Urban Gull Strategy Communications Plan

Introduction and background

North Yorkshire Council has developed an Urban Gull Strategy to address the growing challenges posed by gull populations in coastal towns such as Scarborough, Whitby, and Filey. While gulls are a valued part of the region's biodiversity, their increasing presence in urban areas has led to issues including littering, noise, aggressive behaviour, and public health concerns.

This communications plan for the strategy is designed to support the action plan and address the challenges faced by the council and North Yorkshire's coastal communities. The plan seeks aims to raise awareness of the issues caused by urban gulls and to explain clearly how the council's actions will help residents, businesses, and visitors. By setting out the objectives in plain language, we can build understanding and encourage active participation in the strategy.

Objectives

- Raise awareness of the Urban Gull Strategy and the problems caused by gulls in urban areas
- Educate residents, businesses, and visitors on how the council's action plan and vision with help in the short, medium and long term
- Highlight the impact of gull behaviour on litter, public safety, and the visitor experience, while also emphasising the importance of protecting gull populations as part of the region's biodiversity
- Change public behaviour, particularly around waste management and feeding gulls. Residents will be encouraged to use gull-proof sacks, businesses will be reminded of their duty of care to secure commercial waste, and visitors will be asked not to feed gulls
- Build transparency and trust by openly communicating the phased nature of the strategy. Sharing details of short, medium and long-term actions will reassure communities that we are taking a structured, sustainable approach
- Communications will also strengthen community engagement by positioning residents, businesses, and visitors as partners in the strategy

Audiences

Internal audiences

- Chief executive Richard Flinton
- Director and assistant director, Karl Battersby and Michael Leah
- Leader and executive member, Councillor Carl Les and Councillor Richard Taylor
- Area constituency committees
- Local councillors
- Colleagues

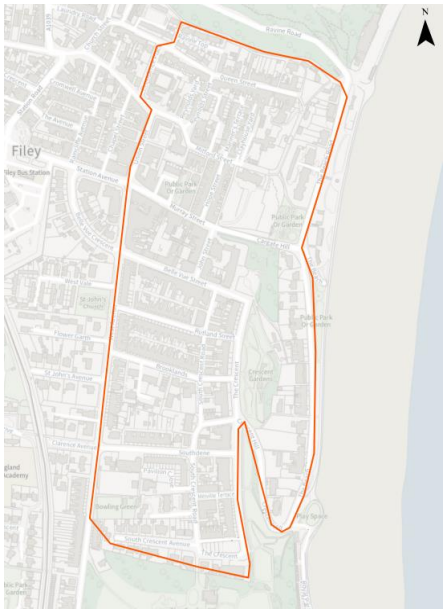
External audiences

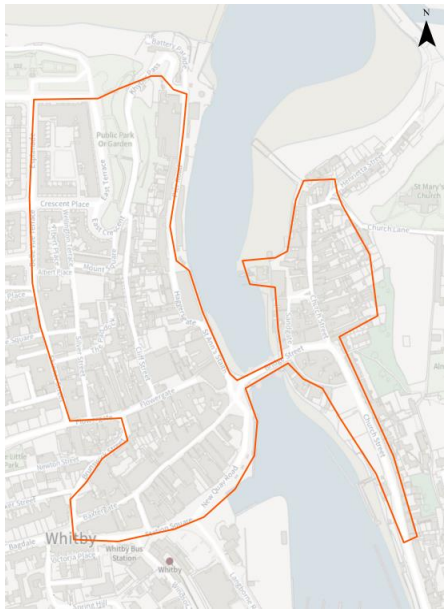
- Residents across North Yorkshire
- Private landlords and letting agents
- Holiday lets/accommodation
- Town and parish councils
- Community and environmental groups
- Businesses (including, tourist attractions, pubs and restaurants, and shops)
- Local media outlets

Strategy and key messages

- The communications plan for the Urban Gull Strategy will be clear, consistent, and community-focused.
- It will emphasise transparency, collaboration, and practical guidance, ensuring that residents, businesses, and visitors understand both the challenges posed by urban gulls and the solutions being implemented
- Tone will be informative and avoiding technical jargon. Instead, use everyday language that resonates with all audiences.
- Campaigns will highlight shared responsibility, reinforcing that small actions — such as securing waste or avoiding feeding gulls — make a big difference to the cleanliness and safety of coastal towns
- Style will be positive and proactive, focusing on solutions rather than problems. Celebrating community efforts, highlight success stories, and show how we are working in partnership with residents, businesses, and environmental groups
- Traditional media (press releases, posters, signage) will be combined with digital channels (social media, council website, videos) and direct engagement (letters to households, businesses, holiday lets).
- We will collaborate with partners on seasonal campaigns to align with peak gull activity, ensuring messages are timely and relevant
- Engage closely with local, regional, national and global (if deemed necessary) media to promote successes and mitigate any negativity through proactive, as well as informative reactive, communications

The following maps will also support the delivery of this action plan:





Key messages

- Gulls are an intrinsic part of British seaside life. However, they are causing serious and growing issues for us on the Yorkshire coast, particularly in Scarborough.
- We need to create the right balance of protecting gulls, and other species of birds that live on the coast, as well as ensuring they don't disrupt the lives of our businesses, residents and visitors.
- The birds cause damage to property, can be a noise nuisance, and also generate significant amounts of excrement. This is a major challenge for our street cleansing teams who clean hotspot locations twice a day every day.
- We are keen to step up our action by thinking creatively about measures to manage the birds while complying with the legal protections that are in place.
- We want our seaside towns to be safe and welcoming places for the thousands of visitors we attract from all over the world.
- The Urban Gull 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
- The strategy is a collaborative effort, bringing together residents, businesses, visitors, to tackle gull-related challenges. By working in partnership, we can create cleaner, safer coastal towns while protecting North Yorkshire's unique wildlife.

Implementation / timeline of activity

All activity will support the strategy outlined above…

Action	Lead	Date	Message details	Status
Short term (Spring 2026) • Launch gull-proof sack distribution • Education campaign on feeding gulls • Business waste control messaging • Seasonal guano jetting communications				
Medium term (Spring 2027) • Audit and upgrade gull signage • Reinforce waste enforcement messaging • Share feasibility study results for nesting structures				
Long term (2030) • Communicate Local Plan integration of gull management • Publicise construction of alternative nesting structures • Review and report on the outcome of the strategy				

Scoring / evaluation

To evaluate the success of this communications plan we will judge the effectiveness of the following:

- Positive media coverage about the Urban Gull Strategy and mitigate any negative publicity.
- Collect the reach and activity data for each social media post relating to the strategy and action plan.
- Conduct regular reviews of the communications plan to ensure its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.