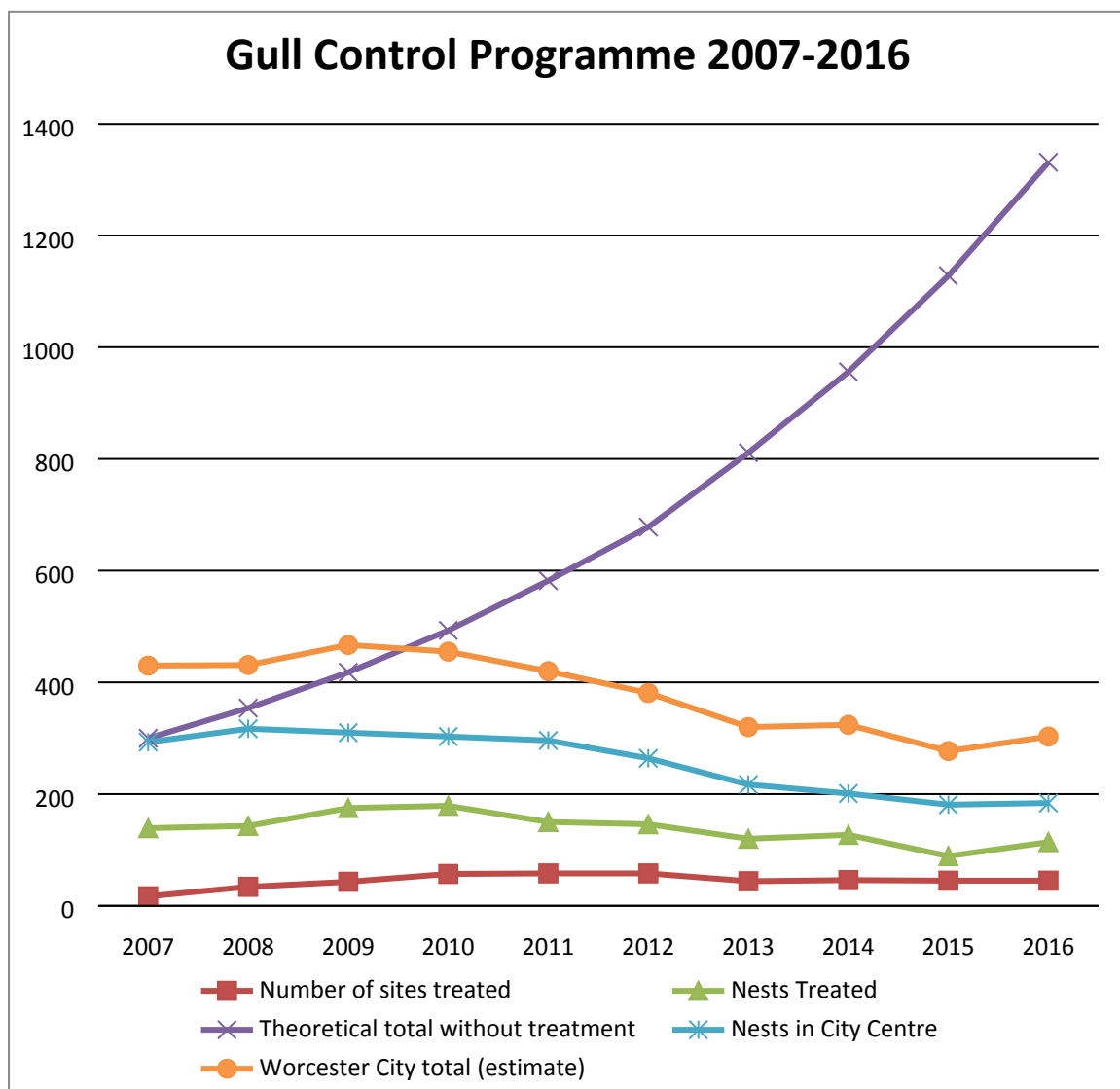
- 1.1 That Cabinet approve an additional budget of £15k to support action to mitigate adverse effects of Gulls in the City as proposed within this report;**
- 1.2 That Cabinet delegate authority to agree the detailed implementation of the proposals to the Deputy Director, Cleaner and Greener Service Delivery; and**
- 1.3 That Cabinet recommends that officers report progress to members via the proposed Environment Committee.**

2. Background

- 2.1 Gulls have been an increasingly common sight in many towns and cities for the past 20 years or more. Over this time they have moved inland away from their traditional coastal habitats and colonised urban areas including Worcester.
- 2.2 These urban areas provide relatively warm and predator free nesting sites, with ready access to plentiful food sources at land fill sites, agricultural land and from urban food litter.
- 2.3 There are two species of urban gull that are found in the City; Herring Gulls and the slightly smaller Lesser Black-backed Gulls.
- 2.4 Both species begin mating in April and nest building from early May, and favour secluded roof tops which are plentiful in urban areas. Gulls usually lay two to three eggs from early May. They tend to nest in colonies and once roof-nesting birds gain footholds other gulls will join and nest on nearby buildings. If left unchecked, colonies can grow exponentially.
- 2.5 Gulls that dive and swoop on people and animals are often parent birds protecting fallen chicks which hatch during July and August. At this time gulls are most noticeable as they are scavenging for food to feed hungry chicks.
- 2.6 There are considerable challenges in controlling gull numbers as they are well adapted to their environment and also protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- 2.7 The Council has been carrying out an egg replacement programme in the City Centre area for nearly 10 years and has been successful in not only restricting growth of the population but achieving a reduction. Egg replacement involves substituting eggs with rubber dummies that the birds usually do not detect as non viable until it is too

late for them to lay additional eggs. This therefore limits the number of hatchlings each year. The effect of this is to significantly reduce the volume of food that adult birds need to scavenge for and to prevent also prevent the sometimes aggressive behaviour that is displayed when defending chicks and fledglings.

2.8 The work is carried out by a local pest control contractor, and managed by Worcestershire Regulatory Services. The graph below shows the projected growth of the population without control and the actual numbers recorded. It also shows the number of nests which have been accessible and allowed egg replacement to be carried out.



2.9 This action has historically been focussed on the city centre area. During 2016 some further work was carried out surveying the Blackpole area following requests from a local business and officers have provided advice to businesses on measures that they may wish to consider to deter gulls from their premises.

- 2.10 Officers have also been in discussion with Worcester BID with a view to coordinating action on this issue, and the BID continue to offer gull proof sacks to member businesses which compliments the Council's Trade Waste Presentation Policy.
- 2.11 A Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel focussed on the City Centre included consideration of gull management in its review which was reported to Scrutiny in February 2014. The panel recognised that the egg replacement programme was a best practice method of gull control. The panel did not identify any interventions that would provide an immediate and significant affect on the impact of gulls, and recommended that that all the current options and methods available to limit the population of gulls should continue to be reviewed and considered.
- 2.12 Scrutiny committee considered this issue again at its February 2017 meeting, with a presentation given by Worcestershire Regulatory Services' lead officer. Members debated potential further action that could be taken over and above the current egg replacement programme and the potential for further provision of advice to residents and businesses. Members were also advised that a trial using red paint on nesting areas had shown some potential benefits in deterring and displacing nesting, and that this merited further trials.
- 2.13 Whilst the Minutes of Scrutiny Committee were not available at the time of writing this report, the Deputy Leader of the Council attended the committee and participated in the debate and this report has been prepared with regard to the evidence presented and the ensuing debate where Members expressed enthusiasm for pursuing a range of activities, whilst noting that eradication of the problem is not feasible.
- 2.14 The current cost of the egg replacement and survey programme is c£5.5k p.a. This allows for treatment of all nests within the City Centre that are safely accessible without the use of specialist equipment such as a cherry picker or temporary scaffolding. For the relatively small number of additional nests that could be reached with such equipment it is unlikely that treating these additional nests would have a significant impact proportionate to the expense required.
- 2.15 On 29th September 2016 Council resolved that to help tackle the gull problems in the city an additional one off sum of £15k should (subject to business case and options appraisal) be funded from Service Improvement Reserve.

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 It is proposed that an additional £15k will supplement the existing egg replacement programme to
- Expand the egg replacement programme where practicable (noting that the majority of accessible nests are already being treated, and other areas may require specialist equipment which may be cost prohibitive).
 - Work with Worcester BID and other partners to provide targeted advice and support for businesses, particularly those with outdoor seating areas.
 - Provide additional information and advice in response to customer demand in areas outside the city centre, particularly St Johns and Blackpole.
 - Provide replacement eggs and advice on use for land owners who wish to carry out their own treatment
 - Provide a small number of "gull proof" bins at key locations where gulls have demonstrated a learned behaviour of accessing open bins.
 - Support the use of gull proof waste sacks as provided by Worcester BID.

- Continue to support the trialling of the red roof trial.
- Produce comprehensive information and advice for businesses.
- Promote responsible public behaviours with regard to not feeding gulls either deliberately or inadvertently through littering of food waste.
- Ask Planning and Licensing and Environmental Health Committees to consider appropriate advice and / or conditions to address problems with Gulls.

3.2 This work will be carried out during the 2017 season and reviewed at the end of that period to assess the impact on management of gulls in the city. A report will be made to Environment Committee to enable Members to review the effectiveness of the proposed interventions.

3.3 The proposed actions will be subject to procurement and demand and it is therefore not appropriate to try and apportion costs between each proposal at this time. Officers will ensure that a range of actions are supported, in accordance with the principle that the most effective approach is to deploy a range of measures.

3.4 Worcestershire Regulatory Services officers will deliver and / or procure the appropriate works under the direction of the Deputy Director, Cleaner and Greener Service Delivery.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 A greater or lesser sum could be allocated for this work. Any level of additional investment will provide mitigation rather than a solution to eradicate gulls from the City. It is recommended that £15k is an appropriate sum at this stage which will allow a range of activities to be undertaken and assessed.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

Funding of £15k is available from within the Service Improvement Reserve. A surplus is projected for 2016/17 which would be available to replenish the Reserve. Management of the egg replacement contract and associated work is delivered within the scope of the existing WRS agreement. As the additional work is outside of this scope, and not undertaken by partner districts, there will be costs for additional officer time which will be funded from the £15k allocation.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Action to control wild birds is closely governed by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and all interventions will need to comply with the requirements imposed by the Act.

The Council has no specified legal duty with regard to gull control.

Property owners are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their premises, which can include damage associated with gulls such as blocked rainwater drainage.

5.3 Risk Implications

No significant implications arise from the content of this report.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

Mitigating the numbers and impact of gulls supports the City Plan through protecting the City as an attractive and welcoming place to be in.

5.5 Equality Implications

No significant implications arise from the content of this report.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

The works proposed within this report will be delivered by staff engaged by Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

Mitigating aggressive behaviour from individual gulls during the nesting season can support public health and safety, although it should be noted that the primary impact of gulls, and the vast majority of complaints, relate to nuisance issues.

Ward(s):

All Wards

Contact Officer:

**David Sutton. Telephone 01905 722302. Email
david.sutton@worcester.gov.uk**

Background Papers:

**City Centre Review, February 2014 (Report to Scrutiny
Committee)**