

# **North Somerset Council**

## **REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE ORGANISATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**DATE OF MEETING: 5 NOVEMBER 2019**

**SUBJECT OF REPORT: SKY LANTERNS AND BALLOON RELEASE POLICY**

**TOWN OR PARISH: ALL**

**OFFICER PRESENTING: DEE MAWN**

**KEY DECISION: NO**

### **REASON:**

This is not a key decision because it will not result in the authority incurring expenditure or making savings in excess of £500,000 and will not be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in more than one ward in the area.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To adopt a policy restricting the release and sale of both sky lanterns and balloons from any council owned land and property.

#### **1. SUMMARY OF REPORT**

There is increasing concern on the possible impacts of fallen sky lanterns and balloons on livestock and the environment. The risk could be decreased by the introduction of a policy restricting the sale or release of these from Council controlled parks and open spaces.

#### **2. POLICY**

The Council already declines requests for the release of sky lanterns or balloons from Council owned land and property but there is currently no policy supporting this. This report recommends the adoption of a policy restricting the release and sale of both sky lanterns and balloons from any council land and property.

#### **3. DETAILS**

Sky lanterns (also known as Chinese lanterns) consist of a paper covered wire or bamboo frame and an open flame heat source, which lifts the lantern into the air where it can float for miles from the point of release. Once extinguished the lantern falls back towards the ground. Sky lanterns are not currently banned across the whole of England or Scotland, whereas Wales have banned the use of them on all council land since February 2018. Sky lanterns are not safe for animals and the environment. They can cause injury, suffering and death to animals by ingestion, entanglement and entrapment. There have been examples of cattle and sheep eating the lanterns and wire. When ingested, sharp parts like the wire

frame can tear and puncture an animal's throat or stomach causing internal bleeding. Animals can also become entangled in fallen lantern frames, where they can suffer from injury and stress trying to get free or starve to death from being trapped. There are recorded cases in the UK of death of animals from internal injury. Farmers cutting grass for stock feed or bedding can gather wire and other lantern parts in the grass, which in turn is fed or used as bedding for stock. Marine life is also endangered by lanterns falling into the sea. Sky lanterns can cause fires as they use an open flame to float. This risk can destroy habitats and set animal housing, feed and bedding alight. During the dry summer months, the fire risk is increased as it's easier for grass and countryside to catch fire. The UK Coastguard has been called out on false alarms when lanterns have been confused with distress flares. Some Sky lanterns are marketed as 'biodegradable', however, whilst the paper can degrade within months, materials such as bamboo, wool or string is used instead of wire and these elements will take much longer to degrade, resulting in visible litter, whilst also leaving the remaining fire risk and the risk for livestock etc.

Balloons are made of either latex (rubber) or foil (also known as mylar). Only a small percentage of balloons burst into small pieces, with the majority coming down intact. Latex balloons, whilst biodegradable, may still persist in the marine environment for up to four years. The balloons themselves and the strings attached present a choking hazard to animals. There have been concerns raised about a significant increase in balloon litter found on beaches that have been washed up onto the beach from the sea.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

Consultation has been undertaken with internal stakeholders including Seafront and Events and the Environment Team together with the Leader of the Council.

The Fire Service, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and many other organisations including the Marine Conservation Society, Women's Food and Farming Union (WFU), Soil Association and National Farmers Union (NFU) all support this sort of ban.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

##### **Costs**

N/A

##### **Funding**

N/A

#### **6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS**

There is no current UK legislation available to control this issue and it is therefore up to each individual local authority to consider the issue for themselves.

## **7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is increasing concern on the possible impacts of fallen sky lanterns and balloons on livestock and the environment. The risk could be decreased by the introduction of a policy on the sale or release of these from Council owned land and property.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

Continuing to allow the sale and release of balloons and sky lanterns on Council owned land and property increases the risk of the environment and livestock being affected by the release of these products.

Risk mitigation would be to adopt the policy.

## **9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? No

The policy and issues considered in this report are primarily focused on environmental issues and therefore the impact of any changes to groups with protected characteristics is neutral.

## **10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

Instances of balloon or sky lanterns releases will need to be monitored on an ongoing basis

## **11. OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

A number of options for consideration are set out below.

Option 1: To continue to allow the sale and/or release of sky lanterns and balloons on council owned land and property.

Option 2: To restrict the release and sale of either sky lanterns or balloons on council owned land and property,

Option 3: To restrict the release and sale of both sky lanterns and balloons on council owned land and property.

## **AUTHOR**

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Draft Sky Lanterns and Balloon Release Policy

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

## **Appendix A**

### **North Somerset Council**

#### **Draft Sky Lanterns and Balloon Release Policy**

##### **1. Introduction**

1.1 In recent years outdoor balloon and sky lantern releases have become a more common event at summer fairs, fundraising events, opening of new stores, or part of commemorative and celebratory occasions. However, what is less known is what happens once these items have been released and the potentially harmful consequences for wildlife and property that can occur as a result of this form of celebration.

1.2 The Marine Conservation Society (MSC) - an internationally recognised charity for the protection of seas, shores and wildlife has produced a thorough and detailed Pollution Policy and Position statement on Balloons and Sky Lanterns, asking UK Local Authorities to recognise balloons and sky lanterns as a form of littering and to ban all outdoor releases. This stance is actively supported by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), the National Farmers Union (NFU) and many other public organisations.

##### **2. Objective**

2.1 The objective of this policy is to discourage and, if possible, to prevent the intentional outdoor release of balloons and sky lanterns in North Somerset and to prohibit releases from Council owned land and premises.

##### **3. Parameters**

3.1 This policy covers the release of balloons and sky lanterns within the boundary of North Somerset and sets out the Council's position in relation to the release of balloons and lanterns from Council owned land and premises.

3.2. The policy covers all types of balloon and sky lantern materials. The main types of balloon are latex (rubber) and foil (also known as Mylar) and can include other materials. Latex balloons, whilst biodegradable, may persist in the environment for several years and sky lanterns typically contain a metal frame.

3.3 The principles and commitments set out in this policy apply to all services of the Council and to our contractors and partners delivering council services on our behalf.

##### **4. Principles and Commitments**

4.1 North Somerset Council will

- refuse permission for the release of balloons and sky lanterns from any Council owned land and buildings, regardless of the purpose for the release. This applies to Council run events and events run by third parties.
- refuse the sale of sky lanterns at any Council event or property
- require council "standard conditions" relating to outdoor events and organised functions on land or property owned and/or controlled North Somerset Council to prohibit the release of balloons and sky lanterns.
- Regard the release of balloons and sky lanterns from any land or buildings as potential littering and will act where appropriate.

## **5. Litter**

5.1 Where balloons and sky lanterns are released intentionally outdoors and are not disposed of responsibly, they litter the environment and could be considered as a potential littering offence. Where the Council receives evidence of littering through the release of balloons and lanterns, which are not disposed of responsibly, the Council may consider exercising its powers under the appropriate legislation

## **6. Permitted Releases**

6.1 Piloted hot air balloons are not covered by this policy. Helium balloons may also be permitted when used for research purposes, for example, weather balloons, if supporting evidence is provided, identifying any risk and/or any hazards to the environment and with any appropriate mitigation.

## **7. Monitoring, Assessment and Review**

7.1 The Council will inform event organisers of the Balloon and Sky Lantern Release Policy by means of including relevant information within booking forms and other promotional material.

7.2 The Council will include details of this policy within any new letting agreement or leases of land/buildings where permitted events take place.

7.3 The Council will promote the awareness of the potential harm of balloon and sky lantern releases, where appropriate.