

Agenda Item 3

Joint Neighbourhoods and Health Scrutiny Board

25 February, 2015

Consideration of Petition “Save Our Sandwell Canada Geese”

1. Summary Statement

- 1.1 On 26 January, 2015 the Council received a petition entitled “Save Our Canada Geese”. The petition contains around 1700 signatures and reads *We the undersigned, strongly condemn the actions of Sandwell Council by instigating the unnecessary cull of Canada geese at Victoria Park, Tipton. We call on a senior officer to give evidence under public scrutiny to explain this extreme course of action and on SMBC to never again allow this measure to take place anywhere in the Borough, but to continue with non-lethal methods of site management.*
- 1.2 The Council’s Petitions Scheme, adopted by Council on 2 September 2014 (Minute No. 85/14 (3), states that for petitions with 1500 signatures or more, an officer can be called to give evidence in a public meeting.
- 1.3 In April 2013 the Director – Street Scene, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment, took a decision to carry out a cull of Canada geese at two locations in Sandwell, namely Dartmouth Park, West Bromwich and Victoria Park, Tipton. Further details are contained on the context of this decision and the procedures followed within the background details.
- 1.4 The Council has, for a number of years, made attempts to try and manage the numbers of Canada geese by adopting different control measures, namely oiling and egg pricking, installing perimeter fences around pools, both permanent and temporary fencing, discouraging overfeeding and installing perimeter planting around pool perimeters but these measures have proved to be ineffective.
- 1.5 If the Scrutiny Board feels that the Authority needs to respond to points raised within the petition it may decide to use any of its scrutiny powers under the Local Government Act 2000 which may include instigating an investigation, making a recommendation to the Executive or referring the matter to full Council.

Adrian Scarrott
Director – Neighbourhoods

Steve Handley
Director – Street Scene

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2. Background

- 2.1 Canada geese can live up to 20 years of age and a pair of geese normally mates for life and can produce up to 100 goslings over that period.
- 2.2 The geese numbers within our formal parks can be seen as a constant source of nuisance, primarily due to the fact that their droppings, which are up to two inches long, are produced on average one every six minutes whilst feeding on grassed areas. They also excrete into water while swimming, potentially having an impact on oxygen levels within our pools and affecting the local habitat.
- 2.3 More overly they defecate on formal grassed areas and hard standing areas around pool perimeters, which impacts on families being allowed to play safely in a clean environment. They also foul footpaths, which restricts the safe movement of families. (See Appendices 1 and 2). A statement from the friends of Dartmouth Park in regards to specific concerns they raise is attached at Appendix 3 as well as a letter from Community Volunteer Gardeners based at Dartmouth Park.
- 2.4 Published reports show that the droppings of Canada geese contain several types of bacteria that are harmful to human health. These can survive and multiply in the droppings, giving rise to the risk of infection if they are inadvertently ingested, for example, by transfer from hands which have become contaminated.
- 2.5 The behaviours of the geese also impacts on some of our sports facilities, preventing participation in sports activities. A letter from the Warley Sunday Football League expressing their concerns and support for action to be taken is attached at Appendix 4.
- 2.6 There is very little evidence to suggest that natural factors (such as a limited food availability), which could become more severe as numbers increase, act to control current numbers. A reduction in feeding alone therefore has little effect.
- 2.7 Canada geese have few natural predators and so, with such a low mortality rate, adult bird numbers have the potential to increase year on year. During the breeding season they can also be very ferocious thereby excluding other indigenous wildlife from potential nesting and breeding.
- 2.8 The Council has, for a number of years, made attempts to try and manage the numbers of Canada geese by adopting different control measures namely oiling and egg pricking, installing perimeter fences around pools, both permanent and temporary fencing, discouraging

overfeeding and installing perimeter planting around pool perimeters but these measures have proved to be ineffective.

- 2.9 A count was undertaken in March 2013 which identified in the region of 700 Canada geese residing within our parks and green spaces. The count identified that two parks, namely Victoria park, Tipton and Dartmouth Park, West Bromwich, had in excess of 300 geese within these two parks alone. In light of this, the Director looked to alternative methods to control the geese population.
- 2.10 In order to cull geese the Council had to obtain a licence from Natural England. Under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the decision to apply for this licence, and to proceed with the cull, was taken by the Director – Street Scene, in accordance with the responsibilities associated with his post. Although no authority was required from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment, nor was it a decision to be taken under the Director’s delegated responsibility, a political steer was sought on the matter.
- 2.11 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment was presented with a briefing report outlining the issue and a proposed way forward. (See Appendix 5). The Cabinet Member prudently sought to gain a direction from the wider Executive and discussed the matter at an informal meeting of the Cabinet.
- 2.12 Following consideration of this matter at a political level, the Director instructed officers to proceed with obtaining the relevant permissions to proceed with the course of action.
- 2.13 The Council employed a local pest control company to undertake egg pricking /oiling and to undertake a culling process in the two parks identified. Strict guidelines were followed, as stipulated by Natural England technical information note TIN046. (See Appendix 6). The gathering of the geese was undertaken during the moulting season during the months of May/June.
- 2.14 During 2013 and 2014 a total of 220 geese were culled in Victoria Park and Dartmouth Park. There are still over 100 Canada geese at these two locations.
- 2.15 The briefing report to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment highlighted that there could be a public concern from the actions taken, and officers would gauge this public reaction. Following public reaction the Council has drafted a Statement of Purpose Policy in relation to the control of geese within formal parks. (See Appendix 7). The Board’s views are sought on the draft policy as a basis of further consultation.

2.16 The culling process was to address the issues within our formal parks and there was never any intention to cull geese within our Nature Reserves and Countryside areas.

3. Options

3.1 If the Scrutiny Board feels that the Authority needs to respond to points raised within the petition it may decide to use any of its scrutiny powers under the Local Government Act 2000, as follows to:-

- i) instigate an investigation;
- ii) make recommendations to the Council Executive;
- iii) arrange for the matter to be considered at a meeting of Council;

3.2 The Board may also choose to take no further action on the matter if it is satisfied with the action taken by officers.

3.3 The Board's views are also sought on the draft policy as a basis of further consultation.

Source Documents

Briefing Document to Cabinet Member

Natural England Technical Information Note TIN046

References

Clark, Larry. "A review of pathogens of agricultural and human health interest found in Canada geese." *USDA National Wildlife Research Center-Staff Publications* (2003): 205.

Converse, Kathryn, et al. "Screening for potential human pathogens in fecal material deposited by resident Canada geese on areas of public utility" USGS National Wildlife Health Centre (1999)

Kullas, Heather, et al. "Prevalence of Escherichia coli serogroups and human virulence factors in faeces of urban Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*)."
International Journal of Environmental Health Research 12.2 (2002): 153-162.

Moriarty, E. M., et al. "Survival of Escherichia coli, enterococci and Campylobacter jejuni in Canada goose faeces on pasture." *Zoonoses and public health* 59.7 (2012): 490-497.