

Goose Management Scrutiny Review – Draft Final Report

Summary

1. This draft final report provides information on Goose Management scrutiny review, and asks the Committee to endorse the Task Group's draft recommendations prior to their presentation to the Executive in late April 2016.

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 Communities & 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 Councils Public Realm Operations Manager (Strategy & Contracts). 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 shown in bold in the above list attended the meeting. They 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 provided information on the geese at various sites and went on to outline their concerns about their impact and the measures they had previously taken to try to mitigate that impact. They attendees were also provided with images of signage and asked to provide feedback.

Analysis

14. In considering the presentation given by the Operations Manager, (Strategy & Contracts) 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.

- There have been a number of reports of geese attacking members of the public and their dogs.

15. The Task Group recognised that the increasing population of geese in York was being driven by successful breeding as there appear to be ample sites, a ready supply of 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.

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

At that time a licence to cull was required so one was subsequently obtained. However a complaint was made to the Ombudsman about the process followed, so a decision was taken not to proceed until the Ombudsman had examined the issue and reported back to the Council. By the time Ombudsman's decision was received the licence has expired. As a result, the cull was never carried out. 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. They also noted there was no co-ordinated national drive towards culling although in various localities, culls had previously been undertaken. The Task Group were also made aware that in rural areas outside of the city, some private land owners had lawfully culled some geese.

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 that make grass unpalatable to geese, but none which were licensed for use in the UK. It was unclear what effect they would have on other wildfowl, dogs, children and nearby watercourses. It was suggested that this option should be further explored and if a suitable licensed product was found, a sample could be obtained and tested (possibly in War 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 gardens.

- 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 previous budget cuts, the Council does not have any dedicated park rangers or officers available to support an education programme. An Educational Officer from the Canal & River Trust offered to share their educational literature and the Task Group questioned whether information could be distributed to primary schools so they could undertake their own lessons, and some of those who attended the consultation session expressed an interest in being involved. 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 of approximately £15K 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, and it was later confirmed that if dried and added to the level 100 compost made at Harewood Whin, it would be suitable for that use. 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 War 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 as their walking route 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. Finally, the use of sprinklers was considered, but it was recognised that none of the council's public parks and open spaces had the necessary infrastructure installed to operate them. The Task Group agreed this might prove a costly measure but agreed the option could be further explored.

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). An officer visited those parks while on other duty in London and it was found that none were similar to the urban parks found in York. They also 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 both Canada Geese and Greylag Geese were a 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. In regards to a cull, the Task Group agreed that whilst there was some support for it and it would have an immediate effect, it would only be of short term benefit. They therefore accepted it would only be effective if carried out in conjunction with other measures, and that a suite of measures were likely to have the same long term effect. They therefore concluded that the city needed an integrated management strategy, recognising that it may take several years before a notable reduction in goose numbers is achieved, and agreed that the strategy should 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 a number of quotes are being sourced for appropriate assessment.

Options

27. Prior to this report being presented to the Executive in April 2016, this Committee may choose to:
 - Endorse the recommendations listed in paragraph 35 below
 - Agree changes to this draft final report
 - Revise the recommendations

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

29. **Financial** – It will be possible to complete the trials and measures listed in recommendation (i) using existing public realm budgets. However there is insufficient budget to complete the remaining recommendations. In regard to recommendation (ii) it has been suggested that it may be possible to provide the necessary funding from the additional ward funding monies allocated for environmental projects, subject to Executive agreement.

30. In regard to Recommendation (iii) the costs involved in implementing the Goose Management Strategy will be identified as the suite of measures required are identified. It is suggested that those measures and costs be identified on a site by site basis so that all options for appropriate funding can be explored, including the option to apply for ward funding.
31. **HR** – It will be possible to complete the work associated with Recommendation (i) using existing resources. The resources required to implement the measures contained within the draft Goose Management Strategy will be identified as the strategy is developed for the consideration of the Executive in due course.
32. **Legal** – The legal implications associated with the recommendations endorsed by this Committee, will be identified and included in this report prior to its presentation to the Executive.
33. There are no other known implications associated with the recommendations arising from this review.

Risk Management

34. There are no known risks associated with the recommendations arising from this scrutiny review.

Recommendations

35. The Committee are recommended to endorse the Task Group's draft recommendations below:
 - i) Officers to carry out a number of trials to test the effectiveness of various measures i.e.:
 - A licensed chemical (if sourced)
 - A droppings collection machine
 - Ultrasound audio
 - Amend the fencing at War Memorial Gardens
 - Expand and refresh signage in public parks and open spaces
 - ii) A survey to be undertaken of the city's Canada & Greylag goose population, to map nesting sites across the whole CYC administrative area.
 - iii) Officers to draft an integrated goose management strategy for the Executive's consideration (taking account of the findings from the various trials and the survey), which identifies:
 - A range of measures suitable for specific public spaces/parks

- The costs and resource requirements associated with those measures
 - Appropriate funding options to include ward funding, capital budget etc.
 - A monitoring regime to assess the strategy's effectiveness
- iv) Permission to be sought from private land owners identified in ii) for access to treat eggs laid on their land
- v) The strategy's effectiveness to be monitored over several years, before consideration is given to whether a cull is required in support of the strategy.

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 Date 24 Feb 2016

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.