

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Waterfowl populations, both wild and domestic, are present on Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council land in permanent and transitory communities. Whilst waterfowl can be a valuable addition to local biodiversity and provide amenity value, overly dense populations can cause habitat degradation and environmental health problems. Equally, human interaction with waterfowl populations can have a negative impact on bird health. It is important to ensure that the waterfowl populations on council land are monitored and managed to ensure a balance between their recreational value, the well-being of the environment they populate and the health and safety of both humans and waterfowl.

POLICY COVERAGE

This policy applies to any Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council land where waterfowl are present. Waterfowl refers to any bird that spends much of its life on or around bodies of water and includes both domestic and wild birds.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)

A public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

It is an offence to capture, kill or injure any wild bird, or to damage or take their nests or eggs. There are exceptions to this act which are relevant to this policy.

POLICY STATEMENT

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council acknowledges the benefit of healthy waterfowl populations in its green spaces in terms of their wildlife value and the enjoyment that they provide to visitors to open spaces. The Council also recognises that overly- dense populations of waterfowl can cause the following problems on its land:

- Dense populations of waterfowl can cause the following problems on its land:
- Grazing of and damage to ornamental plants, turf and aquatic plants
- Trampling of ornamental plants and turf, leading to unsightly areas of mud and droppings
- Fouling of footpaths, causing slippery surfaces with public safety implications
- Accumulation of droppings, causing environmental health concerns
- Large quantities of droppings entering water bodies which can increase nutrient loading, promoting toxic algal blooms and low oxygen levels in the water

- Aggressive behaviour towards humans and other birds
- Damage to wildlife habitats by trampling nesting sites of other birds and by destruction of waterside habitats which can lead to river bank erosion

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) guidance states that attempts to resolve over-population problems by reducing or eliminating populations alone are usually unsuccessful. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is therefore committed to taking an integrated approach to managing waterfowl populations. In each case, the management approach will be tailored to the specific site and the species of birds involved. DEFRA guidance stresses that a build-up of bird numbers in urban environments is usually the result of a readily accessible food supply and that effective long-term management is dependent on the ability to eliminate or reduce this. In addition, a bread-based diet can lead to permanent health problems for waterfowl, such as the condition Angel Wing. Supplies of bread and other foodstuffs also attracts vermin to sites with associated environmental health problems. Therefore, reducing the accessibility of supplementary food that does not form part of a natural diet will be central to our management approach. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council will support the following methods of control.

- Regularly monitor numbers of wildfowl at Parks
- Record information relating to problems/complaints associated with wildfowl
- Reduce at source the levels of food available
- Design Parks in such a way as to help reduce numbers of non-native wildfowl
- Continue to reduce numbers via egg oiling/pricking

General Waterfowl Management

There are a number of ways of identifying problems associated with waterfowl. These include direct monitoring of numbers, reports from experts visiting the park (e.g. Green Flag Judges), observation of problems associated with high bird numbers and complaints from the public. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council will consider all such reports in the management of its waterfowl populations. When an overly-dense population exists or where there are specific problems associated with the presence of birds, e.g. aggressive behaviour towards humans, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council will firstly identify the species involved and whether the birds are wild or domestic as this will determine the courses of action available. The first course of action to reduce over-population will be to discourage the public from feeding waterfowl. This will be achieved through information in the media, council communications and by displaying posters at affected sites. Reasons will be clearly explained to gain public support. Site factors attracting the waterfowl will be identified. Where feasible and appropriate, habitat management techniques will be implemented to reduce the attractiveness of the site to the problem waterfowl, e.g. planting marginal vegetation to deter Canada Geese. Other methods of non-destructive control may be considered. These include behaviour modification techniques, e.g. using visual or acoustic scarers, and exclusion techniques, e.g. fencing. In the specific situation where birds are nesting at a site which can be

accessed by the public and there is the risk of aggressive behaviour towards the public, signs will be erected advising the public to keep away from nesting birds.

Wild Waterfowl

Whilst The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) makes it an offence to capture, kill or injure any wild bird, or to damage or take their nests or eggs, there are exceptions to this act. Therefore, should non-lethal control methods be ineffective or impracticable, the Council may consider implementing lethal methods of control. Any such control would take place subject to the conditions of a general licence or, if required, subject to the conditions of an individual licence obtained from Natural England.

POLICY REVIEW

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to reviewing its policies and making improvements where possible. This policy will be reviewed after four years.