BALLOON AND SKY LANTERN INTENTIONAL RELEASES POLICY

Policy Summary

This Policy provides guidance on intentional balloon and sky lantern releases on council owned land or property and at events supported by the council, including those on non-council land or property.

Policy Status	**Delegated approval granted by Committee on 27 November 2025**
Responsible Officer	Sarah Gosden, Countryside Ranger, Outdoor Access and Countryside Team
Policy Sponsor	Ewan Wallace, Head of Service, Environment and Sustainability
Authorised By	Infrastructure Services Committee
Policy Review Date	27/11/2030

1. Policy Statement

Aberdeenshire Council recognises that intentional releases of balloons and sky lanterns have a damaging effect on livestock, domestic animals, wildlife and our natural and built environment. Therefore, all intentional balloon and sky lanterns releases from Aberdeenshire Council owned land and property, or at events supported by Aberdeenshire Council, are strictly prohibited.

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.

However, statutory interpretation would suggest that this may only occur where the balloon or lantern falls, by which time tracing the perpetrator would be difficult. However, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that public places remain free from litter and as such Aberdeenshire Council is fulfilling its statutory duties through the development of this policy on intentional balloon and lantern releases.

2. Scope of Policy

This Policy covers all intentional balloon and sky lantern releases on council owned land or property and at events supported by the council, including those on non-council land or property.

Within this policy the term “release” refers to the intentional act of releasing a balloon or sky lantern into the general environment.

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.

"Sky lantern” (sometimes called Chinese lantern) refers to a lantern made of paper or other materials; held by wire or a bamboo frame and lifted by heat from a naked flame.

3. Policy Principles & Equalities

All intentional balloon and sky lantern releases from Aberdeenshire Council owned land or property, or at events supported by Aberdeenshire Council are strictly prohibited.

When whole balloons, part balloons, or balloon accessories (such as ribbons or holders) and sky lanterns land on the ground, they can cause injury, suffering or death to animals through ingestion, entanglement or entrapment.

Once released there is no control over where balloons or sky lanterns land and therefore livestock, domestic and wild animals, both terrestrial and marine, are all at risk.

Sky lanterns can ignite fires which can damage countryside habitats and cause damage to buildings and businesses, both rural and urban. Sky lanterns can also trigger false call outs to the coastguard and lifeboats.

The policy will raise awareness of the negative impacts of intentional balloon and sky lantern releases with residents and visitors, including promotion of alternative activities.

The review of this policy complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Fairer Scotland Duty through integration of equality considerations throughout the review process. This was achieved by reviewing information from industry professionals, charity organisations, Local Authoriries, Emergency Services, stakeholder organisations and that provided by individuals. This ensures the policy promotes fair treatment for all regardless of any characteristic and does not exclude particular groups or individuals.

4. Supporting Policies and Documents

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs commissioned report (2013) Sky lanterns and helium balloons: an assessment of impacts on livestock and the environment Sky Lanterns and helium balloons:an assessment of impacts on livestock and the environment

Over 100 United Kingdom local authorities have policies on intentional balloon and sky lantern releases. Locally this includes Aberdeen City, Angus and Moray Councils.

The following organisations all support a ban on intentional balloon and sky lantern releases:
National Association of Balloon Artists And Suppliers (NABAS) National Association of Balloon Artisits and Suppliers Environmental Practices Balloon release
National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) Councils Applauded for Banning Sky Lanterns
Marine Conservation Society Sky lanterns & environmental impact | Marine Conservation Society

Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) Remember, remember the 5th of November (for the right reasons)!
Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA) Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA) Balloon releases
Scottish Society for the Protection of Animals (SSPCA) Scottish SPCA warns the public about the dangers of sky lanterns

Guidance on alternatives to balloon releases:
Marine Conservation Society Sky lanterns & environmental impact | Marine Conservation Society
Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA) Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA) Balloon releases

Fires as a result of sky lantern releases:
Midlands, Smethwick Recycling plant Smethwick fire: Chinese lantern 'caused largest blaze' - BBC News
Worcestershire, Leisure Park: Worcestershire leisure park fire 'caused by Chinese lantern' - BBC News
Cornwall, Vehicle Sales business: Chinese lantern ban call after 20 vehicles destroyed - Cornwall Live

5. Council Strategic Priorities

Pillar	Priority	How does the policy reflect the Council's strategic Priorities?
A sustainable economy	We will support a strong and diverse economy by attracting people of working age to our region, complementing our highly skilled local workforce.	Aberdeenshire's countryside and coast are protected from the impacts of balloon and sky lantern releases, maintaining our area as an attractive destination for tourists and wildlife watchers. Livestock losses due to entanglement or ingestion of balloon litter or sky lanterns are reduced. Risk to buildings, businesses and countryside habitats from fire ignited by sky lanterns is reduced. Costs associated with callouts to the fire brigade and coastguard due to sky lantern releases are reduced.

		Council resources required to keep sites free from balloon litter and repair damage from sky lantern fires are reduced.
Connected communities	We will work with communities and partners to enhance the sense of connection among our places. This includes supporting communities to come up with innovative solutions to ensure our places are resilient and vibrant.	Our communities enjoy an environment free from the negative impacts of balloons and sky lanterns.
Living well locally	We will encourage and support our residents to lead healthy and active lives and contribute meaningfully to their communities. We will make proactive choices that will allow us to cater to the needs of our increasingly ageing population.	Health and wellbeing benefits of accessing attractive greenspaces are maintained through a reduction in litter and fire damage from balloons and sky lanterns.

6. Policy Revision

Version Number	Revision Date	Committee Approval Date	Summary of Changes
(leave blank)	06/01/26	27/11/25	Title changed to Balloon and Sky Lantern Intentional Releases; and policy statement strengthened and made clear that Aberdeenshire Council prohibit all intentional balloon and sky lanterns releases from Aberdeenshire Council owned land and property, or at events supported by Aberdeenshire Council.

7. Policy Distribution

Name	Designation	Organisation
Rob Simpson	Director of Business Services	Aberdeenshire Council
Alan Wood	Director of Infrastructure Services	Aberdeenshire Council
Laurence Findlay	Director of Education and Children's Services	Aberdeenshire Council
Leigh Jolly	Chief Officer, Health and Social Care Partnership	Aberdeenshire Council
Vicky Morris	Risk & Resilience Team	Aberdeenshire Council

Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

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