

Review of Council's Policy on Sky Lanterns and Helium Balloons - Briefing from officers

Sky lanterns might look pretty but they are a serious danger to animals and the countryside. Sky lanterns are usually used in Britain to mark special celebrations such as weddings, parties and New Year, but many are not aware of the dangers they can cause.

Essentially a small hot air balloon made of paper, with an opening at the bottom where a candle is suspended, sky lanterns, or Chinese lanterns as they're also known, can float for miles before they fall to the ground, causing a danger to animals and a fire hazard.

What are the risks?

Litter nuisance

Farmers and other landowners have to clear up the remnants of sky lanterns from their fields. Whilst 'biodegradable' lanterns made from Bamboo are available, they still take months or years to degrade.

Fire

Once a sky lantern is lit, nobody knows exactly where it will land. Fields of standing crops, hay and straw stacks, farm buildings housing animals, thatched roofs plus lots more are all at a significant risk of being set alight.

Climate Change

Global warming is affecting the climate in the UK. In 2022 the highest ever UK daily temperature was recorded and the UK endured drought conditions. These conditions make fields and crops more vulnerable to fire. This trend is forecast to continue. In 2022 the National Farmers Union (NFU) started a campaign for a total ban of sky lanterns in England and Wales and began a petition that received 50,000 signatures.

Animals and Livestock

Sky lanterns can cause suffering or even kill animals and livestock. Not just by fire, sky lantern debris can cause immense stress and injury. Some of the key dangers are: -

- Animals eating lantern debris which can cause tears or punctures to internal organs leading to a potentially life-threatening situation
- Animals getting splinters in their skin which may cause infection
- Animals becoming trapped or tangled in debris
- Frames of lanterns can contaminate crops which are then unknowingly fed to animals.

False alarms

Sky lanterns pose a significant danger to aviation traffic such as planes and helicopters. There are concerns that lanterns can be drawn into aircraft engines and can delay take-off and landing. In addition, lanterns drifting across a night sky have also been mistaken by the public and coast guards for marine distress signals.

Councils

A number of other councils have backed the campaign and banned the release of sky lanterns on council owned land. Councils taking action include: -

- Lincoln City Council
- Newark & Sherwood District Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Rushcliffe Borough Council
- South Kesteven District Council
- West Lindsey District Council#
- North East Derbyshire District Council

Other organisations, including the Peak District National Park, the Countryside Alliance and the RSPCA are calling for bans.

Other considerations

In addition to concerns about sky lanterns some councils, such as Norfolk County Council, have also banned the release of Helium filled balloons.

Balloon releases can also cause harm to the environment and wildlife. Balloon materials quickly become litter and can choke animals and livestock and are harmful to birds.

The alternatives

There are many fun alternatives to balloon and sky lantern releases such as tree planting, flag flying, jam jar lights, or even releasing giant bubbles. The RSPCA website has more suggestions

(<https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/litter/balloon-and-sky-lantern-alternatives>).

Charter

The Council may wish to consider developing a charter as follows: -

Bolsover District Council has banned the release of sky lanterns and balloons on any land or property owned by the Council.

We are committed to encouraging businesses, communities, landowners and individuals to switch to alternative ways of celebrating and commemorating events.

Bolsover District Council pledges to: -

- *Promote the restriction of the release of all types of helium-filled balloon and sky lantern on property and land owned by the Council. This includes those that are made from bamboo or claim to be biodegradable.*
- *Engage with businesses, communities, landowners, schools and individuals to encourage them to sign up to this charter.*
- *Raise awareness of safer and more environmentally friendly alternatives that people can celebrate with, through promotion and campaigns.*

Potential Recommendations/Action to be taken

To develop a Charter banning the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons on any land or property owned by the Council.

To lobby Government for a national ban on the sale of sky lanterns, backing the NFU campaign.

To receive a Council report recommending approval of the Charter.

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