

Bolsover District Council

Council on 6th March 2024

Sky Lanterns and Helium Balloons

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment

Classification	This report is Public
Contact Officer	Ken Eastwood Joint Assistant Director, Environmental Health

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To alert Members of the Council to the risks posed by sky lanterns and helium filled balloons.
- To recommend that Bolsover District Council introduce a charter to ban the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons on any land or property owned by the Council.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 During the 2020-21 municipal year, Members of the Healthy, Safe, Clean & Green Communities Scrutiny Committee were made aware of a number of resident concerns in relation to the impact of sky lantern and balloon use, both at specified celebrations such as birthdays/family and community events; Bonfire night and New Year's Eve.
- 1.2 Following referrals from the Customer Standards & Complaints Officer and the Leader of the Council, Members chose to investigate further to establish what the Council could do to mitigate the impacts at a local level.
- 1.3 Research revealed several organisations running national awareness raising campaigns and calling for the celebratory use of these items to be banned through national regulatory action.
- 1.4 While there is limited additional impact we can have at a local level due to current national legislation, designating restrictions on use on council land will bring us in line with over 50% of English councils.

2. Details of Proposal or Information

- 2.1 The release of sky lanterns or helium balloons might look pretty, but these items can present a serious danger to animals and the countryside.
- 2.2 Sky lanterns and helium balloons are usually used in Britain to mark special celebrations such as weddings, parties and New Year, but many people are not aware of the dangers they can cause.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Helium filled balloons can travel similar distances and also present a danger to animals and litter the environment.
- 2.5 The risks presented include: -
- 2.5.1 **Litter Nuisance:** Farmers and other landowners have to clear up the remnants of sky lanterns and balloons from their fields. Whilst 'biodegradable' lanterns made from Bamboo are available, they still take months or years to degrade.
- 2.5.2 **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.
- 2.5.3 **Animals and Livestock:** Sky Lanterns can cause suffering or even kill animals and livestock. Balloons present a choking hazard. Not just by fire, sky lantern and balloon 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.
- 2.5.4 **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.

- 2.6 A number of other Councils and organisations have backed the campaigns and banned the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons on Council owned land. Councils taking action include: -
- Lincoln City Council
 - Newark & Sherwood District Council
 - North East Derbyshire District Council
 - Nottinghamshire County Council
 - Rushcliffe Borough Council
 - South Kesteven District Council
 - West Lindsey District Council
- 2.7 Other organisations, including the Peak District National Park, the Countryside Alliance, the Marine Conservation Society and the RSPCA are calling for bans.
- 2.8 As a result of the scrutiny review, Members agreed 5 recommendations (as outlined in Appendix 1), and also drafted a Charter for adoption by the Council in line with the approach taken by other Councils nationally. Through the Council's adoption of the Charter, four of the five scrutiny recommendations will be achieved.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 Sky lanterns and helium balloon releases pose a significant risk of harm to animals and the environment.
- 3.2 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>).

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 The alternative option would be to take no action in response to these concerns and issues.
- 4.2 This option has been rejected as it is recommended the Council takes action and sets a positive example with regard to the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons.

RECOMMENDATION

The Council adopts and promotes 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.*

Approved by Councillor Anne Clarke Portfolio Holder for Environment.

IMPLICATIONS:

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details: None from this report. Suggested action for the Council can be contained within existing budgets.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details: There are no legal implications arising from this report.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Environment: Yes No

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment.

Details: As outlined in the report. The creation of a local Charter acts as a statement of the Council's stance in wishing to decrease the environmental impact from sky lanterns and helium balloons on Council land and property.

Staffing: Yes No

Details: There are no staffing implications from this report.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i>	No
Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	No

District Wards Significantly Affected	All
Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SLT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Details: Considered by Scrutiny and Executive in 2022.

Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy and Environment.
Directly links to Environment ambition. Reducing the release of sky lanterns and helium filled balloons will reduce environmental impacts locally and further afield.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION	
Appendix No	Title
1	Original Recommendations from Scrutiny Review and Executive's Responses

Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive, you must provide copies of the background papers).