

# Sunderland Echo

## Sunderland clergyman's crusade against city rat problem

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Father Marc Lyden-Smith has opened Mercy Chapel within St Mary's Church

Sunderland clergyman has launched a new crusade to rid Sunderland of its pest problem. Father Marc Lyden-Smith is fed up with rodents and scavenging seagulls blighting the city centre. The Parish Priest of St Mary's is concerned that if action isn't taken, Sunderland's image could suffer at a time it is bidding to be crowned UK City of Culture. Father Lyden-Smith has even taken to the streets to record evidence of the city's rat problem and other pest-related issues.

A Sunderland Rats and Rodents page has also been set up on Facebook for people to highlight sightings of vermin. He is calling on the council to do more – although civic chiefs have said the number of rodent sightings almost halved in the last year.

Father Lyden-Smith, who is also Catholic Chaplain to Sunderland University and Club Chaplain to SAFC, said: “There has been a dramatic increase in the number of rats around the church. “One night I counted nine in just 10 minutes. I’ve spoken to Environmental Health, and, to be fair to them, in light of all the budget cuts, they have been very good at responding. They are doing a very good job in very difficult circumstances.

“If we are bidding to be City of Culture, we can’t have people sidestepping rats and dodging seagulls.” Sunderland City Council’s Portfolio Holder for City Services Councillor Michael Mordey, said: “Many factors such as weather conditions from cold snaps or rain can influence the number of pest control incidents and reports.

“The council would also remind everyone that they can help, particularly those enjoying the night-time economy, by not disposing of food waste in the street and to use waste bins.

“In 2016-17 the council recorded 2,813 jobs for rodent sightings compared to 5,294 in 2015-16.

“We continue to actively encourage people to contact us about pest control by calling 0191 520 5550.”