

London Borough of Havering

# Policy on the release of Sky Lanterns, the Release of Helium Balloons and unauthorized use of fireworks on Council owned or managed land

February 2023

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## Introduction

The release of sky lanterns, helium balloons and fireworks can be a spectacular sight often used during festivals, to mark anniversaries, religious ceremonies and as a part of charity events. However sky lanterns and helium balloons have been identified as a choking hazard for wildlife and farm animals. Plastic parts, wire and ribbons can all be eaten by animals and wildlife causing a risk of choking or blockage leading to starvation.

Sky lanterns and fireworks pose further risks as a fire hazard with the potential to spark fires in crops, heath, moorland, forestry and buildings.

## Purpose

Sky lanterns have not been banned by the UK government, despite petitions and support from cross-party MPs for progressing a bill in relation to banning their usage. However, 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. This policy asks UK Local Authorities to recognise sky lanterns as a form of littering and to ban all outdoor releases. This stance is actively supported by the Fire Service, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), the National Farmers Union (NFU) and many other public organisations, including London Borough of Havering Council.

Balloons have many uses, including as popular decorations for parties and celebrations. Some people even release balloons in remembrance of a loved one. But balloons have been criticised in recent years due to the potential negative impacts that they have on the environment, including the harm that they cause to wildlife – especially if they are not disposed of properly.

Fireworks are widely used to mark public events and private celebrations, as well as traditional events. While adding excitement to occasions, fireworks can also frighten and disturb people and animals, cause annoyance, damage and impact on air quality.

## Policy summary

Havering Council, as reflected in the Local Plan 2016-2031 and the Havering Climate Change Action Plan 2021 (HCCAP), has a duty to shape the environment in which people live, work, visit and relax. The Council also has a commitment to making Havering a place where the natural environment is celebrated and where we play our part in addressing climate change.

This policy sets out the Council's ban on the use and sale of sky lanterns, the release of helium balloons and the unauthorised use of fireworks on land or property owned and/or controlled by Havering Council.

## Scope

It should be noted that this policy is intended to prohibit the deliberate release of sky lanterns, helium balloons (such as the release of balloons at events) and unauthorised firework displays. 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.

The principles and commitments set out in this policy apply to all services and decisions of the London Borough of Havering and to contractors and partners delivering services on the council's behalf.

This policy does not apply to piloted hot air balloons.

# Policy

## Principles and Commitments

Havering Council will:

- i. Refuse permissions for the release of sky lanterns from any Council owned or managed land regardless of the purpose for the release.
- ii. Refuse the sale of sky lanterns at any Council event.
- iii. Refuse permissions for the release or permanent fixture of helium balloons from any Council owned or managed land regardless of the purpose.
- iv. Refuse the sale of helium balloons for the purpose of release at any Council event.
- v. Require the Council's 'standard conditions of contract' relating to outdoor events and organised functions on land or property owned and/or managed by Havering Council to prohibit the release of sky lanterns and the release of helium balloons regardless of purpose.
- vi. Prohibit unauthorised firework displays on Council owned or managed land.

## Legal Implications

A standard clause is to be inserted in the licences and hiring terms and conditions which sets out clearly that the release of sky lanterns, the release of helium balloons and any unauthorised firework displays on Council owned or managed land and premises is prohibited because they can potentially lead to; loss of life; damage to property; risk to wildlife and farm animals, and increase in pressure on the police, fire service and medical emergency services, and that the prohibition is reasonable.

The Council will include appropriate provisions within any new tenancy agreements, leases, licences of its land and premises.

## Enforcement

Currently, there is no legal process of imposing a fine on people who are in breach of this ban. However, Havering Council byelaws state that "A person shall not in the pleasure ground light any fire or place, throw or let fall a lighted match or any other thing so as to be likely to cause a fire." A breach of this byelaw could result in a level 2 fine of up to £500.

## Applicability

The Council will ensure that all relevant officers involved in the organisation and granting of permissions for outdoor events on Council owned and/or managed land are aware of and implement this policy.

It is the responsibility of all Council departments/teams to comply with and implement this policy as appropriate to their service area.

## Ownership and authorisation

The Corporate Policy, Performance and Community Service will be responsible for the timely review, update and dissemination of this policy.

## **Related documents**

[The Parks and Open Spaces Byelaws](#)

[Havering Climate Change Action Plan \(HCCAP\)](#)

[Air Quality Action Plan](#)

## **Dissemination and communication**

Following approval at Cabinet this policy will be sent to all staff through the Council's internal newsletter and placed on the internal policy library for information and to ensure that staff comply with and implement this policy.

A copy of the policy will also be stored on the Council's website, both under the download section and under the Climate Change section, to be available for all residents and interested parties to see.

A Communications Plan will be formulated and implemented to promote sustainable alternatives, to ensure that cultural and celebratory events can continue without posing any risk. The plan will also call for the restriction of sky lanterns, helium balloons and firework displays by other landowners across Havering, to dissuade the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons by Havering residents.

## **Monitoring and review**

This policy is written as part of the Havering Climate Change Action Plan (HCCAP) and supports the Council's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2040. With this in mind this policy will run for four years.