

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 18 AUGUST 2015

POLICY ON INTENTIONAL BALLOON AND CHINESE / SKY LANTERN RELEASES

REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING AND PLACE

ABSTRACT

This report sets out the hazards posed by the mass intentional release of helium filled latex balloons and Chinese/sky lanterns and the growing evidence of the damage they cause. Other local authorities and organisations, such as Keep Scotland Beautiful and the Marine Conservation Society, are supporting calls for bans of all such releases.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee agrees:-

- (i) to approve the Policy Statement set out in **(Appendix 1)** prohibiting intentional balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property, by Council staff, and at events endorsed or supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land; and
- (ii) that Angus Council will raise awareness of environmental consequences of balloon and Chinese/sky Lantern releases and promote alternatives.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/ CORPORATE PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

- Our natural and built environment is protected and enjoyed
- Our communities are developed in a sustainable manner
- Angus is a good place to live in, work and visit.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The mass intentional releases of helium filled latex 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 in a public open place. Local authorities have the ability to enforce this Act with fixed penalty notices.
- 3.3 More than twenty four local authorities in the UK now have balloon/ lantern release policies including Aberdeen City, Highland, Falkirk and Shetland Islands. 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, National Farmers Union Scotland, Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Marine Conservation Society all support and call for bans **(Appendix 2)**.

3.5 A Policy Statement has been prepared (**Appendix 1**) detailing the issues, alternatives, support from other local authorities, companies and organisations, and how Angus Council can comply with the Policy.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The proposals in this report have no financial implications.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 The report sets out the hazards posed by the mass intentional release of helium filled latex balloons and Chinese/sky lanterns and the growing evidence of the damage they cause. Often the organisers of events with mass releases of balloons or lanterns are unaware of the issues. Approval of a policy prohibiting these items will raise awareness of the environmental consequences of balloon and Chinese/sky lantern releases.

5.2 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. In terms of the Climate Change Act, the Council has a general duty to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and the community, environmental and economic impacts of its actions. Approving this policy will contribute to this duty.

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

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Appendix 1: Policy Statement – Angus Council Prohibition of Intentional Balloon and Chinese / Sky Lantern Releases

Appendix 2: Balloon & Flying Lantern Litter Statement – Keep Scotland Beautiful

APPENDIX 1

Policy Statement – Angus Council Prohibition of Intentional Balloon and Chinese /Sky Lantern Releases

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The mass intentional releases of helium filled latex balloons and Chinese/sky lanterns have increased in recent years. This Policy Statement highlights the hazards balloons and lanterns pose 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 This Policy Statement covers all balloon and lantern releases on Angus Council owned property and land, by Angus Council employees and at Angus Council endorsed or supported events, including those not on Council owned land.
- 1.3 Within this policy the term “release” refers to the intentional act of releasing a balloon or lantern into the general environment.
- 1.4 Under section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence to throw down, drop or otherwise deposit, and then leave, litter in a public open place. Local authorities have the ability to enforce this Act with fixed penalty notices.
- 1.5 This Policy Statement sets out alternatives to balloon and lantern releases, and support for a ban from other local authorities, companies and organisations are also provided.

2. Balloons and Lanterns

Balloons

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 Once a latex balloon has been released it rises 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. These 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)

Lanterns

- 2.3 “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. They pose a fire hazard to dry standing crops, stacks of hay or straw, forestry and farm buildings, and thatched cottages. Recent examples are the recycling plant blaze in the Midlands and a caravan park in Worcestershire, both attributed to lanterns. (3)
- 2.4 In Scotland, NFUS staff and members have reported finding lantern remains on or near farmland in Renfrewshire, Bute, Aberdeenshire, Wigtownshire and near Edinburgh. While injury to animals or damage to property has yet to be reported in Scotland (there have been cases in England), the fear with NFUS is that this is just a matter of time. (4)

3. Threats to Wildlife and Domestic Livestock

- 3.1 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, Risso's Dolphin and Northern Fulmar are all present off Angus coasts.

- 3.2 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. In 2005, balloons and their ribbon and string accounted for 4% of entanglements of marine creatures recorded over a single weekend. (2)
- 3.3 Neighbouring Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service have led Beachwatch events on Aberdeenshire beaches since the 1990s. Evidence 1996 from Balmedie show that anything between 6 and 106 balloons or balloon pieces have been during any one survey. The average number of balloons and balloon pieces found on UK beaches on Beachwatch surveys almost tripled in 2011 when compared to figures in 1996. (1)
- 3.4 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.

4. Practice of Other Authorities

- 4.1 Twenty four local authorities in the UK now have balloon/ lantern release policies including Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Perth & Kinross, Highland, Falkirk and Shetland Islands. 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.
- 4.2 Keep Scotland Tidy, National Farmers Union Scotland, Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Marine Conservation Society all support and call for bans.
- 4.3 Some of the organisations that have balloon release policies or have cancelled events are Barclays, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Norwich Union, TGI Fridays, The Co-operative Group and Guinness Book of Records.

5. Alternatives

- 5.1 Many balloon and lantern release events are planned for fundraising and celebrations. Angus Council can offer alternatives whilst enforcing the ban.
- 5.2 The Marine Conservation Society has provided alternatives:

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.

Chinese lanterns – can still be enjoyed if tethered by a fishing line.

6. Policy Actions

- 6.1 All intentional balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property, by Council staff, and at events endorsed or supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land, will be prohibited.
- 6.2 Angus Council will raise awareness of environmental consequences of balloon and Chinese/sky Lantern releases and promote alternatives.
- 6.3 It is the responsibility of all Services to comply with and implement this policy as appropriate to their Service.

7. Summary

- 7.1 Mass 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 Angus Council join with an increasing number of local authorities in introducing a policy banning all such releases on Council property, Council owned land, by Council staff and at Council endorsed or supported events, including those not on Council owned land. Often the organisers of these events are unaware of the issues so the policy should be publicised as fully as possible, to maximise awareness. It is hoped that publicising the policy and promoting alternatives will also lead to a reduction in smaller scale private releases, especially of lanterns, 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: <http://www.nfus.org.uk/news/2011/january/happy-lantern-free-chinese-new-year>

APPENDIX 2

Balloon & Flying Lantern Litter Statement – Keep Scotland Beautiful



Alternatives to Balloon & Flying Lantern Releases

Instead of just watching balloons & lanterns float away why not make an activity out of them:

- **Balloon Popping Competition.** Release the balloons in an enclosed area (such as a church/school hall). Hide the prize tags in several balloons and children (and adults) rush around popping the balloons to find their prize. The burst balloons can then be then be easily collected and disposed of.
- **Balloon Animals.** Best done in teams. Prizes can be awarded for the best, biggest, most colourful, etc.
- **Balloon Surfing.** For the more radical, why not try balloon surfing! Inflate several balloons to about half size, and tie their ends. Place a small board over the balloons. See who can balance on the board without bursting the balloons. The winner is the person who stays on the board for the longest.
- **Round Up the Herd.** For this game you will need a broom, 6 x 4 balloons (4 colours) and 4 'sheep pens'. The aim of the game is to 'herd' as many balloons as possible into the correct colour 'pen' within the allotted time. One point is awarded for each balloon in the correct pen, with one point being deducted for a wrongly penned balloon and five points awarded for a full pen. The person with the most points wins.
- **Decorate a Hanging Lantern.** Rather than letting flying lanterns go, why not get together and buy some hanging lanterns and then spend time writing personal messages or decorating them with pretty patterns and pictures before hanging them in an outside space. This could be done to celebrate a wedding or other special occasion, or you could create a unique memorial garden.
- **Make your own lantern.** Have a competition to see who can make the most creative lantern. Each person draws window shapes on a piece of coloured card. Cut the shapes out and glue on coloured tissue paper to make windows. Roll the card into a cylinder and staple. Make two holes at the top & thread string/wool through to hang. These can then be hung around a room to make an attractive display.



Other Activities:

- Balloon decoration eg feathers, glitter, fabric
- Lantern decoration eg paint plain, round paper lanterns with pretty patterns
- Balloon modelling/sculptures/archways
- Make scarecrows/characters
- Balloon/lantern printing
- Outside, tie lit lanterns securely so you can still enjoy their beauty
- Table decorations
- Indoor balloon race eg between knees, balanced on a spoon/back of hand/nose, flapping with newspaper
- Indoor balloon release. Participants decorate helium balloons before releasing them from a cardboard box. First to hit ceiling wins
- Raffle with tickets inside balloon (burst to see if you've won) or on the bottom of table lanterns

References

Marine Conservation Society - www.mcsuk.org
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society - www.wdcs.org
National Association of Balloon Artists & Suppliers - www.nabas.co.uk

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Keep Scotland Beautiful is a registered Scottish charity. Number SC030332

Keep Scotland Beautiful - Balloon & Flying Lantern Litter



Clean Up
Scotland



PART OF THE
Keep Scotland Beautiful
CHARITY

Statement

Keep Scotland Beautiful is opposed to balloon and flying lantern releases. This applies to both mylar and latex balloons, to all types of flying lantern produced, and to large or small events.

Introduction



The impressive visual impact of thousands of balloons or flying lanterns being released into the sky may last a few minutes, but the impact upon the environment and wildlife may last many months, with potentially harmful consequences. Releasing balloons or lanterns at promotional and corporate events is not something that should be done without thinking about the consequences.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence to drop 'or otherwise deposit' litter in a public place and it is therefore questionable whether balloon and flying lantern

releases with their potential for littering are within the law.

Balloons used in balloon releases are generally made from latex. A study on balloon persistence in the environment indicated that latex balloons degrade 'faster than an oak leaf' and this is often used in defence of mass balloon releases. However, an oak leaf in a cold water environment may take six months to break down and during this time the balloons can be carried hundreds of miles by sea breezes and currents.

Attachments such as ribbons and string tied to balloons are a particular problem as they can lead to the entanglement of birds and animals.

Flying lanterns can travel long distances on the wind, and some have a wire structure which does not degrade.



The Problem

After balloons are released they rise to high altitude where about 90% of latex balloons burst, undergoing what is termed 'brittle fracture'. The balloon pieces then float back to earth over a large area. However, around 10% of balloons released will come back down to earth without bursting, and these whole balloons pose a particular threat to many animals on land and at sea.

Balloon litter found on beaches during the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Beachwatch survey has shown a general increase since 1996. In the 2011 Beachwatch survey, a total of 951 balloons & balloon string were recovered, representing a density of 10.5 items/km surveyed and 0.5% of all litter picked up.

Both whole balloons and balloon pieces can cause problems for marine animals. It is believed that they mistake balloons for their natural prey e.g. jellyfish and squid. The following species, all of which

Action

Whilst not wishing to prevent fund raising events or spoil peoples' fun, Keep Scotland Beautiful is calling on all organisations to support a voluntary ban on balloon and flying lantern releases and to celebrate or commemorate events in more environmentally-friendly ways.

Local authorities are asked to:

- Ban mass balloon and flying lantern releases at any event over which they have control
- Introduce a condition on Entertainment Licenses to prevent balloon and flying lantern releases

Individuals are also encouraged to take action.

occur in the North East Atlantic 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; Northern Fulmar. In 2005, balloons and their ribbon and string accounted for 4% of entanglements of marine creatures recorded over a single weekend.

When flying lanterns float back to earth, their paper walls may degrade but some of these lanterns have wire frames, often covered with bamboo, which will remain. These pose a high risk to animals, especially with the bamboo coating, as livestock have been known to mistake them for food and then have ended up injured, sometimes fatally, after the wire has punctured their internal organs.

- If you become aware of a potential balloon or flying lantern release let the organisers know about their negative environmental impact, not everyone knows, and encourage them to look at alternatives.
- Write to your local council and ask them to consider banning mass releases from their premises and any premises or events licensed by them.

Corporate bodies who provide sponsorship or other support for charities or events are encouraged to decline to sponsor events involving mass balloon or flying lantern releases and to encourage alternative fund-raising activities.