

North Yorkshire Council

Scarborough and Whitby Area Committee

5 June 2026

Urban Gull Strategy

Report of the Corporate Director – Environment

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present the North Yorkshire Council Regulatory Services Urban Gull Strategy for discussion and comment to be provided to Executive for a decision on 4 August 2026.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Urban Gull Strategy (UGS) at Appendix A proposes a new approach to urban gulls (Herring Gulls and Kittiwakes) in the County's coastal towns. It aims to balance legal and ecological responsibilities with the need to maintain clean, safe, and welcoming urban spaces. The strategy is based on evidence from local studies, stakeholder consultation, and national conservation data which are detailed in the Urban Gull Study at Appendix B.
- 2.2 It ensures compliance with obligations placed on the Council by the Environment Act, 2021 to protect and enhance biodiversity and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 which affords protection to all gull species as wild birds.
- 2.3 The strategy proposes a move away from previously used methods to control gull populations by random and sometimes ineffective proofing measures and the use of lethal and other methods, without any monitoring and evaluation.
- 2.4 There are five areas (pillars) of work: communication, waste management, cleansing, proofing and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, supported by education and enforcement. These will be delivered collaboratively across several service areas such as Waste Operations and Street Scene, Environmental Protection, Environmental Enforcement and Communications. Some of the work will be part of business as usual and for other areas additional funding has been secured.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 While gulls, in particular Herring Gulls and Kittiwakes are a valued part of coastal biodiversity, their increasing presence in urban areas has led to significant issues including, noise, fouling, aggressive behaviour (human/gull contact), and overall public health concerns.
- 3.2 Although the increased number of gulls in urban areas is contrary to their wider and significant population declines, their presence is a divisive issue that requires careful consideration and management.
- 3.3 Of primary consideration is that all gull species are wild birds and must be protected in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and the Environment Act, 2021 places a duty on all local authorities to protect and enhance biodiversity.

- 3.4 Previously various actions have been taken to control gull numbers and deter them from nesting on buildings which included the installation of proofing measures and some lethal and other methods such as nest destruction. These actions were mainly carried out before the formation of North Yorkshire Council and took place in the County's coastal towns, but predominantly in Scarborough.
- 3.5 These actions, particularly proofing measures were installed randomly without effective risk assessment and evaluation of their success or otherwise. Furthermore, there was little regard for the ecological differences between the Herring Gull and the Kittiwake which is essential to understanding how to manage their presence in urban areas.

4.0 DETAILED PRESENTATION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE

- 4.1 Given gull species protection, increased conservation status and the need for local authorities to protect and enhance biodiversity under the Environment Act, it became evident through extensive research and consultation that a new approach was required to manage gulls in the coastal towns. This has dictated a move away from the installation of random and sometimes ineffective proofing, lethal and other methods to establishing an environment where gulls and people can co-exist without conflict and the Council is able to fulfil its legal duties.
- 4.2 Therefore, the strategy sets out a balanced approach of protecting gull populations while ensuring that residents, businesses, and visitors can enjoy clean, safe, and welcoming coastal environments. It aligns with the Council's wider priorities of supporting thriving places, empowered communities, and a sustainable environment.
- 4.3 The objectives are:
- To promote and sustain a healthy population of all gull species.
 - To provide and sustain a clean and safe place for residents of the coastal areas.
 - To identify and implement suitable and sustainable measures to enable gulls and the public to successfully co-exist in the coastal areas.
- 4.4 To meet these objectives, it is proposed that the UGS focusses on five core areas, or 'pillars' of management and delivery with further guidance on gull management being incorporated into Planning Policy. The five pillars are as follows:
- Education and communication
 - Waste management services.
 - Cleaning services
 - Proofing
 - On-going monitoring and evaluation.
- 4.5 There are a series of short, medium and long-term actions, to reduce food sources available to gulls, improve waste management, discourage feeding, and explore sustainable solutions such as alternative nesting structures. This process will continue to be based on expert knowledge, experience and consultation with key stakeholders and will need to be on-going, through trial and development. There is a need for effective continuous evaluation and monitoring, whilst also considering the Council's legal obligations.
- 4.6 It will require collaboration of various services across the Council, such as Regulatory Services (mainly Environmental Enforcement and Environmental Protection), Waste Operations and Street Scene, Communications, and the Regeneration and Delivery service. It is intended that the range of enforcement powers available to the Council will be

used to tackle waste issues and littering supported by an extensive education campaign which is in line with the Regulators Code and the Council's Enforcement Policy.

- 4.7 The Environmental Protection Service will allocate 0.5 FTE of a Technical Officer post on a temporary basis to co-ordinate and manage the work detailed in the Strategy and Action and Communications plans (attached to this report at Appendices C and D respectively) to ensure a coherent and sustainable approach to the implementation of the Strategy until such time as the Strategy is fully operational and embedded as business as usual.

5.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES

- 5.1 A targeted consultation of 102 interested parties/stakeholders was undertaken in March 2025 to help assess the attitudes, potential impact and possible management measures that should be considered to develop the UGS.
- 5.2 The consultees included business in the coastal towns, the coastal town councils, environmental organisations and government departments. The consultation consisted of 24 statements which consultees were asked to indicate their level of agreement with, based on five possible responses from strongly agree, to strongly disagree. An opportunity for further comment was also provided.
- 5.3 The main outcomes were as follows:
- Strong support for education, signage, and waste control.
 - Divided opinions on proofing and visual impact of gulls.
 - Recognition of gulls as part of coastal character, but concern over aggressive behaviour and fouling.

6.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 6.1 The UGS aligns with the Council's priorities of supporting thriving places, empowered communities, and a sustainable environment.

7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 The UGS offers a co-ordinated and managed approach to establish an environment where gulls are accepted and protected as a valued part of coastal biodiversity and the coastal towns are maintained as welcoming, safe and thriving places for resident, visitors and business. It is not an option to do nothing or return to lethal and other methods to control gull species as the Council would be at odds with its legal obligations and priorities.

8.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS

- 8.1 The Council services impacted by the UGS are the Environmental Protection, Environmental Enforcement and Waste and Street Scene. The Environmental Protection Service will co-ordinate the activities using existing resource.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There will be additional work over and above current business as usual duties so it was proposed that additional revenue funding would be required to deliver the measures set out in the Action Plan at Appendix C and the Communications Plan at Appendix D. The total estimated additional cost is £119,500.
- 9.2 The breakdown of the proposed activities and estimated associated costs are set out in the table below.

Action	Cost £	Service
Gull proof sacks	30,000	Waste Operations and Street Scene
Seasonal jetting	50,000	Waste Operations and Street Scene
New and/or retro fit litter bins	19,500	Waste Operations and Street Scene
Education/Comms	15,000	Environmental Protection and Communications
Signage (audit, replace/new)	5,000	Environmental Protection and Communications
Total	119,500	

9.3 The costs will be on going revenue costs and were estimated based upon the cost of previous ad hoc actions and following discussion between the relevant Officers from Environmental Protection, Communications and Waste Operations and Street Scene.

9.4 The seagull sack costs are based upon previous orders to cover 7,000 sack customers. The £50k jetting is based upon the £40k spent last year plus inflation and an increase in activity based upon customer feedback. The £19k relates to the cost of trialling a mix of both new bins and retrofitting additional measures to existing bins.

9.5 To support the actions within this strategy funding of £119,500 has been secured from the Environment Directorate in year budget.

9.6 The costs set out in this report do not include funding related to the proposed design and construction of an artificial Kittiwake nesting site.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 As previously mentioned legal duties are placed on the Council by the Environment Act 2021 to protect and enhance biodiversity and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 affords protection to all gull species as wild birds.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 An initial equality impact assessment screening form has been completed and is attached at Appendix E. This indicates that a full equalities impact assessment is not required.

12.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

12.1 An environmental / climate change impact assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix F.

13.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

13.1 Not adopting the overall approach of the UGS will create a risk that the Council will not comply with the obligations placed on it by the Environment Act, 2021 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Furthermore, there would not be a co-ordinated and managed approach to gulls in the coastal towns which will create an adverse impact on the gulls, people, and the towns by not controlling potential risk to public health, the environment and the integrity of buildings, particularly those with historic significance.

14.0 CONCLUSIONS

14.1 The Urban Gull Study (Appendix B) has provided the rationale for a new approach to deal with gulls in the County's coastal towns and is based on sound evidence from local studies,

stakeholder consultation, and national conservation data. This UGS has been developed from the study and offers the Council a set of objectives and actions to implement this this new approach.

15.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The reasons for a new approach to deal with gulls are as follows:

- The Council can fulfil its legal obligations under the Environment Act 2021 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- To ensure the coastal towns are welcoming, and safe for visitors, residents and businesses.
- Protect public health from accumulations of guano, rubbish and litter etc.
- Protect the integrity of buildings.
- To promote an environment where gulls and people can coexist without conflict.

16.0 RECOMMENDATION

The Committee provides comment on and supports the UGS for progression to the TEEE Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 July 2026 and Executive Committee on 4 August 2026 for approval.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Urban Gull Strategy 2026 DRAFT

Appendix B: Urban Gull Study 2025-26

Appendix C: Urban Gull Strategy Action Plan and Costings 2026 DRAFT

Appendix D: Urban Gull Strategy Communications Plan 2026 DRAFT

Appendix E: Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix F: Climate Change Impact Assessment.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.