

28 SEPTEMBER 2018

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services

1. Purpose of the Report

To seek approval to:

- 1) Ban the organised release of balloon and sky lanterns from Council land and at events supported, financially or otherwise, by Sunderland Council including those not on Council owned land .

2. Description of Decision

The recommendation is:

- 1) That the Council adopts a formal position to not allow balloon and sky lantern releases from its land rather than the current position which is to consider each application on its merits. The scope of this report includes events supported, financially or otherwise, by Sunderland Council including those not on Council owned land.

3. Background

The release of helium filled balloons and Chinese / sky lanterns has increased in recent years. These balloons and lanterns pose hazards to wildlife and livestock and can cause injury and death. Lanterns can also cause damage to buildings and cause callouts to the fire service.

Under Section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 ("the EPA") it is an offence to throw down, drop or otherwise deposit, and then leave, litter in an area which is open to the air and to which the public has access. Local authorities have a statutory duty to enforce the EPA with fixed penalty notices and have a responsibility to keep public open spaces free from litter.

Balloons

Once a balloon has been released it can rise to a height of 5 miles where the pressure and the temperature cause the balloon to undergo brittle fracture. The balloon pieces then float back down but 5-10% do not burst, and float back down whole and partially deflated. Latex balloons are often cited to "degrade as fast as an oak leaf", which is reported as 6 months. However, they can cause significant harm to wildlife and livestock in these six months by entanglement and choking, and take considerably longer to degrade in the marine environment.

Balloons can also cause a choking hazard for livestock as the pieces of balloon, ribbon, string and plastic holder cups fall into grazing fields or fields of hay or straw which are subsequently made into silage.

Lanterns

“Chinese” or “Sky” lanterns are made of thin paper held by a wire or bamboo frame and lifted by heat from a naked flame. They pose similar choking threats to wildlife and livestock as balloons do.

Lanterns pose a fire hazard to dry standing crops, stacks of hay or straw, forestry and farm buildings, thatched cottages and other buildings.

Biodegradable lanterns are not safe either. Bamboo can take decades to degrade and there is still a fire risk.

4. Current Position

The Council does not have a formal policy regarding the release of balloons or sky lanterns on Council land. Formal applications are rarely received.

5. Reasons for the Decision

The negative environmental impact of balloon and sky lantern releases is considered sufficient to prohibit any organised releases on Council land. This decision is also aligned to the Council's wider environmental stance. The issue is topical in the media and to the public, which is evidenced by recent FOI and Members requests. Whilst it will ensure the Council follows the direction of travel of over 50 other Local Authorities who have blanket bans on such releases.

A publicized ban on all balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property; and at events supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land, will raise awareness of the environmental consequences of balloon and Chinese/sky lantern releases.

It is hoped that by publicizing this policy it will lead to a reduction in smaller scale private releases, as the public become more aware of the dangers they pose.

The ban of the release of sky lanterns and the mass release of helium balloons will be incorporated into appropriate license agreements, letting conditions and local park and building management rules.

It should be noted that this report is focused on the deliberate release of sky lanterns and helium balloons, such as the mass release of balloons at events. It is recognised there may be instances where single helium balloons will be accidentally released into the environment such as may happen at children's parties

6. Alternative Options

The alternative options are:-

- (a) To continue to consider an application on its merits to release balloons or sky lanterns on Council land.

This option has been considered and is not recommended.