

**CITY SERVICES, COMMUNITY AND
CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
REPORT COVER SHEET**

Agenda Item 5.1

7 September 2004

UPDATE ON PIGEON MANAGEMENT ISSUE

Division Design & Culture

Presenter Garth Bradbury, Manager Facilities Management

Purpose

To update the Committee on progress to date on the pigeon management issue.

Time Frame

The development of designs for a loft, dovecote and designated feeding area are already underway and trials of a new product from the US are underway, the results of which should be known within a few weeks.

Caretaker Policy

The progress report on pigeon management is neither a major policy decision nor a 'significant' decision for the purposes of the Caretaker Policy.

Finance

While the costs of designing, building and installing a loft, dovecote and designated feeding area have not yet been established, the budget for the 2004/05 financial year allocated to this project is \$100,000.

Legal

The report is for noting only and no direct legal issues arise from the recommendation. Legal advice has and will continue to be provided as required in respect to processes to improve pigeon management in the CBD.

Recommendation

That the City Services, Community and Cultural Development Committee note progress to date and the activities to be undertaken to improve pigeon management in the CBD.

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Purpose

1. To update the Committee on progress to date on the pigeon management issue.

Background

2. In October 2003, Council was asked to take enforcement action against a person who had allegedly been feeding large quantities of bird seed to pigeons throughout the CBD on a daily basis, the practice of which had continued unabated for at least four years.
3. Upon investigation into the situation, it emerged that officers had repeatedly attempted to speak with the individual concerned in an effort to seek voluntary compliance which was not forthcoming.
4. Health Services referred the matter to Community Services seeking assistance with the matter. Despite efforts to work with one bird feeder in particular the problem escalated to the extent that between 15 and 30kgs of bird seed was being brought into the CBD daily.
5. At this point, it was agreed that further research about controlling pigeon populations was required instead of just fining an individual for bird feeding.
6. An extensive six month desktop research and consultative process was conducted to develop an option paper for consideration by Council.
7. The research and extensive stakeholder consultation phase resulted in agreement to invite the English organisation PiCAS UK (Pigeon Control Advisory Service) to Melbourne for the purpose of surveying the city and providing expert advice about the best way to manage the pigeon issue in Melbourne.

Update

8. On 5 June 2004, Mr Guy Merchant, Director, PiCAS UK, arrived in Melbourne to spend a week assessing the extent of the pigeon problem in the CBD and to provide Council with advice about options for managing the situation.
9. Mr Merchant inspected the CBD and surrounds and was also taken on a number of site inspections during the week. These included Flinders Street Station, Degraeves Street, the Town Hall, the Bourke Street Mall, a river boat trip to assess the impact of grain silos and general port activity along the Yarra upon the bird population, assessment of some social housing sites and problem sites in Carlton. Mr Merchant also spent considerable time with the media as his visit generated considerable public interest.

10. Unfortunately Mr Merchant had to return to the UK and was unable to complete the full week's itinerary however he indicated he had spent enough time in the CBD to provide an overview of the situation. It should be noted that Mr Merchant qualifies his report and recommendations by stating that at no time did he conduct any scientific survey and that the findings are based on observations only.
11. Mr Merchant provided a number of recommendations in his report and in summary, the main issues to be considered by Council are:
 - 11.1. reduce public feeding in the CBD;
 - 11.2. relocate pigeon flocks;
 - 11.3. identify sites for one or more designated feeding areas – possibly Batman Park;
 - 11.4. consider providing a dovecote to compliment the feeding area;
 - 11.5. encourage or compel feeders to use these sites exclusively for the purpose of feeding;
 - 11.6. consider on-the-spot-fines for feeders who do not cooperate;
 - 11.7. work closely with feeders and animal welfare groups/RSPCA;
 - 11.8. consider allowing a managed 'cooling-off' period for feeders within the CBD;
 - 11.9. identify derelict/disused buildings used as overnight roosts;
 - 11.10. exclude pigeons from these buildings only if there are alternative roosts available;
 - 11.11. work with, or compel where necessary, building owners to pigeon-proof their buildings;
 - 11.12. consider pigeon-proofing Melbourne Town Hall;
 - 11.13. consider the erection of one or more pigeon lofts on the roof of the Town Hall;
 - 11.14. implement a public education programme;
 - 11.15. launch programme as soon as possible to make use of positive publicity already generated;
and
 - 11.16. consider the appointment of a pigeon warden.

Progress to date

12. Since Mr Merchant's visit to Melbourne in June, various options have been investigated and some actions have already commenced.
13. Beginning with Town Hall, samples of a particular pigeon deterrent product have been sent from the US and these will be installed in the next few weeks as a pilot project to test its effectiveness. The decision about whether to use this product will also be dependent upon Mr Merchant's endorsement or otherwise. He is scheduled to travel to the US in the next few weeks to inspect the product and will determine whether to endorse it.
14. Work has commenced on the design of a suitable loft that could be used on rooftops; a designated feeding area and dovecote both for the public space. Dovecotes and lofts enable an easy method for removing significant numbers of eggs.

15. The pigeon loft is an important aspect of the overall program as it will “act as [an] overnight roost only and will provide accommodation for those mature adult breeding birds that are initially reluctant to relocate to dovecote facilities.”. He also claims that “lofts on or in buildings are virtually guaranteed to be effective and the costs of implementation and servicing are extremely low.”
16. The success of this loft will also depend, in part, upon cooperation from the owners of any nearby buildings which are being used as overnight roosts. We need to discuss cleaning and pigeon proofing these buildings not just from Council’s interest but for the benefits and health of the residents and employees in adjacent buildings.
17. The possibility of utilising Batman Park for the purposes of a designated feeding area and a dovecote is being investigated.
18. Mr Merchant described Batman Park as the “preferred site” and it was “chosen due to its proximity to the existing feeding sites within the CBD and also due to its specification in terms of being a green public recreation area. The site is not overlooked by existing buildings and therefore should not cause concern to nearby property owners. The site is also adjacent to [Queensbridge] under which pigeons already roost and nest. It is almost certain that pigeons are also currently being fed on this site, another prerequisite.”
19. He also advised that “even if the birds fail to take up residence in the cote [at the designated feeding area], the cote itself will be a vital visual aid to the general public. The cote can also be moved to another more appropriate site if the chosen site proves to be ineffective.”
20. Initial discussions and investigations would also indicate that the major works associated with the forthcoming removal of the Flinders Overpass project will not adversely impact upon Batman Park or upon the ability of people to feed the birds, for the area to be maintained, nor for the birds to roost there. It has been suggested that once the overpass project has been completed, the amenity of the general area will improve Batman Park as a designated feeding area.
21. Letters have been sent to all food houses around the CBD with the message that throwing out food scraps for the birds is not only against the law, but is unhealthy and attracts other pests including rats and cockroaches. All food houses have been advised to cease such practices.

Planned activities

22. Other initiatives that are proposed include a meeting with a number of building owners to discuss prevention measures to exclude pigeons from buildings that have been identified as roosts and to have them cleaned up.
23. Further discussions and briefings will be within the Administration to scope the cost and timelines associated with the development of a designated feeding area and dovecote in the public space.
24. Once all elements of the project have been identified and approved, a communications and public education and signage program will need to be developed to support the initiatives.
25. Once suitable pigeon proofing products have been identified, tested and endorsed, it is proposed that the product be introduced to the animal welfare stakeholders for their education and public support.

26. If the project is approved to proceed, it will be important to identify either an organisation or an individual who would be willing to manage the pigeon loft and the dovecote. Initial concepts include working with an existing Council volunteer who, apart from doing work in our Parks, may also be involved in animal welfare activities. This option would need the support of the animal welfare lobby. The people who engage in public feeding of the birds may also need to be convinced that this is a valued strategy.
27. The expectation is that with the support of the animal welfare group, Council will be able to work with known pigeon feeders to have them relocate to the designated feeding area and to cease feeding on an occasional basis at other feeding sites in the CBD.

Recommendation

28. That the City Services, Community and Cultural Development Committee note progress to date and the activities to be undertaken to improve pigeon management in the CBD.

FINANCE ATTACHMENT

UPDATE ON PIGEON MANAGEMENT ISSUE

Funding of \$100,000 has been provided in the 2004/05 budget for the Pigeon Management Program (\$50,000 in Capital Works project 04FM013 and \$50,000 provided in operating expenditure under consultants, activity code 53101).

Joe Groher
Manager Finance Services

LEGAL ATTACHMENT

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Alison Lyon
Manager Legal & Governance