

Report to: Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee – 27 November 2025

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Report Summary	
Report Title	Operation of NSDC Drone Asset
Purpose of Report	To update the committee on the Council's acquisition of a drone asset by NSDC.
Recommendations	a) To note the Drone Usage Policy as detailed at Appendix A; and b) To note the purchase and use of drone assets, primarily for use by NSDC in discharge of its relevant duties and services

1.0 Background

- 1.1 On 11 November 2025, Cabinet approved the purchase of a new drone asset, taking into account the policy prepared by officers which set out how the asset would be used.
- 1.2 Awareness of the availability and use of drone technology across many sectors has grown in recent years. Members will be aware the Council has used this technology in a range of circumstances, including tourism promotion, events (such as the Tour of Britain), regeneration consultation, overt enforcement activity, and recoding for emergency events such as flooding.
- 1.3 It is widely recognised that drones can help Council's save on time and costs across a variety of its services. This broadly falls into two categories – investigatory activity and promotional activity. In the case of the former, drones can assist with the Council's statutory obligations such as in the areas of planning and environmental crime for example. The latter includes events and our cultural assets such as Newark Castle or Sherwood Forest. Bradford Council is an example of an authority who deploy drones to document development activities, investigate dangerous structures, and create 3D digital models. They report that aerial imagery provides records of a site's condition and operations, enabling enforcement teams to assess compliance.
- 1.4 Drone technology is currently commissioned on an as-and-when-needed basis by individual business units from the private market. This obviously means the market dictates matters of price and availability. The need to procure drones is increasing, particularly in the regulatory space. The ability to utilise drones for asset management

(roof maintenance), promotion (our parks and heritage offers), and communications (showing regeneration transformations) is also growing. It is considered there is now sufficient demand and benefits to develop an NSDC drone resource. Such a resource would need to be accompanied by appropriate governance and deployment arrangements in the form of a NSDC Drone Policy (appendix A of this report).

2.0 Proposal/Options Considered

- 2.1 NSDC is increasingly reliant on commissioning drone technology. It is considered that an in-house resource would increase availability, responsiveness, and be more cost-effective moving forward. It has been recommended that the Council purchases a drone, primarily to support Council business in the first instance, but also eventually to grow an asset resource and in-house expertise to aid other public bodies.

Ensuring the technology is used appropriately

- 2.2 It is critical that the circumstances when the Council will deploy drone technology are properly understood and safely and transparently managed, especially within the regulatory and investigatory space. To that end a NSDC Drone Policy to cover the use of 'Unmanned Aerial Vehicle' (UAV) operations has been created (appendix A).
- 2.2 The Policy makes clear that in the context of regulatory deployment the drones will only be used for overt operations as part of a justified and recorded investigatory process. The Drone Policy will not override the ongoing need to follow other due legal processes such as the Regulatory of Investigatory Powers Act 2020 (RIPA), although it is noted that RIPA will likely only govern covert surveillance by a drone, which is not proposed as part of the policy.
- 2.3 The policy will apply to all NSDC staff that use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) on behalf of the Authority, including on NSDC sites.
- 2.4 It is noted within the policy that all drone activity, even overt, is still subject to data protection laws, such as the Data Protection Act 2018. This means public bodies must have robust data protection policies and conduct impact assessments for drone activities. The purpose of the policy therefore is to ensure that all drone flights only take place when necessary and justified including associated training, risk assessment and operations manual procedures (as endorsed by the Civil Aviation Authority).
- 2.5 In order to maintain privacy and data protection, the Policy proposes that the operator and a qualified team will ensure that:
- drone recordings are stored securely on a cloud based storage system.
 - Any recording that is not relevant to the purpose of the flight will be securely destroyed
- 2.6 An authorisation form will be developed by the Officers which will be akin to the RIPA authorisation form to ensure the correct level of checks and balances are being undertaken.

2.7 An annual report will be prepared for Governance, General Purposes & LGR committee which will set out the use of the Drone asset for the previous year.

2.8 Alternative Options Considered

2.9 The District Council could continue to utilise the private market for drone support as and when required. This is not cost effective and compromises responsiveness and availability. An in-house resource will allow the Council to be more response, pro-active and cost effective.

3.0 Implications

3.1 In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Financial Implications – FIN25-26/766

3.2 Over the previous 12 months the Council has spent circa £5,800 with suppliers in order to collect drone footage. Should the proposal to purchase and train officers be approved, this would then save the Council circa £2,519 based on the cost of £3,281 from the table at para 2.14 above in the first year of purchase.

3.3 The £3,281 can be funded from existing budgets within the General Fund. The Planning Directorate is currently forecasting a £0.018m favourable variance to the 31st March and hence can be funded from here. The additional £690 will need to be added to the 26/27 budget.

3.4 Where appropriate the Council will charge other Local Authorities for use of the drone. This will be windfall income where and when appropriate.

ICT implications

3.5 To enable drone operations, ICT & Digital Services will configure operators' laptops and PCs to allow SD card use by exempting them from BitLocker encryption. While necessary, this reduces security controls—data on SD cards and any subsequently connected USB devices may remain unencrypted and vulnerable if lost or stolen. Secure data handling by operators is essential.

3.6 Drone footage will increase data stored on the council's Storage Area Network (SAN), requiring proactive capacity planning and transfer management. A cloud storage solution may offer a more scalable alternative.

- 3.7 A DPIA will be produced to ensure controls are adequate and for compliance with UK GDPR and Data Protection.

HR and Equalities Implications

- 3.8 Consideration is given to the protected characteristics of all people/groups identified in the Equality Act 2010.

The protected characteristics are:

- gender
- age
- race
- disability
- sexual orientation
- religion/belief
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage/civil partnership

- 3.9 The council recognises the need for specific measures to ensure the health and safety of each of these groups. This policy and all other associated Health and Safety related policies take this into account.

Legal Implications – LEG2526/2828

- 3.10 All legal implications have been addressed within the report and best practise and legal parameters are clearly set out in the policy proposed.

Data Protection

- 3.11 Images and footage captured by a drone are subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 and the articles of the Human Rights Act regarding the right to privacy.

Digital and Cyber Security

- 3.12 Images and footage captured by a drone are subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 and the articles of the Human Rights Act regarding the right to privacy.

Human Rights

- 3.13 There is no doubt that some of the usage of the Drone will be classified as surveillance. The issue will be whether the usage is covert or overt surveillance and the necessary authorities would need to be in place for such activity.
- 3.14 Any surveillance by a public authority is governed by strict legislation; this is in the form of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 known as RIPA which ensures

compliance with the ECHR 2000. Local Authorities are further governed by new legislation with the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

- 3.15 All Surveillance is further over seen by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner (OSC) who publishes a guidance document which should be followed by Local Authorities (LA) who conduct surveillance operations. They make inspections of records kept by LA's every 3 years.
- 3.16 RIPA describes surveillance as being any surveillance which is carried out in a manner calculated to ensure that the persons subject to that surveillance are unaware that it is or may be taking place, as in Section 26 (9)(A) of the RIPA 2000.
- 3.17 There is no doubt that the usage will be overt, and not covert. Drone operators will be wearing high visibility jackets and will carry identity badges to show that they are from Newark and Sherwood District Council.
- 3.18 This can be further enhanced by advising all subjects of investigations, or applicants for planning permission, that we operate drones and that we use them for the purposes of viewing developments, sites and for monitoring and investigation of possible or alleged breaches of planning control and/or regulations.
- 3.19 Collateral intrusion or third party information that is obtained but is not necessary has to be immediately disregarded and removed from the investigation. Private information is very strictly controlled and is known as collateral intrusion or third party information. Any such information that is obtained during the surveillance could be construed as being intrusive. Legislation strictly forbids any Local Authority from conducting intrusive surveillance.
- 3.20 Any such breaches would have to be reported to the Office of Surveillance Commissioner and the authority that had been granted would have to be reviewed and reconsidered.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None