



Working for a world without cages since 1957

Dear Sefton Council

Freedom for Animals supports Sefton Council's decision to close the Botanic Gardens Aviary in Southport and its commitment to prioritising the future needs and interests of the birds currently held there.

Freedom for Animals began as the Captive Animals' Protection Society in 1957 and is one of the UK's longest-running charities working to protect animals.

We believe Sefton Council is taking an important and progressive step for animals.

Birds are sentient individuals with complex, species-specific needs. Our understanding of their physical, behavioural and psychological wellbeing has moved forward considerably since public park aviaries such as this were first established. As that understanding has evolved, so too have the standards and expectations around keeping animals in captivity, and many traditional park aviaries have closed.

Whilst we do not believe that zoo licensing standards go far enough to protect the rights of animals in captivity, modern requirements increasingly recognise the complex needs of animals. The new Standards of Modern Zoo Practice for Great Britain have introduced requirements that the existing aviary would need significant changes to meet - as the ageing infrastructure can no longer provide what is expected of a modern facility.

This includes inadequate enrichment for the birds and lack of barriers that separate the public from the birds. Visitors being able to push food or other objects through the bars, potentially puts the birds' health and wellbeing at risk.

We don't believe the question should not simply be whether the aviary could be improved, or whether people enjoy visiting it. It should be whether continuing to confine animals for people to look at is in the animals' interests.

These birds exist for their own sake, not for our entertainment.

They need environments that provide appropriate space and opportunities for natural movement and behaviour, appropriate social relationships and, crucially, choice over their interaction with, and exposure to people.

Closing the aviary therefore represents an opportunity for Southport to move beyond an outdated model of displaying animals for entertainment and towards a relationship with wildlife based on respect rather than confinement.

This process must, however, be accompanied by a responsible plan for every individual currently living at the aviary. Their species, health, behavioural needs and existing social relationships should be carefully assessed. Birds who are bonded or who need to live socially should not be separated.

Freedom for Animals wants to see the birds moved to appropriate sanctuary provision wherever suitable places can be found, rather than transferred to another attraction where they would continue to be displayed for public entertainment.

Any relocation must put the individual bird first and provide high standards of lifetime care, appropriate space, specialist expertise and opportunities to express natural behaviours.

There is also a positive opportunity to rethink what this part of the Botanic Gardens can become.

Southport does not need to hold birds captive in order to celebrate them. The park and the wider Sefton coast already provide vital habitat for free-living wildlife. The former aviary area could instead become a space that further supports local wildlife, while encouraging children and adults to experience and appreciate nature without putting animals behind bars - through native planting, wildlife habitats, bird and insect-friendly features, and educational opportunities to learn about the animals living freely around them.

Ethical progress means being willing to let go of traditions that no longer reflect what we know about animals or the values we want our communities to represent.

We support Sefton Council for taking that step and for putting the interests of the birds ahead of tradition and public entertainment.

Yours sincerely

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Also signed and supported by:

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