

## **Management of Geese in Rowntree Park**

### **Summary**

1. This report responds to the decision of the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion in December 2008 for an independent study on the options for managing wild geese in Rowntree Park and other city centre locations. The purpose of this report is to:
  - a) Update the Executive Member on the report by the National Bird Management Unit.
  - b) Update the Executive Member on feedback on the report.
  - c) Agree which of the options contained within the report should be pursued.

### **Background**

2. The presence of large numbers of wild geese in Rowntree Park and other city centre locations in York creates a number of operational and safety problems. These include large amounts of droppings in paved areas, parks and gardens, making these sites unwelcoming and usable, damage to vegetation through grazing, and intimidation of children and animals.
3. Complaints are regularly received each year about geese especially about the amount of faeces on the grassed area within the park. This makes the main lawn unusable for picnics and games, and lakeside paths slippery and unattractive. This is a long standing problem with the issue first being considered by the Leisure Services Committee in October 1996. Letters regularly appear in The Press (most recently on 11th August 2010). The Green Flag judges often comment on the problems caused by geese as one of the few negative aspects of the park.
4. During this time the Council has obtained annual licences to treat the eggs of birds that nest at Council owned sites. This is carried out by dipping the eggs in paraffin in accordance with the nationally approved practice set by Natural England. This is useful in helping to keep the population from expanding but does not remove the underlying problem. Details of the number of eggs treated each year are provided as Annex 1.
5. Other measures introduced in Rowntree Park in 2001:
  - fencing of the islands: despite this geese still nested there

- periodic sweeping of the footpath, either manually or by a small mechanical road sweeper
- educating people not to feed the geese through on site signage

6. The Council also explored other potential measures over the years including:

- fencing of nest sites
- fencing of lakeside edges
- visual and acoustic scares
- dead decoys
- sheep dogs
- chemical repellents
- relocation
- lion dung
- increased sweeping
- increased shrub and tree planting

Based on experiences elsewhere in York, the impact the change would have on the historic landscape, lack of suitable safety information or cost, none of the above were considered viable.

7. In December 2008 The Friends of Rowntree Park, through the Meeting of the Executive Member for Leisure and Culture, and Social Inclusion, and Advisory Panel, sought a review of the Council's goose management regime. This was agreed by the Executive Member and a project brief was developed with the Friends.
8. In September 2009 the National Bird Management Unit at the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) were commissioned to undertake a review of possible goose management options available to the Council. The review was designed to draw upon on best and current practice and include specific reference to Rowntree Park where there are both resident and transitory Canada and Greylag geese populations. Options would be both short and long term, and if appropriate, the site would be used as a test for new or emerging management techniques.
9. The report "*A review on management options for resolving conflicts with urban geese*" was received in February and is available to view or download from the Council's web site:  
[http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Parks\\_and\\_open\\_spaces/Wildlife/geese/](http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Parks_and_open_spaces/Wildlife/geese/)  
 It is also attached as Annex 2.
10. Micklegate Ward Committee has also taken a keen interest in the issue. During 2009 it voted funds for the improved management of geese in Rowntree Park and asked to be kept informed of progress on the report. Money from the Ward Committee has been used to fund the most recent signage.

## The Review Report

11. The authors of the report state that current management techniques fall into two categories:
  - a) behaviour modification - by scaring (acoustic and visual stimuli), use of chemical or natural replants, physical exclusion or habitat management; and
  - b) population management control - by preventing eggs hatching, shooting in or out of season, culling during moult, culling with other capture techniques and / or by relocation.

Both of these measures can be supported by an education programme informing the public that geese are known carriers of various diseases, and that feeding bread can cause malnutrition and encourage aggressive behaviour.
12. The report concludes that the *“in urban environments current best practice emphasis the use of integrated management strategies that combine techniques and the use of repellents and population control to reduce damage to sensitive sites. No single technique is likely to remove the overall issue”*. A summary of the options available to the council are:
  - 1) Habitat management
    - a) Identification of all breeding sites.
    - b) Installation of goose proof fencing to all breeding sites where possible.
    - c) An education programme to prevent birds being fed by the public.
    - d) A refresh of signage.
    - e) The prevention of access to grass areas via fencing or planting.
    - f) Application of deterrent spray to grass under a trial licence.
    - g) Sowing of special grass seeds if available.
  - 2) Egg management
    - a) Continue ongoing egg oiling programme, under licence for Greylag geese.
    - b) Work with other landowners to include more nest sites within the treatment area.
  - 3) Deterrence or removal
    - a) Deterrence during the day by trained dogs.
    - b) Testing the use of distress calls.
    - c) Testing the use of falconry.
    - d) Culling in urban area during moult (licence required)
    - e) Shooting in surrounding farmland during autumn (either in season or under licence).
13. Although not covered in the report there is the further option to intensify the cleaning regime in the park, specifically the grassed areas. This would require the purchase of specialist equipment and employment of additional staff at an

estimated cost of £15k. If this option is selected further detailed costs will be obtained to inform a growth request in the 2011/12 budget.

### **Consultation**

14. The availability of the report has been widely circulated through Micklegate Ward newsletter. In May the Friends of Rowntree Park provided a briefing at Micklegate Ward Committee. The July edition of the ward newsletter publicised the availability of the report and parks staff attended the meeting to discuss the contents of the report and seek views on which of the options available.
15. When complaints have been received by the service, the complainants have been referred to the report and asked comment on which option(s) they would prefer to resolve the situation.
16. A consultation opportunity was planned for the Park Birthday party on 11th July. Unfortunately the event had to be cancelled.
17. The most commonly selected options are:
  - A cull during the moult (this is when the birds renew their feathers)
  - Continue the egg oiling programme
  - Shooting in the countryside
  - Testing of deterrent non lethal deterrent methods such as dogs or falconry
18. The Friends of Rowntree Park have formally responded to the report in August and their view is set out below:

*"The Friends of Rowntree Park are concerned about the nuisance caused by the goose droppings and about the impact that large numbers of geese have on the environment in the Park and vicinity. We know that many other visitors to the Park are also concerned, as it is the most frequently-heard negative comment about the Park. We realise that the problems caused by the Canada geese are a city-wide and country-wide issue. We know that other authorities have found ways to reduce the nuisance caused by geese in public areas and we understand that managing geese in public parks is best tackled by using a combination of techniques.*

*The Friends have considered the Goose Management report prepared by Baxter and Hart. For the purposes of the Friends, and in the interests of the city as a whole, we feel it is essential to find measures which will reduce geese reproduction rates locally, in a humane fashion. We therefore support the idea of identifying as many breeding sites as possible, on council land and elsewhere, and increasing the number of eggs treated in the oiling programme. More publicity about the oiling programme would increase awareness of this humane way of restricting population growth and potentially encourage land-owners to come forward with information about nesting sites on their land.*

*Public education is a critical factor, as many locals and visitors feed the geese, along with the other wildfowl. We think that there should be an education campaign which stresses the health risks for wildfowl which are overly-dependent on bread, along with information on the negative environmental*

*impacts. We would support the council in such a campaign, and have already been seeking arenas and methods to disseminate the relevant information. Some new signs have been put up in the Park, but these are quite small, and situated too discretely; we would recommend information painted directly onto the lakeside paths.*

*Temporary fencing around the main field could be used for a few weeks in preparation for major events, such as the Birthday Party and the Cycling weekend, but the Friends understand that this would be expensive to erect and maintain, and impractical long term. The Very Young Friends have previously lobbied for a fence and gate around one of the areas enclosed by beech hedging, to ensure at least one area is free of droppings and thus can be safely used by the under-fives. Research into the original designs and early photos of the Park may reveal areas where low-level hedges or similar could be reinstated, providing zones where geese would feel uncomfortable. Given the recent major investment in the Park's restoration, new hedging or planting is unlikely to be appropriate in the more formal areas of the Park, but the Friends are currently working with the Park Ranger to research methods of reed-bed creation, in the more informal, southern end of the lake, and this sort of zone may also be effective in deterring geese.*

*We would like to see trials of some of the other more unusual methods, such as dogs, falconry, lasers and distress calls, perhaps in the lead-up to the peak periods of goose occupation. These would also need good public information. We feel we don't have enough information to form an opinion on the use of bad-tasting chemicals or grass, and would be concerned about the potential effects on other wildlife".*

## **Options**

19. The options are as set out in paragraph 12 and 13 above.

## **Analysis**

20. In light of the identified options and the views expressed in the consultation the best available options would be:
  - a) A combination of current control methods - increasing the number of sites where egg treatment takes place, a refresh and expansion of the signage as part of an education programme. This could start immediately.
  - b) Trialling a non lethal deterrent system such lasers, falconry or trained dogs. This could take place over the next twelve months depending on the availability of the suitable contractor or equipment.
  - c) Install gates to complete the enclosure of the two small formal garden areas within the park. This could start immediately.
  - d) Seeking a licence to cull the geese and/or seek cooperation from surrounding farmers to shoot geese which visit their land. A licence would be needed for a cull during the moult period and there is no guarantee that any geese which are shot on surrounding farm land frequent the park.
  - e) Buying specialist equipment and employing more staff to clean grass areas of the park. This would need additional financial resources.

21. The following option is not considered viable:
- a) To fence the park lake: This is not considered viable because evidence from previous fencing in the park and elsewhere indicates that the geese will simply fly over the fence to reach a safe feeding ground. By erecting a fence it acts to keep other users – or disturbance out adding to the appeal of the feeding area.

### **Corporate Objectives**

22. The scheme contributes to *Inclusive City* – by involving local residents and communities in the management of their spaces.

### **Implications**

23. **Financial:** If any of options a), b), c) and d) are selected costs can be met from within the existing parks and open space budgets. If the deterrent trails are successful a growth bid would be needed for 2012/13 to implement that option on a permanent basis. If option e) is selected the estimated £15k p.a. cost would need to be confirmed and bid for as part of the 2011/12 budget process.
24. **Legal:** Where licences are required they will be obtained from Natural England in accordance the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
25. There are no Highways, Human Resources, Equalities, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology or Property Implications arising from this report.

### **Risk Management**

26. The main risk to the council is that the approved measures do not reduce the goose fouling problem and the reputation risk to the council that this presents.

### **Recommendations**

27. The Executive Member is asked to:
- Agree which option or options set out in paragraph 20 should be implemented.
- Reason: To improve the condition of Rowntree Park for users.

## Contact Details

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**Report  
Approved**



**Date** 02.09.10

### Specialist Implications Officer(s)

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**Wards Affected:** Micklegate

All

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### Background Papers:

Project file held by David Meigh Head of Parks and Open Spaces

**Annex 1 - 2000 to 2010 egg treatment results**

**Annex 2 Report - "A review on management options for resolving conflicts with urban geese"**

**2000 to 2010 egg treatment results**

Year	Greylag	Canada	Total
2000		26	26
2001			88
2002	18	47	65
2003			0
2004	15	79	94
2005	49	134	183
2006	54	61	115
2007	37	171	208
2008	30	164	194
2009	29	195	224
2010	23	107	130

## Notes

2001 - data not recorded by species

2003 - licence application missed due to change in process

2005 - numbers increased due to the inclusion of more nesting sites.



## **Annex 2**

### **A review on management options for resolving conflicts with urban geese**