

National Parks and Wildlife Service

Via email to WildBirdDeclarations@chg.gov.ie

Sunday 7th February 2021

Re: Public Consultation on Wild Birds Derogations – **urban seagulls**

To Whom It Concerns

The following submission is made on behalf of the Residents' of the Chapelgate estate by the undersigned Gerry Newman and John Keogh. We are officers of the Residents' Association Committee for the estate.

1. Introduction.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the public consultation. Our submission concerns urban seagulls and ongoing issues. Our estate was one of eight housing estates who submitted the community-wide petition for assistance with urban seagull issues to the NPWS in 2016. We also corresponded with the NPWS twice, once in 2016 and again in 2017. NPWS responded to us saying that a major review in 2018 was to address the seagull issues. Then in 2019 a new Consultative Committee was set up Minister Madigan to run for another two years which is up in May of this year. Two members of our association serve on the Balbriggan Community Committee that has been working on this issue since 2016 and our Residents' Association is up to date on what has been happening in the Minister's Consultative Committee. The New Minister, Darragh O'Brien, serves our constituency and he is very au fait with this issue and discussed it with community representatives on a number of occasions. Our comments below are made notwithstanding the CoViD-19 restrictions in place since early 2020 – the circumstances as described have been in existence and getting worse for a number of years.

2. Overall, we remain very disappointed with the situation as it is nearly five years now since this issue was raised by our community. It is clear to us that other countries have been dealing with the urban seagull issues for a long time and they all regard it as a public health and safety issue. We are at a loss to understand why this is not the case in Ireland under the same EU laws. Balbriggan is a fishing town and we are well used to seagulls – we have the birds on many of our local crests and logos. So let's be clear our community does not hate seagulls and we are not calling for any harm to the birds. However, there has been a surge in the numbers and they are breeding in many unsuitable places. This is causing huge problems as previously notified with noise at all hours of the day and night for several months, fouling is extensive, people are being attacked and injured, expensive damage to property and many serious issues in our schools and business generally around the town. The consultants from Fingal County Council surveyed a number of locations in Balbriggan in 2018 using a Drone – some of our residents recharged the Drone batteries for them. Their report showed some of the unsuitable places where there are very high numbers of seagulls breeding.

3. Our estate is fortunate to be a short walking distance to four large schools in the centre of Balbriggan. Each one of these schools has ongoing serious issues with seagulls. Once again these issues include serious damage, fouling, attacks and injury to the schoolchildren which means they are kept in from the yard a lot at break times, and constant noise during the day. Parents and grandparents are very concerned that nothing is being done to alleviate the problems in the schools and the fact that this issue has dragged on for so long. It is a regular occurrence to see dozens of seagulls swooping down on the main street of the town at any sign of discarded food – often stopping the traffic. Fingal County Council delivered a leaflet about not feeding seagulls and on proper food waste management into 9000 homes and premises in 2018. Perhaps it is now time to prosecute for feeding seagulls in residential areas as has been the case in other Council areas around the country.

4. Our people have relatives and friends in other areas and in other local towns and working in Dublin so we know that this is not just a 'Balbriggan' issues as is sometimes portrayed in the media. There is a regular item every year on LMFM Radio giving advice to people in Drogheda and Meath on the seagulls issue, and the Station phones our Balbriggan Committee looking for people to go on the air with advice – it is always too late though because the seagulls have already bred chicks. Howth and Skerries were also filmed in the 2018 study. Likewise in Dublin city, seagulls have been causing issues all over the city centre. Anyone with a bit of common sense can see that there is a serious problem and that it is getting worse.
5. We must acknowledge that the NPWS gave a Derogation to Balbriggan in 2017 and that this Derogation has been helpful in dealing with some serious issues e.g. multiple nests on some homes, and on local pubs, restaurants and shops. Without the Derogation, we have no doubt that people would have been forced to take matters in to their own hands as things were so bad. Therefore, we must emphasise that we need the Derogation to be kept in place and in our opinion it needs to be a perpetual Derogation because certain places are never going to be suitable to have seagull colonies breeding on them. Your notice about the submission invites the public to submit comments and proposals so we have done that as follows:

6. Comments:

Chapelgate Residents Association, on behalf of our residents, makes the following summary comments:

- a) The urban seagull problem is serious and getting worse in its impacts on communities.
- b) Ireland is far behind all of our neighbours in recognising and addressing the problem
- c) The problem is a public health and a public safety issue and must be recognised as such
- d) The problem is also causing very serious property damage to homes, schools and businesses
- e) Northern Ireland has had a General Licence for this problem since the early 1980s
- f) There is no justification for continuing to ignore this problem and its impacts on people.

7. Proposals:

Chapelgate Residents Association, on behalf of our residents, makes the following proposals:

1. The Balbriggan Derogation needs to be made permanent for residential areas, schools, creches, medical facilities and shops, supermarkets and restaurants
2. The Derogation needs to be made more publicly through advertising so that everyone is aware of it
3. The NPWS needs to recognise that this is a public health and safety issue and deal with it properly
4. Fingal County Council need to provide assistance to the community on this issue, especially to schools and elderly people who may be living alone and having serious difficulties
5. Other impacted areas/towns and the City needs a similar Derogation for all of the reasons above
6. The Derogation Declaration for 2021/22 needs to address the above points, and with plenty pf advance notice because the seagulls being nesting in the middle of April.

In conclusion therefore, we make the above submission on behalf of the Chapelgate Residents' Association and our residents.

Yours sincerely

Gerry Newman, Chairman, c/o postal address above

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John Keogh, Committee Member, c/o postal address above

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Chapelgate Residents Association
Balbriggan