

Number of rats being found in Crawley homes is on the increase

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By Thomas Mackintosh



ON THE INCREASE: The number of rats being found in Crawley homes is on the rise

THE ease with which offices can be turned into homes has been blamed for a growing rat problem in Crawley.

Figures obtained by the Crawley News show that in 2015 the borough council's pest control officer was called out to deal with 501 infestations.

While some of the callouts were to deal with cockroaches, mice, wasps and bedbugs – almost half were to deal solely with rats. The exterminator was called out 245 times throughout 2015 to deal specifically with rats, an increase of 20 on the 225 callouts in 2014.

The figures show that the worst affected area is Northgate – which includes the town centre – where the pest control officer was called out 26 times over the 12 months to deal with the rodents.

Other areas around the town centre also feature prominently, with the ratcatcher being sent out 25 times in West Green.

Langley Green and Three Bridges are tied in third place, while at the other end of the table only three residents in Bewbush made callouts to the council regarding rat problems.

The Crawley News can also reveal that the most common streets for callouts in the borough were Pearson Road, in Pound Hill, Langley Lane, in Ifield, Town Mead, in West Green, and Gales Drive, in Three Bridges.

Figures for the number of times that the council was called out to deal with bedbugs, mice, squirrels and wasps are all up on the previous year, while requests for getting rid of cockroaches and fleas have dropped slightly.

The council sets aside £29,000 a year for the pest control officer's wage and pesticide purchases. One of the councillors for Northgate isn't surprised that the majority of the rat hotspots are in and around the town centre.

Peter Lamb, who is also the council leader, blamed it on "permitted development rights", introduced in 2013 to enable offices to be converted into new homes without the developer having to apply for planning permission.

While it creates welcome new homes, he says it also means councils cannot insist that developers provide suitable facilities for rubbish.

Cllr Lamb said: "Developers don't have to follow any planning policy, so they are under no obligation to provide bins for the area. They just have to register with us what they are doing, and therefore a lot of people just dump their household rubbish and I think that is creating our pest problem. The council's hands are tied with these kinds of plans, and therefore can't lay any restrictions."

Simon Forrester, chief executive of the British Pest Control Association explained that rats are starting to become immune to some poisons, which may also be leading to the increase.

He said: "Rats breed rapidly and will create nests in attics or walls, so it is vital that people act as soon as possible when they see or hear of any evidence of a rat problem." "These super rats must be dealt with by a professional pest controller who knows the area in question."

Cllr Lamb echoed Mr Forrester, calling on families to make getting rid of these pests a top priority.