

**[Environment Select Committee-  
Task & Finish Working Group]**

**[Review of Rat/Pigeon Problem  
within the Borough]**



**[June] [2008]**

Environment Select Committee (Task & Finish Wkg Gp)  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
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## **TASK & FINISH GROUP – MEMBERSHIP**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Foreword



**Councillor Woodhead**  
Chair – Rats & Pigeons Task  
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**Councillor Cains**  
Rats & Pigeons Task & Finish



**Councillor Rix**  
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## Original Brief

### 1. Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

Liveability-Make Stockton a cleaner, greener place to live, work and visit;  
Maintain the cleanliness of the Borough.

### 2. What are the main issues?

- To identify the degree of rat/pigeon infestation within the Borough;
- To increase awareness of the Council's policy to control such problems, and the role of other relevant authorities ;
- To encourage public and commercial awareness of factors that influence the number of rats and pigeons; and educate their behaviour accordingly.

### 3. The Thematic Select Committee's overall aim/ objectives in doing this work is:

To ascertain whether there is evidence of an increased number/reported problems of rats/pigeons within the Borough; and if so, identify what are the factors influencing such increase in numbers; and what action can be taken to reduce/control these factors.

### 4. The possible outputs/outcomes are:

Greater public and commercial awareness of factors that influence the number of rats and pigeons; with a resultant cleaner environment and a decrease in both their number and the volume of public complaints regarding their presence;

An updated and clear pest control policy and strategy (rat/pigeon infestation) in dealing with domestic, commercial and open public spaces;

Cleaner public places void of litter/food waste and design that encourage infestation by rats and pigeons;

Recommendations to influence landscape/architectural design of habitat of rat/pigeons so as to make more unattractive/less appealing to rats/pigeons;

Greater partnership working between the local authority and sewerage authority to address any recorded evidence of rat existence/reported problems.

### 5. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?

To encourage residents and commercial premises to act responsibly with regard to their storage/disposal of waste so as to discourage infestation of rats and pigeons within the borough; and to review the role of other relevant authorities, such as Northumbria Water, in carrying out their statutory responsibilities.

## 1.0 Executive Summary

### Rats

The numbers of reported sightings/complaints regarding rats within the Borough has remained consistent despite a slight decrease from 1228 in 2005/6 to 1033 in 2007/8. The presence of food source from discarded food, incorrectly stored commercial/domestic waste, and even garden activities such as home composting and feeding of birds, will offer an incentive to attract rats out into the open. Particular evidence has been found of communal bin stores, with either wheeled bins left open, or black bags or waste left on the ground, as being areas that have led to a rat presence.

The Task & Finish Group believe that public awareness of the availability of food sources that directly lead to an increased presence of rats should be raised; with particular emphasis given to advice that can be made available to both domestic and commercial properties so as to lessen the likelihood of their actions encouraging a rat presence.

Unlike some local authorities, including those within the Tees Valley, Stockton Borough Council's Pest Control Treatment Service offers a free service to all domestic properties for the treatment of rats; as well as offering commercial contracts at a competitive rate.

1. **Recommended that a public awareness campaign be conducted via Stockton News, the Council's website and other Council information outlets advising of the sensible action that should be taken (both do's and don'ts) so as to eliminate potential food sources likely to encourage rats.**

**The availability of the free service offered to all domestic properties, and the service offered to commercial properties, be similarly highlighted as part of the campaign.**

When incidents of a rat presence are reported to the Council on publicly owned land such as an open space, grass verge, communal area etc, the current practice is for the Council's Pest Control Section to seek to firstly identify the portfolio responsibility within the Council as to who owns the land, before then advising the portfolio holder of the actual cost of carrying out the necessary treatment works and awaiting authorisation to be able to implement the works at the quoted price.

This process, both the identification of budget responsibility and consideration of approval of the works, can be time consuming and can take several days, whilst the problem continues to exist and it appears to any person having reported the problem that no action is being taken. It should be noted that the Council's Pest Control Section has a target of responding to domestic properties within five days; and this can often be exceeded when dealing with complaints regarding rat problems reported on public property.

Budget responsibility for pest control treatment can vary within Service Groups, with some having a dedicated budget set aside for such costs, and

others dealing with the issue as and when it occurs, seeking to identify available funding when required.

The Task & Finish Group believe that intervention is required to speed up the process following reporting of rat problems on public land so that the Pest Control Service can carry out the necessary works as soon after they are reported as possible. Failure to respond quickly (due to the problems of ascertaining departmental responsibility) can only undermine public confidence in reporting the problem, perpetuate public concern regards the continued presence of the problem whilst responsibility is being investigated, and cause either the problem to worsen or the location of the problem more difficult to pinpoint. Public areas of regular concern, such as shrub beds, should warrant proactive rather than reactive Pest Control. Covert baiting points should be provided and routine treatment carried out based on a contract with the Pest Control Service.

- 2 Recommended that the Corporate Director of Resources be requested to look into current spend across the Council on pest control services and the opportunities to maximise efficiencies and ‘invest to save’ opportunities, particularly in relation to responsibilities for open public land.**

Densely shrubbed areas, situated near litter bins, communal bin storage areas and places where human food may be deposited, often provide refuge for rats (as was evidenced in 2006 when shrubbed areas near Municipal Buildings and the Library attracted a number of rats). In such situations, it is often necessary to carry out reactive action to provide covert baiting stations, which can be costly to provide and, as suggested, are reactionary to the problem rather than preventing it occurring at the outset. These areas also attract litter and are difficult to maintain.

As part of the consideration of all submitted planning applications containing proposed shrubbed areas within an overall landscape design scheme, the Task & Finish Working Group believe that dialogue should be entered into between Planning, Environmental Health and CFYA so that wherever possible the most appropriate designed scheme to suit each party can be agreed upon in order to minimise the potential for the landscape design to attract both rats and litter.

- 3. Recommended that in order to minimise the potential for the urban landscape to attract both rats and litter, the Environmental Health Service should continue to be consulted on planning applications containing proposed shrub beds, and the service should also provide input into the design stage of major projects and the guidance contained within the Local Development Framework.**

Reported complaints regarding evidence of a rat problem are logged by staff utilising the Council’s FLARE system, which records the details, location and contact details of the complainant. These details are then fed to the Council’s Pest Control Team as received; who then establish contact with the complainant and make an appointment, if required, to carry out treatment works.



Whilst the FLARE system records specific data regards the address of the complainant, and can record the ward in which the complaint lies, the system does not identify specific hotspots where problems have been identified, which can assist officers in identifying trends and carrying out appropriate action in a concentrated area, rather than on an individual ad hoc basis. For example, officers requested to investigate a particular rat problem at one domestic property have only their own recollection of whether there are similar problems in the area and can not pinpoint with any degree of accuracy the exact locations of reported rat problems.

The Task & Finish Group consider that purchase of available software would allow a connection to be made between the recording of reported problems on the Council's FLARE system; and the specific highlighting of locations, trends and other related problems on the Council's GIS system, which would assist officers from the Pest Control Section in addressing the problem in a more strategic manner, concentrating resources where they are required in a more economic manner than available at present. The estimated cost of the software is within the region of £8k. This would result in greater, more accurate management information being available that would map the location of reported problems and seek to achieve a more widespread solution to the problem, as opposed to dealing with the matter piecemeal as reported. Such a system could also be utilised to give more accurate data regards both surface rodent problems and issues regards defective sewers resulting in evidence of a greater rat problem. This information could be overlaid with the information held by Northumbria Water Ltd (NW) to give a more overall complete picture of the evidence of rat activity within the Borough; with the Council able to identify and request sewer treatment works required to be carried out by NW.

- 4. Recommended that the benefits of the connectivity of the two systems be acknowledged and the Environmental Health Manager build into Service Improvement Planning the acquisition of the appropriate software necessary to achieve greater connectivity between use of the Council's FLARE and GIS systems, so as to produce a higher level of management information that more accurately records specific trends regarding reported pest control problems.**

It is recognised that available food sources for rats such as that offered via the disposal of food waste via home composting, feeding of birds and keeping of pets/livestock in domestic gardens, can contribute to a rat presence within the curtilage of domestic properties.

The Task & Finish Group noted that sensible advice is required to be given to both residents and the commercial sector regarding both the disposal, composting and storing of food waste, to ensure that neither measure unwittingly encourages and provides a food source likely to attract rodents.

- 5. Recommended that through consultation with the Environmental Health Manager, the Council's Waste Implementation Plan should reflect the need to ensure that the advice provided regarding, and proposed methods of, food waste disposal and home composting do not encourage and provide food sources to rodents; and that the supply of suitable compost unit bases be further investigated by a Sub Group established by the Urban Environment Task Group (UETG).**

## Pigeons

Evidence has been found by the Working Group that there are high numbers of pigeon population within Stockton Town Centre, with particular concentration on and around derelict buildings, and in the vicinity of fast food, café or bakery outlets.

It has also noted the harmful effects to both the town centre fabric, shoppers/visitors, and to pigeons themselves as a result of feeding on junk food rather than seeking food from elsewhere, such as in local parks, gardens or in the countryside.

Many people are likely to be unaware of the problems caused by excessive pigeon numbers; or indeed that by not feeding the birds junk food, they would be actively encouraging them to become healthier and seek a more natural diet from sources other than the town centres.

It is necessary to educate and inform the public and commercial sector of the detrimental effects of providing food sources that encourage pigeon infestation in town centres; and to announce this Council's aim to tackle the problem, thus ultimately making the town centres a more desirable place to shop, visit and conduct business from.

Advice on proofing measures that can be implemented to town centre buildings both in private and public ownership, can be provided by the PCTS and significant financial and other advantages can result through savings made in building cleaning and the attraction of more shoppers/visitors to a cleaner town centre environment.

A variety of communication outlets are available to promote this message; such as via Stockton News, the Council's website, Stockton Retail Forum etc.

- 6. Recommended that an initial public and commercial awareness campaign be initiated via Stockton News, the Council's website, the various Retail Fora highlighting the Council's wish to tackle pigeon infestation in the Borough, targetted initially via a pilot exercise within Stockton Town Centre , through measures designed to:-**

- Reduce food availability;**
- Prevent pigeon roosting sites as far as possible;**
- Raise awareness via high profile publicity/education of the causes of pigeon infestation (i.e. available food sources and areas for harbourage) and the detrimental effects caused by feeding pigeons human food;**
- Enforce prohibition;**

**and that successful measures are then extended to the remaining Borough Town Centres following the trial period.**

There has been some recorded evidence of public and retail opinion received regards the presence of pigeons within the town centre; however, there has been little co-ordinated consultation undertaken nor awareness raised of the benefits to be gained from reducing pigeon numbers in the town centre. What

little evidence has been recorded suggests that many people find the presence of pigeons within the town centre to be deeply unpleasant to their overall shopping experience; however, a small number of people either wilfully or unwittingly encourage their number through providing them with a junk/human food source. Some persistent feeders may be unaware of the harmful effects of this action; or may strongly defend their right to do so.

Formal engagement of both public and commercial opinion on the proposed campaign would establish their commitment or otherwise to the range of possible options that could be deployed to reduce pigeon numbers.

Engagement would allow both the harmful effects of the problem to be explained; and the options available to reduce pigeon numbers to be communicated, each of which would require the future commitment of both the public and retail/business sector.

- 7. Recommended that as part of the awareness raising campaign suggested in Recommendation 6, the views of both the public and the retail sector be sought through a consultation exercise to ascertain their support for any proposed action to be taken aimed at reducing the number of pigeons within Stockton Town Centre in the first instance.**

Many of the retail and business premises within Stockton Town Centre have been found to provide either a refuge or roosting point for pigeons; particularly those that provide a food source or are left derelict and open to inhabitation. There is only a little evidence of proofing measures being carried out to retail premises to discourage pigeon roosting.

The Pest Control Service Team can offer advice and practical help that will assist retailers/businesses when considering what measures can be taken to discourage the harbourage of pigeons on their premises.

Proofing equipment can be supplied at reasonable cost and through collective participation, retailers/businesses can reduce implementation costs by working together when installing equipment, thus achieving economies of scale.

- 8. Recommended that via the suggested Retail Fora (e.g Stockton Town Centre Retail Forum; Town Centre Managers Newsletter, Chamber of Commerce Business Forum) the retail sector be advised of the available support offered by the Council's Pest Control Service regards measures that can be implemented to prevent harbourage of pigeons on their properties, including proofing measures, securing of property against roosting etc, and they be encouraged to identify any retail properties requiring prevention works, including derelict properties providing harbourage.**

Take up and commitment by the retail and business sector to the various measures that can be undertaken to discourage pigeon infestation on their buildings is vital to the campaigns success.

The availability of advice and resources that can be provided by PCTS; including proofing measures, should be proactively encouraged. The

commitment of this sector can be achieved through measures such as the offering of limited period concessions against the cost of proofing works, thus encouraging an early take up amongst the sector and establishing a mutually beneficial dialogue.

9. **Recommended that as an incentive to the retail sectors involvement in measures to reduce pigeon infestation, the Council's Environmental Health Manager give consideration to initial concessions being offered to retailers on the cost of implementing proofing measures on their buildings, and issue appropriate advice regarding necessary measures to be carried out.**

In order to demonstrate to the public and retail/business sector the Council's commitment to the success of the campaign, it is necessary to ensure that each of the Council's buildings, and particularly in the first instance those within the town centre, have appropriate proofing measures in place to discourage pigeon infestation.

There are several Council owned buildings within the town centre area, notably the Town Hall and The Shambles that have little, if any evident proofing in place to discourage pigeons. This particular area has been found to be an area where many pigeons congregate, due to the available food sources in the vicinity.

Early discussions must be held between the Council's Environmental Health officer and the Land & Property Manager to discuss the need for suitable measures to be put in place on all Council buildings, but in the first instance, on buildings within the campaign area of Stockton Town Centre.

Considerable savings may then be realised in time due to a reduced need for building cleaning as a result of pigeon infestation; and the Council's buildings may benefit from reduced maintenance as a result.

10. **Recommended that the Council's Land & Property Manager, in consultation with the Environmental Health Manager, be requested to consider appropriate action that could be taken to deter pigeon roosting on Council buildings; such as the suitability of proofing measures being added where appropriate.**

Members were concerned to ensure that future large scale retail developments, in Town Centre or nearby locations, that were likely to include food sources, should not contain design features likely to provide harbourage for pigeons and therefore likely to encourage infestation. Dialogue between developers, Planning and Environmental Health would allow measures to be built into the detailed design stage to eradicate the potential for future problems.

11. **Recommended that as part of the consideration of the detailed design stage of proposed retail developments dialogue be entered into between developers, Planning and Environmental Health so as to seek to remove the potential for design features to encourage pigeon harbourage.**

The Task & Finish Group saw at first hand the many different Council departments that contributed to Liverpool City Council's successful campaign to reduce pigeon numbers.

Engaging a working Group with input from Environmental Health Officers, City Centre Management, Street Crime Wardens, Cleansing Services, Marketing Press Office, Planning/Building Control Officers and Legal Services, was instrumental in ensuring a co-ordinated campaign was carried out utilising the expertise of all concerned and maximising the benefit gained and ensuring that the improvements could be sustained.

The Task & Finish Group consider that a co-ordinated campaign should be orchestrated with all relevant Council Departments represented, to discuss the range of measures that can be implemented to achieve the objective of the campaign, subsequently sustain its success and encourage consideration of other town centre scene matters that would benefit from such holistic consideration.

The group should be responsible for implementation of some of the detail of the measures to be deployed; and should monitor the success of the campaign and reconsider service provision accordingly.

12. **Recommended that a Sub Group be established by the Urban Environment Task Group with responsibility to incorporate into its work programme consideration of the following measures and their cost; and that they form part of an agreed Action Plan to be built into future Service Improvement Planning to assist this Task & Finish Group's aim in achieving a reduction in pigeon numbers in Stockton Town Centre as part of an initial pilot exercise:-**

- Use of Prohibitive Signs advising the public not to feed the pigeons/warning of enforcement action;
- Media campaign utilising all available advertising outlets, bus shelters, billboards, retail premises, sandwich bags etc, promoting the theme of encouraging the public not to feed the pigeons;
- Advice/Enforcement action towards retail sector regards storage of commercial food waste;
- Target collection of litter bins in the Town Centre to reduce build up of food waste likely to attract pigeon/vermin, and consider number and sighting of bins to ensure that they are sited in appropriate locations (such as outside of fast food outlets) ;
- Involvement of Neighbourhood Enforcement Team in offering advice/enforcement to public regards dissuading them from feeding pigeons/dropping food waste;
- Engagement of the retail sector in all measures designed to improve the Town Centre environmental street scene;
- Enforcement action to be taken with regard to properties left derelict and prone to attract pigeon/vermin;
- Commissioning of a DVD, based on the example provided by Liverpool City Council, as a method of engagement to educate the public, schools, community groups etc regarding the aims of the Council's campaign to discourage the feeding of pigeons, and the DVD be promoted on the Castlegate Centre display screen; hosted as a download on the

**Council's website, and circulated to schools/community groups as appropriate;**  
**- The proposed use of raptor methods, subject to the outcome of the proposed consultation, be approved and be funded from the campaign budget, as a measure towards pigeon control.**

A key element of any successful campaign is likely to be focused around a comprehensive and well directed education, publicity and media campaign. Liverpool City Council were able to utilise an array of publicity around the message 'Its bad for the Bird, its bad for the City' theme.

The message was communicated through a variety of sources, such as poster campaigns in retail premises, sandwich bag promotion, advertising on buses, bus shelters, billboards, leaflets, website, television, radio and shopping centre large screen/tannoy.

The Council's Communications Team should be engaged to assist Environmental Health to identify a suitably resourced media budget that can be deployed to communicate the objectives of the campaign and educate and inform the general public, retail and business sectors.

- 13. Recommended that a campaign to reduce pigeon numbers be built into future Pest Control Service Improvement Planning and if appropriate any funding implications be built into the Medium Term Financial Plan process.**

The Group was advised of the importance of raising public awareness of the issue at the outset of the campaign; delivering the key messages and requesting feedback from the public and retail/business community so as to establish a baseline of opinion on the subject.

The Council's website offers an opportunity to deliver the key messages of the campaign and to invite on-line feedback to the measures being proposed to reduce pigeon numbers.

- 14. Recommended that the Council's website content be reviewed to include the main themes of the campaign, offering appropriate advice and requesting on line comment from the public regarding areas affected by pigeon infestation.**

Initial monitoring has been undertaken of pigeon population in Stockton Town Centre and evidence found of significant numbers of pigeons in areas where there are derelict buildings, fast food outlets, cafes, bakeries etc. The promotion of a 'café culture' encouraging people to both shop in the town centre and eat out in the open environment, can be affected by a town centre with a large infestation of pigeons.

In order to address the problems caused by high pigeon numbers, it is necessary for the Council to declare its intention to tackle the problem in partnership with the general public, the retail and business sectors; and to

define an initial target area and % figure reduction in order that the success of any campaign can be measured.

- 16. Recommended that the Council commit to a campaign to achieve a sustainable 50% reduction in pigeon numbers in Stockton Town Centre within three years.**

The proposed aim of the campaign is that the Council commit to a campaign to achieve a sustainable 50% reduction in pigeon numbers in Stockton Town Centre within three years. There are many key partners integral to such a campaign other than Environmental Health, such as CFYA, Waste Management, Town Centre Manager, Land & Property Manager, Planning Enforcement, Communications and Neighbourhood Enforcement Service, as well as the Retail/ Business Sector and the public to whom the campaign hopes to influence. In order to do so, and achieve sustainability, it is necessary for the campaign to be co-ordinated, monitored and reviewed by all involved so that its objectives become entrenched in working practices and contribute to the wider corporate aim of maintaining the environment of the Town Centre and promoting it as an enjoyable shopping and visitor experience for all concerned.

It is suggested that the Urban Environment Task Group be responsible for the co-ordination, monitoring and review of the campaign and provide feedback to the Environment Select Committee on an annual basis.

- 17. Recommended that the success of the campaign be monitored by the Sub Group established by the Urban Environment Task Group and results provided on an annual basis to the Environment Select Committee.**

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 The report presents Cabinet with the findings and recommendations of the Environment Select Committee Task & Finish Working Group following its review to establish the extent of any Rats and Pigeons problem within the Borough. The review took place between February and June 2008.
- 2.2 The request to carry out such a review had first been suggested by members in 2006 at a time when there appeared to be a visible number of rats prevalent in areas of the Borough, including around the vicinity of the Municipal Buildings/Central Library. The presence of high numbers of pigeons around the main Town Centres had also been noted; encouraged by available food sources. As a result, the Executive Scrutiny Committee had included the topic on its Scrutiny Work Programme. Subsequently in January 2008, the Environment Select Committee was requested to establish a small Task & Finish Group to carry out an appropriate scrutiny review and three members of the Select Committee volunteered to undertake this work.
- 2.3 A scope and project plan for the review was subsequently developed by the Task & Finish Group with the overall aim of the review to ascertain whether there was any evidence of an increased number/reported problems of rats/pigeons within the Borough; and if so, identify what were the factors influencing such increase in numbers and what action could be taken to reduce/control these factors.



### 3. Background

3.1 This scrutiny review had been prompted by members being alerted to concerns regarding the presence of both rats and pigeons in areas of the Borough, including within the vicinity of town centres and public places. The Council's Pest Control Service Team (PCST), within Development & Neighbourhood Services, is responsible for monitoring and responding to issues and complaints regarding pest control, such as those caused by pest species such as rats, mice, cockroaches, bedbugs etc., as well as to concerns regarding the presence of flocks of feral (wild) pigeons often found in urban town centres, or where there is an abundance of an available food source. The service also offered support to other Environmental Health Teams, such as Public Health and Food Hygiene.

3.1 The service structure consists of a Principal Environmental Health Officer; 3 Pest Control Officers, 1 Customer Services Officer and 3.5 FTE Admin Support; reporting to the Environmental Health Manager. Enquiries/complaints received by the Section are recorded on the Council's FLARE database system.

3.2 As well as offering free advice and information service to all customers regarding pest control, PCST offers the following services:-

#### Domestic Properties

Free treatment to all domestic properties within the Borough for the following public health pests;

- Mice
- Cockroaches
- Rats
- Bedbugs

All other pest species, including flies, ants, fleas, squirrels, moles, wasps, pigeons etc, treated in domestic properties for a fixed fee of £35 + Vat , with some of these services free to Tristar Housing Tenants as their Association pays for treatment on their behalf.

#### Commercial Properties

Full Pest Management Programme provided on the basis of a one-off treatment or annual contract for a wide range of pests and proofing services. One-off jobs are charged at £40 + materials +Vat for the first visit; with £20 + materials +Vat for every subsequent visit based on half hour. Annual contract prices are subject to estimate.

3.3 The Task & Finish Group was advised that a growing number of local authorities, including within the Tees Valley, were charging domestic properties for their service to exterminate rats/mice; 62% according to the *2006 National Pest Technicians Association Annual Report*. A few Councils nationally had also closed down their Pest Control sections and placed the necessary work to an outside Pest Control Servicing Company.

- 3.4 Both rats and pigeons can constitute a public health hazard as they both can carry harmful diseases, and can also cause other problems to both property and humans.

### **Rats**

- 3.5 Rats are prone to carry Weil's disease, a dangerous and notifiable disease, as well as salmonellosis that can cause diarrhoea and vomiting. They eat and contaminate human food with their droppings, urine and hair. They can also cause structural damage to properties through their burrowing and gnawing activities.
- 3.6 Whilst generally more active at night, they can be seen searching for food and water during the day. Many rat infestations emanate from sewers however they can be found in tunnelling systems found around the outside of buildings, in embankments, rubbish tips, overgrown gardens etc.
- 3.8 The life expectancy of a rat is approximately nine months to one year, during which time a female will typically breed five times. The average size of a litter is between six and ten. Breeding occurs throughout the year, but especially in the spring and autumn.

### **Pigeons**

- 3.9 Pigeons also carry a number of potentially infectious diseases, including salmonellosis, tuberculosis and ornithosis. Contamination of food by pigeon droppings or by the birds themselves can transmit these diseases to humans.
- 3.10 Pigeon droppings are also a danger to the public as they can cause slippery pavements and roads. Startled flocks will take flight suddenly, causing hazards to pedestrians and drivers. The cost of building/pavement cleaning to both commercial properties and local authorities is also greatly exacerbated by this problem.
- 3.11 Vacant buildings, structural defects and building design can all provide attractive roosting sites for pigeons, with many drawn to the available food sources provided within town centres due to food spillage, litter containing food waste, or through the public choosing to feed pigeons on fatty human food. This can lead to the fouling of buildings where birds nest or roost. Apart from being unsightly, the acidic droppings can erode stonework, block gutters and drainpipes causing flooding, and can make fire escapes/ladders unsafe due to them being coated.
- 3.12 The provision of food sources for pigeons can also encourage rodents such as rats and mice, which take any uneaten food. Pigeon nests, droppings or dead carcasses can provide a home for a wide variety of insects; whose infestations can spread into buildings causing nuisance, damage and skin irritation.

## 4 Evidence/Findings

### Methodology

- 4.1 The Task & Finish Group received written and oral evidence to inform the review. In addition, the Group met with both the Council's Town Centre Manager and the managers of both the Wellington Square Retail Development and the Castlegate Centre in Stockton; who accompanied the Group on an inspection of Stockton Town Centre.
- 4.2 The Group also visited Liverpool City Council to see and hear how that authority had tackled their own problem of pigeon infestation in the city in the lead up to it preparing to receive large numbers of visitors as part of it being named European Capital of Culture 2008.
- 4.3 An announcement that the Group was to undertake such a scrutiny review was also hosted on the Council's website and a press release produced. The comments received in response to this were also considered.

### Summary of Background Documents

- 4.4 The Task & Finish Group received the following background documents in preparation for the review:-
  - National Pest Advisory Panel (NPAP)-Objectives and Members
  - 'The Importance of Pest Management in Protecting Public Health-National Pest Advisory Panel (NPAP) Document explaining link between pest control and public health.
  - 'Pest Management is about more than just killing rats' –NPAP Document explaining role of local authority pest control.
  - National Pest Technicians Association (NPTA) Rodent Survey Report 2007

### Summary of Written Evidence

#### **SBC Pest Control Service-Rats & Pigeons-Service Demand/Performance-Evidence from Mark Berry, Principal Environmental Health Officer**

- 4.5 The Task & Finish Group was provided with an overview of the Service's responsibility, structure and charging policy and considered details of service demand/performance over the last seven year period.
- 4.6 Service requests received from both the public and commercial sector in response to rats, mice and pigeons were summarised as follows:-

## Service Demand / Performance

- Service requests received in the last seven years for Rats, Mice and Pigeons

Year	2001/2	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8 Upto 31/1/08
<b>Rats</b>	714	626	922	1072	1228	1061	1033
<b>Mice</b>	636	626	891	827	894	802	744
<b>Pigeons</b>	1	3	7	7	18	21	21

- 4.7 It could be seen that the numbers of service requests in respect of rats had risen dramatically in the period from 2001/2, peaking at 1228 requests in 2005/6, before reducing slightly in 2006/7 (1061). In comparison, few complaints were received within the same period in respect of pigeons, although the number had risen notably in the last three years, and it was believed that this was a direct result of the majority of rat related requests being to rid peoples own domestic/commercial properties of rats, as opposed to tackling pigeon problems which were generally found within public places such as town centres.
- 4.8 Details of the above figures broken down into ward related requests, were also presented for the last four year period (**see Appendix 1**).

### Rats

- 4.9 It was noted that in respect of reported problems with rats, the wards of Mandale & Victoria, Stockton Town Centre and Yarm had generated the most number of complaints consistently over the last three years. It was reported that this could be due to factors such as their proximity to town centres (food sources), defective drains/sewers, or due to being part of the old fabric of buildings within the borough.

### Pigeons

- 4.10 The majority of the fewer number of pigeon complaints received (in comparison to rats) could be attributed in the main to town centre areas such as in Billingham and Stockton.
- 4.11 The Task & Finish Group also considered performance of the Section over the last five years against targets contained within the Environmental Health Service Plan (**also contained within Appendix 1**), as well as income figures received each year since 1996 from Northumbria Water (for sewer/drainage inspections-ceased in 2002), one-off commercial contracts and fixed term commercial contracts.

### Factors Influencing Infestations

- 4.12 The Task & Finish Group was advised that the following factors were likely to be the reason for increasing numbers of both rat and pigeon infestation:-

#### Rats

- Climate Change – milder winters, therefore no natural control;
- Food sources; such as bird feeding, composting, domestic pet excrement, waste food storage;
- Harbourage- unkept gardens, high density shrub beds, sewerage treatments
- Education/Ignorance regarding action that can be taken to prevent rat infestation.

#### Pigeons

- Climate change- temperature affects length of breeding season;
- Food sources; such as deliberate bird feeding; waste food storage;
- Harbourage – empty or derelict buildings, lack of proofing measures;
- Education/Ignorance, many members of the public not realising that feeding of pigeons with human food is not good for the pigeon and can be detrimental to the environmental appearance of public places, and to the health and safety of the public.

- 4.13 Members noted the various baiting and trap methods used by the PCST to eradicate rat colonies; and were advised of ‘proofing’ devices that they could also provide for premises which could be fitted to window or rooftop ledges to prevent pigeons from perching in these areas whilst waiting for food sources. These devices often took the form of lightweight adjustable length spiking units that could be fixed to window/rooftop ledges preventing the area being used by pigeons; and thus encouraging them to find other sites to perch on away from the main shopping centre and food outlets.

### **Summary of Evidence Obtained from Site Visits/Monitoring**

#### **Task & Finish Working Group Inspection of Stockton Town Centre with Council’s Town Centre Manager and Managers of both the Wellington Square and Castlegate Retail Centres**

- 4.14 The Task & Finish Group, along with the invited retail and town centre representatives, conducted a tour of ‘hotspots’ within the town centre which offered either harbourage to pigeons, or provided possible food sources to both rats and pigeons.
- 4.15 Given the fact that derelict properties offered a particularly attractive source of harbourage for pigeons, the Group noted with concern that large numbers of pigeons appeared to find both harbourage on, and inside, the former Globe Theatre building. Environmental Health had previously requested that the owners of the building make secure the premises to prevent access by pigeons through broken windows, damaged air vents etc; however, the premises could still be seen as offering access points meaning that it could be providing refuge for an untold number of pigeons.

- 4.16 It could be seen that the rooftops and fascia ledges of the majority of buildings along the High Street offered vantage points for pigeons to sit and await available food sources arising. Particular 'hotspots' could be identified where fast food, cafes or bakeries were located in the town centre.
- 4.17 It was noted however that some premises sporadically within the Wellington Square Retail Development on the High Street had deployed proofing measures on canopies above shop windows and window ledges; with a resultant lack of visible presence of pigeons in these areas. In addition, regular inspection was carried out of the area to ensure that there was no build up of food waste in the area or littering; some of this inspection could be carried out through CCTV monitoring.
- 4.18 Similarly, the Castlegate Centre had erected 'netting' above the main entrance to the centre preventing pigeons perching on the glass façade. It was also noted that the centre used a large plasma screen monitor, situated above the entrance to the building, to advertise and inform shoppers. Such a facility could be hired for any suitable public service message.
- 4.19 The Town Centre Manager advised that she also managed an active retail forum within Stockton; which provided a valuable network for consultation and discussion with retailers. In addition, a quarterly Newsletter was sent out to around 500 businesses.
- 4.20 Each of the retail representatives present were advised of the advice and assistance that could be provided by PCST; and were informed of the successes obtained by Liverpool City Council who had deployed a range of measures which had ultimately led to a reduction in pigeon numbers within a year of being piloted. All of the town centre representatives present expressed support for any reasonable measures that could be introduced to make the town centre a more attractive place to shop; and as a host for activities such as the Riverside Festival. The presence of, and damage caused, by both excessive numbers of pigeons and a rat population all contributed to lessen the experience for both shoppers and visitors to the centre.

#### **Task & Finish Working Group Visit to Liverpool City Council-Evidence of Effective Pigeon Control Measures**

- 4.21 The Group was advised by the Principal Environmental Health Officer of the work carried out by Liverpool City Council regards the control of pigeon numbers and that their success had now led to the work being regarded by Environmental Health Officers as notable best practice. This was principally due to the fact that they had been successful, through a variety of measures being introduced, in reducing pigeon numbers within their City Centre by 45% in one year. As a result, the Group was invited to meet with officers from Liverpool City Council and conduct a tour of the City Centre to witness first hand the measures used and successes achieved.
- 4.22 Their ambition to tackle such an issue was driven in part by their impending year as the City of Culture; likely to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city, and also because of the will of both the Council and the retail sector to address the problems caused by large numbers of pigeons present in the city; eg:-

- unhealthy birds
  - fouling
  - slip hazards
  - cleansing costs
  - blocked gutters
  - food safety implications
  - unpleasant shopping/eating experience
- 4.23 As a consequence, they embarked on a campaign engaging the help of both Environmental Health Officers, City Centre Management, Street Crime Wardens, Cleansing Services, Marketing Press Office, Planning/Building Control Officers and Legal Services, with the following key principles:-
- There was likely to be no magic wand or quick fix solution;
  - Zero pigeons was not an option, but a significant reduction was;
  - There was a need to clearly define a target area to focus measures on;
  - The issue was likely to be sensitive to the public.
- 4.24 The first elements of the campaign were to gather the views/opinions of the public and business community; identify key locations and carry out census on pigeon numbers; agree key messages and tone of campaign and agree and communicate a clear and achievable campaign objective. They also sought the advice of an independent expert on measures that were likely to contribute to the success of the campaign.
- 4.25 Feedback from both the public and the business/retail sector revealed that:-
- 85-90% agreed that existing number of pigeons were a nuisance;
  - 75-78% agreed the Council should take some action;
  - Action supported included preventing bird feeding, scare tactics, cleaner streets, proofing of buildings etc;
  - Only 5-6% supported culling as an option;
  - 13% of public admitted to having been casual feeders.
- 4.26 Their pigeon census carried out at key locations revealed numbers ranging from 10 - 75 over the peak lunchtime period, attracted by the available food sources in each location.
- 4.27 Their campaign objective was then declared to achieve a sustainable reduction in the pigeon population in the City Centre; and to achieve a 50% reduction in pigeon numbers over a three year period (2007-2010). Key to the campaign would be measures to-
- reduce food availability;
  - make areas as unfriendly as possible for pigeons;
  - raise awareness through high profile publicity/education of the harmful effects to both the bird and the city itself of feeding pigeons human food;
  - support proofing initiatives on city centre buildings;
  - formal enforcement action against persistent feeders.
- 4.28 Essential to each of these was a strong media and publicity message that advised people of the negative affects of a large pigeon population within the City Centre. Therefore, they had embarked on an eye catching publicity and

awareness raising campaign, utilising new advertising opportunities such as on buses, telephone boxes, sandwich bags; as well as posters displayed in retail outlets.

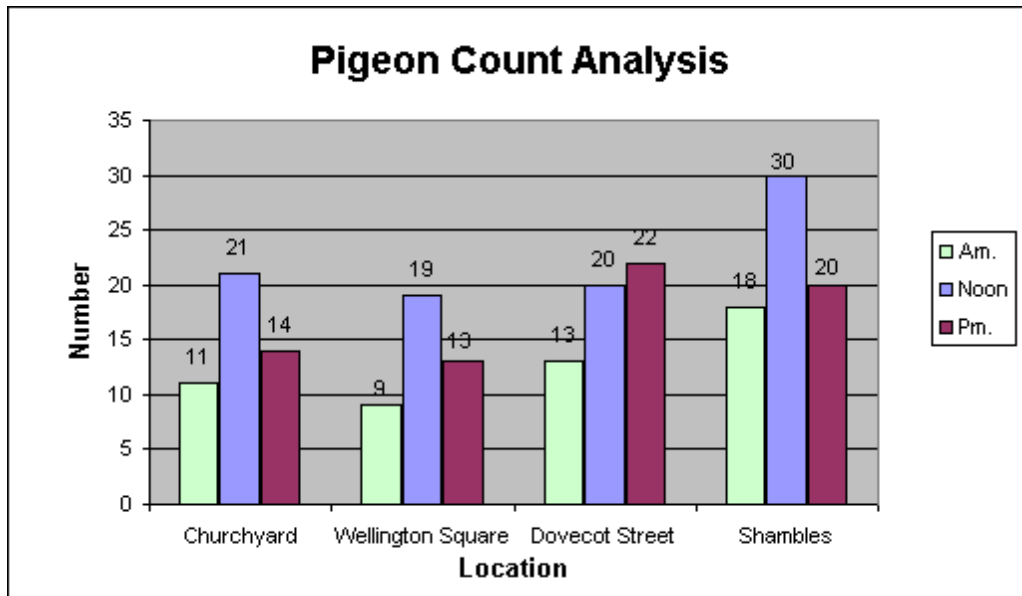
- 4.29 They also commissioned the making of a DVD, which illustrated in way unique to the city both the message that feeding pigeons was detrimental to the city, and to the birds. The method used in the DVD was highlighted for its simplicity of method and style likely to engage and attract public attention as it featured an animated pigeon character, with an ingredient of humour, that made its watching memorable and its message lasting. The DVD was shown regularly on big screens within the city centre; and over 500 copies were distributed to schools, community groups etc, as well as being featured as a website download.
- 4.30 Through the publicity, and the subsequent media interest expressed, a strong message was able to be communicated regarding the campaigns aims; which they regarded essential as a way of both informing and gaining the commitment of the general public. The business and retail sector were also highly supportive of the campaigns measures through financial commitment to carry out proofing and other preventative measures, and through their willingness to display publicity material, show the DVD and contribute to awareness raising in partnership with the City Council.
- 4.31 After the first year of their campaign, the City Council carried out a further census of pigeon numbers and was able to report an overall 45% reduction, with the same key locations evidencing numbers from 2 – 45, in comparison to those referred at paragraph 4.26.

### **Monitoring of Pigeon Population**

- 4.32 As part of the Group's remit, and following the lead of Liverpool City Council, officers undertook a sustained monitoring exercise within Stockton Town Centre over a two week period, and also carried out one off inspections in Billingham and Thornaby Town Centres.
- 4.33 Pigeons were found to be present in each, with the common theme being that most were to be found in locations where food sources existed.
- 4.34 Four random hotspots were therefore identified for monitoring within Stockton Town Centre; chosen due to their proximity to food sources. Consequently, officers carried out a number counts at the same time over early morning, lunch and tea time periods on six occasions over the two week period. An average number was then taken to reflect numbers at each location as follows:-



	Churchyard	Wellington Square	Dovecot Street	Shambles
Am.	11	9	13	18
Noon	21	19	20	30
Pm.	14	13	22	20



4.35 The monitoring was specific to these locations and did not include numbers of pigeons found in other locations within and around the Town Centre. Reference has already been made to the high numbers found by the Task & Finish Group on the premises of the former Globe Theatre (paragraph 4.15 refers) and numbers were also witnessed in the various courtyards within the High Street, adjacent the Swallow Hotel and on the river bank adjacent the footpath bridge next to Silver Street.

## 5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The Task & Finish Group established that there is evidence of both a pigeon and rat presence within the Borough as confirmed by both recorded complaints or visible sighting.
- 5.2 The numbers of reported sightings/complaints regarding rats within the Borough has increased steadily over the last eight years from 714 requests in 2001/2 to 1251 in 2007/8 despite a one-off decrease in 2006/7. The presence of food source from discarded food, incorrectly stored commercial/domestic waste, and even garden activities such as home composting and feeding of birds, will offer an incentive to attract rats out into the open. Particular evidence has been found of communal bin stores, with either wheeled bins left open, or black bags or waste left on the ground, as being areas that have led to a rat presence.
- 5.3 The Working Group found that there are high numbers of pigeon population within Stockton Town Centre, with particular concentration on and around derelict buildings, and in the vicinity of fast food, café or bakery outlets. It also noted the harmful effects to both the town centre fabric, shoppers/visitors, and to pigeons themselves as a result of pigeons feeding on junk food rather than seeking food from elsewhere, such as in local parks, gardens or in the countryside.
- 5.4 As a result of both factors, the Working Group have examined options that seek to reduce their number and have taken note of best practice and the advice of officers within the Pest Control Service, to suggest both practical measures and appropriate publicity and awareness raising information designed to achieve a sustainable reduction.

