

CROYDON COUNCIL
Department of adult services, health and housing
Housing Enforcement

Pest control policy - Pigeons

Back ground

The objective of this policy is to ensure there are consistent and clear guidelines involving pigeons within the boundaries of Croydon to ensure the promotion and preservation of public health, safety and convenience.

Flocks of feral pigeons have become an increasingly common sight in many towns and cities. They thrive in urban areas in particular because there is usually a good food source and the absence of predators. The result is that they can become a pest in built up areas. The cost each year to local authorities to clean and repair buildings and monuments is substantial.

Pigeons may be classed as a pest and the control of their numbers may be the responsibility of the local council for various reasons:

- 1) Noise: Perching and roosting can cause a nuisance to residents. The constant cooing of pigeons and the flapping of their wings can cause stress and upset to some people.
- 2) Damage to property: Pigeon droppings (guano) are acidic and can erode stonework, resulting in costly long term damage. Vacant buildings, structural defects and building design all provide attractive roosting sites. Various proofing methods are available to deter roosting.
- 3) Hazards: Pigeon droppings are a danger to the public as they can cause slippery pavements, roads and escape routes and may be unsafe to use. Gutters and downpipes can become blocked, causing flooding. Startled flocks will take flight suddenly, causing hazards to pedestrians and drivers.
- 4) Attracting other pests: The feeding of pigeons attracts rats and mice, which take any uneaten food. Pigeon nests, droppings and dead carcasses provide a home for a wide variety of insects. Infestations can spread into buildings causing nuisance, damage and skin irritation.

The public should be advised why pigeons should not be fed

Feeding results in all year round breeding which causes overcrowding in roosting sites, allowing disease to spread quickly within the flock. The birds therefore live in an unhealthy and stressful condition, exposed to parasites and disease which can be passed on to other wild birds. Pigeons are wild birds, capable of searching out their own natural food supply. Regular feeding by humans destroys their ability to fend for themselves and makes them dependent on humans.

The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 has been used successfully to stop people feeding pigeons due to the nuisance caused to neighbours. If an Anti Social Behaviour Order is breached the person feeding the pigeons may be ordered to pay a large fine and / or serve a prison sentence.

The complaint process

Following a complaint being received the officer will discuss the matter with the complainant and investigate the complaint further. The officer may visit the site where the pigeons are allegedly causing a problem and note numbers and behaviour of the pigeons, location and people who may be affected.

Following the visit the officer may decide that the most appropriate course of action is to close the case. The complainant will be sent a standard letter with an explanation of the officer's action. An advice leaflet may also be sent.

If the officer decides to take action following the visit a standard letter may be sent to the complainant and feeder of the pigeons. The standard letter to the feeder includes a request not to feed the pigeons and to keep property in reasonable condition. The standard letter to the respondent will advise what action has been taken by the officer to date and what further action may be taken.

Contact centre

Where a request for works regarding pigeons is reported to Croydon Council from an owner occupier or privately rented property, the Contact Centre should advise the resident that the Council does not provide any pest control services for birds. The complainant will be advised that the resident should consult local business directory publications, or look on the internet, for pest control companies. The Council has no policy to control or cull birds within the borough; such actions are expensive and can only have a short-term impact.

For privately rented accommodation the Contact Centre should advise the resident that they should contact their landlord in the first instance, as they are responsible for the upkeep of the building. There may also be other issues, for example repairs that need to be carried out, that their landlord is obliged to carry out.

What the law says about pigeons

Most birds and their nests are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The Act allows for the control of certain birds, including feral pigeons, by authorised persons using specified methods to prevent serious damage to agriculture, to preserve public health / air safety, or to conserve other wild birds.

The use of spring traps, poisons, certain types of nets, gassing and sticky substances that may entangle a bird are illegal. Approved methods include trapping or drugging followed by humane destruction and shooting.

It is an offence under the Criminal Damage Act 1971 to intentionally kill a racing pigeon (all racing pigeons carry a hard plastic ring on the leg/s which identifies the owner).

Useful links

www.naturalengland.org.uk

www.defra.gov.uk

www.rspca.org.uk

www.picasuk.com