

# Gulls – Cook calls for action again

Morningside Councillor, Nick Cook called for Edinburgh Council to seek fresh information on ways the city can tackle the problem of urban gulls earlier this month.

His demands were approved by the Transport and Environment Committee in terms of the motion copied below.

Urban gulls – which commonly nest in tenemental areas – are known to swoop on residents, pets and tradesmen, in addition to creating noise nuisance and litter problems.



In a motion to the Transport and Environment Committee at the beginning of December, Cllr Cook called for the council to review the actions taken by other UK local authorities and other agencies in this area so as to identify future possibilities for action in Edinburgh. They agreed to do so only adding in one word to ensure that it would look only at the work of ‘relevant’ local authorities.

Councillor Cook said at the meeting : “At fairly regular intervals the matter of gull denesting is considered by the committee and it last came up in March 2017. There has been a lot of debate since the earlier pilot about what role the council should play in tackling urban gulls. The population of these birds has more than doubled since 2000.

“Merchiston Community Council has done a lot of work and there have been two public petitions which have attracted significant support. I recognise that in March the council did not allocate any further funding but the Conservatives have

shown that the council could fund a pilot scheme at least.

“What I am calling for today is for a bit of analysis to be done. A lot of fresh approaches have been used by a number of local authorities across the UK. It’s really to gather information and see if there is a fresh way we can deliver a denesting scheme.

“I’m not actually asking for any money today, although it would involve officers’ time. But this is one of the issues which members of the community contact me about most often. There are some areas of my ward where I knock on doors and they ask me ‘Oh are you the gull boy?’ I have campaigned on this issue for some time!”

Green group councillor Chas Booth did not oppose the motion, though stated that he disagreed that the pilot had been such a success. He asked that the council did not spend too much time only looking into denesting, but also looked at containerisation of waste which has been successful in ridding our city’s streets of the birds.

The Council funded a gull de-nesting pilot in Merchiston in 2013. Despite its apparent success, the Council has repeatedly chosen not to allocate any further funding. This comes despite continued campaigning by Councillor Cook and local community groups and two petitions signed by hundreds of residents.

Research from the University of Bristol shows that colonies of urban gulls have more than doubled since the year 2000,

Councillor Cook said : “I called on the Council to establish the best practices used across the United Kingdom and look at how these might be applied in Edinburgh.

“The Council has stubbornly refused to fund a fresh Gull de-nesting pilot, despite the ongoing desire of residents to see action taken.

“I hope that by gathering this information, the Council can hatch a fresh de-nesting strategy for dealing with Urban Gulls which will attract cross-party support and funding.”

In the council’s Business Bulletin considered by the committee at 7 December 2017 the council stated :

“A gull de-nesting service has been made available by City of Edinburgh Council on a commercial basis since 2009. Records show that 786 nests have been removed since 2009, in accordance with the licence granted by Scottish National Heritage to the Council.

“As has previously been mentioned at Transport and Environment Committee, in 2012 a trial of a free service was carried out in North Merchiston with the outcome reported to committee. Officers remain of the opinion that it is not financially viable to provide this service free of charge. Whilst the trial was delivered in a relatively small area, at a cost of approximately £9,000, rolling out this service across all of our tenemental housing in the city would cost substantially more and there are no allocated funds to do so.

“Officers have undertaken benchmarking exercises with Scarborough Borough Council, who provide a gull de-nesting service around their seaside area at a cost of c.£40,000 per annum, and Bath and North East Somerset Council in a restricted area of the city at a cost of c.£60,000 per annum.”

*Councillor Cook’s motion which was agreed (subject to insertion of the word relevant before Scottish and English local authorities) read as follows :*

*Notes the Business Bulletin update on Gull de-nesting;*

*Notes previous cross-party recognition of the urban Gulls issue and of the success of the 2012 de-nesting pilot in the*

*North Merchiston;*

*Notes longstanding campaigning efforts and public petitions organised by Merchiston Community Council and residents to tackle the urban Gulls nuisance, with two previous public petitions each attracting hundreds of signatures;*

*Expresses disappointment that the Bulletin does not contain an update on the work of the Gulls working group as previously indicated it would; Understands that this is due to the group meeting on only one occasion, meaning it has had no meaningful opportunity to formulate potential approaches to tackling urban gulls as remitted.*

*To move forward work in tackling the problem of gulls colonising in urban areas the committee agrees to a report being brought before the March meeting which accurately reviews the actions of other local authorities in Scotland as well as that of English authorities and any other agencies which have been proactive in this area so that future possibilities for action in Edinburgh are identified.*

This matter will next be considered in March 2018 when a report will have been prepared by council officers on those local authorities which use denesting to deal with the problem.