

WODC Environment committee – 15/6/17

Sky lantern/balloon releases

I've asked for this issue to go the agenda after Cllr Peter Emery and I were discussing the problem and agreed that we should try and do something about it across West Oxfordshire.

The problem is the damage that can be caused when these come back down to earth after they've been released. Choking and entanglement are significant dangers to both livestock and wildlife and the fire risks are obvious if a lit lantern lands on crops, hay stacks or thatched roofs. We all know that throwing rubbish on the ground is an act of littering and could result in a fine, but letting a balloon or sky lantern go isn't classed as littering, even though what goes up will eventually fall back down again.

10% of balloons that are released, and don't burst, still return to earth or seas intact or partially inflated where they pose a serious threat to wildlife and livestock. They can also be transported long distances by air currents and can easily be blown thousands of miles from their release point. Some balloons released in Cardiff were found in Germany.

Livestock are being killed from eating degraded lanterns which are accidentally picked up by harvest machinery and put into winter feeds. In 2010 it was reported that a farmer in Cheshire lost one of his pedigree cattle worth £1,000 after it died from eating the wire frame from a lantern.

Currently both the National Farmers Union and the Marine Conservation Society are running campaigns on the issue and 20 different councils, of all political persuasions, across the UK have banned the release of these lanterns and balloons on council owned land. The most recent being the Isle of Wight this week. Now I don't know how effective a similar ban might be across West Oxfordshire or how easily it could be enforced. After all we don't have all that much land that could be affected – Kilkenny Park, Deer Park Wood and maybe the Council offices here which are used as a venue for weddings.

After having some very encouraging and supportive discussions with the Leader of the Council and with Council officers, I would like to suggest that this committee ask officers to look into the current campaigns and see how we could possibly make it work here in West Oxfordshire. Officers could then report back to this committee with a recommendation we could then propose to the Executive.

Cllr Andrew Coles
15/6/17