

Birmingham City Council

Policy on the Release of Balloons and Sky Lanterns



1. Objective

- 1.1 The objective of this policy is to ban the intentional outdoor release of balloons and Sky lanterns from land or property owned and/or controlled by Birmingham City Council and to seek support to encourage others to follow suit.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all land or property owned and/or controlled by Birmingham City Council.
- 2.2 The principles and commitments set out in this policy apply to all services and decisions of the City Council
- 2.3 This policy does not apply to piloted hot air balloons.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 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 nylon fabric.
- 3.2 Sky lanterns, sometimes known as 'Chinese lanterns' or Kong Ming lanterns are any unmanned device which relies on an open flame or other heat source to heat air within it with the intention of causing it to lift into the atmosphere.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 The release of balloons and sky lanterns can be a spectacular sight often used during festivals, to mark anniversaries and as a part of charity events.
- 4.2 Plastics are a major source of aquatic and global marine pollution. They cause harm by entering the food chain as they are broken down by the sun and the action of water.
- 4.3 Plastic pollution in the oceans is an alarming problem affecting the ecosystems that support human life.
- 4.4 Balloons and sky lanterns have been identified as a choking hazard for wildlife and farm animals. Balloons, plastic parts, wire and ribbons can all be eaten by animals and wildlife causing a risk of choking or blockage leading to starvation. In addition, they can get mixed together with grass cut for silage which is then fed to livestock.
- 4.5 Sky lanterns pose a further risk as a fire hazard with the potential to spark fires in crops, heath, moorland, forestry and buildings.
- 4.6 Helium, often used to inflate balloons, is a non-renewable resource that is in short supply. It is of incredible value to science and humanity – in particular used as a coolant for MRI scanners. When released from bursting balloons it is lost from the earth entirely.

- 4.7 The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) - 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.

5. Principles and Commitments

- 5.1 Birmingham City Council will not permit the release of any sky/floating lanterns or balloons from land or property which it owns and/or manages the use of.
- 5.2 It is the responsibility of all Services to comply with and implement this policy as appropriate to their Service.
- 5.3 That Council representatives on Event Planning and Safety Advisory Group panels endorse the prohibition to release balloons and sky lanterns (or similar).
- 5.4 The Council representatives also discourage intentional or reckless release of balloons and sky lanterns (or similar) from non-BCC land
- 5.3 It should be noted that this policy is intended to prohibit the deliberate release of sky lanterns and helium balloons such as the mass release of balloons at events. The council recognises that there may be instances where single helium balloons will be accidentally released into the environment such as may happen at children's parties.