

Community council outraged at council's inaction on gulls



The City of Edinburgh Council are recommending no action on the problem of gulls nesting in Merchiston this spring as their budget will not stretch to it.

The September and November meetings of the Transport Infrastructure and Environment (TIE) committee commissioned an investigation into what to do about the pests. They investigated the way that Dumfries and Galloway Council deal with gulls in their towns, and also considered the request made by Merchiston Community Council that the City Council should launch a pilot scheme in that area of the city first. Merchiston Community Council have a particular problem with gulls owing to the large number of flat roofs which provides perfect nesting areas for the birds. The council has now had a couple of meetings with Merchiston CC and the report which will be produced to the February meeting of the TIE committee is the result of investigative work by council officials. You can read the whole report below.

The report concludes that the city council is not responsible for dealing with the pest posed by gulls or pigeons, and says that is the responsibility of the property owners to take such action.

In the report the council estimate that a city wide denesting project would have to be done for at least five years and would cost about £212,000 a year, although a pilot project in Merchiston alone is estimated at around £25,000.



Dr Mairianna Clyde

In September last year Dr Mairianna Clyde, Chair of Merchiston Community Council [attended the TIE meeting](#), and explained to the elected representatives at some considerable length why the answer to the gull problem is to take away the nests, rather than removing eggs or culling the birds themselves. Dr Clyde is experienced in this matter, as the Community Council have been trying to deal with the problem for some years. They started off with a gull action group in 1999 when they employed a falconer to scare the birds. But they quickly realised that the way to deal with these pests was not simply to scare them off, as the birds came back within hours of the falcon leaving the area. The action group raised about £6,000 over three or four years to try and get rid of the pests, such was the strength of feeling in the area.

The Reporter spoke to Dr Clyde who said:-“The cost which the report proposes is only £25,000 which is not a lot. But we actually dispute the estimate anyway. For example, a cherry picker might not be needed in each and every case. There is usually a hatch access to most flat roofs on these tenements, and in the case of villas there is usually a driveway to allow access. We have had lengthy meetings with the council officials, but we are now very cynical about the way they are dealing with this matter. The council has now issued a new gull leaflet which is really not advising people to do anything about the problem of gulls at all. It is very watered down compared with the previous advice leaflet. It says that roofs are dangerous places and you should not go up there at all. We think that the council should be empowering people rather than discouraging them from doing anything.”

“The way to deal with gulls effectively is to have a wide practice of removing nests over a large area. If you are working in one street you have to do both sides of it for example, and eventually you will disperse the gulls out to a more remote area where they might eventually be culled. Gulls form colonies just as humans do so there is no point in only

one owner taking action, it has to be a bigger operation than that. I have a lot of practical experience in this so I know what needs done.”

“I am only one person looking after my own patch, but there are many other people in the city who are affected by these pests and I feel that the council have a moral responsibility to offer advice. There are many tenements where there are absentee owners and it is not always possible to get people on side to take action themselves. The council are discouraging initiative and also trying to stop them doing anything themselves.”

“I am fairly angry, but not surprised in a way. It shows the official line really. I can see that this report has been put together by the council officials who seem to be manipulating the councillors. All we asked for was two men for four days to clear these nests! East Lothian Council only clear nests for ten days in May, and that deals with the problem.”

Merchiston Community Council still hope to try and persuade the council to undertake the pilot scheme in their area and also want to present another deputation to the committee meeting on Tuesday 21 February 2012 when they will challenge some of the points made in the report.

[Item 5.6 – Control of Gulls and Feral Pigeons in the City – Final](#)