



Gulls - Advice and Guidance for Businesses

Carlisle has seen an increasing number of lesser black back and herring gulls building nests on both domestic and commercial properties. Food and nesting is easily available within the city centre and in the commercial areas of the city. The problem is further compounded by people deliberately feeding the birds and also by food waste being dropped on pavements.

The roof tops, empty properties and land provide ideal shelter. The urban environment also means that the birds can feed at night when human activity is reduced and street lights provide a light source for active feeding.

Although some gulls live in city centre and commercial areas all year, reports to the council of gull issues peak before and during the birds breeding season. The birds can become particularly aggressive during nesting and when rearing young in the subsequent months. They are also noisy; create mess; and damage property and vehicles.

About Gulls

Gulls start nest building from early May onwards. Clutches of two or three eggs are laid from early May onwards and are incubated for about three weeks. The chicks grow quickly and are active, which means that they often fall from their nests.

If a breeding site becomes established, gulls will return year after year. Gulls are social creatures, so once a site is established other gulls will start to colonise an area and nest on adjacent buildings.

The nests can be large and if they are made of material collected over several years, they can become heavy, which can cause problems with weak structures.

Young gulls begin to fly in late July-early August and aggression increases as they squabble over food and noise nuisance gets worse. It can be hard for the birds to find enough to eat, often attacking people carrying food in the street by swooping down low, aiming to frighten their victim, before stealing the food.

Mess caused by their droppings on cars, gardens, people and walkways, is also highlighted as a problem and may pose a health and safety risk, particularly on footpaths, external stairs and fire escapes.

The Law

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is illegal to capture, injure or destroy any wild bird, or interfere with its nest or eggs, the penalties can be severe.

The law also provides a general licence system, which allows property owners to take action against gulls nesting on buildings by destroying nests or eggs. This can ONLY be used for the purpose of preserving public health, public safety, and preventing the spread of disease and is specifically for the control of herring, black backed and lesser black backed gulls. If action is taken for any other reason, or if other species of gull are targeted, then an offence is committed. More information can be found on www.gov.uk



What can I do?

The best advice is to deter the birds from nesting in the first place; removing the nests will not solve the problem on its own. The birds will always return to the site to build another nest the next spring.

In order to tackle the issues caused, businesses need to take responsibility to address any issues, to prevent future nuisance being caused. Responsibility should be taken to remove all nests and nesting material from the building and actions taken to discourage the gulls from coming back.

Preventative measures include fitting plastic or metal spikes in the nesting and roosting areas of the roof. Wires or netting can also be effective at protecting roofs or raised flat structures. An area that is particularly vulnerable is the flue stack or any other raised structure on the roof that provides additional shelter for the birds.

What other action can be taken?

If businesses are taking the appropriate action to protect property and prevent nuisance, but these are still proving to be ineffective, landowners can take immediate action if these gulls pose a risk to public health or safety under the terms of a general licence.

The licence allows the birds to be removed from their nests and eggs of lesser black backed gulls and herring gulls. It also allows lethal control of lesser black backed gulls in certain circumstances. Herring gulls, however, have been red-listed as a bird of conservation concern so their lethal control is only permitted by obtaining an individual licence from Natural England.

We recommend using professionals for dealing with the licence and property protection process. The work you do will be most effective if you take advice from professional persons or other agencies such as DEFRA, Natural England or most pest control companies.

When to act to prevent nuisance

The best time to de-nest and proof buildings is at the end of the nesting season, usually around September time. If you engage a company to do the job they will advise you further on your particular situation. Proofing of buildings should be carried out outside the nesting season of seagulls (September to mid-February).

There is no quick fix to the problem of nuisance gulls and control measures need to be kept up for several years to be effective. The key lies in reducing their ability to breed successfully and limiting the supply of food. Gulls pair and mate for life but if they fail to rear chicks they will split up. Action needs to be planned early in the year - once the chicks have hatched it's too late to do much to reduce bird numbers.

We have no statutory duty to take action against gulls, but do recognise the need to protect communities. However, we cannot do this alone and everyone has a role to play in preventing problems.

The responsibility for resolving any problem is your own if you are the owner or occupier of an affected building. Therefore, the cost of any works to resolve the problem will have to be met by the owner or occupier.

Work on roofs should only be carried out by a competent person aware of safety requirements. All roof fixtures should be suitable for the specific roof and not constitute a safety or fire risk.

For further information

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