North Yorkshire Council
Urban Gull Strategy

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Urban Gull Strategy

1. Context and Vision

Context: Urban gulls, particularly Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*), are a valued part of coastal biodiversity increasingly present in North Yorkshire's coastal towns, Scarborough, Whitby, and Filey. Their presence reflects wider environmental pressures including habitat loss and changes in food availability. While afforded protection as wild birds under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, overall populations are declining causing growing conservation concern. However, their presence in urban environments is increasing and poses challenges including noise, fouling, and human-wildlife conflict.

This strategy balances legal and ecological responsibilities with the need to maintain clean, safe, and welcoming urban spaces. It is based on evidence from local studies, stakeholder consultation, and national conservation data, and aligns with biodiversity obligations placed on the Council by the Environment Act 2021. The rational and evidence for this Strategy is detailed in the Urban Gull Study.

Vision: To enable sustainable co-existence between people, the built environment and gulls, ensuring coastal towns remain clean, safe and economically vibrant while supporting biodiversity and complying with legal responsibilities.

2. Scope of the Strategy

The Strategy covers the coastal towns of Whitby, Scarborough and Filey and considers the relationship between people and the built environment with gulls in a legal and public health context. Although the Urban Gull Study discusses and supports the construction of an artificial nesting structure for Kittwakes in Scarborough it is currently not included as an option in this Strategy as further work is required to establish the viability of such a project, considering the likelihood of its success as a long-term measure against the costs of implementation and maintenance. The interaction of gulls and bathing water quality falls outside the scope of this Strategy.

3. Aims of the Strategy

- Promote and sustain healthy gull populations.
- Reduce the negative impacts of gulls and provide clean and safe environments for residents and visitors and protect the built environment.
- Implement sustainable measures to enable coexistence between gulls and people.

4. Objectives of the Strategy

The five main objectives of the strategy reflect the required shift from reactive gull control such as random unevaluated proofing schemes and lethal methods to proactive coexistence, fulfilling the Councils legal obligations. It is structured on five core pillars of management which are underpinned by planning policy, education and enforcement as follows:

Pillar 1: Education and Communication

- Develop and use consistent messaging to raise awareness of gull ecology, legal protections, and the Council's management goals.
- Engage with residents, businesses, and tourists through signage, media, and campaigns.

Main Outcomes

- Improved public understanding and tolerance of gulls.
- Reduced sources of human food and waste available for gulls.

Pillar 2: Waste Management

- Improvement in the use and continued use of gull-proof waste sacks where wheelie bins cannot be used.
- Commercial waste practices comply with legal standards and best practice, particularly in hotspots for gull scavenging.
- Take appropriate enforcement action where legal standards for waste management are not met.
- Audit the litter bin provision in gull hot spots and provide gull proof litter bins by replacement or retrofitting of the current estate.

Main Outcomes

- Further reduction of human food sources for gulls.
- Reduced gull scavenging behaviour.
- Improved compliance with waste management standards.

Pillar 3: Cleaning Services and Public Realm Management

- Maintain and expand seasonal jetting of guano hotspots.
- Engage landowners to share responsibility for cleaning adjacent areas.

Main Outcomes

- Cleaner streets and reduced risk to public health.
- Welcoming environment for residents, businesses and visitors.

Pillar 4: Targeted Proofing and Risk Assessment

- Encourage professional installation of deterrents (netting, spikes, Avi-Shock) based on a public health risk assessment with ongoing evaluation of their effectiveness.
- Highlight the risks of some proofing measures to bird welfare.
- Ensure there is ongoing maintenance and evaluation of proofing measures.

Main Outcomes

- Proportionate and effective proofing schemes.
- Protection of the built environment.
- Reduce the risk of harm to gulls and other wildlife.

Pillar 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

- Conduct annual Kittiwake surveys and periodic Herring Gull counts.
- Track effectiveness of management measures and public attitudes.

Main Outcomes

- Provision of evidence for ongoing decision making.
- Ability to improve and change approach.

Planning Policy Development

Planning policy will embed gull management and coexistence into the new Local Plan. This will include identified zones where it is acceptable to include passive provision for artificial nesting sites on new buildings and conversely ensuring the design of buildings will actively deter gulls from nesting.

5. Resources and Implementation

Resources: There will be a co-ordinated approach across Council services including Regulatory Services (predominantly Environmental Protection and Environmental Enforcement), Waste Operations and Street Scene, and Communications.

There will be ongoing new revenue costs (and some initial capital costs) for seasonal additional jetting, the provision of gull proof sacks and litter bins (new and retrofitted), signage and education/communication activities. This will be funded from the Environment Directorate's in-year budget.

Implementation: The implementation of the strategy will be coordinated by an officer from the Environmental Protection service as part of business-as-usual work. Enforcement activity will also be carried out as part of routine duties by the Environmental Protection and Enforcement services. Enforcement will be risk based and have regard to the Council's Enforcement Policy and the Regulators Code.

Action and Communication Plans: There will be short-, medium- and long-term actions detailed in the Action and Communications Plans as follows:
Short term:

- Launch education and communications campaigns.
- Distribution of gull proof sacks.
- Seasonal jetting of guano hotspots.
- Implementation of risk assessed proofing measures.

Medium term:

- Audit and upgrade of gull signage.
- Enforcement approach to waste and litter contraventions.
- Audit, retrofit and replacement of litter bins, primarily in gull hotspots.

Long term:

- Integration of Strategy principles into Local Plan.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

All measures will be subject to ongoing review and evaluation, managed and coordinated by the appointed officer from the Environmental Protection service. Specialists will be used to monitor gull populations as required. Relationships will be maintained with key stakeholders including the Yorkshire Coast Urban Gull Partnership and Town Councils.

This Strategy and the action plans will be kept under review and progress will be monitored against the desired outcomes of the five management pillars. It is anticipated that a full review of the Urban Gull Study and Strategy will be undertaken in 2030.

7. Conclusion

Implementation of this strategy offers a new approach to urban gulls providing a shift from random, unassessed control measures to coexistence with people and the built environment based on risk assessment to protect public health and ensuring compliance with the legal obligations placed on the Council. It will therefore protect gull species, promote biodiversity and ensure that the coastal towns are safe, clean and welcoming places for residents, businesses and visitors. This will be achieved using the five management pillars, to communicate and educate, to manage waste and remove food sources, to have effective cleaning regimes and to have risk assessed proofing measures all of which will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that they are effective, and improvements and changes will be implemented as required based on evidence and further research.