

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

15 DECEMBER 2020

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor McGonigle to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Bird Feeding, Kennetside

On Kennetside between Kennet Mouth and The Jolly Anglers is a favourite spot for people to feed the plethora of birds in the area.

While this is admirable in many ways, it is also creating some unpleasant side-effects, including the wrong kind of food, empty plastic bags blowing into the river from overflowing bins and food left on the ground encouraging rats, which have increased in number.

It is felt by many that some permanent signage stating what birds can be seen in this location, what they can and cannot be fed and some basic do's and don'ts regarding environmental health would be very welcome by residents and the many passers-by in this area.

Is this something the council would consider arranging?

REPLY by Councillor Davies:

I invite Councillor Rowland, the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation (Councillor Rowland):

I would like to thank Councillor McGonigle for the question and for raising this matter, which crosses not only the boundary of my ward, Abbey, but also Park ward and in fact Wokingham Borough Council! Your question does however, highlight an issue that is not only evident along Kennetside, but also occurs across the Borough where residents with the best intentions are feeding birds and other wildlife along our waterways. I acknowledge in certain locations it can be a pernicious issue and one that needs to be addressed.

People chose to try to feed birds and wildlife for all sorts of reasons, sometimes out of a genuine goodwill towards wildlife and sometimes these offerings are the manifestation of religious practice too, all of which we need to be very sensitive to and mindful of. Sadly, the wrong sorts of food being consumed by birds and wildlife can be of particular harm; noting for example that white bread can be a particular issue for waterfowl causing a condition called "angel wing" leaving the bird unable to fly as a result. Furthermore, despite the various best intentions of residents, there are the obvious added side effects of attracting rats and other vermin and the additional litter that the Council's Street Cleansing teams then need to deal with.

Specifically, with regards to the litter along the Reading Borough Council portion of the Kennet Mouth, I can confirm that the litter bins are emptied three times a week along

Kennetside and our Streetcare Cleansing Team believe that this frequency is adequate at this point in time. However, the Team will monitor the area more closely and should an additional litter bin or additional emptying be required, they will action this accordingly.

With regard to the requested information sign, I wish to be clear that whilst this is not a regulatory enforceable sign on the public highway, I concur with Cllr McGonigle that signage could be of benefit in this area and others in protection of our wildlife and birds in several areas around the Borough. Therefore, I can assure you that I will prioritise looking into the development of appropriate signage that can provide helpful guidance for those that may wish to feed birds and wildlife and to look to place that signage along Kennetside and around the Borough as needed.

In addition to new signage, I will ensure that the Council will look into using our available social media platforms to get the message out to the public and to encourage residents, and volunteer groups to become involved with spreading the word, monitoring the area and taking a more proactive role in dealing with this issue.

I trust this answers the Councillor's query and I am also more than happy to write a letter to Wokingham Borough Council to ensure that they also engage similarly in the area around the Kennet Mouth. I concur that we need to do more to ensure that residents with often times the best of intentions to use their common sense to feed wildlife with appropriate foodstuffs and to dispose of their litter responsibly. I would encourage local residents and groups that are noting similar issues in their areas to make contact with the Council, so that we can work together to improve the situation for wildlife not only along Kennetside but throughout the Borough.