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Council Wastes Public Money on Inhumane Bird Control Programme

PiCAS UK has today learned that Bath and North East Somerset Council (BANES) has put in place a strategy to control gull populations that are breeding and feeding within Bath city centre. This control programme will include the use of industry standard controls such as ‘egg oiling’ and ‘distress calls’ to both reduce gull numbers and to deter gulls from using existing breeding sites within the city centre. Both of these controls should be included in any multi-faceted gull control programme and are PiCAS UK approved.

The programme also involves the use of Harris Hawks to disperse the gulls and “..make them feel unsettled...”, according to Cathryn Humphries, Environmental Health Manager at BANES Council. Unfortunately this element of the programme will have no effect whatsoever on the resident gull population and when this point was made to Ms Humphries the response was that the authority “...needed to be seen to be doing something”. This is a common response from a vast majority of officers tasked with controlling feral bird populations. Although there is an understanding that this method of control will have zero effect on the problem, there is still a willingness to spend public money in order to ‘be seen’ to be taking some sort of action - in this case highly visible action.

Gulls are renowned to ‘mob’ hawks when flying anywhere near their roosting, breeding or feeding sites and therefore this method of control cannot, under any circumstances, be effective as a method of gull control and should play no part in any overall gull control strategy. It should also be understood that the Harris Hawk is not the natural predator of the gull and gulls will be immediately aware of this, thereby further rendering this method of control ineffective.

Apart from the fact that gulls will not be ‘unsettled’ by a Harris Hawk, there is another even more serious problem associated with the use of a hawk as a control option in urban areas - hawks catching and ripping apart both target and non-target species of birds when being flown as part of a bird control operation. This happens every day in London’s Trafalgar Square, in front of children and visitors to the city, where hawks rip pigeons to bits as part of Ken Livingstone’s inhumane and ineffective pigeon control programme.

Nottingham City Council made a huge error of judgment when employing a falconer to fly a hawk in the city centre some years ago, using public money and at a cost of £5,000. The hawk was regularly seen ripping birds to pieces, whilst still alive, in the city centre as residents and tourists watched in horror. The Council quickly withdrew the falconer admitting that the scheme had been a public relations disaster and had been totally ineffective as a control option.

BANES Council has suggested that their gull control programme will, amongst other things, be humane. If the Council continues to employ falconers to fly Harris Hawks in the city the word humane cannot, under any circumstances, be used to describe what residents and visitors to the city will witness.

A vast majority of pest controllers that fly their birds as a 'control option' are falconers, who use their hawks to kill other birds and animals for pleasure and sport. This activity is described as a 'blood sport' and yet some Councils and other public bodies continue to spend public money to employ falconers, most of whom have little or no idea what they are doing where bird control is concerned. Falconers are not bird control experts, they are people who are jumping on the bird control bandwagon in the hope that they will make a quick profit before the world wakes up to the fact that the service they offer is worthless.

BANES Council has taken commercially biased advice from a pest control company that has a vested interest in selling their services. Incredibly, the authority did not approach PiCAS UK for independent and expert advice even though PiCAS UK is the only wholly independent source of expert and non-commercially biased advice on bird control in the UK. It remains to be seen whether BANES Council has any success with this control programme but there is one certainty – the most expensive element of the programme, the flying of Harris Hawks, will have no effect on Bath's resident gull population whatsoever.

PiCAS UK will **never** recommend the use of a hawk to control feral bird populations. This method of control is discussed, in some detail, on the 'deterrents' section of PiCAS UK's website.

Emma Haskell, Director of PiCAS UK said: "BANES has ignored the only body that is in the position to provide them with independent and commercially unbiased advice, PiCAS UK. Instead the Council has chosen to take advice from a commercial contractor with a vested interest. The Council has, as a result, been duped into purchasing inhumane and completely ineffective pest control services. The only beneficiary of flying a bird of prey in Bath City Centre is the contractor that has sold the service to the Council, not the general public that are paying for it."

For further information on PiCAS UK, please visit the website: www.picasuk.com.
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