

Goose Management Scrutiny Review – Draft Final Report

Summary

1. This report provides information in support of the ongoing Goose Management scrutiny review, and asks the Task Group to identify what further work is now required to conclude this review.

Background to Review

2. At a meeting in September 2015, the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee agreed to proceed with a scrutiny review of Geese Management across the city following submission of an associated scrutiny topic by Cllr Kramm.
3. A Task Group made up of Cllrs Kramm, Gunnell and Richardson was set up and tasked with identifying a suitable review remit and carrying out the review. The Task Group met for the first time in early December 2015 and the following was agreed:

Aim:

To improve the experience of residents and visitors to public parks, gardens and open spaces by examining the geese (and other water fowl) related problems affecting Rowntree Park, the University and other sites.

(NB: All references thereafter to Geese, relate to both Geese and other water fowl).

Objectives:

- i. To understand previous examinations of the geese related problems in York, lessons learnt, cost to the city, associated health risks etc.
- ii. To examine best practice nationally and elsewhere.

- iii. To consider technical options for dropping removal, the associated costs and external funding possibilities.
 - iv. Consult all interested parties on geese population management and control practices, to understand the requirements for different species and animal protection issues.
 - v. Identify appropriate solutions and options for funding.
4. Furthermore, the Task Group agreed to co-opt two members on to the Task Group, one a member of the 'Friends of Rowntree Park' group and one a representative from the University of York.
5. The Task Group also identified a number of meetings dates and the following methodology for the review:

Meetings	Tasks
Meeting 1 - Formal Tuesday 26 th January 4pm (West Offices)	Objective 1 – To consider information relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The geese population in York • All previous related work undertaken by the Council • The associated cost to the city • Lessons learnt • Any associated health risks
Meeting 2 – Formal Tuesday 2 nd February 5.30pm (West Offices)	Objective 2 - To examine best practice nationally and elsewhere. Objective 3 - To consider technical options for dropping removal, the associated costs and external funding possibilities.
Meeting 3 – Informal Tuesday 9 th February 5.30pm (West Offices)	Objective 4 – Consultation Meeting
Meeting 4 – Informal Wednesday 17 th February 5.30pm (West Offices)	To consider findings and consultation feedback, and identify appropriate review conclusions

Meeting 5 – Formal Thursday 3 rd March 5.30pm (West Offices)	To consider draft final report.
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6. The remit and methodology above was subsequently agreed by the Community & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2016.

Information Gathered

7. In support of objective (i), at their first formal meeting on 26 January 2016, the Task Group received introductory information on the law protecting wild geese in the UK, together with a detailed presentation on goose management from the Strategy & Contracts Operations Manager. The presentation confirmed:
- There has been an issue with geese in the city for 20 years with complaints being received annually
 - The history of goose management in York with a summary of the principle areas of the city affected
 - The species of Geese found across York (including at the University), and an estimation of their numbers
 - The effect of droppings – poor water quality damaging the ecosystem of the lakes in Rowntree Park and at the University
 - The current programme of actions (in place since 1999) e.g. the treatment of eggs, the use of signage, fines for littering with bread, the daily sweeping of paths in Rowntree Park, and the associated costs
 - The Council is currently only treating Canada Geese eggs as a licence is not required for this. Previously the Council were licensed to treat the eggs of Greylag Geese but this has lapsed and needs renewing.
 - Egg Treatment entails coating the eggs in paraffin. Treated eggs are left in the nest to allow the female to continue incubating them. If removed the females will relay.
 - Other actions considered, outlining the possible use of fences, how to discourage the public from feeding the geese and scaring techniques
8. The presentation also referenced a report on a 'Review of Management Options for Resolving Conflicts with Urban Geese' produced by FERA (Food & Environment Research Agency) in 2010 – see copy of

presentation and FERA review at Annex A. Furthermore, the University of York confirmed they were experiencing the same problems with geese as evidenced in the presentation, and outlined the measures they had tried to address those problems.

9. Objective (ii) - To examine best practice nationally and elsewhere.

At a meeting on 2 February 2016, the Task Group received an information pack containing the following best practice guides, examples of good practice, and information on arrangements within the EU – see copy attached at Annex B:

- English heritage Landscape Advice Note on Canada Geese
- Natural England Technical Information Note TIN009: The management of problems caused by Canada geese: a guide to best practice
- Rural Development Service Technical Advice Note 51: The management of problems caused by Canada geese: a guide to best practice
- The Management of Problems caused by Canada Geese - A Guide to Best Practice: Produced by Dr John Allan, (Central Science Laboratory) - funded by the Dept of Environment Transport & the Regions (DETR)
- Examples of Good Practice from South West London, the Lake District and Scotland
- Information on the Arrangements for Goose Management from countries within the EU, Scandinavia, Iceland & Greenland

10. The Task Group also considered some examples of public education literature produced and in use by Friends of Rowntree Park, together with information on chemical repellents and electronic sonic devices.

11. Objective (iii) - To consider technical options for dropping removal, the associated costs and external funding possibilities.

At the same meeting in early February 2016 the Task Group considered information on two technical options for the collection of manure and watched a DVD showing those machines in use.

Consultation Meeting

12. Invitations were issued to representatives from the following organisations to attend a consultation meeting held on 9 February 2016:

- York University
- Friends of Rowntree Park

- Friends of Chapman's Pond
- Friends of New Walk
- York Environment Forum
- York Ornithological
- Askham Bryan College
- Parish Councils with ponds/lagoons – Askham Bryan, Askham Richard, Dunnington, Haxby, Holtby & Wigginton
- York & District Amalgamation of Anglers
- York Lakeside Holidays
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
- Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
- RSPCA
- Public Health
- RSPB
- British Trust for Ornithology
- Yorkshire Water
- Yorkshire Farming & Wildlife Partnership
- Canada Goose Conservation Society
- Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

13. Those that attended the meeting received a verbal update on the review work to date, and considered examples of signage used by authorities and organisations across the country to encourage the public not to feed the wildlife. The attendees went on to outline their concerns about the impact of geese and the measures they had previously taken to try to mitigate that impact.

Analysis

14. In considering the presentation given by the Strategy & Contracts Operations Manager, the Task Group accepted that:
- Canada & Greylag Geese have adopted a residential strategy in York and do not undergo long distance migration.
 - They tend to stay on or around the same body of water throughout the year based on the availability of food, the number of nearby breeding sites, and safety from predators.
 - There has been no confirmation of any health issues in York associated with Geese. However, there is evidence to show that avian and human pathogens have been isolated from goose faeces including avian flu virus, Salmonella and E.coli¹. Geese therefore have the potential to indirectly affect people and other water birds.

¹ Information taken from FERA's 2010 report on 'A Review of Management Options for Resolving Conflicts with Urban Geese' – see Annex A.

15. The Task Group recognised that the increasing population of geese in York was being driven by successful breeding as there is ample food and no predators. They therefore agreed that the continuation of egg treatment was necessary, and were pleased to note feedback from the consultation meeting, that others were also treating eggs.
16. Having discovered that Canada Geese are long-lived birds (12-16 year life span) with the average number of eggs laid in a nest being 5 or 6 each time, the Task Group considered whether the treatment of eggs was having the desired affect. They recognised that if some eggs remained untreated a limited number of chicks would be sufficient to replenish the normal annual loss of adults.
17. With this in mind, the Task Group agreed that unless every egg laid was treated, it would be impossible to prevent the number of geese from increasing. They also agreed that whilst the Council were paying a contractor to treat eggs laid on council land, there was no guarantee that all the nests on Council land were being found. Furthermore there was no real understanding of the number of nests elsewhere on adjacent land owned by others.
18. In considering whether the rounding up of a large number of the geese for transportation to a rural area of North Yorkshire was a viable option, they learnt that Canada Geese are now formally recognised as pests and therefore if caught, must be destroyed. Also, it was confirmed that those geese would likely return to their original location where they were already confident there was a food source and suitable and safe breeding sites. The Task Group therefore questioned whether it would be possible to seek permission from other land owners to treat the eggs in nests on their land.
19. In considering whether a cull would be a way forward, the Task Group noted that in 2000 it was agreed that a cull be undertaken in York. At that time a licence to cull was required so one was subsequently obtained, but the cull was never carried out following a petition from the public. Whilst sensitive to public opinion, the Task Group noted feedback from the consultation session that suggested those present would not be against a cull if carried out as part of a measured approach to the problem.
20. The Task Group also considered other methods of geese management:

- Chemicals –The Task Group noted there were a number of products in use in other countries but none which were licensed for use in the UK. The cost of those products was also prohibitive and it was unclear what effect they would have on other wildfowl, dogs and children. It was suggested that this option should be further explored and if a licensed product was found, a sample could be obtained and tested (possibly in Memorial Gardens).
- Audio Methods – it was agreed that super sonic audio methods would not be suitable for use in public parks but the use of ultra sound methods should be explored further as a solution for specific sites, and perhaps trialled to evaluate its effectiveness.
- Visual Methods – The Task group agreed that the use of visual deterrents could be useful in smaller locations but were probably not suitable for larger public spaces where they could be tampered with by the public. It was confirmed that the Merchant Adventurers Hall had previously trialled the use of a fake fox as a deterrent. Feedback confirmed that initially the geese were wary but soon became comfortable with its presence. Their view is that it may have worked better for longer, if the fox had been repositioned regularly. However, the fox was lost in the floods. The Hall now has netting placed along the river bank which has stopped geese from walking out of the water into the grounds, which they seem to prefer rather than flying into the site. This has resulted in fewer geese using their garden.
- Education – It was confirmed that both the University and the Council uses signs to discourage feeding of the birds. As a key driver of urban population control, it was agreed that the public needed educating in regard to inappropriate feeding. The Task Group recognised that minimising or banning the feeding of geese would be highly beneficial. They considered the posters produced by the Friends of Rowntree Park and the examples of signage in use nationally (see annexes C & E), and noted the risk of causing malnutrition in birds and wing deformation caused by the feeding of bread. However, they agreed that the more complex signs explaining the effects of feeding the geese may not be suitable for public parks. Officers advised that currently, due to budget cuts, the Council does not have any dedicated park rangers or officers available to support an education programme. The Task Group questioned whether information could be distributed to primary schools so they could undertake their own lessons. It was also suggested that local media may also assist in promoting any educational messages.

- Collection of Droppings & Disposal – The Task Group watched a brief promotional video for a machine which could be used on grassed areas to collect manure. It was confirmed that the machine would be suitable for the collection of goose droppings and so it was suggested that officers arrange a demonstration. However, the Task Group acknowledged that the cost of a collection machine was not the only consideration; a machine to pull the collector would also need to be purchased as the Council did not currently own anything suitable. The cost for both machines would be approximately £10k. They recognised there would also be a staff cost associated with the work e.g. 1 Hr a day x up to 357 days a year, plus the cost of disposal. They agreed it may be possible to recycle the manure by offering it to the general public but it would need to be stored somewhere where the public could access it. The Task Group therefore questioned whether goose droppings were suitable for use as fertiliser. They agreed that a nursery specialising in fertiliser should be contacted to investigate further. Finally, they agreed that a machine of the type suggested would not be suitable for use at every site affected by geese, due to the size and/or layout of some sites e.g. Memorial Gardens.
- Fencing – The Task Group learnt that adult geese can fly for all except the moult period and they typically choose to feed close to water. Therefore separating grassed areas from water bodies with a fence may be sufficient to prevent their access under certain circumstances. For example, if there are nearby trees that would prevent them from flying in – geese need an angle greater than 13°. The Task Group noted that fencing designed to prevent breeding had been shown to work but that it was reliant on the adults realising that nesting on the fenced site would prevent their chicks from being able to escape. The Task Group agreed that the high cost of fencing the lake at Rowntree Park (approximately £60k) precluded it from being a viable option for the site. However they questioned whether appropriate fencing around Memorial Gardens might be a possibility. Officers suggested that fencing the full site would cost approximately £45K. In an effort to reduce that cost the Task Group agreed it may be possible to only fence the rear of the site adjacent to the river and car park which geese use to walk into the gardens. It was suggested that a trial could be undertaken using temporary fencing to evaluate the effectiveness of fencing part of the site.
- Alternative Planting – It was suggested that longer grass could provide an effective barrier to goose grazing as geese like to have a suitable view of the surrounding area and want their young to have

visible access to a nearby body of water. However, the Task Group acknowledged that in places like Rowntree Park, the grass would never have time to grow as the geese are constantly there feeding. Elsewhere, replanting with unpalatable alternatives may work - one consultee confirmed that he had been advised that removing grass and other food sources and planting Ivy was a good way of ridding a site of geese.

- Other Deterrents – The Task Group considered a number of other possible deterrents e.g. the use of light lasers, trained dogs, distress calls, and falconry. ‘Friends of Rowntree Park’ confirmed they had tried walking dogs in the past and the geese appeared to be frightened by them, so were considering doing it again. However the Task Group were informed that geese are intelligent birds and over time would become accustomed to most stimuli. Scaring techniques would also influence the behaviour of other species and loud or visual stimuli might also conflict with the public’s use of the parks. Also the Task Group noted the use of a metal grid system placed across a body of water had been implemented in some places to prevent geese from accessing the water. However it was agreed this would not be a suitable option for Rowntree Park, as it would be costly and unsightly.

21. The Task Group considered further information on the long term results of the London Lakes Project undertaken by Wandsworth Borough Council (see Annex B for further information on that project). They noted that a cull had been undertaken at one of the parks but that overall the results were equally good at the other parks therefore suggesting the cull may not have been required.
22. Finally, the Task Group found no evidence to suggest that any single management technique would be fully effective in controlling the problems caused by geese, and where best practice showed evidence of success; this had invariably been as a result of a suite of measures.

Conclusions

23. In considering all of the information the Task Group agreed Canada Geese were the main problem for York’s parks and open spaces. Whilst at the University the issues were mainly with Greylag Geese. There was also no evidence to suggest that other forms of wild fowl were a problem.
24. Overall, the Task Group agreed that no one measure in isolation could lead to a long term improvement in the experience of residents and

visitors to York's public parks, gardens and open spaces. They therefore agreed that a mix of population-based, site-based and impact controls together with a public education approach would be required to reduce York's goose population and manage the adverse effects of geese, which in turn would benefit other waterfowl species. They also agreed that:

- Measures to encourage Geese to use land not in use by the public would be of benefit
- Site based solutions would need to be tailored to each sites needs
- It may be possible to use ward funding for some site-based measures

25. The Task Group therefore concluded that the city needed an integrated management strategy, recognising that it may take several years before a notable reduction in goose numbers was achieved. As a result they agreed that the strategy would need to be implemented and the accumulative effect monitored over several years before it would be necessary to consider whether a cull was required.
26. As a first step, in order to fully understand the scope of the problem across York, the Task Group agreed it would be prudent to undertake a survey of York's goose population, preferably during this year's nesting season. It was agreed that the cost of carrying out a survey in York should be investigated further, so quotes for the work were sourced from the Wildlife & Wetlands Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology (*quotes to be included here*).
27. Finally, the Task Group recognised that the cost of purchasing machinery, carrying out a survey, treating eggs annually and implementing other measures over a number of years, as part of an integrated strategy, would prove more costly than carrying out a cull and continuing with the treatment of eggs (as currently done). However, they recognised that the option of a cull was unlikely to be acceptable to the public.

Council Plan 2015-19

28. This scrutiny review addresses an ongoing issue for residents in a number of wards and will aim to identify a solution for those local communities. The review therefore supports the 'a council that listens to residents' priority of the Council Plan.

Implications & Risk Management

29. All implications and risks associated with the integrated management strategy drafted by this Task Group will be detailed in the review draft final report for the consideration of the full Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendations

30. The Task Group are asked to consider the following draft recommendations for the review, and agree revisions where necessary:
- i) Officers to carry out a number of trials to test the effectiveness of various measures i.e.:
 - A HSE licensed chemical (if sourced)
 - A droppings collection machine
 - Ultrasound audio
 - Temporary fencing at Memorial Gardens
 - ii) Funding be provided to carry out a survey of the city's Canada goose population to map nesting sites and movement
 - iii) An integrated management strategy to be drafted for the Executive's consideration, which takes account of the findings from the various trials and the survey
 - iv) Permission to be sought from private land owners for access to treat eggs laid on their land
31. Finally, assuming an integrated strategy is agreed, it is suggested the Task Group also recommend that the Executive:
- v) Provide the necessary funding to implement the strategy
 - vi) Monitor the strategy's effectiveness over a number of years, before deciding whether to consider the option of a cull.

Reason: To assist in the development of a suitable long term strategy for the management of geese in York and to conclude this scrutiny review in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols

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Report Approved



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Wards Affected: Guildhall, Micklegate & Hull Rd



Background Papers: None

Annexes:

Annex A: Copy of Presentation provided at meeting on 26 January 2016 & copy of FERA Review

Annex B: Information pack containing best practice guides, UK examples of good practice & Information on goose management across the EU.