

RELEASE OF HELIUM BALLOONS AND SKY LANTERNS

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider the findings regarding the impact of helium balloons and sky lanterns on the natural environment, public safety, and animals in Newark and Sherwood and to further consider whether the release of Helium balloons and sky lanterns should be prohibited on Council land.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In 2013 Defra commissioned a report - Sky lanterns and helium balloons: an assessment of impacts on livestock and the environment. The report reached the following conclusions.

2.2 Risks to livestock and animal health

Anecdotal reports and media coverage suggest widespread concern from farming groups and others over the impacts of sky lanterns on the health and welfare of livestock and horses. However, the evidence reviewed indicates that the number of cases reported each year of animals affected through panic and fright and of ingestion of sky lantern debris is very small.

On the basis of the evidence presented, it is difficult to conclude that the overall impact is anything other than of minor significance.

The main concern regarding helium balloons is in relation to ingestion by animals. Whilst there may again be a significant level of under-reporting, the current evidence indicates that the impact is very small and confined to only isolated incidents.

2.3 Fire risk (sky lanterns only)

Incidents in which sky lanterns were said to be directly implicated in starting fires have been reported from a variety of sources, including the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA). Given that any of these individual incidents has the potential to cause significant disruption, loss of property and risk to human and animal life, the project team has concluded that fire risk associated with the use of sky lanterns is significant.

2.4 Risks to aviation

The report also highlighted 48 incidents reported to be related to sky lanterns and helium balloons between 2001 and 2012. 40 of these incidents were related to sky lanterns and 8 to helium balloons. CAA guidelines state that sky lanterns should not be released within 10 nautical miles of an airfield.

- 2.5 The Defra report states that across England, 15 local authorities have applied a voluntary ban on the release of helium balloons from council-owned land.

- 2.6 Since the above report was published all the local authorities in Wales have now banned helium balloons and sky lanterns and there are now more than 35 local authorities in England that have introduced bans. In many cases, this voluntary ban also includes sky

lanterns. These controls are only active on council-owned land (i.e. recreation grounds and parks) and they are described by councils as being purely voluntary bans – they are not able to take legal action against infringements. Under current legislation set out in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005) or the Environmental Protection Act (1990), waste from balloons or sky lanterns is not classified as litter and as such, no specific legal action can be taken against releases.

- 2.7 In November 2017 the Nottinghamshire County Council adopted a policy to ban the use and sale of sky lanterns on land or property owned and/or controlled by the Council.

3.0 Introduction

- 3.1 The Council has not received any reported incidents involving helium balloons or sky lanterns during the last three years. If residents were to report incidents they would be signposted to the RSPCA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) in the case of incidents involving animals and to Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service in the case of incidents involving sky lanterns.

- 3.2 A number of organisations, including the RSPCA, have run campaigns to raise awareness of the issue and produced information about the risks to animals from helium balloons or sky lanterns. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) have also called for bans. The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) are also running a campaign called 'Don't let go' to encourage local authorities to ban the release of balloons and lanterns on their land.

- 3.3 The CAA has also published a policy - Operation of Directed Light, Fireworks, Toy Balloons and Sky Lanterns within UK Airspace. The CAA guidelines are laid down for the benefit of those planning to release balloons and sky lanterns. There are several active airfields within a 10 nautical mile radius of the District (e.g. Syerston, Rectory Farm and Waddington).

- 3.4 Clearly, there are potentially 'harmful consequences' to animals, the public, and the environment from helium balloons and sky lanterns. The extent of the problem and the risks in Newark and Sherwood are unknown, although based on the national research and local data, any action the authority takes needs to be proportionate. It appears that there are no powers to control the release of helium balloons or sky lanterns and the council only has the ability to control activities on land it owns and/or controls.

- 3.5 The council owns a large amount of open space such as car parks, playing fields and country parks that could be used for the release of these items. There have not been any requests to release helium balloons or sky lanterns from these locations. Any requests to undertake activities at these locations would currently be dealt with on a case by case basis. In the future, if a request was made to the council, offices could refuse to allow the release of helium balloons or sky lanterns on all land that it owns and or controls which would prevent the release of helium balloons and sky lanterns.

- 3.6 In addition to the above large areas of land are controlled by Town and Parish Council's. The authority could write to these councils', making them aware of the risks to animals, the public, and the environment from helium balloons or sky lanterns and asking them to consider if they wish to take steps to prohibit the release of helium balloons or sky lanterns

on their land. They could consider alternatives (e.g. bubbles, floating flowers (on a stream or river) or plant a tree schemes.

3.7 A copy of the report produced by the RSPCA is attached as an appendix to this report.

4.0 Proposals

4.1 It is proposed that Members consider introducing prohibition on the release of Helium balloons and sky lanterns from land owned or controlled by the district council.

4.2 It is further proposed that Members consider whether officers contact Town and Parish Councils in the district to make them aware of the risks to the environment, public, and animals from helium balloons and sky lanterns and ask them to consider if they wish to take steps to prohibit balloons or sky lanterns being released on land they own and/or control.

5.0 Equalities Implications

5.1 There are no equalities implications arising from these proposals.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) the information in the report be noted;**
- (b) based on the evidence outlined in the report, the committee considers if the Council should take any steps to prevent the release of helium balloons or sky lanterns on land it owns and/or controls; and**
- (c) the Committee considers whether it would wish officers to contact all Town and Parish Councils in Newark and Sherwood to make them aware of the risks to the environment, public and animals from helium balloons and sky lanterns and ask them to consider if they wish to take steps to prohibit balloons or sky lanterns being released on land they own and/or control.**

Reasons for Recommendations

To protect and enhance the environment of Newark and Sherwood.

Background Papers

Sky lanterns and helium balloons: an assessment of impacts.

DEFRA

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