

REPORT TO: Cabinet

MEETING DATE: 14 February 2017

BY: Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services)

SUBJECT: Policy on Balloon and Chinese/Sky Lantern Releases

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 Releases of balloons or lanterns can make an impressive sight but pose hazards to wildlife, livestock, humans and property. They are on the increase, often for fundraising, commemorative or celebratory events. Evidence is growing of the damage they cause and it is recommended that East Lothian Council join with an increasing number of local authorities in introducing a policy banning all such releases on Council property, Council owned land and at Council licensed, endorsed or supported events, including those not on Council owned land.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to:
- 2.1.1 Approve the Policy Statement prohibiting balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property; and at events licensed, endorsed or supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land.
- 2.1.2 Authorise the Council as Licensing Authority to attach a condition to all Public Entertainment Licences prohibiting the release of balloons or lanterns at any event covered by said licences.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The release of helium filled balloons and Chinese/sky lanterns have increased in recent years. These balloons and lanterns pose hazards to wildlife and livestock causing injury and death. Lanterns can also cause injury to humans, damage to buildings and cause false callouts to the coastguard.

- 3.2 Under section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence to throw down, drop or otherwise deposit, and then leave, litter. Local authorities have a statutory duty to enforce this Act with fixed penalty notices and have a responsibility to keep public open spaces free from litter.
- 3.3 Over fifty local authorities in the UK now have balloon and/or lantern release policies including Angus, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Highland, Falkirk, Perth & Kinross, Orkney Islands and most recently Fife. Regional authorities in Canada, USA and Australia have banned balloon releases. Lantern releases are banned in Australia, Malta, Vietnam, Spain and most parts of Germany, and it is also illegal to import or sell them in Austria.
- 3.4 Keep Scotland Tidy, the National Farmers Union Scotland, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Marine Conservation Society all support and call for bans.
- 3.5 A Policy Statement has been prepared (Appendix 1). It details the issues, alternatives, support from other local authorities and organisations, and how East Lothian Council can comply with the Policy.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Recommendations will contribute towards the East Lothian Plan (SOA - outcome 8 East Lothian has High Quality Natural Environments).

http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/downloads/file/9787/the_east_lothian_plan_single_outcome_agreement_2013

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report has a positive impact in the environment and as such does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant detrimental impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any additional costs arising from policy will be managed from existing resources.
- 6.2 Personnel – There are no staffing implications arising from this report.
- 6.3 Other – None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Policy on Balloon Releases and Chinese / Sky Lantern Releases –

7.2 **Appendix 1**

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APPENDIX 1

POLICY ON BALLOON AND CHINESE/SKY LANTERN RELEASES



1. Introduction

- 1.1 The release of helium filled balloons and Chinese / sky lanterns have increased in recent years. These balloons and lanterns pose hazards to wildlife and livestock causing injury and death. Lanterns can also cause injury to humans, damage to buildings and cause false callouts to the coastguard.
- 1.2 Under Section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence to throw down, drop or otherwise deposit, and then leave, litter. Local authorities have a statutory duty to enforce this Act with fixed penalty notices and have a responsibility to keep public open spaces free from litter.
- 1.3 This Policy Statement sets out the hazards posed by these releases and examples of incidents. Alternatives to balloon and lantern releases, and support for a ban from other local authorities, companies and organisations are also provided.
- 1.4 This Policy Statement covers all balloon and lantern releases on East Lothian Council owned property and land; and at East Lothian Council licensed, endorsed or supported events, including those not on Council owned land.
- 1.5 Within this policy the term “release” refers to the intentional act of releasing a balloon or lantern into the general environment.
- 1.6 Within this policy the term “balloon” refers to any inflatable flexible bag filled with gas, such as helium, hydrogen, nitrous oxide, oxygen or hot air made from materials such as rubber, latex, natural latex, paper, polychloroprene, foil, mylar or a nylon fabric. This includes all biodegradable balloons.

2. Balloons

- 2.1 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 in these six months by entanglement and choking, and take considerably longer to degrade in the marine environment (1).
- 2.2 The following species, all of which occur in the waters off the UK, have been reported with latex balloons in their digestive system: Common Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin, Loggerhead Turtle, Leatherback Turtle, Blue

Shark and Northern Fulmar. (1) Common Dolphin and Northern Fulmar are all present off East Lothian coasts.

- 2.3 The Marine Conservation Society co-ordinate regular beach cleans and litter surveys, as part of their Beachwatch campaign, on beaches throughout the UK on the third weekend of September. Reports can be found on their website: <http://www.mcsuk.org/> (4).
- 2.4 East Lothian Council has a regular volunteer beach cleaner who isn't surprised to find 20 balloon remnants on one beach tide line after an easterly storm; along with other litter items.
- 2.4 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 ensiled.

3. Lanterns

- 3.1. "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 and they also cause false callouts to the coastguard.
- 3.2 Lanterns pose a fire hazard to dry standing crops, stacks of hay or straw, forestry and farm buildings, and thatched cottages. Examples are the recycling plant blaze in the Midlands and a caravan park in Worcestershire, both attributed to lanterns (3).
- 3.2. In Scotland, NFUS has called on all Local Authorities to prohibit the release of balloons and sky lanterns given the dangers they pose (4).

4. Alternatives

- 4.1. Many balloon and lantern release events are planned for fundraising and celebrations. East Lothian Council will offer alternatives, as suggested by Marine Conservation Society:

Flags, banners & pop-ups – When budgets are tight many businesses are realising the benefits of using reusable eye-catching signage. Colourful streamers, flags, banners and other signs save money and time over balloons, string, helium and lanterns.

Balloon sculpture - Turn balloons into something stunning with a hired-in balloon artist or try your own.

Virtual balloons & races - The RSPB have launched a new virtual balloon race where you can design and personalise your balloon and then track it on Google maps.

Pop a balloon - Put a raffle ticket in a few balloons before blowing them up...let them go (indoors) and ask people to pop them...the raffle ticket indicates the prize.

How many? - Fill up a car with blown up balloons and then get people to guess how many there are. The closest guess wins a prize.

5. Policy Actions

- 5.1. All balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property; and at events licensed, endorsed or supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land, are prohibited.
- 5.2. East Lothian Council will raise awareness of environmental consequences of balloon and Chinese/sky lantern releases and promote alternatives.
- 5.3. It is the responsibility of all Services to comply with and implement this policy as appropriate to their Service.
- 5.4 It is hoped that publicising the policy and promoting alternatives will also lead to a reduction in smaller scale private releases, as the public become more aware of the dangers they pose.

References:

1. Marine Conservation Society Pollution Policy and Position Statement:
http://www.mcsuk.org/downloads/pollution/beachwatch/MCS_balloons_and_chinese_lanterns_policy.pdf
2. Entanglement:
<http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/media/58556/balloonlanternstatement2013.pdf>
3. Midlands fire: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-23123549>
Worcestershire fire: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-25100406>
4. NFUS: <https://www.nfus.org.uk/news/2016/december/councils-applauded-banning-sky-lanterns>
<http://www.nfonline.com/back-british-farming/love-your-countryside/the-dangers-of-sky-lanterns/>