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It incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which was founded in 1876.**

Ms Monica Patterson
Chief Executive
East Lothian Council
John Muir House
Haddington

Dear Ms Patterson,

I write concerning plans to pigeon proof the railway bridge over Spott Road on the outskirts of Dunbar. The article about this in the East Lothian Courier has been brought to my attention by a concerned member of the public. From the article and accompanying photograph I can see this is a bit more complicated than the predictable pigeon poo problem which usually prompts action by those responsible for structures which have inconveniently become pigeon perches.

From the article it would appear that action is being taken by East Lothian Council (ELC) and not by Network Rail whom I would usually assume were responsible for the bridge.

I would appreciate it if you could bring this email to the attention of any Councillors and officials involved in this initiative. If the work is being carried out by Network Rail or one of their subcontractors please also copy them in.

I have been dealing with situations of this nature for forty years and if ELC proceeds along the lines outlined in the local paper my successors will be responding to complaints about pigeon welfare at Spott Road Bridge for the next 40 years.

I am sure the technique of netting bridges to exclude pigeons was thought up by a much-respected pest control operator. Much respected by fellow pest controllers as a netted bridge provides regular work and an income for life.

Within months or at best a year of installation of the nets you will be receiving regular complaints about pigeons and other birds trapped behind or tangled in nets which have worked loose or been damaged in bad weather. As happened recently at a netted bridge in Dumbarton people will not be complaining about guano on their shoes but about maggots on their heads, falling from rotten bird carcasses tangled in the netting.

Your pest controller will be happy to clear out the carcasses and repair or replace the netting and then send you an invoice. All will be well - for at least another six months or a year. If in-house staff are dealing with the problem remember to include that expense in all future annual budgets. I see a Council spokesperson is quoted saying the underside of the bridge is to be "re-netted". This supports my argument that netting should only be considered a temporary measure or recurring expense.

If the problem had only been about pigeons pooping on pedestrians the solution would have been easy: fit a solid barrier to the underside of the bridge over the length of the one narrow pavement under the bridge. However if the press story is accurate and hundreds of pigeons are roosting under the bridge, distracting motorists and making the road surface slippery with their droppings, there is a safety issue which will require more extensive work.

I strongly recommend that a mixture of stainless-steel anti-roosting spikes and blocking using rigid metal grids or robust chicken wire be utilised to provide an efficient, long term, humane solution to the problem. This will have a higher initial cost than netting but it will be money well invested and will cut Council expenditure for decades to come.

Whatever you decide to do please ensure the pigeons are not trapped and are released unharmed. There are techniques and equipment (such as a one-way release flap allowing pigeons out but not back-in). It is also likely, even at this time of year, that there will be young pigeons still dependent on their mothers. Prior to commencing work please find a rescue centre willing to take-in and hand-rear any squabs found and put into place a procedure to facilitate this.

Organisations which may be able to help with any squabs include:

<https://www.facebook.com/Eastlothiananimalrescueandadvice/> and
<http://www.hessilheadwildlife.org.uk/>

For further advice on humane wildlife control I suggest you contact <http://www.bccsi.co.uk/>

I would be grateful if, in due course, you would let me know how ELC deal with this situation.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Animal Concern