

# Balloon and Sky Lantern Release Policy 2024



**Walsall Council**

### Version Control

Owner	Healthy Spaces and Environment		
Purpose	To avoid unnecessary damage to the environment and property through the release of balloons and sky lanterns.		
Status	Draft	Version	1
Effective From	01 / 04 / 2024	Approved on	07 / 02 / 2024
Last Updated	07 / 12 / 2023	Last Updated by	Healthy Spaces

This policy links to:

Our Council Plan 2022 – 2025  
Cohesion and Integration Strategy  
Litter Charter

## 1. Objective

- 1.1. The objective of this policy is to ensure that Walsall is a clean, green borough, known as a place, where nature is respected and protected and where parks and open spaces support the health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to all land and property owned and/or managed by Walsall Council.
- 2.2. The principles and commitments set out in this policy apply to all services and decisions of the 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. In recent years, outdoor balloon and sky lantern releases have become increasingly popular at community events or as part of commemorative and celebratory occasions. Whilst providing what may be initially considered to be a beautiful spectacle, the potentially harmful consequences for wildlife and property are often overlooked.
- 4.3. Balloon and lantern releases can pose a direct threat to wildlife, as animals may ingest balloon remnants or become entangled in them, leading to injury or death. The plastic waste generated from these releases becomes litter and exacerbates the broader issue of single-use plastic pollution.

Additionally, ignited lanterns may descend and cause fires in open spaces or residential areas.

- 4.4. 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, for example in its use as a coolant for MRI scanners. When released from bursting balloons it is lost from the earth entirely.
- 4.5. 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.
- 4.6. Numerous countries have banned their use and over 150 councils across England have also banned balloon and lantern releases on council land.

## **5. Principles and Commitments**

- 5.1. The 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 council departments to comply with and implement this policy as appropriate to their service.
- 5.3. Council representatives on the Safety Advisory Group panels will endorse the prohibition to release balloons and sky lanterns (or similar and set out affordable, accessible alternatives that are acceptable such as memorial walks, candles in jam jars, planting trees or flowers and the use of bubbles instead of helium balloons.
- 5.4. The council will discourage intentional or reckless release of balloons and sky lanterns (or similar) from non-council land.
- 5.5. 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.